

Buttons by the Bushel

By Virginia Cook Card

ONE hundred thousand buttons, and no two alike—that's the collection acquired by Mrs. Helen B. Moody of Santa Monica through 40 years of search.

This collection is outstanding in America. It includes a bewildering variety of such buttons as silver filigrees, jewels, corals, cut steels, photographs and lithographs, animals and heads, jets, mosaics and modern "goofies."

Mrs. Moody's hobby started when, as a Nebraska school-teacher, her pupils rewarded her with "charm strings" of buttons. She says, "I started to collect in earnest in 1912 when Dr. Moody and I built our Santa Monica home."

She had the walls of her den finished in burlap to accommodate an all-button, foot-wide frieze encircling the room. Built-in cabinets were made to hold countless trays.

She has a burlap-covered screen displaying 3500 buttons and a pair of boys' overalls on which are sewn several hundred distinctive overalls buttons with such tried and true names on them as "Stronghold," "Oshkosh B'gosh," "True Fit," "Can't Bust 'Em," "Big Boss," and "Railroad Kink."

Bedecking a blue cape of Spanish War origin are 700 brass buttons from Army, Navy, policeman and fireman uniforms. Eleven hundred gleaming buttons, some hand-painted in Sweden, some enameled in France, buttons carved in Hawaii and those worn by monarchs and milkmaids, peasants and presidents, contribute to the glory of a scarlet cloak.

Mrs. Moody used to sew her buttons in heterogeneous groupings on large button trays. In recent years button societies have sprouted up throughout the nation and, next to stamps and coins, button collecting now ranks third in national hobbies. To comply with the new standard Button Show rules her buttons are mounted on 9x12-inch cards which are encased in glass-covered walnut frames.

Since the actual number of buttons in each tray or frame depends upon the size of the button the five classes are: 10 for large buttons, 25 for medium, 30 for small and 70 for diminutives. For facility of handling, wires,



Mrs. Moody wears a scarlet cape on which 1100 buttons are sewn; the burlap-covered screen displays 3500.



Figures of roosters decorate buttons of enamel, black glass, of porcelain, carved pearl, brass or black bone.



Edward Lester Smith photos

Heads of famous characters from history, mythology and legend have been carved on these unusual metal buttons.

of facility of handling, wires, clips, safety pins or pipe cleaners are used to fasten the shanks to the backs of the button cards.

In addition to being a member of the National Button Society, California State Button Society and Los Angeles Button Club, Mrs. Moody was founder and first president of the Helen B. Moody Button Club of Santa Monica, a study and research group. Although she celebrated her golden wedding anniversary last year she thoroughly enjoys hopping

a plane to participate in a National or State Button Show.

The past parades through the fingers of this button fancier like footsteps echoing in the corridor of history and in the procession march buttons with shimmering iridescence, crayola colorings, bold ostentation. But also taking part in this pageantry are modern plastic goofies (recognizable by shape of some object) among which are a pencil box, heart, wishbone, thimble and

a very complete fish dinner.

One tray is mounted with opaque mourning buttons one with wedding dress buttons dated from 1776 to 1897. Another displays 25 "sew-through" buttons with from one to five holes. There is a great variety of button backs, too, including loop backs, shank backs, hump backs, thread backs and pin backs.

Mrs. Moody's one request is NOT to be asked, "Button, button, who has the button?"