

Why Clubs Fail

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“ Looking at a list of past clubs would certainly start one wondering exactly why clubs fold. Actually, a few didn't really disappear; they merged to form a newer, bigger club, usually because they were covering the same geographic area. Pennsylvania's Keystone and Lehigh Valley clubs, for example, merged in 1987 to form the Keystone-Lehigh Matchcover Club. Mergers, though, are the rare exception.

The list of clubs that have, in fact, failed is quite formidable. What happened? Attrition? After all, the hobby does tend to appeal to the older citizenry; collectors sometimes lose interest and drop out, at least temporarily; and people move in and out of local areas. All of these things happen, but these aren't the primary causes.

At least one club failed because an officer absconded with the treasury! But, fortunately, chicanery hasn't proved to be one of the primary causes either.

It turns out that one of the two culprits causing club failures (although not the biggest one) is “*infighting*”—a clash of personalities or clicks within the club, itself. As likable and lovable as we all are, we all have our own preferences, opinions, and agendas, and sometimes these get in the way of our primary hobby goals (*and you don't have to look far to see current examples*). Anyway, what should, at the most, be minor annoyances, can become problems that rip a club apart. The central figures in such situations (often the club officers) stop cooperating and associating with one another, and pretty soon other members stop attending meetings because they don't want to get caught in the middle, and because they're own collecting goals are no longer being met. The result: a defunct club.

But the most common cause is simply...*a lack of people willing to do the work*. In order to keep a club running, some of the members have to be willing to do the organizing, record-keeping, bulletin-writing, auction-running, etc. When a club loses its vital people, and no one else steps forward to take their places, the club simply can;t continue to exist. That's why every club should always be currying new officers. Even if past or present officers aren't going to disappear, sooner or later replacements are going to be needed...and they'd better be there! [The same problem, by the way, is why areas that have been ripe for a club for decades (Las Vegas and St. Louis, for example) haven't been able to field a club—lots of braves, but not enough chiefs!]

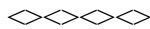
OK, so some clubs over the years have survived and some clubs haven't. There are always clubs going at any one time, so what difference does it make to the organized hobby. Is there some detrimental effect? Absolutely! When a club goes belly up, the hobby is going to feel it in the long run, and what it's going to feel is the loss of new collectors. How many can't be measured because we'll never know who those would-be collectors were, but they're there, and we've lost them.

We won't lose the active members of that now defunct club. They'll just transfer their activities and loyalties to another club. They're already in the hobby. It's all the local people who collect informally, who sort of have a yen for matchcovers but don't know how to follow through on it. Those are the people who are almost literally drawn out of the woodwork by the local club—by the club's displays at local fairs, county libraries, and banks—by flyers posted on bulletin boards all over town—by regularly scheduled meetings. Only now, in that particular area, there is no local club anymore, and all of those would-be collectors who would have been recruited by the club are left in a state of limbo. Some will

eventually find their way into the hobby anyway, but without the impetus of a local club to guide them, and welcome them, and support them, most are lost.

And it gets worse! The loss to the hobby of these new collectors has a rippling effect. All the covers that they would have traded to others are lost; all of the conventions and swapfests they would have attended will lack them now; all of their knowledge and experiences which would have been shared with the rest of us...lost! And so on.

That's why the passing of a club is something of a tragedy (*a moment of silence, please*). Not only have the efforts of a number of local people gone for naught, but the hobby loses, RMS loses, and the individual collector around the country loses."



Ed. Note: Well, I wrote that eleven years ago, and it's certainly still true today, but today the problem is compounded. Clubs are more worried about just finding members than finding officers. So, where are those officers going to come from? Who's going to be President after so-and-so wants to step down? Who's going to want to take on the paperwork headaches associated with being Secretary/ Treasurer? And worse, who's going to take over doing the bulletin? [I say 'worse' because of the various club officer positions, the Editor's job is the only one that absolutely requires the presence and availability of various pieces of technology ...and, it's a time-consuming job, as well].

I'm not a seer, but if things continue as they are at the present, or even get worse, I can see at least one solution to the "Where are our next officers coming from?" problem. It can already be seen in at least a few clubs...non-collectors as officers/members.

Since I'm most familiar with Sierra-Diablo, allow me to use our own club as an example. We've been very lucky to have Peggy Leslie as our Treasurer for many years. She volunteered (!) and

did a fantastic job, but she wasn't really a collector. She got into in through her relative, Warren Marshall, who was a founding member of the club and a super collector. Peggy recently stepped down from her position, and Jack Benbrook kindly consented to take over the Treasurer's duties.

Another example: Loren Moore, President of Sierra-Diablo, is an ardent collector, of course, but his entire family regularly helps out the club in a number of ways. Scott, his son, is something of a computer genius, and Scott's done a lot of graphic design and web work for the club. Plus, Loren's wife and sons help with the annual Swapfest auction.

"...And so-and-so's wife not really a collector, but she's nice enough to be our Secretary, or Publicist, or she's volunteered to collate and mail the bulletins for us", etc. I've heard that before. You may already know of such a volunteer at another club.

So, a collector's technologically-oriented son or daughter might be willing to step in, if needed, and produce a club's bulletin...someone's spouse, while not a collector, might still wish to be involved simply because his or her partner is...maybe the kids would like to come along and help Mom or Dad, Grandpa or Grandma...[OK, the last one's not very likely, I admit...Mom and Dad's kids are already grown, and the grandkids are probably not in the local vicinity anymore...but...maybe?]

Perhaps another possible solution/trend is simply merging some positions together so that less officers are needed by the club. The most common such merging already seen is Secretary+Treasurer into Secretary/Treasurer. Does the club *really* need a Vice-President? Sierra-Diablo doesn't. We don't have any meetings that a Vice-President would need to preside over in the absence of the President.

Whatever the solution, we *don't* want to see a club fold. We all lose in that event.