

Really?!!

“Dear Sir. I have just come across this Al Capone matchbook in the attic of a recently purchased home. This must surely be worth quite a bit of money. What would be the best way to sell it so that I and my family could make our fortunes?!”

I get e-mails like this from time to time, especially on the Al Capone cover. In such cases, unfortunately, it falls to me to deflate their high hopes. No fortune...not even 50¢! Such covers as discussed here are simply not real.

Even novice collectors might initially get taken in. After all, it says the famous historical person's name right on the cover. But, any veteran collector can spot the problem immediately—the name's old...but the cover is too new! For example, take a look at the examples below that I happened to have on hand. Al Smith ran for President in 1928, but there weren't any 30-strikes in 1928! Jimmy Walker's cover is dated 1925, but, clearly, this isn't a 1925 cover. Al Jolson? He was performing as late as the 1930s and 1940s, but this 30-strike isn't anywhere near that old.

Well, then, what's happening here? Some of these covers are issued as gag-novelty items (a la Tip n' Twinkle sets) or by specific businesses simply looking for a gimmick or just a little humor. The problem is...some people get it while others don't.

In a few cases, we may even be talking of covers that are reproductions of older covers, such as a reproduction of the Mendelson Opera or Piso covers, but those are quite rare instances. In an event, when you see that famous old name from the past, you'd better look twice!

