

## TURMOIL IN POST OFFICES

It's hard to believe, but more than a hundred years ago, New Year's Eve postcards - also called century postcards - triggered a real hype at the turn of the century. These postal stationeries with an imprinted Germania stamp (5 Pf) feature the typical drawing "1900 in sun rising above clouds".

They are sold on New Year's Eve morning in 1899, mostly rationed, i.e. each buyer receives only a certain number. They are valid until the 31st of December 1902. There is an enormous rush at the post offices on New Year's Eve morning. This was also the case, for example, at Post Office 1 on Marienstrasse in Dresden. By 9 a.m., more than 12,000 of these cards have already been sold. And the post office is suffering: windows are being smashed, through which buyers are jumping out, as their way back is blocked by the crowds.



Also in Berlin reports are published featuring an enormous rush to the post offices, with the Berliner Lokalanzeiger even writing about price gouging (I especially like the part where the man's heart began to pound fearfully):

*"This morning, the Berlin post offices have again experienced a storm of collectors, similar to the famous 9.9.99, who wanted to capture the largest possible quantities of the new postcards to be issued on the occasion of the turn of the year. This time, however, the Reichspost Fiscus had to capitulate after half an hour, since the postcard ammunition allotted to the individual offices was totally spent. At ½ 8 o'clock, the applicants were lined up in long columns, the rear guard of which reached as far as the embankment. Everyone craned their necks and peered sharply at the gate of the post office, which had to open at the stroke of 8 o'clock. When this finally happened, the foremost pushed forward with such verve that those wedged between the doors raised a pitiful cry. However, since great patriotic interests were at stake, this did not dampen the general enthusiasm. The postal workers, whose man hearts began*



to pound a little fearfully in the face of the stampede, did what they could. They could have had a thousand hands, however, and they would still not have been enough to meet the demand. But soon the supply was exhausted. Since each office had received only about 1200 pieces of the Podbielskian New Year's gift, the only thing left for them to do was to declare themselves insolvent and announce this by posting a notice. The crowd dispersed amid a general "Ah!" of disapproval. At the counter windows, however, small handwritten notes appeared to the effect: "The edition is out of print! Next issue on Saturdays!"

In the meantime, the reflectors (prospective buyers) did not have to wait until the day after tomorrow for the new card. The well-meaning intention of the postal administration to prevent any price increases has become illusory. In Friedrichstrasse and the large traffic centers, the cards are offered with the usual hullabaloo on the part of the street vendors. Of course, there is a premium. 25 to 50 pfennigs per piece are willingly paid. At the close of the noon exchange, the new 1900 issue was trading at 55 pfennigs apiece. The trend is upward."



Even though these century cards were sold in such quantities that they have no appreciable monetary value today, they represent an exceedingly broad and highly interesting field of collecting due to their dispatch all over the world, their variety of different types (see Michel postal stationery catalog) and last but not least with their manifold official and private overprints.

Sources: [Wikipedia, Michel postal stationery catalog, http://www.jahrhundertkarten.de/;](http://www.jahrhundertkarten.de/)  
<http://www.buechersammler.de/silvester-1899-tumulte-wegen-einer-postkarte/>