

Introduction

Germany's postcard industry was dominating the world market in pre-1910 years. In books on postcards, especially from the USA, you usually find as answer *because labour was cheap* in Germany. This statement appears to have been copied by writers during the past decades over and over again.

When comparing figures only, one in US \$ and the other in Mark, the then effective exchange rate in mind, the German worker in the graphic trade did indeed earn less money per day. For an exact answer it would need access to historical economic archives. When you compare the costs of living in the US and Germany, the money the workers were able to save, then the results may look different. But this sort of statistics is something for academics. Fact is that German lithographers, printers/pressmen, bookbinders and other trained personell had a quite good income then.

Germany had thanks to the training controlled by the individual trades (guild system) an almost unlimited supply of skilled workers. Not this "training on the job" thing.

Were Germany's printing presses better than others? No, not really. Except when it came to collotype presses. Only France had some similar well designed models. British and US engineers have designed excellent bookprinting and litho presses. German machines were not that fast but extreme solid and reliable. However, mechanical works like Karl Krause, Leipzig, specialized in machinery for the printing/paper trade, were quick in finding

HISTORY OF THE GERMAN POSTCARD INDUSTRY

Postcard Manufacturer Associations



**Verein Photographischer
Reproduktions-Anstalten
GmbH, Berlin**



**Neue Bromsilber
Convention,
Berlin**

**Schutzverband der
Deutschen Postkarten-
Industrie e.V., Berlin**

solutions when necessary for better/faster production of postcard for example.

It looks like that many German printers who had concentrated entirely on postcard production, were often well organized, had something which is nowadays called "an optimized workflow".

German chromolitho printers had already a leading market position when the "Gruss aus" type cards became popular. So it was no problem to use (part of) the existing printing plants for ppc production.

Bromide photo cards: the "Neue Photographische Gesellschaft" (NPG) was big in business, in own words the world's biggest factory for photo cards. However, other investors

began to set up own factories in/around Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden etc.

Collo type printers: too many firms tried their luck with this process, mono-chrome printed cards were soon available at dumping prices. Only firms offering better (combined with litho process) quality were making money.

Letterpress: The Autochrome process (halftone ill. with 3-5 overlay colours) was a growing market for ppc production and export.

Both, the collotype and Autochrome processes have replaced the typical "Gruss aus" chromolitho picture postcard. But it was still widely for subject/greeting cards.

Heavy competition among German export printers, dropping prices, some had to close down. The protective tariffs of many countries made it worse.

This was the situation in Germany by 1906-07, a time which is generally described still as the "Golden Age of Postcards". Something had to happen. Otherwise the entire trade would had been damaged. High time for an organisation of the postcard manufacturers, and as the bromide photo producers (not too many firms!) were currently suffering most, it started with the P.R.A.

Read now what I have found in the volumes of the "Papier-Zeitung" (official organ) on the attempts to form a postcard manufacturer's *cartell* and the printing trade situation.

No individual sources/PZ issues mentioned due to limited space. If anyone wishes details on this, please contact me.

1907 Foreign customers of German postcard printers placing bigger orders, benefit a great deal from the severe competition among German firms. This is the major reason why postcards from Germany are low in price at that time.

April: The R.P.A. association (president Arthur Schwarz / director of Neue Photographische Gesellschaft, Berlin - NPG) formed by 13 German and 4 photographic printers from Austria, decide to increase prices for bromide cards by 6 - 7%. Payment terms agreed upon: 2% cash discount for payment within 30 days. Max. period allowed for payment: 3 months. Minimum order: 25 series / 150 cards each.

- The association of postcard wholesalers (500 dealers in Germany, 200 in Austria) agrees, but asks manufacturers to increase the minimum order to 50 series, to avoid competition with smaller (retail) dealers otherwise placing orders directly.

May: The union of postcard wholesalers (Hamburg) is not happy with the work of the R.P.A. but agrees not to sell 100 b/w cards under 6 Marks to sub-wholesalers.

- The recent agreement on minimum prices and payment terms of the bromide

Some 12,000 companies were organized in 385 cartels in Germany by 1905. Everything was absolutely legal. What about free competition? Do we misunderstand today what once was called a cartel? Influenced by Hollywood movies? Well, I don't know.

"Das Buch des Kaufmanns", 1928 edition offers long explanations on this subject. I learned that there had been 5 different types of cartels. 'Convention' was the simplest form, to have common terms of payment etc. Syndicate is already more worse with price-control, but there have always been "outsiders". Bad were also "Ringe" (corners) usually set up by speculators.

cards trade, encouraged the other of the c. 100 postcard manufacturers and c. 200 postcard publishers in Germany and Austro-Hungary, to start negotiations for an similar agreement to end price dumping.

- A long article by an anonymous postcard expert describes the current situation. He wishes that the planned cartel and fixed minimum prices/payment terms might soon come into existence. Critized is the behavior of some wholesalers who deduct

3 - 5% discount off payment even after 3 months, or otherwise order from someone else. French dealers/importers, although used to monthly payments, try to push German ppc manufacturers the same way.

- Printers of Autochrome cards also try to agree on fixed minimum prices. All firms are very busy especially with orders from the USA. Leipzig printers offering this process could need some 50 more presses to fill all orders. However, customers expect high quality at low prices. Autochrome and chromolitho printers have currently delivery periods of 4-5 months.

- Less postcards sold in Germany and Austria. Higher exports to Russia, France and especially England and Northern America. Many US firms appear not be financial sound and expect long payment periods.

August: There are still firms that do give special discounts to customers, selling cards below the agreed price.

September: The members of the Union of postcard wholesalers (Hamburg) want to do something against the postcard trade on the streets. Street traders and other sources of giveaway prices do harm to the regular ppc retail trade.

– Director Arthur Schwarz is no longer R.P.A. president.

October: the election results: new R.P.A. president is **Paul Hamburg** (E.A. Schwerdtfeger & Co., Berlin), 1. vize-president: **Hans Krämer** (Rotophot GmbH, Berlin), 2. vize-president: **M. Manes** (Photochemie GmbH, Berlin).

November: The Union of postcard wholesalers (Hamburg) suggests the R.P.A. best to be disbanded. Except higher manufacturer prices nothing was done, promises towards wholesalers not kept.

1908 Quite silent around the R.P.A. Now the "Schutzverband der Postkarten-Industrie" (S.P.I.), an organ of the "Papier-Industrie-Verein", gets more press. The "Protective Association of the Postcard Industry" meets regularly at the Leipzig fairs.

March: H. Krämer (Rotophot), president of the S.P.I. warns postcard printers not to increase production capacities. PPC exports in January 1908 went down to 204,000 kg (418,000 kg Jan. 1907) 1 kg = about 200 cards. Export to Belgium down from 6,200 kg (Jan. 07) to 4,600 kg (Jan. 08); France 11,200 / 8,500 kg; England 91,000 / 38,500 kg; Italy 8,700 / 5,800 kg; Holland 16,200 / 6,700 kg; Switzerland 13,600 / 11,000 kg; Argentine: 2,600 / 1,500 kg; Canada 4,600 / 3,100 kg. Mr. Krämer also asked member firms to reduce the number of novelties (subject/greeting cards) per year.

– An upset printing works director tells the public of a price inquiry by a German publishing house requesting dumping prices. 200,000 coloured cards with views from Germany/abroad, with absolutely no logo's/codes on, for max. price 2,20/2,50 Marks per 1000 cards incl. shipping costs.

April: NPG and Berlin-Neuroder Kunstanstalten AG leave the P.R.A.

– The P.R.A. puts the convention aside.
– The entire board of the S.P.I. resigns and refuses re-election.

May: S.P.I. general meeting at Berlin. The S.P.I. has 218 members. H. Krämer (Rotophot) is pretty disappointed by the behavior of many member firms. Although he does not want to be president anymore, he finally agrees to continue until the autumn fair meeting. Mr. Hamburg (E.A.S.) rejects his election for vice president. Replaced by Mr. Löwenstein (Osnabrücker Papierwaren-Fabrik), other members of the board are Mr. Michaelis, Mr. Barschall and Baumann (all Berlin). The S.P.I. advisory committee, according Mr. Hamburg useless because members did come to meet-



"Pussy", EAS card no. 08513/6 published by their London branch. Sepia bromide photo card with matt finish. On address side we find a "IIA" imprint. It means the quality of this card is not perfect: **second quality**. I find no defects. This reminds me of a note from a S.P.I. meeting when Mr. Krämer (Rotophot) is angry with Mr. Hamburg (EAS) who has marked some 100,000 cards as second quality, although of regular quality. (to get round fixed NBC convention prices). I have several "IIA" samples from different firms and only one shows several ink spots from colouring on image. Tricky people!



ings very often, is now installed again (wish of Mr. Krämer). The members are: Mr. Manger (Cologne), Andelfinger (Munich), Oesterreicher (Leipzig), Danziger (Liersch & Co.) and Baumann, both from Berlin.

– The German postcard industry and the S.P.I. has additional trouble. This time with the government who requests that the name and city of printers and/or publisher has always to be imprinted. Cards on sale not carrying such imprints will be confiscated. First cases are reported from Munich and Hildesheim.
– The Union of German collotype printers has called off its activities.

June: Not only the German ppc trade is a difficult situation. The general meeting of Raphael Tuck & Sons Ltd., London, reports of unsatisfactory market conditions (their business year ends in March), the dividend dropped from 10% to 6% and many share-holders are not very happy. Adolph Tuck says that the crisis in America (?) is the major reason. He criticizes the German ppc printers who had exported too many cards to the USA. Too many cards on sale = less sales and ruined prices. German printers had worked for financially weak US publishers, some of them even not in the position to pay the import taxes. Single German firms had lost up to 100,000 Marks. The result was that these (surplus) cards (with captions in English) were re-directed to England, and led to overcapacity on the local markets and also ruined prices. The consequences for the huge Tuck postcard stocks are bad.

– Germany has exported about 500,000,000 postcards between January - June 1908. This are 150,000,000 cards less than the year before.

September: S.P.I. meeting at Leipzig autumn fair. Mr. Krämer was unable to come and the meeting is led by Mr. Krug (of Regel & Krug, Leipzig). There are still too many novelties, and the trouble with the government re imprints on cards has still not come to an end. The committee to prepare the election of the new board is represented by Mess. Saulsohn, Falk, Barschack(?), Oettinger (all Berlin) and G. Jährig, Leipzig.

October: The S.P.I. has gone to court to clear the matter with imprints. Member firm Robert Prager (owner Richard Schlenner) who had not imprinted his name on cards for export, was proved not guilty in the end.

December: The Union of Austrian Postcard related trades invites all interested manufacturers, publishers, wholesalers etc. to come to Vienna and take part in the *First Austrian Postcard Day*. Besides an entertaining programme, talks are planned to find a solution to better the present bad situation of the postcard trade.

– A public meeting of the S.P.I. takes place on Dec. 15. Mr. Krämer is still president (?) and describes the situation of the ppc trade as difficult. The decline of the bromide photo cards market after the end of the P.R.A. agreements has continued. The big NPG is working with dumping prices (20% below once agreed prices) for new designs. It appears that the NPG does not only want to get previously lost customers back, but to ruin other competitors not

**Bromide
photo
card
printers /
publishers**



Aristophot



S. & G. Saulsohn



G. Liersch & Co.



Albrecht & Meister



E.A. Schwerdtfeger



Heliophot



unknown

so financial strong. (Ed. note: the strategy of NPG worked out first. Aristophot, Leipzig-Taucha was already in deep trouble. However, Albrecht & Meister, Berlin, took over the entire business and the NPG had suddenly a bigger competitor right in front their door).

1909 The Association of German Postcard Wholesalers is established at Berlin in January to better the situation of the postcard trade. Leading persons in this association are Mr. J. Themal (Posen), A. Schulze (Berlin), G. Kaufmann of Arthur Rehn & Co. (Berlin), Mr. Trinks, Leipzig and Robert Weller (Berlin).

February: The (British) Postcard Defense Association holds its annual meeting. This association is also open to firms of the postcard trade from outside Britain.

March: The leading manufacturers of (raw) photographic paper for ppc production by the mile form a (price) cartel with main sales office. The production price for 1000 bromide real photo cards used to be 48 Marks, and has now gone down to 28 Marks and below. Member firms of the new cartel are: NPG, Vereinigte Fabriken photograph. Papiere, Dresden, and the General Paper Company who represents the two biggest photographic paper factories: Blanchet frères et Kléber, Rives/Grenoble and Steinbach & Co., Malmédy/Aachen.

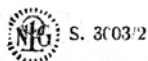
April: S.P.I. meeting. Krämer is still president but asks urgently for assistance with his work from the new committee of experts for the individual printing processes. The committees are indeed a Who is Who of the German ppc printing trade:

- *Autochrom experts:* Rich. Krug (Regel & Krug), Rich. Arnold (Gebr. Arnold), Th. Eismann and Bernh. Lengner, all from Leipzig.
- *Multi-colour printing:* Director G. Axmann (Bruckmann AG), Director H. Rump (Meisenbach, Riffarth & Co.), Hans Kohler, Herm. Sonntag, Carl Andelfinger, all from Munich.
- *Bromide photo cards:* Director Budwig (Berlin-Neuroder Kunstanstalten), S. Danziger (Gustav Liersch & Co.), Felix Freund, Paul Fink, Siegf. Saulsohn, all Berlin.
- *Chromolitho:* Director Budwig, Director Feinberg (Albrecht & Meister), Falk (A. Silbermann & Co., all from Berlin. Mr. Hamburg of E.A. Schwerdtfeger has not yet agreed to join.
- *Collo type:* experts need to be found.

May: The S.P.I. yearly business report reveals that the number of member firms has dropped from 218 to 195.



Silhouette type card, NPG series 3003/2, not p/u. What makes this card interesting? It is printed by litho process in 3 colours. Definitely not photographic bromide process BUT shows the NBC convention logo inside stamp box position. This is really unusual and the only sample I ever found. Probably a mistake by the printer. This NPG logo is most likely not that of the original NPG AG, but of its successor NPG GmbH = E.A. Schwerdtfeger and so dates from the 1920's.



June: The official trade statistics show that the production and export of postcards in 1908 has gone down by about 20%.

July: Share-holders attack the NPG director's board for leaving P.R.A. which has resulted in further losses. NPG directors announce a new price convention coming soon.

August: Germany's postcard export to the USA: 1st half year 1908 = 13,256,000 kg - 1st half year 1909 = 16,381,000 kg. Many US customers placed orders before the coming import tax increase.

- The Association of German Postcard Wholesalers, Berlin, sends an open letter to all bromide photo card manufacturers requesting a new price convention to end the current price dumping.

- The P.R.A. (president Paul Hamburg) and bromide photographic printers announce a new price convention (NBC) valid until the end of the year. Firms taking part are: Aristophot, Leipzig; Berlin-Neuroder Kunstanstalten; NPG; Photographica, Charlottenburg; Rotophot; E.A. Schwerdtfeger.

September: S.P.I. meeting at Leipzig. The retail prices for bromide cards are fixed: b/w cards 10 Pf/each; coloured 15 Pf and 15-20 Pf for bromide cards with glossy finish. All cards should show NBC logo.

- The new price convention covers the markets of Germany, Austro-Hungary Empire, Belgium, Holland and Russia. Minimum prices for wholesalers are discussed. Not all bromide photo manufacturers have joined the NBC.

- The Association of German Postcard Wholesalers is not happy with the prices of the NBC and wants better conditions/discounts. The convention is now valid until 1911.

October: Leipzig's Autochrome printers announce a price convention. Various wholesaler organisations want to boycott. A new wholesaler association for southern Germany is going to be set up (in Karlsruhe). They do not feel well represented by the Berlin association.

- Full page adverts found in several trade publications by bromide photo manufacturers who have not joined the NBC: Albrecht & Meister, Berlin; Aristophot(?), Leipzig; Adolf Engel, Berlin; K. Heinrich Krause, Grossenhain; Neue Photographische Industrie, Berlin; Regel & Krug, Leipzig; Photochemie, Berlin; Polyphot, Munich. These firms form the "Independent Association of Bromide Photo Cards Manufacturers".

- Problems everywhere - wholesalers do not want fixed prices for a 2 years period.

November: The two bromide photo associations have found a solution and are now in a single (P.R.A./NBC) association again. Wholesalers are also happy. Peace everywhere?

December: trouble again between P.R.A. and the Berlin wholesalers association.

1910 Now more trouble between the raw photographic paper manufacturers alliance, the P.R.A./NBC and the association of photographic dealers.

- The union of postcard wholesalers (Hamburg) is not happy with the behavior of the so-called "Rotophot" (Krämer) group.

March: S.P.I. Leipzig meeting. Problems everywhere for the postcard trade/export.



Then a heavy dispute between the president Mr. Krämer (Rotophot) and Mr. Hamburg (E.A. Schwerdtfeger). Krämer wants to be president no more.

- The P.R.A. with its NBC convention is still around, but only part of the now divided wholesaler's associations pay the fixed prices. Most do what they want. Other planned conventions, except Autochrome, are not in sight. Competition everywhere.

May: S.P.I. has a new president: Kommerzienrat Hugo Deyhle (Gebr. Deyhle & Wagner), vice presidents are Walter Neumann (NPG) and Mr. Löwenstein (OPF).

- Official trade statistics 1909: Further decline in ppc exports, mostly due to higher import tax barriers (Russia, Spain, Portugal, Italy). Better cards still good for export to France. About 50% less ppc exports to England. Only South American countries place many orders.

- Chromolitho printers have to set off workers, presses shut-down.

June: Bromide photo manufacturer Ad. Engel, Berlin, declares insolvency.

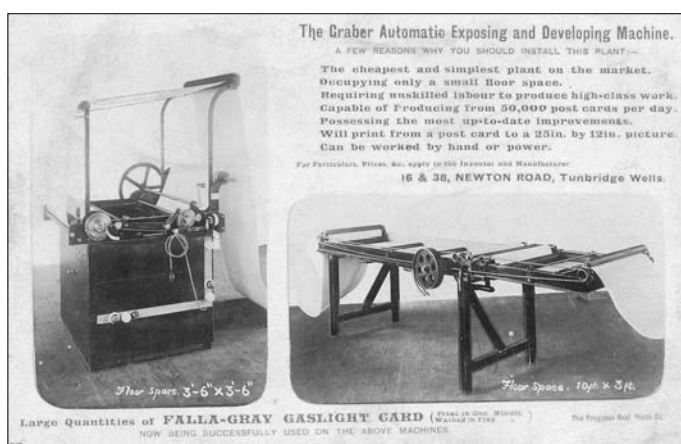
I better stop here although there is still lots of material but I run out of space.

Those of you who have read all the notes without getting bored might understand what I try to show. A little bit of realistic information on the German ppc printing trade then. But most of all that this trade was far from being "a big happy family". Nothing but aggressive competition, own profits first, mistrust, arrogance and ignorance. They never managed to form a working cartel organisation. Some even hated each other very much. Like Mr. Krämer head of the Rotophot group (with Ross and H. Wolf) on one side and Mr. Hamburg of E.A. Schwerdtfeger (and Helio-phot and later others) on the other side.

The Graber Automatic Exposing and Developing Machine

(from Tunbridge Wells). The cheapest and simplest plant on the market - requiring unskilled labour to produce high-class work - capable of producing from 50,000 post cards per day - large quantities of "Falla-Grey Gaslight

Card" (fixed in one, washed in five minutes) now being successfully used on above machine etc. Bromide photographic printing became popular everywhere and new, improved machinery was offered by different firms. This is indeed a quite small machine, the NPG machinery needed more space. Although this card is not in good condition anymore, the quality of the photos/text is not very exciting. A small imprint reads "The Progress Real Photo Co." On address side is another imprint "H.M. & Co. Blackpool". Not p/u, div. back.



When Valentine & Sons complains that they had trouble with the *German Association of Postcard Manufacturers* it is not correct. Valentine's had probably problems on the British market with one or more firms who were members of the association. E.A.S. had a very aggressive price policy in GB from about mid 1909 on, to compensate lost export markets. Also Trenkler & Co. pushed into the British market when their US customers could not afford the cards anymore due to high import taxes.

Valentine's & Sons was a big firm, said to had been the biggest British ppc printer(?). E.A.S. alone had about the same business/production capabilities as Valentine's. Trenkler & Co. was only a little bit smaller. Both were highly specialized in postcard production. Valentine's printed also other articles.

All these German bromide photographic printers once around are well worth a sepa-

rate research. I have managed to identify some of the many logo's seen, but far not all. The many "real photo" cards still on offer give us an idea of the huge quantities that once were produced. NPG alone sometimes published 150 new series per month!

The P.R.A. and later the NBC logo are the only evidence found on postcards of a sort of cartel/alliance of the ppc trade I know of. To collectors these logo's could be of interest to date not p/u cards roughly (logo usually found inside stamp box). The P.R.A. came into existence in 1907. The NBC was around from about Aug./Sept. 1909 onwards. The "Neue Bromsilber-Convention (NBC)" is still around with a small office at Berlin in the early 1930's. President is now Heinrich Ross (from Rotophot Bromsilberdruck GmbH).

More information on the German postcard industry follows (in future TPA issues and/or the internet).

Neue Photographische Gesellschaft Berlin-Steglitz, Siemensstr. 27

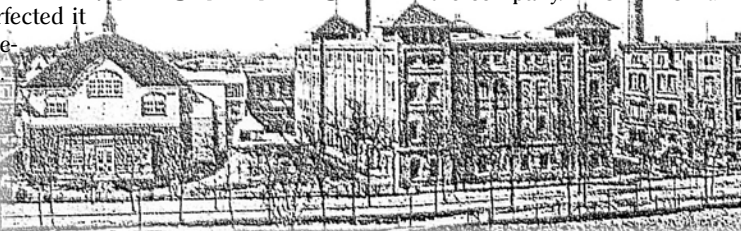
was established by Arthur Schwarz in July 1894 in Schöneberg. Other source say 1895 and mostly it reads 1896. Fact is that the huge factory at above address was working in 1897.

Arthur Schwarz, born 1862 in East-Prussia, had worked in England and the USA (photographic article) in the 1890's. He bought a US patent for an automatic rotary photographic printing process, improved and perfected it and that was the major secret of success of the NPG.

Another important quality factor was the bromide emulsion of the paper/card rolls. This was done at the NPG factory and

guaranteed so constant quality. The early NPG automatic printing machines produced c. 40,000 cards per day (10 working hours then) = one roll of 1000 m length = *photographic printing by the kilometre*. By 1905 the NPG employed c. 650 persons, had branches in London, Ruell/Paris, New York and Milano. A few years later 1000 persons worked for NPG. But the times changed. NPG had invested much capital for a colour photo process well. Early 1913 A. Schwarz had to leave AG run into financial difficulties after

WW1. In early 1922 the photo paper patents/production was taken over by Mimosa, Dresden. The ppc publ. business and some machinery was bought by E.A. Schwerdtfeger, Berlin (NPG GmbH until WW2).



Bromide
photo
card
printers /
publishers



Ross / Rotophot Group

Georg Gerlach

Paul Fink

Polyphot

Bromūra

unknown