Collectors Club Philatelist



By a Vertical Line on the Face:

The Introduction of Postcards with Divided Address Side

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Per Gustafson

The early 1900s were the years of a global "postcard craze." Since the introduction of the first prepaid postal stationery cards in 1869, postal cards had mainly been used by businesses for commercial correspondence. But as new printing techniques allowed the mass production of illustrated cards, the picture postcard rapidly became a popular way of sending images and short personal greetings to family, friends and acquaintances, near and far. Picture postcards first appeared in commercial production in the 1880s, started to gain popularity – primarily in Europe – in the 1890s and turned into a global mass phenomenon during the first years of the new century.¹

An important event in the development of the picture postcard was the introduction, in 1902, of the divided address side. Previously, the address side had only been used for the address, whereas personal messages had been written on the image side. But when the address side was divided by a vertical line, the left half could be used for personal correspondence.

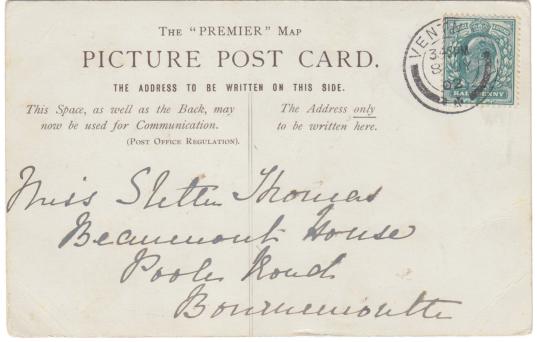


Figure 1. U.K., inland use, July 8, 1902. ½d postcard rate. Earliest divided card recorded by the author.

When the divided address side was introduced, it was not in accordance with the current rules of the Universal Postal Union (UPU). Yet postcards with divided address side – in this article described as "divided postcards" – rapidly became popular and came to be used in many countries before the UPU finally decided to accept them, in 1907. This caused considerable problems in international mail

exchange. Thousands of frustrated correspondents all over the world had to pay postage due for divided cards that were not accepted at the postcard rate.

At the same time, postal authorities in many countries made efforts to facilitate the use of divided cards. This makes the introduction of divided postcards an interesting episode in international postal history.² This article examines that episode and how the postal treatment of early divided postcards was affected by national rules and practices, international agreements of various kinds and UPU rules.

The article draws on a range of data from different countries – postal regulations, newspapers, archival records, more recent postal history literature and correspondence with other postal history collectors. Of particular importance was the discovery, in the Swedish National Archives, of a file containing all international correspondence of the Swedish Post Office between 1903 and 1906 on the subject of divided postcards.³ This file showed in detail how the question was discussed and how agreements were made between national postal administrations prior to the 1906 UPU Congress.

An additional source of information is a survey made by the international bureau of the UPU in November 1905.⁴ All members were asked four questions about their rules and practices regarding divided postcards:

- 1) Are divided cards permitted for inland use in your country?
- 2) Have you made agreements with other countries about accepting divided cards? If so, which countries?
- 3) Does your country strike "T" [tax] marks on outgoing divided cards to countries with which you have no agreement?
- 4) Do you charge postage due for incoming cards without "T" marks from countries with which you have no agreement?

Replies from 48 of the member states were published by the international bureau between December 1905 and May 1906. These replies give useful information about the situation at the time of the survey.

Introduction of the Divided Address Side

The invention of the divided address side is attributed to German postcard manufacturer Frederick Hartmann, who produced cards for the British market. In response to a query from Hartmann, a message from the British Postmaster General was published in the *Picture Postcard Magazine* in January 1902:

... postcards may bear on the front, i.e. address side, a continuation of the message, or the name and address of the sender, or even an advertisement, so long as such matter does not interfere in any way with the legibility of the address.

This message did not refer to any new postal regulations, but to existing rules, in force since 1897. Yet it has been interpreted as the *de facto* acceptance of divided postcards in the United Kingdom.⁵ There was also a letter published in *The Times* of Jan. 30, 1902, referring to a communication from the secretary of the British Postmaster General, confirming that writing on the left-hand half of the address side of postcards was permitted.⁶

Yet, for some reason, postcards with a dividing line on the address side did not appear until the summer of that year. Figure 1 shows a very early divided card, postmarked July 8, 1902, with the characteristic phrase "This Space, as well as the Back, may now be used for Communication."

The divided address side was not in accordance with then-current UPU regulations, which said that only the address and other postal notes were allowed on the address side of a postcard. Any personal correspondence should be written on the "back" of the card. This meant that the first divided cards could only be used within the United Kingdom. If sent abroad, with messages written on the address side, they did not qualify for the postcard rate but required letter postage.⁷



Figure 2. United Kingdom to Japan, July 23, 1903. 1d postcard rate, 12 sen postage due.

Figure 2 shows an example of this. It is a divided card sent to Japan in July 1903 with only postcard postage (1d) and was taxed as a letter because of the short message written on the address side. The addressee was charged 12 sen postage due – twice the difference between the British foreign postcard rate and letter rate converted to Japanese currency. Relatively soon, many British divided cards came to have printed instructions, saying that messages on the address side were only allowed for inland mail. This had some effect, but many cards continued to be sent abroad with correspondence on the address side.

From 1903 onwards, divided postcards spread to other countries. Correspondents and postcard collectors appreciated the cards, as they provided more space for correspondence and left the image side "clean." Among the countries that allowed divided cards already in 1903 were New Zealand, France, Canada, Switzerland and Portugal.⁸

Other postal administrations followed suit – important countries, such as Russia, Austria, Hungary and Australia in 19049, and several other European countries in 1905. 10 Among the last countries in the world was the United States, where divided cards were not allowed to be sent until March 1907. 11 Figure 3 shows a divided postcard, with correspondence on the address side, sent during the first month it was allowed. The card has a printed instruction: "After March 1, 1907, this space may be used for a written message, using a one-cent stamp."



Figure 3. United States, inland use, March 13, 1907, at the 1¢ postcard rate.

Organizing the International Exchange of Divided Cards

In international mail exchange, divided cards were to be taxed as letters if they had correspondence on the address side, due to the then-current UPU regulations. But already in November 1903, when France decided to accept divided cards, the French Post Office took an initiative to enable their international use. A letter was sent to the other UPU members, informing them that France would suggest to the next UPU Congress that divided cards should be accepted in international mail exchange. In addition, the letter asked whether the other postal administrations would be willing to exchange divided postcards with France at the postcard rate with immediate effect, i.e. before the question had been settled by the UPU. Some countries seem to have responded favorably to the French inquiry. Yet many postal administrations wanted to await an eventual revision of the common UPU rules, rather than to make agreements on a bilateral basis, as suggested by France.

The next UPU Congress was to be held in Rome in 1904. However, the congress was postponed, for political and administrative reasons, and would not be held until 1906.¹³ In the meantime, more and more countries allowed the use of divided cards. Increasing numbers of such cards were also sent abroad and surcharged as underpaid letters. The need to facilitate the international

use of divided cards became urgent, and the French suggestion about mutual acceptance became part of the solution. Many countries made bilateral agreements about exchanging divided postcards at the postcard rate. In addition, several countries made unilateral decisions to accept divided cards in incoming mail, outgoing mail or both. The Imperial Penny Postage scheme, in force in most of the British empire since late 1898, also made it easier to use divided postcards internationally.

The UPU Congress in Rome was finally held in spring 1906 and a decision was made to allow divided cards in all international mail exchange. ¹⁴ The decision entered into force on Oct. 1, 1907, but the UPU members could choose to apply the new regulations earlier – which many members did.



Figure 4. Italy (UPU Congress in Rome) to France, May 23, 1906, with 10 centesimi postcard rate (bilateral agreement) and 25 centesimi registration fee.

Figure 4 shows a registered divided postcard (yes, there is a faint dividing line!), sent from the 1906 UPU Congress in Rome, with postmarks and a registration label from the special post office of the congress. Despite the message on the address side, the card could be sent at the 10 centesimi postcard rate as a bilateral agreement between Italy and France was already in place. ¹⁵ In addition, there was a 25 centesimi registration fee.

Thus, from the introduction in 1902 until the full UPU acceptance in October 1907, the treatment of divided cards sent internationally depended on an interplay between bilateral agreements, unilateral decisions, various national practices, one important multilateral arrangement (the penny postage scheme) and the earlier UPU regulations, which did not allow postcards with messages on the address side. In addition, rules and practices were in more-or-less constant change. The following sections illustrate this, and the confusion it caused among both correspondents and postmen.

Bilateral Agreements

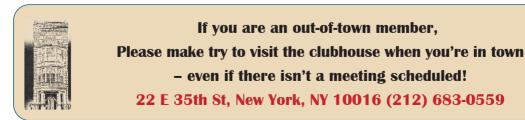
The French Post Office initiated bilateral agreements in the letter sent to other UPU members in November 1903. A first round of agreements was announced in a French postal bulletin in May 1904. From May 16 onwards, divided cards with messages on the address side were allowed in the exchange between France and 13 other countries and, in addition, to all French colonies.

Over the following two years, an intense correspondence about the exchange of divided cards took place between postal administrations around the world. Numerous agreements were made between different pairs of countries at different points in time. They were usually announced in postal circulars or bulletins. In the post offices, lists with "permitted" countries had to be updated as new agreements were made, sometimes on a weekly basis. For example, France announced 48 different agreements between May 1904 and October 1906¹⁶ and the United Kingdom announced agreements with more than 50 different countries and territories between December 1905 and August 1906.¹⁷

Figure 5 shows a card sent from France to Italy in late May 1904. Italy was one of the first countries to make bilateral agreements with France, and this card was accepted at the 10 centimes postcard rate the first month that agreement was in force.



Figure 5. France to Italy, May 28, 1904, 10 centimes postcard rate (bilateral agreement).



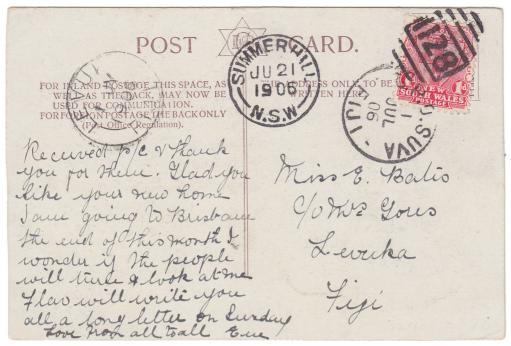


Figure 6. New South Wales (Australia) to Fiji, June 21, 1906, 1d postcard rate (bilateral agreement).

Most agreements involved European countries, but there were also initiatives in other parts of the world. For example, the commonwealth of Australia made a number of agreements, mostly with other British colonies. Figure 6 shows a divided card sent from New South Wales to Fiji in June 1906. The bilateral agreement between Australia and Fiji was recorded on May 14, 1906, just before the end of the Rome Congress. ¹⁸ Once the Rome Congress ended, however, relatively few new bilateral agreements were reported. Several countries instead began to apply the new UPU regulations about acceptance of divided cards shortly after the congress.

Bilateral agreements were usually mutual, allowing divided cards to be sent at the postcard rate in both directions between the countries involved. But there were exceptions, where divided cards could be sent at the postcard rate in one direction, but required letter postage in the other. For example, Germany allowed inland use of divided cards in February 1905, and at the same time decided that no postage due should be charged for divided cards arriving from abroad. It seems that Germany also informed other European countries about this policy. Several countries therefore announced, in the spring or summer of 1905, that divided cards could be sent to Germany with only postcard postage. Yet divided cards sent from Germany to other European countries required letter postage until at least Sept. 1, 1905. 19

The purpose of bilateral agreements was to facilitate the international use of divided cards. Yet, as agreements were made with different countries at different points in time, it became difficult for the public to keep track of current regulations. The card shown in Figure 7 was sent from Sweden to Spain in July 1905 with 10 öre postcard postage. At that time, Sweden had made bilateral agreements with six different European countries, but an agreement with Spain was not announced until late January 1906;²⁰ the card was therefore surcharged

as a letter. The Swedish post office applied a "T" and a tax mark indicating a deficiency corresponding to $12\frac{1}{2}$ French centimes. A Spanish tax mark shows that the addressee had to pay 25 centimos postage due – double the deficiency in Spanish currency.



Figure 7. Sweden to Spain, July 21, 1905, 10 öre postcard rate, 25 centimos postage due.

At times, even postal clerks made errors and applied tax marks on cards sent to countries with which bilateral agreements were already in place. Figure 8 shows an interesting card from Australia to the United Kingdom, sent on Nov. 22, 1905, at the 1d postcard rate. A bilateral agreement about sending divided cards at the postcard rate from Australia to the United Kingdom was recorded by the Australian Postmaster General on that same day. The card was initially surcharged as an underpaid letter, with a tax mark indicating a 10 centimes deficiency. But information about the agreement apparently reached the post office in Melbourne later that day, or at least before the card was sent off to the United Kingdom. The tax mark was therefore deleted and no postage due was charged upon arrival. It also happened that postmen failed to apply tax marks in cases where they should have done so.

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Imperial Penny Postage

The Imperial Penny Postage represents a special case in the postal treatment of divided postcards. UPU regulations gave members the right to make agreements about lower postal rates than those decided by the UPU. This was often done by neighboring countries. A more far-reaching initiative was taken

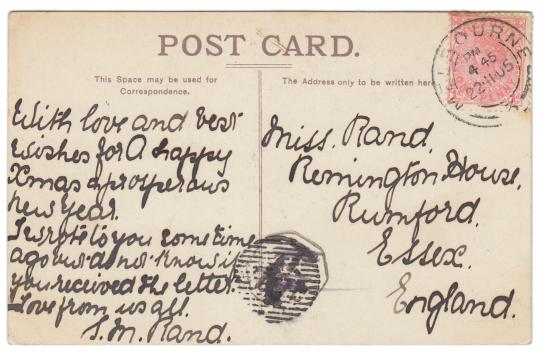


Figure 8. Victoria (Australia) to the United Kingdom, Nov. 22, 1905, 1d postcard rate, tax mark obliterated (bilateral agreement).



Figure 9. United Kingdom to Malta, Aug. 15, 1903, 1d imperial penny postage.

by postal officials of the United Kingdom and members of the British Empire on Dec. 25, 1898, with the introduction of Imperial Penny Postage. Among the members of the penny postage scheme, letters of ½ oz., as well as postcards, could be sent for one penny, which was the normal foreign postcard rate. Membership in this scheme was optional, but most British colonies, dominions, protectorates and other related territories joined, either from the start or in the following years. The most important exception was Australia, which was not part of the penny postage scheme when divided cards were introduced.²²

As the penny postage applied to both letters and postcards, divided cards with correspondence on the address side could be sent at the normal foreign postcard rate in most parts of the British empire. Figure 9 shows an early example of this. The card was sent from the United Kingdom to Malta in August 1903 with 1d postage, some nine months before the first bilateral agreements were made about divided cards in international mail exchange.

Unilateral Acceptance of Divided Postcards

To further complicate matters, many postal authorities made unilateral decisions to facilitate international exchange of divided cards. As suggested by the previously mentioned UPU survey, postal authorities might decide to abstain from striking tax marks on outgoing postcards, to abstain from charging postage due for divided cards that arrived from abroad without tax marks, or both. In certain cases, divided cards could therefore be sent at the postcard rate even if no bilateral agreement was in place.

The card shown in Figure 10 was sent from Austria to Sweden. A bilateral agreement between these two countries was announced in a Swedish postal circular on March 30, 1906. Yet this card, sent on March 1, 1906, was still accepted at the 10 heller postcard rate. The reason for this was unilateral decisions taken by both countries. Austria had made a unilateral decision, published on Feb. 28, 1905, that no tax marks should be struck on outgoing divided postcards. Sweden, for its part, had made a unilateral decision to abstain from charging postage due for incoming cards arriving without tax marks, whether or not a bilateral agreement was in place. That decision was in force since April 1, 1905, when divided cards were allowed for inland use in Sweden.²³

A few countries went even further and decided that no postage due should be charged for incoming cards – even if they arrived with tax marks. Russia made such a decision in December 1903.²⁴ Figure 11 shows a divided card from the United States to Russia, sent in October 1906. The United States did not allow outgoing divided postcards until March 1, 1907.²⁵ Consequently, this card received a 15 centimes tax mark in New York, indicating the difference between the foreign postcard rate (2¢) and letter rate (5¢) in French currency. Yet the Russian post deleted the tax mark and charged no postage due, in accordance with its unilateral decision.

Somewhat surprisingly, the United States had made a similar decision in late June 1906.²⁶ This decision meant that incoming divided cards were not surcharged in the United States, even if they arrived with tax marks. At the same time, the United States applied tax marks on outgoing divided cards only if the postcard rate was paid. No wonder the public got confused!

Unilateral Non-Acceptance of Divided Postcards

In international mail exchange, it was normally the post office of the sending country that should signal, with a "T" (tax) mark, if a postal item was underpaid. But if mail arrived without tax marks, the post office of the receiving country could still charge postage due "in case of obvious error," according to UPU



Figure 10. Austria to Sweden, March 1, 1906, 10 heller postcard rate (unilateral decisions).



Figure 11. United States to Russia, Oct. 5, 1906, 2¢ postcard rate. The U.S. tax mark was deleted on arrival (unilateral decision by Russia).

rules.²⁷ Several countries charged postage due for divided postcards arriving from abroad even if they did not have tax marks from the sending country.

The United States systematically treated incoming divided cards as underpaid letters until the decision in late June 1906 to accept cards from abroad at the postcard rate. The card shown in Figure 12 was sent from the Dominican Republic in February 1906. The card arrived in the United States without tax marks, probably due to a unilateral decision by the post office of the Dominican Republic to abstain from applying tax marks on outgoing divided cards. Yet, when the card arrived in the United States, the addressee was charged 6¢ postage due, representing twice the difference between foreign postcard and letter rate.

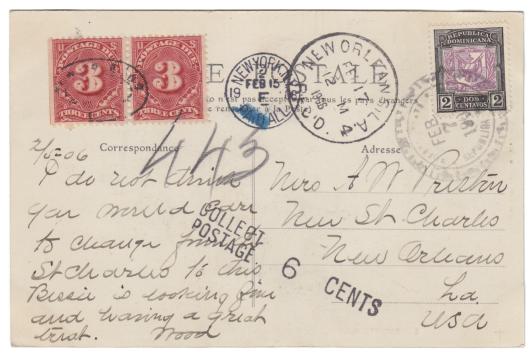


Figure 12. Dominican Republic to the United States, Feb. 7, 1906, 2 centavos postcard rate, 6¢ postage due (unilateral decision by the United States).

Several European countries also charged postage due for divided cards arriving without tax marks, at least up until the date when they accepted divided cards for domestic use. The U.K. continued surcharging incoming cards until December 1905 when they announced their first bilateral agreements about international exchange of divided cards.

One potential problem with applying the rule about "obvious error" was that there was no indication of missing postage from the sending country. It was therefore up to the post office of the destination country to determine how much postage due to charge. That sometimes led to additional errors, as the difference between foreign postcard and letter rates was not the same in all countries.

Another "unilateral" practice was to apply tax marks on transit mail. There was no explicit support in UPU rules for this practice, yet available material shows that it occurred in a few countries. The most prominent case was Germany. The German Post Office announced on Sept. 4, 1906, that divided

postcards could be sent to non-European destinations. But prior to that date, the German post consistently struck tax marks on all divided cards sent outside Europe, including transit mail, regardless of bilateral agreements or unilateral decisions made by sending and destination countries.

Figure 13 shows a divided card sent from Hungary to Brazil in August 1906 with 10 fillér postage for the foreign postcard rate. By then, Hungary had made a unilateral decision that tax marks should not be struck on outgoing divided cards and Brazil did not charge postage due for incoming cards without tax marks. But when the card passed through Germany, it received a German tax mark (partly covered by a Brazilian postage due stamp), and the post in Brazil charged postage due accordingly. There is no visible note about deficient postage, but 240 réis due represents twice the difference between Hungarian postcard and letter rate.



Figure 13. Hungary to Brazil, August 25, 1906. 10 fillér postcard rate, 240 réis postage due (because of German tax mark applied in transit).

Tax marks on transit mail are also known from the United Kingdom and the United States. In the United Kingdom, divided cards from British colonies that passed through London might receive tax marks if they had only letter postage. I have also seen two cards to Canada, sent from Germany and Martinique, with U.S. tax marks. However, these tax marks may have been struck in error by postal clerks who did not notice that the destination was Canada and not the United States.

Divided Cards Sent with Letter Postage

Before the exchange of divided cards was permitted between a given pair of countries – by a bilateral agreement, by unilateral decision(s) or by the UPU rules from the 1906 Rome Congress – divided cards with correspondence on the address side did not qualify for the postcard rate, but required letter postage. Postcard writers were often not aware of this. In several countries, the postal

authorities and the producers of postcards tried to inform the public that correspondence should not be written on the address side of cards sent abroad, or that this was only allowed to certain countries. Printed instructions to this effect often appeared on the address side of divided cards – in France such an instruction was even prescribed by the postal regulations.³¹

The possibility to write a message on the address side and apply letter postage was rarely mentioned in such instructions. Moreover, those few correspondents who knew the rules mostly preferred to write their messages on the image side rather than paying the more expensive letter rate. Divided cards with correct letter postage are, therefore, difficult to find.



Figure 14. Germany to France, May 23, 1905, 20 pfennig letter rate.

The card shown in Figure 14 was sent from Germany to France in May 1905. Divided cards were allowed for inland use in Germany from February that year, but could not be sent to France with postcard postage until September.³² The sender was aware of this and applied 20 pfennig letter postage.

Figure 15 shows a postcard from Australia (Victoria) to Japan on Nov. 23, 1905. The overseas postcard rate from Australia was 1½d, but this card has 2½d letter postage. There is no recorded agreement between Australia and Japan, so letter postage was required. What makes the card particularly interesting is a short article printed in an Australian newspaper on Nov. 22, 1905 – the day before the card was sent:

POSTCARDS. With reference to the arrangement recently made as regards postcards for transmission within the Commonwealth [of Australia], and between the Commonwealth and New Zealand, for the face of the cards to be divided by a vertical line, the space to the left of the line to be utilised, if desired, for a written communication, and to the right for the address, the postal authorities advise the receipt of a notification



Figure 15. Victoria (Australia) to Japan, Nov. 23, 1905. 21/2d letter rate.

from the Japanese postal administration that cards divided as described above have been forwarded to Japan, where they are not allowed to circulate as postcards, and are therefore surcharged on delivery with double the deficient postage.³³

It also happened that letter postage was paid in situations where this was no longer necessary due to recently made bilateral agreements or unilateral decisions. In such cases, one may guess that the sender had been informed that the addressee had been charged postage due for a previous card.

Conclusion

The introduction of divided postcards is an interesting episode in international postal history. From 1902, when the divided address side first appeared in the United Kingdom, until 1907, when universal acceptance was granted by new UPU regulations, divided cards caused considerable confusion and frustration among postmen and correspondents around the world. This article has shown how and why divided cards were accepted at the postcard rate, surcharged as underpaid letters or – much less often – sent with letter postage.

The absence of common UPU regulations, together with the large volumes of postcards sent internationally during the early postcard craze, provoked a situation that reminds one of pre-UPU conditions. National postal administrations made numerous bilateral agreements about accepting divided cards at the postcard rate. Various unilateral decisions and practices also came to play an important role, as did the Imperial Penny Postage scheme for most parts of the British empire. Even though these agreements and decisions mostly aimed at facilitating international mail exchange and the use of divided postcards, the result was an array of constantly changing rules and practices. In the early 1900s, this was a real challenge for postal administrations, postmen and correspondents. Today, it is a fascinating subject for postal history collectors.

Endnotes

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