Libraries on postcards: historical trends, modern applications and potential

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0. I**ntroduction**

I am most grateful to the Chair and her Standing Committee for the invitation to tell something about my collection of library postcards or postcards with libraries or libraries on postcards …..

Of course I was flattered with the invitation, but I am also very happy to report here. It is my hope that my collection can be useful for any research or for supporting historiography of libraries.

The bottom line – of course – is that I would be most happy to welcome contributions to the collection from you in the audience, from colleagues who read this paper and from those who hear about it through the grapevine.

1. My collection – Why? An explanation

Allow me to tell you what my collection encompasses.

I have always been a postcard guy. I have carefully kept all of the cards that I received over the past half century. I have always had a particular interest in the extremely friendly format of the postcard; have used it abundantly for correspondence, for love statements, business announcements, congratulatory messages, exchanging family

information, etc. etc. – there is no end to it. I just love the format, which is much more sympathetic than an email message, etc.

I started working for IFLA in 1998 and thought of ways and means to satisfy my postcard fetishism. And I decided to invite IFLA colleagues and friends to send me cards depicting libraries for the poster session I presented at our Conference in Glasgow (August 2002) [1])

A call to colleagues worldwide to send me cards resulted in a couple of dozen reactions and more than 100 cards.

The idea of the poster was to encourage libraries to produce and issue their own postcards. I wanted to show that postcards are excellent means for promotion and can provide all kinds of publicity opportunities. Examples were shown of nice cards from libraries in different parts of the world, with suggestions for possible actions.

2. Historical trends: the development of the postcard

The postcard came to development during the last decades of the 19th century. The United States Postal Service began issuing pre-stamped postal cards in 1873 as a quick and easy way to send short notes.

This led soon to the absolute summit of the postcard around the turn of the century 1899/1900. How it went on is very neatly described by Richard Douglas, who mounted a very nice website together with Sharon McQueen: www.libraryhistory.org [2])

It sketches the history of the American postcard, through the various phases: the Divided Back era, the White Border and the Linen era. Absolutely fascinating reading for someone like me, but I have my doubts about you in the audience.

What is very clear is that the format was a tremendous success and soon after the turn of the century it had its absolute hay day!

Another aspect that is very clear is of course that a lot of the literature describes the history of the American postcard, but as we know the world is bigger than just this sub-continent. The world history of the postcard still has to be written.

Anyway, permit me to introduce my collection to you by having a closer look at it.

3. Libraries on postcards: an account of my collection. Let me introduce the main characteristics of my collection. It consists of postcards, so not just photos, the cards have to be published and produced in series. The most obvious aspects are the following:

Figure 1 Free Library Bideford, England

Figure 2 Children's Library, Savonlin, Finland

3.1 The focus is on library buildings: exterior and interior views. The focus is **not on parts** of the collection, famous manuscripts, particular printings or bindings.
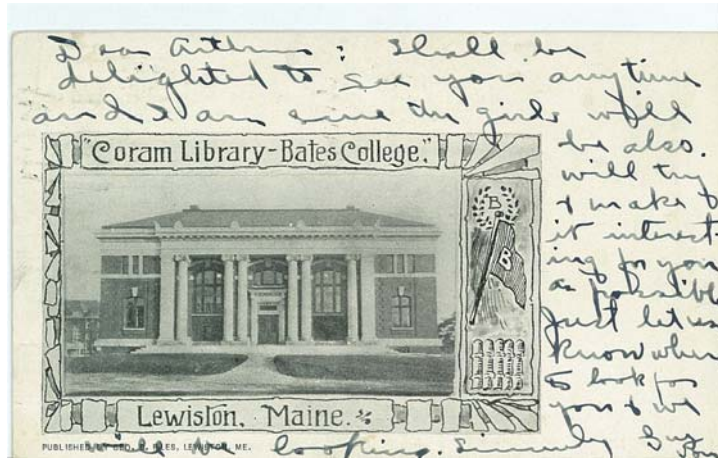
Figure 3 Coram Library, Bates College, Lewiston, Maine, USA

Figure 4 Public Library, Amsterdam, Netherlands - opened 07.07.07

3.2   There are antique and modern cards. The oldest one dates back to the end of the 19th century, while the newest was probably published this year or in any case in 2007 – I don't know exactly.

3.3   About half of the collection consists of black and white pictures, the other half is colour.

Figure 5 City Library, Lulea, Sweden

Figure 6 British Museum Reading Room, London, England

3.4 These are from all around the world – approximately 100 different countries are represented. It will not be a big surprise that most of the cards in my collection are depicting American Libraries, at a distance followed by six European countries: the UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Austria.

3.5 The total number of postcard in my collection is 10.700 at the moment and some more figures are listed here:

Table 1: Total 10.700 cards, depicting libraries in approx. 100 different countries. Some figures per country:

USA	4.150
UK	1.240
France	960
Germany	850
Netherlands	510
Belgium	440
Austria	200
Canada	170
Italy	160
Sweden	150
Russian Federation	130
Spain	110
Czech Republic	100
Finland	100
Switzerland	100

4. Historical research

On several occasions I have offered my collection for study or research purposes and I repeat that offer here. I will present a couple of examples of how I think cards can be used in a moment. But first I would like to mention an interesting article that was recently published by Bernadette Lear: *Wishing They Were There: Old Postcards and Library History* [3]) and I thank John Cole for bringing it to my attention.

That author gives a very nice account of both the possibilities for using postcards in library history research and the drawbacks to using them as historical sources. Her essay is a fine story based on her own private collection which she found back in a dusty carton in the back of a closet, after a house renovation. It is aimed entirely at American (local) history.

I think library history research can be supported by information contained in postcard for study and illustration purposes and I would like to give three examples.

4.1 History of an individual building: Boston Public Library

I have got some 60 or 70 different postcards of the Boston (Mass.) Public Library, dating from approximately 1900 onward. The development of both the building itself as well as its environment (traffic!) is well documented in these cards.
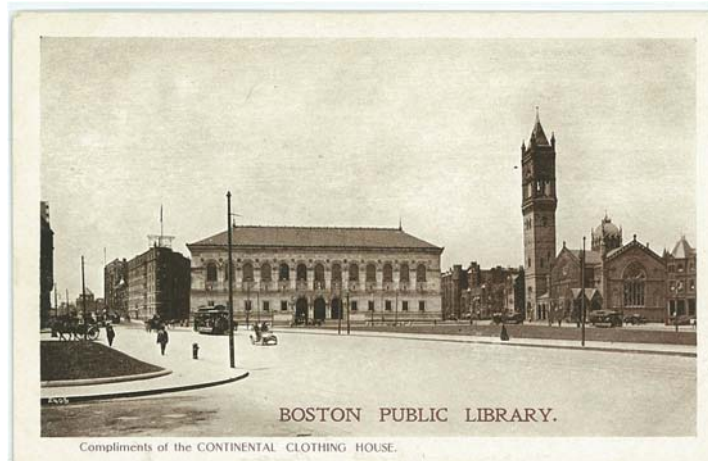
Figure 7 Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
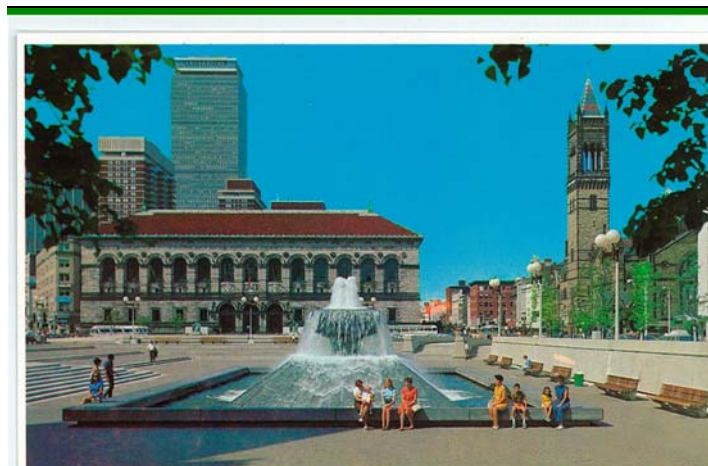
Figure 8 Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts, USA

4.2   Architectural developments, overviews of city planning: Tours

Another nice example of the position of a library in city planning is shown in a selection of my cards of the bibliothèque municipale in Tours, France

Figure 9 City Library, Tours, France

Figure 10 City Library Tours, France

4.3   Illustrations for historiography: Canada

Then finally I would like to show some examples that could illustrate a history of the libraries in a particular country. I selected 10 of my 170 cards from the host country of this congress, Canada – two of them are shown below.

Figure 11 Public Library, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada

Figure 12 Carnegie Library, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

5. Potential

Now that photography and printing are within the reach of many, many can afford to produce attractive cards at an easy manner, in large numbers in a cheap way.

These may be used as tools in various ways:

- Publicity: where the library is, services provided, opening hours

Figure 13 City Library, Hamburg, Germany
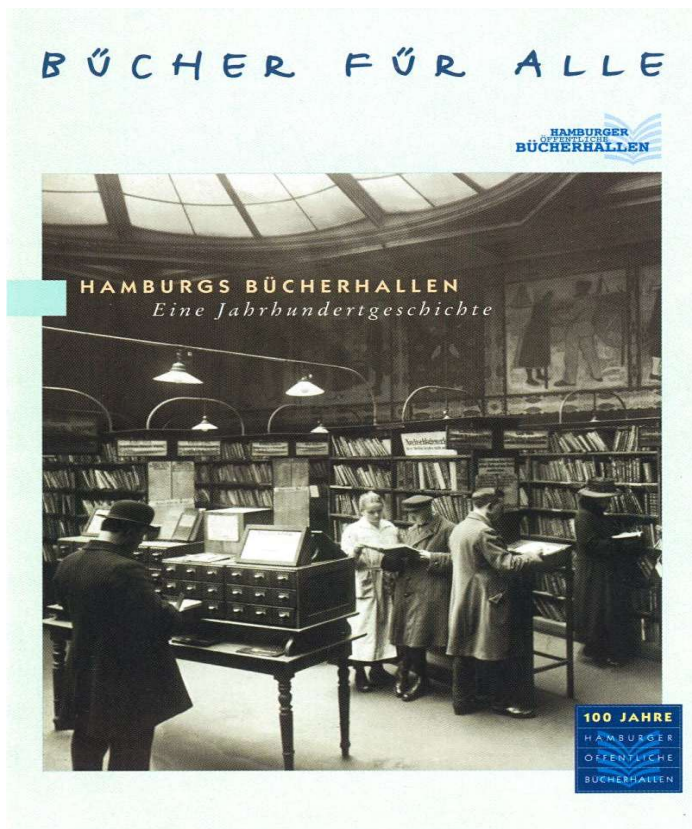
Figure 14 University Library, Hannover, Germany

- Support of campaigns: promote reading, free access to information
- Membership rallies
- Attract or advertise sponsors
- Architects
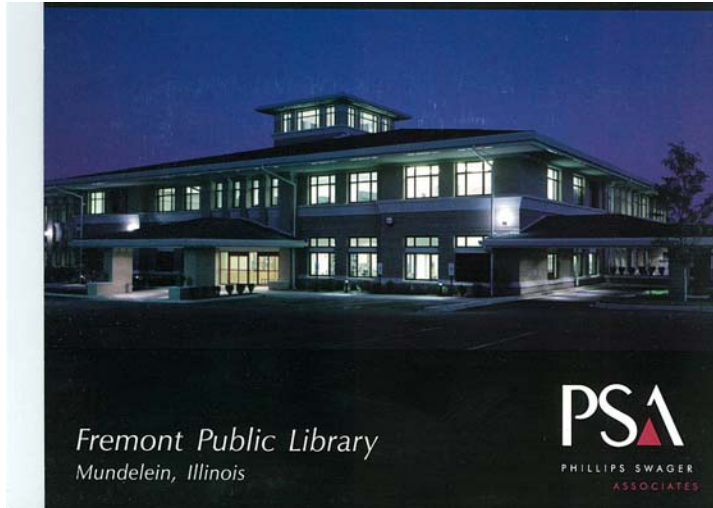
Figure 15 Fremont Public Library, Mundelein, Illinois, USA

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6.   Notes and References

1. Sjoerd Koopman, *Your Library on a Postcard.* Poster presented at the IFLA Conference Glasgow, August 2002 http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla68/papers/poster20.htm

2. *Post Card Library* www.libraryhistory.org is "Celebrating the rich history of United States Libraries through the lens of the postcard."

3. Bernadette A. Lear, *Wishing They Were There: Old Postcards and Library History.* In: Libraries and the Cultural Record, Vol. 43, No 1, 2008, p. 77 – 100.

4. The presentation of this paper will be supported by a PowerPoint Presentation containing 116 pictures of library postcards. This list is added as an appendix, the presentation is available from the author.

7.   Appendix: List of cards

The PowerPoint Presentation supporting the presentation of this paper contained the following 116 postcards:

1.   1.   Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, Germany
       2.   National Library of Estonia, Tallinn
       3.   Deichmanske Library, Childrens' department, Oslo, Norway
       4.   Regionalbibliothek Neubrandenburg, Germany
       5.   Public Library Wellington, New Zealand
       6.   Constitutional Library, Saint Petersburg, Russia
       7.   Free Library, Bideford, England
       8.   Khedivial Library, Cairo, Egypt
       9.   Picton Library, Liverpool, England
       10.   Public Library, East Chicago, Indiana, USA
       11.   Library University of California, Berkeley, California, USA
       12.   Trinity College Library, Cambridge, England
       13.   Carnegie Library, Decatur, Alabama, USA
       14.   City Library, Stuttgart, Germany
       15.   British Library, London, England

2.   16.   V.I. Lenin's Library, Kremlin, Moscow, Russia
       17.   Public Library, Nürnberg, Germany
       18.   Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
       19.   Kupferstich-Kabinett, Dresden, Germany
       20.   Fremont Public Library, Mundelin, Illinois, USA
       21.   Lenin Children's library, Ulyanovsk, Russia
       22.   Library Canisius College, Nijmegen, Netherlands
       23.   Stadtbibliothek, Augsburg, Germany
       24.   National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth
       25.   Coram Library, Bates College, Lewiston, Maine, USA

3.1   26.   Public Library, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, USA
       27.   Public Library, Waterville, Maine, USA
       28.   Public Library, Chelmsford, England
       29.   University Library, Giessen, Germany
       30.   City Library, Halmstadt, Sweden
       31.   City Library, Lulea, Sweden
       32.   Paul Hamlyn Library, British Museum, London, England
       33.   Alexandria Library, Alexandria, Egypt
       34.   Médiathèque Roanne, France
       35.   Chartwell Library, Westerham, England

3.2   36.   Cathedral Library, Hereford, England
       37.   Bibliotheca Thysiana, Leiden, Netherlands
       38.   Public Library, Bournemouth, England
       39.   Ruskin Library, University of Lancaster, England
       40.   Public Library, Lewes, England
       41.   Public Library, Nîmes, France
       42.   University Library, Cambridge, England
       43.   Library Georgian Miniature House, Edenbridge, England
       44.   Grant Lodge, Public Library, Elgin, Scotland
       45.   Library, Halifax, England

3.3   46.   Bookmobile, Lousiana State Library, USA
       47.   Carnegie Library, Parsons, Kansa, USA
       48.   Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève, Paris, France
       49.   Free Library, Kingston, England
       50.   Kendall Young Library, Webster City, Iowa, USA
       51.   Public Library, Moulins, France
       52.   Castle Library, Hluboká, Czech Republic
       53.   Municipal Library, Pantin, France
       54.   Town Library, Varnsdorf, Czech Republic
       55.   Peckham Library, London, England

3.4   56.   Public Library, Larvik, Norway
       57.   Deutsche Bücherei, Leipzig, Germany
       58.   Bibliothek Goethehaus, Weimar, Germany
       59.   City Library, Rotterdam, Netherlands
       60.   Mao Zedong's Library, Beijing, China
       61.   Library Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany

	62.	Queen's Library, Christiansborg, Copenhagen, Denmark
	63.	University Library, Göttingen, Germany
	64.	Public Library, Clamart, France
	65.	Abbey Library, Waldsassen, Germany
3.5	66.	Library North Florida Junior College, Madison, Florida, USA
4.1	67.	Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
	68.	Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
	69.	Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
	70.	Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
	71.	Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
	72.	Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
	73.	Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
	74.	Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
	75.	Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
	76.	Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
4.2	77.	Public Library, Chatham, Canada
	78.	Redpath Library, McGill University, Montreal, Canada
	79.	Public Library, Owen Sound, Canada
	80.	Public Library, Regina, Canada
	81.	Public Library, Saint John, Canada
	82.	University Library, Toronto, Canada
	83.	Public Library, Vancouver, Canada
	84.	Public Library, Woodstock, Canada
	85.	Carnegie Public Library, Winnipeg, Canada
	86.	Public Library, Windsor, Canada
	87.	Bibliothèque municipale, Tours, France
	88.	Bibliothèque municipale, Tours, France
	89.	Bibliothèque municipale, Tours, France
	90.	Bibliothèque municipale, Tours, France
	91.	Bibliothèque municipale, Tours, France
	92.	Bibliothèque municipale, Tours, France
	93.	Bibliothèque municipale, Tours, France
	94.	Bibliothèque municipale, Tours, France
	95.	Bibliothèque municipale, Tours, France
	96.	Bibliothèque municipale, Tours, France
4.3	97.	Bibliothèque municipale, Grenoble, France
	98.	Bookmobile, Silinjärvi, Finland
	99.	Bookmobile, New Zealand
	100.	Library Literature Faculty, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands
	101.	Slaska Library, Katowice, Poland
	102.	Taunton Library, Somerset, England
	103.	Lenin Russian State Library, Moscow, Russia
	104.	City Library Växjö, Sweden
	105.	Bodleian University Library, Oxford, England
	106.	Mitchell Library, Glasgow, Scotland
5.	107.	Public Library, Manchester, England
	108.	University Library, Helsinki, Finland
	109.	Helen Temple Cook Library, Dana Hall School, Wellesley, Massachusetts, USA
	110.	University Library, Jönköping, Sweden
	111.	Médiathèque municipale, Montmorillon, France
	112.	Amerika-Gedenkbibliothek, Berlin, Germany
	113.	Children's Library, Savonlin, Finland
	114.	Public Library, Hamburg, Germany
	115.	University Library, Hannover, Germany
	116.	Public Library, Amsterdam, Netherlands