

Tips For Getting Started

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As with most things, organization, here, is the key to success in your new hobby. You'll be dealing with thousands of items that will need to be kept track of, and you'll need to identify your goals and how you mean to accomplish those goals. The following is presented as a logical sequence to those ends:

This hobby demands space, so a good place to start is by finding a good place to start! From this base 1) of operations, you'll eventually be directing the entire course of your hobby. Your hobby area needs a table or desk (the more open, flat space, the better—you'll be spreading out albums, covers, and the like), good lighting (essential for all that fine reading on matchcover text), storage facilities (closets, shelves, customized drawers, boxes, etc.), and a means for sorting covers into their respective categories (this can be anything from bundled stacks to empty caddy boxes to 'multi-mailbox' style cubicles housed in a single container—some stationery stores carry the latter item; teachers use them for sorting out students' papers).

Stocking your hobby area is the next step. You'll need pens, pencils, a ruler, lots of rubber bands 2) (never let them damage your covers, though), stationery, a small pen knife (for stripping matchcovers), a couple of small, wooden vises (for flattening covers), a postage scale (for weighing outgoing trades), a tape dispenser, some empty shoe boxes (indispensable as temporary storage for covers), 3-ring binders (for housing your collection), a good supply of plastic pages in assorted sizes (for mounting your covers), memo pads (I'm always leaving myself notes as reminders), and, if you're going to be a serious collector, your computer should be in this area, as well (for collector correspondence, for web site reference and research, hobby record keeping, etc.).

One thing you do need to acquire right away is knowledge. This hobby has its own language, history, 3) and way of doing things. You should become familiar with all three as soon as possible. The best way to do this is to maintain your membership in RMS (we are, after all, the national hobby organization and the largest matchcover collecting organization in the world) and at least a couple of the more than 30

30 regional clubs around the United States and Canada. Even if you are never able to attend any club meetings, you'll be receiving the RMS and club bulletins, have access to auctions and membership rosters, and be kept up to date on what's going on in your hobby. Most collectors belong to several clubs, while attending the meetings in their local area.

- a) An excellent way to start learning immediately about the hobby, if you have internet access, is to visit the various matchcover-related sites. As of this writing, there are a few club sites up and a number of collector sites. The Rathkamp Matchcover Society web site (<http://www.matchcover.org>) is the largest of the club sites. It has lots of basic information and exemplary pictures. My own site (<http://users.ev1.net/~rmseditor>) is by far the most comprehensive in existence—and that's the way I designed it. Novice or veteran collector, you'll find a lot of helpful information there.
 - b) And, just as when you were in school, the library and research are a necessity, only here you should start building your own reference library. Bulletin articles that you find helpful, a glossary of hobby terms, various 'how to' pieces, cover listings, guides, etc.—you'll find all invaluable.
- 4) Now you're ready to begin. You have only one goal at this point in the game plan: amass covers—all covers, any covers, as long as they're undamaged and unstruck—covers that you run across in night clubs, restaurants, hotels, motels, and other businesses. covers that have been saved for you by relatives and friends, covers that you can pick up at club meetings and conventions. This "vacuum" approach accomplishes two important things. It allows you to build up a base from which to trade, and it enables you to view and examine the wide variety of cover types and styles that exist. These, in turn, prepare you for the final step in basic matchcover collecting. Namely...
- a) Only a small percentage of collectors actually collect all types of covers. The sheer numbers involved, and the resulting space required, makes it necessary for the great majority of collectors to specialize in particular categories. For example, I currently collect in 231 categories, which sounds horrendously large, but just by not collecting Hotels, Motels, and Restaurants, I've already eliminated the vast majority of covers in existence. You'll be able to make that decision for yourself when the time comes, based upon your own preferences and what you've learned about the hobby.
 - b) Once you've decided what categories of covers strike your fancy, you're ready to concentrate on building up a real collection in those areas. That means zeroing in on only certain types of covers. Many collectors try to do this by simply looking for what they want in club and convention auctions, but, at best, this is a slow and expensive process that results in mediocre collections. If you have the money, of course, you can simply bid your time and purchase someone else's good collection when a veteran collector retires or passes away, but you'll have missed the most important part of any hobby that deals in collectibles. You'll have pride in ownership, but not the pride that comes from craftsmanship, since it was someone else who actually put the collection together. The best way to have both is to trade.
- 5) For the serious collector, trading is a must. Usually, to build a truly outstanding collection, it's necessary to have a network of collectors all over the country, or countries, collecting for you.

Other collectors are willing to do this for you because, in trading relationships, you're doing the same for them, and, in the process, you often build important contacts and lifelong friendships, as well.

There's more to collecting matchcovers than this, of course, but this outline provides an adequate structure to get you going. The hobby's now hidden intricacies and finer points will reveal themselves to you as time goes on.

When questions do arise, never hesitate to ask more experienced collectors. One of the best features of this particular hobby is the collectors, themselves. I've collected coins, stamps, books, etc., but I've never come across a more congenial, helpful, and fun-loving group of people than matchcover collectors. They want you to succeed. After all, they already know the pleasures this hobby has to offer, and they're more than willing to share the secrets with you.