

Collecting Colleges and Universities

by
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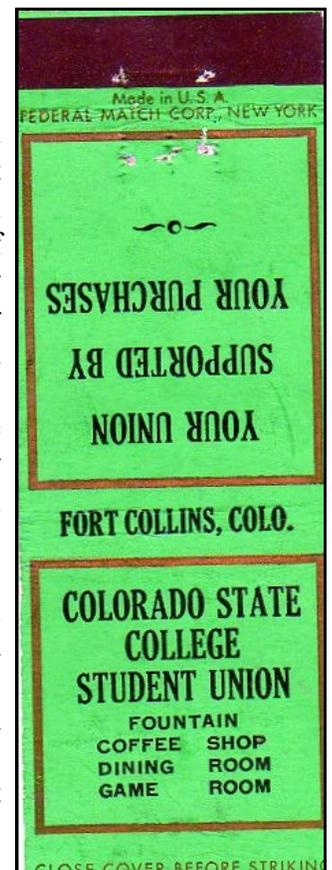
This has traditionally been one of the hobby's favorite categories, and it still is, judging from the survey that was featured in our Sep/Oct 2000 issue, where it was in the top 20 most frequently requested categories. And, it's a nice, large category, as well.

First, one of the few hard and fast rules in this category is that only higher academic institutions qualify (no barber colleges, business colleges, beauty colleges, etc.). Basically, it's junior colleges and four-year colleges and universities.



To the hobby novice, it might come as something of a surprise that academic institutions issued matchbooks at all, but, in fact, this is a category whose covers number in the thousands. It should be noted, however, that not all of these covers have been actually issued by the college or university. Some of them come from private stores or restaurants on campus; some originate from alumni associations; some come from specialized departments, such as the sports program, the campus book store, or the student union. But that's no different than many other categories. Most National Park covers, for example, certainly aren't issued by the Park Service.

Colleges and universities, themselves, go way back in recorded history. Although some historians would identify Plato's Academy in Ancient Athens (c. 387 BC) as the first university, the Moslem academic institution for higher learning set up in Cairo, Egypt, c. 1000 AD, would probably be the first that looked anything like what we would normally expect of a university today.



Colleges, on the other hand, actually came after the universities, even though we now tend to see colleges as stepping stones to universities. Colleges started as endowed residence halls for university scholars and eventually absorbed much of the university's activities. The first college appears in 12th century Paris, but it was in England that it became the principal center of learning, with the university serving mainly to examine candidates and confer degrees. Thus, today, one of the main differences is that normally only the latter can award doctorates.

The University of Mexico is the oldest in the New World (1551), while the earliest in America is Harvard (1636). Interestingly enough, all of the early American colleges and universities were established as religious schools (Harvard was Puritan; William and Mary was Anglican; Yale was Congregationalist; Princeton was New Lights Presbyterian; etc.). Not surprising, since the early European colleges and universities also started out as religious schools.

Well, while you'd be hard put to find a 17th century Harvard cover, collegiate matchcovers certainly go back early enough in the history of the matchbook, itself. From the 1920s on, covers from colleges and universities can hold their own with any of their peers within the hobby.

Variety is a keynote in this category. Here, you'll find covers (and boxes) in all shapes, sizes, and types, all the way from Midgets and Ten-Strikes to Giants and Souvenirs. You'll find lots of conjunctives here, as well: Indians, Animals, Crests, Fraternities, Tall Ships, Fancies, Christmas, Full-lengths, Military, and the list goes on and on.....Military? Yes, during World War II, many campuses were associated with military schools, training units, etc.

And, we certainly don't want to miss pointing out that many of these covers are dated! Some celebrate the anniversary of the institution, but most are associated with team schedules. The late Bob Oliver and Harry Branchaud, especially, had some beautiful dated 1920s and 1930s specimens.

Let's not forget Foreign covers in this category, while we're at it. There's a good number of covers from Canadian colleges and universities, and along the way you may pick up a few English and Australian covers. Anything else is by stroke of luck only.

It was easy to put together a sizeable collection in this category. The covers were plentiful and available, although few will get to the 3,000 different covers that one collector had in 1987. Now, who knows? There is no listing of US College and University covers, although there is an index of US Colleges and Universities that can be used as a checklist. Claude Aube, Canada, was listing Canadian Colleges and Universities in 1985, but I don't know the current status of that listing.

