
Does the Hobby Serve The Collector,

By Mike Prero

This all stems from a discussion I had some time ago with Loren Moore, President of Sierra-Diablo Matchcover Club. I don't remember how we got onto the subject, but we started talking about who should be doing what for whom, and it's been an ongoing philosophical discussion between the two of us ever since. Upon thinking about it, it seemed to me that it might be of interest to other collectors, as well.

The hobby is great, and it's certainly proven to be a blessing to me, but to my way of thinking when it comes right down to it...the hobby exists to serve the collector. That's what it was formed for (*I think*)—as a tool to enable the collector to better meet his or her goals. Envisioning that original group of collectors back East getting together in 1940 to eventually form RMS, I have to assume that the thinking was something along the lines of “We can accomplish more together than we can separately.”

I can use Sierra-Diablo as a more recent and local example. When we formed it in 1983, we did so to create a focal point for collectors to come together, share information and covers, have auctions and other opportunities to obtain and sell covers, and so forth. If anyone was actually thinking that we were forming a club to better serve the hobby, it was certainly never voiced.

Belonging to a club is good for the hobby, but when people drop out it's often because they're collecting needs aren't being met; attending club meetings is good for the hobby, but when people stop showing up, it's usually because they're not getting enough out of it. The focus is *always* on the collector rather than the hobby.

One might well point to those people in the hobby who so freely give of their time and effort to support the clubs, the swapfests, the conventions, and the hobby in general—the volunteers, the workers, the givers. Aren't they subverting their own needs to better serve the hobby? I can't speak for all the wonderful Ellen Guttings, Mark Quillings, John Bachochins, and Marilyn Reeses, but as for myself—everything I do in the hobby I do because of *my* needs. I do bulletins because I like to write; I do lists because I like to research; I maintain the hobby web sites because I like to do web sites. It's all unabashedly about...*me, me, me!* Granted, I think the hobby benefits in the process, but I can't honestly say that I'm doing it *for the hobby*...*It's for me!* Certainly there are more altruistic people in the hobby than me, but the vast majority of collectors that I've met during my years in the hobby are like myself. They're in the hobby for themselves, not to serve the hobby.

Even with all the benefits I've received from being in the hobby the last 25 years—knowledge, friends, thousands of hours of pleasure, and some 300,000 covers—if the organized hobby ended today (*something I don't really want to envision*), I'd still be a collector tomorrow. It wouldn't be as easy, and it wouldn't be as much fun, but I'd still be a collector. The hobby is there as a facilitator; it provides a focus and hopefully insures that there will be collectors in the future, but it's not the be-all and the end-all of collecting. The truth is...the hobby needs the collector; the collector doesn't need the hobby. Collecting, by definition, I think, is an individual endeavor.

To my way of thinking, the idea that the collector is there to serve the hobby turns the whole thing upside down. Come to think of it, it's all sort of like politicians! The original idea was that they were there to serve the populace—you know, *public servants*—and now...well, which of us is the servant?!

Or Does The Collector Serve The Hobby?

By Loren Moore

The direction of the hobby appears to be focused *inward* instead of *outward*. We focus on people already *in* the hobby—We award each other plaques, trophies, and honors; we run pictures of each other at banquets and receiving accolades; we provide tours during conventions; we hold events for ourselves without adequately publicizing such within the local communities. Such activities promote *us* rather than the hobby.

I am an avid (rabid) collector and am always trying to increase my collection. However, my priority is the support and promotion of the hobby. Exposing the merits of this great hobby is fun, satisfying and rewarding. It is the first step in attracting new members.

The increase or decrease of collectors and club members has a direct economic impact on our collections. You could have 500 beautiful covers in a category, but if no one knows about or wants them, what is their value?

When collectors concentrate on their own collections, *they* benefit and few others do. But, when collectors promote the hobby, they're dealing with everyone—new collectors, veteran collectors, non-collectors. When collectors promote the hobby, it benefits everyone, as opposed to simply promoting their own interests and benefitting themselves.

I routinely buy a lot of collections and accumulations, and the first thing I always try to do is to convince the seller to *keep* his or her covers and join the hobby. I'd rather have a new collector than his collection. I think everyone benefits more that way.

The hobby encompasses so much that most people aren't aware of many of its facets and intricacies—so it is up to us to serve as a focal point for information for all. And that's precisely why we at Sierra-Diablo have free access to our bulletins on our website—to promote the hobby through advertising and information. I believe the primary goal of the clubs should be to promote the hobby, not the collector.

The hobby isn't taking advantage of technology enough. We could use that technology to showcase what the hobby is all about. A good example is displays. A collector spends hours and hours making an attractive display and perhaps 100-200 people actually see it. Why not use technology to make those displays available to thousands of people *outside* the hobby? That will bring new collectors into the hobby, which, again, benefits all collectors. The basic question is, "Short term goals or Long term goals?" [Ed. Well, where do you stand? Are you a 'robber baron' or a 'Mother Theresa'?(!). Send in your thoughts ...but come on, now...be honest!]