

Put a stamp on it

PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Amy J. Putnam*

If you are looking for Sunapee steamboats, try ‘Sunapee’ or ‘steamboats’ or ‘Newbury,’” suggests David Sysyn. “Look around some. Each dealer has his own way of categorizing — their own method to their madness.”

It’s hard to imagine a million of anything in one room, but the Granite State Post Card Club sees it happen every spring and fall during their annual post card show. Although there are dozens of deltiologists in Concord’s Holiday Inn ballroom, the room is surprisingly quiet. Pockets of patrons are sitting in chairs, flipping through stacks of post cards.

Sending post cards was America’s #1 hobby from 1905 to 1910. “Millions were sent through the post office,” says Sysyn, Granite State Post Card Club treasurer and past president. “The

number is unequaled, even to this day.”

It was a hobby, but it was also a necessity — no telephones. “People sent everyday messages, like ‘Had a new baby girl’ or ‘Had my appendix out and I’m fine,’” says Sysyn. “The mail ran efficiently because of railroad connections. You could write a post card in Lebanon and send it to Nashua on the 8:30 train. The recipient gets the post card at 9:30, writes back, and sends it on the 10 a.m. train. You get it at 11, and write back. You can’t do that today.”

Today, millions of people worldwide collect post cards, a hobby with the formal name of “deltiology.” It is the third largest collectible hobby in the world, right behind stamps and coins. The members of the Granite State Post Card Club meet the third Saturday of each month in the meeting hall of the Unitarian Church in Franklin. Joan Young opens the hall, makes the coffee, and welcomes 15 to 20 members who have brought their recent acquisitions to buy, trade and sell amongst themselves. “We know what each person collects, so we help each other out,” says Sysyn.

The city of Franklin has hundreds of post cards documenting its history, and that’s how the club began — with Franklin post cards and five people in 1983. Today the club is 200 members strong, including international members. Although some states have three or four clubs, the Granite State Post Card Club is the only club in New Hampshire.

Where do you find post cards? “Estate sales, auctions, flea markets, yard sales, antique shows and shops, coin and stamp shops, rummage sales,” Sysyn says. “Sometimes word of mouth.



I’ll speak at a historical society and someone will say, ‘I have a lot at my house’ and I’ll go check it out. I also appraise post card collections.”

The image, in many cases, is what makes a post card the most valuable. “They depict actual scenery,” says Sysyn. “You can place the location.” And that’s a little bit of history that you might not find in a book. “A post card of Grantham 100 years ago will show houses that don’t exist anymore. You can imagine what things looked like 100 years ago — but post cards show it.”

Not every town had a photographer, so not every town had post cards. Grantham has three or four post cards in its history; Sunapee has thousands. “I’ve sold many Lake Sunapee cards,” says Sysyn. “The post card manufacturer had a market there with tourists. There’s a lot of nostalgia from families coming back every summer.”

The image doesn’t have to be of scenery to be collectible. Some folks are interested in technology, and post cards may show its history from trolley cars to automobiles. Some collect only railroad post cards, political cards, holiday cards or art cards. Some collect post cards for the stamps and postmarks. “No matter what subject you collect, there’s a post card about it. That’s the big appeal,” says Sysyn.

WHAT: Granite State Post Card Club

WHERE: Unitarian Church, 206 Central Street, Franklin

WHEN: Meetings the third Saturday of each month; shows in June and October

WHY: Delight of receiving things in the mail

HOW MUCH: \$10/year membership



Lloyd Eckholm of Gilford flips through a stack of post cards.