

DECEMBER 2007 "COLLECTING WITH JEFF"  
JEFF FIGLER

Question: #1

Most of the people I know collect something, whether it be magnets, books, coins or even stamps. I never really have collected anything, but I would like to. Can you give me some advice on how I can get started. Remy S., Minneapolis.

**Answer:** Nowadays, Remy, people collect anything you can imagine. But whatever you collect, keep a few things in mind. First, try to collect what interests you. Are you interested in Disney items, die-cast cars, sports autographs, or record albums? It is easier to be enthusiastic about collecting if you are interested in the subject. Look upon your collection as fun, not a chore.

Second, consider how accessible your collectible items may be. You may have an interest in old coins, but how many old coins do you think you can collect? Be practical. Select a collectible that lends itself to being acquired? playing cards, baseballs, masks.

Another consideration is money. Will you be able to afford your collection. Even if you can afford a piece or two, will you be happy with that, or do you want 20 or 30 items for your collection? Of course, you don't have to buy all your items at once, but you surely do not want to have to refinance your house merely to keep up your collection.

Also, where will you keep and display your collection? Do you have a special room? Depending on your collection you may want to insure your items.

There are many other considerations, but think about these first.

It is the journey that counts. Have fun with your collection.

Question: #2

I will soon be passing down my coin collection to my grandson. What type of records should I try to find to go along with the collection? Jerry S., Los Angeles.

**Answer :** You should always try to maintain good records. You might someday sell your collection. Photograph each of your items. That will also help for insurance purposes as well. You may wish to have your collection appraised, but you will need an expert in the field to be the appraiser.

When acquiring an item ask for a Letter of Authenticity, or LOA, for the item. This LOA is mandated by law in certain situations, but are not always an absolute guarantee. Along with the LOA try to obtain as much "provenance" or background about the object, such as previous owners, and correspondence.

I would suggest you organize your records, and make a separate page for each item, including the photograph. This page may include the name of the item, where it is located in your collection, a description of the item, conditions of the item, when and where you acquired the item, how much you paid for the item, and any provenance.

Keeping good records will surely increase the value of your item. You may even want to keep your records in a separate location from your collection.

I invite questions for this column, but I cannot guarantee they will be used or answered personally.

## THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

**Question:** I have about twenty five of the thirty one cards of a presidential set issued by U.S. Caramel Company in 1932. As I recall, there was a controversy about this set. Can you explain it? Rick S., Denver.

**Answer:** Very good question, Rick.

Here is the Story Behind the Story.

U.S. Caramel was a company that specialized in making chocolate candy. In an effort to promote its products, the company issued various sets of cards, including ones of sports figures, aviators, and presidents. In 1932 a set consisting of the 31 presidents to that time in U.S. history was distributed. Cards were attached to the boxes of candy. If a consumer was lucky enough to collect the entire R114 U.S. Caramel Presidents set, that person could send the complete set to U.S. Caramel, and in turn, the manufacturer promised to send that person a one pound box of assorted chocolate candy, along with the set of cards that were sent in, and marked "cancelled".

Considering the economic situation in the United States at the time, it was an attractive offer. However, there was only one problem with the offer. Only four or five William McKinley cards are known to exist. That's right. In the 85 years since the set was issued, only a handful of William McKinley cards have ever surfaced, and all but one of them were marked "cancelled". Somewhere there is a lone McKinley card from R214 U.S. Caramel Presidential set. That would mean that the one uncanceled card is much, much rarer than the T206 Honus Wagner baseball card. U.S. Caramel reportedly did a similar promotional gimmick with its baseball card set, when only a minimum number of Lindstrom cards were issued.

It is unfortunate that such a few number of McKinley cards were made, especially when some collectors go to great lengths to collect an entire set. However, card companies have always made fewer of certain cards than others, and therefore the cards that are the scarcest are worth appreciably more money.

Card collectors will often limit their collection to sports-related sets, but many collectors will diversify and collect card sets pertaining to presidents, movie stars, singers, countries, and many other diverse subjects.

My experience is that most sports collectors will narrow their collection to sports subjects, but if they do go beyond sports, many of them will indeed collect historical-related sets, such as the U.S. presidents with the R114 U.S. Caramel Presidents set.



## THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

**Question:** How did the famous "Who's on First?" routine of Abbott and Costello originate? Alan R., Kansas City.

**Answer:** : Good question, Alan.

Here is the Story Behind the Story.

William (Bud) Abbott and Lou Costello, whose real name was Louis Cristillo, were one of the most popular comedy teams of all time. Their work was seen in radio, film and television.

"Who's on First?" is a comedy routine in which the premise is that Abbott is identifying the players on a baseball team to Costello, but it appears that their names and nicknames are being given as non-responsive answers to Costello's questions. For example, "Who" is the first baseman, which is the answer to the question of which person is the first baseman.

"Who's on First?" was a natural evolution of the prevailing burlesque sketches. In the early 1930s, many American comics had a baseball routine. Abbott and Costello first started working together in 1935 at the Eltinge Burlesque Theatre on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street in New York, and officially became a team in 1936. They paid writer Michael J. Musto to write the "Who's on First?" script. After they appeared on the "Kate Smith Radio Hour" in 1938 performing "Who's on First?", Bud Abbott and Lou Costello were on their way to stardom, and Hollywood.

The comedy duo performed "Who's on First?" throughout their career, but performed it a little different each time. Once they did the routine for President Franklin Roosevelt; another time they did the routine for the film "One Night in the Tropics". They also include it in their 1945 film "The Naughty Nineties".

In 1956 a gold record of "Who's on First?" was placed in the Baseball Hall of Fame. A video, taken from the film "The Naughty Nineties" plays continuously at the Hall of Fame. Contrary to public opinion, Abbott and Costello were never inducted in the Hall of Fame.

In 1999, Time magazine named "Who's on First?" as the Best Comedy Sketch of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In 2005 the "Who's on First?" line was part of the American Film Institute's list of the 100 most memorable movie quotes. The routine was widely used in a "Hertz U-Drive" commercial about renting a car. A "Who's on First?" board game was even devised in the 1970s.

In the early 1950s Abbott and Costello's huge popularity waned, having been replaced by Dean Martin and Jerry Louis. Costello died in 1959 and Abbott in 1974.

There is very little sports memorabilia of Abbott and Costello together. I have seen single-signed baseballs of Abbott or Costello, and very rarely, of them both together. A baseball with both of their signatures is valued at about \$1500.



Bud Abbott (left) and Lou Costello  
(right)