

A PENNY SAVED...

Coating Postal Cards for Reuse, 1876-1902

Synopsis
Ladd Faszold

Introduction

Nine Frame exhibit. Most pages are 8.5x11 with several 11x17 pages to balance the appearance of the exhibit and properly group the items. This exhibit has been shown before and has been revised to improve the story.

Aim, Purpose, & Scope with Background

This exhibit explores and celebrates the story of coating postal cards for reuse from 1876-1902, discussing production, types, usages, and eventual demise through introduction of counterfeit cards.

When postal cards were introduced in 1873, businesses saw an opportunity to inexpensively promote products, sales, and events. Advertisements and notices were printed on postal cards and mailed for an economical 1¢ per card. After a mailing, some unused cards were left over or had errors. While the Post Office Department (P.O.D.) would not redeem “spoiled” (preprinted but unused) cards, it did permit printing companies to coat the cards with metallic ink, clay, or enamel to obscure the original printing and either print a new ad or leave blank for a written message. **Thus, the industry of coating postal cards for reuse (called bronzing) was created, giving “spoiled” cards a second life.** This allowed advertising businesses to redeem some of the value of spoiled cards, thus saving a penny per card. Beginning with the earliest known coated card in 1876, the industry thrived for over 25 years until one man, E. Louis Smith, brought down the industry by counterfeiting postal cards. Due to his counterfeit cards the P.O.D. invalidated all coated cards on August 1, 1902.

Structure & Plan

Treatment:

Each new chapter heading is printed in **Bold Black**. Subsequent pages within chapters use **Light Gray**. Bodoni 72 font is used on white card stock. Natural-colored card stock is used for postal card mattes. Reverse of displayed items are reduced to 50–60% or enlarged for readability. Special cards have a **Red-Bordered matte**.

Red dot [●] indicates item identified by exhibitor.

The outline of the exhibit is on the Title Page. Below is a description.

1. Why Coat Spoiled Postal Cards? – includes why coated, economics of card-coating business, and failed attempts to reuse cards.
2. Coating Process – discusses how spoiled postal cards were coated and the various coatings used.
3. Clay Coating for Fine Printing – coating with clay allowed more precise printing, notably Exposition and Pioneer cards.
4. Printers of Coated Cards – Map shows coated cards were limited to northern Midwestern and Eastern states with a few examples from West coast. Printers of coated postal cards are listed by city– most important was Chicago, IL. A study of the most common card describes varieties of the coating, Partial Coating (when only a portion needed correcting), Fancy Coating to attract attention, and, finally, hidden printing under coatings revealed.
5. Coated Card Usage by Businesses – Businesses reused coated cards in multiple ways: Advertising, Notices & Receipts, Canadian postal cards coated by U. S. companies with salesmen in Canada for customers use for correspondence, and Philatelic Dealers. Each is organized alphabetically by topic or first card of the page. Double pages are centered for appearance.
6. Counterfeit Cards – In 1899 E. Louis Smith found a way to enhance his coating business’ profits by counterfeiting cards. Beginning with authentic examples of Smith’s business, eight of 58 known counterfeit cards are displayed, including one like Issue of 1894 and seven like Issue of 1898.
7. The Last Days (of Coated Cards) – Counterfeit cards extinguished a thriving industry and beginning August 1, 1902 coated cards of any kind were proclaimed postally invalid. The last known legally used coated card was posted at 9:30 pm, July 31, 1902.
8. Epilogue – describes the after effect of the now worthless coated cards.

Importance:

This is an excellent example of a problem created by the government (P.O.D.’s refusal to redeem spoiled cards) and solved by citizen entrepreneurs, many times more cheaply than buying and printing new cards. If not for one individual, the practice could have continued well into the Twentieth Century. As it is, it vanished into philatelic history in 1902 and was forgotten. Many collectors are unfamiliar with coated postal cards. This historical study introduces coated postal cards and presents examples for further research. Serious collectors of postal stationery can learn valuable insights regarding these elusive items.

Knowledge and Research:

Since coated postal cards were forgotten, documented research is limited. This exhibit reflects years of collecting and gathering information about these cards. Even *Postal Stationery*, United Postal Stationery Society journal, has only a handful of articles about coated cards other than counterfeit cards. Most references are contemporary ads by card coating printers or newspapers reporting coated cards’ demise in 1902.

After extensive research into coated postal cards and Louis Smith counterfeit cards, the exhibitor's *Coated Postal Card Catalog Including Louis Smith Counterfeit Cards*, was published by the United Postal Stationery Society, 2025, and a 2-part article, "Census of Louis Smith Counterfeit Postal Cards," was published in *Postal Stationery*, in July-August & September-October 2021. Topics covered include detailed analysis of coated card and counterfeit origins, production, cataloging of known coated cards, and census of confirmed counterfeit cards. *Specific original research indicated in the exhibit by magnifying glass.* 🔍

Challenge, Rarity, and Condition:

Very few coated cards remain of the millions produced. Used for advertising or notices, they were considered as junk mail; therefore, the vast majority of them were discarded or destroyed. While there are some common coated cards, usually with no printing over the coating, many reprinted cards may be unique. Coated cards are surprisingly difficult to find, rarely available at bourses and auctions.

The exhibitor compiled a census of Smith counterfeit cards, published in United Postal Stationery Society Journal *Postal Stationery*, July-August and September-October, 2021. The exhibitors *Coated Postal Card Catalog Including Louis Smith Counterfeit Cards* updates the total to only 58 counterfeit cards in collectors' hands. This exhibit includes eight of 58 counterfeits known (1 of 3 like Issue of 1894 and 7 of 55 like Issue of 1898). All 5 Types [Types 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5] counterfeits like Issue of 1898 are the in exhibit. Since many passed through the mails, displayed cards are the best condition available.

Highlights

Material Highlights (with **Red-Bordered matte**)—

Early bronze coated card with blue printed ad for Frank G. Tullidge & Co. dated and **posted July 5, 1877**. [ex. Fricke]
[Frame 1, Page 5]

Columbian Exhibition Series No. 5, Government Building **with inverted printing**. [Frame 1, Page 16]

Early bronze coated card with ad for H. J. Burton. Printed by J. W. Robinson, Boston, MA. Dated & **posted May 14, 1877**.

Earliest Usage of Coated Card by a Recognized Printer [ex. Fricke] [Frame 2, Page 2]

Double Ad on coated card, only example found. [Frame 2, Page 15]

Study of a Common Coated Card—showing six progressive flaws in coating (**Red Dots ●** – No Red Matte) [Frame 3, Pages 2-4]

Earliest Known Usage of coated postal card. Partial Coated B. Kittredge & Co. **posted October 19, 1876**,
[Frame 3, Page 5]

Two early (1877) all-over ad cards—one with black-negative ad printed on gold coating and one with blue ad printed on gold coating [latter ex. Fricke] [Frame 4, Page 1]

Two cards for Longman & Martinez Paint Makers with **identical ad on uncoated and coated cards**. Reflects procedures for printing advertising. [Frame 5, Page 1]

Three Canadian postal cards coated by U. S. companies. [Frame 8, Pages 1-3]

Mint Counterfeit card like 1¢ Issue of 1894, 1 of 3 known (Only mint example) by Louis Smith [ex. Stratton, Beachboard, Falberg] [Frame 9, Page 2]

Counterfeit cards like 1¢ Issue of 1898 – Type 4 by Louis Smith [Frame 9, Pages 3-4]

Counterfeit card like 1¢ Issue of 1898 – Type 1 by Louis Smith [Frame 9, Page 5]

Counterfeit card like 1¢ Issue of 1898 – Type 5 by Louis Smith [Frame 9, Page 6]

Counterfeit card like 1¢ Issue of 1898 – Type 2 by Louis Smith [Frame 9, Page 7]

Counterfeit card like 1¢ Issue of 1898 – Type 3, 1 of 2 in collectors hands by Louis Smith [Frame 9, Page 8]

Late usage 1¢ Issue of 1898 **prepared by counterfeiter Louis Smith** [Frame 9, Page 12]

1¢ Issue of 1902, One of last coated cards produced [Frame 9, Page 14]

Last Known Legal Usage of a coated card. 1¢ Issue of 1898 **cancelled on July 31, 1902 at 9:30 p.m.** [Frame 9, Page 15]

Coated Pioneer Card on 1¢ Issue of 1898 with DUE 2 CENTS marked over indicium. Shows handling after coated cards lost postage value August 1, 1902. (**Red Dot ●** – No Red Matte) [Frame 9, Page 16]

Bibliography

Basic coated postal card and Smith counterfeit card sources are indicated here. Over 150 sources are in footnotes on each page.

Coated Postal Card Catalog Including Louis Smith Counterfeit Cards, Ladd Faszold, United Postal Stationery Society, 2025.

Census of Louis Smith Counterfeit Postal Cards, Ladd Faszold, *Postal Stationery*, Part 1 July-August & Part 2 September-October 2021.

Census of Louis Smith Counterfeit Postal Cards—Update 2022, Ladd Faszold, *Postal Stationery*, November-December, 2022.

United States Postal Card Catalog, Lewis E. Bussey, United Postal Stationery Society, 2020, pp. x, 12, 216, 219.

Postal Cards, Circular to Postmasters, Post Office Department, Washington, April 15, 1873

Coated U. S. Cards, Steve Pavlina. *Postal Stationery*, September-October 1969, p. 314.

The Inland Printer Company, Vol. XXVII, April 1901, No. 1, p. 27.

The Inland Printer Company, Vol. XXVIII, December 1901, No. 3, p. 462.

Follow Up on the Louis Smith Counterfeits of US Postal Cards, Bill Falberg, *Postal Stationery*, May-June 2002, p. 58.

Another View of the S14 & S17 1902 Louis Smith Counterfeits, William Falberg *Postal Stationery*, November-December 2001, p. 106.

The Biggest Little Counterfeiter, F.B. Stratton, *The American Philatelist*, February 1984, p. 121

The American Stationer, Vol. LI, No. 18, May 3, 1902, p. 25.

St. Louis Post - Dispatch, [St. Louis, Mo] 25 Apr 1902, p. 4.

Spurious Stamps: A History of U. S. Postal Counterfeits, H. K. Petschel, p. 62-63.

U. S. Postal Cards, Frank B. Stratton, *Postal Stationery*, March-April 1971, pp. 39-40.

A PENNY SAVED...

COATING POSTAL CARDS FOR REUSE, 1876-1902

Introduced in 1873, postal cards presented businesses an opportunity to promote products and events for just a penny. After mailing, left over printed cards were wasted or “spoiled” and could not be returned to the P.O.D. for credit.

Thus, the industry for coating postal cards for reuse (called bronzing) was created, giving “spoiled” cards a second life.

Purpose of Exhibit:

This exhibit tells the story of coating postal cards for reuse from 1876-1902, discussing production, types, usages, and eventual demise due to counterfeited cards.

Challenge Factor:

Of millions produced they were discarded as “junk mail” and very few coated cards remain. Common coated cards exist but those with an overprinted ad may be unique. Only 58 counterfeit postal cards known.

What is Presented:

“Spoiled” postal cards coated for reuse and company advertising linked to printing on cards are displayed.

Treatment:

This exhibit follows Exhibit Plan below. Pages within “4. PRINTERS OF COATED CARDS” listed by city, and “5. COATED CARD USAGE BY BUSINESSES” alphabetized by topic or first card on page. Multi-pages are centered. Chapter headings in **Bold Black**, within chapters **Light Gray**. Reverses reduced to 50–60% or enlarged for readability. Natural-colored card stock is used for footnoted print resources and postal card mattes. Original research indicated by magnifying glass. 🔍

Special cards have a Red-Bordered matte.

Red dot indicates item identified by exhibitor. ●

Exhibit Plan

1. Why Coat Spoiled Postal Cards?
 - 1.a Economics of Coating Postal Cards
 - 1.b Early Failed Attempts to Reuse Spoiled Postal Cards
2. Coating Process
 - 2.a. Types— Metallic
 - 2.b. Types— Multiple Metallic
 - 2.c. Types—Clay and Enamel
 - 2.d. Types— Layered Multiple
3. Clay Coating for Fine Printing
4. Printers of Coated Cards
 - 4.a. Distribution Map of Usage and Printers
 - 4.b. Printers (by City)
 - 4.c. Study of a Common Coated Card
 - 4.d. Partial Coating
 - 4.e. Fancy Coating
 - 4.f. Hidden Messages
5. Coated Card Usage by Businesses
 - 5.a. Usage for Advertising
 - 5.b. Usage for Notices & Receipts
 - 5.c. Canadian Postal Cards Coated by U. S. Companies
 - 5.d. Usage by Philatelic Dealers
6. Counterfeit Cards
 - 6.a. Authentic Louis Smith Cards
 - 6.b. Counterfeit Card –
Like 1¢ Issue of 1894
 - 6.c. Counterfeit Cards –
Like 1¢ Issue of 1898
7. The Last Days (of Coated Cards)
8. Epilogue

Significance of Coated Postal Cards in Postal History

For over 25 years businesses benefited from the postal card coating industry. If not for one man, it could have continued well into the twentieth century. After its demise, this successful practice was forgotten.