

Collecting Casinos

by
Joe DeGennaro

Wow, where do I begin? Collecting Casinos is one of the most popular categories in our hobby, and, after restaurants, hotels and banks, one of the largest and certainly, I think, the most interesting.

I started accumulating casinos matches over forty years ago, long before I became a true matchcover collector. As part of my job I used to travel to Las Vegas and Reno at least once a year. My sister collected matches (actually accumulated them) and I always picked them up for her where ever I went. I figured if I could pick up one I'd also pick up another as a souvenir for myself. Those were the days when you could walk right off the Strip into the casinos without a long trek and matches were so easily accessible that you needed a shopping bag to carry all that you could carry. I remember one place that had a caddy on top of every slot machine. Unfortunately this overabundance of covers made them undesirable since most people who collected them already had what was available and likely had quite a few of each. When I first got into the hobby, I noticed that traders would specifically say "No Nevada Casinos" on there want lists since they would constantly be getting the same covers over and over. Just to give you an idea of how many were out there, when I attended my first (and, sadly, only) AMCAL one of the west coast collectors invited me to his room where he had boxes and boxes of casinos covers laid out in alphabetical order and told me to help myself. Without exaggeration I must have left his room with over 500 covers and that's only because I skipped over the ones I knew I already had.



Three decades ago, gambling was legal in only three states. Today, every state with the except Hawaii and Utah has some form of legalized gaming, and I've heard that at least 25 states are considering expanding their casinos and gaming options. When casinos first started to pop up in other parts of the country like Atlantic City, Colorado, Louisiana, South Dakota and many other states, there

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was a sudden burst of new interest in casino covers. These new ventures saw the value of matches as advertising tools and the hobby had a wonderful new source of covers and boxes. Being only a three hour drive from Atlantic City I made regular trips down there and always came away with a wonderful array of matches. I found the best way to get them in the bars was to stand by the waitress station and there would always be caddies just sitting there for the taking as long as you were careful. Resorts, which was one of the first to open, had 12 different covers at one time, their own hotel & casino cover plus one for every restaurant, lounge and club in the place. They also made up covers and boxes for stars appearing there like Frank Sinatra (three different 40 strikes) and Johnny Carson (an American Ace Box).

It was in Atlantic City that I saw and learned from one of the best collectors with a knack for getting covers I've ever seen, Dick Hagerman. He had no fear and would go anywhere he had to in search of matches even if a place was closed. He was a pleasure to watch. He taught me that one of the best ways to get matches was to go floor to floor and hit the carts as the maids were making up the rooms. I always kidded him that one of us was someday going to call the other to bail us out when they found us on a floor in a hotel we were not staying at. Security has certainly tightened up since 9/11 and so it's very difficult to go between floors anymore. Sadly, with no smoking restrictions, new matches have almost dried up there.

My sister-in-law lives in Colorado so I was able to visit the three small casino towns there when gambling became legal. This new gambling fever made almost every business in town turn there small stores into slot machine parlors and amazingly, most of them had matches. I was lucky enough to find a trader who regularly visited the casinos there and I put together what I consider a pretty darn good Colorado collection. Just like Atlantic City matches have almost slowed to a halt in these three towns.

In order to keep up with the new competition Las Vegas had a rebirth with new gigantic luxurious casinos, some with over 5000 rooms, replacing the smaller ones. Much to the collector's delight along with these new casinos came a wealth of new matches and many of the new locations had 10 or more different ones with new ones coming out all the time. A few years ago, while staying at the Belagio, I returned from a business dinner and, not being sleepy, I hit every restaurant, club and lounge and got 14 different covers and boxes, not including the hotel's own cover which brought the total top 15. Jene Lyle, whose also a great searcher of matches, visits Las Vegas often, either on business or to visit his daughter who goes to school there, and he has helped to add considerably to my collection. Since I'm retired I no longer travel to Vegas, so Jene is a godsend. Most recently he sent me six boxes and a cover about the size of a 24 from the new Aria Casino there. This, to me, is a clear sign that there will be many more cover and boxes coming out of Las Vegas to add to our collections for many years to come.

Foreign casinos are also a great source of covers and boxes in this category. I would say that England is one of the best sources but I have them from other parts of Europe, Australia, Asia, the Far East and the Caribbean. There are also many from Canada but I really don't consider our good neighbors to the north to be foreign. Your best bet if you are interested in these is to try and establish a trading relationship with one of our many foreign collectors but many of our US collectors travel and can also help you out.

The Hard Rock Organization has been opening hotel and casino properties both here and in foreign countries and many covers and boxes have been issued by them. They most recently opened the Tulsa Hotel and Casino in Oklahoma which has two covers and a box and another in Macao which has a box. As they continue to expand they will certainly continue to be a great source of new matches for

the casino collector.

If you're interested in collecting casinos the first thing you should do is join the Casino Club. (You can find their address in the Club listings on our website). When three of us saw there was new interest in collecting casino matches, myself, Dick Hagerman and Ken Schneider formed this club over 15 years ago. Thanks to Dick's efforts and with the help of Ellen Gutting the club has grown and continues to prosper. Dick and Ellen put out one of the best bulletins in the hobby with a color page in every issue and always offer free covers. The bulletin keeps our members aware of what's new in casino matches while still highlighting covers and boxes from the past. Additionally, thanks to them, the Casino Club meeting is one of the best attended at the RMS Convention.

There are many early casino covers which, for obvious reasons, don't say 'casino' on them, and these are prized possessions that are highly sought after by both match collectors and casino collectors, as well. I have very few of these but four of my most prized possessions are from casino ships that operated off the coast of California beyond the limits where they had to worry about the law. If Mike has room maybe he'll print them for you. Collecting casinos is a truly interesting and exciting category, and I hope my article prompts you to give it a try. It's not a "gamble" and I promise you won't be sorry. I'd be happy to answer any questions or inquiries you may have on the subject. Happy Collecting!

[Ed. I'll go ahead and insert a plug for the Casino Club—Meetings are held annually at the AMCAL and RMS Conventions. Dues: \$10. There are 10 bulletins annually (at least one color page in each issue). Contact: Dick Hagerman, 824 Peachy Canyon Circle #101, Las Vegas, NV 89144 or Joe DeGennaro.

Also, I couldn't find those Casino ships; couldn't even find the article I ran on them years ago. If someone will send them in, I'll run them in the next issue.]

