



# Paper Work

Ephemera  
collector values  
fleeting relics

By Norm Powers  
Photos by Matt Rose

One generation's trash can be another's treasure, a happy circumstance for the sub-genre of the collecting world concerned with ephemera, those fragile historical and cultural relics that can be anything from old library cards to advertising posters. "People save old paper deliberately for a variety of reasons," says Marty Weil, an ephemera enthusiast. "In some cases it's just a fluke of luck or happenstance why certain old paper has survived to the present day."

Marty, who moved to Asheville from Chicago in 2007 and is a nationally-published freelance journalist writing on technology issues, maintains a modest collection of ephemera along with a website and blog on the subject with posts from fellow collectors.



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"My collection is made up mostly of items given to me by the dozens of ephemera collectors I've interviewed for the blog, or items that I've acquired through various other means," Marty explains. "It's unusual in that it doesn't have a specific focus or theme, as most ephemera collections do." The oldest item in Marty's collection is a sheet of Confederate bond coupons from 1861, along with a stack of land deeds from the 1880s, both of which he bought for ten dollars at a garage sale in Charlotte. "While age is interesting to a degree, it really isn't a major collecting consideration, unlike antique furniture, for instance," Marty says. "Ephemera is collected for countless reasons, but age generally isn't one of the more important ones."

Historical relevance, though, is inherent in such material and holds a prime spot in the first sentence of the mission statement of the Ephemera Society of America, which seeks to "cultivate and encourage interest in ephemera and the history associated with it." In its tri-annual *The Ephemera Journal*, the society has included articles about artifacts as recent as campaign posters from the dramatic 2000 United States presidential election, to a group of flowery letters from an 1884 dating service in Utica, New York, to a collection of what must be the most ephemeral of ephemera, toilet paper, which seems to have been first commercially produced only in the 1850s and didn't appear in the familiar perforated rolls until the 1870s, leading to a court battle over the patent that went all the way to the Supreme Court.

Although Marty helped develop a popular scale of characteristics to assist collectors in determining the value of any one piece, the historical value of a collection is hardly ever reflected in a corresponding dollar value. "I don't track the value of ephemera in my collection," Marty says, reflecting a common trait of most collectors.

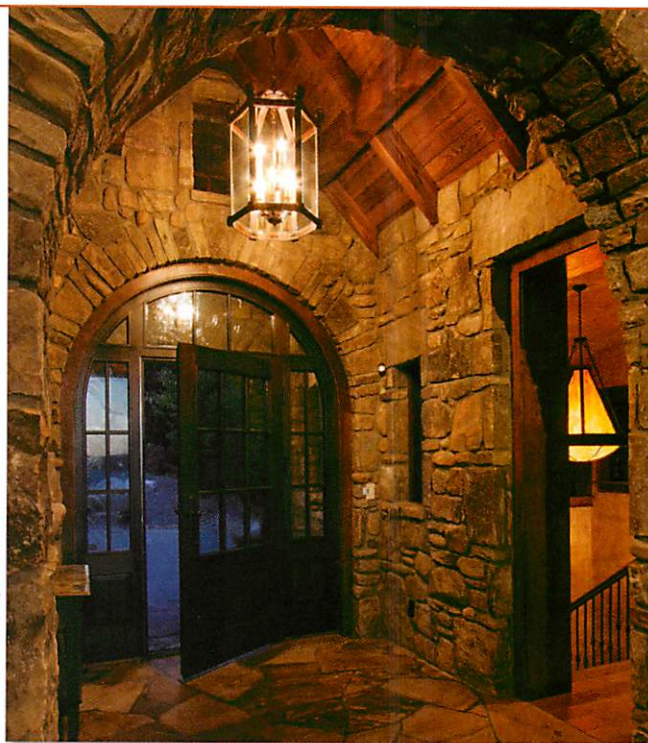
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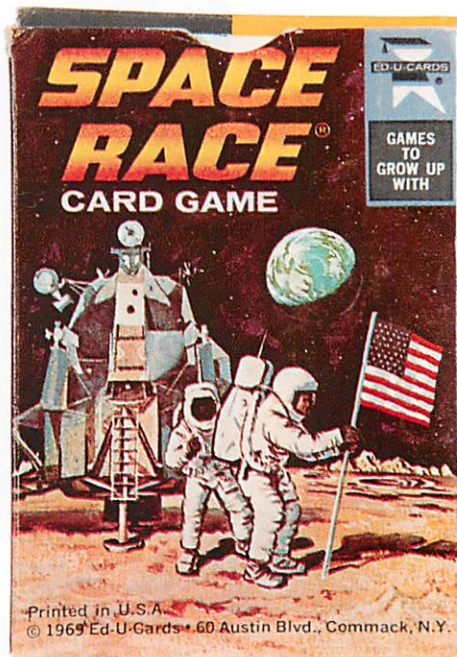
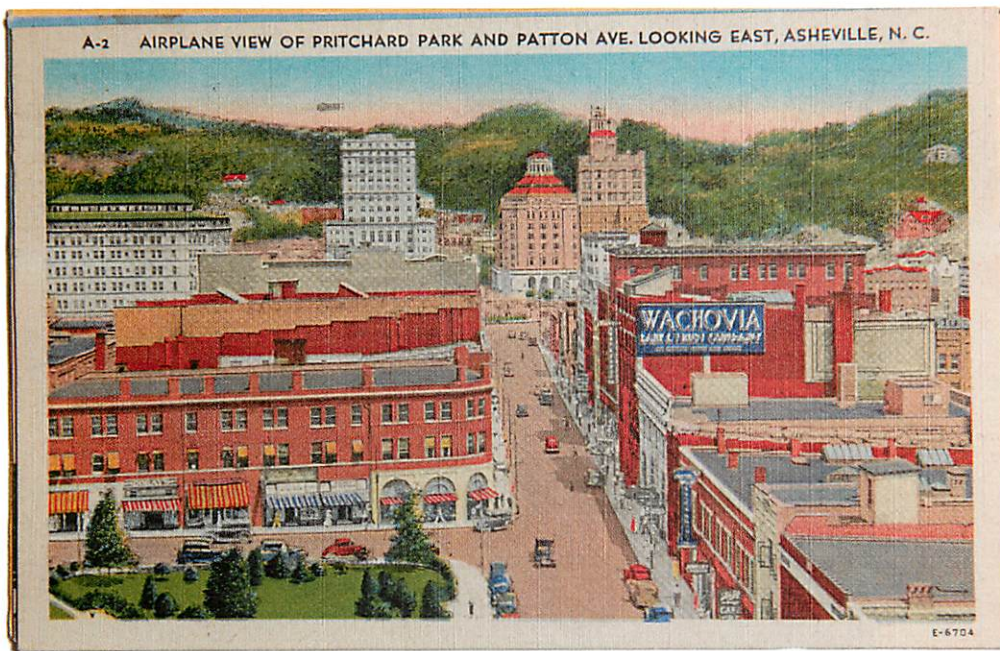
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"I pick up items as I go along that either have meaning to me or are given to me by other collectors, or heirs of the estates of ephemera collectors. The value of any given piece of paper is determined by the market."

Marty's website ([ephemera.typepad.com](http://ephemera.typepad.com)), which launched in 2005 and has more than 2,000 posts, indicates that most items up for sale on eBay may fetch a few hundred dollars at the top of the market. Visitors to the site are looking more for cultural, social or historic significance. "The blog exists as a means of tapping into the extraordinary wealth of ephemera that is held in public and private hands throughout the world," Marty says of his website. "The primary mission of the blog is to showcase the world-class collections of others, and items being offered for sale at auction."

The general tone of the posts underlines the historical significance of collecting ephemera. "It can...provide a political statement to artwork in the case of racism or genderism that were so prevalent and accepted in the past," one post from an artist and collector reads. Other posts on the site discuss the introduction of Hostess Ho-Hos in a 1930s *Ladies Home Journal* advertisement ("Jean's Husband Is Always Hungry For Cake," the ad says, "And Now He Gets Hostess Every Time He Wants It!"), and a campaign button with a jowly Lyndon Johnson in a post titled "LBJ The Scariest President Ever."

While Marty's site has become an important resource for collectors, he's not about to quit his day job anytime soon. "The blog is far from being a profit center," Marty cheerfully admits. Like collecting itself, he says, "It's a labor of love." ■

Find the Ephemera Society of America at [www.ephemeriasociety.org](http://www.ephemeriasociety.org). Visit Marty Weil's blog at [ephemera.typepad.com](http://ephemera.typepad.com).



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# A Racy Ride

This '47 Dodge Hot Rod is made for speed

By John Clausen  
Photos by Tim Robison

**Grady Hawkins** is a Dodge man, always has been and probably always will be.

His driveway is dominated by a 2009 Charger (with the legendary Hemi engine), his wife, Doris, drives a Neon, and one side of his garage hosts a fully restored antique 1947 Dodge sedan that once belonged to his grandfather. But the crown jewel in this impressive collection of American automobile enthusiasm is the '47 Dodge D-24 hot rod that sits menacingly beside Granddad's old ride.

Ask Grady about the car's mechanical pedigree and you'll unleash a torrent of technical explanation.

The 360-cubic-inch engine, he will tell you, has been bored out to 6.0 liters. The