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# *EDWARD H. MITCHELL*

**HIS LIFE and TIMES**

**POSTCARD PUBLISHER 1867 - 1932**

**Credits: Sam Stark, Golden Gate Postcard Club,  
and many others that added information.**

**Edited: Walter Kransky –Member of SJPCC/SFBAPCC**

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**Collectors will agree that Edward H. Mitchell was the most prolific publisher of post cards in the West. More than any other publisher, he promoted the sale of cards, devised new and better methods of production, and instituted innovations in design and color, bought companies, as well as forming and dissolving various Partnerships. More importantly, while other publishers were dependent upon foreign imports and having their lithography or color-work processed in Germany, Mitchell developed his company into an all-American industry.**

**Primarily, he was a businessman. He was not, as has been reported, a photographer, an artist or a dreamer. His children are bemused and his friends and former employees astonished that collectors now regard him as other than a resourceful and successful business man.**

**Contrary to reports, Mitchell did not declare bankruptcy and he did not die destitute. At the time of his death, from a heart attack in Palo Alto, California on October 24, 1932, at age of 65, he was president of the Edward H. Mitchell Oil Company. He left a sizable estate that included real estate, oil well leases and 3,562,000 post cards. His surviving children still own and lease out the large Army Street warehouse that was built by Mitchell as his publishing headquarters following the destruction of his Post Street offices during the 1906 earthquake and fire in San Francisco.**

**As an avid Mitchell collector, I have been fortunate in obtaining quite a bit of his correspondence, business papers, catalogues (1899 and 1907), together with press clippings and advertisements that appeared in local newspapers and trade publications. His son, Allen, has permitted me to make copies of his father's meticulously-kept ledger and cash books that record his daily business activities. It is my plan to incorporate all this information into a biography of Edward H. Mitchell that will include check lists of all the cards he published. Portions of this material will be offered to bulletins of the of the Golden Gate Post Card Club and others, in order to stimulate a greater interest in the collection of Mitchell cards.**

**Edward Henry Mitchell was born in San Francisco, California on April 27, 1867, the son of John Henry Mitchell, a native of Illinois. His paternal grandfather, Samuel Mitchell, an Absolutist Methodist minister, was born in Virginia and his grandmother,**

**Mary Hodnett (Mitchell) was from Ireland.**

**Mitchell graduated in 1883 from Lincoln Grammar School, San Francisco and furthered his education by Taking extended high school courses at Lincoln Night School, while employed as an office boy with A. L. Bancroft and Company for a salary of \$10. per month. After several years he improved his position (and salary!) and the firm became known as Bancroft-Whitney and is listed in the directories as law publishers, booksellers and stationers and is still in business. While there he met another employee, Idelle Gertrude Lanehan, also a native San Franciscan and following a suitable courtship, they were married on November 26, 1891. His wife was a Catholic and Mitchell converted to his wife's faith. It proved to be a happy marriage and only ended with his death in 1932. Mrs. Mitchell lived until 1941 and they are survived by three children, a son, Allen G. Mitchell and two daughters, Mrs. Stafford (Marion) Buckley and Mrs. Garton Keyston – all residents in the Bay area.**

**During his employment with Bancroft-Whitney, Mitchell supplemented his income by selling souvenir items, mainly metal ash trays, pennants, banners and scenic playing cards. His initial efforts with post cards were black and white views of the California Hotel, San Francisco encouraged, perhaps by the proprietor who was a personal friend.**

**This period can be established by a letter Mitchell sent to newspapers, jobbers and trade papers during the “price war” of 1908. In part, it reads:**

**“We were publishing post cards in this city in 1893 and consequently been in business for 15 years. We have steadily improved the quality of our cards and reduced the price. Our first cards were printed from half-tone cuts in one color and sold to the trade at \$20.00 per thousand. We might add that we only printed 1000 of each subject and our output was 32,000 cards per month. We now print not less than 18,000 of a subject and our minimum monthly output is 1,600,000 cards, although we often finish from 2,000,000 to 3,000,000 in a single month, by working overtime. Our prices have gradually been reduced to \$7.00 per thousand (we will soon make a further reduction), as the increase in our output made it possible...”**

**“We were the first lithographing establishment in the country to give our workmen an eight-hour day and did it of our own accord.**

**“We pay our men as much per week as foreigners in the same line receive per month, and further out money is paid to American workmen who spend it at home and keep it in circulation. It was to notify the trade of these facts that we recently added the imprint ‘Printed in the United States.’ on all our cards.”**

**Two other bits of information might be of interest. The Following appears in the List of Subscribers of the Pacific States Telephone Companies, March 1899:**

**“Grant 9 Mitchell, Edw. H., Art Stationer, Engraver and Printer, 225 Post.”**

**And, the San Francisco City Directory, 1899 shows the same address but lists Mitchell as “Stationery.”**

**The Post Street address, at this time, was definitely his place of business as his residence was 3857 Clay Street and Bancroft-Whitney was located at 609-13 Clay Street.**

**In the middle of the 1890’s, Edward Mitchell, in addition to utilizing his own presses, obtained orders for Post Cards which he jobbed out to other printers. He had been intrigued with the colored vignettes and Gruss Aus type of card that was the vogue in Europe and made plans to develop his own distinct type of card. As a means to this, he brought to the West Coast, a German-born lithographer who had previously been employed with the American Souvenir Card Company in New York. This arrangement worked well, as later they were able to develop the Mitchell Photo-Chrome process that required a specially-treated oiled paper for the colors.**

**Their first, presumably, catalogue was issued in 1898-99. Mitchell in later years, makes reference to “our initial catalogue of multi-views.” This catalogue was printed in either black or brown (green one has not been found) as were the cards and carried the heading:**

**MITCHELL’S  
PRIVATE MAILING CARDS  
Generally called  
SOUVENIR POSTALS  
(Ansichtspostkarten)**

**“Series No. 1. – These cards are printed in one color (either black, brown or green) and contain four to ten small views, artistically grouped. Price, 25 cents a dozen. There are 27 cards showing the following views: Cliff House, Golden Gate Park, Palace Hotel, Ferry Building and Mint, City Hall, Newspaper Buildings, Chinatown, Ferry Boat, War Ships, Presidio, Old Mission, Big Trees, Shasta-Route, Mt. Tamalpais, Mt. Lowe, Yosemite Valley, Berkeley and Stanford Universities, Oakland, San Jose, Los Angeles, San Rafael, Monterey, Sacramento, Coronado Beach and Yellowstone Park. “**

**“Series No. 2. – Are like above, but contain only one large view on each card. Price 25 cents a dozen; 24 styles. They Comprise: Cliff House and Beach, Ferry Boat approaching San Francisco, Chinese babies, Main Drive and Key Monument – Golden Gate Park, Fort Point, Mission Dolores, Emporium and Academy of Sciences, City Hall, Big Tee ‘Wawona,’ Yosemite Valley, Lick Observatory, Logging Scene, Midway Point from Cypress Drive, State Capitol, Mount Shasta, Mossbrae Falls, Geysers. Lake Tahoe, Del Monte Hotel and Catalina Island. “**

**“Series No. 3. – These cards are printed in colors, two views on each after the style in vogue in Europe. They are 50 cents per set of 12 cards. The following sets are in this series: San Francisco, Alaska, White Squadron, Chicago, Niagara Falls in Winter, Philadelphia, Staten Island, Milwaukee and Albany. “**

**“One of the very best remembrances to send friends and relatives in the East and abroad is a deck of Cal. Souvenir Playing Cards, they contain 52 views of the most important scenery throughout the State, with Seal of California and Poppies on the backs, put up in telescopic cloth cases. Price \$1.00 per deck. Also Rocky Mountain pack just out, same price, and Alaska deck in preparation. “**

**All of the three series have been seen, and carry the standard Mitchell ribbon and quill, private Mailing Card back, in dark brown. However, the view sides are either in black or green. It would be nice to know if the brown color ones exist!**

**Please note that Series No. 3 does not include Baltimore, Boston, New York, Niagara in Summer, Voyage to Europe or Washington D.C., which would complete the list of Petriographics as originally issued by the American Souvenir-Card Company. Otherwise, the Mitchell cards are identical in views, numbers titles and Coloring, but with two exceptions; the credit line reads, “Copyright 1899 by Edw. H Mitchell, S.F.” in place of “Copyright 1897, by American Souvenir Card Co.” and the Mitchell card is smaller – top to bottom.**

**The playing cards that Mitchell published are interesting and worth collecting. These cards were sold, not only in hotels and at newsstands but were stocked by the “candy butchers” and dining car stewards aboard the transcontinental trains. Regarding the “Alaska deck in preparation” they actually materialized as a deck and has been seen, with case, at the California Historical Society. They are not for sale!**

**When Mitchell first started in business, he was indifferent as to whether his name appeared on his post cards. He bought photos and plates and jobbed his orders to numerous printers. This method, of course, was used by publishers all over the United States and Canada and has proved frustrating to anyone attempting to trace the source of many of the unidentified early private mailing cards.**

**Mitchell admired the work of Charles Weidner, whose commercial photography business was on Fillmore Street, and bought many views from him, as did others. Take note of Weidner’s #1 card, “San Francisco, California. Cliff House.”**

**Britton & Rey used this same view as #517. It is Galloway Litho's #9 while Mitchell published it as #40 in an early vignette view and later as two different divided backs with an old and new Cliff House shown.**

**Information is needed on the following? "The Pacific Stationer" for September 1911 Reports.**

**"It may be interesting to note that the sepia baseball picture given out by the Collins-McCarthy Candy Company with their well known specialties are published by the Mitchell factory, nearly a million and a half cards being issued for this purpose within the last two months."**

**These cards have not been seen and it is not known whether the Mitchell name appears. Bray's American Card Catalog lists some Collins-McCarthy cards as E-136 and E-137 but without a publisher's credit line. Perhaps, if a sufficient number of titles are reported, a check list can be compiled. Note: Advise Walter Kransky of any data found in this area.**

**The much heralded visit of the U. S. Navy to San Francisco in May of 1908 known as, "The Peace Voyage of the United States White Fleet," caused a frenzy of excitement in the business community, as well as a boom in building construction. The city was recovering from the disastrous earthquake and fire of 1906 and the tragedy of still fresh in the minds of many as they grappled with the myriad of designs and plans for the restoration of San Francisco. The people had rallied behind the ringing phrase, "The City That Knows How."**

**In addition to the visit of the fleet, the Portola Festival to be held in 1909 was in the planning stage and although there were rumors of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, San Francisco would not know definitely until January 31, 1911 that their city had been chosen for the site.**

**What was known was the fleet was on its way and the dealers in post cards and souvenirs were anticipating a harvest as there were indications that more post cards would be sold during the fleet's visit than ever before.**

**With that in mind, the flowing news item appeared in April, 1908:**

**"Owing to the fact that among the copyrighted photographs that Edward H. Mitchell recently purchased from Enrique Muller, Special photographer for the navy, the exclusive right for the Pacific Coast to reproduce on souvenir goods, there were beside**

**the warship views a large number showing men in their various duties and pleasure on board. On account of the great interest and demand for these views, they have been brought out in three ways – as black and white post cards, colored post cards, and in a view folder showing thirty-six views, entitled ‘Duties and Pleasures on Board a United States Warship.’ ”**

**In spite of his elation over the expected upsurge in business, Mitchell (and most certainly other publishers) was not too happy on learning that “two new camera shops” would open in the downtown hotel area “and carry a large assortment of supplies and equipment.” Perhaps it was difficult to believe that visitors would want to snap their own photos when so many views, by experts, would be available.**

**In the May, 1908 issue of Sunset Magazine, Mitchell ran the following Quarter page advertisement illustrated with a view of the battleship “Alabama” coming ahead, under full steam:**

**“Copyrighted View Folder ‘New Pacific Squadron of the United States Navy,” showing views, each three by four and one half inches, printed on fine paper. Outside measurement of cover five and one half by seven and one half inches, printed on heavy stock. Pictures include Battle Ships, Armored Cruisers, Protective Cruisers and Torpedo Boats. Gives number of Officers and men on each ship, Together with the length and armament. Price postpaid, 10 cents each - \$1 per dozen.”**

**Note: The above folder is the booklet type, with a light blue cover. The photos are black and white, two to a page and foldout.**

**“BLACK AND WHITE POST CARDS, 60 subjects, showing one ship on each card, but all the different ships on separate cards printed on best quality card-board. 25 for 25 cents or 60 for 50 cents - postpaid.”**

**Note: The above are the #5000 series with Mitchell T-backs. The few that show life aboard ship carry and Enrique Muller 1907 copyright credit line.**

**“COLORED POST CARDS. 60 subjects, same as above, lithographed by our celebrated Photo-chrome process, in nine printings, on best stock. 25 cents per dozen or the 60 for #1.00 – postpaid.”**

**Note: See Mitchell’s #1268 to #1331.**

**“Write for special prices on very large orders or trade orders to EDWARD H. MITCHELL Publisher of SOUVENIR POST CARDS 3363 Army Street, near Mission.”**

**The Navy cards sold well as Mitchell was able to announce in July 1908:**

**“The Departure of the Atlantic Fleet and Torpedo Boat Squadron from San Francisco to complete its voyage around the world has created a renewed**

demand for the battleship line of post cards and Edw. H. Mitchell has completed new printings of his series, comprising sixty-eight numbers.” At a later period, c. 1918, Mitchell issued a #4300 series of Navy cards, with a star or bar back and a blank stamp box. These are gray and white views and inferior to his earlier cards. However, they are sharp, close-up photos of the various warships, with showing dreadnaughts passing through the Panama canal (a credit line reads, “Official Photograph – U.S. Naval Air service.”) The cards run from #4300 to #4319 and there may be more. Several are identical in view and number with a Pacific Novelty issue, which continues with the higher numbers In the 4300 series showing views of California. Of Course by this time Mitchell had acquired the Pacific Novelty Company.

A “Pacific Fleet” folder was published also Mitchell containing 18 views, #4300 to #4319, #4317 has not been seen- U. S. Destroyer Rathburn and #4318- U. S. Dreadnaught in Panama Canal as seen from Airplane. The Cover shows a photo of #4363 – “Mother Boat and Submarines in Dry Dock, Mare Island, Calif. “

The afore-mentioned folder of the Enrique Muller photos was advertised as follows:

“COPYRIGHTED VIEW FOLDER, Duties and Pleasures on Board a United States War Ship’ showing 36 views, each 3 by 4 one half inches, printed on fine paper. Outside measurements of cover 5 and one half by seven and one half inches, showing title printed on heavy stock. Pictures include Fencing, Boxing, Wrestling, Sewing, Gun Drill, Wig-Wag, Tying Knots, Signaling, etc. This makes a good companion for the War Ship Folder, being same size and price. Trade price: 75 cents per dozen; postage 6 cents extra. \$6.00 per 100, postage or expressage 62 cents extra.”

Note: See #1316 to 1329, colored T-backs for some examples.

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