

Looking For Treasures? Look For Accumulations!

People who have ‘dabbled’ in the hobby—dropping in, finding that they aren’t getting what they want, and leaving—often give reasons for their leaving such as, “Nobody will part with the ‘good’ covers”; “The veterans are sitting on their hordes of covers and won’t share”; “I can’t get what I want.”

Those people weren’t cut out to be cover collectors in the first place, and none of the above comments are true. But, for the sake of argument (and this discussion), let’s say a collector *couldn’t* get the covers he or she wanted. There’s always the chance the specific covers are so rare that there just aren’t enough to go around (Are we all going to get a Lindbergh or a Washington Crisps?). That’s not true for 99.9% of the covers that are collected, though. Chances are, whatever you’re looking for, it exists, and it’s available...but perhaps, at the moment, *not* within the hobby.

Collectors, as a group, have been culling out matchcovers from the existing body of matchcovers for some 80+ years, and a few collectors today can boast collections of over a million, but the vast majority of covers that exist are *still* in the hands of non-collectors—in attics, in basements, tucked away in forgotten corners of closets—Uncle Harley’s matchbooks that he gathered on all his salesman’s trips; Grandma Betty’s matches from her vacations back East; cousin Herb’s bags of covers gotten from when he worked for King Midas...They’re all out there. They’re what the hobby calls ‘accumulations’.

The difference between a collection and an accumulation is that the latter is an amassed group of covers/books/boxes not organized in any logical fashion, although the term is generally used throughout the hobby to simply refer to such material in the hands of non-collectors. It’s these accumulations that will always give hope to collectors, both new and old. Can’t find what you want in the hobby’s auctions, or from your traders? What about all those accumulations stashed away literally all over the country, from California to Maine? Some of those, a tiny, tiny fraction, come into the hobby of their own accord every month—people off the street bring them in to local swapfests and conventions (one good reason for advertising such); people even call you up and offer them to you after seeing the write-up on you in the local newspaper.

But (and here comes the kicker), if you really want to collect, and you’re not satisfied with what you’re able to obtain from hobby sources, you have to *work* at finding the accumulations in your area. It’s certainly not that hard, but you *do* have to put in some time and effort.

First, you have to let people in your area *know* that you’re interested in their covers. The two easiest ways to do this are 1) word-of-mouth, and 2) advertising. Let people beyond your family and close friends know that you collect matchcovers. For example, all my students know I’m such a collector. I even give a presentation with some of my albums during our ‘hobby speeches’ in class. As a result, I usually have a couple of parents every year who drop off bags of matchbooks for me. They ‘heard’ I collected them.

A much more effective way to reach those hidden accumulations (because you reach a larger audience) is advertising. One method is to get your collection written up in the local newspaper. You’d be surprised at how easy that is. Those newspapers (and sometimes even local radio and TV stations) are always looking for items that would make for interesting ‘human interest’ stories.

Another method is to take out an ad in a local weekly advertising circular, or even the regular newspaper. Costs next to nothing, and the chances are good that you’ll get at least several responses. From the covers you actually get as a result, most will probably be run-of-the-mill, but good, useable material. And there’s always the chance that you’ll occasionally run into that hoped for treasure trove! I once bought twelve coffee cans full of full-books from a gentleman who just wanted them to go to someone who would appreciate them. They were filled with DQs, Midgets, and many other goodies.