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VISITING AND VISITING CARDS: NOT JUST FOR THE LADIES
and
HIDDEN MYSTERIES OF VISITING CARDS,
INCLUDING LITTLE KNOWN [make that useless] TIDBITS OF KNOWLEDGE

by

Virginia Mescher

[Note: In researching this article, the author found the term “visiting cards” was used rather than “calling cards.” When “calling card” was used as a search term in databases, nothing was found until the 1870s and did not seem to be in common use until the twentieth century but “visiting card” garnered numerous hits.]

Over the years there have often been discussions on the etiquette of visiting cards and the size and appearance of the cards. One of the first Visitor’s Showcase articles had detailed instructions on making one’s own visiting cards, which included specific sizes (needed to be hand cut) and card cases. Now, there is little need for hand-cutting cards, because in researching further, depending upon the source, it has been found that ladies’ and gentlemen’s cards could be similar in size to a modern business card. With the availability of clean-edge perforated business cards and numerous period-style fonts it is extremely simple to make period style cards on the computer. While glazed card stock may be difficult to find, plain card stock is acceptable. Silver and gold borders were mentioned in primary sources but plain cards were more often mentioned as being in better taste. Black bordered cards for mourning would be fairly easy to make, using a stencil and black marker to make the border. One thing was clear in primary sources, the pastel or fancy decorated cards that one sees in Victorian magazines would not be correct for our time period as visiting cards. If one needs a visiting card for an impression, use a plain white card with a simple script with the correct name on the card.



Figure 1

Included are examples of the actual sizes (the white portions of the illustrations) of both the larger sized woman's cards (Figure 1) and smaller sized lady's (Figure 2 and gentleman's (Figure 3) cards. The two smaller cards are the same size as what we consider "business card size." The larger one is 3 ½ inches long by 2 ½ inches tall and must be hand-cut from card stock because there is no preformatted templates of that size.

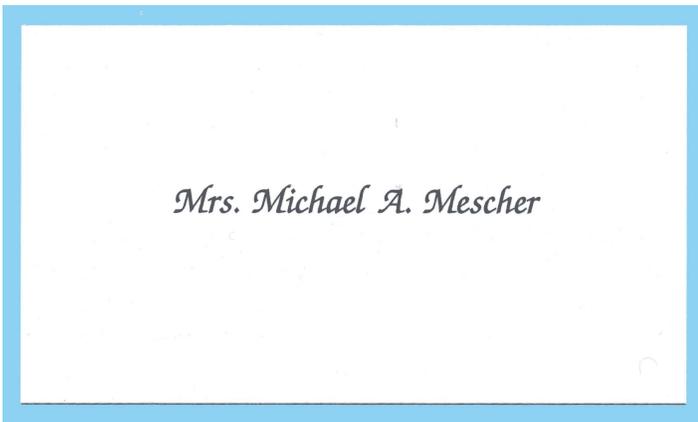


Figure 2



Figure 2

So, rather than discussing further how to make a visiting card, the focus of this article is on the etiquette of visiting and visiting cards during the nineteenth century; how the cards looked; the etiquette of using the cards; and the numerous contradictions about cards and card etiquette seen in various etiquette books. The reader will also be introduced to visiting card innovations and dangers of visiting cards as well as some humor concerning the cards.

Hopefully, after reading the article the reader will have some insight into the confusion that our ancestors experienced when they tried to "do the right thing" when it came to visiting cards. For fun, the reader will also be offered bits of "useless" information that he or she can tuck away for future

reference. One never knows when these tidbits will come in handy — there’s always quiz shows or trivia games.

TYPES OF VISITS and ETIQUETTE OF VISITING

It is helpful to understand the types of calls and the etiquette associated with each before the etiquette of visiting cards can be fully explained. Visits were not simply the “running next door to say hello and have a cup of coffee.” A majority were formal and served specific purposes and each type of visit demanded a certain type of behavior and required particular visiting card etiquette. It should be noted that rules for visits differed for ladies and gentleman and the differences were usually specified in etiquette books.

[Note: The references used in this article range from the 1830s to the 1880s and each source of the excerpt is noted either within the excerpt or at the end of the quote. Full bibliographic information is included bibliography at the end of the article.]

“Of visits there are various sorts; visits of congratulations, visits of condolence, visits of ceremony, visits of friendship. To each belong different customs. . . .

Visits of ceremony should be very short. Go at sometime when business demands the employment of every moment. In visits of friendship adopt a different course.

If you call to see an acquaintance at lodgings, and cannot find any one to announce you, you knock very lightly at the door, and wait sometime before entering. If you are in too great a hurry, you might find the person drawing off a night-cap. . . .

The style of your conversation should always be in keeping with the character of your visit. You must not talk about literature in a visit of condolence, nor about political economy in a visit of ceremony. . . .

In paying a visit under ordinary circumstances, you leave a single card. If there be residing in the family a married daughter, an unmarried sister, a transient guest, or any person in a distinct situation from the mistress of the house, you leave two cards, one for each party. If you are acquainted with only one member of the family, as the husband, or the wife, and you wish to indicate that your visit is to both, you leave two cards. Ladies have a fashion of pinching down on corner of a card to denote that the visit is to only one of the two parties in a house, and two corners, or one side of the card, when the visit is to both; but this is a transient mode, and of dubious respectability.

If, in paying a morning visit, you are not recognized when you enter, mention your name immediately. If you call to visit one member, and you find others only in the parlour, introduce yourself to them. Much awkwardness may occur though defect of attention to this point.

When a gentlemen is about to be married, he send cards, a day or two before

the event, to all whom he is in the habit of visiting. These visits are never paid in person, but the cards are sent by a servant, at any hour in the morning; or the gentleman goes in a carriage, and sends them in. After marriage, some day is appointed and made know to all, as the day on which he receives company. His friends then all call upon him. Would that this also were performed by cards!”

– *The Laws of Etiquette; or Short Rules and Reflections for Conduct in Society* (1836)

“The usual hours for a morning visit are between eleven and two, or twelve and three, and all calls of ceremony should be made between these hours.

Never, in paying a ceremonious call, stay more than twenty minutes, or less than ten. If your hostess has several other visitors at the same time that you are in her parlor, make your visit short, that she may have more attention to bestow upon others. . . .

Never, while waiting in a friend’s parlor, to the piano and play till she comes. This is a breech of good-breeding often committed, and nothing can be more illbred. You may be disturbing an invalid unawares, or you may prevent your friend, if she has children, from coming down stairs at all, by waking the baby.

If you are a stranger in the city, and bring a letter of introduction to your hostess, send this letter up stairs with your card, that she may read it, and know how to welcome you when she comes down stairs. . .

If you have a visitor, and desire to introduce her to your friends, you may invite her to accompany you when paying calls.

In making a call for condolence, it is sufficient to leave a card with your enquiries for the health of your friend, and offers of service. The same if calling upon invalids if they are too ill to see you.

In visits of congratulation, to in, and be hearty in your expression of interest and sympathy. Pay visits, both of condolence and congratulation, within a week after the event which calls for them occurs.

It is proper, when you have already made your call of the usual length, and another caller is announced, to rise and leave, not immediately, as if you shunned the new arrival, but after a moment or two. Never out-sit two or three parties of visitors, unless you have private business with your hostess which cannot be postponed. Many denounce the system of morning calls as silly, frivolous, and a waste of time. They are wrong. It may be carried to an excess, and so admit of these objections, but in moderation the custom is a good and pleasant one. You have then an opportunity of making friends of mere acquaintances, and you can, in a pleasant chat with a friend at home, have more real enjoyment in her society than in a dozen meetings in large companies, with all the formality and restraint of a party thrown around you. There are many subjects of conversation which are pleasant in a parlor, tête-à-tête with a friend, which you would not care to discuss in a crowded saloon, or in the street. Personal inquiries, private affairs can be cosily chatted over.

In paying your visits of condolence, show, by your own quiet gravity, that you

sympathize on the recent affliction of your friend. Though you may endeavor to comfort and cheer her, you must avoid a gay or careless air, as it will be an insult at such a time. . . .

Never sit gazing curiously around the room when paying a call, as if taking a mental inventory of the furniture. It is excessively rude. It is still worse to appear to notice any disorder or irregularity that may occur.

If, while paying a call, you perceive that any unforeseen matter in the family, calls for the attention of the lady of the house, calls for the attention of the lady of the house leave instantly, no matter how short your call has been. Your friend may not appear to notice the screams of a child, a noise in the kitchen, or the cry from the nursery that the fire board has caught on fire, but you may be sure she does hear it, and though too well-bred to speak of it, will heartily rejoice to say good-bye.

Do not take a child with you to pay calls, until it is old enough to behave quietly and with propriety. To have a troublesome child constantly touching the parlor ornaments, balancing itself on the back of a chair, leaning from a window, or performing any of the thousand tricks in which children excel, is an annoyance, both to yourself and your hostess.

Make no remark upon the temperature of the room, or its arrangement, when you enter it. Never open or shut a window or door without asking permission, and unless really suffering from excessive heat or cold, refrain from asking leave to take this liberty.

If you are invited to go upstairs to your friend's private apartment, you will, of course, accept the invitation, but never to upstairs uninvited. When you reach her door, if the servant has not preceded and announced you, knock, and await her invitation to enter. Then once in, take no notice of the room, but go instantly to your friend. If she is sewing, do not speak of the nature of her work, but request she continue, as you were not present.

In cases of long standing friendship, you will not, of course, stand upon the ceremony of waiting for each and every one of your calls to be returned before paying another, but be careful that you are not too lavish of your visits. The most cordial welcome may be worn threadbare, if it is call into use *too* often. . . .

If, when you make a call, you unfortunately intrude upon an early dinner hour, do not go in, but leave your card, and say that you will call again.

– *The Ladies' Book of Etiquette, Fashion and Manual of Politeness* (1860)

This next excerpt is from 1884 but it shows that the etiquette of calls did not change much in twenty-plus years.

“In fashionable life, a lady is under obligation to call on all her female acquaintance at stated times. These calls are formal in their nature, and are generally short. The conversation is devoted to society news, the gossip of the day, and kindred subjects. In the large cities of the Eastern States, such calls are made from eleven in the morning until three o'clock in the afternoon. In other parts of the country, where the

dinner hour is in the middle of the day or early in the afternoon, they are generally made from nine to twelve o'clock. And are termed morning calls, as 'morning' is supposed to mean any time before dinner.

The morning call should be brief. From ten to twenty minutes is usually sufficient. It should never be prolonged over half an hour.

A lady, in making a formal call, should never lay aside her bonnet or shawl.

A gentleman making a morning call must retain his hat in his hand. His umbrella may be left in the hall, but not his cane.

Should a gentleman accompany a lady on a morning call, he must assist her up the steps to the door of the house, ring the bell, and follow her into the reception-room. He must wait patiently until the lady rises to take leave, and accompany her.

Avoid all ungraceful or awkward positions and all lounging in making calls. Sit upright at ease, and be graceful and dignified in your manners.

Do not handle the table ornaments in the room in which you are received. They may be admired, but not handled.

Should other callers be announced during your visit, wait until the bustle attending the entrance is over. Then rise quietly and take your leave, bowing to the new-comers. . . . Do not make it appear that your departure is on account of the new arrivals. . . .

Avoid subject calculated to lead to a prolonged conversation. Time your visit properly, and so not take out your watch and say it is time to go. Rise quietly, and take your leave with a few pleasant remarks.

A lady engaged upon fancy work of any kind is not obligated to lay it aside in receiving the call of an intimate acquaintance. In formal calls a lady should devote herself entirely to her guests. . . .

The circumstances under which gentlemen may make morning formal morning calls are limited. They may do so to express congratulations, sympathy, or condolence; to pay their respects to a friend who has just returned from a foreign country or a protracted visit; or to pay their respects to ladies who have accepted their escort to parties or places of amusement. In the last mentioned instance the call should not be delayed more than a day. . . . There are other cases which must be governed by circumstances and the good sense of the person. . . .

Ladies should make their morning calls in simple toilette, and not in very rich dress. Gentlemen should wear morning dress.

You may make visits of congratulation upon the occurrence of any happy or fortunate event in the family of a friend — such as a marriage, a birth, or the inheritance of wealth. Such visits should be made in the morning. . . .

You should not defer a visit of condolence beyond the next week after a death occurs in a family. Among friends such visits are regarded as an imperative duty, except where contagious disease render them dangerous.

You should not make a visit of friendship unless you have a formal or general invitation. To drop in upon friends at all times is to render to yourself a bore. Never

solicit an invitation, either by word or act. Wait until you are asked, and your presence will be doubly welcome.

Visits of friendship are conducted by no particular rules of etiquette, as it is to be presumed that intimate friends, or relatives, understand each other's tastes and peculiarities, and will conduct themselves in a manner mutually agreeable. Such visits may occasionally be made under misapprehension, because there are many people in the world who are extremely fond of change, and will often persuade themselves that their society is coveted, when in fact they are not particularly welcome. . . .

In the country calls are more prolonged and less formal than in the city. . . .

New-comers into a neighborhood should not make the first calls.

A lady should not call upon a gentleman unless on business. . . .

– *The National Encyclopedia of Business and Social Forms* (1884)

EARLY HISTORY VISITING CARDS

Visiting or business cards were first mentioned in seventeenth century France. The cards first appeared during the reign of Louis XIV (1634-1715) were used by men and were called *Visite Bilettes*. They were originally playing cards, with addresses or promissory notes written on them and later became the first business cards. Apparently the use of the cards moved from the gaming rooms and business concerns to the drawing rooms and ladies began to use them sometime in the late eighteenth century; little more was found about their use for either business or visiting until the nineteenth century.

Visiting cards were not just used in the western world and nineteenth century publications gave glimpses into the visiting cards of other cultures. The *Juvenile Port*, in 1816 had an interesting article on various ways people were welcomed in different countries. “Salutations. . . . The Chinese have visiting cards, the colour and size of which are regulated agreeable to the rank and estimation of the people visited. When the British embassy was in China, Lord Macartney received from the Viceroy of Petchehé a crimson card, large enough to have papered his bed chamber!”

In 1827, *The Souvenir* reported the following:

“Visiting Cards. The practice of presenting visiting cards is one which does not prevail only in the civilized nations of Europe. The chiefs of the Lochoo islands invariably present them to strangers, on the occasion of a first visit; and it is stated by Captain Maxwell, of H. M. ship *Aleeste*, when the Heir-apparent came on board his ship, one of the Chiefs rowed forward in a canoe and presented His Royal Highness' visiting card. It was made of red paper and measured forty eight inches long by eleven wide!. A neat ornament for the mantle piece of a fashionable drawing room.”

ADVERTISING VISITING CARDS and PRICES OF THE CARDS

As the use of visiting cards became more popular and more affordable, the middle classes began to use them and advertisements began to appear in newspapers. These advertisements sometimes give an indication as to the appearance and the evolution of the style of cards.

Advertisements for visiting cards appeared as early as 1784 in American newspapers. In the April 28, 1784 *Pennsylvania Gazette* “a great variety of Ornamental Visiting cards” were advertised. In 1809 an advertisement appeared in the *Balance and State Journal* for “Elegantly Embossed Visiting Cards of different sizes and Plain Visiting Cards of different sizes.” Similar ones continued to appear in most newspapers but in 1836, some advertisements became more explicit as to the types of cards that were available. In *Zion’s Herald*, “Ivory surface and Gilt Visiting Cards” were advertised. By 1853, the *New York Daily Times* was advertising “embossed, engraved, motto, French, enameled, gold, silver border, and gilt edged visiting cards.” The advertisements continued throughout the nineteenth century and a great deal of the time they were combined with wedding cards and other wedding products such as invitations, envelopes, and engraved boxes.

The prices of the cards seemed to remain stable from the time the prices started to appear in advertisements. In a copy of an 1846 *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, visiting cards were advertised as costing \$1.50 for the engraving plate and for the printing of fifty cards and the enameled cards cost fifty cents per pack of fifty cards but no mention was made for the cost of the engraving plate. In 1853 the cost of either French or Italian printed cards from engraved plates were fifty cards for \$1.50. In the next years prices fluctuated quite a bit; both of the following prices were taken from New York publications. In an 1868 *Harper’s Bazaar*, the following appeared. “Visiting cards for the coming season are of unglazed card board, large and almost square. Tinted cards, especially buff, are fashionable. The lettering is in old English text, or in script. The expense of fifty cards is \$3.50. The plate is then given to the owner. Extra cards are furnished at \$2 a hundred.” This was the only advertisement that indicated that the plate was given to the owner and also this was the first mention of tinted cards being in fashion. In 1869, *Harper’s Weekly* advertised “fine 100 visiting cards for 75 cents” but no mention was made of the plate.

While discussing the cost, to the consumer, of visiting cards, one should also consider the salary paid to the makers of the cards. Although the author found no information on the salary paid to the printer’s or engraver’s helpers, information was found on the salaries paid to the girls who cut and packaged the cards after engraving. The following was taken from Virginia Penny’s *Employments of Women*.

“Visiting Cards. A., New York, employs two girls to put up visiting cards, and pays \$3 and \$3.50 per week. It does not require any time to learn. He now uses a machine that does the work of several girls. I was told by a very obliging girl, working in a visiting-card manufactory in New York, that to some the occupation is unhealthy, because of the lead inhaled [more about that later], which injures the lungs. In that

factory learners are paid \$2 a week. It requires but a week to learn to cut the cards, which is done with a small hand press. The girl knew of to places in the city where the work was paid for by the piece; but in that factory they were mostly paid by the week, receiving \$3.50 and \$4, working ten hours a day. It requires from four to six weeks to learn. Nimbleness of fingers and the ability to count are the most desirable qualifications. They have work all year, except in November and December. They sit while cutting, assorting, and packing. This work is confined to women, as they are best adapted to it. Those in the brushing room stand. Several hundred girls are employed in New York in the card business.”

ETIQUETTE OF VISITING CARDS

Now that the background has been set and the reader is familiar with the types of visits, the early history of cards, advertisements of the various cards, and the costs of the cards, the confusion begins — that of the etiquette of the cards.

No modern interpretation of the original etiquette instructions is offered by the author; it is up to the reader to form his or her own interpretation, just as the nineteenth century readers had to rely on their own interpretations of period etiquette books.

The following excerpt is of English origin but was published in America.

“The card is the next point. It should be perfectly simple. A lady’s card is larger than a gentleman’s. The former may be glazed, the latter not. The name, with a simple ‘Mr.’ or ‘Mrs.’ before it is sufficient, except in the case of acknowledged rank, as ‘The Earl of Ducie,’ ‘Colonel Marjoribanks,’ ‘The Hon. Mrs. Petre,’ and so forth. All merely honorary titles or designations of position or office should be left out, except in cards destined for purely official visits. Thus our ambassador at Paris returns official visits with a card thus: ‘L’Ambassadeur de Sa Majeste’ Britiannique,’ but those of acquaintance with ‘Lord Cowley’ simply. The address may be put in the corner of the card. The engraving should be in simple Italian writing, not Gothic or Roman letters, very small and without any flourishes. Young men have adopted recently the foreign custom of having their Christian and surname printed without the ‘Mr.’ A young lady does not require a separate card as long as she is living with her mother; her name is then engraved under her mother’s, as —

Mrs. Jones Brownsmith
Miss Jones Brownsmith

Or if there be more than one daughter presented, thus: —

Mrs. Jones Brownsmith
The Miss Jones Brownsmith

Which latter form can be defended as more idiomatic, if less grammatical than, ‘The Misses Jones Brownsmith;’ but it is a matter of little importance. I cannot enter here on a grammatical discussion, and the one form is as common as the other.

You will find a small card-case neater and more convenient than a pocket book; and *in leaving cards you must thus distribute them; one for the lady of the house and her daughters— the latter are sometimes represented by turning up the edge of the card — one for the master of the house and if there be a grown up son or near male relation staying in the house, one for him. But though cards are cheap, you must never leave more than three at a time at the same house. As married men have, or are supposed to have, too much to do to make ceremonial calls, it is the custom for a wife to take her husband’s cards with her, and to leave one or two of them with her own. If, on your inquiring for the lady of the house, the servant replies, “Mrs. So-and-so is not at home, but Miss So-and-so is,” you should leave a card, because young ladies do not receive calls from gentlemen, unless they are very intimate with them, or have passed the rubicon of thirty summers. It must be remembered, to, that where there is a lady of the house, your call is to her, not to her husband, except on business.”*

– *Habits of Good Society* (1857)

[The section between the * * was repeated verbatim in *Martine’s Hand-book of Etiquette, and Guide to True Politeness* (1866)]

Although America tended to follow English and European visiting card etiquette, it was sometimes noted that customs differed in America.

“Perhaps it may be as well in this connection [social convenience and propriety] as in any other, to say a word about the matter of *visiting cards*.

Fashion sanctions a variety of forms for this necessary appendage. In Europe, it is very common to affix the appendage or political title to the name, as ‘ _____, Professor in the University of Heidleburg,’ or, ‘ _____, Conseiller d’Etat,;’ and a Englishman in public life often has on his card the cabalistic characters — ‘H. M. S.’ (in Her Majesty’s Service). Among the best-bread Americans, I think the prevalent usage is to adopt the *single signature*, as ‘Henry Wise,’ or to prefix the title of Mr., as ‘Mr. Seward.’ Sometimes, — particularly for cards to be used away from home — the place of residence is also engraved in one corner below the name.

Europeans occasionally adopt the practice of having the corners of the *reverse* side of their cards engraved *across* with such convenient works as ‘*Pour dire Adieu*’ (to say good bye). ‘*Congratulation*’ (to offer congratulations). ‘*Arrivé*’ (tantamount

to ‘*in town*’). The *appropriate* corner is *turned over*, as occasion requires, and the sentence is thus brought into notice on the *same side with the name*.

Business cards should never be used in social life, nor should flourishes, ornamental devices, or generally unintelligible characters be employed. A smooth, *white* card, of moderate size, with a plain legible inscription of the name, is in unexceptionable taste and *ton*, suitable for all occasions, and sufficient for all purposes, with the addition, when circumstances require it, of a pencilled word or sentence.”

– *The American Gentleman’s Guide to Politeness and Fashion, or Familiar Letters to His Nephews* (1858)

This next excerpt was generally written for ladies but didn’t fail to include the gentlemen. The author also gave an idea of the type of card that was correct and etiquette for dealing with servants of the host.

“. . . . Visiting Card Etiquette.

Kinds of cards, and manner of carrying them. — After making the toilet with care, persons intended to make ceremonious calls, should provide themselves with cards, upon which their name is printed or well written. Gentlemen ought simply to put their cards in their pocket, but ladies may carry them in a small elegant portfolio, called a card-case. This they can hold in their hand, and it will contribute essentially (with an elegant handkerchief of embroidered cambric), to give them an air of good taste.

A lady’s visiting card should be of small size, glazed but not gilt. It should be engraved in script characters, small and neat, not in German [Fraktur] text or old English. Never have your cards printed; a written card, though passable, is not perfectly *au fait*. If you write them, never first draw a line across the card to guide you; it betokens ill-breeding.

Under what circumstances cards are to be left, and how many. — If the call is made in a carriage, the servant will ask the lady you wish to see is at home. If persons call in a hired carriage, or on foot, they go themselves to ask the servants. Servants are considered soldiers on duty; if they reply that the person has gone out, we should, by no means, urge the point, even if we are certain it was not the case; and if by chance we should see the person, we should appear not to have done so, but leave our card and retire. When the servant informs us that the lady or gentleman is unwell, engaged in business, on dining, we must act in a similar manner.

We should leave as many cards as there are persons we wish to see in the house; for example — one for the husband, one for his wife, another for the aunt, &c. When admitted, we should lay aside our overshoes, umbrella, &c. in the entry, so as not to encumber the parlor with them.”

– *Ladies’ Guide to Perfect Gentility* (1859)

This next excerpt comes from an undated English publication but notes differences in practices between England and France as well as new types of cards available in Europe.

“On returning visits of ceremony you may, without impoliteness, leave your card at the door without going in. Do not fail, however, to inquire about the family.

Should there be daughters or sisters residing with the lady upon whom you call, you may turn down a corner of your card, in better taste, however, to leave cards for each.

Unless when returning thanks for ‘kind inquiries,’ or announcing your arrival in, or departure from town, it is not considered respectful to send round cards by a servant.

Leave-taking cards have P. P. C. (*pour prendre congé*) written in the corner. Some use P. D. A. (*pour dire adieu*).

It is not the fashion on the Continent for gentlemen to affix *Monsieur* to their cards. *Jules Archard*, or *Paolo Beni*, looks more simple and elegant than if preceded by *Monsieur*, or *Monsieur le Comte*. Some English gentlemen have adopted this good custom, and it would be well if it became general.

Autographic facsimiles for visiting cards are affectations in any persons but those who are personally remarkable for talent and whose autographs, or facsimiles of them would be prized as curiosities. A card bearing the autographic signature of Charles Dickens or George Cruickshank, though only a lithographic facsimile, would have certain interest; whereas the signature of John Smith would not be only valueless, but would make the owner look ridiculous.

The visiting cards of gentlemen are half the size of those used by the ladies’.”

– *Etiquette for Gentlemen* (1860s)

In the following excerpt one will see how the fashion changed in cards as well as see instructions for having wedding cards made up.

“A lady does not put her address on her visiting-card. . . .

For visiting cards, the custom changes often. Sometimes it is a glazed card, sometimes not; sometimes a large one, sometimes a small one; sometimes with silvered edges, sometimes a golden border; sometimes with a printed inscription, sometimes engraved, sometimes written in pencil. Any person designing to get up a set of visiting or wedding cards, should consult a good engraver; or, if no such person is near, should obtain from some friend, ‘just from the Metropolis,’ the ‘style.’ The usual form for visiting cards, is simply the name, not address being given, as that belongs to business. For wedding cards, the style now in vogue is two cards in one envelope, one inscribed with the lady’s maiden name, the other with the name of husband and wife, thus; ‘Mr. and Mrs. John Dean.’ If these are sent out before the wedding, and are designed as invitations to the ceremony, there is added to the last-named card the words: ‘At home, Thursday morning, at ten o’clock;’ or, as the case may be, in the evening; or if at church, say: ‘At St. John’s church, at 10.

A. M., Thursday.”

– *Beadle’s Dime Book of Practical Etiquette for Ladies and Gentlemen* (1860)

This next excerpt instructed the reader as to the correct behavior if one calls and no one is home.

“In making a call, if the lady called upon is not at home, leave your card, if you have one; and if there are several ladies there who you wish to see, desire the servant to present your compliments to them severally. Should you not have a card, leave your name with the servant, of course.”

– *Etiquette, and the Usages of Society* (1860)

In the following excerpt, Mrs. Hartley offered advice to the caller on the proper hours to call, what to do if the hostess is not at home or is delayed.

“. . . Upon your own visiting cards, below the name, put the day when it will be proper to return the visit, thus:

Mrs. James Hunter
At Home on Wednesdays.
No. 1718 C — st.’

‘When the servant answers your ring, hand in your card. If your friend is out or engaged, leave the card, and if she is in, send it up. Never call without cards. You may offend your friend, as she may never hear of your call, if she is out at the time, and you trust to the memory of the servant.

If your friend is home, after sending your card up to her by the servant, go into the parlor to wait for her. Sit down quietly, and do not leave your seat until you rise to meet her as she enters the room. To walk about the parlor, examining the ornaments and pictures, it is ill-bred. It is still more unlady-like to sit down and turn over the cards in her card basket. If she keeps you waiting for a long time, you may want to take a book from the centre-table to pass away the interval.”

– *Ladies’ Book of Etiquette, Fashion, and Manual of Politeness* (1860)

Although the next excerpt is dated 1869, it explains why there may be no simple answer to some of the questions posed today about visiting cards and proper etiquette of visiting cards in the nineteenth century but also offers a simple answer that may be followed in almost any circumstance.

“VISITING CARDS. The fashion of cards is a variable one. It may be the fashion to-day to have them large, square, and printed upon rough surfaces; to-morrow they may be small, long, and highly glazed; now they are engraved; now written. In fact, there are too many freaks and changes to mention all; but etiquette requires always perfect simplicity. An ornamental visiting card is simply detestable.

Glazed cards are not now in vogue, but they may be again, and ladies’ card are cut much smaller than those used by gentlemen.

Persons who have a city and country residence must have two sets of cards, with the residence at the time of calling engraved on the left-hand corner, thus

MRS. JOHN POTTS
No. 27. _____ Street

while Mrs. Potts is in the city, and

MRS. JOHN POTTS
CEDARS

when Mrs. Potts is out of town.

Visiting cards must never bear a business.

All merely honorary or official designations must be omitted, except in cards designated for official visits only. . . .

Cards should be engraved in simple Italian characters, and without flourish, embossed surface, or even ostentatiously large letters.

Every visiting card should have the address in small letters in the left-hand corner. If used when in a strange city, the usual address may be scored in lead-pencil, and the temporary one under the name, thus:

MR. and MRS. WILLIAM LEIGH,
No. 207 _____ Street. St. James Hotel.

It is optional with unmarried ladies to use the prefix to their names. . . .

Autograph visiting cards are conceited affectations. The autograph of distinguished characters may be desirable; but it is precisely that class of people who would be least likely to use them. A neatly engraved card is *en règle*; printed ones look cheap, and are not suitable for visiting.

Persons in mourning should use cards with black borders.

Young unmarried ladies may use separate cards, or may have their names added to their mother's thus:

MRS. JOSEPH BANKS.
MISS LUCY BANKS

Leave-taking cards have a P. P. C. (*pour prendre congé*) written in the right-hand corner.

Wedding cards are in the best taste when perfectly simple.

It is a breach of etiquette to leave a card after being informed that the person visited is at home.

When you have been informed of an important event in the family of a friend — a birth, a marriage, a or a death — if you are unable to offer personal congratulations or condolence, you may

leave a card within a week.

If you reside in another city, you may send your card by post, with the word ‘felicitation’ under the name. A mournful event calls for a letter.

A card left for two or more members of the same family must have a corner turned down.

A card with a photograph portrait upon it, though to a certain extent fashionable, is a vulgarism that can never obtain general favor. If you are a gentleman, your visage may be reserved by the chambermaid, to exhibit as ‘one of her beaux,’ and no lady, surely, would ever display her face on a visiting card.”

– *Frost’s Laws and By-Laws of American Society* (1869)

This 1878 excerpt answers one question that had not been covered in the previous etiquette books, “How did visiting-card etiquette differ between rural and metropolitan areas?”

The answer came from *Peterson’s* magazine.

“Etiquette. Cards, Notes or Invitations, Etc, Etc. — As our circle of acquaintances increases, we find that personal interviews are often impossible, and sometimes not even desirable. In such cases the useful little bit of engraved pasteboard, called a ‘card,’ become quite invaluable. In thinly settled country neighborhoods, of course, the card is of but little use; there every one within visiting distance knows every one else; and should the person visited be not at home, the name is not likely to be forgotten; but in large cities the card is absolutely indispensable, very often with the most intimate friends or even close relations, for with the multitudinous duties with crowd on a servant in a house where there is much visiting, the name or message may be forgotten of one whom they are in the habit of seeing frequently.”

– *Peterson’s* (1878)

As one can see in the following excerpt from 1884, the etiquette of visiting cards did not change much from the 1850s but there were some changes. These rules seem to be similar to what other etiquette books indicated as correct throughout the nineteenth century. The author did not investigate etiquette books beyond the nineteenth century.

“In the selection of cards great taste should be exercised. The material should be a thin, fine board of paper. The size and shape are regulated by the prevailing fashion. The color should always be pure white. Tinted or colored cards are an abomination.

A gentleman’s card should bear only his name and address. A lady’s card should have the word, ‘Mrs.’ or ‘Miss’ prefixed to her name. The eldest unmarried daughter of a family should have her card read simply read ‘Miss White,’ not ‘Miss Mary White.’ The younger sisters, if unmarried, should have their Christian names on their cards.

Professional titles may appear upon the card, as ‘James Dickson, M. D.,’ or ‘Doctor James Dickson,’ ‘Rev. Thomas Smith,’ or Rev. Thomas Smith, D. D.’ . . . In the United States this practice varies, but the best etiquette unquestionably

demands the prefix, 'Mr.' . . .

The most perfectly tasteful card is an engraved one. The printed card comes next; then the written one. The fashion as to letters changes, but a plain script or old English text, well engraved, is always neat and in good taste. . . .”

– *The National Encyclopedia of Business and Social Forms* (1884)

As the reader can see, understanding visiting card etiquette was no simple task. If one was to be correct in all circumstances, one had to keep up with the current trends in visiting cards by reading the latest etiquette books but yet not seem to be “putting on airs.” Indeed, it was a fine line to tread.

VISITING CARD HUMOR

As with any ritual or affectation of a society class, visiting cards were sometimes the subject of satire and provided humor. In an 1823 article, a visiting card was defined as “A memorial left by some one who is delighted at not having seen you.”

In 1826 an article titled “The Back-woodsman in Washington” offered a picture of a newly arrived resident from the western frontier to Washington City. Needless to say, the gentleman was confused about the art of visiting or “carding and being carded” and order to be fashionable, he saw the need to purchase his cards from a card shop. Arriving at the visiting card shop and confusing visiting cards with wool cards he ordered, a “pair of visiting cards;” he was informed by the card shop owner that visiting cards did not come in pairs. Having that problem straightened out, the gentleman then ordered “plain” cards which the shop owner took to mean “playing cards.” With great frustration, the frontiersman was finally able to order his visiting cards and picked them up the next day. The rest of the story relates his experiences with delivering the cards to all the gentlemen of his acquaintance and then being overcharged by the coachman. The newcomers’s day had not gone well!

Another bit of humor was just too good to summerize. It was a description of the evolution of the art of “carding” in Washington and appeared in 1830.

“Carding at Washington.

The following amusing description of the *origin and progress of visiting cards*, is extracted from the ‘Banner of the Constitution.’

‘Of all the labour-saving inventions that have yet been discovered, there is none which exceeds what, in Washington, is called *carding*. The term is technical, belonging to the science of *etiquette*, and although it is an improvement which is familiar to the fashionable people in all cities, yet it is not so to all those for whom this lucubration is intended, and we shall accordingly, for their benefit,

give a brief history of the rise and progress of this very sensible and time-saving art.

In the days of our great grandfathers and great grandmothers, when the intercourse of society was carried on upon the true principles of sociability, — when it was lawful for Mrs. A. To send her compliments to Mrs. B. With a message, that if she Mrs. B was not engaged Mrs. A. Would come and drink tea with her, — it was the custom for any one, who wished to see a friend, to go to his house, knock at the door with his knuckles, and if his friend was not at home, to say to his wife, or daughter, or any one else who should happen to come to the door, that he would call again. This was the genuine old fashioned mode of visiting, and although it has long been exploded, as a vulgar and anti-good-society custom, yet we presume it still exists in many parts of the country, amongst persons who venerate the good old usages of our forefathers.

The first step towards refinement in this particular, which characterized the incipient march of mind, was *leaving the name* of the caller at the door without any signification of his intention to call again. But as sometimes a bungling cook or chambermaid, would come to the door, who could not remember names, it became expedient, in order to prevent mistakes, that the caller should take his pencil out of his pocket book and write his name upon any piece of paper which he might happen to have about him.

To this improvement succeeded cards, which announced the commencement of a new era in the science of visiting. At first the name was written on the card with a pen. Copperplate printing soon followed, and with it all the embellishments which could be contrived, such as gilt edges, embossed and polished surfaces, and all the various tastes as to size and shapes, Roman letter, script, and German text [Fraktur], in ink, or gold leaf, according as the different fancies of people suggested. These cards were left at the houses of persons called upon after learning that they were not at home, and if the visit was intended to kill more than one bird with a stone, the card was disfigured by having one, two or three of its corners turned down.

This custom continued for a considerable time, but as society extended and large parties became fashionable, it was found impossible to pay personal visits to every body of five hundred to whom invitations were intended to be sent. The expedient of *carding* was then resorted to, which is simply dropping a card with a man you do not care six-pence about, without having the trouble of carding a man with your own hands. An empty carriage may perform the job as well as a full one, and in the present advanced state of the science, a gentleman may sit in his chamber, and without stirring a foot from

the fire may visit the whole city.

But the visiting by cards has an advantage over a personal visit. The latter is temporary and fleeting; the former perpetual and lasting. In one case, as soon as the door is shut behind your back you are forgotten; out of sight, out of mind. But in the other, you are stuck up over the mantel-piece, among a crowd of other sensible people like yourself, to be gazed at by the social visitors [sic] of the family, and are thus made to add to the glory and dignity of the gentleman who has the good fortune to be carded by you. No longer is your card disfigured like a child's spelling book, but each person called is to be complimented with a separate card, from each individual caller, so that a pack of cards is sometimes hardly enough to while away the morning with.

Somebody will perhaps ask, 'what has carding to do with political economy?' We reply that it has a vast deal to do with domestic economy, which is a kindred science, and as it saves time and hack to hire, it is of incalculable advantages to those who have neither leisure nor money to spare in a city like Washington, where the population is so very much scattered, and where no one can pretend to pay visits to all whom they wish to see. We think, that an opportunity is afforded for the establishment of a new branch of *American Industry*, which would require no tariff law to give it proper encouragement, and we should not be surprised, some of these days, to see signs stuck up in various parts of this city, 'Visiting by proxy done here.'

And whilst upon this subject, we will make a suggestion, for which we think we shall receive thanks of a number of those who are liable to first visits, which is, that strangers be particular in their address on their cards. From the want of necessary precaution, visits are often not returned; for it is too much to require of the person called upon, who generally has some business to attend to, that he should not only return a visit, but that he should waste his time hunting up the lodgings of the person calling. We know that great complaints exist on this subject.'

— *Philadelphia Album and Ladies Literary Gazette*

Not to be outdone by American satire, the English publication, *Punch*, also poked fun at the visiting card custom and social climbers. This next excerpt was reprinted from *Punch* in a 1844 issue of *Littell's Living Age*.

"To the Would-Be Genteel.— The termination of the season has enabled *Punch*, through extensive negotiations with the butlers and footmen of the nobility and gentry, to offer to his subscribers, on the most moderate terms, a large assortment of

Aristocratic Visiting Cards. Any gentleman or lady, desirous of gaining credit for titled and fashionable acquaintance, will find this and eligible opportunity for gratifying their pride and vanity. Physicians, surgeons, and other professional men, who may wish to appear to have a good connection, will also do well to avail themselves of it. . . .”

Although this next satirical excerpt is dated 1869 it gives an indication that the etiquette of visiting cards and other invitations began to take on a life of their own and became more and more ridiculous. Card etiquette was no less confusing to those of the time period as it is to us today.

“THE GENTEEL THING IN CARDS. Cards enter so much into the business of fashionable life that they may almost be called the literature of society. Of course we do not mean that sort of cards which a Southwestern American calls his ‘papers; or his ‘Bible’ — the only one he is prone to trouble — but the small oblong or square pieces of pasteboard which society uses to chronicle its movements. No social event can take place without them; no one who is anybody, or who aspires to be anybody, can very well be born, not at all married, and rarely and ignominiously die without their indispensable aid. They serve to herald the coming, speed the parting guest; they help us see our friends, and, still more important, not to see them; they aid us to make peace or war; they bring us when merry or sad, the company that misery is said to love, and happiness seldom hates; they assist us to society or solitude, as we desire. The card-receiver on our parlor table is a directory of *ton*. It tells us who is in town, and who has gone away; who wants to see us, and whom we ought to see; who has been married, and who is going to be; who has been dying, and where everybody but the last mentioned lives. Then, to, it holds, as it were, our social credentials, and at a glance it enables the expert to gauge our exact social standing.

But manifold as are the uses of cards, not less various are their mysteries. No man, we venture to say, ever fully understood them, unless it were for those phenomenal creatures disguised as men who write for, read, and are celebrated in the weakly [sic] columns of the *Fireside Flunky* or the *Small Beer Chronicle and Family Spy*. This, too, lovely and progressive woman counts among her triumphs, that she has mastered the bewilderingments of cards. For ourselves, we openly confess that they stand among the most constant perplexities, the most wearing anxieties of life. To tell which pocket visiting cards are in is a conundrum we have never yet been able to answer when occasion and an impatient lackey required; to know how many cards to send in where there are ten Miss Browns (or is it Misses Brown?), three married sisters, Mrs. Brown *mère*, and Grandmamma Brown, and one wants to be polite to all of them, is a problem more intricate than any in Euclid; to know which corner to turn down, and which way to turn it, yet remains to us one of the profoundest of enigmas. If our neighbor has had a death in the family, we are sure to disgust him by sending him a card of *Felicitation*; at a wedding of his eldest or the birth of his last, we are certain to win a repute for ill-timed and vapid sarcasm by sending our *Condolence*; and we invariably turn down *Visite* to signify that we are going away.

..
There is a gentleman in this city who knows all about cards — a great deal more than we know, probably a great deal more than anybody else knows about them; who can tell you out of hand precisely what cards to use on every possible emergency of life. . . . the remarkable man (who is, by chance, a dealer in cards) has issued a little monograph telling us all about them, . . . The monograph is entitled *Card Etiquette*, and has given us so much mingled instruction and entertainment. . . .”

– *The Round Table. A Saturday Review of Politics, Finance, and Literature...*(1869)

The article continues to elaborate on the sometimes stilted wording of invitations, incomprehensible initials on invitations and cards, and what veiled meaning could be construed from the wording on funeral and wedding cards.

NEW TRENDS IN VISITING CARDS

Fashion changed in visiting cards just as it did in dress and was always being updated but there were only so many ways to change a visiting card. Some of the innovations caught on and became standard, which are still in place today, some cards’ original purpose changed and became more well known in another form and trends completely died because they were not practical or were just unpopular.

In 1848, *Godey’s* reported on a new type of visiting card but one can see why it was not a card that could be used for mass production.

“A NEW VISITING CARD.— I shall merely inform your fair readers of a new fashion for visiting-cards that has been started amongst the select few and is hardly likely to get vulgarized. These cards consist of a square of agate, porphyry, malachite, cornelian, or lapis-lazuli, on which the name is engraved, but are only left at the house of intimate friends, and not at the porters, but in the hands of the footman of the person it is intended for. I must observe that with us a lady's card is smaller than a gentleman's. Were it of the size of Lady B—'s card, which I saw the other day at your embassy, I can easily understand that few fortunes, even in your rich island, could stand such an expense. Only one of our eleganties [sic] has thought fit to send round this new sort of card for her New-Year's visits— on which day everybody stays at home, while their carriage visits all their acquaintance. But I hear she intends purchasing them back at a cheap rate through the medium of the servants.”

Turning Down the Corners of Visiting Cards

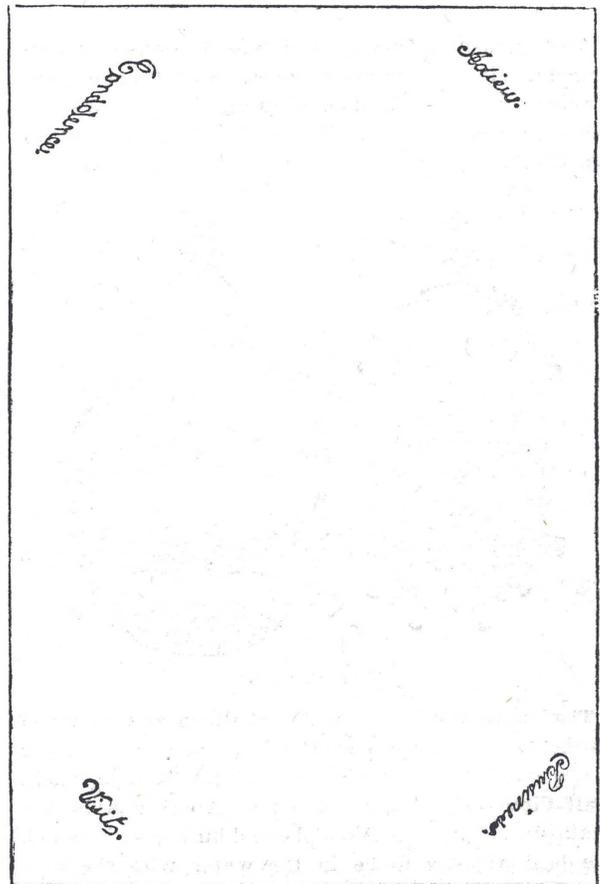
One innovation that was introduced and continued for some years (and still appears in some modern etiquette manuals and advice columns) seemed to be quite practical. If a call was made and the hostess was not at home or not receiving, a card was still left with a servant. Rather than writing a note on the card or expecting the servant to remember the purpose of the card, certain corners of the card were turned down and the hostess was supposed to then know the purpose of the visit.

In 1853, *Godey's* mentioned that "the large unglazed visiting-cards now in use are no longer turned down on the corner, but folded in half, if left for a friend."

Three years later, the magazine reported a newer trend concerning folding down the corners. To make things easier, the visit purposes were printed in the corners of the reverse side of the card. The correct corner could then be turned down and seen from the front of the card.

In the March 1856 issue of *Godey's* there was an illustration of the reverse side of the card with the labeled corners.

"We give the latest style of visiting card. When a call is made, the corner relative to the matter called upon is turned. On the reverse side is the name of the visitor engraved; the portion we give is the back of the card." [Wording in corners: upper left - Condolence, upper right - Adieu, lower left - Visit, lower right - Business]



The next few excerpts show that even the order of which corner was turned down for which purpose was not standardized.

Harper's Bazaar, in 1868, gave the following explanation:

"One corner of the card is turned down to denote to object of the visit. In different cities a different signification is attached to these broken cards. We give the custom of New York society. On the left hand upper corner the word *Visite* is engraved on the reverse side. This corner is turned down, displaying the word on the front of the card to signify that an ordinary call is made. On the right hand corner is *Felicitation*, to be used when making a visit of congratulation on some happy event, such as a marriage, or the birth of a

child. On the left lower side is *Congré* or Good-by. The remaining corner is marked *Condolence*.”

Harper's Bazaar also offered this same advice in December 1868 but first just offered the information as to what each turned down corner meant and then indicated that sometimes cards were printed with the appropriate words on the reverse side of the card.

By the late 1860s, turning down the corners of the cards seemed to be an established practice as well as the appropriate words being engraved on the reverse side of the cards but apparently it was not as widespread as it seemed to be. In an 1874 issue of *The Galaxy*, there was an extensive discussion on the turning down of the corners of visiting cards.

“. . . There is no question which has puzzled so many people, probably, who are beginning the study of card etiquette, as those relating to the habit of turning down the corner of a visiting card. There are those who suppose it to be a custom which, like virtue, is to be practiced for its own sake; there are those who never practice it at all, as there are also those who practice it capriciously, turning down now one corner and now another; now supposing its signification to be that of an intention to include a whole family in the attention of your visit not imagining it to be designed for the exactly opposite purpose of including only a single person. All these explanations we have heard given, but they are radically different, to judge from the rules of this hand book [The title of the book was not given.], from the meaning attached to the custom in New York. In New York it seems that any one of the four corners may be turned down, and each one gives a different signification to the visit. The handbook, referring prophetically to the last season, says, ‘Visiting cards, with words denoting the object of the call, will remain in use to some extent, especially for calls of congratulations, condolences, and regret. The word, *Viste*, on the right-hand upper corner, will be printed on the reverse side. The corner with either word denoting the object of the call will be turned down. On the left-hand corner *Felicitation* will be used for visits of congratulations on some happy event — as for instance, a marriage or a birth; on the right lower corner the word *Congré*, or P. P. C., used for a visit previous to leaving town; the other corner, the word *Condolence*.’ And again: ‘No further doubt need occur regarding occur regarding the signification of turning down the corner of a vising card, even when the words are not printed on the back *Viste* would occupy the right-hand upper corner, *Felicitation* the left upper, *Condolence* the left lower, *Adieu* the lower right.’ This simple and intelligible explanation, and reflects great credit on the genius of the people who, to judge by the language used on the four corners, invented it. There is a neatness and completeness about using all four corners, too, and not stopping short at three, or confusing everything with making the number one, and then not defining what corner this one ought to be, or precisely what the meaning is, if we are so fortunate as to know the proper corner, which shows that etiquette is not mere arbitrary collection of unmeaning rules, but a growth, subject to laws of evolution of its own, just a s much as in animated nature. . . .”

The above two excerpts both related the New York society rules for turning down specific corners of cards and contradicted each other. No wonder people constantly needed to be updated on the current rules of etiquette in order that they not make a *faux pas* and embarrass themselves and others.

In the January 1869 issue of *Godey's* they presented a novel idea in visiting cards. How practical or useful this new card was perceived but no further mention of this type of card was found.

“A Visiting card of the following description has been suggested. We think the idea is a good one:— ‘Oval in form, and the border divided into twelve angular sections, each carrying the figures from one to twelve, to represent the hours of the day. The visitor turns down the corner which contains the hour at which the call was made.’ ”

Images on Visiting Cards and *Cart-de-viste*

It would seem that people were not just satisfied with their names on visiting cards; they wanted their images on the cards. Before photography, engraved portraits could be placed on cards.

In 1802, the *Port-Folio* introduced the latest from Paris — engraved portraits. “A new fashion of visiting cards has appeared at Paris. Instead of the name, the card contains an *engraved* portrait of the visitor.” This same quote also appeared in 1815 in *New York Weekly Museum*.

The term *carte-de-visite* or CdV, referring to small photograph, is very familiar to those involved in research of the mid-nineteenth century and those that perform impressions of the time period. We recognize these photographic cards but have we associated them with actual visiting cards?

With improvements in photography, it was only inevitable that photographs began to appear on visiting cards. In 1855, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* reported a new trend.

“Parisians have turned the art of Photography to a new account, that is to the embellishment of visiting cards. In the place of the name is presented the counterpart of the person, either in profile, half-length or entire, as his taste and pocket may discriminate. The process, states, one of the Paris newspapers, is by no means expensive. Thanks to the progress of the industrial art, a first photographic impression may be very easily reproduced at a trifling cost. A hundred are attainable for twenty-five francs, only five dollars! What an inducement to vanity, it possessed of an attractive frontpiece! How can any reasonable good looking man or woman refuse her or his image, when it can be furnished for twenty centimes the piece?”

In 1861, *Godey's* also advertised photographic visiting cards.

“AMONG the principal novelties of this season are the little photographs, called, from their smallness, ‘visiting-cards,’ which may be had very cheap, and which enable an individual to bestow a likeness of himself at small cost, on his entire

circle.”

In another issue in the same year, *Godey's* declared that “photographic visiting cards were all the rage.”

The photographic visiting cards couldn't just be kept in the card basket with the regular visiting cards so a new industry was born — that of photographic albums. In 1861 advertisements for “Photographic Visiting Card Albums” began appearing in newspapers. Charles A. Fredericks claimed to be the first to introduce albums and frames for holding the cards.

Scientific American, in 1862 also reported on the popularity of CdVs and photograph albums.

“The fashion of having one's likeness photographed upon his visiting card, has been modified into the custom of distributing dozens of small full length portraits among mutual friends, and these are kept in handsome books made with thick leaves for the purpose and called photographic albums. Every young lady expects to receive one of these books from some relative, lover or friend, and then she begins to besiege all of her acquaintances for photographs of their persons with which to form her collection. Sometimes the grandfather and grandmother occupy the honored place of the first pages, while father, mother, brothers and sisters, uncles, aunts and cousins

The Photographic Visiting Card.

CHARLES D. FREDRICKS & CO., 585 and 587 Broadway, were the first to introduce this very beautiful and popular picture in the United States, and from the success which has followed its introduction, various styles of frames, *passe-partouts*, and other articles adapted to the picture, have been manufactured by us in Europe and in this country. With a view to make our establishment the depot for all the articles referred to, both wholesale and retail, we respectfully call the attention of the public to the following:—

ALBUMS holding 200 Visiting Cards,

ALBUMS holding 100 Visiting Cards,

ALBUMS holding 50 Visiting Cards,

ALBUMS holding 30 Visiting Cards,

ALBUMS holding 20 Visiting Cards,

VELVET Frames for Visiting Cards,

Jet Enamelled Frames for Visiting Cards,

Turkey Morocco Frames for Visiting Cards,

Velvet Frames, for 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 Visiting Cards,
Composition Frames, richly ornamented, for Visiting Cards

Black Walnut and Ebony Frames for Visiting Cards,

Feather Fans, holding 6 Visiting Cards,

And many other articles exclusively adapted to the Photographic Visiting Card. Ladies having fine miniatures and other pictures for which they desire rich and appropriate frames and cases, are invited to examine our varied assortment of Velvet, Turkey Morocco, and Enamelled Frames, adapted to almost any sized picture.

Photographs colored in oil, pastel, or water-colors.
Prices reduced to conform to the times.

C. D. FREDRICKS & CO.,
Photographers and Dealers, 585 Broadway.

complete the collection and constitute the most truthful, beautiful and perfect gallery of family portraits. In other cases the school-girl acquaintances fill the pages in all varieties of smooth cheeks, soft eyes and carefully dressed hair, the collection being spiced with an occasional curling mustache or well-brushed pair of whiskers.

The fashion having become the rage, the photographic galleries are completely overrun with demands for the album pictures. One negative is taken from the sitter, and then six, eight, twelve or more positives are printed from it according to the desire of the customer. In all of the popular galleries in this city, crowds of persons are constantly waiting for their turns, and the proprietors are reaping a rich harvest. The same prosperity is enjoyed by the profession in other places, and from the receipt of the little pictures from officers beyond the Potomac, we discover that travelling photographers are visiting the army for the purpose of enabling the soldiers to comply with the all-prevailing fashion. . . . “

These “New Visiting Cards” were also subject to satire. The following cartoon appeared in the February 2, 1861 issue of *Vanity Fair*.



THE "PHOTOPASTBOARDGRAPH," OR NEW VISITING-CARD.
Morning Call.—"MRS. FITE DULCIMER NOT AT HOME!—WELL, JUST TAKE MY CARD UP, WILL YOU!"

The *Christian Advocate and Journal*, in 1862, explained the relationship of visiting and cartes-de-visites.

“CARTES-de-VISITE. Has the reader ever wondered what the meaning of this term was, and how it came to be applied to the description of photographic portrait now so popular? A *carte-de-visite* is a ‘visiting-card,’ and the kind of photograph so called for a time used as such among the fashionables of Paris in their morning calls. The practice, however, was too unnatural to last. It offends against principles of good taste that are more permanent than convention rules, and generally, in the overcome them. Less offending has been a more recent Parisian novelty — but that custom must have its limits. It is all very well to sport a card of that sort if one owns a Chatsworth or a Blenheim; but what is a plain John Brown to do, who lives in a Rose Cottage, or No. 2 Albert Parade! or, worse still, if he should happen to have no ‘castle’ but one in so airy a situation that it defies even the photographic art. We suppose it would puzzle M. Claudet himself to take a ‘carte’ of a ‘Chateau en Espangne.’ The *carte-de-visite*, in its later modification as a contribution to an album, is really a beautiful invention, and is not likely soon to go out of vogue. . . .”

Also, in 1861, the *Circular* was described a number of ways that photographs were being used. “Photographic bookmarks and visiting cards are sold by the thousands, while photographic shirt studs and waistcoat buttons, ornamented with microscopic miniatures, are now being produced daily in Prussia.

Since using a *carte-de-visite* did not remain in favor as proper visiting card, there was still a way to have one’s image on a visiting card. The following appeared in the November 1866 issue of *Arthurs’s Home Magazine*, the December 1866 and January 1867 issues of *Godey’s*.

“BILLETDOUX PHOTOGRAPHS.—This is the name given to a neat little unmounted photograph about the size of a postage stamp, and gummed on the back in a similar way. By this means you can attach your likeness, when desired, to your visiting-card, or place it at the head of the paper on which you write your letter, and do it as easily as affixing a postage stamp. These pretty little likeness are furnished all ready for use, at the moderate price of \$1 50 for twenty-four.

We have made arrangements to get these Billetdoux Photographs for any of our readers who may desire them. The price will be as above, \$1 50 for twenty-four. A good card photograph from which to copy the portrait must be sent to us.”

Apparently the use of *carte-de-visites* as actual visiting cards was short lived since a number of etiquette books suggested that no well-mannered individual would want their photograph on a visiting card but *carte-de-vistes* are valuable as a record of nineteenth century society and are used as a research tool for those that study various aspects of the nineteenth century.

THE DARKER SIDE OF VISITING CARDS

Visiting cards did serve an intended purpose and provided a source for humor but a simple card could also be dangerous. In the following excerpts, one can see that the awareness and concern for lead poisoning was noted as early as the 1840s but apparently that knowledge did not stop the production and purchase of leaded cards. Alternatives were offered for leaded cards but enameled cards continued to appear in advertisements. Sometimes unglazed cards were in fashion but more often the glazed cards were recommended.

“Scraps.

DON'T GIVE CARDS TO CHILDREN. — The New Haven Register mentions lately the case of a child of Mrs. Charles Chapman of Danbury, Conn. was poisoned on the 5th instant by putting a visiting card in its mouth, which its mother had given it to play with. It died forty-eight hours (from the effects) after. An analysis of the card (by Dr. Bennett,) showed that the enamel or coating was composed (wholly or in part) of ‘carbonate of lead.’ (‘We believe all cards have more or less of the compounds of lead in them.’)”

– *National Era* (1847)

“Zinced Cards. We have a card before us, the enamel of which has been put on by zinc white instead of the old lead enamel. The zinc used was that of the Villa Montagne Co. of Belgium, and Francis F. Milleroux No. 33, Broadway, N.Y., general agent. The card is very beautiful, surpassing, we believe, those enamelled with white lead, and is certainly less poisonous.”

– *Scientific American* (1853)

“*Poisoning by the Introduction of Visiting Cards into the Mouth.*— In the month of August, 1853, Dr. Caffé was summoned to the Hôtel des Princes, by M. Rick, a Mexican merchant of German extraction, to see his infant, who was suffering from the usual symptoms of poisoning by salt of copper. Dr. Caffé found the child holding in his hand and at the mouth some green-coloured cards, which the nurse would not take away for fearing of making it cross. Vomiting was easily induced; and, in the matter thrown up, was found the cause of the symptoms. The infant rapidly recovered. . . .” Three more cases were discussed in the same article.

– *Medical News* (1854)

“The *Scientific American* says — ‘*Common red wafers, scattered about the haunts of cockroaches, will often drive away if not destroy them.*’

These wafers, like candies, are colored red by oxide of lead; a most deadly

poison, and so is the acetate of lead, or sugar of lead, as it is sometimes called, on visiting cards, which being a little sweetish, has been known to destroy young children to whom they were handed, to be amused with. Fashion for ones acts

sensibly in discarding glazed cards, using instead *Bristol board*, more pliant, less cumbersome, and really more delicate.”

– *The New England Farmer; a Monthly Journal* (1855)

“ETIQUETTE OF VISITING CARDS.

When you drop your piece of pasteboard anywhere, even in the very genteel neighborhood, let it be a piece of pasteboard, and nothing more, except in being engraved with your name and address. Do not, at any rate, let your card be enamelled. The enamel is prepared from lead; and the process of applying it as stated, on good authority, to produce paralysis of the hands and other miserable complaints, among the poor people engaged on this ridiculous manufacture. A shiny imparts no lustre to the name upon it; but communicates an appearance of vulgar glitter to the table or shelf wheron [sic] it is deposited.

If you rejoice in polish, concentrate that quality on your manners, conversation, and boots. In case you find it absolutely necessary to display your taste in your visiting cards, have them embossed; and then it will be as well for you to wear lace collars and shirt cuffs of the same material. But eschew those cards that are enamelled; and which, to the enlightened eye, are glazed with what may be called a shine taken out of the health of unhappy victims afflicted with palsy and colic. *London Punch*.”

– *Christian Inquirer* (1856) and *Ballou’s Dollar Monthly Magazine* (1856)

Even as late as 1868, over twenty years after the lead problem was discussed in the press, leaded visiting cards were still being produced and sold under other names than “enamelled.”

“On The Poisonous Composition of the ‘Mother of Pearl’ Address or Visiting Card. Munich, Bavaria, Nov. 24th, 1867. Dr. G. C. Wittsteins, *Analytical Chemical Laboratory*.

To the Editor of the Am. Journal of Pharmacy.

ESTEEMED SIR: — A novelty in a way of a visiting card appeared in the early part of the present year (1867,) which from its resemblance to *Mother of Pearl*, by its crystallized surface, was much admired, and was largely used. This same curiosity has of late been introduced in this city, and I am informed by a dealer that the demand is greater than the supply. Several days ago one of these crystallized cards was brought to the laboratory by the Medical Director of the Sanitary Department of Munich, requesting Prof. Wittstein to give his opinion in relation to the composition

of the crystallized surface. The professor, after applying the necessary tests, pronounced it soluble *salt of lead*.

. The consideration which prompted me in addressing you on this subject, it not being, strictly speaking, of Pharmaceutical interest, was to call attention to a matter of more consequence than may at first sight appear. The public not being acquainted with the poisonous properties of these cards, will not be on their guard in preventing their being chewed or eaten by small children, to whom the *sweet taste* (of the lead salt) and the crystallized appearance will for an attraction, thereby producing obscure cases of illness and poisoning. The inventors of such deleterious articles deserve, if not punishment, public censure for thus placing the health of human beings in jeopardy.

The manufacture and sale of these cards in this city has been forbidden by law.

Yours most respectfully,

ALBERT E. EBERT.”

– *American Journal of Pharmacy* (1868)

Also in an 1868 issue of *Scientific American*, a substitute for mother-of-pearl cards was suggested. A combination of glycerin, magensia, dextrine, and water was mixed and boiled. A thin layer was spread on the paper that was previously covered with either glue or glycerine. To produce a crystalline effect on the paper, the variegated crystals were made by coloring the solution with aniline dyes and brushing the paper with equal parts of egg white and water instead of the glycerine. When the crystals dried, the paper was run between two smooth rollers or pressed. Using the process, the paper seemed to be glazed but was safe. There was no indication if this process was instituted instead of the more dangerous leaded process.

In later years, etiquette books suggested that enameled visiting were fashionable and they were advertised but there was no description as to what material was used for the enameling.

SENTIMENTALITY

One final aspect of visiting cards was the sentimental value. They could be saved and reminisced over at a later time and were the subjects for numerous emotional poems and stories.

The following excerpt first appeared in 1835 and again in 1843 and the latter was attributed to Ann S. Stephens.

“Visiting Cards. . . . I have opened this little treasure box of loved names, each a sweet or bitter link in the chain of memory. They are but paper — bits of pretty ornamented pasteboard, yet what a world of associations do they open. How does my heart leap or stand still, as I raise each from the repository in which three years, has not been opened. My fancy cheats me, for as I open this little box, my room seems filled with familiar faces — young, happy faces, that I once looked on and loved.

The delusion is over, I am alone, aye alone, — I have no friends, such as they were, and shall never have again — never.

Here, on top of the pile, as if to win me from my lonely thoughts, is the name of my dearest friend; how delightful are all the associations connected with it, how like herself are the delicate Italian letters. I can almost see her taperd fingers forming the slight rose wreath circles them, so delicate and lightly touched that a fairy might have penciled it. What a pretty link this little card is in a chain of deep and hole remembrances? — who would think that tears would come into my eyes while looking upon it. . . .

This large enamelled card, with its gilt border, and graceful running hand comes next. My heart aches, as I look upon it, for it is a relic of the dead, of one whose inheritance of genius was too much for his vigor. Ambition — literary ambition, cost him his life. . . . Death loves such brows and sets his signet on them early. The souls of those that possess them seem to prey upon the body; consuming it gradually, till a slight shock proves a death-bolt. Such a one was he, who left me this card. In his twenty-third year the fire of genius was turned upon his heard in disappointment, and he died. . . . I saw him two months after the failure of his work, and in a low but very sweet voice, he told me he should not live many days. . . . He extended his hand and it was thin and pale, like that of a sick infant. He said truth — poor fellow, I never saw him again. Why did this card thus present itself? I was sad enough without it. I will close the box. I can look no further.”

Another sentimental story appeared in 1854 in the *New York Evangelist*.

“The Last Year’s Card-Basket. According to established usage, the basket containing the cards left during the closing year, is to be emptied of its contents, the mementos of past social intercourse, that it may be ready for the tokens of the future. And as this work, during the busy preparation for the new year, is generally allotted to the most idle and useless of the inmates of the parlor, it has for a few years developed upon us. We like it well. We like to look over each card, and recall the past — the circumstances and the persons connected with it. Yet we shrink from committing to the flames, or the entire destruction of any token of remembrance of kindness, from those we have known and loved; and thus we linger sadly around the basket, laying aside, we know not with what purpose, many cards, and falling into long reverie as they recall us to the history of those who left them. . . .”

The writer recalled cards of a dead friend, brides, a seamstress, a friend who died of consumption and others who called through out the year and was a bittersweet journey through the year.

VISITING CARDS IN THE MODERN WORLD

In the nineteenth century visiting cards seemed to have had a life of their own. They had a place in some classes of society, their own etiquette rules, entire businesses catered to them — from printing to photography, were the topic of literature, and provided card baskets and card cases for craft and

needlework projects and rules for their use still appear in etiquette books. Business cards, which still had their own rules of etiquette, were also used in the nineteenth century but were only used by gentlemen in their realm of business, where women rarely ventured. In our busy modern lives, visiting cards don't seem to have a place except in the most formal circumstances and under the guise of business cards where we hear, "Let me give you my card." or "Do you have a card?"

For those who use visiting cards in their nineteenth century impressions, it can be confusing to employ proper nineteenth century calling card etiquette for all occasions. Some people exchange cards, at events, for convenience's sake and other times it is part of our impression; for this one needs two different types of cards and details of etiquette — a modern style card with an added address and phone number and a period style card with only our name, each with its own expression of etiquette. The exchange of cards in the modern situation needs no special etiquette but properly using visiting cards in an impression would require a correct background scene — making a proper call, a servant answering the door and receiving the guest, a card basket for collecting the cards. Correctly done this could create more complications; it takes a great leap of imagination unless it is done in a period house, or is a set for a theater production or movie but the knowledge alone can also be helpful. Using this knowledge can provide an excellent background for understanding the nineteenth century attention to details of etiquette and which brings up the much larger topic of general etiquette, the multitude of etiquette books and the debate on how closely they were followed general society. The quest goes on for the perfect understanding of the nineteenth century lifestyle and visiting card etiquette is only a small piece of the puzzle.

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