

## Did You Say “Variation”? (I)

One man’s variation is another man’s dupe, so, not surprisingly, there’s a lot of variation when it comes to variation! And what is a ‘variation,’ anyway? It’s a cover that is basically the same as another cover, but there is some (usually very small) difference. If that cover is actually a ‘legitimate’ variation, then it can be counted as a different cover, rather than a dupe. Thus, the question of exactly what constitutes a legitimate variation is an important one, since it directly affects the size of a collection, the number of covers in a set, which covers you can and can’t send to a trader, and how your collection breaks down when it’s time to sell it.

Well, I can definitely answer the question right off the bat—there is no unanimous consensus on what constitutes a variation [*why are you not surprised?*]. I can give you some guidelines, though, based on general procedures within the hobby.

**Striker Variations:** There are two types of striker variations: color and width. Most collectors will accept strikingly different striker colors or shades as legitimate variations (black - brown - gray, for example). After that, you’re on very shaky ground. Anything in between may be due to fading or who knows what. Also, the colors of many strikers change with age, humidity, and the like. So, again, you have to be very careful here.

As to striker width, the only really legitimate variation is the difference between the very wide early strikers (1930s and before) and the later, thinner variety. Otherwise, even though you can take a ruler and find lots of differences in the widths of strikers, Vance Marks [*Long Beach Bulletin, December 1976*] pointed out that those differences are normally due to the manufacturer using different striker application wheels during the manufacturing process—not legitimate variations.

Errors, of course, in this area and others, on the other hand, would be definite variations. Incomplete strikers, double strikers, misplaced strikers, no strikers, etc. would all be legitimate variations.

**Manumark Variations:** Now we’re on thin ice. Even if two similar covers have completely different manumarks (say, one Diamond, one Atlas), there are lots of collectors who would count the second cover as a mere dupe (and I’d have to normally include myself in that group, as well). Still, there are also lots of collectors who would count them as two different covers. So, collectors are split when the manumarks are *substantially* different. You can imagine the disagreement on manumarks that are *slightly* different! One cover has “Diamond Match Co., N.Y.C.” while another cover (exactly the same otherwise) has “Diamond Match Co., Buffalo, NY”. Are they different? Are they not? But, let’s take it all the way to the extreme. What about all those Universal covers with the dots in front and behind the manumark text? For example,

- Universal Match Corp., Kansas City •
- as opposed to...*
- • Universal Match Corp., Kansas City • •

Are those variations, or are they dupes? In my Manumark Dating Guide, I use them as separate and distinct manumarks (because I want to date each possible variation), but I wouldn’t dream of counting such ‘variations’ as different covers in my own collections....and then what about the same manumark right side up on one cover and upside down on the other? What about a dot in the manumark as opposed to a dash? What about no comma in one and a comma in the other? *Oi vey!*

*Continued in Part II, next issue*