

# Small Categories

by Mike Prero

The problem with Small Categories, although almost all collectors have them, is that hardly any two collectors agree on just what the term actually means. At face value, it would seem that “Small Categories” refers to those categories in which there aren’t many qualifying covers.

But, that definition, in turn, invariably leads to subsequent problems. For example, where’s the cut-off, numerically? How many covers can be in a Small Category for it to still be a Small Category? 100?...200?...300?... There’s no clear agreement in the hobby.

The biggest obstacle, however, no matter what number the collector settles upon, is that most Small Categories eventually *exceed* that number once the collector has been amassing those covers for some time. Since it’s not known exactly how many covers exist in a category, the collector is actually guessing when he or she initially pictures it as a Small Category. In most instances, the collector later finds that there are substantially more covers to be had there than was thought. Indeed, I can only think of one category that is finite—Classiques, with 33 listed, and 33 agreed upon as the total that was ever issued.

In a somewhat similar fashion, the hobby term “Small Towns” has become obsolete. When the hobby started, a Small Town was one with a population of 500 or less, but, as the country has grown in the ensuing decades, those have become such rarities that “Small Towns” has simply given way to “Towns”.

Thus, I don’t use a numerical definition for Small Categories. Instead, I see them as categories that are not widely collected within the hobby. Lots of collectors collect Christmas, Military, Navy Ships, Girlies, Matchoramas, etc. These are Major Categories. But, one collector goes after Alligators, while another likes Chevy Dealers, and still another collects Paintings. These are Small Categories. Think of them as “pet” categories, peculiar to only a few collectors in the hobby, and perhaps even just one.

The number of covers in the particular Small category, then, doesn't matter...at least to me. I collect Metallics and Mirro-Gloss, for instance, and I have several thousand of each, but hardly anyone else collects them. Thus, they're...Small Categories.

While most collectors have at least several Major Categories, almost all of us, at the same time, have one to many special little Small Categories. They may exist for us because they simply strike our fancy, or they have a nostalgic value. I was once given a collection, for example, that consisted entirely of Dry Cleaners covers. That had been the profession of the collector.

Because Small Categories are so specific to the individual collector, they share one other major characteristic—They're basically valueless. By way of illustration, by the time I pass away, I may well have the greatest collection of Mirro-Gloss covers ever put together in the history of Mankind...but what will happen to that unique collection when I'm gone? It will be broken down into "more relevant" conjunctive categories by some other collector who has no use for Mirro-Gloss covers, themselves...because few, if any, other collectors value that particular category.

Still, that doesn't matter to the Small Category collector. Those covers aren't being collected for their value to others, but only for their value to that special collector. He's not interested in that collection as an investment, or for its resale value. Its value, instead, is immediate and personal.

In January 2017, in preparation for this article, I took a quick survey of collectors, asking what their Small Categories were. The following are the results, although I have omitted a few of the more super-specific responses. Take a look at them. You may just see one or more that might give you an idea or two.

AAA	British Columbia	Colosseum	Flags, Confederate
Adult	Buffalo	Construction	Flags, Texas/Lone Star
Airports	Bullfighting	Cowboys	Florentine
Amish	Busses	Cranes	Food
Anchors	Cactus	Crests	Food pics
Angels	Candy	Devils	Frankenstein
Antique Stores	Carousels	Disney	Fraternities
Atlas Foil	Cartoon Characters	Dogs	Friendship Inns
Babies/Children	Catfish	Dolphin/Porpoise	Full-Length Bank
Balloons, Hot Air	Cats	Don the Beachcomber	Checks
Ballrooms	CCC	Donuts	Full-Length Diners
Barns	Chain Saws	Dragons	Full-Length, Vertical
Bathrooms	Chamber of Commerce	Duncan Hines Recommended	G.E.
Bats	Champion Sparkplugs	Eagles	Garbage Trucks
Beard/Moustache	Cheetahs	Easel-Back	Gas Pumps
Bears	Chef hats	Eiffel Tower	Gay-Related
Beauty Salons	Chickens	Elvis	Ghosts
Bellboys	Churches	Errors	Giants (trademark)
Bells	Cigars	Estab.Date, Since, etc.	Great Wall
Best Eastern Motels	Clicks	Fairs	Hallmark
Blacks	Clocks	Famous Places	Happy Faces
Boots, Cowboy	Clothing, Men's (pics)	Fans, Decorative	Hats
Buoys	Coca-Cola	Firemen	Hats, Cowboy
Bread	Coffee (brands)	Fish, Jumping	Hats, Sombrero
Breweries/Brew Pubs	Coffee Shops		Hawaii, T.H.

Headstones/Caskets	Metallic	Rest., Big Boy	Sylvania
Helmets	Mileage	Rest., Bonanza	Swimming Pools
Historical Characters	Mirro-Gloss	Rest., Chuck's Steak.	Tall Ships
Hoisery	Mona Lisa	Rest., Darryl's	Tattoo Parlors
Horses	Monorails	Rest., Dave & Buster's	Tax Stamps, Canadian
Horses, Bucking	Moon	Rest., Fred Harvey	Taxi
Hospitals	Motorcycles	Rest., German	Tea Rooms
Hospitals, VA	Motorola	Rest., Hard Rock	Tear-Outs
Howard Johnson	Movies	Rest., Houlihan's	Theatres, Movie
Ice Skating	Mythological Creatures	Rest., Japanese	Tikis
Imperial 400 Motels	Names, First/Last	Rest., Keg Steak.	Tip n Twinkle
Indian Tribes	New York City	Rest., McCormick &	Tires
International Harvester	Newspaper/Magazine	Schmicks	Top Hats
Jack-O-Lanterns	Orange Crush	Rest., Morton's	Tractors
Jai Alai	Orchestras	Rest., Muer's	Trademarks
Jewelers	Outhouses	Rest., Outback	Trains, Elevated
John Deere	Palm Springs	Rest., Philadelphia	TraveLodge
Jupiter One-Eight	Parrots	Rest., Planet Hollywood	Trees
Jutes	Parthenon	Rest., Specialty	Trolley/streetcars
Kaeser & Blair	Pawn Shops	Rest., TGI Friday's	Trucks
Kansas City	Penguins	Rest., Trader Vic's	Tulsa, OK
Kennedy	Pep Boys	Rodeos	Unions
Kentucky	Pepsi Cola	Rodeway Inns	Universal Studios
Keys	Perfect 36	Roosevelt	USO
KFC	Phone #s	Roses	USS Mississippi Con
Knights of Columbus	Photos	Royal Canadian Legion	junctives
Knotholes	Photos, B&W	Royalty/Coronations	Utilities
KOA	Photos, Grant-Mann	Rt. 66	Venus d'Milo
Kodak	Photos, True Color	S&H Green Stamps	Vista-Lite mm
Lawn Mowers	Pianos	Santa Barbara	(numbered)
Leatherettes	Pigs	Santa Claus	Wagon Wheels
Lighthouses	Pirates	Shamrocks	Watch Manufacturers
Lincoln	Pisa, Leaning Tower	Satin	Web sites
Lion 21	Playboy	Sheep	Webs
Lion 30-STICK	Police	Shoe Repair	Western mm
Lion 40s	Pool/Billiards	Signet	(numbered)
Literary Characters	Political Photos (faces)	Skeletons	Windmills
Macaws	Port Authority of NY	Skulls	Witches
Made In Texas By..	Prospectors	Snowmen	World Trade Center, NY
mm	Pyramids, Egyptian	Snowmobiles	YMCA
Made In The West..	Rabbits	Soda	Zenith
mm	Rainbow (trademark)	Soldiers, Roman	Zip Codes
Marijuana	Rainbows (weather)	Space, Outer	
Matchtones	Raised-Ink	Sphinx	
McDonald's	Rancho Mirage	Spiders	
Medicine	RCA	Statue of Liberty	
Merchants Ind.	Ready Kilowatt	Steel Co's	
Meridien Hotels	Red Cross	StopLites (trademark)	
Mermaids	Rest., Benihana	Stouffer's	