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## Studio Greeting Cards: Where They Came From, and What They Lead To

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STUDIO GREETING CARDS--WHERE THEY CAME FROM,  
AND WHAT THEY LEAD TO

BY

RICHARD H. WILSON  
B.S., University of Florida, 1972

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts; Communication  
in the Graduate Studies Program of the  
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1976

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Greeting cards are, and have been for some time, one of modern man's (and especially modern woman's) quickest, easiest, and most succinct forms of communication. Expressing for the many what perhaps only the very few could actually put into words and effectively convey, studio greeting cards especially have become one of the most significant forms of communication to emerge in modern times.

Amazingly, extremely little has been recorded for posterity on the subject of studio greeting cards. Generally taken for granted, the studio greeting cards emergence as a significant form of communication has gone largely unnoticed by most students and scholars of communication. The goal of this thesis is to help fill that gap.

### THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this study is to explore the origins and subsequent acceptance by both manufacturers and consumers of the contemporary humorous greeting cards, from the earliest appearances of humor in greeting cards to the advent and expansion of the modern studio cards.



## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Studies of communication media have long centered on the major components of electronic and print journalism, i.e., newspapers, magazines, books, radio, television, and their various arteries. While the communication of information and ideas has not changed in substance, the ways in which communication takes form have broadened significantly. For example, a tee-shirt or bumper sticker may communicate the same types of messages that Thomas Paine wrote about in his famous revolutionary pamphlets.

Likewise, greeting cards, especially humorous ones, have become part of this expansion in the forms of communication media. Although greeting cards in their most primitive and unrefined state have existed since around 600 B.C.,<sup>1</sup> the humorous greeting card, as an industry and form of communication, has only come about within the last forty years, while commercial manufacturing of greeting cards has been taking place since 1843.<sup>2</sup> Yet today humorous cards constitute almost a quarter of the total greeting card market,<sup>3</sup> and eighty percent<sup>4</sup> of the non-occasion greeting card market. The

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<sup>1</sup>Ernest Dudley Chase, The Romance of Greeting Cards (Cambridge, Mass.: University Press of Cambridge, Inc., 1956), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>"Glad Tidings", Barron's, 40, September 12, 1960, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup>Based on personal correspondence between Carl Goeller, Vice-President, Public Relations of American Greetings Corporation and the writer from July, 1975 to September, 1975.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.



greeting card industry itself is a billion dollar a year business,<sup>5</sup> and one of its major components has become the humorous and studio card.

The importance of this growth is significant from the standpoint of the evolution of a very unique and special form of communication, rather than solely the fiscal growth of a successful innovation. The need and acceptance of humorous greeting cards spawned their industrial successes, but manufacturers are aware that the prime characteristic of greeting cards which led to this growth is the communicative function which greeting cards serve.

#### The Communication Function of Greeting Cards

Consideration of the communication function of greeting cards is foremost in the minds of greeting card manufacturers, as evidenced by the public statements of some of their executives. In a speech delivered at the Kansas University Art Awards Banquet in May of 1965, Robert McCloskey, Director of Contemporary Design for Hallmark said:

...we found ourselves in the communication industry where all the successful solutions, no matter how intricate or unusual, had as a common denominator, a clear, easy-to-understand message. We learned to

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<sup>5</sup>"Greeting Cards Grow in All Seasons," Business Week, December 12, 1970, p. 32.



communicate with both words and images, using whatever combinations seemed most suitable.<sup>6</sup>

Mr. McCloskey was making reference to the writers and artists who comprised Hallmark's early workshop which developed the first humorous contemporary greeting cards for that company. The comments and recollections of some of these men appear in later chapters of this thesis.

Thomas Wilson, Creative Director of American Greetings Corporation's Contemporary Division, has said:

...the expansion of non-occasion cards and merchandise is a spinoff from the real change in the industry--that greeting cards have broken from tradition and become a valid form of communication as opposed to the obligatory thing to do on certain occasions.<sup>7</sup>

According to another industry official, Richard Eubanks, President of Gibson Greeting Cards, Inc., "The occasion for sending many cards today has actually become secondary to the act of communicating."<sup>8</sup>

Stephen Shannon, past Executive Director of the National Association of Greeting Card Publishers has remarked, "...the one catchword today...is communication. And right there is what our industry is about."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Opinion expressed by Robert McCloskey in an address to the Kansas University Art Awards Banquet, May 20, 1965. Taken from the text of the speech, supplied by Hallmark's Public Relations Office.

<sup>7</sup>Business Week, "Greeting Cards Grow in All Seasons," December 12, 1970, p. 32.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.    <sup>9</sup>Ibid.



## CONTRIBUTORY STUDIES

While it is obvious that greeting cards, especially our contemporary humorous ones, have become a common tool for personal communication, there has never been a cohesive study made of how this phenomenon came about, how it developed, and how it evolved into what it is today and will be in the future. In fact, the existing body of written literature on the subject of greeting cards skips over contemporary humorous greeting cards as an entity separate from the mainstream of standard greeting cards, as evidenced by the select bibliography of the greeting card industry, which reflects no entries on the subject. A search of scholarly indices of theses and dissertations yielded no papers on the subject of humorous greeting cards, or greeting cards at all.

The primary historical work in this bibliography is The Romance of Greeting Cards, written by Ernest Dudley Chase, under the auspices of the Rust Craft Greeting Card Company. Originally published in 1926, The Romance of Greeting Cards was revised in 1956, in commemoration of Rust Craft's fiftieth anniversary. It is a comprehensive and informed chronicle of the traditional concept of the greeting cards made by many companies, but barely touches on humorous cards. When the book briefly does hit on the subject, it is not in regard to our contemporary concept of the humorous or studio card, but rather refers to comic Valentines, and



special occasion cards which could be more aptly termed whimsical or light-hearted, but hardly humorous.

This omission is not an oversight by Mr. Chase. It is because at the time of his revised edition, humorous cards as we know them today, were only beginning to become a factor in the market, as evidenced by this excerpt from Barron's of October 31, 1958:

Perhaps the most important innovation in the business is the so-called studio cards, produced by Panda Prints and a host of the smaller companies. Most of the long established firms now devoted at least part of their lines to this type of card, which began to appear shortly after the war in book, gift, and department stores in the metropolitan area. It features such "off-beat" characteristics as odd shapes, freer use of color, and weird people, animals and designs... according to S.Q. Shannon, Managing Director of the National Association of Greeting Card Manufacturers..."This type...has opened up a whole new field. In other words, not many previous users of greeting cards have switched to studio cards. Rather, they are being bought and sent by a whole new breed of greeting card enthusiasts. And this new breed now represents about 10% of the industry's unit and dollar sales.<sup>10</sup>

#### METHODOLOGY AND TYPES OF DATA

Since there exists so little organized research on the subject of humorous greeting cards, much of the information contained in this thesis is necessarily original research, gleaned

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<sup>10</sup>Richard Hammer, "Season's Greetings-The Card Makers Enjoying a Growing Year Round Business," Barron's, 35, October 31, 1955, p. 13.



from primary sources, including data from prominent figures in the early and present humorous greeting card industry. In addition to these primary sources, much information has been taken from the articles in business, trade, and consumer publications. All of the information included is of three general classifications.

A. Verbal Recollections. Knowledgeable figures in the field of humorous greeting cards were contacted by phone and their remarks recorded, with their permission.

B. Written Recollections. Much information was relayed in long, detailed letters written by knowledgeable primary sources.

C. Other Written and Printed Materials. These cover a wide range of sources, including articles from trade, consumer, and business publications, plus books, and also actual greeting cards which were obtained from primary sources. Included among these significant greeting cards are many samples which were first in the industry.

## CHAPTER DIVISIONS AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The facts, figures, and other information collected from all sources generally separate themselves into three general areas. Each of these constitutes a chapter division in this thesis.



A. The Origin of Greeting Cards, Custom and Creation.

Although the contemporary studio card is the best known form of humor in greeting cards, humor as an element in personal communication as presented in greeting cards, is as old as greeting cards themselves. This chapter explores the greeting cards from past centuries until World War II. The Christmas cards from the 1800's through the depression is included, along with the notorious comic valentines, or "penny dreadfuls" or "penny horrors" as they were called. While the humor of these cards is a far cry from what is seen in the cards of today, they are nonetheless the embryos from which modern humorous greetings sprang. The first mass marketer of humorous greeting cards, the Meryle Publishing Company is also discussed.

B. The Post-War Explosion. The real growth of humorous greeting cards did not take place until during and after World War II. This chapter looks into how and why this growth came about at this time, the advent of the non-occasion card, how the modern studio card was born and grew in popularity to a point where the major card manufacturers added them to their lines, and what this growth did within the industry. Also included in this chapter are some of the various off-shoots and innovations which were spawned by humorous cards.

C. Studio Cards and the 70's, and the Communication of the Future. This chapter focuses on the humorous greeting cards of today, and what the outlook is for the humorous greeting cards of the future. Among the factors considered are trends in humor, design and subject matter.

D. Conclusion. While little has apparently been formally written on the subject of humorous greeting cards, it is obvious that they have existed for a number of years, and will continue to grow and function as a significant form of personal communication. How and why they came about, and where humorous greeting cards went after that, is what this thesis is about.



## Chapter 2

### THE ORIGINS OF GREETING CARDS, CUSTOMS, AND CREATION

Greeting cards as they are today, humorous and otherwise, shared a common beginning in Egypt around the sixth century B.C.<sup>11</sup> It was the custom among Egyptians to observe the new year by sending gifts to friends and relatives, via messenger. So the recipient would know from whom the gift came, a personal message inscribed on papyrus and often embellished with color would accompany these tokens of friendship.<sup>12</sup> Apparently, these hand-inscribed messages of greetings were rather highly regarded by those who received them; some have even been found next to mummified remains in Egyptian tombs.<sup>13</sup>

The custom of writing greetings spread to Rome, where seasonal messages of good will took the form of olive branches coated with gold paint.<sup>14</sup> As in Egypt, early Romans exchanged greetings at

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<sup>11</sup>Chase, Romance of Greeting Cards, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.    <sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>D. Newhouse, "Cardography's Ancestry," Design, Winter, 1968, p. 13.



the time of the coming new year, although the surfaces on which these greetings were inscribed were not necessarily paper.

A common form of greeting for Romans was to send copper coins bearing the likeness of Janus, the Roman god of openings and beginnings.<sup>15</sup> If the importance of the sender was such that a more opulent token of esteem was required, whatever gift was chosen might in effect actually become its own greeting card, for it was not unusual to inscribe the gift itself with a message of good cheer.

Later the lucky symbols were pictured on terra-cotta tables and other objects and were often accompanied by inscriptions such as 'A Happy and Prosperous New Year to Me,' "which presumably meant to the recipient who, it was hoped, would often look at this token of friendship..."<sup>16</sup>

The custom of sending greetings at New Years became so widespread that the ancient city of Rome probably gave the world its first mass-produced greetings. These were medals addressed to the Emperor Hadrian, who ruled from 117 to 138 A.D.; these medals bore a likeness of the emperor on one side, and on the reverse side was the inscription "The Senate and People of Rome Wish a Happy and Prosperous New Year to Hadrian Augustus, the Father of the Country."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Chase, Romance of Greeting Cards, p. 10.    <sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.



Through the 1400's and the 1500's New Years greetings were done in woodcuts.<sup>18</sup> They were attractive enough to be used not only as messages of holiday greeting, but also as holiday decorations,<sup>19</sup> much in the same way many people today decorate their homes with Christmas cards.

Delicate parchment and lace gave way to brown newspaper wrappers in 17th century Europe. Like today's mimeographed Christmas letters, a paragraph of past activities was included with this form of greeting, along with a wish for a good future, usually composed in verse form.<sup>20</sup>

The 1700's in Europe saw the advent of lithographic and woodcut greetings on paper or cardboard, but with one major new development. Some of these greetings were made to be sent to particular types of people, such as sweethearts, wives, or parents.<sup>21</sup> What the modern greeting card industry would term "sending situations" originated at this time.

It was not until the 19th century however, that the greeting card industry was actually born. Before then, written greetings, in whatever form they took, were generally specially made for one person or occasion, and not for consumption by the general

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid.    <sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Newhouse, "Cardography's Ancestry," p. 13.

<sup>21</sup>Chase, Romance of Greeting Cards, p. 12.



public. This was changed by three important events of the 1800's.<sup>22</sup>

The first of these was the fact that literacy jumped at this time in Europe. It became possible for more people to understand, and also be able to send, greetings to one another.

Second, modern techniques of color reproduction had been invented. This helped the growth of the greeting card industry in two ways. Not only did greeting cards become available in much greater numbers than even before, but they were now cheaper than they ever had been. Gone for good were the days of the hand-made or woodcut card. The "Baxter process," a form of letter press multi-color printing, had replaced them all.<sup>23</sup>

The third and probably most significant development was the institution of the British penny postal regulations in 1840, which allowed low postal rates to open up the mails to more people than ever before.<sup>24</sup>

### The Origins of the Christmas Card

The significant advances in literacy, printing and postage in the 19th century, more than anything else probably, were responsible for the birth of greeting cards as a form of popular communication.

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<sup>22</sup>Hallmark's "A History of Greeting Cards," a promotional pamphlet.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.    <sup>24</sup>Newhouse, "Cardography's Ancestry," p. 13.



Prior to this time, most artistically sound cards were made by hand or some laborious process of reproduction, even so, printed valentines did not come into existence until after 1840.<sup>25</sup> Printed Christmas cards for the general public, did not come about until after 1850, although the very first Christmas cards of a sort were made in the 1840's.

While there is some dispute as to who actually originated the idea of a Christmas greeting card, the man usually given credit is Sir Henry Cole, who, in 1843 commissioned his friend John Horsley to design and print 1,000 Christmas cards. These were 5½" x 3¼" sepia colored cards decorated with hand-colored designs which depicted a family apparently in the midst of a holiday party. The picture of the family was bordered on both sides by scenes depicting acts of charity being performed, presumably in the name of the holiday season.<sup>26</sup>

A Christmas card drawn by a young artist named Charles Egely was thought to have preceeded the Cole/Horsley card by perhaps a year, but this is probably not the case. The final digit of the Egely card is indistinct, and while it might have been struck in 1842, it was more likely made after the Cole/Horsley card,

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<sup>25</sup>Hallmark's "A History of Greeting Cards."

<sup>26</sup>Newhouse, "Cardography's Ancestry," p. 13.



probably in 1848 or 1849.<sup>27</sup>

It is interesting to note the similarity between these two earliest Christmas cards. Both depicted scenes of revelry, the Cole/Horsley card a family party wine flowing (for which Cole received some criticism), the Egley card with a ball and a party both pictured on the face of the card. Both cards also included, off to the sides, pictures of various charitable acts taking place. Even the inscriptions on both cards were the same, "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to You."<sup>28</sup>

Regardless of who actually made the very first Christmas card, it is certain that the first publishers of Christmas cards was the British playing card publishers Charles Goodall and Sons,<sup>29</sup> issuing their first edition in 1862. Other British publishers followed Goodall's lead shortly thereafter, and published series of Christmas cards for general use.

### The Origins of the American Greeting Card Industry

The American greeting card industry did not begin until a German refugee named Louis Prang became the first U.S. publisher of Christmas cards in 1874. Already the owner of a lithographic business renowned for its superb color reproductions, Prang's beautiful cards dominated the Christmas card business on both sides

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<sup>27</sup>Chase, Romance of Greeting Cards, p. 16.

<sup>29</sup>Hallmark's "A History of Greeting Cards."



of the Atlantic until 1890, when cheaper European cards, and the pursuit of other interests, caused Prang to quit publishing.<sup>30</sup>

Although Louis Prang is remembered primarily for his dazzling color reproductions, many of which were of such high quality that they could not be distinguished from the originals, and for his annual design competitions which awarded thousands of dollars in cash to the winners. Prang was also probably the first publisher of greeting card humor of a sort. Of Prang's treatment of subject matter it has been noted:

...Nativity and Civil War scenes were his speciality, but he liked the risque as well. One might say that the forerunner of the anti-traditional cards with their luring overtones were remnants of Prang's spicy, unclothed pinups...<sup>31</sup>

Joe Hacker, president of his own greeting card company that specializes in humorous cards, credits Prang with bringing a humor of sorts to greeting cards. But according to Mr. Hacker, "...his humor, if that is the correct word, was merely in his design characters, and not in his texts..."<sup>32</sup>

When Prang left the business in 1890, European manufacturers dominated the greeting card business until World War I cut off the

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<sup>30</sup>Chase, Romance of Greeting Cards, p. 26.

<sup>31</sup>Newhouse, "Cardography's Ancestry," p. 13.

<sup>32</sup>Based on personal correspondence between Joseph Hacker, President, Laff-Masters Studios, and the writer, February 4, 1975 through March 2, 1975.



supply of these cards, at the same time demand logically increased.<sup>33</sup>

In the years immediately preceeding the beginning of the first world war, many of America's most prominent publishers of greeting cards began their businesses. Among these were Rust-Craft, Gibson, Norcross, American Greetings, Hallmark, Buzza-Cardoza, plus many other lesser known companies, some of which are no longer in business.

It was about at this time that the earliest humorous greeting cards came to be included as part of a regular line. These were manufactured by Charles J. West, who was chief executive of a greeting card publishing concern named The Campbell Art Company. One of the Campbell Art Company's early humorous creations was the "Hooverized Christmas Card," of which it has been said:

...Of all the cards published for the 1918 Christmas season, however, none sold better than the "Hooverized Christmas Card." Published by the Campbell Art Company, the folder was printed in red ink on the cheapest possible sort of thin box board, gray in color, and was tied with a piece of hemp string instead of ribbon. Near the string was a note, 'Camouflaged Ribbon.' On the cover, at the top, was a tiny sketch of holly, marked, "this is holly," and also a very small drawing of mistletoe, also identified by a note. Under the title was a bird marked, "This is a bluebird," and inside in green ink, was the message:

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<sup>33</sup>Chase, Romance of Greeting Cards, p. 33.



I've Hooverized on Pork and Beans,  
 And butter, cake and bread,  
 I've cut out Auto Riding,  
 And now I walk instead,  
 I've Hooverized on sugar,  
 On coal, and light and lard,  
 And here's my Xmas Greeting  
 On a Hoover Xmas Card.  
                                   I wish you a very  
                                   M.C. and H.N.Y.<sup>34</sup>

The Campbell Art Company became part of Rust-Craft Greeting Cards in 1924, and Charles J. West became Rust-Craft's General Manager, and later, its President, a position he held until his death in 1948.<sup>35</sup> It was during this time that Rust-Craft established itself as a leading innovator in all phases of the greeting card business, including a number of firsts in creation, production and merchandising.<sup>36</sup>

### The Origins of Valentines Cards

While Christmas cards traditionally compromised the largest portion of the greeting card industry, they were neither the first, or second type of special occasion cards to come into existence. As mentioned earlier, the first greeting cards of any sort were sent to commemorate the New Year. Christmas cards did not appear until the mid-nineteenth century. But hundreds of years before the first Christmas card was struck, in 1415 to be exact, an imprisoned

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 181.    <sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 197.



Duke of Orleans sent his wife the first known Valentine's card.<sup>37</sup>

Valentines, the second oldest branch of the greeting card family, grew out of the medieval code of chivalry and courtly love.<sup>38</sup> The holiday itself stems from the Roman holiday of Lupercalia, traditionally occurring in February, when young men and women would draw names to discover who their respective lovers would be.<sup>39</sup>

The earliest known commercially produced Valentine card is dated 1819. Valentine cards are responsible for two major contributions to the world of humorous greeting cards.

The first of these, which practically everyone is familiar with, is the comic valentine, or "penny dreadful". These made their first appearance a scant three years after the first commercially produced sentimental Valentines. Several British companies produced them during the Victorian era, and these "penny dreadfuls", as they came to be called, stayed as popular as the sentimental types of Valentines throughout this time, although some of them were deemed obscene enough to be banned in more than one European country.<sup>40</sup>

The first direct ancestor of the American studio card was produced in the United States in the late 1870's by writer/artist

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<sup>37</sup>Hallmark's "A History of Greeting Cards."

<sup>38</sup>Ibid. <sup>39</sup>Chase, Romance of Greeting Cards, p. 63.

<sup>40</sup>Hallmark's "A History of Greeting Cards."



Charles J. Howard.<sup>41</sup> Although comic Valentines have been produced in the United States to a very limited extent since the middle of the century, it was Howard, along with two brothers named McLoughlin who had established the nation's largest toy and children's book company of that time, who brought the comic Valentine into its greatest popularity.

Charles Howard personally conceived and drew practically all of the comic Valentines produced in America between 1880 and 1910.<sup>42</sup>

...Back towards the end of the 19th century the old 'comics' had become so abusive and lewd (in England at least) that St. Valentine's Day itself had almost fallen into disfavor. But when Howard joined forces with the McLoughlins, he brought a new aspect to the old art, and over the thirty-odd years of his productivity he created many examples of clever caricature and humor of a high order. Indeed, some of his later series have a wittiness that shows a real insight into human nature...<sup>43</sup>

Twenty million of Howard's cards sold annually, with an estimated billion or more being sold in all, some as late as the 1940's and 50's.<sup>44</sup> The success of his Valentines was apparently in spite of, rather than as a result of Howard's liking of them. As he explained in a 1903 interview:

...I make nearly all the comic Valentines in this country, or rather, I design them. But it's the public's fault, not mine. Several times I've tried

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<sup>41</sup>Dick Martin, "Poisoned Darts from Cupid's Bow," Hobbies, February, 1959, p. 30.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.    <sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.



to give them serious, pretty pictures. And once I persuaded my publishers to try something not so undignified...the public wouldn't have them...they did not sell at all. What the people wanted was the same old monstrosities, so I had to give those to them...<sup>45</sup>

Ironically, fifty-five years later, another prominent figure in the world of greeting cards would express almost identical sentiments, as reported by the December 1958 issue of Fortune magazine. This time it was Joyce Hall, President of Hallmark Cards.

...Joyce Hall moved ahead to satisfy the urge to be beastly. This February, Hallmark's releasing for the first time a line of "Sharp Dart" valentines...the Sharp Darts, which Hall conceived a year ago and then backed through to production over the objections of his subordinates, are plainly derived from the nineteenth century "penny horrible" valentines, and many of them, like their predecessors, are (as one Hallmark executive put it) "plain mean"...Hall admits some concern about the effect of the Sharp Darts on Hallmark's reputation for wholesomeness. "This whole line bothers me," he said recently, "I don't want to do anything destructive, but I know they'll sell jillions..."<sup>46</sup>

Another indication of Howard's growing displeasure with his craft was reflected in the fact that although he initially signed his full name to his Valentines, in later years he would only sign with a single letter "H," if with anything at all.<sup>47</sup>

Valentine's card also gave birth to an idea which would become a mainstay in the area of humorous greeting cards; this was

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 31. <sup>46</sup>S. Freedgood, "Joyce Hall is Thinking of You," Fortune, 58, December, 1958, p. 194.

<sup>47</sup>Martin, "Poisoned Darts," p. 31.



the mechanical card. First occurring in the 1890's, the earliest mechanical cards were German<sup>48</sup> as were most greeting cards of the time. Described as "...usually three-dimensional pullouts with a series of sets lined up behind one another....," these early mechanical cards were the forerunners of latter day humorous and studio cards with components that popped up, popped down, brought paper figures together, and even spoke and sang.<sup>49</sup>

#### French Folds to World War II, the Beginning's End

With the United States completely in the greeting card business in the 1920's, several significant developments came about in the cards that were being manufactured which would figure profoundly in the evolution of humorous cards.

One of the most significant of these was the advent of the "French Fold." Briefly, a French fold is what results when a piece of paper is folded in half once, and then folded in half again, so as to create four equal segments on each side of the opened page. Simple as this idea may seem, apparently no one thought of it until the late 1920's.<sup>50</sup> Until the advent of the French fold, which offered a total of eight equal sized spaces for either printing or

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<sup>48</sup>Hallmark's "A History of Greeting Cards."

<sup>49</sup>Joe Hacker, "Humor and How it Evolved Into the Studio Card," Greetings, May 1973, p. 37.

<sup>50</sup>Detailed letter from Mr. Joseph Hacker, President, Laff-Master's Studios, February 4, 1975.



writing on, most greeting cards were either two separate pieces joined together, or a single piece of light board stock, printed on one side only.<sup>51</sup>

In the late 1930's, the French fold card was joined to whimsical and sometimes pun-filled verse accompanied by illustrations to create what became known as "cutes."<sup>52</sup> First brought out by the Norcross Greeting Card Company,<sup>53</sup> these "cutes" were probably the most immediate ancestor to what would become the modern studio card, although the cutes themselves were not outstandingly clever. As one authority put it:

. . . most of the humor was written in verse, with a few prose texts added for variation. The humor was threadbare whimsy spiced with coyly sweet puns and saccharin plays on words. These cards were called "cutes." Greeting card editors and art directors at least had the good sense not to call them "funnies." The designs, however, were printed in four to six color half-tones on stiff parchment or fine papers, and there was a great variety in the illustrative matter. The artwork was . . . infinitely superior to the so-called humorous texts of the ideas themselves . . .<sup>54</sup>

The reason for the generally vapid nature of humorous verse at this time lay in the fact that practically all humorous verse was written by the people who wrote sentimental verse. There were

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<sup>51</sup>Hacker, "Humor How Evolved," p. 38.

<sup>53</sup>Based on a personal telephone conversation between Jules Pollock and the writer, March 1975.

<sup>54</sup>Hacker, "Humor How Evolved," p. 38.



no writers who wrote only humorous verse. This situation however was about to be changed.

"The first major break-through in the development of greeting card humor . . . <sup>55</sup> happened in 1939, when a greeting card publisher and merchandiser named Michael Cohen joined forces with a young writer/editor named Jules Pollock. Cohen had founded a greeting card publishing house called the Meryle Publishing Company. Together, the two of them made the Meryle Publishing Company the first to market the non-sentimental type of greeting card.<sup>56</sup> According to Joseph Hacker, they did it like this:

Under an exclusive contract with the government of Ireland, Michael Cohen purchased thousands of chips from the legendary "Blarney Stone." Jules Pollock wrote two complete lines of Everyday and St. Patrick's Day cards based on humorous tie-ins with the Blarney Stone. A single chip of stone was glued to the cover or inside of each card, depending on the basic ideas involved. Thus was born the first paste-on gadget greeting cards. They proved an instantaneous success and took the syndicate market by storm. Mike Cohen then purchased hundreds of assorted hard rubber and celluloid gadgets and published gadget lines for every season and category. Jules Pollock wrote all the gag ideas . . . other greeting card styles and merchandising ideas followed . . . "mechanical" greeting cards through the deft utilization of cardboard, rubber bands, string, tiny steel springs, wire and glue . . . these production ideas were all humorous greeting card firsts, and were created long before the inventions of many of the mechanical and technical aids in use today. In quick profusion followed "pop-up" and "pop-down" cards, multi-

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid.    <sup>56</sup>Pollock telephone interview.



fold "broad-sides" cards, die-cut and cut-out cards, and multi-page booklet cards . . .<sup>57</sup>

Although a millionaire, Michael Cohen was forced to retire while still in his early forties because of poor health; he is now dead. His partner, Jules Pollock, went on to enjoy a long and successful career writing humorous greeting cards, and is still living in Brooklyn, New York today.

According to Mr. Pollock, the hand-appliqued blarney stone cards which he and Michael Cohen published in the late 1930's and early 1940's sold phenomenally well at five cents a piece, to what was then a ninety-five percent female market.

One of the most successful of their subsequent greeting card lines was a series of 12 cards each of which was employed a miniature panty as part of the punch line. For example, the front of one said, "This birthday wish is very brief, in fact it's rather scanty," (inside) "May all your troubles be so small, they'll fit inside this panty."

"These were not devastatingly clever; they were commercially sound greeting card verses," said Mr. Pollock when reached at his home, "In humorous cards, the trick is to say something funny, but, it must encompass a me-to-you philosophy. That is so important." Mr. Pollock, 73, is still using some of his "panty-verse" today. When new, eleven million dollars worth of the panty cards were sold.

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<sup>57</sup>Hacker, "Humor How Evolved," p. 100.



Amazingly some verse, like the panty-verses, do endure for many years. A Valentine card Jules Pollock wrote in the 1930's said on the front, "Want to go steady?" inside, it read "Try castor oil!" According to Mr. Pollock, this verse is still in use today, along with several others created during his days at the Meryle Publishing Company.

Cohen and Pollock opened the doors and blazed the trails into what proved to be profitable territory. However, just, as it took World War I to get the American greeting card Industry going a generation before the Meryle Publishing Company, it took a second World War to get the humorous greeting card business off its feet. In fact, had it not been for World War II, humorous and studio greeting cards may have been years longer coming into existence, if ever.



## Chapter 3

### THE POST-WAR EXPLOSION

#### The 1940's

During the war years, production of most gadget cards was suspended, due to shortages of necessary materials such as celluloid, rubber and steel.<sup>58</sup> However, this situation did help to develop humor in greeting cards grow in another direction. Since gadgets were unavailable, humorous greeting cards were forced to rely on their verses for their punchlines, and attention was focused on the verbal, rather than the visual aspects of greeting card humor.

In the early 1940's, Paper Novelty Manufacturing Company, under the guidance of its gifted young art director, Fred Maas, developed the "comic card" one step further . . . (He) concentrated on developing the slapstick "gag" in order to sell and merchandise humorous greeting cards. Under his expert tutelage, the multi-page comic card reached its highest pinnacle of perfection; slapstick Valentines were born; and penny Valentine sheets became the boisterous and irreverent ancestors of the modern day studio card . . .<sup>59</sup>

After the Meryle Publishing Company dissolved, and World War II was over, writer Jules Pollock joined forces with a recently discharged G.I. named Alvin Barker, who was setting up a greeting

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid.    <sup>59</sup>Ibid.



card company in Cincinnati which would become "the world's largest producer of humorous and novelty cards."<sup>60</sup>

In its time, the Barker Greeting Card Company would become renowned as a leading innovator in the field of greeting cards, especially humorous cards that were mechanical in nature. Barker developed the idea of mechanical cards to their highest point. Cards he designed, when opened, might speak, sing, or play, or cause a mousetrap to snap shut on the fingers of the opener, or allow paper moths to flutter into space. Of Alvin Barker it has been said, ". . . His greetings cut a wide swath through the direct selling market and set off the golden age of French folder and cardboard comic cards."<sup>61</sup>

In 1948, what is generally considered to be the first commercially produced and manufactured studio cards was created by Rosalind Welcher of Panda Prints, a greeting card company in New York City. It was a birthday card, fashioned in the traditional square shape, and it featured a drawing of a tipsy looking matron, along with the caption "Stay as sweet as you are."<sup>62</sup>

With artwork described as "satirical whimsy" Rosalind Welcher was given credit for giving birth to a new humorous greeting

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<sup>60</sup>"Light Slams," The New Yorker, June 7, 1958, p. 27.

<sup>61</sup>Hacker, "Humor and How Evolved," p. 38.

<sup>62</sup>C. Leedham, "5 Billion Greetings Yearly," New York Times Magazine, April 3, 1960, p. 44.



card art form.<sup>63</sup> The dozens of Panda Print designs which followed the first were filled with highly stylized artwork, and texts equally advanced in cleverness and sophistication. They more than carved a niche in the greeting card market; they created a whole new market.

. . . While the new cards simply puzzled established greeting card customers, a new segment of the population --young secretaries, junior executives, young housewives --bought them with whoops of delight. The studio card did not make inroads on the traditionals, but created its own new customers . . .<sup>64</sup>

As Rosalind Welcher explained it, studio cards were created " . . . to suit the needs of an audience too literate and sophisticated ever to buy ordinary commercial cards."<sup>65</sup> Panda Prints was one of the first companies to sell exclusively humorous cards, primarily for the everyday market, although they also carried seasonal cards.<sup>66</sup> Although never a large company, Panda Prints is still in business today, which is more than can be said for many of the early studio publishers.

### The 1950's

Despite the initial acclaim which Rosalind Welcher received for her cards, sales of studio cards were restricted mostly to

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<sup>63</sup>Hacker, "Humor and How Evolved," p. 100.

<sup>64</sup>Leedham, "5 Billion Greetings," p. 44.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 45. <sup>66</sup>Hacker, letter.



speciality stores until 1952, when artist William Steig put out a studio card featuring one of his more popular drawings, which depicted a little old man sitting inside of a wooden box and staring out at the reader with the caption, "People are no damn good."<sup>67</sup> This card became very popular, and Steig supposedly earned \$250,000 from it, but more importantly,

. . . The success of Steig's card convinced a number of small greeting card companies that thousands of Americans inwardly rebelled against the trite thinking, shallow emotion, and mass produced sentiment of the average greeting card . . .<sup>68</sup>

Just as William Steig's card was becoming popular, the two young men who would eventually start Box Cards, the most significant of all the early studio card publishers, met each other for the first time. Their names were Bill Box and Bill Kennedy, and at the time, they were both parking cars for a living, in the lot of a Los Angeles restaurant.

Box was already selling greeting card ideas on a free-lance basis, when he and Kennedy pooled their resources, a total of \$26, and reproduced one thousand copies a piece of two of Box's designs. They sold these cards in sample batches of a dozen each to stationers in San Diego, realizing a \$528 profit. These first Box cards were

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<sup>67</sup>H. Joseph Chadwick, The Greeting Card Writer's Handbook, (Cincinnati, Ohio: Writer's Digest, 1968), p. 5.

<sup>68</sup>J. Hyams, "Greeting Cards with No Inhibitions," Saturday Evening Post, October 25, 1958, p. 24.



described as "deliberately contrived, crude, and provincial drawings, black on white, because that was the least expensive way to get out a line of merchandise. To tie in with the drawing, the card had a first rate gag-line or snapper on the inside page . . ."69

Spurred on by their successes in San Diego, Box and Kennedy borrowed \$1,550.00 from relatives, printed more cards, and headed for the annual stationers convention in New York City. Here is what happened there:

. . . Stationers attending the convention, remembering the successes of the Steig cartoon cards, cautiously and conservatively bought assortments of the new Box cards. This encouraged the partners to open an office and send samples of their line to some 1,500 dealers across the country.

The response was phenomenal. Box Cards, Inc., was on its way. Since the firm's inception four years ago, the two Bills have had to move their business four times to permit necessary expansion. In the past two years alone their output of cards has quadrupled. The firm now has twenty home employees in Los Angeles and thirty-two salesmen on the road. The company now is housed comfortably in its own brick building, across the facade of which is a twenty foot long sign in letters a foot high reading, OURS IS A TICKLISH BUSINESS.70

Box Cards, Inc., figures importantly in the evolution of studio cards for several reasons. Simply that they were one of the first studio card companies would be enough, but Box Cards reflected a humor and sophistication that would be sendable and enjoyable even today.

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid.    <sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 25.



At its peak, Box Cards dominated the early studio card industry. Selling 80,000 cards and grossing \$12,000 during their first year in operation,<sup>71</sup> Box Cards four years later was producing 5,000,000 cards annually, or roughly 20% of all the studio cards then being produced in the United States, which at that time represented about one-half of one percent of the entire greeting card market.<sup>72</sup>

In addition to creating cards for the general greeting card market, Box Cards also created cards for specific purposes on behalf of large organizations, such as a thank you card designed for the Damon Runyon Cancer Fund to send to contributors, or the card designed for the Smith College Alumnae Organization, which asked for contributions.<sup>73</sup>

Thomas Wilson, Creative Director of American Greetings, credits Box with being a leader in the studio card field because he "actually put together a line of merchandise."<sup>74</sup> Box merchandise included Box Card humor being put on napkins, record album covers, ice buckets, and their own ash tray line, which was called "Burnt Offerings," one of which featured Smokey Bear puffing madly away on a variety of pipes and cigarettes, all of which are leaving embers

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<sup>71</sup>"Greetings you Bum," Newsweek, February 16, 1959, p. 82.

<sup>72</sup>Pyams, "No Inhibitions," p. 25. <sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Recorded telephone conversation between Thomas Wilson and the writer, October 22, 1975.



and butts smoldering on the ground.

And, like America's first publisher of greeting cards of any sort, Louis Prang, Box and Kennedy also sponsored art competitions. Their annual Campus Cartoonist of the Year Contest offered all expense paid trips to Europe to the college students who won, after being judged by such well-known humorists as Steve Allen, Groucho Marx, and Al Capp.<sup>75</sup>

Unfortunately, the sales of Box Cards took a downturn in the late 1950's, as the major card corporations were getting more heavily involved in studio cards. In the mid-sixties, Box Cards Inc. turned from studio card manufacturer to tax loss maneuver, when it was purchased by the Gillette Razor Company.<sup>76</sup>

While Box Cards Inc. was the largest black and white card company of its time, the largest producers of color studio cards was the Oz Studio Card Company. Under the direction of Ozzie Freedgood, the son of the company's founder, Oz created the earliest full-color studio cards. Ozzie Freedgood himself was a trained commercial artist whose eye for color and design helped make Oz appealing in appearance, although not as sophisticated or satirical as Box Cards.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Hyams, "No Inhibitions," p. 25.    <sup>76</sup>Hacker, letter.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.



Another first credited to Oz was the creation of the earliest "gloop" or neuter characters to appear on any kind of greeting cards.<sup>78</sup> This type of character, which is identifiable as neither male or female, later became a common feature of studio greeting cards.

Although at its peak, Oz did about \$1,500,000 worth of business annually, it started down the road to ruin when it attempted to branch out into greeting cards other than studios. After purchasing a manufacturer of conventional greetings, the Stanley Greeting Card Company, Oz began selling to syndicate stores and began loosing the major and exclusive card shop accounts with which it had always done business in the past. In desperation, Oz sold out to a black owned company named Onyx, which itself soon went under, taking Oz with it.<sup>79</sup>

The earliest marketer of what became a lucrative part of the studio card business, i.e., off-color and risque cards, was a company called Taterbug. Although much of what Taterbug published would not be shocking by today's standards, it was enough in the fifties to cause Taterbug to be "blue-pencilled out of the market."<sup>80</sup> The fact that some of Taterbug's material was actually clever was not enough to change the negative attitudes of most major card buyers.

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid.    <sup>79</sup>Ibid.    <sup>80</sup>Ibid.



Although never a large company, Taterbug's greatest card is still published by many printers in a wide variety of designs, including several variations put out by American Greetings. It is estimated that this one card has sold over three million designs in its lifetime. The outside featured a picture of a bluebird, with a caption, "May the Bluebird of Happiness . . .," inside the card continued "Crap on Your Birthday Cake."<sup>81</sup>

Probably not unlike the popular "Holly Hobby" cards which feature homespun scenes seasoned with the Americana simplicity of years gone by, a company called Country Cousin was another early studio card publisher of some note. After enjoying popularity in the west and mid-west, but none in the east, Country Cousin went out of business in the mid-sixties.<sup>82</sup>

The reason for many of the pioneer studio card companies going under at approximately the same time can probably be attributed in large part to the total commitment most of the major card companies had made to studio cards, beginning initially in the mid to late fifties, and reaching full speed in the early sixties. The small companies found that the greeting card form which they had helped to build had become popular enough, and a big enough market factor to be picked up by the major card companies, a fact that ultimately caused the demise of many of the small studio

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid.    <sup>82</sup>Ibid.



card publishers, who could not compete effectively against the largest card companies that controlled most retail card rack space.

### The Entry of the Major Card Publishers Into Studio Cards

In 1955, the entire American greeting card industry sold approximately four billion cards worth \$350 million dollars. Of this volume, an estimated 10% was in studio cards, including non-occasion cards.<sup>83</sup> The studio cards which were being marketed at this time were published by the early studio companies like Box Cards and Panda Prints. None of the major card companies had a studio card line.

About this time, Hallmark's dealer reporting system produced some data which seemed to indicate that a nationwide audience had developed for a clever "contemporary" card, in short, a studio card. Up until this point, the major greeting card publishers had shied away from the studios, many of which had justifiably been regarded as insulting, suggestive, and "sick." In fact, a few years before, Hallmark's President, Joyce Hall, had expressed the fear that studio cards might be the ruin of the industry.<sup>84</sup>

Hardly anything could go into production at Hallmark without President Hall's signature of approval. However, there was an

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<sup>83</sup>Hammer, "Greetings Year Round," pp. 13-14.

<sup>84</sup>Freedgood, "Joyce Thinking," p. 97.



extended period of time during the mid-fifties when Mr. Hall was absent from his job, suffering from a blood disorder called polyeythernia, from which he did not recover until 1955. It was during Hall's absence that Vice-President C. Edward Goodman instructed Robert McCloskey of Hallmark's Art Department to organize a staff capable of putting out a line of studio cards.<sup>85</sup>

According to Mr. McCloskey, who is still head of Hallmark's Contemporary Division,

. . . . we had no idea who our customers were, their taste preferences, their buying characteristics, etc. We had no idea how big this market was, but thanks to a very alert Research and Development Division, we placed short runs on each of the cards, tested then at the retail level in key geographical areas, and discarded any that sold less than average. Over a period of ten years, we . . . produced approximately 15,000 cards, and discarded 7,500 of them . . .<sup>86</sup>

After two years, Hallmark was leading the industry.<sup>87</sup>

At the end of the first year of Hallmark's initial studio card department, the staff was placed on retainer and allowed to work outside of Hallmark's Kansas City studios. Eventually, Hallmark did develop a full-time in-house contemporary staff<sup>88</sup> although the members of that staff were not treated as were other artists and writers working for Hallmark at that time. In 1958,

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>Opinion expressed in an address by Robert McCloskey, at the Kansas University Art Awards Banquet, May 20, 1965.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.    <sup>88</sup>Ibid.



the small group of young men who designed the contemporary line was sequestered from other creative staff members. According to President Joyce Hall, "We put them off in a special cage because we were afraid they'd be an explosive force on the others."<sup>89</sup> Mr. Hall's apprehension was not without some justification.

According to Arnold Shapiro, who was one of the writers working for Hallmark at that time, a group of visitors was being conducted on a guided tour through Hallmark's Kansas city offices one day, when one of these visitors happened to catch a note which had been tossed over a partition from someone in the Contemporary Department. The note read, "Help! I'm being held prisoner in a greeting card factory." Following this incident, guided tours were no longer taken by the Contemporary Department. In fact, shortly thereafter, the entire department was moved to a new location, some distance from the routes of any guided tours.

Hallmark's entry into the studio card field gave studio cards a legitimacy and respectability they had heretofore not known. This move by Hallmark, which might have not happened had Joyce Hall not been incapacitated, precipitated two major developments within the greeting card industry.

First, it served as a go-ahead for the other major card companies to initiate their own studio card lines. American

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<sup>89</sup>Freedgood, "Joyce Thinking," p. 97.



Greetings Corporation, in fact was already in production with their own studio card line, called Hi-Brows when Hallmark's Contemporary line came out.<sup>90</sup> The other major companies followed suit within six months to a year.<sup>91</sup>

Why did it take these manufacturers so long to market studio cards? According to Carl Goeller, Vice-President of Public Relations for American Greetings Corporation,

The major companies didn't like the studios when they first appeared and refused to put that kind of merchandise in their lines. The cards broke too many rules--they were offensive, unartistic, didn't have traditional greetings, everything was wrong. Company executives ruled them a "fad" and pronounced they would soon go away. From 1953-1956 though, they didn't go away . . .<sup>92</sup>

Second, by entering the studio card market, Hallmark in effect changed that market. According to Contemporary Director, Robert McCloskey,

. . . when we first produced Contemporary cards, we were directing them toward a smaller group--largely intellectuals and pseudo-sophisticates. Because these people set trends and mold opinions, it became very fashionable to purchase Contemporary cards . . . Contemporary cards were "in" and conventional cards were "out." But the popularity of Contemporary cards soon spread and before long, instead of a segmented market, a mass market was buying them.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>Wilson telephone interview.

<sup>91</sup>Based on personal correspondence between Carl Goeller, V.P. Public Relations for American Greetings Corporation and the writer.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid. <sup>93</sup>McCloskey, speech.



So, while many of the early studio cards had been printed in runs of only five to ten thousand, with the majors entering the studio card field, with their research and re-testing techniques, runs of forty to fifty thousand were not unrealistic.

Along with the profits of mass marketing came problems, since people who had never been exposed to the off-beat humor of studio cards were now sending or receiving them. McCloskey reported that on one occasion, the F.B.I. paid him a visit because of a Hallmark card, part of which was a tiny note which read, "This is a stick-up, put all your money in a paper bag and shove it across the counter." Apparently, the F.B.I. was concerned that this card might be used in a real bank robbery, since there was no way to trace the handwriting.<sup>94</sup>

Other problems arose with the advent of the mass-marketed studio card, as Mr. McCloskey explained,

. . . (there is) quite a steady stream of correspondence with customers who take our cards literally and attempt to follow the outlandish directions or instructions built around the punchline . . . If we use a line on a cheer card that says, "the sales clerk told me this card would have you feeling better in no time at all . . . personally, I doubt if you can even swallow it, but good luck." some customer will try to eat the card and then write us a letter to complain about how it tasted . . . We once had some imitation cake mix in a card and a customer tried to make a cake with it . . . she told us it turned out very lumpy and went so far as to send us a piece . . . along with the exact amount of time she had left it in

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid.



the oven . . .<sup>95</sup>

### Studio Card Characteristics and Differences\*

With the influence and effects of studio cards becoming more apparent from the mid-fifties onward, it is important to consider the nature of studio cards themselves.

That studio cards were different in many ways from conventional cards is obvious. Probably the most significant of these changes was the shape of studio cards,<sup>96</sup> which was long and thin as opposed to the square shape greeting cards had traditionally always had. There are two possible explanations for the adoption of this shape.

According to Carl Goeller of American Greetings, studio cards started out being square just like the old humorous cards. Since the sales of the first studio cards went so well, they had to be reprinted sooner than anticipated. However, there were not enough of the traditional greeting card envelopes available, but there were enough of standard size business envelopes. Consequently, these standard number ten business size envelopes were pulled, and the cards were redesigned to fit them, thereby accidentally introducing the new slim shape, an innovation which the rest of the greeting card companies picked up.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>Ibid.    <sup>96</sup>Goeller, letter.    <sup>97</sup>Ibid.



Another explanation suggests it merely may have been a question of money rather than convenience which prompted the studio manufacturers to adopt the slim shape.

. . . The oblong shape came about because the buying public demanded envelopes with their greeting cards, and the nine-by-four inch business size envelope was much less expensive than the invitational size commonly used for greeting cards . . .<sup>98</sup>

The name "studio" card is derived from the fact that the first ones were created by young artists in Greenwich Village studios.<sup>99</sup> Most of these were silk-screened by hand into black and white designs.

The advent of studio cards themselves may have been solely out of economic desperation on the part of their early creators. Unable to sell their paintings, village artists drew original greeting cards which they sold to nearby gift shops.<sup>100</sup> Appearing shortly after the end of World War II, almost all of the cards, according to one writer on the subject, reflected ". . . the tongue in cheek cynicism of the post-war atomic age."<sup>101</sup>

Had studio cards differed only in shape, they most likely never would have received the attention they did. However, what studio cards said, and the way studio cards said it was quite different from what the concept of greeting cards had been.

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<sup>98</sup>Hyams, "No Inhibitions," p. 24. <sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid. <sup>101</sup>Ibid.



The traditional greeting card generally possesses each of the following characteristics:

1. . . . a wish, a compliment, or an expression of appreciation.
2. There is usually a direct tie-in between the words and the illustration. Often one without the other would be devoid of meaning.
3. Each card is built up on a basic idea which leads up to the punch line. The last line is, or should be, the cherry in the cocktail.
4. The wording on the card is conversational, timely, and easy to read . . . Also, there are few foreign phrases used. Occasionally one gets by, but it must be in the reading vocabulary of millions of people.
5. Each card contains at least one of the basic ingredients of humor; the unexpected, the ridiculous, the incongruous, . . . exaggeration, anachronism, underplay. Because everybody buys cards, the greeting card editor tries to use gags that will "tickle the funny bones" of the greatest number of people in all age groups. However, "senses of humor" vary. Hence, the great variety of humorous ideas on the counter.<sup>102</sup>

While studio cards are considered to be humorous cards, they differ from this traditional concept of what the humorous card should be in several ways.

First of all, unlike general humorous cards, studio cards seldom rhyme. Rather, the studio card seeks to deliver the most

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<sup>102</sup>Ada Bassett "Humorous Greeting Cards and the Freelance Writer," Writer, December, 1960, p. 20.



impact possible while using the fewest words possible.

Paralleling the success of quick foods in recent years, studio cards offer "quick communication."<sup>103</sup>

Design is much more of a factor in the studio card than in the general humorous card. While the design and artwork of a general humorous card usually just supports the verse which actually carries the thrust of the card's message, studio card messages are more tied in with their designs.<sup>104</sup>

For the most part, while sentiments are much the same, the sentimentality usually found in general humorous greeting cards is absent from studio cards,<sup>105</sup> as evidenced by the following examples of studio and general humorous cards, each of which expresses basically the same wish as its counterpart, but the way each card does this varies widely.

### FRIENDSHIP

#### General Humorous

(Cute rabbit design, tied in with illustration)

Whether I'm toasted, wined,  
and dined,  
Or go through life with a  
patch behind,  
I'll count myself rich, and  
darn lucky too . . .  
As long as I have a friend  
like you!

#### Studio

(ridiculous looking figure with yo-yo)

You've got more class  
talent and brains in  
your little finger than  
. . . anyone else I  
know has in their little  
finger!

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid.    <sup>104</sup>Ibid.    <sup>105</sup>Ibid.



BIRTHDAYGeneral Humorous

If Birthday's aren't your  
cup of tea (disdainful  
mouse with teacup) . . .  
You've sure got lots of  
company! (large teacup  
filled with cute, sad  
mice) Happy Birthday,  
Anyway!

Studio

(lettering only)  
ON THIS AUSPICIOUS DAY  
YOUR CUP RUNNETH OVER . . .  
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, SLOPPY!

GET WELLGeneral Humorous

Sorry you're in the hospital-  
Nurses and Docs are such  
curious folks! They eye ya,  
they fry ya, they prod and  
they poke, they cuss ya,  
discuss ya, and when you're  
well they send ya a bill for  
it . . .  
Gosh, ain't it hell?! Hope  
you're out soon!

Studio

In the hospital?  
Hope you're luckier  
than my mother was.  
She went in perfectly  
all right and came out  
with . . . ME! Get well  
soon!<sup>106</sup>

Although one segment of the card-buying public regarded studio cards as the best things to come along in years, not all of people involved in greeting card production, and in greeting card purchasing, felt that way toward this startling new development called studio cards. Like most large businesses, the greeting card industry tended to be on the conservative side when it came to testing a new product.

A prime example was Hallmark's contemporary line, which relied

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., pp. 20-21.



more on subtle plays on words rather than out and out risqueness.<sup>107</sup>

According to Thomas Wilson of American Greetings,

For years, Hallmark would not touch a card with the word 'sex' or 'hell.' Then when they finally used such words, they at first blanked out the 'e.' Don't forget, Hallmark did these things with studio cards, which were designed for youth with copy that was to be human and written the way people really talk.<sup>108</sup>

Accordingly, recently Mr. Wilson commented that ". . . the kind of cards which brought about studio cards were not terribly saleable. They were controversial, but not especially saleable."<sup>109</sup>

#### Negative Reactions Toward Studio Cards

The controversial nature of studio cards during their early years, compounded with criticism from various quarters, was responsible for actions such as Hallmark blanking out key vowels in what might have been considered objectionable words. The truth of the matter was that many people were not happy at all with the idea of studio cards, as evidenced by this quotation from a 1957 magazine article:

In that recent past which seems so far away, manufacturers of greeting cards employed psychologists to see that no accidental or unconscious insult was lodged in verse or illustration. If, for instance, a "Mother's Day" card showed a picture of Whistler's

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<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 33.    <sup>109</sup>Wilson, interview.



Mother over a mantlepice, on no account was the illustrator to allow candlesticks, roses etc. to protrude into the painting. For this would, the theory goes, suggest unconscious hostility to mother, and many who received the card would feel a definite disturbance in their psychic life.

Now however, there have appeared several series of cards which seem to be designed on exactly the opposite premises. They are meant to cut and to cut deeply. They go far beyond the illustrations of a Steig or an Abner Dean, those incisive commentators on the American scene. The new 'greeting cards' are usually tasteless and obscene. They are more objectionable than the worst of the "comic" books, so often inveighed against, for they exploit the same material with at least a measure of talent and intelligence. These cards, which can be seen readily in many stationery and drug stores in big cities across the country, are in too many cases repellent to taste and sense. They can be added to those things, like dishonest movie advertisements and objectionable pocket book covers, that we can well do without.<sup>110</sup>

Initial objections to many of the early studio cards were not without foundation. Many indeed were, as the trade put it at the time, "sick." For example, some of the Barker studio cards displayed at the New York Stationers Show, included a "Do It Yourself Drop Dead Kit," which demonstrated 15 ways to commit suicide, shut-in cards to send to prisoners, a birthday card which bore the verse "Enjoy your Birthday. It may be your last," and Barker's best selling get-well card, which bore an illustration of a deranged

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<sup>110</sup>"Greetings," Commonweal, July 26, 1957, p. 414.



doctor hacking off the leg of his patient.<sup>111</sup>

Even Joyce Hall of Hallmark originally called studio cards "vulgar" and "horrible." According to one source, when it came to studio cards, Mr. Hall, although he was impressed by their success, did not understand studio cards fantastic and sometimes grotesque humor. For the most part, President Joyce Hall of Hallmark left studio cards alone.<sup>112</sup>

#### Reasons for Studio Card Popularity

If, as it appears, studio cards were regarded in such low esteem by so many, why did they become so popular? As it turns out, there were many.

It is important, though, to consider the function of all greeting cards, which is "to convey a message from one person to another for a particular reason or occasion . . . in a sophisticated, humorous, or novel manner."<sup>113</sup>

Given this set of circumstances of what the function of greeting cards is, the question arises; Why is there a need for special cards to convey these messages? There are many reasons, all of which evolve from basic human nature.

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<sup>111</sup>"Light Slams," p. 27.

<sup>112</sup>Freedgood, "Joyce Thinking," p. 95.

<sup>113</sup>Based on personal correspondence between Arnold Shapiro and the writer, July 18, 1975.



"People are basically shy," says Peanuts studio card innovator Arnold Shapiro, "and unable to express their real feelings. Therefore, a greeting card serves as a convenient way to be sentimental or loving or sarcastic without being too personal. Studies have proven that the biggest, dumbest, toughest characters usually buy the most flowery, sentimental, expensive cards--mainly because they cannot express themselves, and feel this kind of card really does the job for them."<sup>114</sup>

Inability to express one's self, in fact, has frequently been cited as a reason for the popularity of greeting cards. As far back as 1946, before the advent of studio cards, and just as greeting cards in general were starting their tremendous growth, an article in the New York Times Magazine noted,

. . . greeting cards do provide a welcome relief to the more inarticulate members of our society. And in expressing emotions, most Americans do tend to be somewhat inarticulate . . .<sup>115</sup>

Taking a somewhat less sympathetic view of the greeting card phenomenon, another writer commented in 1959,

. . . There are several reasons for this great greeting card craze which set in after the war and took momentum in the last five years. First of all, Johnny can't, or doesn't like to write . . . they prefer to use the ready made product instead . . . the tendency of post-war

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<sup>114</sup>Ibid.

<sup>115</sup>Helen Bryant, "Greetings-Three Billion Times a Year," New York Times Magazine, November 24, 1946, p. 12.



Americans to move . . . may be another reason for the greeting card boom . . . People on the move from one Levittown to the next like to keep some contact with their former neighbors and friends . . .<sup>116</sup>

In addition to providing services to the inarticulate and the geographically mobile, greeting cards proliferated because of another need which they satisfy--the need for convenience and expediency, as President Joyce Hall of Hallmark pointed out in 1970,

The country's growing affluence, population mobility, and general restlessness all contribute to the growth of greeting cards. Busy people find it hard to take the time to write. So they send a card, and jot a little message on it.<sup>117</sup>

Why and how, then, did the advent of studio cards satisfy these needs? Again, the reasons are numerous.

According to one of the earliest full-time writers of greeting card humor, Jules Pollock, the reason for the tremendous popularity of the studios was due to the fact that

. . . the public was sated with the saccharine, horrendous, maudlin, silly, innocuous, eight-line verses about "as each birthday is a turnstile along the path of years," you know, that pseudo-philosophical bunk. Then, all of a sudden, the Norcross Greeting Card Company came out with charming, delightful things ("cutes") and they were the forerunners of what

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<sup>116</sup>Norbert Muhlen, "The Canned-Emotion Industry," America January 10, 1959, p. 426.

<sup>117</sup>"Greeting Cards Grow," p. 32.



we call humorous cards . . . again, I'm going back to 1937, '38, '39 . . .<sup>118</sup>

According to Carl Goeller of American Greetings Corporation, the reasons for the growth and acceptance of studio cards lay in the nature of America's returning World War II veterans.

The real growth of humorous cards began during World War II when servicemen sent and received cards. They didn't like the "schmaltz" that was available and pushed for more humor. Until World War II, cards were 99% a woman's market. After the war, men were sending too-- a habit they acquired during the war. It wasn't until after the Korean conflict, though, and the return of America's first "cynical" veterans, that card companies began to be pressured to make cards men, and particularly young veteran men, could send. "Hot Dog, it's your birthday" was too establishment for a guy who'd been in the brothels of Japan and the hospitals of Korea. It was pressure from these people, mostly now college students taking advantage of the G.I. Bill, that forced the birth of studio cards.<sup>119</sup>

Bill Box, one of the founders of Box Cards, considered by many to be the flagship studio card publisher, regarded the reason for his cards popularity as being the fact that ". . . all Box Cards are open to individual interpretation,"<sup>120</sup> a sentiment echoed in essence by American Greeting's Thomas Wilson, who recently stated,

. . . What the studio card really was, was a card that solicited involvement on the part of the sender, and the recipient . . . the traditional greeting card form didn't pretend to really represent you, or sound like you, in fact, it goes to the ultimate extremity . . .<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>Pollock, interview.    <sup>119</sup>Goeller, letter.

<sup>120</sup>Hyams, "No Inhibitions," p. 25.    <sup>121</sup>Wilson, interview.



Mr. Wilson went on to point out that studio cards delivered their insights by way of conversational humor, rather than very unconversational-sounding verse. This in turn brought about the use of slang in studio cards, although that did not mean that sentiment was, or is absent from studio cards. As the foreword to Greetings Dearie, a collection of Hallmark's early studio cards in book form, pointed out,

. . . Sentimentality is absent in these cards and in this humor. But sentiment is always present. Strong feelings about certain things--including the right way to express one's feelings in greeting cards--have made this style of humor almost as popular in some quarters as the funnies and cartoons are in others . . .<sup>122</sup>

In fact, one of the best-selling studio cards marketed by American Greetings Corporation, ideally reflected this philosophy of sentiment without sentimentality. It read simply, "There's no special reason for this card . . . I just wanted to make sure you don't forget me."<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup>Hallmark Cards, Inc., Greetings Dearie (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1962), p. 4.

<sup>123</sup>Wilson interview.



## Chapter 4

### STUDIO CARDS AND THE SEVENTIES, AND THE COMMUNICATION OF THE FUTURE

#### Trends in Sales and Appeals

It was apparent as early as 1946, that significant changes lay in store for the total concept of the greeting card industry. Generally speaking, these changes, most of which rode in on the back of the studio card, were felt over a period of years rather than all at once.

Probably foremost among these changes was the drift away from sentimentality, while retaining sentiment, which greeting card publishers began to explore with the early studio cards. As noted in 1946, before the studio card boom began, ". . . the trend today is to sentiment without sentimentality, the light yet heartfelt touch . . ."124

Commenting on his success, one of the earliest manufacturers of studio cards said,

Actually, I think our success is a product of our era. With the threat of atomic annihilation, many people are disillusioned, and they expresse themselves caustically. Also, the schmaltz and smugness of the TV commercial started a rebellion. Our cards have a kind of universal

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124Bryant, "Greetings Three Billion."



humor. Everyone, young and old, buys studio cards  
today. I design cards I like to send to my friends.<sup>125</sup>

While a drift away from sentimentality, accompanied by, or perhaps exacerbated by, the paranoia of the cold war, in combination with cultural changes of the post-war era doubtlessly helped studio cards to catch on in the greeting card marketplace, it is also important to consider the changes going on in that marketplace. What had once been an almost exclusive female market had to make room for males, although they never have taken the market away from the females. Shortly after the end of World War II it was noted,

. . . During the war, men in the forces who had never before bothered with greeting cards, felt the urge to express their sentiments so strongly that they even snapped up dollar cards to mail home, and it is now hoped that they will make card buying a permanent habit. Cards are now specially designed with male purchasers in mind.<sup>126</sup>

Apparently, encouraged by the ever-increasing variety of cards available, the men who started buying greeting cards during the war, continued their card buying habits, as evidenced by the testimony of a large west coast bookstore card buyer in 1958,

. . . she feels studio cards have found a market among people who never before bought cards. "Men, for example, have found that studio cards can sometimes say for them what they might get their faces slapped for saying in person. Until studio cards were published, at least ninety percent of our greeting card sales were made to women. Nowadays, at least thirty percent of the sales come from men . . ."<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup>Hyams, "No Inhibitions," p. 25.

<sup>126</sup>Bryant, "Greetings Three Billion," p. 13.

<sup>127</sup>Hyams, "No Inhibitions," p. 25.



According to a most recent survey, women still dominate the greeting card market, comprising 85% of the studio card buyers, who in turn represent 38% of all card shoppers.<sup>128</sup> Part of the reason for this imbalance might be found in the fact that studio cards are much more of an impulse purchase than most other things, including conventional greeting cards. While 81% of conventional cards are planned purchases, only 48% of studio card purchases are.<sup>129</sup> With all due respect to women's liberation, it is still logical to assume that women do more of the shopping in this country than the men. Consequently, it is women who are more likely to be exposed to studio card displays, then making impulse purchases which account for 52% of all studio card sales.

The emergence of something new, created for an entirely new market, was another significant change in the greeting card industry. This was the advent of the non-occasion card, or everyday card, which grew out of ". . . the tendencies of post-war Americans to move, combined with the growth towards expediency and quickness . . ."<sup>130</sup> As Time put it in 1966,

. . . Once birthdays and holidays were the principal card business, and there was a long dull season between Father's Day and Thanksgiving. Now "everyday cards"

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<sup>128</sup>"Studio Card Funny Business is Money Business," Professional Selling, 5 (December 23, 1975): 3.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., p. 4. <sup>130</sup>Muhlen, "Canned Emotion," p. 426.



get wells, new baby, confirmation, religious cards and bon voyage messages, account, along with birthdays, for 60% of American Greeting's business, since families are more scattered nowadays . . .<sup>131</sup>

According to the National Association of Greeting Card Publishers, non-occasion "Friendship" cards accounted for 35% of all sales in 1970, up from 25% in 1960.<sup>132</sup> Humorous studio cards account for 80% of the non-occasion market.<sup>133</sup>

Greeting card manufacturers are in an enviable position, because theirs is a product which is virtually "inflation and recession-proof,"<sup>134</sup> as pointed out by the Wall Street Journal,

One of the biggest plusses for greeting card makers is their ability to raise or lower prices without loosing sales. "People tend to buy the card they want, regardless of cost . . ."<sup>135</sup>

This resistance to economic disaster helped greeting card companies survive the depression of the 1930's, as noted in an American Greetings in-house publication,

Another milestone was reached in 1932 when the great depression caused businesses to topple, but the Sapirstein Greeting Card Company (as American

<sup>131</sup>"Hearts and Darts for Far-Aparts," Time, November 18, 1966, p. 108.

<sup>132</sup>"What's News," Wall Street Journal, August 20, 1970, p. 1.

<sup>133</sup>Goeller, letter.

<sup>134</sup>Shapiro, telephone interview.

<sup>135</sup>"What's News," p. 1.



Greetings was then named) emerged stronger than ever. The greeting cards business was "depression proof." People couldn't afford to buy gifts for friends or relatives. Yet somehow they managed a nickel or a dime for a greeting card.<sup>136</sup>

A feature story in a New York Times Magazine of 1960 made the dire prediction that ". . . Despite their successes, (or rather because of it) studio cards already seem to have reached their natural limits . . ."<sup>137</sup> Actually, at this time, studio cards were really only just beginning to grow, for as it turned out, studio cards have served as the springboard for what appears to be the future of the greeting card industry.

### Promotions

Probably the most significant development in the marketing of greeting cards themselves over the past few years has been the success of "Promotions." Briefly, a promotion is a "series of cards with some unifying theme, either design or sentiment oriented."<sup>138</sup> Although they were not referred to as such, the Blarney Stone and panty verses of the Meryle Publishing Company might be considered two of the earliest promotions.

However, the idea of promotions in studio greeting cards did

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<sup>136</sup>"J. S. . . . Forever Young at Heart," Professional Selling, 4 (November 21, 1974): 4.

<sup>137</sup>Bryant, "Greetings Three Billion," p. 12.

<sup>138</sup>Carl Goeller, "Realities of the Greeting Card Market," The Writer, December 1971, p. 19.



not really take hold until the 1960's. One of the earliest and most successful of the promotions is the "Peanuts" line of studio cards, which uses characters from the comic strip by Charles Schulz. Ironically, the "Peanuts" cards almost never made it onto the market, and probably would not have, had it not been for the resourcefulness of the Hallmark Contemporary card writer who conceived the idea, Arnold Shapiro.

According to Mr. Shapiro, in 1960 Hallmark had agreed to put a trial run on four test designs of Peanuts cards into two Kansas City stores, even though another line of cards with a Disney character theme had not been successful, and at the time, Peanuts was only beginning to grow in popularity. To insure that the cards did move well, Mr. Shapiro bought them all. Consequently, Hallmark went ahead with the line, and Peanuts cards have been selling well ever since.<sup>139</sup>

Initially, the ideas for Peanuts cards were taken from the daily comic strips and then adapted to cards. Later, existing greeting card ideas were adapted and redesigned using Peanuts characters. Eventually, new ideas were created especially for Peanuts characters.<sup>140</sup>

While he does not actually write each Peanuts greeting card, creator Charles Schulz does have final approval of all ideas using

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<sup>139</sup>Shapiro, letter. <sup>140</sup>Ibid.



his characters, and rejects those which he feels do not accurately portray the personalities of his characters.

For example, in the late sixties, Hallmark started to develop a Peanuts line of twelve horoscope books, one for each sign of the zodiac. Although he agreed to the project, even to the point of approving the first three books, Schulz later changed his mind, since it was not his idea and he did not want to involve his characters with it. Consequently, Hallmark was obliged ". . . to kill a one million dollar idea."<sup>141</sup>

One outstanding use of a Peanuts character which Schulz did agree to was the Snoopy for President campaign in 1968. That year, Snoopy related campaign items from Hallmark sold three times as well as other election oriented greeting card materials.<sup>142</sup>

Election-year cards themselves comprise a significant and interesting part of the promotions story. Beginning with two cards in 1960 from American Greetings, the idea was successful enough to be expanded to twelve card designs in 1964, and then to twenty for the election of 1968. According to President Stone of American Greetings, half of the cards poked fun at republicans, and the other half at democrats. Approximately 150,000 of each

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<sup>141</sup>Ibid.

<sup>142</sup>"Greetings with a Dig," Business Week, October 26, 1968, p. 154.



were distributed and sold well.<sup>143</sup>

Following the American Greeting's lead, Rust Craft followed with 10,000 copies of each of ten cards created for the election of 1968. These sold so well that Rust Craft had to print another 20,000 of each. According to a Rust Craft executive at the time, "Anything like this will move; it's life is short, but it moves."<sup>144</sup>

The short life-span, combined with low profit margins, are what caused two other large greeting card companies, Norcross and Gibson, to steer clear of election cards. With the exception of "Snoopy for President" cards, and party items like napkins or paper plates with a political theme, Hallmark also stayed out of the political card arena.

According to American Greetings' Thomas Wilson, an election oriented series of Hi-Brow cards will be coming out this year, although,

. . . it is not as big of a success as you might think. Even though there's a great deal of pre-occupation on the part of the consumer . . . I kind of have a theory that . . . the greeting card situation . . . being a personal form of communication, national issues, things of that type . . . people don't relate to those things so much in an interpersonal sense . . . we try to evaluate if its a strong message issue, all by itself, regardless of the election or the candidate--if it holds up under that kind of scrutiny, then it becomes a timely plus . . .<sup>145</sup>

Probably one of the most, if not the most successful and

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<sup>143</sup>Ibid.    <sup>144</sup>Ibid.

<sup>145</sup>Wilson, interview.



significant promotions in relation to studio cards was the development of the phenomenally popular "Soft Touch" greeting cards. While the Hi-Brow line of studio cards was created to appeal to the youth market through the use of humor, it was not meant to appeal to the sentiment aspect of the youth market, although ironically, some of the best-selling Hi-Brow cards were heavy with sentiment, but not necessarily humorous. As American Greetings' Thomas Wilson explained it,

. . . For years we had been doing only half a greeting card line for the youth market . . . We had responded to the youth market, as far as greeting cards, by coming out with a line of humorous cards . . . but these people are not insistent only on humor; they are not without sentiment . . .<sup>146</sup>

Armed with this logic, Wilson developed Soft Touch cards, which employed photography and handwritten script rather than cartoon-type artwork and block letters, because, Wilson felt, these factors made the cards "more real,"<sup>147</sup> and because " . . . the whole thing was based on something that was more real in copy . . . conversational sentiment . . ."<sup>148</sup>

Soft Touch cards did ten million dollars worth of business their first year, 1970, and spawned many imitators, including its own contemporary opposite at American Greetings, the ill-fated "Zonk" line. After the success of Soft Touch, Wilson remembers reasoning,

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<sup>146</sup>Ibid.   <sup>147</sup>Ibid.   <sup>148</sup>Ibid.



. . . Now we've got a complete line, or do we? Because at that point, Hi-Brow was appealing to a very mass market; it was no longer a youth market thing . . . the people who had popularized studio cards . . . now had children of their own who were the age of sending cards . . . young people sure don't want any part of hand-me-downs from Mom and Pop. We ought to re-create what happened with Hi-Brow . . . a line that would appeal to young people, something that was somewhat anti-card and anti-tradition . . .<sup>149</sup>

Zonk cards used artwork identified with popular underground comic books (Robert Crum, a former American Greetings artist who had gone on to create such underground comic stars as Fritz the Cat, drew many of the Zonk designs), fantastic paste-up art, day-glow colors, surrealistic photography, art by Mad Magazine artist, Don Martin, even cards with no copy at all, just highly unorthodox illustrations.

The plan was originally to bring out a new series of Zonk cards every six months or so, so as to create sustained interest among Zonk fans.<sup>150</sup> Zonk, however, did not sell well, according to Mr. Wilson, because it was not given enough time even though,

. . . the studio card, the Hi-Brow line . . . and studio cards in general, did not go crazy right off the bat . . . they sold well, but they were appealing only to a limited crowd in the beginning, so the volumes were not that great. It grew eventually to where it became an acceptable standard form of card, but that was after years . . .<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup>Ibid.

<sup>150</sup>"New Zonk Series Features 'MAD' Artist," Professional Selling 2 (November 15, 1972): 2.

<sup>151</sup>Wilson, interview.



American Greetings went into Zonk production with a much higher volume of cards (36 designs) than the original studios had, but the mass market was not there from the outset, and did not have time to develop, before the line was abandoned, mainly because, according to its creator, "Zonk was an idea whose time had not yet come."<sup>152</sup>

### The Merchandising of Non-Card Items

In 1970, Carl Goeller, now Vice-President of Public Relations at American Greetings, wrote,

. . . this is the most exciting period in greeting card history. Editors are competing for new ideas, new gimmicks, new products, and they're paying more than ever before for what they buy. And they are buying ideas as well as words. To succeed in the greeting card field in the seventies, you have to be an idea man as well as a writer . . .<sup>153</sup>

Although on the negative side, Goeller went on to say that the writers of conventional four and eight line verses were in trouble, since the number of straight verse markets had become half of what it once was, due to the fact that conventional verse is easy to modify and re-use, and there was plenty of it around, since conventional verse is the oldest kind of greeting card verse.<sup>154</sup>

Goeller pointed out that since there had been more  
". . . changes in the greeting card business in the last three years

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<sup>152</sup>Ibid.    <sup>153</sup>Goeller, "Realities Greeting Market," p. 18.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid.



alone than there were in the preceeding twenty . . ."155 and because of these changes, those who create greeting cards have had to become more aware of the kinds of markets for which they need to be able to write, primarily the special lines and promotions such as Soft Touch.<sup>156</sup> Perhaps even more importantly, writers need not limit themselves merely to words anymore, because of the changing nature of the industry.

. . . Look what the 'card' industry is making and selling these days--books, games, puzzles, party items, toys, calendars, posters, badges, candles, candy, writing instruments, gift items . . . the list is endless . . .<sup>157</sup>

The changes the greeting card industry has undergone, and is undergoing, this trend toward diversification and merchandising of non-card items, points the way of the future for greeting card manufacturers, as reflected by the annual report of the American Greetings Corporation, which shows the share of greeting cards steadily dropping over the last five years, while the percentage of non-card items steadily increases. Specifically the following table shows the distribution and percentages of total dollar sales, of products during the period indicated.

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<sup>155</sup>Ibid., p. 18.    <sup>156</sup>Ibid., p. 19.    <sup>157</sup>Ibid.



<u>Fiscal Year Ended</u>	<u>Greeting Cards</u>		<u>Gift Wrappings</u>	<u>Miscellaneous</u>
	<u>Everyday</u>	<u>Holiday</u>	<u>and Party Goods</u>	
Feb. 28, 1971	50	29	16	5
Feb. 29, 1972	47	29	17	7
Feb. 28, 1973	44	29	17	10
Feb. 28, 1974	41	27	15	17
Feb. 28, 1975	37	28	14	21158

The miscellaneous category includes stationery, desk products, vinyl accessories, candles, art supplies, giftware, and other non-card items.

In all likelihood, this trend toward non-card items will not abate in the near future, because they too, constitute a form of communication. As person to person contact becomes more removed from our everyday life, suitable substitutes for the usual ways people communicate will evolve, and these non-card items are some of these substitutes.

The merchandising of non-card items by greeting card companies can only be considered the logical outgrowth of the studio card. Starting out as a rude upstart in what had been a fairly constant commodity, studios proved there were more ways to communicate than with an iambic pentameter verse printed on French-folded parchment. Likewise, the many items marketed today by greeting card companies, such as candles, games, big and little books, plates, posters, and puzzles, everything that one human being can buy to give one another,



all point out that there are more ways to communicate than with the words and pictures on a card.



## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the origins and subsequent acceptance of contemporary humorous greeting cards by both manufacturers and consumers. In doing so, the earliest greeting cards have been traced since before the birth of Christ, up to and through the advent and expansion of today's modern studio cards and their satellite products.

Although the sending of greeting cards for many years held the position in our culture of being the obligatory thing to do on holidays and other special occasions, their function has changed in the past 25 years. For some time now, greeting cards, and especially humorous studio cards, have come to be a special form of communication between individuals, a form of communication which says much more than "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Birthday". Whereas in the beginning, it was the occasion which was the reason for the sending of any greeting card, now it is more likely that the occasion is secondary in importance to just expressing a sentiment that might otherwise go unexpressed.

Yet, with all these changes in the essential nature of greeting cards and communication going on over the last few years, there has never been a study made of this unique



communication phenomenon of greeting cards. Emerging unnoticed as a newly-coined form of communication, studio greeting cards have been until now, almost totally unstudied, even though there is probably no one in our society who has not communicated with, or been communicated to, by them. It was out of recognition of the importance of studio greeting cards as a form of communication, and also the lack of collected information on the subject that this thesis was written.

The earliest greeting cards were sent in observance of the Egyptian New Year, and these date back as far as 600 B.C. The custom spread to Rome and the rest of Europe, with New Years remaining the only occasion on which greeting cards were exchanged until the 1400s, when the age of chivalry gave birth to Valentines Cards. The first Christmas cards did not appear until the mid-1800s, coinciding with three important events of that period which were to profoundly affect the future of greeting cards.

As literacy in Europe increased significantly, along with the development of color printing techniques and the institution of the British penny postal system, the greeting card industry was born in the 19th century, flowering on both sides of the Atlantic.

The American greeting card industry really began with the beautiful and colorful cards of Louis Prang, who published superb lithographic prints for Christmas cards from 1874 until



1890, when cheaper European cards achieved a dominance which continued until World War I not only removed the source of most greeting cards, but at the same time created additional demand. It was around this time that many of America's most prominent publishers of greeting cards began their businesses.

The embryo of what would become the humorous greeting card industry had been forming piecemeal over a period of many years, starting in the latter half of the nineteenth century with mechanical cards first being developed in Germany, comic Valentines in England and America, followed by the French fold (a greeting card which, when opened, has four equal sized segments on each of the page) in the 1920s, which in turn led to the coy and sweet verse of the Norcross "cutes", which came out in the 1930s.

With practically all humorous cards being written by the same writers who had for years done nothing but turn out traditional sentimental verse, the humorous cards of this time were hardly humorous by today's standards.

This situation was changed when the Meryle Publishing Company began to market exclusively non-sentimental types of cards in the late 1930s. It was from these small beginnings that World War II finally caused humorous greeting cards to begin their climb to popularity, for a variety of reasons.

One of these was the fact that war-time made scarce



many of the materials needed for the attachments upon which the Meryle Publishing Company had depended upon for humor therefore, more emphasis was necessarily placed on textual humor.

Also, the nature of the market was shifting from almost exclusively female, to a market in which males were beginning to exert their influences, both as senders and receivers. Logically, greeting card publishers began to cater to this market, and sought to create cards the male buyer could identify with.

Another reason for the post-war changes in the greeting card market was the fact that people had become more geographically mobile than ever before, and sought to keep in touch with each other through greeting cards.

All of these factors, combined with the new cynicism of the atomic era, plus the arrival of yet another war, helped to give birth to the studio card, around the early fifties. The studio card appealed to a totally different kind of card-buyer from the traditional purchasers of greeting cards; in fact the studio card market was considered to be an entirely separate entity from the traditional market. People who bought studio cards were those who may have never or rarely purchased greeting cards before. Younger, and more urban, the early studio card purchasers bought their cards from a variety of small greeting card publishers who specialized



in studios, such as Panda Prints, the Oz Studio Card Company, and the leader of the early studio card publishers, Box Cards. It was not until the end of the 1950s that the major card publisher, such as Hallmark and American Greetings, began to enter the field. When they did though, it was not long until they dominated the studio card rack space, absorbing the small early companies, or forcing them out of business.

As the major card publishers took over the studio card market, there were also serious changes which came about within that market. For instance, just the fact that studio cards, which had initially appealed to a limited market, were now available to a much wider market, created problems for people who had never been exposed to the off-beat humor of studio cards. The greeting card market adapted, however, and soon studio greeting cards, in the hands of the mass-marketers, had become the springboards from which most of today's modern greeting card company innovations sprang.

Included among these are "promotions", those series of cards tied together by some unifying theme, such as Hallmarks "Peanuts" cards, or American Greetings "Ziggy". Probably the most successful of all promotions was the "Soft Tough" line, created by Thomas Wilson of American Greetings, which created an entire new genre of studio cards, featuring photography, sensitivity, and sentimentality more than humor to



convey a message.

In fact, it seems apparent that studio cards may have paved the way for non-card items to take over the greeting card publishing industry. Today, the greeting card industry manufactures not only cards, but also books, games, puzzles, calenders, posters, candles, gift items, and much much more. In the past five years, greeting cards themselves have gone from 79% to 65% of the total output of greeting card publishers, while non-card items have increased from 21% to 34% during the same period.

This diversity in greeting card company production is in one way a product of, and in another way, a reaction to studio greetings.

It is a product of studio greetings in that at one time studio greetings were considered an alternative form of communication; today many of the greeting card company's new products might be looked upon in the same light.

By the same token, many of the factors which initially caused the popularity of studio greeting cards, i.e., increased geographical mobility, the trend away from unrealistic sentimentality, and the desire to communicate on a more personal level, have also led to the increased usage of long distance telephone calls, which were for many years prohibitively expensive except for rare special occasions. However, based on the information



and research contained in this thesis, it is not likely that telephone communication will ever completely replace greeting cards. Although the telephone is quick and offers more immediacy than a greeting card (and at a greater cost than a greeting card) there is one thing that no telephone can ever do for a caller. The telephone caller must speak for himself or herself; the greeting card sender chooses the cards that best express his or her thoughts, and then adds to them, or doesn't as he or she pleases. This is an important difference.

People, being basically shy and usually painfully aware of their own infallibilities, rely on greeting cards, and especially studio cards, to say what they can not, or dare not, say themselves. In addition, greeting cards probably say it better than the people themselves could anyway. Just as people elect representatives to speak for them in government, and have lawyers to speak for them in court, they also retain studio cards to speak for them on those occasions and non-occasions when they feel it is better that they not speak for themselves.

Also, greeting cards keep our ways of communication in step with the rest of our lives, providing easy to use, pre-packaged messages for the masses. What McDonald's is to appetities, is for many what greeting cards are to communication.

The popularity of studios is part of a general sophistication and maturation of the public's taste and attitudes over



the last thirty years. Studio cards are as much a part of the new morality as are free love, living together out of wedlock, and triple-x rated movies. One of their main advantages lies in the fact that studio cards have become accepted by virtually all people in all walks of life, while many other components of the new morality have not been so fortunate.

By the same token, studio cards represent a departure from tradition, and a turn toward a more realistic approach to things in general. People do not naturally speak in verse, so why should the cards which pretend to speak for those people be in verse? Studio cards helped to make written communications a bit more human.

Difficulty in communicating with one another is not something which civilized men have only recently had to deal with. Reasons for and ways of communicating have longed plagued the human race. It does seem, however, that had our ways of living not become more complicated, greeting cards may never have become more simplified by the advent of studio cards.

True communication between individuals is a commodity increasingly difficult to come by. The urgencies of technological advancement, coupled with the trend toward expediency in all things associated with modern life, have likewise fostered non-involvement among the people who populate our contemporary society.



Communication of sentiment, however, is something which has always been difficult to come by. It is reflected in literature by Cyrano de Bergerac's overly successful efforts to put into words the emotions which is handsome but inarticulate counterpart could not. It is even reflected in our own early American history, by the colonial love triangle of John Alden, Miles Standish, and the ever perceptive Priscilla, whose incisive quip, "Speak for yourself, John.", remains as memorable and more quotable than any eloquence ever uttered or written by Patrick Henry or Thomas Paine.

Mail service, telegraph service, and the telephone service have all lubricated and revolutionized the ways of communications. However, the communication of sentiment by these media has and will continue to pose a formidable challenge to many, if not most, people who lack the verbal and characteristic resources to make themselves understood and accepted to others.

While the gospel according to McLuhan dictates that the medium is the message, it is not an unassailable presumption. that the converse is equally valid, i.e., the message is also the medium. In the case of studio greeting cards, medium and message combine to create an especially potent and credible communication force, acting both verbally and visually to convey what mere spoken or written words can not. Somehow, an engagingly designed studio card featuring an amusing character or situation, can believable communicate what might be awkward or stupid



if expressed in person.

As long as humans interact, there will always be a need for communication surrogates such as Cyrano de Bergerac, John Alden, and studio greeting cards, along with their various off-shoots and by-products. These bits of paper, ink, art and thought which have become such an important part of our communication culture, can only continue to grow and change, along with the range of human lives and emotions which they were created to serve.



APPENDIX

ILLUSTRATIONS

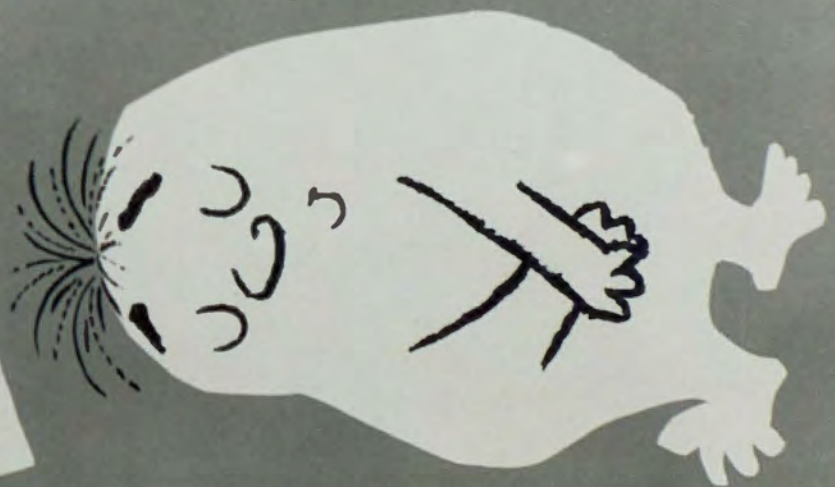


Laff Masters # 1521

With a total sales of about 750,000, this studio card was the first to use an advertised product as an idea theme, a practice which has since become common in the industry.



To celebrate  
your Birthday  
I swallowed some  
flowers....



Four Roses!

Happy Birthday



### Laff Masters # 1522

This design by Laff Masters Studios was the first studio card to use an inside attachment, a small plastic comb.

According to Laff Master's President, Joseph Hacker, this card was also one of the first to incorporate a full bleed, or solid color from end to end.



Here's a **COMB**

on your  
Birthday



it's all

I have to

**PART**

with !



happy birthday

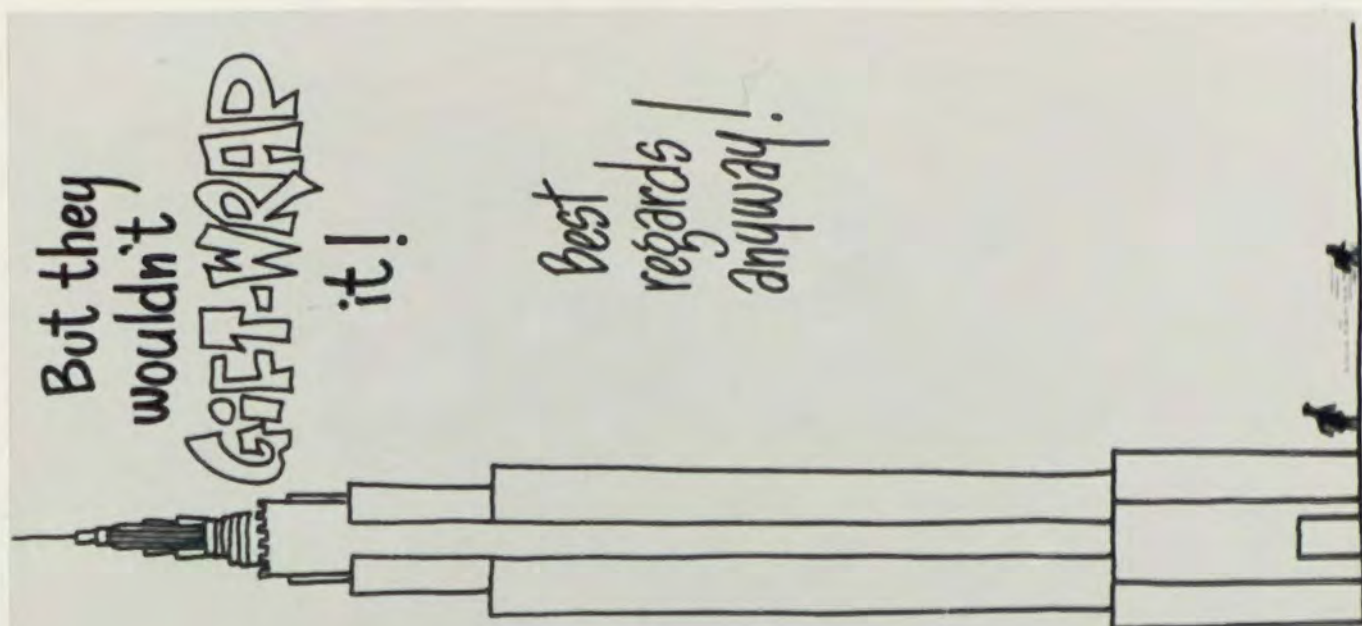




Laff Masters # 4512

Among the first studio cards to employ a local theme was this Laff Masters design, published during the time of the 1964-65 Worlds Fair in New York City, according to Joseph Hacker.







### Laff Masters # 1529

Originally published in 1958, this was the first studio card to use a die-cut (holes punched in the card). Prior to this, studio cards had always used cheap production methods. According to Laff Masters' Joseph Hacker, this card has been redesigned several times, and is still being sold.



At Last!

THE gReATeST  
pRoDuct of  
AmEriCAn  
iNvEntivE  
gEniUS....



AN

AIR  
CoNDitioneD  
BiRThDAy  
CArD!

Happy  
BiRThDAy!



Laff Masters # 6103

Flock, a furry, velvet-like application had been used on greeting cards for a while, but never on a studio design until this card came out, according to Laff Master's President, Joseph Hacker.



AN IMPORTANT PART OF  
MARRIED LIFE IS SPENT  
**IN BED...**  
So remember the old Proverb:  
**ONE GOOD TURN...**



**Gets all The  
BLANKETS!**

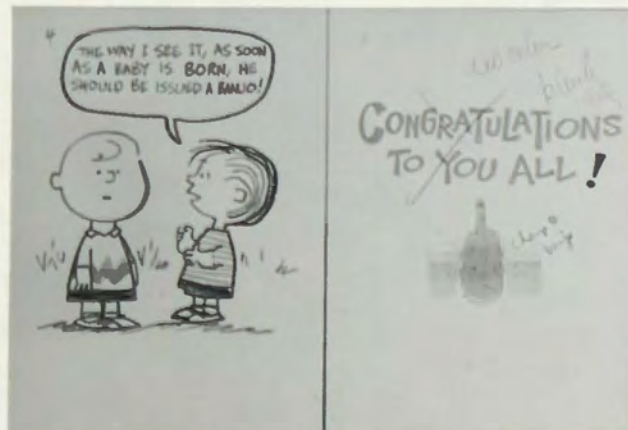


HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!



This is a Hallmark artist's rendering of what was to become one of the first "Peanuts" cards. The idea was developed by then Hallmark writer, Arnold Shapiro, from whom this rough, and the following roughs, were obtained.







This is an enlargement of the back of the rough on the preceeding page, enlarged to show the approval initials and cost notations.



✓ \$1.70 per 100 - Banfoant  
 \$ .62.5 per 100 Rojastu  
 132.5 12.5  
 5  
 62.5

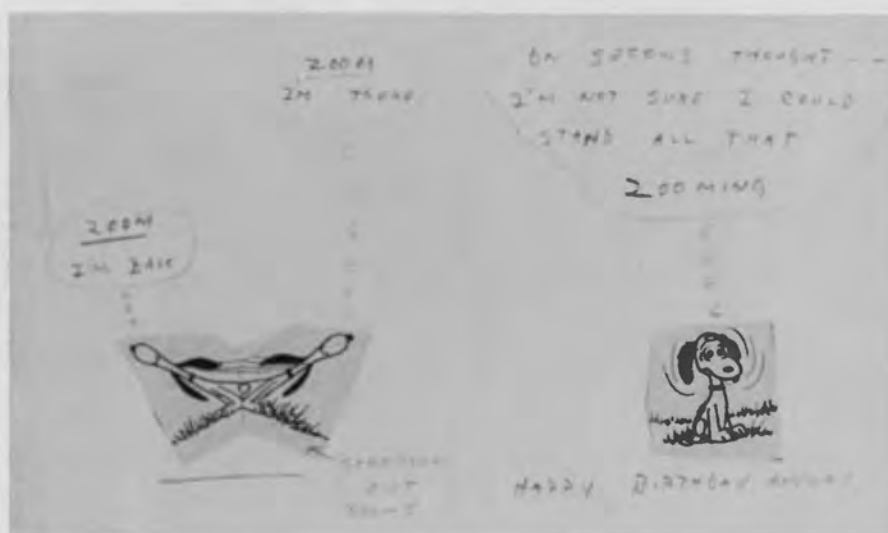
OK pr Skpli.

SHAPIRO  
 HUNT  
 (S CHARLES SCHWIZ)  
 3-22-60



Another of Arnold Shapiro's early roughs for Hallmark, this one was constructed from artwork lifted from a Peanuts comic strip. Beneath the artwork are two different sets of copy for the same card, so that the same card design could be used for two different sending situations.





25F70-1

1. Gee---I sure miss you!
2. If I were a bird I could ZOOM off and see you any time I liked.
3. Then I could ZOOM back!
4. ZOOM! I'm there! ZOOM! I'm back!
5. On second thought, I'm not sure I could stand all that ZOOMing!

But, gee---I sure miss you!

25B304-2

1. Gee! It's your birthday, and here I sit ---miles away!
2. If I were a bird, I could ZOOM off and wish you "Happy Birthday" in person. ~~Then I could ZOOM back!~~
3. Then I could ZOOM back!
4. ZOOM! I'm there! ZOOM! I'm back!
5. On second thought---I'm not sure I could stand all that ZOOMing!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, ANYWAY!



The top photograph is a sample of a "Zonk" card, by American Greetings. Published in day-glow colors, this particular card featured no copy when opened, just a bright, blank, orange interior. The bottom illustration is a typical Zonk envelope.







This was the concluding entry in a book of Hallmark's early studio card line entitled "Greetings Dearie," and was probably also the basis for or inspiration of the anecdote related on page 38.



This card was  
inspected by  
no. 74

*please help me...  
I'm being held  
prisoner in a  
greeting card  
factory*



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