
NRA Covers

[This is an update of a May/June 1996 RMS Bulletin article]

Years ago, in my blissful novice stage, the first few times I saw NRA covers I actually thought NRA stood for ‘National Rifle Association’! I kept wondering, “Why on earth would the National Rifle Association be on all these covers?” There it was, “NRA,” on restaurant covers, hotel covers; there was no specific pattern to the categories that ‘NRA’ appeared on...it was a mystery.

The late Harry Branchaud eventually explained to me that ‘NRA’ stood for “National Recovery Administration.” Mystery solved. In response to President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s message of May 3, 1933 *[See? I wasn’t even alive then. How was I supposed to know?!]*, Congress passed the National Industrial Recovery Act, an emergency measure designed to encourage national industrial recovery from the Great Depression and to help combat the widespread unemployment that the country was experiencing. The Act established the U.S. administrative bureau known as the National Recovery Administration. The administration was given the power to make voluntary agreements dealing with hours of work, rates of pay, and the fixing of prices. Employees were given the right to organize and bargain collectively and could not be required, as a condition of employment, to join or refrain from joining a labor organization.

Until March 1934, the NRA was chiefly engaged in the drawing up of industrial codes; a blanket code for all industries was adopted; and well over 500 codes of fair practice were adopted by the various industries. Patriotic appeals were made to the public, and firms were asked to display the Blue Eagle, an emblem signifying NRA participation...and that’s where the matchcovers came in.

Attached to certain quarters as authoritarian, the NRA did not last long enough to fully implement its policies. In May 1935, a federal court invalidated much of the NRA’s power. The NRA was extended in skeletonized form until January 1, 1936, whereupon it ceased to exist. This provides an excellent way of dating your NRA covers, then, since any such cover you come across would have to have been issued between 1933 and 1935.

And that means you’re going to be dealing with *old* covers. Currently, for example, there are 26 different NRA covers among listed DQs, including the one shown here. Curiously, I don’t find any among Crowns or what few old Universal I have. Since private firms opted to advertise their participation in NRA, Diamond couldn’t possibly have had a monopoly on the trade. The firms would have been able to go to any match company of the time to have “NRA” put on their matchcovers. But, a further search of my pathetically small Oldies collections has turned up NRA covers by Atlas (the old one), Lion, Federal, and United Engr. Corp., at least.

The overwhelming number of NRA covers have a stock Red NRA design on the back panel. There is also at least one silver NRA. Look through your old covers and see if you can find any. This would be an interesting small category to work on, quite tough, though, because of the age of the covers you’d be looking for. It certainly does recall an important time period in American history, and all the more relevant, of course, if you happen to be *mature* enough to have actually lived through it.

