

## This Day in History... May 19, 1898

### Private Mailing Card Act



*Scare 1898 Private Mailing Card. The pictorial side of this classic postcard pictures "The Terrace" in New York City's Central Park and a message written by the sender.*

On May 19, 1898, Congress passed the Private Mailing Card Act. The act allowed private printers to produce their own postcards with the same postage rate as government-issued cards.

The US Post Office didn't begin producing postal cards until the 1870s. Up until that time, people mailed cards with postage on them, and they were called "mailed cards." There were also picture envelopes, which may have been early inspiration for postcards. Congress passed an act in 1861 that allowed privately printed cards weighing under one ounce to be sent through the mail.

Then on June 8, 1872, Congress passed another act approving the US Post Office to produce its own postal cards. The first of these was issued on May 1, 1873, with one side for the message and the other side for the recipient's address. By this new act, the Post Office's cards were the only ones allowed to have the words "Postal Card" printed on them. Additionally, privately-printed cards were more expensive – 2¢ compared to the Post Office's 1¢ cards.

Then on May 19, 1898, Congress passed the Private Mailing Card Act. This new act allowed private companies to produce their own postcards that could be mailed at the same price as government cards – 1¢. The private cards were required to include the statement "Private Mailing Card, Authorized by Act of Congress of May 19, 1898." Messages couldn't be written on the address side – in fact the address side usually had the phrase "This side is exclusively for the address." Many of these cards also included "Postal Card – Carte Postale" – which meant they were able to be mailed internationally.

In 1901, the Postmaster General amended some of the 1898 act's provisions. From that time on, the cards could read "Post Card" instead of "Private Mailing Card." Additionally, the cards no longer needed to cite the 1898 Mailing Card Act.

Another significant change came in 1907. That year the Universal Postal Union declared that all member nations' postal cards could have messages on the left half of the address side. The US Post Office made this change to its postal cards and permitted private card manufacturers to do the same on their postcards. This era is often considered the "Golden Age of Postcards" because of the rapid increase in their popularity.

While early postcards featured engraved, drawn, or painted images, the early 1900s saw the rise of photo postcards, particularly Kodak's "real photo" postcards. Kodak produced a special "postcard camera" that took a picture and then printed a postcard-size negative. Beginning in the late 1930s, photochrom postcards, which featured photo-quality images, became the norm throughout the postcard industry. Postcard collecting has always been a popular hobby, known as deltiology (from the Greek "writing tablet, letter").



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