

Easy Ways To Avoid Damaging Covers: II

Continuing with our opening theme from Part I, another “material” we use with our covers every day that also commonly damages them is...the rubber band! [*Oh no! Not the rubber band! Is nothing sacred!*] I know. They’re so convenient, so easy, so available—but they’re really not good for your covers. When you rubber band a stack of covers together, it has to be reasonably tight to keep the stack intact. However, that also means, at the very least, that the top and bottom covers of the stack are going to be creased on the edges where the rubber band cuts into them. This often happens even when you try to get around this problem by using extra-wide rubber bands. Also, when banding together stacks of 30-strikes, not all of the covers may be exactly the same width, and then the rubber band will cut into the edges of the widest covers in the stack, no matter whether they’re on the top or bottom, or in the middle.. They stick out more, so they take the pressure of the rubber band on the sides.

What to do! What to do! Easy—stop using rubber bands. Use paper bands. Just cut a strip of any scratch paper and band it around your stack of covers, fastening it with a small piece of tape...just like you see on the various bundled lots in auctions [*ever wonder why you don’t see those auction lots bundled with rubber bands?.....hm-m-m-m?*]. Granted, it’s a wee bit more time-consuming, but you can make the strips of paper as wide as you want (thereby giving additional support to that stack of covers), and they don’t crease the top and bottom covers. There are a couple of other advantages to this method, as well. Using such paper bands, you can now easily label each stack by simply writing on the band. And, although your piece of tape may eventually lose its holding power, paper bands won’t disintegrate over the years as rubber bands will. Also, many of those old rubber banded bundles that may be stored away for years will eventually have the rubber bands fuse to the surface of the top or bottom covers, permanently defacing those covers. [*Boy, I’ll bet you never realized just how evil rubber bands were!*]

More materials hazardous to your covers include sharp knives, ball-point pens, and vises! It’s usually not a good idea to use a sharp knife to shuck your covers. When trying to open the staple on a cover, it’s too easy for a sharp knife to accidentally dig into the cover itself, rather than simply lifting the staple prongs open. Also, more than a few of us have ended up with more band-aids on our fingers than shucked covers! I usually use a letter opener. It’s dull, and it works on all but those few covers where the staple is actually buried in the cover.

Ball-point pens? How do they damage covers?.....guess! Right! How many times have you come across usable covers that have been written on—in ink!—by collectors!—some, even on the front of the cover! It’s enough to make even the most docile of us howl in frustration. Never write on covers with ink, and that includes stamping them on the inside with ink pad stamps. There will be times when you might want to write on covers—say, noting catalog numbers on Girlie or Navy Ship covers—but when and if you do, do it lightly, on the inside, in pencil.

Vises! [*not “vices;” I can think of a lot of vices that would ruin covers, but that’s another article!*] Flattening your newly shucked covers offers some potential problems. Because you’re going to be putting pressure on a group of covers to take the bends out of them and make them nice and flat, it’s necessary to be careful of the materials you use. The vise in the garage works well, but most vises have “teeth” to hold the object in place, so you’ll need to put your covers between two small boards or other smooth surfaces before you put them into the jaws of death! Even so, I’ve gotten a little over-enthusiastic on tightening the vise...only to see the boards crushed and my covers go flying all over the garage. There are better ways!

[more in Part III in our next issue]