

Finding Treasures

The weird.

Fred Schmitt



The author thinks it's high time we took the time to go after these kinds of postal history uses—the odd and sometimes strange.

In nearly every accumulation and/or collection of covers that I view when anticipating a purchase from a collector, I find scores (sometimes hundreds) of what are called advertising covers. You're familiar with this sort of postal history, even if you've never thought about collecting them. They come in your mailbox most every day of the year, and admittedly, you also often open them to read the offer enclosed inside.

People who collect ephemera (see Dr. Art Groten's "Paraphilately Page" in each issue of this magazine) are avid followers of this type of mail. The very name, ephemera, connotes some kind of item—whether paper, like an envelope, or a plastic cup with an ad printed on the outside—that normally would be casually looked at by the recipient and then quickly thrown away. Everything from cereal boxes to beer cans falls into this kind of category.

What I am getting at here is the fact that countless tens of thousands of adver-

tising covers have made their appearance in American commerce over the years—and while some of them are relatively collectable, only the most colorful and unusual in nature are kept by the serious collector. Some of the greatest cover collections ever assembled have been of color lithograph printed ad covers employed by major and minor businesses from the mid-1880s until around the World War I period.

Those covers are, of course, valuable, but there is a subcategory of advertising/promotional covers that is slowly edging its way into importance and prominence and, here on this page, you see a few examples. Essentially, this category can be called "Esoteric Advertising and promotional Mail and/or Items That Somehow Use Stamps of Some Kind." Gosh, that's a long title, but it's highly appropriate.

A small number of business firms—often run by someone with imagination, or being a company with a weird or unusual product—used some kind of unusual motif, design or gimmick in their advertising—like the company who put their advertising

shamelessly on their bank checks, as shown here.

Or perhaps there is a company in the stamp business that, regardless of the dangers of sending stamps through the mails, boldly promoted their company's headquarters building right on its envelopes. Or the "church goods" publisher whose window envelopes were designed to look like the front entrance of a church.

In the midst of a sizable percentage of cover (read: postal history) accumulations are only a tiny handful of such weird uses. If you spot this kind of thing in a dealer's box at a stamp show and the price (as is normal) is reasonable, I'd advise you to snap it up...perhaps even form a collection of them. You'd find such a collection, in the long run, to be something of a potential investment.

A good motto for philatelists has always been: "Never fail to take a second look at anything you think might be unusual." ☒