

HOBBY HISTORY

The Movers & Shakers: VII

Doc Higgs, PA - "Charles J. Higgs, M.D., who has what is generally conceded as the largest collection of match covers in the United States, has a 17-room house in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., and it is overrun with match covers.

There are match covers in the doctor's examining-room, one entire room on the second floor is filled with them, two rooms in the basement, the second floor of the garage, and the stairs leading to it. The doctor's guess is that he has 1,500,00 match covers, including duplicates but not including 8 orange-cratefuls which he hasn't yet got around to sorting. In addition to specially built wooded drawers and steel filing cabinets, Dr. Higgs has a waterproof safe for his most valuable covers, a protection against spring floods in the Wilkes-Barre neighborhood.

Before Dr. Higgs began collecting match covers, his medical practice, his electrical construction business, aluminium awning business, and automatic fuel stoker business had kept him pretty close to Wilkes-Barre. As a matter of fact, he hadn't had a vacation in 10 years. He is still an active practitioner and businessman, but he doesn't let his business and professional interests interfere with match-cover collecting.

He has traveled 100,000 by auto in the search for match covers, and makes it a rule to go one way and come back another. He specializes in hotel covers, and hotel clerks and porters from Wilkes-Barre to Canada and back are unofficially his agents. When Dr. Higgs hits a strange town, settles down in one hotel, and buys or begs some of their match covers, he sets out to visit every other hotel in the city to add to his collection. It is sometimes two in the morning before he gets to bed.

Higgs operates on such a grand scale that he has

attained the stature of a hero in match-cover circles. Collectors come to Wilkes-Barre from all over the country to see his collection, and tell with awe and admiration of the time when Dr. Higgs, in Cleveland for the Rathkamp Society convention, heard of a collection which a widow in Atlanta was willing to sell, picked up the long-distance phone, and bought it, sight unseen, for \$500. And they tell about the times Higgs has paid \$1,000 and \$1,500 to get a collection out of which he wanted only a dozen covers—or one—to complete a set.

Dr. Higgs himself tells of a time he offered to wash dishes in a restaurant to get a set of 5 covers which the restaurant owner refused to sell. And he thinks nothing of leaving his patients, his family, his aluminum awnings and other businesses to take care of themselves when he drives 1,000 miles to track down some rarity like the light-blue Jackie Cooper Movies cover to complete a set."

Dr. Higgs was RMS President from 1944-1946, Outstanding Collector of the Year for 1953, and voted into the Hall of Fame in 1990.

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