

The Singer Building and Postal History

By Patrick Crosby

In Skyscrapers, a very tall book, Judith Dupré states “The forty-one story Singer Building shattered all records for the new heights made possible by steel-frame construction. Its theatrical silhouette signaled the birth of the skyscraper as a symbol of capitalism.” The base of the building was 12-stories and took up an entire block, and the tower above was narrow because the architect, Ernest Flagg, wanted the tower offices to be less dependent on artificial light and for the streets below to receive light and air. The steel-frame construction was a must after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. Completed in 1908, this was the headquarters of the Singer Manufacturing Company.

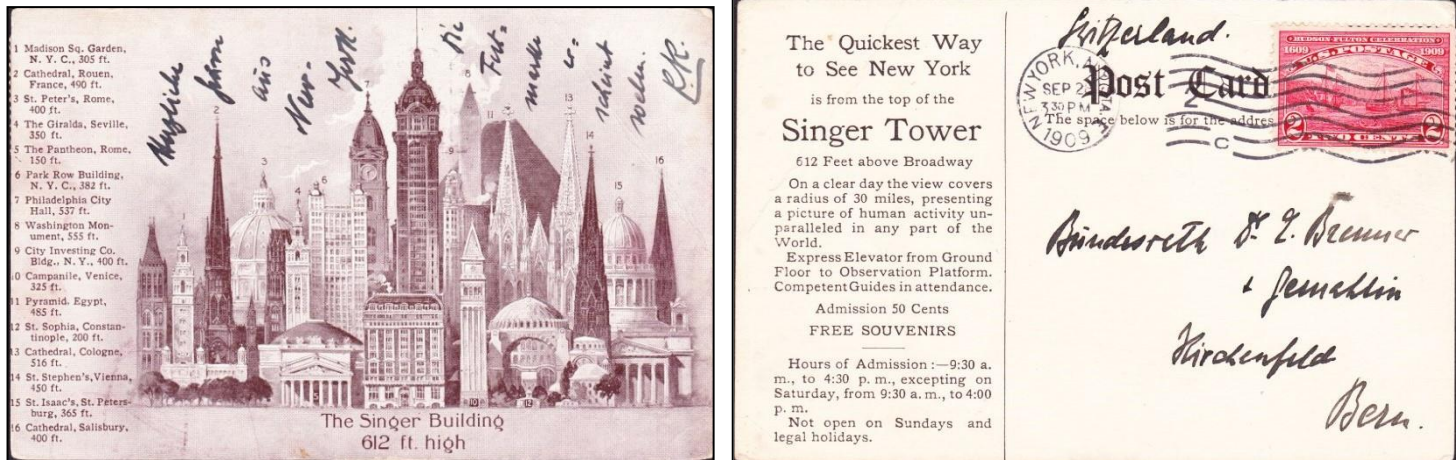


This card postmarked in 1909 shows a panoramic view of the New York Waterfront and the tallest building, to the left of center, is the Singer Building (or Singer Tower). The card is 2¾" tall, but at 6-3/16" long it is too long to receive postcard rates (maximum was 5-9/16").



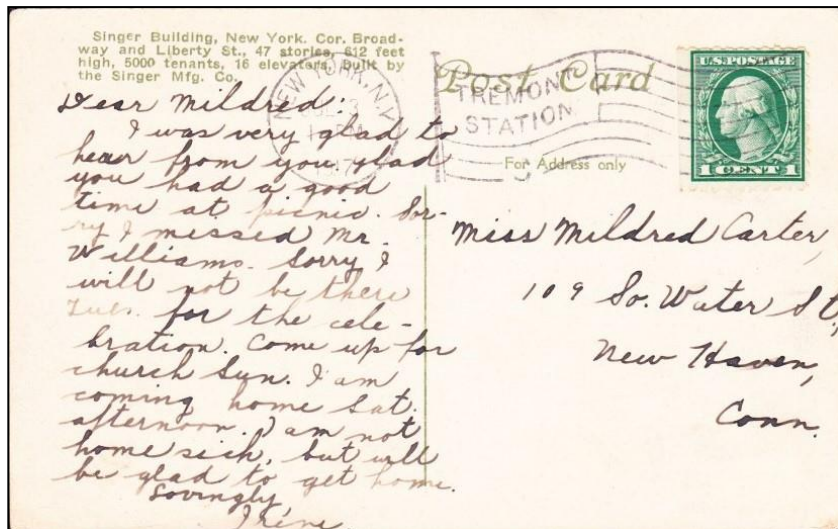
The producer knew this and states that if sent as printed matter (note the required “Printed Matter” at the top) 1¢ was the rate whether domestic or foreign--but there could be no hand written message anywhere on the card, only the return name and address. But since the sender wrote a message and

the card was going to France, the letter rate of 5¢ was required. But he only paid the usual 2¢ foreign card rate. So being 3¢ shy and this deficiency being doubled per Universal Postal Union regulations, the addressee was charged 30 French centimes as evidenced by the handstamps and a black triangle precanceled French 30 centimes postage due stamp (Sc. J34).



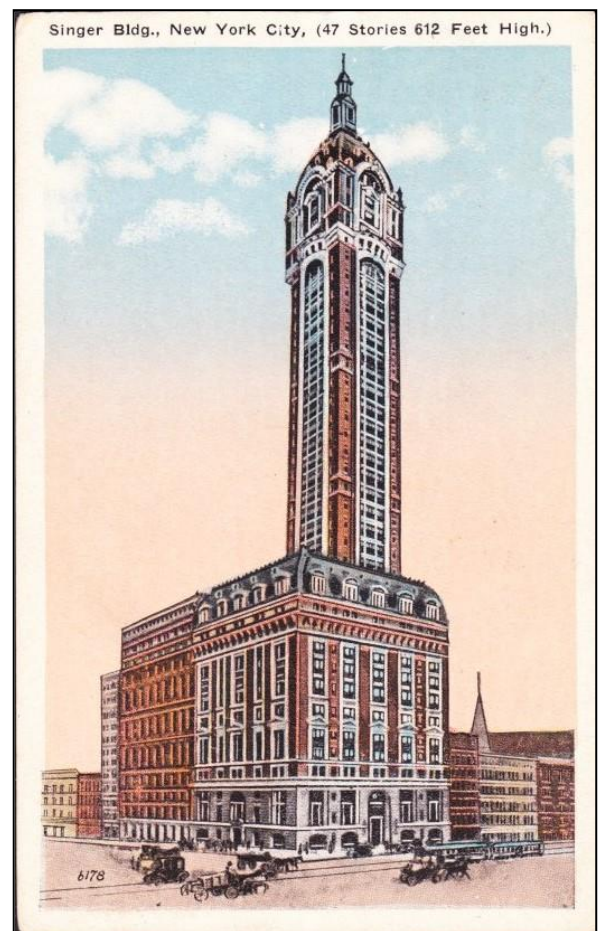
The view on the postcard to Switzerland (above) shows the Singer Building higher than the rest of the world's landmark structures. It was the world's tallest building for only 6 months. Also mailed in 1909, this card advertises an Express Elevator ride to the Observation Platform of the Singer Tower. The sender writes a short message on the view side and pays the correct 2¢ postage with a nice Hudson-Fulton Celebration stamp (Sc. 372, cat. \$8.50 on cover) that was issued only 3 days earlier.

The third card (on the right and below) features an unobstructed view of the Singer Building. The vertical lines running up the tower can also be seen in the first card



shown above, which helped me identify the building.

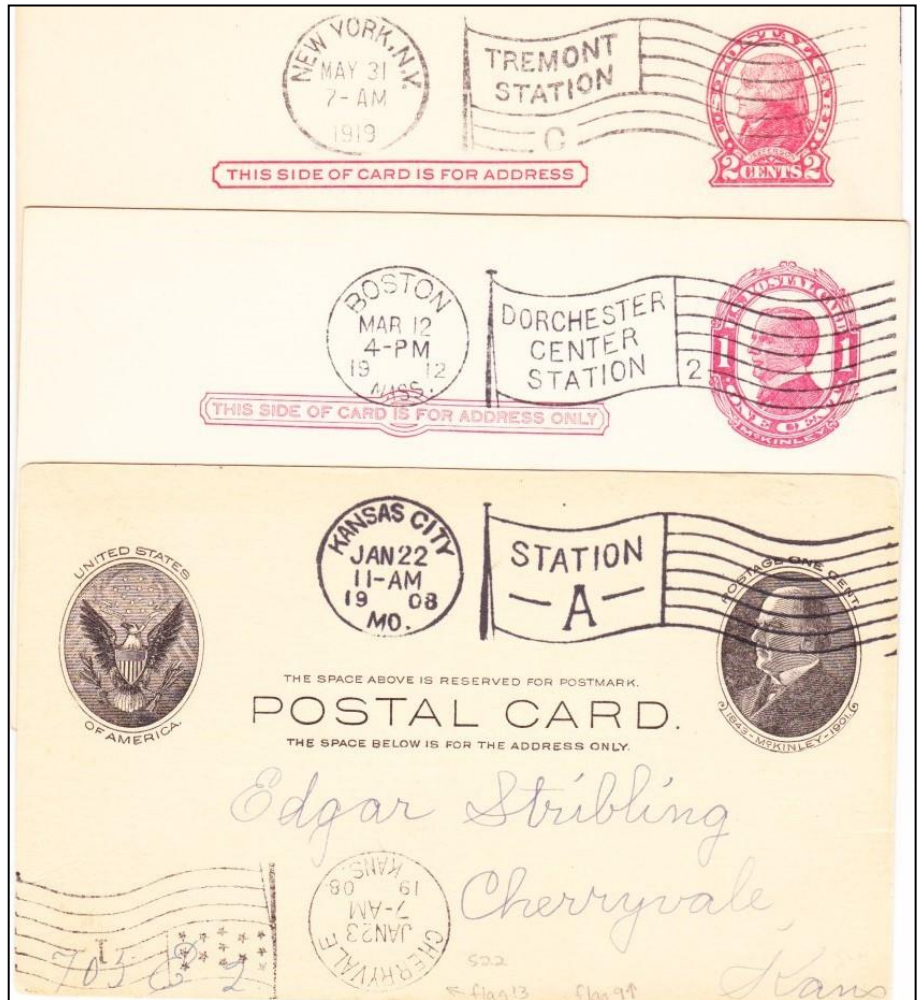
The postal history on the address side of the 1917 card above has to do with the American Postal Machine Company flag cancel from the Tremont Station post office in New York City. Only one other post office in the United States



(Fordham Station, NYC) used this style of flag.

Although not scarce, it pops out to a machine cancel collector as compared to the usual style larger station area as shown on the cards on the right. A common style of flag cancel is shown inverted on the bottom card used as a receiving postmark.

Perhaps because of an article by Charles M. Ripley in 1907 before building completion entitled "A Building Forty-Seven Stories High" the Singer Building is often attributed with forty-seven above ground floors instead of forty-one. Once the tallest building ever built, in 1968 the Singer Building was the tallest building ever to be razed.



References:

Judith Dupré, *Skyscrapers* (New York, NY: Black Dog and Leventhal 1996)

Anthony S. Wawrukiewicz and Henry W. Beecher, *U.S. International Postal Rates, 1872-1996* (Portland, OR: CAMA Publishing Co. 1996)

Anthony S. Wawrukiewicz and Henry W. Beecher, *U.S. Domestic Postal Rates, 1872-2011* (Bellefonte, PA: American Philatelic Society, 2011)

Emporis.com/buildings/102519/singer-building-new-york-city-ny-usa

En.wikipedia.org, search Singer Building and Ernest Flag

Frederick Langford, *Standard Flag Cancel Encyclopedia*, 4th ed. (Pasadena: Frederick Langford, 2008).

Patrick Crosby is a member of the Nevada Stamp Study Society and collects U.S. postal cards, especially used, including first days; the 1886 Grant Letter Card (or Sheet); UC16, the first U.S. aerogram; and postal history on business or picture post cards.