

Housing Your Collections Economically

Most collectors aren't particularly wealthy, so I thought some suggestions on how to house your collection more economically might be of some interest, especially since I've faced the problem, myself.

Of course, the most economical method of housing your covers would simply be to stack them in boxes and put the boxes in some out-of-the-way place, such as the garage. But, that doesn't work for a variety of reasons. For one thing, your covers won't last long if you're continually digging them out of boxes and pawing through them, as you'd invariably have to in order to find certain covers, match up what you have with what you've recently acquired, etc. And then, the collector in all of us wants those covers easily accessible, logically organized, and nicely displayed. The problem is...to do so is usually prohibitively expensive, both in terms of cost and space.

It's certainly a matter of dollars and cents. Take plastic pages, for example. They're just too expensive to house all but smaller collections. If you have 20,000 or 30,000 covers...OK. But the average-sized collection (that's all your categories together) is over twice that number. The July/August 2007 Insta-Poll showed an average of 66,823, at least for the some 100 collectors participating in the survey. Even figuring only 20-strike pages, that works out to 4,176 plastic pages. At \$15 per pack of 50, that's \$1,253...just for plastic pages.¹ And the chances are that you're not just going to need 20-strike pages, but 30s and 40s, as well, which hold fewer covers and, thus, would increase the overall cost even further. And there are good many collectors who have well *over* 66,000 covers. What are you going to do if you have 100,000, 300,000, 500,000+ covers? Are you going to put them all in plastic pages? Not hardly!

Even if you use paper pages, which are considerably less expensive than plastic, almost all collectors inevitably put those pages in 3-ring binders, and *those* quickly add up to a pretty penny, as well! Say you have those 66,823 covers, and, like me, you want them in 3" binders. That's approximately 1,100 covers per album,² which means you'd need some 61 albums at \$10.98 each³ for a grand total of \$720.01.⁴ Ouch!

Just as important as cost is the matter of space. Where are you going to put those 61 binders? That's at least a couple of walls' worth of shelving space. In my own case, I've managed to fill two hobby rooms, a utility room, several closets, the cabinets in the study, and a good part of the garage. What do you do if you don't have the room? How many times do we hear of collectors either down-sizing or liquidating their collections altogether because they've moved into smaller quarters?

Well, there *are* compromises that you, as a collector, can make here that will significantly ease the problems noted above. You can lessen your financial costs and required space while at the same time meeting your basic collecting needs, both practical and personal.

For example, even though I'd like to put all my covers in plastic pages, it's not practical for me, so I *purposely* put some categories in plastic, some in paper, and some in boxes or trays, according to how prioritize them. Since it's normally the older covers that get damaged by the slotted paper pages (because those covers are thicker and often softer or have brittle strikers), all of my Oldies categories automatically go into plastic. By the same token, my categories that are made up of exclusively newer covers (such as Uniglos, Matchtones, Matchoramas, etc.) can go into paper pages. Such a compromise not only saves money, but allows you to maximize the resources you already have on hand. I.e., instead

of simply throwing out those paper pages because you've turned to plastic, now you use both.

But, a *real* money-saver is not putting *all* your collections on pages at all. Again, there's a compromise you can make, which, to me, at least, makes sense. I said earlier that simply putting all your covers in boxes or trays doesn't work because you'd be constantly manhandling them every time you needed to work on those categories. However, there is a grouping of categories where constantly having to go to those covers isn't necessary--those that you collect by list.

Girlies, Towns, Zip Codes, County Seats, Phone Numbers, Navy Ships, American Ace, Pocketbox, etc. are *all* collected by list. When you acquire new covers, in order to determine whether you need them or already have them, you *don't* check the covers you already have; you check your list! Thus, you don't need those particular collections readily at hand and readily displayed. All those covers can be boxed or trayed and stored wherever you want. And, notice that such categories tend to be the large to very large categories...thus saving you *lots* of pages, *lots* of albums, and *lots* of space...How convenient!

There are also lists out on practically all of the Oldies, plus Foilites, Filigrees, Jewelites, Matchoramas, Military, American Legion, VFW and any number of smaller categories. Also, John Bachochin and Cliff Czecker are about three-fourths of the way to having completed a listing on Elks. Currently, however, most collectors who collect in these areas don't collect by list. Still, you could if you wanted to, and the aforementioned savings would be even greater. How far you would want to take this depends on your own particular needs.

The more you use boxes or trays, the more space you save, as they take up considerably less space than the appropriate number of albums. And, whereas albums basically demand shelving (and that means wall space), boxes or trays can be put anywhere, which gives you a lot more flexibility. I prefer trays to boxes, but if you have your trays as drawers in some type of cabinet (which is very convenient) you're back to using up extra space you otherwise wouldn't have to, not to mention the cabinet taking up more wall space.

When looking for tray formats, you can find ready-made boxes that are perfect for your needs. For example, 1 lb See's Candy boxes are the exact height and width for two rows of 20-strike covers. Those are pretty small boxes for a larger collection, though, and, since I don't have access to them anyway, I use an idea that I stole from Loren Moore, CA. As a teacher, I *do* have access to the boxes that copy paper comes in. These are boxes that are 9"x11½"x17½" and come with nice, snug lids. I cut the box down to a height of 3½", and that gives me a tray high enough and wide enough for two rows of anything from 10's to Giants, with wooden divider down the middle. You could even use paper-wrapped stacks of covers in place of the wooden divider in order to maximize tray space. With the lids on, the trays are then perfect for stacking and storing, and, being only 3¾" high (with the lid on), they can go into all sorts of nooks and crannies that might otherwise be wasted space.

¹Based on the cost of Better-vue pages as of September 2010.

²That's using 20-strikes in plastic pages.

³Current price at local Staples.

⁴Including California sales tax.