
Battered, Beveled,

How many times have you found a promising cover to add to your collection, only to find upon closer inspection that this 'beauty' had seen better days? It's always disappointing to see treasures tarnished...and by the time they find their way to you, there's not much that can be done to repair them. But, 'an ounce of prevention is with a pound of cure'.

There are many ways that covers can become damaged during the span of their existence--moisture, mold, mildew, fading, oxidation, and so forth. And, although most of those particular conditions could have been prevented by proper storage, let's just concentrate on the damage that results to covers from more direct handling by you, the collector...which is *plenty!*

Covers that are written on aren't that uncommon, and many are ruined by such. As a general rule, it's not a good idea to write on covers. The writing that we see on the outside of covers is almost exclusively done by non-collectors, and we have no control over that. Writing on the inside, however, is often done by...*us!* Some collectors, especially in the past, liked to put notations on the inside of their covers, often marking them with their initials, personal logos, or numbers. If it's important for you do this for some reason, never use ink...just light pencil. And, there are instances, indeed, when such a notation is not only called for, but constitutes a favor to other collectors. Navy Ship collectors, for example, write the appropriate catalog number of the cover on the inside, as do collectors of Ace boxes, Matchoramas, Girlies, and at least a few other categories. When those covers eventually circulate to others over the years, that numbering is appreciated. But, if it isn't, it can easily be erased...*hopefully!*

A common type of damage, notably with older covers, is gluing. Fortunately, collectors don't do that any longer, but occasionally someone outside the hobby will do so in the process of making some sort of display or simply as a convenient way of mounting them in albums (it *does* save on photo corners and such!). A lot of collectors will shun glued covers, but there have been at least a few who have been successful in cleaning the insides of such covers...Although, that's a labor intensive effort, however, and it remains to be seen just how many people would be willing to even try and do that.

Along with gluing, collectors used to bobtail covers by cutting off the striker portion. Thankfully, we don't do that anymore, either, so such is only seen on some of the old covers. An additional type of 'cutting' in the old days was more rare, and not as drastic, but certainly damaging. Sometimes you can see older covers with the bottom corners of the front panel nipped off. This was to make the cover slide into slotted pages more easily. Indeed, at least one album manufacturer actually suggested such with the accompanying instructions, along with nice diagrams showing how one might go about this! We don't do *that* anymore, either!

Still another condition is holing, where someone has 'nailed' covers to a bulletin board or wall, for example. Again, this isn't something collectors do, but we do run into them from time to time. Years ago, I was once in a barber shop where the barber had put up hundreds of covers on the wall...all with *tacks!*

Well, so far we can blame somebody else for most of the above types of damage, but I've saved the most common type for last, and we're the culprits here. I'm talking about damage to the corners and/or edges of covers, and most of that is caused by the way current collectors have handled those covers. It's accidental, of course, but the damage is still real.

and Bedraggled

Corner damage almost always has come from putting covers in slotted album pages. When the slots aren't wide enough, or when the page, itself, is stiff, the corners often get banged up. Older covers, and most Superior and Monarch covers, were somewhat thicker and often prime candidates for such damage. Universal Mirro-Gloss covers sometimes also become damaged this way, as the plastic overlay begins separating at one or more of the corners, or the peeling is worsened by the collector's attempt to get the cover into the slot. Either way, once a corner is damaged, it usually just worsens the more it's handled. Plus, as some of those older covers are fitted into those slots, the paper slices right through the soft or brittle strikers.

And, speaking of putting covers into slotted pages, sometimes you're so intent on getting that cover into the slot when it's a tight fit that...as your hand's pressure on the cover unconsciously increases...the sides of the cover cave in and the cover crumples [*Now, come on! I know I'm not the only one to have ever done that!*]...and once the cover crumples, the resulting creases never disappear.

More common damage to the sides of a cover is often the result of hand-sewn pages. The thread, filament, or whatever is used on the page was too tight, or the spacing too narrow, and as a result the thread acts as an abrasive on the sides of the cover as it's worked in or out of the page. I've messed up more than my share of covers doing that, myself. And, if the sides of the cover are already nicked in some way (as many older covers are), the thread is certain to catch on it and make it all the worse.

By the way, how could those covers have become already nicked, dented, or creased on the sides? A common way is using rubber bands to hold stacks together. If the rubber band is too tight, the pressure causes the sides of at least the top and bottom covers to 'give', cause a nick, dent, or crease...and that sets up the possibility for easier damage later on. The best way to hold stacks together is with bands of paper held by strips of scotch tape. That takes a little while longer to do than using rubber bands, but I've found it's worth it. Sooner or later, those rubber bands are going to get old and snap anyway (if they haven't already fused to the top and bottom covers), and then your nice, neat stacks of covers become a jumbled mess.

Then, of course, there are a variety of other mishaps that we commit on covers from time to time. For example, it's not usually a good idea to have any type of drink sitting by covers. I can think of a particularly nice set that ended up stained in red when I inadvertently upset the wine glass on my desk. [*If you've ever wondered how I can constantly pound out all these bulletin articles, that glass of wine is an important ingredient!!*]

We often produce yet another fairly common mode of damage when stripping the matches out of matchbooks. One has to be careful when opening the staple (on one side) and prying or pulling out the staple (on the other side). Carelessness (on one side) can produce deep gouges in the cover, while carelessness (on the other side) can produce marks on the striker which end up looking suspiciously like strike marks. And, how about that sloppy way of stripping wherein you simply *pull* the matches out of the cover, hoping that you'll leave the staple behind...but the staple comes with the matches, instead, and you end up with a nice hole in the cover!

[*Boy, this has turned out to be more of a confession of some of the bloopers I've made over the years... Remind me to tell you sometime about the time I accidentally launched a garbage can by dumping discarded matches into it!*]