

The Plight of the Fancies

They're beautiful! They're colorful! They're works of art!....And they're unwanted! Cameos, Uniglos, Filigrees, Matchoramas, Foilites...each and every one a delight to the eye. They were something different; they made you sit up and take notice amidst all those hum-drum covers you were sorting through; but, like so many other categories over the years, they finally met their Waterloo. And why? I can't tell you. I don't know.

When I came into the hobby in the early 1980s, the Fancies were at their peak of popularity. They were widely collected, widely wanted. My traders requested them; they brought respectable prices at the auctions; and they commanded respect, as covers go. Now, none of my traders request them; they bring junk prices at the auctions; and many look upon them with disdain as 'run-of-the-mill' material. But they certainly *aren't* run-of-the-mill!

What happened? The covers certainly didn't change! Something else did. True, interest in the Fancies plummeted just after Universal stopped production in 1987; and, true, Universal was the company that made most of the Fancies; but, why would that have changed collector interest?

Well, here's a theory. If one looks back across the years of the hobby, it becomes readily apparent that collector interest has, from time to time, been, shall we say...fickle. A good example that comes to mind is Holiday Inns. Once, they, too, enjoyed a golden age of sorts. For most of the 1980s, they were hot...*really* hot!—Especially the non-stock issues. Then the non-smoking campaigns took hold, the market changed, and Holiday Inns started going to Nationals, and finally none. And that's when the interest dropped off.

On the other hand, Casinos, in the early 1980s, was a pretty 'blah' category. In one of my articles of the time, I even referred to them as the 'black sheep' of the hobby! Then, later, as availability of other covers dropped off and casinos began popping up all over the country (and issuing attractive covers), interest in Casinos skyrocketed. Ergo, the Casino Club forms in 1994 and the Mar/Apr 2007 *RMS Bulletin* Insta-Poll identifies Casinos as the most popular single category.

A similar scenario can be seen with Tobacco covers. D.D. Bean came out with its several very slick 'Joe Camel' sets in the early 1990s, and then the Camel 30-strike singles appeared, and *voilà!* Tobacco becomes a hot category! [*Whether Tobacco will be able to maintain this popularity as the majority of tobacco covers shift from the US to Europe and Asia remains to be seen*]

So, a trend becomes readily apparent. Collector interest is drawn to what's available at the time. Now, there are many categories which are able to transcend this trend—Oldies, 'pet' categories, and the like—but, there, there are other interest factors at work.

Of course, for my theory to be correct, it would more or less mean that the interest in Fancies didn't lie in their beauty, but simply in their availability. When they were still in production, collectors were interested; when they were no longer being produced, no collector interest. Simple!

And yet, *How can that be?!!* They're soooo attractive! *Can* collector interest be so...dare I say... shallow? Perhaps that's why so many collectors left the hobby when new covers became harder to get. They weren't into collecting...they were into *easy*.

Fancies are still there....Where's the interest?