



Editorial

-Part I-

“How do I keep track of all these things?!”

[overheard from novice collector at 2002 Sierra Swapfest]

“How do I keep track of all these things?!”

[overheard from seasoned collector at 2002 AMCAL convention]

“How do I keep track of all these things?!”

[overheard from veteran collector at 2003 RMS convention]

I have to smile when someone asks this question. It’s so basic to collecting, and yet it cannot only drive you crazy...it can drive a collector right out of the hobby! Because, if you don’t devise some efficient way of staying on top of everything, it can become incredibly frustrating. Who knows how many novice collectors end up leaving the hobby because they simply find themselves overwhelmed. Yes, it’s great to come home from your first convention with a shopping bag of 8,000 covers...but *then* what do you do?! As with teaching, there’s no one magical solution. Different approaches work for different people and different personalities.

There are, I think, two factors, however, that override everything else: How organized are you? and “How much time do you have? Using myself as an example *[first rule of successful writing—always write about those things you’re familiar with!]*, I happen to be one of those disgustingly organized people that others simply shake their heads at, and it’s certainly served me well in the course of my 58 years, but there are times when I simply don’t have the time—so I’ve developed a system that works for me because it’s been tailored to meet my special needs and circumstances. I would think that that’s what each collector has to do somewhere along the line.

For example, ‘keeping track of everything’ includes not only the covers, themselves, but your hobby correspondence, your calendar activities (meetings, swapfests, conventions), and when it’s time to pay your various club dues *[I can hear all the membership secretaries around the country cheering that!]*. When things are lost, forgotten about, or overlooked, that’s a pretty good indication that you either have no system in place or a system that doesn’t work *[I’m smiling to myself...that’s right out of any number of the thousands of parent conferences I’ve had over the years]*. A good system, while being short of perfection, perhaps, will eliminate most such failings.

A case in point: my hobby correspondence, of which there are two types—e-mail and postal. E-mail is usually no problem. Answering same day is normally quick and easy. During the summer, when I’m not working, I answer my incoming trades the next day. For the majority of the year, however, when I’m working, I don’t have the time to do that, so my ‘system’ adjusts, and I answer all such mail each weekend. In either event, I don’t allow the mail to simply pile up with the idea that I’ll get to it ‘sometime.’...that invariably ends up with your return letters all starting out with “Sorry I haven’t written in two months...”

So, as my postal mail arrives, I open everything each day to see what it is, and then it goes into various holding areas—this batch needs to be answered this weekend, this batch is on hold while I await further info, this stack is input for the next *Bulletin*, etc. Sorting it out this way also means that I don’t have to wade through *everything* each time I’m ready to deal with *one* type of mail.

How about other stuff?—when dues are due, all those covers, and the like? You’ll have to wait for Part II.