

Indians

by
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[Well, I suppose they're Native Americans now, but you know who I'm talking about...You know, the people that own all those casinos.] This is another *large* small category! Collectors in this area are well aware that, like Lobsters, for example, this topic has much the same appeal as many of the other small categories. Once you start seeking them out, you'll never cease to be amazed at the great variety you'll encounter: all sizes, shapes, trademarks, and colors. Bob Heskett, OH, reported having 2,979 in August 2005, so they're out there!

The real fascination for me, however, is the beautiful art work on some of these covers. Crowns, as an example, are already famous for their top quality cover art, and to behold a beautiful Crown with a detailed Indian on it is something to see, indeed. Some DQ's and later Diamonds also sport Indians in such detail as to make collectors extol their virtues. It's for this reason that I prefer the serious renditions of Indians over the caricatures, but both are fair game to the collector. Also, as usual, any cover with an Indian on it, big or small, outside or inside, is fair game.

Another attraction that this category has to offer me is the history behind the subject matter. Being a History and Anthropology teacher, I may be somewhat inherently biased, but it seems to me that having an understanding of the subject would naturally enhance the joy of putting together and owning such a collection (any Navy Ship or Military collector will know what I'm talking about, I'm sure).

When you see an Indian depicted on a cover, you're seeing much more than one of the 'first Americans' or the mythical 'noble savage'. That Indian represents a group that arrived in North America, from Asia (across the Bering Strait) some 25,000 years ago (although the date varies according to which source is consulted). There were several different waves of migration that eventually spread from the top to the bottom of two continents, all the way from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. In the ensuing thousands of years,

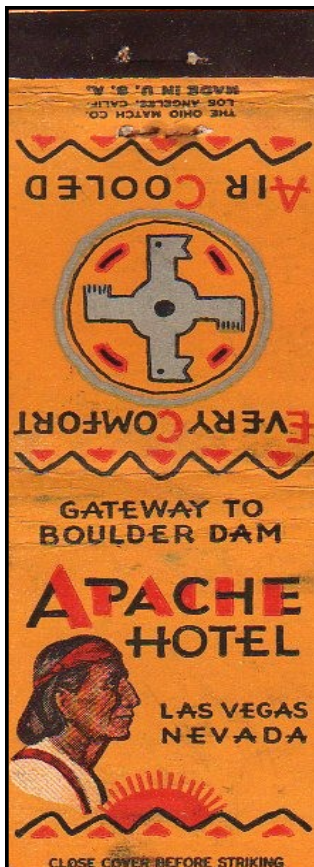
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they developed into literally thousands of different cultures, and not all of these remained primitive.

Although no Indian culture rose to the heights of civilization north of Mexico, several truly advanced civilizations, such as the Olmecs, Toltecs, Mayans, Aztecs, and Incas flourished in what is now Mexico and northern South America. These people practiced intensive agriculture and were heavily into Astronomy and Mathematics. They built great cities and had complex social structures. But, as with all Indians, being in the New World meant that they were 'cut off' from what was taking place in the rest of the world. Thus, they weren't able to 'borrow' and capitalize on important innovations taking place in China, India, and later the Moslem world and Europe. So, when Columbus later landed at San Salvador, in the Caribbean, in 1492, the eventual outcome was a forgone conclusion. [*Columbus thought he was in the Indies, incidentally, hence the name 'Indians'*]

Along with technological advances, the white man also brought his diseases. More Indians, by far, died of those diseases (smallpox, etc.) than were ever killed by soldiers and settlers. One American general even advocated giving the Indians blankets purposely infected with smallpox, as his 'final solution' to the 'Indian problem.' [*not one of our finer moments*]

After 1815, the policy of Indian removal to reservations across the Mississippi was pursued by the US government with such success, although certainly not peacefully, that by 1860 the great majority of tribes had been so moved. Thus, it's not surprising to see that the Indians west of the Mississippi were up in arms by the 1860's. The Great Plains, the Southwest, and the Northwest all became great areas of conflict. The fighting between the army and the Indians reached its height between 1869 and 1875, when over 200 pitched battles were fought. Wounded Knee, in 1890, is often considered the last page in the over 300-year conflict, although there was an expedition against the Ojibwa Indians in Minnesota as late as 1898.



By 1887, with the passage of the Dawes Act, a new era in Indian policy had begun. The wars had all but ceased, and the government abandoned force for conciliation, and efforts were made to improve the health, education, and general welfare of the Indians. [*Of course, by then, the majority of Indians had been wiped out, and the government had succeeded in disenfranchising those who were left, so one may wonder just how magnanimous this turn about was*]

Today, certainly, many Indians have integrated into modern American culture and have made outstanding contributions to its security and advancement, but many more are still to be found on the many reservations which dot this country, surviving at poverty level and desperately trying to keep their own cultural heritage alive...most of which has already disappeared forever. So, when you see that Indian on your matchcover, you're looking at History and nature, at triumph and tragedy, and, ironically, at Americana. There is no listing of Indian covers, but Toby Messmer, KY, reported having 6,457 as of February 2010.

