

## Nobody can be perfect...

This was and still is only too true. Even modern high-tech computer controlled production processes don't guarantee 100% quality. But items not meeting the quality standards are usually (automatically or by hand) sorted out (rejects) and do not come into circulation.

How was the situation 100 years ago during the ppc boom era? Taking the old-fashioned, quite primitive production means into account, the quality of the many million of postcards was good to excellent. Especially when you learn more about the production and working situation in the factories at that times. But the final control of the cards before they were packed up and delivered to customer wasn't that "perfect" as the number of substandard cards still found today proves. I show three categories of mistakes which almost run parallel with production stages of postcard printing.

## Pre-Press Mistakes

Orders for ppc printing came to the factories via travelling salesmen, overseas branches and their network of agencies or were sent directly through the mail. The customer had made his choice by viewing printing sample cards of the different processes and qualities available. When both parties agreed upon a certain price, with or without freight, insurance etc, the customer had to supply good quality photo prints or negatives (glas plates) together with instruction which portion of the photo to be used, necessary retouches and most important of all,



which text to be imprinted: publisher line and caption(s). Printers always asked to write clearly or use block letters, but the imprints were a constant source of mistakes. Misspelled because the manuscript was (partly) illegible or because the composer could not read foreign languages, geographic names etc. I am talking here about the mass of cards with topo views made from photos to be supplied by the customer and printed by colliotype or halftone process.

The procedure with chromolitho "Gruss aus." type cards was different as in this case the lithographer had to create something entirely new. The customer might have supplied previous printed cards or other views, sketches. Usually customers ordering (expensive) chromolitho cards did receive a proof print first and had a chance to make corrections, especially with the colouring or size/arrangement of illustrations. Delivering time was usually 3 months and longer.

You might have noticed misspelled captions on some of your cards. Major postcard printers in Germany like C.G. Röder, Stengel & Co, Römmler & Jonas placed adverts in periodicals eg "Papier-Zeitung" looking for persons with good command of English, French and Spanish language. Not only to take over correspondence but to control imprint text

on postcards of foreign customers. These jobs were well paid but meant also a lot of responsibility.

Talking about captions. On cards printed by colliotype the text was imprinted at final stage of produc-

tion on a letterpress machine. When you know that postcards were printed on colliotype presses with huge printing format, with 32 or up to 60 different views per sheet, you might understand that the chance of making mistakes with caption imprints found on a

wrong card was quite high. Not all printers had same printing format colliotype and letterpress machines available and the sheet had to be cut up to fit into smaller press. Another potential source of mistakes. Suddenly a landscape view from Sussex received a caption of Central London. To arrange a printing forme for letterpress imprint can also be tricky. Everything is mirror faced and mistakes with positioning type are common.

A matter of constant problems and complains was the colouring. As mentioned before, customers of chromolitho cards usually received a proof print when they ordered a new design and not a reprint. However, sometimes the cards did come out different due to various reasons. Printers offering machine coloured cards (overlay colours) often provided a colour scheme, so that the customer or his photographer could add instructions (use colour 12 yellow-brown for wall; colour 27 for roof house left and so on). Remember that the people responsible for the arrangement of the colours had no idea how the place looked like; there was no colour photography around. Stencil- and hand-colouring was even more difficult to handle and for larger/high volume orders proof "prints" were given to customer. But often tight delivery dates did not allow to do so with customers living in far away places.

Colliotype printing process as well as bromide photography (by the mile) often showed an up and down of quality because colliotype printing was sensible to temperatures and humidity and bromide photo process with its various tanks of developer, stabilizer and other washout chemicals produced poor quality when the constant move of the photopaper strip was interrupted or became irregular. Sorting out by hand all cards too dark or bright, with dots, scratches or whatever fault was a must (and not well paid).



(above) **Amsterdam - O.Z. Achterburgwal**. Blue colliotype with captions in red ink. Published by local firm *H. Schaefer* as no. 13 in 1900. P/u in July 1900. The rear part of "Amsterdam" is found a second time on picture side (see arrow). Although the address side has correct position I believe the writing space should have been on the right side only with picture in upper left corner. (coll. Frans Bokelmann)

(right) **Southern Road, Fortis Green** (GB). Monochrome colliotype with (handwritten) caption scratched into negative. Publisher line added by letterpress, but the publisher name only (!) upside down. This is indeed unusual and should have been noticed quickly. Card no. 83 published by *E.J. & H. Clarke*, East Finchley. P/u in 1911. (coll. Chris Ratcliffe)





Above you see the upper part of the address side of a chromolitho card with a couple (bicyclists) taking a rest under a tree. P/u in the Netherlands, but stamp missing and part of the postmark. The card is of German make and shows a pre-1905 address side design. I guess the additional imprint/overprint with Dutch “Briefkaart” and some UPU details was done at a later date and this is not a typical printing mistake. Perhaps a Dutch firm bought surplus card stock at low price and the imprint was done to meet Dutch postal regulations.



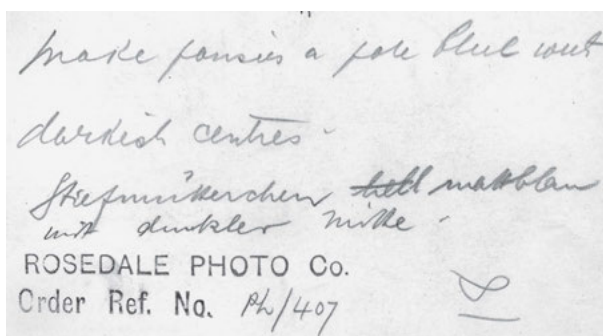
## Printing Mistakes

You might prefer *misprint* to be more correct or *printer's error*. In German language “Druckfehler” stands almost entirely for typographical errors but not for printing faults. I will continue to use printing mistake and I am sure you understand what I mean.

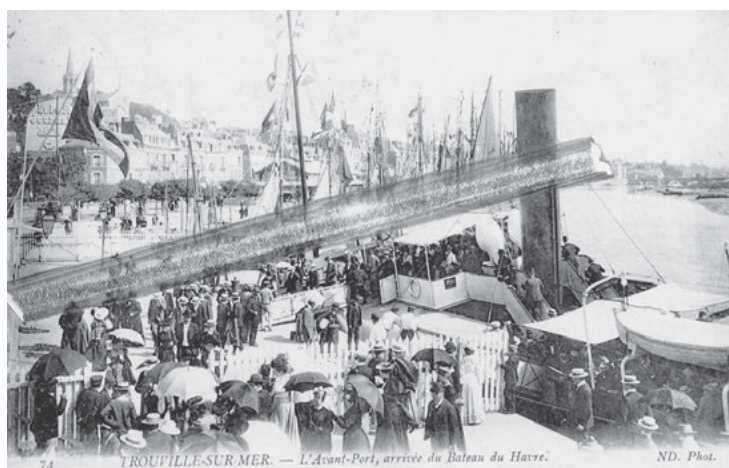
Each printing processes has individual weak points. Some printing problems are however of general nature, leading to entire or partly ruined postcards. Bad register for example, especially worse for more-colour work, means that the (individual) printing sheet is not at correct position when coming in contact with printing forme. Really bad thing when a (reversed) caption is arranged inside coloured picture. – Too much or not enough ink and/or pressure, any alien element sticking to/damaging the printing forme/image and so on. – Litho processes work with damping systems/rollers. The ink is fatty and sticks to the portions not washed out on the printing forme. All none printing parts are kept ink-free (clean) by water (mixed with special chemicals) supplied by the damping rollers going first over the printing forme before the ink rollers reach it. If this balance is spoiled you get in trouble. From details getting lost in images to ink at places you don't want it. Before this becomes too technical, take a look at the samples I show on this and next page.

## Post-Printing Mistakes

Another wide field of potential failures. Any further work necessary like embossing, any kinds of finish applied to the picture side, any extra imprints on address or picture side by other processes can easily ruin the entire job. But most mistakes happened with cutting up the finished printing sheets. Not only sizes differ a bit when you look at a pile of old cards. The worst was when cards were cut wrongly, some part cut off and part of the neighbouring image appearing on the wrong card. Plus cards cut although ink wasn't fully dry. Guillotines operate with pressure to fix the pile of sheets before cut. *And so on and on*. Fine collecting topic!



I have 5 cards of the same make, showing flowers and landscapes with greetings and/or poetry. None has a postcard back. All five bear a rubberstamp “**Rosedale Photo Co, Order Ref. No. ph/407**” and interesting handwritten comments on the colouring ranging from *make the fancies a pale blue to the colouring is simply terrible*. As these notes were translated into German I think the cards were produced in Germany. Have you heard of a British Rosedale Photo Co?

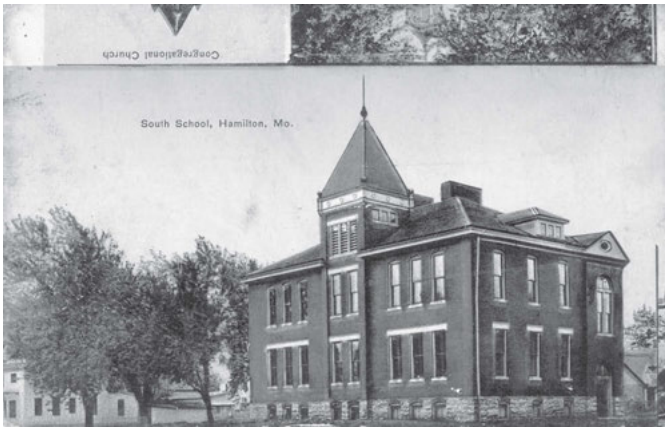


Trouville-sur-Mer, L'Avant-Port, arrivée du Bateau du Havre. ND Phot., card 74. P/u August 1907. Collotype image ruined by unidentified object which stuck to / damaged the gelatine plate. Found by Chris Ratcliffe.

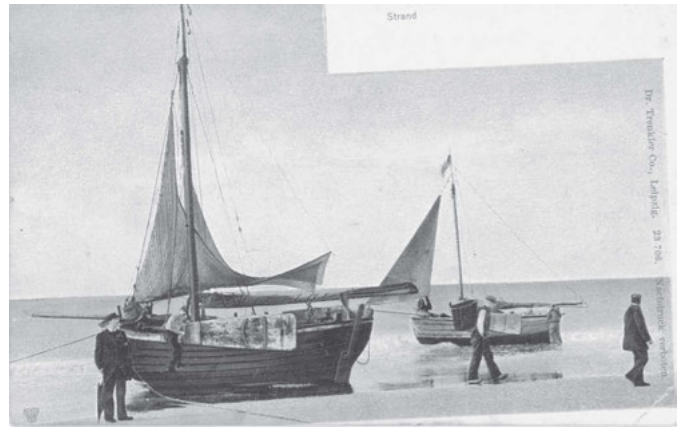


**Shakespeare's House**, Stratford on Avon, publ. by F. P. & Co. (GB). Card printed in Germany, not p/u. Halftone printed and machine-coloured by litho process. Along the lower side of the image we find an irregular streak of red colour, that comes from a ink roller. Most likely the balance between ink and water was not okay and/or the roller surface damaged.





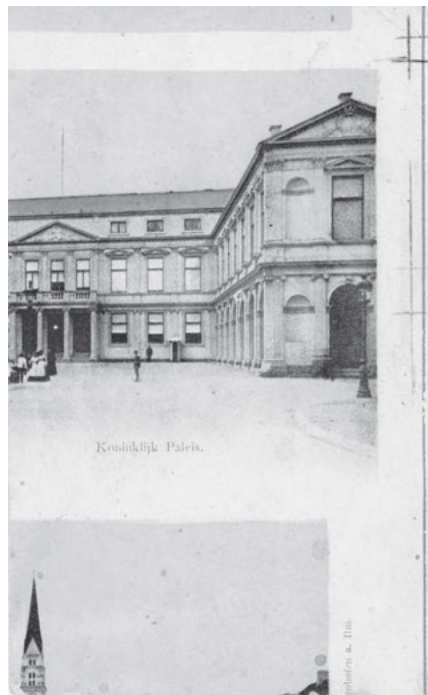
ANC, N.Y., Octochrome process, for Hamilton Post Card Dealers, Hamilton, Montana. Card no. ? 11241. Printed in Germany. **South School, Hamilton, Mo.** and part of the neighbouring card with “Congregational Church” in ? Images arranged top to top.



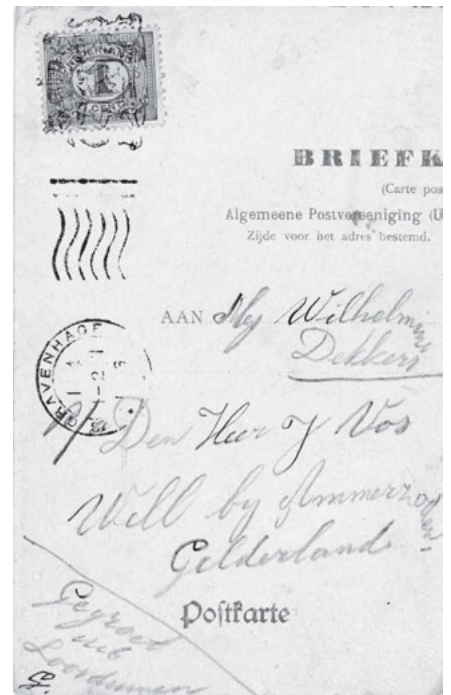
**Fisherboats on the beach of...** (Scheveningen?), **Netherlands.** “Lop-sided” card produced by Dr. Trenkler Co., Leipzig (no. 23 706). Not p/u, undivided back. Typical miscutted sample not ought to get into circulation. (Both cards were provided by Oene Klynsma)



Chromolitho printer **O. Schloss** from Berlin produced this embossed greeting card (no. 501), p/u in 1908. Most dark portions of the image show white paper spots coming from the next sheet in the pile. Too much ink (layers), that did not dry quickly enough.




This is a very nice sample! Picture side with images from **3 different cards** and printing register marks. Wastepaper indeed but the view of the Royal Dutch palace encouraged somebody to send it through the mail anyway. View below Palace shows a place in Germany “...enhofen” on River Ilm. Printed by Lautz & Balzar, Darmstadt. *Thank you Oene!*



**Nanteuil-le-Haudouin - Etang Muzelle.** Collotype printed by „A. Breger Frères” from Paris. I guess this card dates from WW1 years. The collotype gelatine plate is ruined, everything comes out flat, most details lost, some dark portions and the rest messy grey. Scanning has already improved the impression you see here.

WANTED!

MORE COPIES OF THIS COMMON CARD !!!



I believe many of you are familiar with the situation that you see the same, common card over and over again at different places. I have come accross this “dream of a house” so often, that I decided to collect ALL samples I can get. By now I have 5 copies (from 2 diff. publishers!) and I want more. Offers to the editor please. Thanks!