

## HEATON C. PEART

*"The topographical postcards of Heaton Peart easily compare with the best of F.G.Radcliffe and S.C.Smith".*



As a self-confessed fan of N.Z. postcards between the two world wars, it may come as no surprise for some of my readers to discover that I have a lot of respect for the work of the photographer, Heaton C. Peart. This interest has already manifested itself in a piece I did in August 2004 in *The Postcard Pillar* under the heading *Modern Postcard Producers No.6 The Royal Series*. In this I described the origins of this Wellington firm and its two photographers, Harold Emmett and Heaton C. Peart. The illustrations to this article featured postcard views of the four main centres as well as North and South Island scenic spots. All were taken by Peart.

Since then I have added numerous Peart cards to my collection and gained a better insight into his life and times. What follows is an update on this interesting photographer which I hope will demonstrate my belief that his work deserves to be measured against some of the great names in New Zealand postcard photography.

My main source for all this fresh material on Heaton Peart comes as a result of an inquiry which I made to a friend and fellow photo historian in Auckland called John B. Turner. As well, I managed to flush out information on Peart in the form of a newspaper cutting from the West Coast Historical Museum in Hokitika. When all this was combined with the research which Alistair Robb did on the Royal Studios, I think we can now say we have a fairly good idea on Heaton C. Peart's life and times.

Heaton Clairemont Peart was born in the Nelson province in 1894 to parents who came from Sweden. After schooling in Takaka he trained as a draughtsman. In 1917 he was appointed to the Hokitika Branch of the Government Department of Forestry, Lands and Survey. In spite of a birth deformity which gave him a pronounced limp, he was active with friends climbing in the Southern Alps. In time he befriended the professional photographer Ben Thiem, who had a studio in Hokitika. His influence on Peart who was by this time active with a camera was significant. Evidence of this association can be perhaps be measured when see that Peart won an Amateur Photography Competition conducted

by the *Auckland Weekly News*. When Thiem fell ill, his doctor, a Dr. Teichelmann (who was also an accomplished postcard photographer), asked Peart to take over the running of Thiem's business on a temporary basis. It seems this presented no problems for Peart who was ever growing in confidence as a photographer. However, when Thiem died, the landlord of the studio declined Peart's offer to take over the business and terminated the lease.

In the early 1920s, Peart moved to Wellington where he took up lodgings in Tinakori Road. After a settling in period he joined the Wellington Camera Club where he met up with E.T.Robson, a professional photographer who had a business in Manners Street. Later in his life, Peart stated he'd worked for Robson, who, besides running a very successful business in town, was one of the Camera Club's leading exponents of pictorial photography. It did not take long before Peart was deeply involved in the club's activities, becoming exhibitions secretary for a period and giving talks to members on Sepia Toning, Reticulation and other matters including a magic lantern showing of his West Coast and Southern Alps series.

By the mid 1920s, he'd left the employ of Robson and began his association with Royal Studios, which had been running for several years under various owners. The earliest Peart postcard under the Royal Studios imprint which we can positively date is postmarked 1927 and is titled "350 Wellington Heads, Rona Bay". Although there are specimens which I have seen proving beyond doubt that Peart was producing cards under his own name well before this date, the use of the Royal imprint probably represents the first of four distinct phases of Peart's *oeuvre* as a topographic photographer.

The first of these groupings of images could have begun on the West Coast where he would have been supplying cards for the local trade from Hokitika. These were being distributed around 1920 and start with neg. no. 3 "Memorial Clock, Hokitika", and continue through to no. 348 "Band Rotunda, Christchurch". During this period he used a combination of his initials and surname. They were, 'H.C.P.', 'H.Peart' and 'H.C. Peart'.

The word 'Royal' or 'Royal Studio' replaced these individual signings around negative no.370 and continued until he returned to Hokitika around 1940 with card no.1736. After this, the only way his third block of postcards can be identified is through the very distinctive hand-written inscriptions which he printed on every negative. These seem to end around 2700 in the late 1940s. This final grouping of Peart cards includes negatives with no numbering or titles. It is difficult in most instances to date these with the exception of a couple which show scenes in the streets of Hokitika that look as if they were taken in the 1940s. These cards were discovered in the bundle of negatives which Peart must have sorted out as 'special's' before his health declined and he went into a retirement home. Others of bush scenes, mountains and gold dredging need more local knowledge that I'm capable of providing. Sadly, inquiries to the handful of postcard collectors on the West Coast have met with a blank response.

The backs of all his cards during the Royal Studios connection have rubber stamp headings. These and the way they vary from year to year were explained in some detail in the earlier article I wrote and are also mentioned above. As well, cards can be found with special edition imprints for firms like Hicks-Smith & Wright, M. Lehany or N.L. Stevens (booksellers and stationers, Featherston Street, Wellington). To date, I have only seen a handful of Royal postcards with Emmett's name as the photographer.

Another unique if not odd characteristic which distinguishes Peart's postcards from the masses is the fact that silverfish seem to have enjoyed them immensely! I have several cards where they have nibbled away to their hearts; content, starting on the white border and encroaching into the image. Although I'm not sufficiently informed on the chemicals which Peart used for sepia toning or glazing, the composition of these may have made them very attractive to silverfish. Some home-made solutions like domestic starch as a finishing solution for prints could have attracted these insects.

As well, we might ponder the reasons for Peart's return to Hokitika. Postcards about this time were not the thing they had once been and it seems obvious that his impediment would not have allowed him to serve his country in the armed forces. Oddly enough, his gammy leg never seems to have worried him while climbing in the Southern Alps! At the same time, he may have eyed the possibility of easing himself back into the slower lifestyle on the West Coast where all the things he enjoyed were at hand. This became a reality when he heard that the resident photographers in Hokitika, the Burke sisters, were closing down their studio. Friends of Peart it seems rallied around and helped to finance his take-over of the business.

It would seem he got enough work in portraiture to make it all worth while. 1943 saw him back to Wellington briefly to attend the newly formed Professional Photographers Association. It was at this conference that we have a portrait of him which Alan Jackson and I used in our book *Wish You Were Here*. His involvement with various organisations on the Coast led to him becoming briefly involved in local politics. Outside the studio, his camera continued to record facets of life in Westland. Judging from the newspaper article which was supplied by the museum it seems he became something of an identity, travelling around the Coast on his bicycle, with his leather camera cases slung over his shoulder.

My personal favourites from the collection of negatives which are now housed in the Museum at Hokitika are his very artistically posed studies of ice and water, where sunlight plays on a variety of surfaces. I doubt if any of these were ever produced as postcards because I suspect they were personal observations which he may have considered had no commercial value.

Peart never married. For all of his life he boarded with various families in Wellington and on the West Coast. He finally moved into St. Andrews Rest-home, Christchurch, where he died in January 1991 at the age of 97.



## PEART ILLUSTRATIONS - FRONT COVER

All of the illustrations on the cover of this issue of *The Postcard Pillar* with the exception of the old miner and his hut were produced on my computer from negatives which were temporarily in my care before they were transferred to the Hokitika Museum. As far as I know, none of them have ever turned up as postcards. However I see nothing wrong in publishing them in this fashion in the hope that other collectors might recognise them in the form of unattributed cards in their collection.

These negatives came into my temporary possession in a brown paper envelope. They were forwarded to me by John Turner who had received them in his role as editor of a magazine in the 1980s called *PhotoForum*.

The envelope contained about 30 negatives. It had a pencilled message on the outside saying that Peart would like them forwarded to the Hokitika Museum after John had finished with them. On receipt of this package, I copied them onto my computer and sent them off to Hokitika, where they were gratefully received. By return mail I received a photo-copy of a tribute to Peart from the *West Coast Times* which was dated January 25, 1991. This last item filled in a lot of information concerning his family background and education and how he drifted into photography. Where the negatives had no titles, I've described them myself using italics to distinguish them from Peart's original captions.

### Large feature photo:

"A Westland Digger, Hokitika. H.C.Peart 271". Printed here from a black & white bromide photograph in postcard format which bore an inscription on the back written in pencil, "George Wiltshire - well known West Coast character. Hut on Lake Kanieri Range. Born in reign of George IV photographed 1920(?)".

### Smaller photos:

Top right: "Westland Digger, Hokitika. H.C.Peart". From a sepia postcard. Plain back.

\*Second from top: "Cape Foulwind, Westport, N.Z. H.C.Peart".

\*Third from top: No title. *Street in Hokitika showing art deco frontage of Hotel Westland.*

\*Fourth from top: No title. *Weheka School, West Coast c.1920.*

\*Fifth & Sixth from top: No title. *Two studies of Kanieri Dredge.*

\*Bottom: *Armistice Day, Hokitika.*

*\*Those with an asterisk were made from original Peart negatives.*



