

## For the Serious Collector: Building a Reference Library

If you wish to be knowledgeable and really understand what you collect, having a reference library is an absolute must. For any hobbyist, whether he deals in coins, stamps, porcelain, toy trains, or matchcovers, a reference library is an invaluable tool and will prove its worth to the collector over and over again. Think of the frustration we've all felt at one time or another when we have that question that needs to be answered and find that we don't have the resources at hand to answer it ourselves. As an editor, I couldn't survive very long without the reference materials I've amassed over the years. I have to know what I'm talking about [*hopefully*], and there are so many topics to be aware of and so many potential questions. Most collectors won't need anything that extensive, but, just like having a dictionary, atlas, and perhaps a set of encyclopedias around, any cover enthusiast will benefit by having some reference materials.

What you choose to have in your reference library depends on your particular interests within the hobby; however, there are some basics that probably belong in just about everyone's hobby room.

A glossary of hobby terms is a good place to start. Even veterans come across terms that they may not have encountered before, and new terms are occasionally being added to the hobby as new cover types appear, or new "slang" terms come into use. A number of regional clubs have, in the past, compiled at least basic glossaries as helpful guides for new, incoming members, and there are more extensive glossaries available.

From a glossary, a good treatment of the hobby in general would be my next recommendation. In this category, there was basically nothing to choose from until Esther Rancier's book, *Matchcovers: A Guide to Collecting*, appeared in 1976. At the moment, the best general treatment of the subject is Bill Retskin's *Matchcover Collectors Resource Book and Price Guide*, which came out in 1990. I don't endorse the

price guide, but the rest of the book is a decent general guide to the hobby. I had hopes, at one time, that eventually an even better, more in-depth text would surface, but I don't see that as feasible for a writer now that the hobby has shrunk down to a relative handful of people.

After the glossary and the general hobby guide, then you need to start specializing, according to your own needs and interests. Regardless of what those are, your best place to start with specialized literature is your local club and RMS bulletins. After all, they're being delivered right to your door [*well, perhaps not right to your door...and maybe even not right to your house, but you get the idea...you know (for the younger generation), in the o-l-d days the post office actually did bring the mail to your door!...but that's another story*).

Now, you might simply store your bulletins away after you're finished reading them initially, but, since the majority of collectors belong to more than one club, and thus receive multiple bulletins regularly, those bulletins stacks start becoming rather intimidating after the first couple of years. What you might do is simply take the pages you want for future reference and get rid of the rest of the bulletin. When the stack of pages starts getting too big, you could simply photocopy appropriate articles back-to-back, and that alone tends to cut the stack in half. Eventually, you could then file the articles away under their appropriate headings [*sounds like a lot of work, but it's all quite a fast and easy process, and it certainly saves a lot of time and expletives when you're looking for that specific information*]. Of course, the idea of saving your bulletins intact may have a special appeal to you, but if you simply don't have room, then the above solution represents as adequate compromise.

Fortunately for me, since I write so many of these articles, much of my article archive is on disk...*which really saves on storage space!*

Next come the lists! Now you're really getting down to specifics. If there is a listing available in a category that you're really into, you should have it. Such listings enable you to hunt for specific covers

you know you need, rather than using a shotgun approach where you sift through all sorts of covers in the category, hoping to run across some you can use. It used to be that it was convenient to trade by list catalog #s (as we do now with Navy ships and Girlies), but the big advantage of lists today is that they show you exactly what and how much you still *don't* have.

There are three basic types of lists: *indices*, *lists*, and *catalogs*. An “index” lists categorical information about your category, but it doesn’t actually list existing covers. For example, the “Airline Index” lists airlines, not airline covers. Still, this can be very useful information to the collector of Airlines. A “list” does list every known existing cover under that topic. Extremely helpful! A “catalog” is normally a list with pictures. The Girlie Catalog is a prime example.

Specific lists are done by specific people. You can obtain them in a variety of ways: 1) contact the author; 2) contact the RMS librarian, John Williams, if the author is deceased; or 3) shorter lists will frequently be run in the various club bulletins. There is always a list of current existing lists and their makers posted on the RMS web site.

After glossaries, guide book, bulletins, and lists, there’s even more specialized information available. There’s a long list of past articles on matchcovers and the match industry that have appeared in newspapers and magazines, as well as pamphlets that have been published; you can pick and choose which ones fit your needs the best.

More technical information (*i.e. on defunct match companies, manufacturing processes, historical developments, etc*) can be found from a variety of sources. While researching the American Match Industry, for example, I found literally *pounds* of information from each state’s Secretary of State office, since it’s there that the records of companies incorporated within the state are stored.

Libraries around the country contain some obscure, yet helpful, texts, some of which were only published locally. The trick is to find out they

exist (a good way is to get the bibliography that RMS Historian John Williams maintains); then you can request them through your local library’s Inter-Library Loan System. Each time you find a source, check to see if there’s a bibliography in the back. That will set you on the course to other publications.

Some other useful publications you might find helpful are:

***Postal Zip Code book*** - great for using zip codes to identify unknown locations; also great for checklist of small towns around the country. However, this information is now available on the internet, although it’s in piecemeal form.

***Chain Hotel Catalog of Locations*** - Best Western, Holiday Inn, etc. all have catalogs listing all of their current locations around the world; good for checklists.

***List of Lists*** - tells you what lists have been done and who maintains them (I’ve posted that on the RMS web site).

***Dating Guide*** - gives relative and specific dates for various covers, sets, boxes, companies, footers, etc.

***MM Dating Guide*** - gives dates for manumarks used since the inception of the matchbook; allows you to date your covers within a given range of years.

***Trademarks*** - gives known dates and manufacturers for industry trademarks throughout the world; covers labels, boxes, and matchbooks.

Knowing your hobby thoroughly can only enhance your enjoyment of it, so hang on to useful information whenever you come across it, wherever you can get it. And, if it’s appropriate for hobby use, send a copy of it to John Williams for the RMS Library...and posterity.