

A Book Of

[Note: This 'essay', dated January 1981 and apparently attached to an album of 'junk' covers, was written by Win Lang, who was the editor for Golden Orange MC, in Southern California, for many years, and who passed away a few years after I had entered the hobby in the early 1980s. Janet Johnk, CA, happened to find a copy of this and forwarded it to me some time ago. Reading over it, it strikes me as being especially poignant for several reasons—because of Win's introduction, because of the discussion of nostalgia as a major impetus for collecting, and because of our present economic circumstances. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did....The Ed]

The Purpose of this Particular Album: With Pertinent Notes:

To the Collector of the Future: (Who, hopefully, will be reading this sometime in the not too distant future, after my demise. [Or, as the lexicon of the day covered in this album, after I “croaked”, “bit the dust”, “took the six foot dive”, or “put on the wooden overcoat”.])

You are perhaps wondering why a serious collector kept all of this old “junk”, whose value is very questionable. There are several reasons:

1. Nostalgia.

2. It is interesting to note the advertising of that time, both in content and in quality.

3. It is a bit of living history. Not history that you read in the history books, which is too often an assembly of facts, but the little things that the person who lived in this period knew and experienced. And it is a period, an era, a time zone all of its own...none other like it has or ever will again occur. Only one who was a living part of this time can chronicle the every day events that happened to the every day person, or as we then dubbed it, “the man on the street”. Match covers bring back memories and are a proof of these little things.

“The man on the street” he too often literally was! Unemployment was a way of life, and for those who tired of hanging around the local pool halls or drug stores, there was the street—the open road. Men “rode the rods”...that is, empty freight cars, and railroad ‘dicks’ (detectives) obligingly failed to see them, whenever they could do so. They lived in jungles, called “Hooverilles”, shacks made of tin and cardboard and packing crates.

They were not to be confused with “Hoboes”, or professional wanderers, who ignored them, refused to associate with them. Indeed, the duly elected “King of the ‘Bos” was a national figure.

We had passed thru the “Roaring twenties”, an insane decade when all America lived on borrowed time, borrowed money, borrowed credit. Virtually everyone was a millionaire—on paper. The “flapper” was the liberated woman of the day, who actually dared to appear in public wearing “rouge”, smoking cigarettes, her hair “Marcelled”, not to forget the “rolled stockings”, exposing bare knees... older women called her a “hussy”.

When the “Great Depression” started with the crash of the stock market in October, 1929...and lasted until the threat of World War II put everyone to work...times were not bad—they were simply A Time of Survival.

As we look at these lowly match covers we see many things:

Memories: I

1. The products offered for sale.
2. The prices we paid for them.
3. The clothing styles of the times.
4. The transportation modes and styles of the time.
5. How we were amused and entertained.
6. The entertainment, business, political leaders of that day.

Perhaps of most importance to the cover collector, the progress of the book match.

The book match made its initial impact, advertising-wise, when it went “national” in 1925; it perhaps climaxed in the years 1942-1944, when Uncle Sam used it to proclaim the war effort in every way—wand with every “patriotic” business with something to sell cashing in on the same theme.

Now, to the album itself...and the “pertinent notes”:

Razor blade covers: Only to show how many long gone brands then existed, and the flood of cover advertising.

The same identical thing with the “Nationals”; all were then nationally advertised products, household words. Some of their claims were hilarious, but we knew no advertising limits then. Perhaps 10% of these Name Brands are with us now, 50 years later.

You will find no defunct match companies, here...they are in other albums...but many a MM (manufacturer’s mark) went out of business in that period; many were absorbed into (or forced into) a conglomerate—perhaps the first of these accepted business monsters—the Universal Match Co.

You will find no autos of that time, as they too are in other albums; proud names, long out of business, such as Packard, Hupp, Hudson, Marmon, and many others, which went under in this period.

No—you will find here memories of the little things, the little people.

Claudette Colbert and Fred MacMurray, in the movie version of “The Egg and I”, was 15 cents well spent, as was Greer Garson and Walter Pidgeon in “Mrs. Miniver”.

If you had \$1.25...and many of us did not...there was the great stage of the day. “Life with Father”; “The Passing Show”; “The Blackguard”; “Banjo Eyes”. The Barrymores—Ethel, Lionel, and John; Eddie Cantor; Al Jolson—you will find them all here.

We didn’t have T.V., but we had radio! We had “Amos and Andy” (and the “Fresh Air Taxi”); “This is Magic”; “The People’s Rally”; “The Shadow”; we had Ted Husing, and Red Barber, and Fred Hoy, and we had Jack Benny, and Fred Allen.

You wonder about men’s hats? In that time, this was a vital industry. Every man wore a hat. True, the derby had passed on ; the felt had replaced it. We had one magic day, each year, in the spring—and on that one certain day, regardless of temperature or weather, off came the felt hat—on went the straw hat!

[the conclusion in our next issue]