

## Why We Collect What We Collect

For a new collector coming into the hobby, it must be something close to amazing to see the incredible variety in collector preferences: covers or full-books, covers or boxes, old or new, flats or regular, struck or mint, stock or non-stock, one category or more, general or specific, and the list of possible topics is seemingly endless!

Why *do* we end up collecting what we do? Simplistically, we're all phillumenists, so we should all be collecting the same things. But, we don't. From the macro to the micro, other forces are at work. And, as luck would have it, right at the top is one of my favorite causal factors--geography.

Right at the beginning, it's geography that determines whether we, as phillumenists, collect covers, labels, or boxes. And it's pretty straightforward. If you're in the US or Canada, you collect covers; if you're just about any place else, you collect labels and boxes. It's simply a matter of what's historically available in your culture. Labels died out here beginning in the 1920s. On the other hand, matchbooks never really caught on in the rest of the world.

Then what? Well, after that, our individual histories and personalities kick in. How about deciding whether to go for covers or full-books? The vast majority of collectors opt for the stripped covers--they're easier to deal with, easier to obtain, and certainly less dangerous. On the other hand, if you're a purist, you want the collectibles exactly how they were sold, so you collect full-books.

What about flats vs. regular covers? Most collectors won't look at flats simply because the hobby doesn't consider them 'real', since they functioned as salesman's samples and were never in circulation. Also, of course, compared to covers, there are very few available. On the opposite side, if you're after mint cover artwork, you can't beat flats.

Why are some collectors General and some not. Many new collectors start out as General collectors simply because they need to see what's out there before deciding on specialties...and there's just too many goodies out there and it's too hard to say no. Eventually, though, almost all collectors narrow General down to something less. Space is usually given as the reason, although here's where individual personalities and histories really come into play.

Nostalgia, I think, plays a big part in determining preferences. It's simply harder to ignore covers that stimulate memories and emotions--places we've been...places we haven't been, but they're so famous and ingrained in our culture that we consider them part of our lives anyway: Hoover Dam, Yosemite National Park, Disneyland, Grauman's Chinese Theatre. The names vary, but we all have such places that are special to us.

Then, there are all those other personal preferences. This collector saves Christmas because they're beautiful; that collector thinks they're gaudy. This collector saves Laundries because he was in the business for 30 years; that collector throws them away. This one values rarity; that one's looking for the odd and unusual. He wants Military, recalling his younger days; she wants Teddy Bears...because they're so cute. *[sexist stereotyping, but, come on, I'm trying to prove a point here]*

Try as I might, I can't think of any other hobby that offers the variety that ours does, and that simply opens the way for all of our little quirks, whims, likes and dislikes, and so forth...to just run rampant! Is this a great hobby, or what?!