


**NOW
&
AND THEN**


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Less-than-picturesque postcard slights Wheatland

By John Zavinski

“PICTURE POSTCARD” usually brings to mind tropical beaches at sunset, breathtaking views of natural wonders or scenes of bustling cities full of cars and commerce.

Poor Wheatland. The only postcard I know of ever to feature the tiny burg also is arguably the ugliest postcard among the thousands in my collection.

It's hard to imagine an image less flattering to a community than this dull, black-and-white image. “Wish you were here” would be more

of a curse than glad tidings.

Even today, though, Wheatland is a tough place to capture in an iconic image. The proud working-class town has never really had much of the typical fare of postcards – dense blocks of brick storefronts, opulent mansions, or great civic edifices such as schools, churches, city halls or post offices.

A century ago, you rarely saw a postcard image that was a dud like this one. Images were smartly composed and frequently enhanced by artists to remove blemishes (horse droppings swept from brick boulevards, webs of overhead wires vaporized, unsightly utility poles sprouting heads of foliage to become trees).

Some-where along the line – about when color photography came into play –



The building housing Wheatland Variety and News Center and Isaly's dairy store plays second fiddle to vast areas of black-top, gray sky and utility poles in this unflattering 1950s postcard looking west on Broadway in downtown Wheatland.



John Zavinski/Life & Times

The same scene today – admittedly still not breathtaking, even in color.

many of the ugliest and tackiest postcards were produced. You'd swear some were taken from a moving car.

Composition is the worst flaw. Rather than a closeup of a building from an angle that fills the frame, the photographer often stood across the street, with the building stretching from left to right between vast, dead sky and foreground. No framing with tree branches or foreground interest. And nothing says beauty spot like a couple utility poles and power lines.

Back to Wheatland. The poor town deserves better, so I've created a mock postcard to represent the town. It's a tough assignment with nothing in town that instantly says “Wheatland,” but I went with the tried-and-true bird's-eye view from Sieg Hill, overlooking town from the south.

With the lush greenery of late spring, at least it's a view that might make anyone who has ever lived or visited western Pennsylvania truly wish they were here. ♦

This mock postcard illustrates how Wheatland could be captured in a style more welcoming than an image that could have come from a surveillance camera.

John Zavinski/Life & Times

