

Menko Corner Colour Bromide Menko

by Ryan Laughton

Previously I looked at the R-series or Rikishi menko, the rare C-series or Circle menko, the classic M-series or Square menko, the H-series or Brick menko and the BB-series or “Black and White” bromides and cards. This month we’ll look at the BC-series or Color Bromide menko and cards. BC-series cards, from the 1930s and 40s, are small in number due to the expensive process involved of transferring real photographs onto paper. Postcard manufacturers had been doing this for years in the early 20th century, but postcards were relatively popular and expensive when compared to menko and bromides, so the costs could be recouped much easier. The only way to print color pictures onto paper at the time was by using the halftoning process, or actually hand-tinting black and white bromides by adding color. Hand-tinting was extremely time-consuming and expensive and halftoned BC-series sets from the 1930s and 1940s were vastly overshadowed by the very popular R-series menko.

The very first BC-series menko set was made in 1938 and depicts three yokozuna: Futabayama, Musashiyama and Tamanishiki, along with a dozen or so other

rikishi. This set was halftoned, but its quality for the late 1930s is exceptional. Some colors, like orange and yellow, are very vibrant, while the rest have a washed-out feel. The registration on the set is absolutely phenomenal and easily the highest quality of any BC-series sumo set ever made.



Picture 1 (BC381 Set) –
Sekiwake Taikyuzan –
1938 Color Bromide 4-5

There are a few known hand-tinted BC-series sets from the 1930s, but so few of these cards survive today that it is hard to tell exactly how many different sets there actually are. I’ve temporarily lumped them all into one set from 1939 until more show up.

BC-series cards really took off in the mid 1950s as the M-series sets

with cartoon drawings started to be phased out in favour of BC-series sets with actual rikishi photographs. This was due in part to kids starting to collect menko rather than destroy them in battle. Additionally, BC-series sets were cheaper to make because actual photographs could be used instead of paying an artist to design a whole set of cards. The first BC-series sets printed in the 1950s weren’t even available until 1956; a full 16 years after the last one was printed in the early 1940s!

The last BC-series set was printed in 1964 – the year that almost all other series of menko and cards stopped being printed, thus marking the end of the menko era. The last known BC-series set was the 1964 Marusho Tawara 5 set. This set has some nice menko of Yokozuna Taiho and Kashiwado along with up-and-coming Yokozuna Sadanoyama.

1950s BC-series of cards are easy to find on the market today and so the price tends to be fairly cheap when buying them. Some of the hardest menko to find, in fact, are the ones produced in the 1960s, because there weren’t so many made and menko popularity was nearing its end.



Picture 2 (c1939) –
Hand-tinted Color Bromide of
Yokozuna Futabayama



Picture 3 (BC562-2) – Maegashira
Dewaminato – 1956
Marukami Hoshi 6: Type 2



Picture 4 (BC641-3) – Yokozuna
Taiho – 1964 Marusho
Tawara 5 Set: Type 3