

BOOKS

Hope in winters of discontent.

E18

TASTE

Enjoy Buffalo sauce without the wings.

E5



FAITH

Four-legged, furry spiritual teachers.

E19



Photos by Kin Man Hui / Staff photographer

Joseph Cooper owns more than 10,000 vintage San Antonio postcards, including one of the Menger Hotel, left, that dates to 1898.

City history shown in postcards

Collector has 10,000 vintage views of the past, from grim to glorious

By René Guzman
STAFF WRITER

Joseph Cooper admits he has “a bad addiction” to the more picturesque history of San Antonio. That would explain the more than 10,000 vintage postcards he’s been collecting for decades.

For half his life, the 53-year-old Alamo City native has collected various 4-by-6-inch portraits of his hometown, some more than a century old. The postcards spotlight all sorts of landmarks in old San Antonio, from enduring hallmarks like the Alamo and the River Walk to gone-but-not-forgotten haunts like Joske’s and Playland Park.



Most of Cooper’s 10,000 vintage San Antonio postcards cover the early to late 1900s.

The dictionary calls it deltiology, the study and collection of postcards. You can just call it being puro postal for San Antonio.

He feels drawn to the images on the postcards. “I like the view into history,” said Cooper, who showcases his postcards on his website, The Alamo City (thealamocity.com).

But Cooper, who owns a company that provides loans to those who need legal services, also finds the messages written by the senders just as fascinating.

“The one thing I hear all the time is people look at them and (say), ‘I can’t believe the hand-

Postcards continues on E7

PANDEMIC PASSION PROJECTS

A song a day keeps pandemic boredom at bay

By Richard A. Marini
STAFF WRITER

U2’s “New Year’s Day” was an easy choice. So was Earth Wind and Fire’s “September” (“Do you remember/ the 21st night of September?”)

But Joey Liechty’s pandemic passion to find a song with a connection to every single day of the calendar year wasn’t always so simple. Sometimes he had to

stretch the definition of a “connection” for what he came to call The Song Calendar project. (You try finding a song that references Oct. 11.)

But he got them all, and since Jan. 1, he’s been releasing the list, one song a day, on his Twitter feed, @thesongcalendar. Because he wants the list to be usable for any year, he also included one for Leap Day, Feb. 29.

The 36-year-old software de-

veloper in Denton concedes the project doesn’t have any grand meaning, but he thinks music lovers will enjoy the daily releases and being introduced to musicians they may not have heard before.

A self-confessed collector (records, laser discs, mugs) who loves nothing more than compiling lists (triple homonyms: flu, flew, flue and by, buy, bye), Liechty said working on the

four-month project helped clear his mind and deal with being cooped up during the pandemic.

“It helped relieve stress because I enjoyed the process of doing the research and filling in the slots,” he said. “And I found it satisfying to have a creative outlet, if you want to call it that, of making this derivative work out of the work by these original artists.”

Songs continues on E3



Courtesy photo

Joey Liechty has compiled a calendar that matches a song to every single day of the year.

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OUR PICKS FOR WHAT TO SEE AND DO THIS WEEK

By Jim Kiest and Deborah Martin

STAFF WRITERS

1. Concert

With his '90s band the Refreshments and on his own, Arizona native **Roger Clyne** has built a loyal following with a big and buzzy blend of rock, country and mariachi on songs such as "Banditos," "Mekong" and "Americano." Those songs will get stripped down to their essence on this duet show with bandmate P.H. Naffah.

6 and 9 p.m. Friday, Sam's Burger Joint, 330 E. Grayson St. \$140-\$225 for tables for four and booths for five, samsburgerjoint.com.

2. Streaming

TV veterans Katherine Heigl ("Grey's Anatomy") and Sarah Chalke ("Scrubs") play lifelong friends Tully and Kate in the new series "**Firefly Lane**." It's based on the bestselling novel by Kristin Hannah that explores the friends' relationship over more than three decades in the Pacific Northwest. Available Wednesday on Netflix.

3. Book

Australian author Jane Harper is a rising star among crime fiction fans. Her debut novel, "The Dry," was made into a movie starring Eric Bana. Her latest, "**The Survivors**" (\$27.99, Flatiron Books), revolves around a murder at a high school reunion in a small town on the south coast of Tasmania. On sale Tuesday.

4. Classical music

The **San Antonio Symphony** will give its first performances in nearly a year this week. The program holds works by Beethoven, Schubert and George Walker. The limited seating will go to subscribers first, but there is a wait list in case some cannot attend.



Netflix

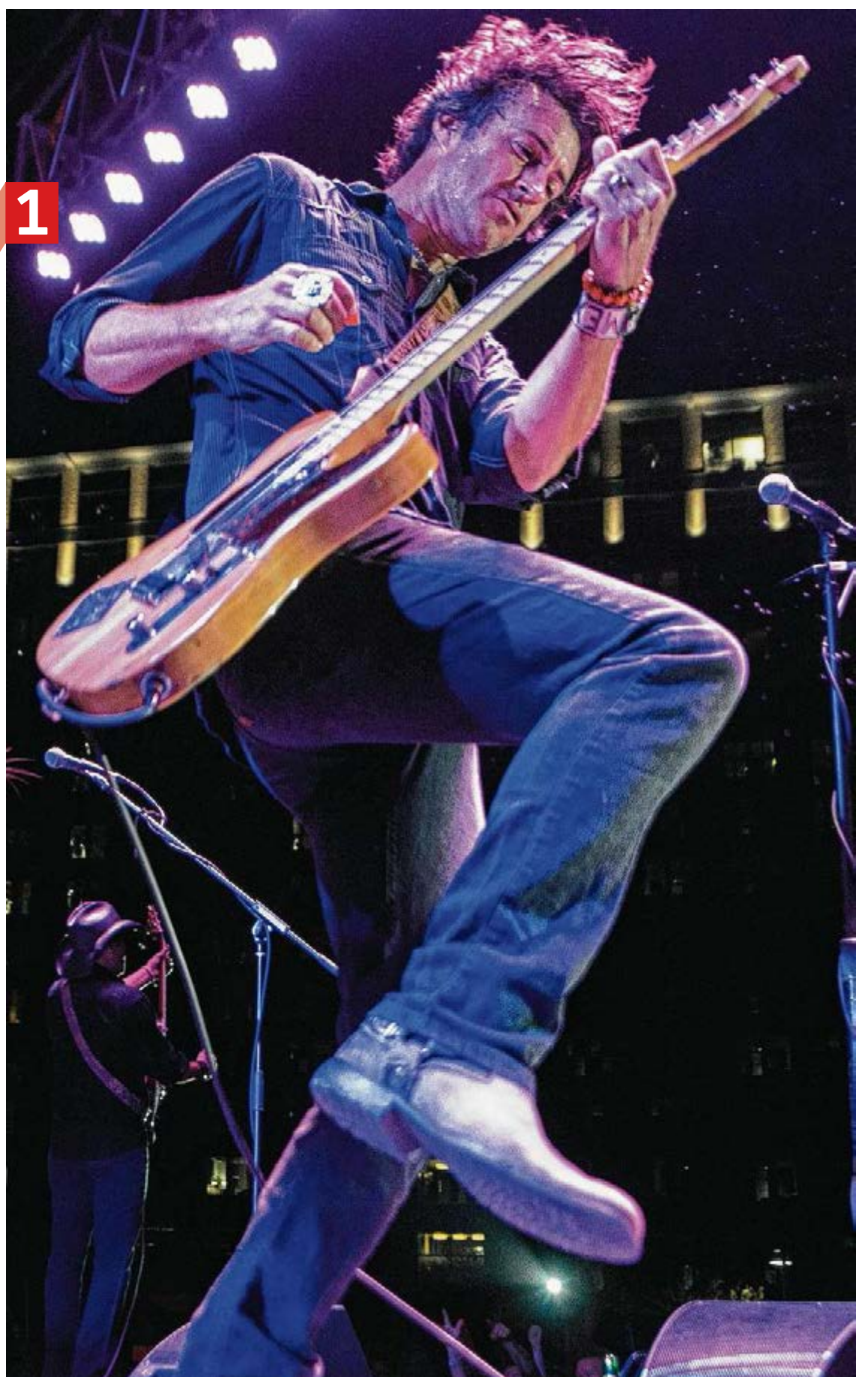
Email boxoffice@symphony.org to be placed on the wait list. 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, H-E-B Performance Hall, Tobin Center for the Performing Arts, 100 Auditorium Circle. Info, sasymphony.org.

5. Movie

Texas music legends Townes Van Zandt and Guy Clark are featured in the rarely seen 1976 documentary "**Heartworn Highways**," director James Szalapski's chronicle of the dawn of outlaw country. The newly re-released movie also features an appearance by a teenage Steve Earle. Available to rent Friday via kinomarquee.com.

6. Theater

The Wimberley Players theater is resuming live performances, with the option of watching at the theater or via a livestream. First up is "**The Gin Game**," starring the gifted real-life couple Linda Ford and Michael Howard as a pair who meet in a nursing home and pass the time playing cards. Opens Friday. 7:30 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays and 2:30 p.m. Sundays through Feb. 14, Wimberley Players, 450 Old Kyle Road, Wimberley. \$18 to \$22 for in-person performance or streaming, wimberleyplayers.org.



Courtesy image

POSTCARDS

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writing. It's so beautiful.' We've lost that personal connection, that someone took the time to buy a card, write it, put a stamp on it and put it in a mailbox. As opposed to just taking a picture and sending it out somewhere."

Cooper noted that postcards also offer insights into the human condition you just don't get on social media.

"Just thinking about what that person was doing when they wrote it, and who it went to," Cooper said. "You'll see a run of cards or a collection of cards that were sent between a grandfather and his grandson over the years. And somebody held on to those. Just the life story. It's very, very real."

The majority of Cooper's postcards capture San Antonio from the early to late 1900s, showcasing the city's cultural heritage and diversity. Some are written in Spanish and German. And plenty highlight the city's signature celebrations, such as HemisFair '68 and so many Fiesta floats and horse-drawn carriages from across the decades.

One of the oldest postcards in Cooper's collection, the "Souvenir of San Antonio," is an 1899-postmarked card with colorful illustrations of the Alamo, Mission Concepcion and Mission San José, which was printed in Germany the year prior.

The message itself has just as much historical significance. Arthur Guenther, the son of flour mill magnate C.H. Guenther, sent the postcard to his own son Hillmar in Germany to add to his own postcard collection.

The "Souvenir" card connected Cooper with Richard Eisenhour, a fellow postcard buff at the State Preservation Board in Austin, after Cooper



Kin Man Hui / Staff photographer

Joseph Cooper also posts some of his 10,000 San Antonio postcards on his website, thealamocity.com.

outbid Eisenhour on the postcard on eBay. Eisenhour hounded the seller to connect him with the guy who beat him, and after he was successful, the two became friends.

"It's the earliest known Texas tourist postcard," Eisenhour said of the "Souvenir" card. "And Joseph has it."

Eisenhour has collected postcards for more than 40 years. He's currently working on a book about Texas' earliest postcards, a good portion of which involves Cooper's postcards.

"Comprehensive. That's the word (for Cooper's collection)," Eisenhour said. "It's extremely diverse."

On the lighter side is a pair of postcards with black-and-white photos of conjoined twins Violet and Daisy Hilton, who were billed as the San Antonio Siamese Twins in 1920s vaudeville.

One is an autographed, unmailed postcard of the sisters holding saxophones. Cooper has no

idea which sister signed it, "Sincerely yours Daisy & Violet Hilton," on the back.

The other postcard features the sisters in dresses with big bows in their hair. Although it was never mailed, the message on the back, dated Sept. 20, 1922, is addressed to Grace and Irene.

There's no signature, but the writer seemed to know a lot about the Hiltons, reporting that the sisters' mother had died, and that a "very nice appearing lady" was now caring for them. The message also reports that the twins "would not want to be separated if that were possible."

On the grimmer end is a postcard with a photo of a dead horse slumped on the sidewalk of a Crockett Street storefront, a victim of the 1921 flood that swept through downtown San Antonio. A note underneath the image reads, "Horse pulled out of basement."

Even creepier than the image, the postcard was

sent unsigned, with no message to Miss Hortense Fox in Richmond, Va., sometime in the 1920s (the last digit on the postmark is missing.)

It's one of several postcards in Cooper's collection with images from the devastating 1913 and 1921 San Antonio floods.

And talk about your postcards from the edge. Some grim black-and-white photo postcards show the aftermath of the 1913 and 1921 floods that swept through downtown San Antonio. Most of these stark images feature devastated roadways and shell-shocked citizens wading through knee-high water.

Cooper safeguards these lithographic and chrome-colored wonders in clear plastic sleeves, most of them filed in small steel cabinets made for index cards, in a secure closet in an undisclosed location. Others fill boxes at his Shavano Park home, where his wife, Catherine, cheers on his collecting.

Cooper's collection started 25 years ago, when he came across a scrapbook of old San Antonio postcards at the City-Wide Vintage Sale in Austin. That find soon led to postcard shows, then dealer contacts.

"Way before eBay," Cooper said.

Now in addition to eBay, Cooper relies on "pickers," basically three or four dealers and a couple of individuals who scour estate sales for postcards and other relics to flip on the secondary market. He also gets a helping hand from his wife.

"I end up finding more postcards for him than he does," wife Catherine said. "That's my go-to gift. I just kind of comb everywhere. And that's fun for me. I love that."

Postcards as we know them today date back to 1861, when Congress passed an act that allowed privately printed cards to be mailed.

Postcards didn't really take off until the 1890s,

when souvenir postal cards, considered the first picture postcards, showed up at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 and at other expos.

Stamped postcards peaked in 1990 with more than 2.8 billion mailed, according to the United States Postal Service. Then as email usage grew, mailing postcards declined. By the end of 2019, the most recent figures by the USPS, Americans mailed only 563 million stamped cards and postcards combined.

As for how much those postcards of yesteryear sell for today, expect small prices to match that small correspondence.

The earliest picture postcards, which date back to the 1890s, may sell for around \$25 each. Most postcards from the early-1900s heyday may ring up around \$5 to \$10 each.

The most Cooper ever paid for a postcard was \$175, though he was willing to bid up to \$1,500 on eBay for that 1899 "Souvenir of San Antonio" postcard. He ended up getting it for just \$2.

Cooper is still deciding on an inheritance plan for the collection. His two adult sons are safe from burden, and Cooper said Eisenhour is begging him to share his collection with the state archives.

"I don't know," Cooper said. "I'd love to see it stay in San Antonio."

In the meantime, Cooper plans to just keep collecting postcards of the San Antonio that used to be, all while still sending postcards from anywhere else he and his wife travel. "To get something that's written by a person or a loved one is still significant," Cooper said. "It's a lot of fun."

And like so many other saved postcards from the past, they're bound to make future collectors wish they were there, too.

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