“Wish You Were Here”

Wallace Magazines & Periodicals, Newspapers and Postcards, 103 Royal Street: a postcard picturing a postcard purveyor

The Wallace News Store, the picturesque news stand (pardon the pun) once located in the first block of Royal Street, right off Canal, operated for more than three decades “twenty-four hours a day” with “three
shifts of clerks” in “constant night and day service”. The “little store whose front” was “practically covered with magazines and periodicals of every sort and kind,” not to mention a plethora of postcards, was “known by every visitor and resident of the Crescent City,” reported an article in the New Orleans States, dated June 3, 1928.

Summer of 1908 photograph of Wallace’s Newsstand: beaucoup postcards, William Howard Taft on the Chicago Tribune, Billboard, Variety, Saturday Evening Post, Harper’s Weekly and more

- Detroit Publishing Company

The business was founded by George F. Wallace, who was born circa 1862 in Syracuse, New York, and came to New Orleans as a young
man. Starting from an orange box at the corner of Royal and Canal streets, where he sold daily newspapers, he grew his little operation into the largest newsstand in New Orleans. He specialized in having newspapers for sale from all across the nation.

Wallace’s Stand (at right) was indeed part of “A Busy Corner”.

Wallace married a young lady, Jeanne Fazende, from an old New Orleans family on September 27, 1901, and raised two sons and two daughters.

When Wallace died at Touro Infirmary on November 20, 1927 at age 65, the Picayune stated that he had sold daily newspapers on or near that same corner for “more than twenty-five years”. Postcards were
also a large part of his business, selling for only 3 for a nickel or 15 cents a dozen. Postage on a postcard was only a penny back then.

A one cent stamp with George Washington mailed your postcard.

Postcards first appeared in England in 1840 when writer Theodore Hook sent one to himself from Fulham in London, England. Being the world’s oldest postcard, it sold in 2002 for a record £31,750. And I bet you didn’t know that the study and collecting of postcards is known as deltiology.

The oldest postcard in the United States was postmarked December 1848 and contained printed advertising. Postcards were first commercially produced in 1861 when John P. Charlton of Philadelphia patented a postal card. He sold the rights to Hymen Lipman, whose postcards featured a decorated border and were labeled “Lipman's postal card”. The Morgan Envelope Factory of Springfield, Massachusetts, began producing postcards in 1873, which depicted the Interstate Industrial Exposition that took place in Chicago. Postcards displaying images or scenes increased in number during the 1880s, and they grew in popularity because the general public was looking for an easier way to send quick notes inexpensively.

There was a time when only the Post Office was allowed to print postcards, and it held its monopoly until May 19, 1898, when Congress passed the Private Mailing Card Act, which made it possible for private publishers and printers to produce postcards. Private companies were prevented from calling their product “postcards” until December 24, 1901, when that prohibition was lifted. Beginning on March 1, 1907, the Post Office allowed private citizens to write on the address side of a postcard. It was on this date that postcards were allowed to have what is known as the "divided back", one half for the address and the other half for the message. The Brits had divided cards five years
earlier in 1902. The standard size postcard, introduced in Britain in November 1899, is 3.5” by 5.5”.

1906 postcard of Canal Street in New Orleans, with message area on right front (Cards were like this before March 1, 1907.)

Reverse side of same postcard, undivided side “for the address only”, published in Germany by The New Orleans News Company

The Golden Age of American postcards was underway. This countrywide craze between 1907 and 1910 peaked with the introduction of tariffs on German-printed postcards, and ended by
1915, when World War I disrupted the printing and import of fine German-printed cards. Quite a number of New Orleans postcards from those years were printed in Germany.

New Orleans postcards through the years reveal an interesting history of the Crescent City. Some of our iconic monuments have changed or no longer exist. Businesses and restaurants fill our collective memories, but have closed with the passage of time. Fortunately, many are still around. I will present for your perusal just a few of these wonderful reminders of the past.

"Madame John’s Legacy," immortalized by George Washington Cable’s story “Title Poulette” and often proclaimed (as it was on the reverse of this postcard) as “the oldest building in the Mississippi Valley”, was actually erected in 1788. The Ursuline Convent has the distinction of actually being the oldest building in the Mississippi Valley (1745).

Another New Orleans postcard scene, which has enjoyed widespread circulation through the years, is the Brulatour Courtyard at 520 Royal Street. This iconic courtyard is part of the Seignouret-Brulatour House, erected in 1816 by Francois Seignouret, a French wine merchant and furniture maker. Subsequently owned by another wine importer, Pierre Ernest Brulatour, for whom the courtyard was named, and in the early 20th Century by William Ratcliff Irby, a prominent tobacco company executive, banker and philanthropist, the building
eventually became home (from 1950 to 1996) to WDSU Television, Channel 6. Irby was instrumental in saving historic French Quarter buildings from mass demolition. Purchased in 2006 by The Historic New Orleans Collection, the Seignouret-Brulatour House is today being transitioned to a museum facility with nearly 12,000 square feet of exhibition space.

The caption on the postcard’s reverse side states: "One of the most famous courtyards in the city. This corner, showing the old stairway and arch, is painted and photographed more than any other place in old New Orleans."

The above postcard was described as: “33 – A. Hirschwitz, New Orleans, Louisiana.”

Another popular Crescent City view that has been replicated on
countless postcards is one looking out across any number of the French Quarter’s exquisite lacework balconies.

Two ironwork balcony views, the one on the left looking down Orleans Street toward the rear of the St. Louis Cathedral, and the one on the right a view of Royal Street in the Vieux Carré.

The postcard on the left (above) was described as: “58 – A. Hirschwitz, New Orleans, Louisiana.” The “Royal Street” balcony postcard (above right) was ascribed to “A. Hirschwitz,” but without a numerical designation.

Sometimes local postcards carried more than just a photographic image. One such postcard featured “Fine Tombs” in New Orleans’ Metairie Cemetery, topped by angelic statuary. Three ladies are strolling along a tree-shaded walkway as they pass before the impressive resting places. What makes this card somewhat unusual is that on the reverse side, where one would write the address of the card’s recipient along with a message on the left, an advertising message is printed in bold letters at the bottom of the postcard. In this case, it is an ad for “Brer Rabbit Syrup and Molasses”.
The Metairie Cemetery postcard above, in addition to featuring an advertisement on the back is an example of cards from the “white border” era (named for the white borders that form a frame around the card’s picture area), which lasted from about 1916 to 1930.

From 1931 to 1959, mid-century linen postcards were produced in great quantities.
Postmarked 1940, the linen postcard above is a view of St. Charles Avenue with its “Giant Palm Trees”. The roadway is tinted in such a beautiful manner that one could literally eat off the street. And, tell me, where are all the oak trees – not to mention the telephone poles?

This postcard scene is one of “Unloading Bananas” at the Port.
Two past postcard views of Carondelet Street are shown below:

Carondelet Street, early postcard, view, published in Germany by the Grombach-Faisans Co., Ltd., of New Orleans

The Carondelet Canyon, or N. O. Financial District - Buildings on the right are (reading from the foreground backward) the Federal Reserve Branch, Canal-Commercial Bank, Marine Bank, Cotton Exchange and Hibernia National Bank (completed in 1921).

Oftentimes postcards reflect various businesses and, in New Orleans, that included hotels, motels, florists and restaurants, to name just a few.
The above postcard advertises Kolb’s Restaurant on St. Charles, “The Restaurant With An Individuality”. Founded in 1899 by Conrad Kolb, the popular dining establishment with a German flavor closed in 1994.

Sometimes postcards were connected together in souvenir fold-out packets. One could save the entire folder as a personal souvenir or send it along as a collection of scenes to a friend or loved one. New Orleans themed souvenir packets were available with a variety of different local scenes. Many New Orleanians will remember postcard racks and carousels located in French Quarter drugstores or Canal Street gift shops and 5 and 10 cent stores, such as Woolworth’s and Kress. In today’s i-phone/internet world, postcards are still popular.
Fold-out Souvenir Packet

Cover of a fold-out souvenir packet, featuring the St. Louis Cathedral and Andrew Jackson Statue in Jackson Square, in the very heart of the city’s French Quarter
Many key spots in the Vieux Carré are shown above: Madame LaLaurie’s “Haunted House”, the “Old Absinthe House”, the “French Market”, “Jackson Square” and “Congo Square”.

And what would a collection of New Orleans postcards be without a dazzling scene of Mardi Gras merriment? The colorful postcard shown
below is a float turning at the corner of St. Charles and Canal streets.

Many postcards contained brief messages, such as this one on the reverse of a postcard entitled “Fan Window in Governor Claiborne Home, New Orleans, La.”:

“This sure is an interesting place. We are going on a cruise up the Mississippi this afternoon.”

Other postcard sentiments were words of love between sweethearts, and one must remember these messages were not altogether private.
The postman, one’s parents, brother or sister may have taken a peek before you got home to collect your mail. Often such a love note was heartfelt, short and sweet, such as:

“I know that I love you because of how much I miss you.”

Other times, it was a clever, if not corny, poem:

“You can fall from the sky.  
You can fall from a tree.  
But the best way to fall  
Is in love with me.”

And here’s a comment about New Orleans weather from this pre-1907 (message on the front) postcard of Jackson Square, pictured below:  
“Feeling fine, but a trifle warm in the collar.”

And then there’s perhaps the most commonplace message of all:

“Having a good time. Wish you were here.”

The handful of postcards displayed above are but a small part of the countless images of “NEW ORLEANS – AMERICA’S MOST INTERESTING CITY”, a description used frequently on a multitude of those cards.
Postcard seller and newsdealer George Wallace’s business continued after the owner’s death in 1927, later moving to 108 N. Rampart Street in 1935. Wallace’s was replaced by the Rolay Newstand at 107 Royal Street, just to right of the former stand, offering a similar array of “over 250 out-of-town newspapers and periodicals” as well as foreign papers from “Great Britain, Spain, Russia, Germany and Sweden,” explained a 1939 article in the New Orleans States. This was a tribute to the city’s thirst for knowledge, its interest in events around the globe and New Orleans’ cosmopolitan stature as a large port city.

Bert E. Gilmore, a native of Pensacola, Florida, was the “well-known proprietor” of the newstand who made the mistake of selling fireworks for the New Year’s Eve celebrations on December 31, 1937. Either a ne’er-do-well pedestrian or someone from a passing automobile (it was not determined by police) threw a lit firecracker into the store and the fireworks display for sale just inside the open doorway “began to explode, sparks leaped to the stacks of magazines and soon the entire front of the establishment was in flames,” reported the Picayune. A trio of men, suffering first and second-degree burns, were dragged to safety from the inferno by nearby Traffic Patrolmean Sidney Terrebonne.

Rolay’s operation survived and continued in business at the site for quite a number of years, eventually taking the name of it’s proprietor, becoming Gilmore’s Newsstand. The late Anthony Marcello and his partner, Leo Miceli, purchased Gilmore’s News in the 1960s, which remained opened until the 1980s. Bert Gilmore died in 1986. The two
partners, Marcello and Miceli, opened the “Lakeside News” newstand next to Morning Call at 17th and North Hullen streets in Metairie in the mid-1970s. Anthony’s son, Michael Marcello, took over the day-to-day operation of the business in the 1990s. It closed in 2015 with digital media ascendant and after the loss of many longtime customers. Sales had dropped steadily over the previous decade.

The site of Wallace’s and Gilmore’s newstands today, 2018

The Royal Street site today is a dismal shadow of its vibrant past, when postcards and periodicals formed a colorful frame around Wallace’s lively emporium. Richard Campanella has written that Wallace’s postcard and magazine stand operated “on the Royal Street side of the first unit (1852) of Touro Row, a series of twelve identical structures that spanned Canal Street from Royal to Bourbon.” Not all of the twelve remain, and most have their ground-floor interiors modernized. The 100 block of Royal, full of history but not technically part of the French Quarter, is due a loving makeover – or at least a return to its former “picture-postcard” glory.

NED HÉMARD
New Orleans Nostalgia
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