

## Visitor information

# Display Window Archive Historic Postcard Greetings

6th March to 18th September 2022

**The *Display Window Archive* has, since 2019, been displaying selected material from the museum's extensive archive, with a new theme chosen twice yearly. In 2017 and 2018, the archive was largely made accessible, and was partially digitalised. Its contents include documents, letters, postcards, diaries, and photographs from the Brown family's possessions. The preserved documents date from a period from 1850 to 1987.**

Postcards were the social media of the 1900s: in Switzerland, thousands of greeting messages would be sent every day. The Browns were enthusiastic users of this mass medium, exchanging greetings with family, friends, and acquaintances all over the globe by means of these small illustrated cards. Over the years, a wealth of postcards accumulated. Their period-specific visual language brings us closer to a bygone world, one that sometimes appears tremendously alien, and sometimes strangely familiar.

The rapid sending of short messages featuring both picture and text didn't start in the digital age. It was in 1870 that the first postcards made their way into the letterboxes of Swiss men and women. The rapid rise of the new mass medium was possible thanks to the invention of new printing processes and faster printing machines. By 1902, a circulation of 22 million postcards had already been achieved. Households would receive postal deliveries up to six times a day. Correspondence would thus sometimes reach its intended recipient on the same day that it was sent.

The booming tourism industry made clever use of postcards for advertising purposes. Hotels, holiday destinations, and firms would use both black-and-white and colour images. The spa town of Baden, for instance, provided its guests with views of its

traditional baths and picturesque old town, while the industrial concern of Brown, Boveri & Cie. flaunted its success by showing hordes of employees or its imposing factory halls.

Private persons would also have postcards printed, featuring their own photographs. In this way, the Browns would allow friends, acquaintances, and business partners to share in their family life, or to take a look at their grand villa and its exquisite exterior.

The Browns and their upper-class acquaintances regularly travelled in the increasingly accessible realm of Switzerland's mountainous regions, enjoying the new and burgeoning winter sports activities. The postcard was a constant companion, documenting all the paths they took. Their favoured travel destinations also included the cultural centres of Europe, such as Munich, Paris, and London, and spa and bathing resorts located on the sea coast.

In the circa-1900 period, overseas travel was very much a luxury, and usually undertaken for business reasons, in order to open up new markets for large-scale industry, which was export-oriented. The international postcard motifs show an interconnected world of the imperial age. A wealth of postcard greetings were sent to the Browns from colonies of the German Reich and the British Empire, from the Ottoman Empire's sphere of influence and exotic destinations in Latin America.

To the viewers of today, these printed images sometimes appear romanticising – or present a European view which regarded native populations as backward and primitive.

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