

A full-page photograph of an older man with a grey beard and a woman embracing in front of St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow. The man is wearing a tan coat and the woman is wearing a dark coat with a red scarf. The cathedral's colorful onion domes are visible in the background.

# BOXOFFICE

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**Movie Memorabilia:**  
A Theatre Owner's Guide to Collectibles



## A Theatre Owner's Guide To Movie Memorabilia

By Bradford G. Boyle

IT COULD BE considered an urban legend: a theatre owner, while cleaning out the dark and mysterious recesses of his or her theatre, finds a cache of old and dusty movie memorabilia. The owner sorts through the pile, hoping to find a valuable one-sheet from "Gone With The Wind." Instead, the owner finds only lobby cards from "Godzilla, King of the Monsters," an insert from "Forbidden Planet," and a one-sheet from some old picture called "Dark Victory." Presuming it to be basically worthless, the owner gives it, or sells it "by the pound," to some collector who has been pestering him or her for old posters. Perhaps the selling price is \$25.00 or some other nominal amount, so that the owner can feel that he or she made a profit. Everybody is happy. The owner has gotten rid of the junk that was cluttering up the back closet, and has even made a "profit" off the worthless stuff. The collector walks away glassy-eyed with the worthless material.

Except, of course, that the glassy-eyed collector turns around and buys a new car with the \$9,000 he or she received from the "Dark Victory" one-sheet, the \$500 from the "Forbidden Planet" insert, and the \$150 from the "Godzilla" lobby cards.

Of course (hopefully) this scenario is just a legend. For it is common knowledge in this day and age that movie posters can be worth big bucks, even those you would not imagine could be valuable. Any older poster is worth something, but some are worth far more than their chronological age would indicate.

Usually collectors specialize in particular areas: actors, directors, or an entire film genre such as science fiction films of the 1950s. But some concentrate on even more obscure areas. For example, take the case of "Earth vs. the Flying Saucers," a B science fiction thriller from the '50s. It is over 30 years old, and you would be correct in assuming it has

some value because of its age. You may even be aware that science fiction memorabilia from that era often brings a good price. But you probably are not aware that a poster from this film has a special value: the special effects were done by Ray Harryhausen, who went on to do "The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad," "Jason and the Argonauts," and other cult classics. And there are a sizable number of collectors who specialize in Ray Harryhausen's films. Since more collectors are interested in those posters, there is a shortage, and the price increases. Thus works the law of supply and demand.

Memorabilia from even a relatively new release can appreciate in value. Posters from a new James Bond film, for example, usually sell for more. It is easy to explain—collectors of that series of film material already have a complete set, except for the latest release. So they all want the new poster, raising the price by the law of supply and demand. The inflated value for material from a Bond film may not be much, but it will probably be worth two to three times that of its contemporaries. Films that create their own sub-genre, such as "Star Wars" can appreciate incredibly fast. But how can you





get the best price from your find?

### Types of Movie Memorabilia

First, a quick review of the various types of movie memorabilia:

**One-Sheets.** The most common style of poster, they are traditionally seen in display cases outside the theatre. Measuring 27 by 41 inches, they are printed on paper, and usually folded. Extremely old one-sheets may measure 28 by 42 inches, but it is unlikely you will find one of this size as the current size came into vogue about the same time sound movies did.

**Three-Sheets.** As the more quantitative-minded might have deduced, three-

sheets are the size of three one-sheets, or 41 by 81 inches. They usually are also printed on paper, folded, and normally come in two pieces. Three-sheets are less common than one-sheets.

**Six-Sheets.** Rarer than the other "Sheet" posters, six-sheets are gigantic—approximately six times larger (as you might have guessed) than a one-sheet.

**Half-Sheets.** Perhaps better known as display posters, they are the last member of the "sheet" family. They measure 22 by 28 inches, and are printed on light cardboard stock.

**Inserts.** 14 by 36 inch vertical posters, also printed on lightweight cardboard. Usually rolled.

**Window Cards.** 14 by 22 card stock posters. Window cards may have handwriting on the bottom, telling where and when the movie was playing. This arises from the fact that they were given to other businesses to display in their store windows, often in exchange for free movie passes.

**Lobby Cards.** Small card stock posters, measuring 11 by 14 inches. Lobby cards typically come in sets of eight; and a complete set is more valuable than the combined worth of individual cards. One card is the "title card," with the film's title and credits, and the other seven are "scene cards," which are usually color photographs from the film, although some may have artist's renderings.

**Stills.** Not posters, stills are 8 by 10 inch photographs from a movie. They can may be black or white, color, or a combination of both. Unlike other memorabilia, they are easily duplicated. Stills are photographed separately from the movie, which can sometimes result in scenes that are edited out of the final print.

**Pressbooks.** Those glossy little books with camera-ready advertising. They are often cut up, since the theatre owner probably used it to advertise the movie. This reduces their value.

### How to Sell Movie Memorabilia

Actually, the first option is not to sell. Movie memorabilia has appreciated at dizzying rates. For example, a "Wizard of Oz" one-sheet in 1965 was worth \$15.00, while today that same poster would be worth several thousand dollars, if you could find one for sale. You can speculate in this market by simply holding on to your posters. Since there are a limited number of old posters, demand will probably continue to rise. Of course, the typical investment disclaimer exists: past performance is no guarantee of future trends. But I can tell you this much: I'm not selling right now.

If you do decide to take this option, be aware that posters need special treat-

## Selling Movie Memorabilia

### Movie Collector's World

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Fraser, MI 48026

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### Memorabilia Shops:

#### A Belle Epoque

11661 San Vicente Blvd., Suite 211

Los Angeles, CA 90049

213-442-0054

#### Cinema City

Box 1012

Muskegon, MI 49443

616-722-7760

#### Collectors Book Store

1708 N. Vine St.

Hollywood, CA 90028

213-467-3296

#### Gone Hollywood

172 Bella Vista Ave.

Belvedere Is., CA 94920

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#### Hollywood Book and Poster Co.

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#### Jerry Ohlinger's Movie Material Store

242 West 14th St.

New York, NY 10011

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#### The Paper Chase

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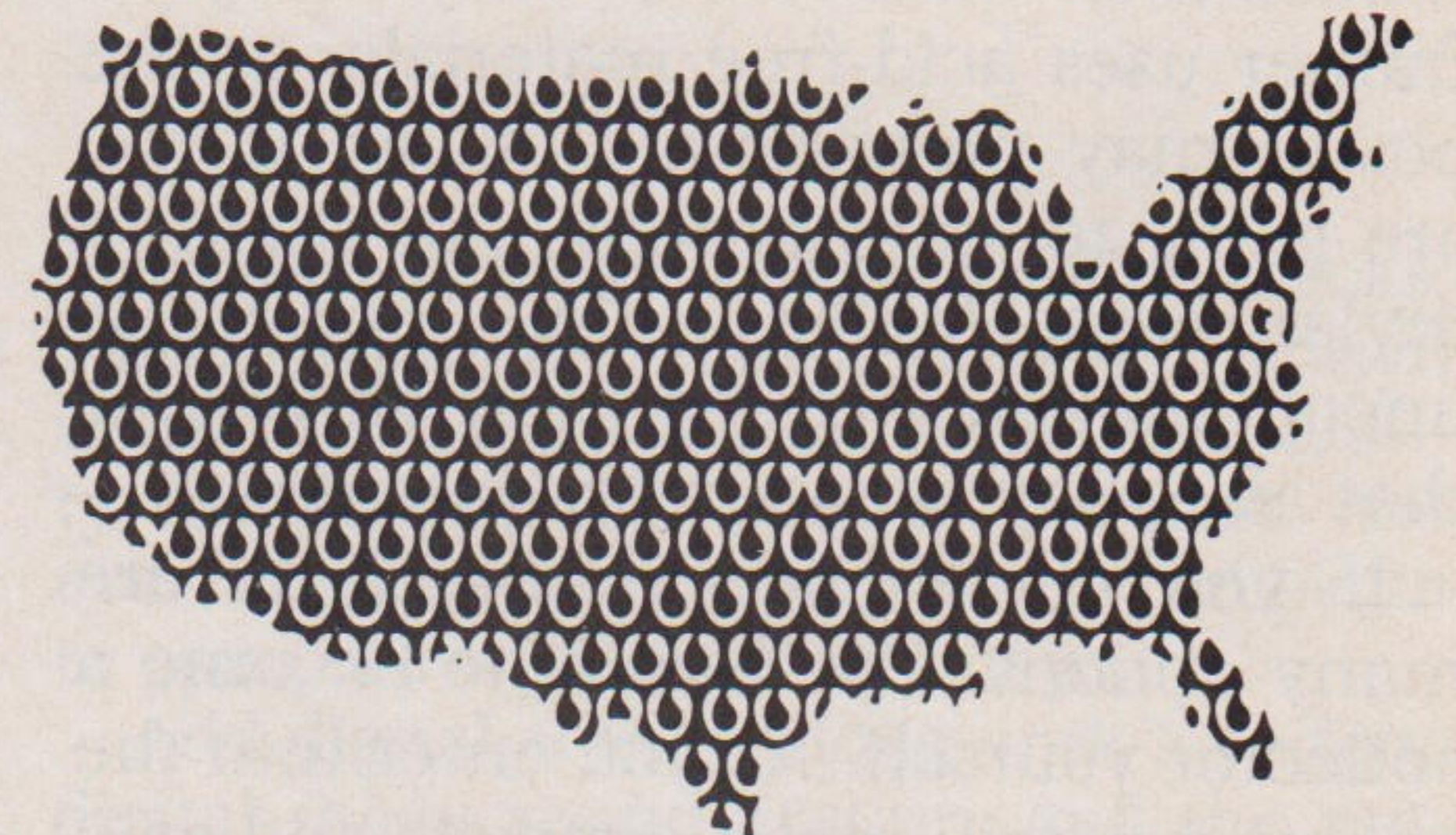
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# Memorabilia

(continued from p. 15)

ment. Keep them away from direct sunlight, extreme temperature changes, and humidity. If you want to display a poster, try to avoid having it mounted. Although this may flatten a poster out (since most are folded), it tends to reduce their value. Also, verify that your framer uses acid-free materials, or the poster may prematurely decay. If you are going to store posters, put them in mylar bags. Mylar, unlike plastic, is uncontaminated by harmful chemicals that also may cause premature decay.

If you do decide to sell, there are many options. The best is to become a collector yourself. As you enter into the hobby, you will make contacts and gain a familiarity with marketplace that will give you the knowledge of how to get the best price. An excellent way to enter the world of collectors is to order a copy of the tabloid *Movie Collector's World* (See accompanying sidebar). It is chock full of ads from both dealers and collectors, in addition to articles on films.

But if you don't want to gain a new hobby, what is the best route to maximize your return? The quickest and easiest way is to sell everything to a dealer who specializes in the field (See sidebar). The dealers will give you a decent



deal, and you can quickly have cash in your pocket. But movie poster dealers exist because they make money: they buy low and sell high.

My advice to quickly maximize your profit is this: Buy a movie memorabilia price guide, available at most movie bookstores. While not a "bible," they

can give you a rough approximation of a poster's value. Things that make a poster more valuable (such as the example of Ray Harryhausen working on the film) will be incorporated into the price. Order a copy of *Movie Collector's World* or a similar publication and look through it for ads from collectors seeking specific posters. Since they are looking to add to or complete their collection, you can usually get a good price. (Check the prices against the price guide—if they are close, sell.) Then take out your own ad listing your unsold posters. Price them slightly lower than in the price guide, but also stating "or best offer, but seller reserves the right to refuse all offers." List the condition of the posters—tears, yellowing, etc. Be sure to include a charge for postage and insurance. Sell the posters you get a good offer on, mailing them in sturdy tubes or packaging. Solicit bids on everything else from dealers, and sell to the highest bidder.

Of course, most of the posters are not going to be worth a thousand or even a hundred dollars. But some might. With a little effort, you can secure a good price for them. And that beats giving them away or selling them by the pound. ■

Bradford G. Boyle is a free lance writer based in Taipei, Taiwan.



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