

THE PALIMPSEST

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VOL. LI

ISSUED IN MARCH 1970

NO. 3

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Collecting Cigarette Pictures

Back in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of World War I, hundreds of Dubuque youngsters acquired a new and exciting hobby. They became avid collectors of cigarette pictures! This was an era when the manufactured cigarette was still a luxury, when it was customary, at least among the working class, to "roll your own," whether with *Bull Durham* or *Duke's Mixture*, or some other less well-known brand. *Velvet* and *Prince Albert* were two of the most popular brands for those who were confirmed pipe smokers.

How does the writer—who never smoked a cigarette or puffed on a pipe—know about these? Well, it happens that he was one of many Dubuque youths addicted to the hobby of collecting the pictures tucked away in every pack or box of cigarettes. I was aided and abetted by the good fortune of having four lovely sisters, all older and all being courted, two of whom were going steady with their future husbands who smoked

cigarettes. And, since they smoked brands that offered picture premiums I was always eager to run to the nearest store to purchase a pack for them.

The pictures offered by most tobacco companies were attractive, as well as interesting and educational. The fifty "Indian Life in the 60's" offered by *Hassan* cigarettes were the most exciting imaginable for any youngster born in Dubuque with its rich Indian lore. Issued by the American Tobacco Company in 1910, they covered a good cross-section of "Indian Life in the 60's" and were quite accurate in the text that appeared on the back of each picture card.

The following sets, issued by *Hassan*, were collected by the writer, chiefly in the period between 1911 and 1916:

- Indian Life in the 60's* (50)
- Cowboy Series* (49 issued)
- World's Greatest Explorers* (25)
- Lighthouse Series* (50)
- Animals* (80)
- Arctic Scenes* (25)

During the 1930's the writer read an article in *The Month at Goodspeed's* on card collecting. It appeared that a small collection of cigarette cards had been acquired by this famous Boston bookstore. The two proprietors began reminiscing, to the extent of about four pages in their catalog, about how they had collected cigarette cards as

youngsters. Neither of them, apparently, had been able to complete a set. This led them to wonder if the tobacco companies had intentionally set the figure at, say fifty, and issued one or two less, causing the collector to continue purchasing their brand in hopes of completing the entire series. This was not true, as my own collection listed above will confirm.

There were many brands in addition to *Hassan* with equally attractive pictures. The writer was able to collect all 100 "Fables" by *Turkish Trophies*—which ran in two series—1 to 50 and 51 to 100. One of the most beautiful series was issued by *Helmar* about women under the title "Costumes and Scenery." The same company issued fifty cards entitled "Historic Homes."

A popular series many boys collected was entitled "Flags of All Nations." It contained 200 cards, and represents one I was unable to complete as a youth, even though I did collect over 150 of them. It is still amazing to me how many companies were involved in this "Flags of All Nations" series—*Sweet Caporal*, *Sub Rosa*, and *Recruit* being a few of the brands that offered the flags as premiums in the packages sold at Du-buque.

About ten years ago, while making the red carpet tour of the Library of Congress, which included a section containing an immense collection of circus, beer, liquor, and patent medicine ad-

vertisements, I inquired of my guide as to whether the Library of Congress had ever acquired such a thing as a cigarette picture collection. The answer being in the affirmative, I asked if one might see them, and they were promptly brought out. What an amazing revelation lay before me! Not one of my fairly extensive collection that I had saved as a youngster was in the Library of Congress collection! Instead, a whole new world of cigarette pictures unfolded before my astonished eyes.

It was obviously clear to me that the Library of Congress collection was of an earlier vintage. Upon inquiring who the donor was, I was told to look on the bottom of the box containing the pictures. The moment my eyes rested on the donor's name a strange feeling came over me; I was no longer embarrassed to discuss my boyhood hobby with friends or strangers. For the donor turned out to be a nationally known figure in history and literature, a man known to millions of Americans—none other than the great Lincoln scholar—Carl Sandburg.

The use of advertising cards began shortly after the close of the Civil War. The idea spread and gradually included coffee, food, chewing gum, and other products. About 1885 the advertising cards began to appear in the small boxes of cigarettes (which were wrapped in tobacco leaf and not paper) and hence would be called cigars to-

day. The sales of these cigarettes zoomed skyward between 1885-1892, almost every manufacturer, large and small, issuing these cards for a short time at least. The practice was still going strong in the 20th Century when the writer became addicted to the card collecting hobby.

The nine pictures on the outside back cover are from Allen & Ginter issues that appeared during the 1880's and 1890's. They are of the vintage represented in the Carl Sandburg collection. Since there were not enough Indian chiefs associated with Iowa included in the group, I have selected Indians representing different tribes that appear in the pages of Iowa history. Only the Potowatomi tribe was missing from this series, and hence could not be included. The reproductions used for the cards were made from a collection of originals once housed in the Smithsonian Institution.

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