

The Fickle Soul Of The Collector

I happened to be perusing an old issue of Long Beach Matchcover Club's *Matchcover Beachcomber* (April, 1979), and I was struck by what then editor Esther Rancier termed "Patterns of Collecting Change." She pointed out that the history of collecting matchcovers was basically a pattern of changing collector preferences that she divided more or less into decades.

In the 1930s, collectors were "totally absorbed" in Group I covers. Today, they've become so scarce and are in such demand that only the connoisseur collectors seriously go after them.

Much of the 1940s was dominated by collector interest in Universal's Royal Flash covers, Esther noted. By the late 1940s, and through the early 1950s, though, Hotels had become the most popular category.

In the early 1950s, Universal introduced its Jewelite and Lion brought out the Contour, and collectors jumped on these speciality collections. By 1960, however, Universal's beautiful Matchorama was the "cover of choice."

By the mid-1960s, Universal's Jewel claimed collectors' attention, and, as the 1960s ended, Universal's Cameo and Foilite covers vied for the number one spot.

Of course, as Esther noted, there were occasional shorter spikes of special interest. The 1939-40 and 1964-65 New York World Fairs produced intense collecting spates, for example.

By the mid-1970s, the theme, of course, was Bicentennial, but that proved to be fairly short-lived as a category of widespread interest, as did the topic of Esther's last observation...namely that the other hot category of the period would prove to be Space covers. Noting that they were in short supply, she predicted that their value would be "sky-high" by the 1990's. Looking back via our hindsight today, we can see that that didn't

happen. There were so few different Space covers issued, and so many of the few that were, that the Space category never really got off the ground in terms of a sustained-interest area of collecting.

Well, continuing Esther's train of thought, let's see what's happened in the last two decades. The first half of the 1980s were dominated by Holiday Inns, with Ken Riggs' astounding collection of over 23,000 serving as the shining example to all other collectors. American Ace boxes and Fancies were also very hot—Jewelites, Cameos, Uniglos, Foilites, etc. By the mid 1980s, however, with more and more Holiday Inns using generic Nationals, and the demise of Universal (and, thus, the end of all of those great Universal Fancies), interest in these categories became less wide spread.

By 1987, Universal, Lion, Ohio, and most of the traditional manufacturers with which the hobby had grown up with had disappeared amidst the collapse and restructuring of the American match industry. At the same time, the anti-smoking campaigns were in full swing across the country, disposable lighters had become commonplace, and the availability of matchbooks within the society significantly dwindled. Not surprisingly, collectors' focus on specific categories changed, as well.

For most of the 1990s, right up to the present, the two hottest categories have been the areas which have continued, in spite of contrary trends everywhere else, to be both plentiful and available—Casinos and Tobacco. Hence, the Casino Club was formed in 1994, and the Tobacco Club was founded in 1997.

Not to be left out, I should mention that interest in the Girlie category has remained consistently high (cited as the most-requested category in last year's collector survey [*RMS Bulletin, Sep/Oct 2000*], but that's a limited, specialized category.

What's in the future? Stay tuned for next issue's "Where does the hobby go from here?"