



Eastern Illustrating & Publishing Company



IT MUST HAVE BEEN AN EXCITING DAY when this company's photographer showed up in town-- he drove a special truck and used a big camera and was hard to miss! The photographers made a point of getting to know people in the village, and of asking their opinions about where the best "scenics" were to be found. They drove their glass plates back to the company's home base in Belfast, Maine, where a factory of printers—mostly women—produced the actual postcards. Eastern Illustrating specialized in micro-marketing, selling their postcards back to the general stores, hotels and gas stations of the village they depicted, ready for tourists visiting that specific scenic location.

The photographic plates these photographers made are now safely preserved in the Penobscot Maritime Museum in Searsport, Maine. They were almost lost in a flood at their previous home in Rockport but were rescued by PMM curator Kevin Johnson. He has actively processed and archived the collection, as well as adding to it as more images are found: originally 35,000 glass plates, it now exceeds 50,000, mostly of New England but of other states as well.

While the motivation of Eastern Illustrating's founder, R. Herman Cassens, was a strong bottom line for his business, the end product was a photographic survey of small towns that provides an unparalleled visual record from 100 years ago. The Eastern Illustrating postcards reproduced especially for this exhibit demonstrate both the collection's historic value and its artistic merit. The company methodically chronicled small town New England, 100 years ago, preserving details of everyday life, many long since vanished. They also composed, image by image, a body of work that established what we still think of as scenic, picturesque views—the framing, patterns of light and shadow, and arresting details that invite us into each scene.

THE PEACHAM HISTORICAL HOUSE