

# THE "IS IT RARE?"

## 4-Point Checklist

### 1. THE "REAL PHOTO" (RPPC) TEST

Mass-produced lithographs were printed by the millions. Real Photo Postcards were often produced in batches of only a few dozen.

**The Check:** Use your loupe. If the image is made of tiny ink dots, it's a print. If the image is smooth, continuous, and has a slight silver "sheen" in the shadows, it's a Real Photo.

**Why it's rare:** You are holding an actual piece of darkroom-developed history, often the only surviving copy of that specific moment.

### 2. THE "OCCUPATIONAL" OR "ACTION" FACTOR

Generic landscapes of mountains or city parks are the most common cards in existence.

**The Check:** Does the card show people doing things? Look for shopkeepers in front of their stores, delivery wagons, factory interiors, or early construction crews.

**Why it's rare:** Social history collectors crave "the human element." A photo of a 1910 blacksmith shop is worth significantly more than a 1910 photo of a generic forest.

### 3. THE "DPO" (DISCONTINUED POST OFFICE) POSTMARK

Sometimes the value isn't in the picture, but in the ink stamp on the back.

**The Check:** Look at the circular date stamp. Is it from a tiny town, a rural route (R.F.D.), or a village that no longer exists?



**Why it's rare:** Postal history buffs (Philatelists) hunt for "DPOs." If that post office closed in 1912, that cancellation stamp is a rare relic of a ghost town.

### 4. THE "MACABRE OR MOURNING" MARGIN

Ephemera related to the "culture of death" was often discarded by later generations, making surviving pieces scarce.

**The Check:** Look for a heavy black border around the card, an "In Memoriam" poem, or photos of funeral floral arrangements and grave sites.



**Why it's rare:** These were personal, somber items not intended for general sale. They are highly sought after by niche collectors of Victorian and Edwardian mourning customs.

#### **Rule of Thumb:**

**Common:** Generic flowers, greeting cards (Happy Birthday), and large city skylines.

**Rare:** Small town street scenes, disasters (fires/floods), interior views of buildings, and anything with a black mourning border.