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AMES WOMAN

Collects 18,000 Playing Cards

By Herb Owens

AMES, IA.—Mrs. Joe L. Robinson, wife of an Iowa State College agronomy professor, has built one of the finest collections of playing cards in the midwest.

Among more than 18,000 befuddling decks are items produced more than 300 years ago — cards drawn by artists, cards made by hand, cards made by some printing process, and cards made by a stencil method.

With more than 200 rare, valuable complete decks, Mrs. Robinson has items from China, Japan and India. Among European decks, she has a rare dozen, hand painted face cards, by H. Muller of Vienna in 1818.

Her oldest card with geometrical dots is a wood-blocked *King of Clubs*, found in a monastery. A Belgian theology professor —a priest—had used it to make solution of $5 sermons delivered in Paris churches in 1907.

Mrs. Robinson first became intrigued by the romance of playing cards as an applied art major at University of Wyoming. She collected decks for demonstrations of applied art.

Czech Cards

Ten years ago Mrs. Robinson started collecting complete decks. Her first valuable item was a Czechoslovakian deck in the Latin suit signs: Coins (diamonds) representing tradesmen; swords (spades) representing nobility; batons (clubs) representing peasantry; and cups (hearts) representing the clergy.

Antique German suit signs are bells, acorns, hearts and leaves. Mrs. Robinson had one card of this type which was picked up by an Allied soldier during the retreat of General Rommel's troops in Africa.

Mrs. Robinson, who is judges national playing card exhibits and lectures on the subject, has decks ranging from 2 cents to $100 cards which cost her $4 "of a bargain."

Books on the history of playing cards are themselves rare. Mrs. Robinson has a voluminous 468-page 1930 volume by Catherine Hargreaves which Mrs. Robinson was happy to get for $35 second-hand and a 1894 volume by William Chatto.

Mrs. Robinson is an expert on Bicycle brand cards —81 designs of which have been produced in the U. S. Card Company since 1891. There are rare items even among these modern decks

Bicycle Decks

"All the Bicycle decks were produced in a single color—blue, red, green or brown—on white cards. Then someone began using a two-color design which were for export. It's almost impossible to locate any of the two-color cards," she said.

"Four rare Bicycle designs were produced just as World War I was ending. They had tanks and airplanes in the designs and were withdrawn when the war ended. The few that "got away" are rare."

Mrs. Robinson has some circular cards from the Orient. Made of lacquer, they have 10 suits—sword, thunderbolt, arrow, battalion, bear, fish, shell, ax and dwarf.

Round cards were produced in the Orient but the error widely corrected. Several American firms now broke trying to popularize them, Mrs. Robinson said.

Until comparatively recently, the backs of playing cards were blank. In colonial days, they were used as calling cards, with the person's name written on the back. George Washington used cards to issue presidential inspection on the backs of cards, Mrs. Robinson said.

Playing cards were once used as matriculation cer-

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Along the Way

TOMORROW Clear Lobo's gardens-artist.

I. S. C. Addition Bids Are Opened

(The Tribune's Iowa News Service)

AMES, IA.—Bids for an addition to Home Economics hall at Iowa State College have been opened Tuesday by the finance committee of the state board of regents.

Low base bidders were on the general contract, P. L. Thomas Construction Co., West Des Moines, $1,000,000; mechanical, School Plumbing and Heating Co., Austin, Minn., $111,111; electrical, Western Lighting, Des Moines, $54,215; elevators, Materials Handling Equipment, Inc., Des Moines, $29,900.

Awarding of the contract is subject to approval of the board of regents and the budget and financial control committee of the legislature.

The legislature appropriated $950,000 for the 3-story addition. It will be of Bedford stone to match the existing building.

Joe Robinson card collecting article

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