

# THE CHANGING FACE OF COLLECTING

## David Zipkin 2/2000

The character of collecting boards has changed considerably in the recent past. Previously, we members of CBCS, scattered as we are geographically across the country, each had our own 'territories' or stomping grounds within which we cruised for boards. Several times a year, we'd roam outside our usual haunts, visiting relatives, annual antique sales, seasonal flea markets, the occasional auction or estate sale, or on our vacations. Some of us may be 'snow birds' who follow the seasons and thus have two areas to exploit. Thus fortune - the coming together of geography, timing and chance - gave each of our collections a particular 'flavor', a characteristic all its own. When we met to show off our collections or traded pictures we always experienced a real treat, seeing the range of diversity in boards out there and seeing boards we could set our sights on for future hunting.

Sure, individual tastes in types of boards caused us to put special efforts into seeking out certain types of boards. Over time we developed networks with dealers or other collectors to obtain these boards, but they were limited. Only those of us lucky enough to be able to travel extensively could fully indulge in this type of specialized collecting.

Now, with the advent of Ebay and other on-line auction services, the entire character of cribbage board collecting has changed. Members with access to the Internet now have instant access to an international pool of cribbage boards without ever having to. We can pick and choose from among a selection of boards previously unavailable in our traditional hunting grounds - commercial boards we once only dreamed of finding, folk art boards of amazing ingenuity and creativity, art boards once only found in the finest antique stores or by foreign travel.

This new emporium of boards has triggered several changes in our collecting and in our collections. Firstly, we are tending to abandon eclecticism in favor of specialized collecting. Secondly, we are creating new areas of specialized interest by being exposed to boards never before encountered in our local forays.

Thirdly, many members are seeking out some of the same boards or types of boards. Thus, our collections are losing their distinctive characteristics and are becoming more homogenized.

Most importantly, however, cribbage board collecting is becoming expensive. The Internet not only gives us a huge new stock of boards to choose from, it also gives us a huge new number of shoppers to compete with. Before, we were the only nuts out there in our territories looking for boards, or perhaps there were a handful of other collectors we were vying with for local boards. Thus, prices, except for the acknowledged rare and expensive art boards, were kept fairly low. The auction format on the Internet ensures that boards will sell for the highest price the market will bear at any given time.

Ebay and the other on-line auction services now set the market value for collectibles. No longer are the price guides the final word in determining the selling prices. No longer can collectors bargain with dealers for a better price. Dealers now follow the outcome of auctions and set their prices accordingly. If a common board happens to go for a relatively high price once or twice, even if the same boards fail to sell all the rest of the many times they are offered, the dealer prices are frozen at the inflated price. Just try to talk them down.

My biggest fear is that the lure of this new marketplace, with its potential for high prices for our unwanted or duplicate boards, might tempt our members away from the comradery of CBCS that it has fostered in the past, tying us together as a society of people who share a common passion, weakening it to a forum for information on cribbage boards that will only serve to enhance our knowledge of the worth of our boards. I fervently hope this never happens. I remember the joy I felt when I discovered the ad for Bette's Cribb in the ACC newsletter and, when upon sending for a catalog, was told by our President of the existence of the CBCS and learned that I wasn't the only nut out there collecting cribbage boards.