



Flour Power: The Richard Ferrell Collection
Video Podcast transcript
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Richard Ferrell: Well, my collection started with one simple postcard. When I was with Pillsbury's paper bag conversion plant operation down in Wellsbury, West Virginia, I received a postcard from a fellow back in Minneapolis, which was a card showing the A Mill from about 1923. This card was what really got the whole thing rolling. The thing that really struck me was the information and the wonderful graphics on postcards and trade cards and I found many of these at flea markets in the West Virginia, Southern Ohio and Western Pennsylvania area. When I was in corporate, travelling to the plants, they were long days, but usually, on the way to the airport, when I was finished, I would find some time to search the area. I got to the point where I could almost sense when there was something in the shop that I would go through. I would walk through very fast in two directions, go around the shop one way, and then turn around and go the other way so I would see everything from a different view.

You just find so many things as a collector that you didn't realize were available. Those were the really special things: all the sudden something would come up you couldn't imagine existed. One of which was a large brass sign from the Pillsbury building, which was moved by the maintenance people. There were two of them. It's kind of an educational process. You see how there is a general trend to advertising over the different decades, such as the Art Deco artwork. The two big advertisers in this area, in Minneapolis-St. Paul, were Washburn-Crosby and Pillsbury. They had opposing slogans. Whereas Washburn-Crosby came up with "Eventually – Why Not Now," for their Gold Medal Flour, Pillsbury's response to that was: "Because Pillsbury's Best." It's very interesting to follow that and you can date things that are undated by virtue of the artwork.

Once I thought I had collected all the Pillsbury things there were, I moved to other mills in Minnesota. When I thought I had all of those then I moved on to other states, and other parts of the country. I think I learned a lesson about condition because when I first started to collect I would really take everything I hadn't seen before. And I soon found that the item would turn up again in better condition. So, I was constantly upgrading in my early collecting years. I finally learned that you should look for good condition before you collect the first time. It's really easier and better for you as a collector.

Well, you don't have to talk very long to a dealer in antiques to say that Ebay changed the whole world for them. It's a totally different approach to collecting: very few people go to the shows anymore, except for the ones who are very deeply involved on a particular subject.

They are all in alphabetical order in these acid-free albums. I like to look through a magnifier and see the detail of the people and what they are doing. If there is a sack on the dock, you can read the logo or see the designs. And again that's one of the very attractive things about collecting for me - the artwork, the color: It's very interesting and one of the things that pushed me in the early stages to continue to collect.

Although I'll never be called a flour miller, I certainly understand the process well from the collecting.

Title card: Donating the collection

Richard Ferrell: Over the years, I'd always hoped that there would be some way to preserve my collection. And, certainly when Mill City Museum became a reality, it was wonderful to be able to work with the folks there and be able to share my collection by donating it.

(laughs) My wife is going to kill me one of these days. I won't die a normal death. I know that.