

Organizational Prompt

# The Postcard Collectors

by ReadWorks

Contribution of Jennifer Flurer, Cambridge, Indiana



Remember:  
4 Paragraphs  
~ Intro  
~ Support for claim  
~ Counterclaim  
~ Conclusion

photo. Instead of advertising a place, the postcards show scenes from small town life. There are photos of celebrations, disasters, and visits from famous people, as well as portraits of the photographers' friends and family. These cards give a sense of what American life was like during that time.

Every six months, the club holds a big show in which many collectors gather together to talk about postcards and view each other's collections. In October of 2012, the convention was held in the ballroom of the New Yorker Hotel. Dozens of collectors had brought their collections with them. Some were very broad, while others were very specialized. One collector had only postcards of animals, while another had only ones of famous people. The collectors who were there to buy cards would sometimes walk up to the collectors selling cards and ask them if they had a particular type of card.

"Excuse me," an old woman asked a man. "Do you have any postcards of a hotel?"

"I do," said the man. "From where?"

"Miami Beach," said the woman.

"Damn," said the man, throwing up his hands. "I'm all out."

The woman scowled.

All the collectors said they were drawn to collect postcards for different reasons. Some said they liked collecting postcards as a way of understanding American history. Others said they had started out collecting stamps, but then they had grown more interested in the cards the stamps were attached to. A few said they collected all kinds of photographs, but that real photo postcards offered scenes they couldn't find anywhere else. A couple of collectors said they didn't have any special interest in postcards. They were buying cards as an investment, like some people buy financial stocks or pieces of art.

One collector, named Lisa, explained that she got into postcard collecting when she was very young. As a child, her father liked to wake her before dawn and schlep her from their home in Old Bridge, New Jersey, to the sprawling flea market in Englishtown, to forage for old postcards. For three decades, his collection grew. When he died, he left behind more than 100,000 cards, cached at random in a jumble of albums, envelopes, and shoe boxes, all crammed into a special annex to the garage, built explicitly for their preservation.

Several years ago, doctors told Lisa, then a spritely 48-year-old, that a tumor was growing in the pituitary gland of her brain. One night, unable to sleep, she went out to the garage, gathered up the postcards, and spread them across her dining room table. For the next 18 months, the family ate dinners in the kitchen while Lisa organized the cards, first by geographic region, then by topic.

"My brother said, 'Of course you have a brain tumor,'" Lisa recalled. "No sane person would do this."

Her brain tumor having been safely removed, Lisa brought a small portion of her collection—a mere 10,000 cards—to the hotel with her. All day, she had been trading with other collectors. Lisa liked to collect postcards with cats, as well as cards that related to Halloween. She loved the postcard show, but she was worried because the crowd was smaller than in previous years. Young people were not as interested in collecting postcards as their elders, and those who were tended to buy and sell their cards on the Internet rather than in person.

"I think it's a shame," said Lisa. "Part of the fun of collecting is all the people you meet. The cards all have their own history, but so do the collectors."

When you go on vacation, it is often customary to send friends and families postcards from the places you visit. The postcards not only let them know where you are and how you're doing, but they provide them with a keepsake from your vacation. Today, the ritual of sending postcards has been somewhat supplanted by posting vacation pictures on Facebook, Instagram, and other social media sites. Not long ago, however, it was not uncommon for people to amass many hundreds of postcards received from acquaintances. As these collections grew, a hunger for more postcards arose, and some people became amateur postcard collectors.

As postcard collecting became more popular, many collectors sought out one another to buy, sell, and trade cards. Some of them formed clubs, which gathered regularly. In New York City, the oldest and largest such club is the Metropolitan Postcard Club of New York. The club meets every month, usually in a small conference room in a hotel, where members can examine one another's collections. Most of the members of the club are middle-aged or elderly, but there are some young collectors as well. They bring their card collections in shoeboxes. The collectors sit at folding tables and spend many hours flipping through cards, pulling out the ones they like.

Every collector looks for something different. Some collectors look for cards from a specific place. Often, people like to collect postcards from the place where they were born or grew up. Others like to collect cards showing certain buildings. One man claims to have 200 different postcards of the Empire State Building. Some collectors like postcards with photos on the front, while others prefer illustrations. A lot of the collectors specialize in postcards from New York, but many have postcards from all over the world. Some organize their collections by state, while those with lots of foreign postcards organize them by country.

While we may typically think of postcards as showing places, old postcards can actually show many different subjects. In particular, there is a specific type of postcard called a "real photopostcard" that is particularly valuable to collectors. These postcards, popular in the early part of the 20th century, were produced by amateur photographers, mostly residents of small towns. The photographers would take photos and produce them as postcards in very small quantities, usually only several hundred cards per

## The Unknown Hall of Famer

by Michael Stahl

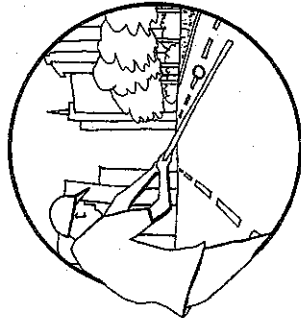


Illustration Credit: Nishan Patel

New York City is famous for many things: pizza, Broadway shows, skyscrapers, and baseball. The New York Yankees are possibly the best-known sports team in the world. Baseball has been so popular in New York City that there have been four professional major league baseball teams, including the Yankees, that have made their homes in New York City since the beginning of the 20th century.

So many kids in New York have always wanted to play baseball. However, playing baseball can be difficult in such an urban setting if the game is going to look like the real thing. There need to be a large grass field with a dirt diamond. The players need bases, bats, balls, and gloves to play with. In order to get a game of baseball going without having all of the required items, many New York City boys created their own version of baseball, one that would be played on the hard concrete streets. They would call it "stickball" because it could be played with a simple broomstick handle instead of a large, heavy bat. They'd use small, pink rubber balls instead of expensive hardballs made of leather and twine. Those kids, who were good, would incredibly one day find themselves in an actual Hall of Fame. George "Loin" Osorio is one of those players.

Osorio's family moved to Manhattan from his home in Puerto Rico when the ink on World War II peace treaties was still wet. In Puerto Rico, he was given his nickname because, as a very young boy, he was known to chase after a girl named Lola, so neighbors took to calling him the masculine form "Loin" since the two always seemed to be together. At nine years old in New York City, he did not hesitate to immerse himself in the king of the street games—as long as his homework and chores were done. He and the other kids on his block would take to the streets in t-shirts and cut-off shorts to enjoy the "cheap game." All they needed was one broomstick, a few rubber balls, and nine or so other guys from another block to prove themselves against.

"We'd play for a little money, five cents a game or a quarter when I was about ten years old," Osorio says, recalling that if his team won, they'd often use their money to see a movie. Sometimes kids would save their winnings to buy two-dollar Puma sneakers, which were more desired than one-dollar Converse because they were better for running; plus, everyone knew they were twice as expensive.

"But really we played for bragging rights," Osorio insists. "You were on the team from your block. You played for pride."

"Loin was one of the best because he always hit the ball hard on the ground, and was so fast that nobody could throw him out," remembers Carlos Diaz, the curator of New York City's Stickball Hall of Fame, of which Osorio is an esteemed member. "He was also very clutch and reliable. He could get a hit just about any time," Diaz adds.

Osorio and his friends, who were all of Puerto Rican descent, would play stickball for hours; that is, until the Irish cops would show up. Though there were few cars driving through the city streets in those days and the rubber balls with which they played were as harmful to windows as a summer wind, many of the

ReadWorks.org © 2013 ReadWorks®, Inc. All rights reserved.

police officers would discover games and immediately order the kids to hand over their makeshift bats. "I could never understand why they'd break up our stickball games," Osorio says. "We played to stay out of trouble."

For a time, Osorio remembers the cops slipping the sticks down into the sewer. But after the officer had moved along and the boys had faked disappointment long enough, one of the smaller kids would climb beneath street level into the muck and come up with the bat, covered in sludge. There was always an open fire hydrant somewhere they'd use to clean off the grime from both the bat and the brave boy.

"Then the cops got smart," Osorio says. "They started taking our bats, hold them halfway down in the sewer's grating and snap them in two."

Still unafraid, Osorio and his block mates continued to play throughout their adolescence, traveling farther away from their neighborhood with each passing year, challenging players in various neighborhoods and having tons of fun.

A frequent teammate of Osorio's, Alfred Jackson, another Stickball Hall of Fame member, remembers one particularly incredible shot struck by a rival of theirs named Tony Taylor. "He crushed the ball," Jackson begins. "He hit it so hard that it went off the third-floor siding of a building, came down, bounced off a car, hit the building again. Then it hit a lamppost and ricocheted to one of our outfielders who caught it for an out. The ball was in fair territory the whole time!"

As Osorio's clan got older, more and more money was bet on their games. They can recall games played for upwards of three to five thousand dollars, with the victorious team getting a cut. Some players depended on winnings as a sort of additional income, so some teams felt pressured to win for their players' financial stability. Fans who had their own best interests in mind heckled batters trying hard to focus on a potentially game-changing pitch.

Still, money was not as important as the feelings of self-respect and community, which truly compelled Osorio to go outside and play each and every Sunday, even 24 hours after his wedding. "I got married on a Saturday," Osorio says. "We had a bunch of leftovers from the wedding in the refrigerator. The players' wives always made food for all of us, so I woke up and packed the leftovers to bring to the game," he laughs, adding with a shake of his finger, "My wife wasn't very happy about that."

In the late 1950s and throughout the '60s, Osorio made a living building clock radios—and, briefly, delivering zippers—but always found time to participate in the first organized stickball leagues that were emerging throughout Manhattan and beyond. Though he has continued to play, Osorio and his friends have seen the game nearly completely disappear.

"Not as many guys play anymore," says Carlos Diaz, who has tried for many years to revitalize stickball in New York City. "And most of the young ones that do play are sons and grandsons of the guys who played fifty or sixty years ago." Diaz's efforts include opening a gallery this past winter, giving the Stickball Hall of Fame a more permanent home.

No matter what, Osorio still finds himself out on the streets of New York City every Sunday playing the game he loves, around the guys that he loves, all of whom have respected, and even honored him, for decades.

ReadWorks.org © 2013 ReadWorks®, Inc. All rights reserved.