

Collecting As An Educational Pursuit

We all collect for a variety of reasons, I suppose, but I was thinking recently about just how much this hobby has taught me in the last 36 years.

The most obvious area is probably history, and that's saying a lot for me since I'm a history teacher. But, I teach Medieval history, and collecting matchcovers has taught me a lot about more recent U.S. history...everything from political candidates to the backgrounds of various presidents, to various events now forgotten by all but scholars to, of course, the story of the domestic and international match industry. And, the latter, by the way, has been a perfect example of how cultural factors affect economic factors which, in turn, affect...me!

It's also taught me more about past American culture—transportation, clothing, famous places, and so on; the fascinating stories behind various old landmark hotels, military bases, famous trains, and personalities. Nostalgic sites that no longer exist; various traditional items that have become obsolete. It all certainly adds to the 'big picture.'

And, it's *really* expanded my knowledge of geography and demographics, both domestic and foreign. Collecting Towns has exposed me to a myriad of places I'd never heard of before ("Hey, there's a Washington, Pennsylvania!" "Did you know that there are 311 cities in the U.S that have 'Washington' in their names?") and collecting Zip Codes has shown me relative locations. Attempting to get four covers/boxes from every country in the world has shown me countries I wasn't even aware existed, aside from a plethora of other tidbits. For example, there is only one foreign city named after a U.S. president—Monrovia, Liberia.

Collecting has also spurred me to learn much more about technology. When I entered the hobby in 1983, I already had my first computer (an Apple IIc), but it was my hobby endeavors that led me to learn how to construct and post web sites (i.e., RMS, Sierra-Diablo, Lone Star, and my own). It was my position as bulletin editor that led me to desktop publishing, scanners, and everything else that goes with it. Today, I can hardly imagine doing bulletins without computer technology.

I'm a better organizer because of the hobby. You can't deal with hundreds of thousands of matchcovers without being organized. "Where does this go?" "Where can I find that?" Everything has to be organized to make the whole thing work. It's one massive filing system...that you have to develop and constantly work with.

The hobby has even taught me something of entrepreneurship in that I developed and now run my own on-line auction.

Finally, that same hobby has enabled me to learn a little more about people, in general. Being a teacher for some 40 years, my entire career has seen me dealing with children, and, consequently, my view of how people work, what motivates them, etc. may have been a little skewed (!).

All of the above, and perhaps even more that occur to you, are additional advantages to being a member of this hobby. There are certainly a number of other non-educational advantages that could be pointed to, but the educational ones, in themselves, are more than worthwhile.