

Love Those Elks!

by
Mike Prero

Since its founding on February 16, 1868, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks (BPOE) has been recognized by its elk logo, representing a distinctively American, intensely patriotic, family-oriented organization subscribing to the cardinal principles of "Charity, Justice, Brotherly Love and Fidelity." The 15 Founders of the BPOE desired a readily identifiable creature of stature, indigenous to America. Eight members voted to adopt the elk, seven favored the buffalo.

Although the original Elks were actors and entertainers, members of other professions soon joined the organization. Today's Elks represent just about the full spectrum of occupations in America. Throughout the course of the Order's history, many celebrities from the entertainment field, business and public service have been Brother Elks.

Presidents Warren G. Harding, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman and John F. Kennedy were all Elks. Former President Gerald Ford belongs to Grand Rapids Lodge No. 48, where his father served two terms as Exalted Ruler. Of course, many members of Congress have been Elks, too. Former Speakers of the House Tip O'Neill, Carl Albert, John McCormick and Sam Rayburn all belonged to the fraternity. Former Speaker Tom Foley belongs to Spokane, Washington, Lodge. And the late Hale Boggs of Louisiana was also an

General John "Blackjack" Pershing, American general and



hero of the First World War, hailed from New York Lodge No. 1 as a lifelong member. 70,000 Elks served in the First World War; 1,000 gave their lives in the service of their country. 100,000 Elks served in the Second World War, over 1,600 made the supreme sacrifice for American freedom.

Entertainers Lawrence Welk, Will Rogers, Jack Benny and Andy Devine were Brother Elks, too. Devine served as Exalted Ruler of San Fernando Lodge No. 1539. And Clint Eastwood is a member of Monterey Lodge No. 1285. "Buffalo Bill," was also an Elk. From the sports world, the Order has counted among its members the likes of Vince Lombardi, Casey Stengel, Mickey Mantle, Whitey Ford and Jim Finks.

From the original organization of the Elks, came extensions. The Improved Benevolent Protective Order of the Elks of the World (IBPOEW), was formed in 1898 in Cincinnati, Ohio by B.F. Howard and Arthur J. Riggs, a Pullman porter. They had been denied membership in the all-white BPOE and they were determined to form an organization that granted membership to all qualified individuals without regard to race, creed, or ethnicity. In 1918, the BPOE officially ended its opposition to the IBPOEW. The period of inter-fraternal strife was rendered closed. Its women's organization, the Daughters of the IBPOEW, is organized in units called "temples." The IBPOEW presently has approximately 450,000 members in Lodges throughout the U.S.A. and the Caribbean, and also wear fezzes as part of their regalia.

Founded on September 26, 1912 and incorporated under a special Dominion of Canada Charter. The first lodge of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of Canada was established in Vancouver, BC. The Elks is the largest all-Canadian fraternal organization in Canada. Then, a group of women of Omaha, Nebraska, wives of Elks, laid the foundations for the B.P.O. Does, on February 12, 1921, and their lodges are called "Droves". [<http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/masonicmuseum/fraternalism/elks.htm>]

With all that history, and all those lodges, Elks covers abound, not surprisingly. I currently have some 5,600 in my collection, and I believe John Bachochin has about that many, as well. Although there is no listing of Elks covers, themselves, there are three different listings within the hobby of lodge numbers and locations. Mary Ross originally did a listing spanning 1-2419; John Williams has a later one that goes to 2787; and John Bachochin has extended that to 2850. On the official Elks web site (<http://www.elks.org>), there is a listing that goes to 2850, as well. And, it has the defunct lodges marked, which would be helpful to many collectors. Out of the total of 2,850, this latter listing indicates that there are currently 2,115 active lodges as of Dec. 2006.

The actual covers that exist are, predictably, mostly stock design covers, usually have the lodge number and location on the front panel and the familiar Elks logo on the back panel. The inside may or may not be blank. Even so, there are several long-running stock designs to be seen, and even a few similar to the VFW cover pictured on p. 22, where the Elks, for whatever reason, share cover space with another fraternal organization. Additionally, there are currently nine different Elks error covers listed on the Error Listing.

Even with all of the stock designs, there is still a lot of variety to be seen in an Elks collection. Size-wise, they run from 10's-40's, with the vast majority being 20-strikes. I have two Perfect 36's, as well. I don't believe I've ever seen any Jewels or Jewelites, here. Also, as one would expect, the great majority of all these covers are front-strikes.

With so many covers, there are lots of conjunctives to be seen, and appreciated—Beer, Royal Flash,

Full-length, Christmas, Dated, World War II Patriotics, Mirro-Gloss, Sets (some Girlie), and a few Fancies, just to name some. There are very few of the Fancies. As a general rule, you'll only see Fancies rarely—an occasional Uniglo or Cameo, an even rarer Foilite/Foilite-type. Out of some 5,600 covers, I could probably count the Matchoramas on one hand, and I don't remember ever even seeing or hearing of an Elk Jewel or Jewelite [no watch someone produce several!]

The manumarks to be seen here are predictable. Generally, the pre-1960's covers show the manumarks of the major manufacturers, and afterwards, especially, beginning in the 1980's, the majority are from local 'jobbers' (i.e. 'Bob Smith Ad. Spec. Co.'). The pre-1960's covers are dominated especially by Monarch, Superior, and Match Corp., but it looks as if all the major names had a shot at issuing at least some Elks covers. As for early 'Golden Oldies', my listings of Oldies currently show...

-Advance Match & Prtg:	14	-Inter-State Press:	3	Surprisingly, and disappointingly, I've never come across any <i>really</i> old Elks covers...No Diamond Match, no Diamond Approved No. 7...nothing like that. It raises the question of when the first Elks cover was issued. The earliest that I've run across are the Lion Safety-Firsts, c. 1923.
-All-Trades:	1	-Jersey Match Co.:	1	
-Albert Pick:	2	-Kaeser & Blair:	12	
-American Match & Prtg.:	4	-Lion Safety-First:	10	
-Arrow Match Co.:	1	-Manhattan Match Co.:	1	
-Chicago Match Co.:	9	-Maryland Match Co. (ws):	3	
-Cincinnati Match Co.:	1	-Match Corp. (ws):	25	
-Crown Match Co.:	10	-Merchants Industries:	10	
-DQ:	16	-Standard Match Corp.:	1	
-E. I. Plottle:	1	-Star Match Co.:	4	
-Federal Match Corp.:	35	-Willens & Co.:	1	What was going on, match-wise, in the previous 55 years? <i>Any input?</i>
-Green Hat:	1			

