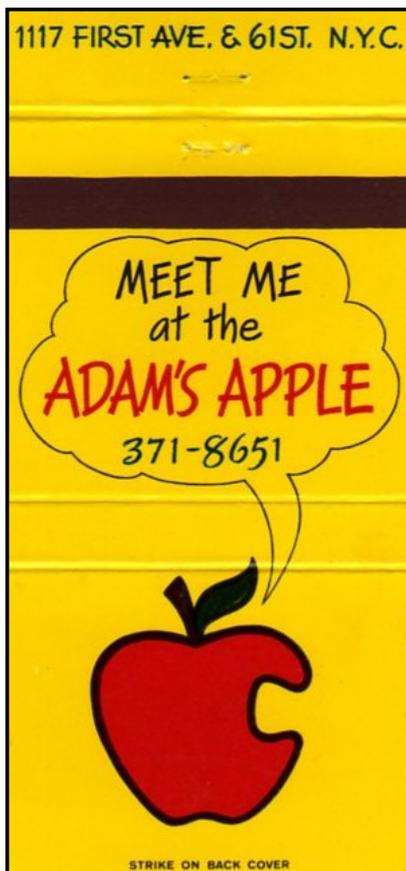


Collecting The Big Apple

by
Les Good



[Ed. There are a number of collectors who collect specific cities, the bigger ones. But it's more than big cities. Otherwise, people would be collecting places like Detroit, Pittsburgh, Chicago. No, it's big cities with character [Sorry Detroit, Pittsburgh, Chicago...Well, maybe Chicago's ify]—cities like Washington, DC; New Orleans; San Francisco, and...the biggest apple of them all...New York City.

What's really interesting about collecting a specific city is that a good collection can chronicle the growth and development of that city—its landmarks, its great hotels, its now forgotten places of interest. Of course, it helps if the collector is from that city. Then all the covers are that much more meaningful. But, the special attraction that these particular cities have is that they're at least somewhat familiar even to non-natives, because of their...character.

And what city has the most character of all? New York City! And it's the biggest. And it's the most important, historically. And for the last 100 years or so it's just been cranking out cover after cover—thousands and thousands!—Hotels (some of the most famous in the world), motels, restaurants of every make and description, famous places by the score, World's Fairs, Port Authorities, VIPs, and on and on.

Not enough? New York and its surrounding environs was also the headquarters of many of the most popularly collected old, continued on p.3

defunct manufacturers—Advertizit, Atlas, Empire, Hercules, Imprint Book Match, Jersey, Lion, Manhattan, Merit, National, Ownname, Rex, Royal, Union, Unit, and United Engineering Corp. How's that for a list! That means that many, if not most, of those companies' covers are from NYC locations. So, there are plenty of sought-after oldies in a NYC collection, plus lots of DQ's, Safety Firsts, and old Federals.

Still not enough? How about variety? All types and all sizes, from Midgets to Giants, from die-cuts to boxes, from barrels to Pull-Quicks to Features. They're all here. But, to my way of thinking, it's actually the run-of-the-mill covers that really show what New York City has been all about—all the little mom and pop businesses, the ethnic restaurants, Frank's Barber Shop on West 57th St., Times Square, Central Park, and all the rest.

That being said, still one can't ignore New York City's covers from its more outstanding attractions—The Waldorf=Astoria, the United Nations, Radio City Music Hall, The Copacabana, Luchow's, Delmonico's, The Ritz-Carlton, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and much more. (Are there any covers from the Statue of Liberty? Probably not, but I have it on good authority that there are some small businesses on the island—a snack stand, a souvenir shop, etc, so maybe...)

Les Good, NY, has the biggest NYC collection that I know of, so who better to write this article?!]

New York City, “THE BIG APPLE!” To many, the most exciting city in the world; the financial capital; the center of the arts and culture’ the Fashion District; the Theatre District; home to famous colleges and universities, hospitals...To others, noisy, busy, impersonal. Some even “hate” the City! (hate that word!)

Story: When I co-chaired the 1995 RMS Convention, Empire Matchcover Club’s 50th Anniversary, I asked an old-timer collector, “Are you coming to our convention?” “No,” he said. “Why?” I asked. “Because I hate New York City.” he exclaimed. Again I asked, “When were you last in New York?” “Never,” he replied. Go figure!

New York City has “matches, matches, matches”...from airports, bars, Chinese restaurants, drug stores, expositions, French restaurants, grocery stores, hotels...but, alas, no casinos!

I collect New York City covers and boxes. At last count, 29,754...and still counting! I started collecting in 1956 when I returned from California, where I had started collecting matchcovers in 1952. Why NYC? ‘Cause I live in New York City, and why not? The City, to me, has the most intriguing and interesting covers—and the most intriguing and interesting stories and history. So many restaurants and hotels have changed names, locations, cover designs, telephone numbers, manumarks, area codes, zip codes, and, of course, front-strikers to back-strikers. Many have simply gone out of business, sadly, but they all leave fond memories.

I have been asked how I “deal” with such a collection. I file my covers in three-ring binders from A-Z. By size, starting with Giants, then 40-strikes, Jewels and Jewelites, 30-strikes, 20-strikes, 12’s, 10s, and finally Midgets. All front-strikers come first, and then back-strikers. I start with Restaurants, then Hotels, Banks, and finally the commercial and odd covers.

This city offers the most well-known and popular locations. The location that I have the most covers from is the Stork Club, with 34 issues. The covers feature a white stork with a top hat on a 20-strike black cover. There are some with different text, but the main difference is the message on the inside.

Many advertise the 1939 New York World's Fair. Another large group of covers come from the Savarin Restaurants; I have 23 of those. Sadly, Savarin went out of business years ago. Then, there Sardi's, in the Theatre District; it's still going strong and issuing new covers. Longchamps is out of business, but its first appearance was in the Empire State Building, with 12 later locations in the City. Leon & Eddie's has a popular 10-cover panorama set which is sometimes seen at auctions.

A fellow collector suggested I separate out the business covers. I looked at him in horror and amazement.

I have many 'favorites', but the Palm Restaurant stands out. The original is located on Second Avenue, off the corner of East 45th Street. I moved into the neighborhood in 1970 and immediately went to 'the Palm' for dinner. The food was, and still is, fabulous, as are the prices. Hey, you get what you pay for! The restaurant is housed in a four-story 'brownstone' and opened in 1926 as a speakeasy. I am told it had many notorious and famous customers. Soon after, the Palm expanded by adding another restaurant directly across the street, naming it 'Palm II'. Of course, I picked up a matchcover, a simply blue and white 30-strike with no artwork.

Through the years, the Palm added similar covers with minor changes, so now I have five from the original location. Then, a few years ago, I heard that new locations were opening, and I rushed off to see what was what. Voila! Now I have a 40-strike picturing an artist's rendering of the original building and adjacent structures. As each new location opened, a new 40-strike appeared with the same front but new addresses on the inside. Currently, I have 12 different issues...and more to be added, I hear!

Another interesting location is Pete's Tavern, on Irving Place, off East 18th Street. It's rather famous, as it is featured with "The Tavern O'Henry Made Famous". O'Henry, of course, was a famed short-story writer (1862-1910) who frequented the tavern and imbibed in some quantity.

This city is a Pandora's Box of memories—the fabled names, locations, many musical, many odd, but all interesting! The different ethnic foods, menus, smells, tastes...and matchcovers.

We mourn the passing of the matchcover, but not true! As I Travel the City, I am still picking up a new cover or box here and there. Also, many of you still send me covers and boxes from New York City. Even considering the size of my collection, I am still able to add to my 'stash'...I even came home from the last convention in Hagerstown with 68 new additions.

Advice: Don't just give up! The covers are out there, so go get 'em...and don't forget me!

[Ed...And that's a pretty good summary of why I collect NYC, myself!]

