

Finding Treasures

American commerce depicted on our mails.

Fred Schmitt



Oh for a book and a shady nook!" The little cover from the hammock maker (and a nice franking with the Alaska-Yukon commemorative) caught my eye in a lot purchased recently—and I got to thinking how much seemingly worthless promotional covers from decades ago are now generating some cash for sellers who have some of them.

What got me to thinking was the value of advertising covers that, when mounted on an album or exhibit page, jump right out at the viewer. A good example, above, is the J. Ellwood Lee Co. ad cover franked with the two-cent Columbian. It's amazing what printers of that era could do with colors. And check out the cover with all the fruit on it!

I've handled advertising covers for most of my professional life and it never ceases to amaze me how rare many of

them actually are—and how infrequently one sees them at sky-high prices. This means that collectors will generally be able to buy them easily—and for those individuals wishing to sell them, there will always be a market. The vast majority of advertising covers have come on the market from private individuals whose families have stored old correspondence for decades. Many of the old ad covers contained some kind of information the recipient wanted to save—and thus, they were preserved. The normal location for such mail, as we all know, was usually "File X."

Note, by the way, that all of the covers shown above are in the \$40 to \$150 price range (the cameo cover is the most expensive).

But collectors and specialists in these covers keep them for very different reasons. We know one collector who is enthralled with 19th century printing methods and ex-

presses to me often about his amazement that they could produce such colorful lithography. (Again, check that fruit cover.) Another specialist looks for exotic businesses little heard of—such as the hammock maker. And yet another collector won't buy an ad cover unless there is something unusual about the postal use and/or franking. The early machine cancel on the Cedar Rapids Pump Company cover is a good example of the latter.

One might ask, "If ad covers can become so valuable, wouldn't it be a good idea to save some of today's mail that may be a bit unusual? Could it be worth some money some day?"

That's a hard question to answer. But in the entire scheme of philately, one should never forget: today's postal history are the covers people once upon a time decided to save! ✉