



Time has a way of blurring things. As the years go on, the primary participants in an event pass away, and different versions of what that event was really all about circulate and merge, while memories of that event become dimmer and dimmer. The *King Arthur* stories, for example, which are all about knights and castles, actually tell of a time long before the advent of such things. And in a way, I think, the same has happened to the story of how our hobby began and who was responsible for it all.

Today, we tend to think of RMS as being synonymous with the beginning of the hobby, and some, I'm sure, would probably name Henry Rathkamp as the one person who started everything off (simply because RMS bears his name). But, neither are actually true, and, as it seems, both are perhaps even less true now, in light of the following...

Thanks to Loren Moore, CA, I've had a chance to read through four years' worth of *Match Pack Notes*, 1937-1940, and that, coupled with information from other contemporary sources, such as early collector correspondence, and, I believe, early RMS issues and later regional club bulletins, has led me to the definite conclusion that the hobby as we know it should be credited, in fact, to W. V. Wilson, founder, editor and publisher of *Match Pack Notes*, or he and his contemporary peers, rather than the founders of RMS, as we are wont to do.

Why? Well, let's set the stage first. By the late 1930's, there were already several clubs in existence, as well a number of informative newsletters. Whatever scattered collectors of covers, boxes, and labels there were prior to 1931 we may or may not ever find out, but M. A. Richardson had organized the Blue Moon Match Label Club in 1931, and that would run to 1942. By 1936, the United Matchonians, WV, was established. Also in 1936, *Match Lights* began to be published by Jess Heuzel. This was out of Kansas City and ran until 1941. In the same year, *Match Pack Notes*, written by W.W. Wilson, in San Francisco, appeared. The *United Matchonian* newsletter was a third publication during this same period. The *Matchonia & Hobby Advertiser* ran from 1938-1939, when it became the *Collector's Forum*.

Thus, phillumenic collecting had a good start before Henry Rathkamp started collecting and before the formation of RMS. C.S Morris writes, "Henry Rathkamp and I started serious collecting of match covers back in 1932.." (letter written to Bill Thomas, February 12, 1974). By then, a number of people had already been collecting, and Blue Moon was going. "Those people who joined Blue Moon before 1935 can be classified as the real pioneers of the hobby...Cover collectors really had no place to go before Blue Moon for mutual help or exchange of information." (*Long Beach MC bulletin*, November 1975)

By the late 1930s, however, problems were appearing. None of these early groups focused specifically on covers, or even boxes or labels for that matter. They all covered other collectibles, as well (almost always paper-collectibles) (ex: *Match Lights*, July 1938). One can look back and easily see why. Phillumeny in the US was just starting; such collectors represented a handful of the collecting population in general; they were disorganized and unstructured. Plus, there were a number of other burgeoning paper collections going on, so why not cover them all? Sounded good, but, of course, one problem for these various club leaders and editors was walking that inevitable tightrope where you keep all those different collectors happy. It proved to a difficult job, at best...and, in the end, it proved

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to be impossible, especially as various types of collectors grew in number. As different collecting interests tended to dominate the newsletters, other collectors howled their dissatisfaction. “One group seemed to be nearly taken over by razor blade wrapper collectors.” (*Long Beach MC bulletin*, November 1975) And so it was, by 1939, that a number of cover collectors felt that what they needed was a club *just* for cover collectors. Not an unreasonable goal, even laudable from our point of view today, but another problem appeared...this time in the methods used to accomplish this.

If we go back momentarily to the original movers and shakers—M. A Richardson and his Blue Moon Match Label Club, W.W. Wilson and his *Match Pack Notes*, Ernest Damron and the United Matchonians, in particular. We may well understand their chagrin at what they were seeing. They had started something...but it was getting away from them. I’m second-guessing them, here, I admit, but it’s more than likely that each felt that his organization...his newsletter...should rightly be the guiding light for all these collectors, the spearhead of this new wave of collecting. And, they had strong arguments on their side—factual arguments, moral arguments, ethical arguments...but it simply wasn’t something they could control.

As more and more new publications and new organizations appeared, these innovators complained, often bitterly. And they weren’t just complaining about competition—for these other sources for collectors were definitely competitors. These early organizations weren’t grouped as we are now, a bunch of *equal* regional clubs under a national organization. And, they didn’t freely ‘share’ members as our clubs do today. Indeed, W.W. Wilson, in 1939, demanded that subscribers to *Match Pack Notes* not belong to any other such clubs or organizations and be willing to sign a statement to that effect. (*Match Pack Notes*, November 1939). He went on to say, “...we are opposed to such clubs that now exist, or have existed in this Hobby..” “These clubs do get quite a number of beginners, and if YOU are well informed on the Hobby, well posted as to values, and have an elastic conscience, you do have a wonderful opportunity to take [*advantage of*] beginners by trading them inferior covers, and with the help given you by the official organ, secure much better covers for [*should be ‘from’*] them.” [*ouch!*] Wilson usually referred to such clubs in general, but occasionally he’d broadside a specific competitor, such as United Matchonians. (*Match Pack Notes*, January 1940; March 1940). By the way, it’s also interesting to note that Wilson reserved his greatest disdain for any “...so-called club, owned privately and for the profit of the owner..” (*Match Pack Notes*, November 1939).

Then there was the problem of plagiarism. Collectors and organizations ‘borrowed’ unmercifully from each other, although Wilson’s *Match Pack Notes* seemed to be the biggest victim as far as content was concerned. These early clubs/publications pioneered lists, for example, and Wilson, especially put in an incredible amount of time and effort preparing lists for his publications. He also made up a complete symbol/cataloging system for covers, which he used throughout his publications. One can well imagine his and others’ frustration at finding such personalized and dedicated work appearing in a competitor’s publication! Wilson finally called it quits in September 1940, after lambasting *Match Lights* for stealing his list of First Baseball. (*Match Pack Notes*, September 1940)

And, as far as the personalities noted here, the plagiarism wasn’t limited to text. Wilson and Damron, particularly, thought that their membership was being stolen, as well....and in a very real way, it was.

[Next issue, we’ll see in what way, and we’ll examine what the formation of RMS in 1941 has to do with all of this]