

From Whence

Yes, our covers originally come from the match manufacturers and printing companies, but how do they end up in the hobby? In the May/June 2007 *Insta-Poll*, 51.8% of responding collectors indicated that they acquired their covers through buying in one form or another (auctions were the source for most of these collectors). Another 20.9% said that their main source of covers was through trading. Thus, at least in that particular survey, 72.7%, or basically two-thirds of collectors had in-hobby sources as their main points of acquisition. Now, some of the buyers also purchased covers on ebay (a non-hobby source), but that was more than balanced out by other collectors who had the freebie tables at club meetings, swapfests and conventions marked as their main source). So, how *do* all those covers filter into the hobby? Well, it's a multi-stage process, and somewhat interesting from a collecting standpoint.

Stage I: Grunts on the front lines!

From the perspective of our topic, here, these are the most important people in the entire process. *They're* the ones who do the groundwork, transitioning covers from *outside* the hobby to *inside* the hobby...and they do it in a variety of ways.

- Going from business to business, town to town, whether purposely and methodically or more randomly during vacations, business, trips etc., hunting down whatever current matchbooks and boxes that can be found. The collectors that do this should receive many more accolades than they do, because they're willing to literally do the legwork that most collectors are not willing or able to do on a regular basis. In fact, I'm a case in point for the latter. As a newer collector, I eagerly scouted local businesses wherever I happened to be, and it was quite rewarding...but, of course, that's when matchbooks were plentiful. I haven't done such for the last 20 years. Thank God, there are still collectors who do!

- Another 'front line' source, here, is the collector who goes after accumulations and collections waiting to be found in his or her own local communities. They may run ads in a newspaper, post flyers, etc., and the results are that they end up bringing hitherto unknown material into the hobby in both small and large quantities. Sometimes, the effort's not even needed. Almost all collectors, for example, who have had stories published about their collections in the newspaper find, as a result, that they are contacted by people in that audience...people wanting to give or sell them their match accumulations.

- Acquisitions on ebay or from other non-hobby sites represent yet another avenue that covers from outside the hobby come into the hobby. These tend to be minimal in number, since almost all such purchases are involve either single items or very small groups of items...but still, this is new material coming into the hobby.

- Purchasing overruns from the manufacturers used to be much more common than it is today. Only a few collectors had the contacts to do that, but it certainly would pay off in covers gained. Evelyn Hovious used to bring in covers that way; she knew people at Universal.

- But, that's not all. What about all the dribs and drabs that come to you by way of relatives and friends? Here's where it pays to be a member of a *big* family! All those relatives and friends are eyes and ears...for *you!*...And that means they're eyes and ears for the *hobby!*

Cometh Our Covers?

Stage II: Distribution points

Once the covers/boxes enter the confines of the hobby, then, sooner or later, they reach various focal points where they then find their way to other collectors.

- Some go into auctions, a very important source of covers, as we've seen. The hobby's auctions come in several formats, with varying degrees of frequency and size. Some clubs have silent auctions or even mini-auctions at their club meetings. Many clubs have much bigger and more formalized bulletin auctions (auctions that go out with the clubs bulletin mailings (postal, electronic, or both). Not only are these auctions important to many collectors as a source of covers, but they're crucial to the clubs, themselves, since they're normally what keeps the clubs financially solvent....because membership dues almost always aren't enough to pay the bills.

Then, there are the on-line auctions, both outside and inside the hobby. Outside, this is mainly ebay, but there are a few others from auction houses, etc. Not counting club bulletin auctions that are also on-line, such as Sierra-Diablo's, the internet auctions *inside* the hobby are almost exclusively put on by individual collectors (such as the one I post and that of Bill Retskin). There is also at least one private postal mail auction. I believe Bob Hiller still has his going.

Finally, there are the swapfest and convention auctions. These are the biggest in the hobby, with hundreds of lots going at a session and lots of variety, from old to new, rare to bulk.

- Estate sales funnel deceased or retired collectors' collections into other collectors' hands, sometimes partially, sometimes wholly. If one can afford it, it's a great way to get a big start on a category or a big boost to what you already have.

- Trading, until recent years when there was a big shift to buying, was the traditional way of acquiring covers in the hobby. It's still a basic for many. It's slow, and usually haphazard, and there are some who don't want to be burdened with the obligations of regular correspondence, and if my pay check increased proportionally with postal rates I'd be a multi-millionaire...but as a steady trader, myself, I truly believe that if you're patient trading will eventually bring you just about anything you're looking for.

- Still another venue is purchasing covers from dealers. There aren't many of them in the hobby, and the prices (at least by my frugal standards) are high, but here you eliminate the randomness of trading and the competition of the auctions. Dealers are usually found at the conventions and swapfests.

- Occasionally, you may run across a collector selling off part of his collection, or perhaps a batch of dupes. I once bought a couple hundred Lion Safety-Firsts from Jim Moffett that way, and a lot of Midgets from Murray Nicholson, for example.

- And we certainly can't forget the freebie tables. Lots and lots of covers are redistributed to others that way. It's a hobby tradition, and one that won't disappear, I hope. Covers are donated from collectors or come in from some other source (leftovers from this or that activity, etc) and are put on the Freebie tables for the taking.

.....Thus, all the covers that come our way usually do so thanks to someone else.