

Article from Issue 14 of the Postcard Pillar in May 1994.

FREDERICK GEORGE RADCLIFFE

With the listing of F.G.Radcliffe postcards now under way, I thought readers might be interested to have some biographical and other data about our man. The following facts were extracted largely from Wise's street and trade directories dating from the early years of the century (consulting such references is a time-consuming but often rewarding way to gather basic information). Most of this information was compiled several years ago, but has remained unpublished till now.

The first reference to Frederick George Radcliffe as a "photographer" occurs in the 1906 directory, where his address is given as "Wapiti Avenue, One Tree Hill, Auckland". In previous editions (1903-1905, and probably earlier as well), he was listed only as "farmer, Paparua". So it appears that he gave up farming (and probably part-time photographic activity) for full-time photography around 1906. In the 1907 directory, his address has changed to "Green Lane, One Tree Hill, Auckland". In 1908, he is not listed at all.

From 1909 to 1913, he appears as "photographer, Whangarei". Apparently, the stint in Auckland was not a raging success. Once relocated to Whangarei, though, he remained at the same address for many years. All editions of Wise's from 1914 to 1932 list him as "photo trade printer, 122 Mill Road, Whangarei". From the 1933 edition on, he does not appear. Had he died or retired? The change in description from "photographer" to "photo trade printer" appears significant in relation to his postcard work (see below).

Radcliffe apparently operated his business from home. The 1925 Whangarei telephone directory lists him as "F.G.Radcliffe, res. Mill Road". From the 1928 (August) edition, the listing was changed to "Mrs F.G.Radcliffe". What was the significance of this alteration?

Usually, his initials, "F.G.R.", along with the relevant catalogue number of the negative, constitute the only credit appearing on his photographs used for postcards. Some cards he published himself, and these have "F.G.R." or "F.G.RADCLIFFE" imprint on the address side. All cards he published on his own account have a real photo finish. In the light of the description of him as a "photo trade printer", it seems very likely that he processed all the postcards himself in his own laboratory.

The majority, however, of real photo postcards bearing his photographer's credit were published by Fergusson, Taylor & Co. in their 'Industria' series or (later) by Frank Duncan & Co. of Auckland. Again, it seems to me likely that the F.T. and Duncan published cards were also processed by Radcliffe in his laboratory. The general style and high-quality finish is

very similar to cards Radcliffe published on his own account. In this respect, it is relevant to note that the vast majority of 'real photo' postcards published in New Zealand from about 1908 on were also processed in New Zealand (unlike the earlier printed type of postcard).

My researches have uncovered the interesting fact (perhaps not widely known) that a close business relationship existed between Radcliffe, Frank Duncan, Fergusson Taylor & Co., and the Wellington firm of Tanner Bros.. Duncan was in fact a minor shareholder in Tanner Bros. when that firm was incorporated as a private limited company on 10th February 1908. At that time, his occupation was given as "commercial traveller". Probably, he worked as a traveller for Tanner Bros. themselves. Later, he went into business on his own account in Auckland.

I have in my research files rather a lot of interesting data concerning Frank Duncan & Co., Tanner Bros., and Fergusson Taylor & Co. (or 'Fergusson Ltd', as the company at one stage styled itself), which could perhaps be published in later issues of "Postcard Pillar".

I would be very interested to hear more of Radcliffe's professional life. Does any reader have useful information to contribute? Perhaps someone living in Whangarei could investigate local records? They could prove quite rewarding.

- Alan Jackson

Article from Issue 41 of the Postcard Pillar in April 1998

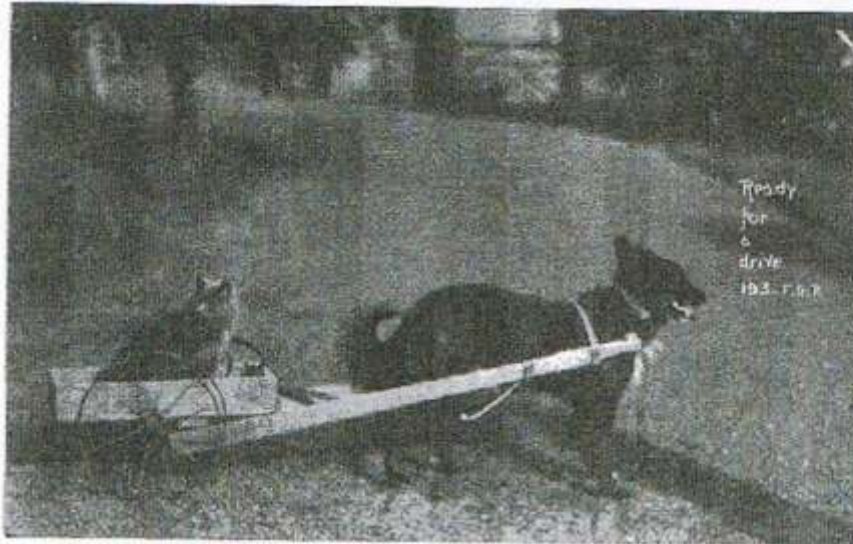
F.G.RADCLIFFE

In 1994 quite a bit of interest was taken in FGR. Alan Jackson did an article a check list of his work was commenced. Other information received but not published at the time gives us a further insight into his life and career.

Frederick George Radcliffe immigrated to NZ from Liverpool, England for health reasons at the age of 30, early in the 1890's. His wife and daughters followed a year or so later. They settled at Papanoa near relatives who were earlier arrivals. They spent the next ten years tending the land and no doubt he had an interest in photography at this stage and spent his spare time dabbling as an amateur photographer.

The farm was put up for sale and in 1906, the family moved to Auckland for two years. According to family sources he worked for "Ellerbecks", though that has not been substantiated. Here he took up his hobby on a professional basis.

In 1908 he and his family moved northwards again, this time to Whangarei. A studio was established in Cameron St. This was taken over by Ernest de Tourret, another postcard photographer in 1909. From that time FGR worked from his home, Stoney Hill, Mill Rd, Whangarei where he had a large studio out the back where a staff of girls worked at "spotting". Travelling throughout NZ on his own behalf and for the then Tourist & Publicity Department, he recorded the many thousands of images on glass plate negatives. His wife, one daughter and several young women processed and produced the thousands of real photo postcards ordered by retailers throughout the Dominion. They continued the business after his death at Onerahi, Whangarei on 14th January 1923.



FGR had a single cataloguing system to number his negatives although it is possible that for the Tourist series he used a separate numbering system.

An unusual early photo, "Ready For a Drive" No 193.

He also did a limited amount of printing for some other artists, such as perhaps Geo E Wooley, an artist and contemporary of his. Again he worked with "Stewart" on a series of stereoscopic cards. Not only did FGR produce photographic postcards, but also large framed photographs of spectacular mountain and forest scenery - the caption, initials and numbers from the postcard negative blocked out. His photographs appeared in Xmas Annuals The Weekly News, several books and at least one souvenir album.

The information comes from material at National Archives, microfilms of the Northern Advocate and Auckland Weekly News, published sources such as The National Bibliography compiled by G A Bagnall, souvenir albums, the negative collections at the Alexander Turnbull Library and Auckland Public Library and oral interviews. In addition, a descendant of the family Toni M Watkins, has written a paper held at the Elam Library, School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland - Call No HOPINZ 88-5. The paper is a catalogue of a collection of photographs inherited by Toni's family, now held in the Auckland Public Library, New Zealand and Pacific Dept. The "Radcliffe Collection" comprises some 2000 glass plate negatives. It is believed to be the negative file of the Tourist Postcard Company. Most, but not all, of the photographs were taken by Radcliffe. Some of the negatives have been contact arrangements may be made with the printed and these prints are stored with the negatives. Arrangements to view the collection can be made by the Librarians.

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