

OCT 2003

Don't Get Into... Bad Habits!

by
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[I originally wrote this for the RMS Bulletin 1994, but it's worth a rehash here, and it's all still applicable]

We all have bad habits; it's a condition that comes with being human. However, being *intelligent* humans, we can learn our way out of these habits. In the hobby, there are several common bad habits that collectors slip into if they're not careful. Sometimes, it's due to ignorance; sometimes it's due to sloppiness, but everyone who's been collecting for at least a few years knows that these bad habits can cost you time, effort, money...and good covers, so let's go over some of these pesky situations.

Don't wrap stacks of covers with tight rubber-bands. The stack's top and bottom covers, at the very least, will be permanently marked, if not torn, by the rubberband.

Don't use rubberbands for long-range storage. The rubberbands are going to get brittle with age and break away, but if you have one stack of covers sitting on top of another, the rubberband will eventually FUSE to at least one of the covers it is touching! The solution is to wrap your stack of covers with a strip of paper (say 1"-2" wide) and a piece of tape. The paper acts like a rubberband but doesn't damage the covers. It's a tiny bit more effort to do it this way, but the results are worth it.

Don't mail your trade covers in a single stack. If you have 30 20-strike covers you're mailing, for example, and you simply plop the stack of 30 in an envelope: 1) the post office will charge you additional postage for all the bulkiness; and 2) you've just increased your letter's chances of being torn to shreds by the post office's sorting machines. Take that stack of 30 covers and (for a small envelope) make two 15-cover stacks, wrap them, and piggyback one on top of the edge of the other. Now your letter still carries the same 30 covers but is only half as thick. Or (for a legal-sized envelope), you can divide your 30 covers into four stacks and then make two side-by-side piggyback sets. Now your letter is only 1/4th as thick as it originally was. Different sized covers call for different packing combinations.

Don't write on the faces of covers! Sometimes people will circle address locations or even write in the city and state if it's not on the cover. When you do that, you've just converted your cover to garbage. If you HAVE to write on a cover, write on the inside, lightly, in pencil. If that cover eventually goes to

another collector, he or she may not appreciate the writing and want to take it off. Sometimes, by the way, it *is* a good idea to write on a cover. When you're working on Navy Ships, Girlies, or any covers that are listed by catalog numbers, you'll find it very helpful to put the appropriate number on the inside of the cover for future reference....but *in pencil on the inside*. This will also aid collectors who receive those covers in trade.

Don't re-color a struck striker. This practice used to be more common in earlier days than it is now, thank goodness! Some collectors would take a felt-tip pen, for example, and re-color strikers in the hopes of covering over strikes and thereby "rejuvenating" struck covers. A struck cover by any other name is STILL a struck cover. Not a good idea!

Don't cut the strikers off covers. Many early collectors, and a few present-day novices, used to do so before they discovered the organized hobby. Guess they only wanted to save the "pretty parts." ...a major no-no in the hobby. [*incidentally, within the hobby, we call this practice "bobtailing" ...after the Lorena Bobbitt incident(!)*].

Don't glue covers onto anything. Again, this was more common in earlier days, but you can still hear people coming into the hobby saying, "Oh, I didn't know!" This practice ruins most such covers, especially if there was printing on the inside of the cover to begin with.

Don't leave covers in the sun to dry. The covers you just obtained might be musty-smelling...they might even be damp...but drying them in the sun will fade the colors on the cover. If covers need to be dried out, let them dry out naturally, indoors. In the past, there was at least one Navy Ship collector who put his covers in the sun purposely to change the color of the strikers. He could then claim to have discovered new variations!

Don't replace strikers. Earlier collectors often tried to reverse the bobtailing practice by putting a striker from one cover onto a more highly-prized bobtailed cover. They would simply cut for a good fit and then tape the new striker on (from the inside) the bobbed cover. Usually, these are easy to spot, but some look quite original. This practice still occurs in some nooks and crannies of the hobby. Don't get into this habit.

Don't cut boxes to open them up. If you regularly receive boxes in trade, you'll begin to notice that, for example, some opened American Ace boxes are shorter than others. That's because some unknowing soul simply snipped the box open instead of carefully prying the two glued edges apart. Again, the cut box is a ruined box...bad habit!

Don't store covers in damp areas. This will eventually cause the staples to rust, the strikers to age, and the covers to generally deteriorate. If your basement tends to flood in the winter, you don't want to store your covers there. But, your local climate has a lot to do with it. I, for example, living in perpetually beautiful, sunny California, can store many of my albums in my garage with no qualms. The soggy souls living in the Deep South, however, where humidity on any given day is 114%, shouldn't do that.

Don't put staple holes in flats in order to pass them off into acceptable covers. "Flats" are salesmen's samples; they've never contained matches; normally, they're not considered real covers. So, putting staple holes in them to make them look more real is cheating! (doesn't work, anyway, because flats normally haven't been machine-creased, either) Basically, just remember...

Don't do anything that will permanently alter a cover's original state, not counting stripping