

HOBBY HISTORY

The Dark Side

by Mike Prero

Oh, yes, boys and girls! There definitely *is* a dark side to our beloved hobby. No more so, I trust, than with any other group of people that are in contact with each other, but it's there—it's automatic—we bring it with us wherever we go...our egos, our feelings, our personalities and attitudes. They're all part and parcel of every one of us, but they sometimes clash with others—and the results are often dramatic, sometimes tragic.

Such hobby clashes actually predate RMS. We glimpse one early example in a 1968 letter written by the late renown collector Edgar Perkins which was subsequently published in the Long Beach bulletin, October, 1979. In it, Perkins points out the bad feelings between two of the hobby's earliest collectors, Ernest Damron and Henry Rathkamp. Damron was founder of the United Matchonians, a matchcover club which appeared in the 1930s, and there appeared to be little love lost between him and Rathkamp. Indeed, Perkins says, "The very name of Rathkamp was anathema to him."

In any event, things only became worse when Henry Rathkamp, Ken Riggs, Bob Lockard, Tom Torrent and a few others founded RMS. "It was RMS' intention to continue to help Damron by sending him for publication in his UNITED MATCHONIANS, listings of the Group One covers. However, Damron resisted all help... Damron called us 'fair weather friends' - said we were trying to run his club aground."

Well, we can possibly see at least part of Damron's reasoning. He was 'first kid on the block,' and newcomer RMS seemed, perhaps, to be infringing on his territory and stealing some of his thunder. United Matchonians fizzled out several years later.

Over the next 60 years, there were other personal and personnel problems within the hobby. I won't mention names from here on to protect the innocent and the guilty.

There was, for example, the very prominent collector who permanently stopped going to the AMCAL and RMS conventions because she felt she had been slighted by her peers. There also was the very prominent collector who continually drew the ire of other collectors upon himself because he always unabashedly lobbied for votes for his convention displays.

And, in all fairness, I can hardly omit the brief nastiness which flared between....two editors!

Then, of course, there was the British club which basically folded over night in the 1970s because one of the officers absconded with the club treasury! And I could easily write a full article on the clubs which have either divided or folded all together because of infighting among the officers. Infighting for a variety of reasons—too many big fish in a small pond, different goals, jealousy, etc.

Clicks? We have 'em...and clicks within clicks. When I joined the hobby in the early 1980s, the biggest factions were the West Coast and East Coast groups. I couldn't begin to tell you how many times I've heard the West Coast collectors referred to as "screwballs" and "kooks" and East Coast collectors as "uptight" and "closed-knit." I can honestly say, though, that I haven't heard much of that at all in the last several years. I have a hunch that as many of the "old guard" have passed away, that attitude has significantly dwindled. Technology also may have helped combat that, as e-mail enables us all to chat with each other easily and speedily.

[I'm not going to exploit this topic further than this one article [so we can all rest easy!], but it's a fascinating side of the hobby that I've never seen examined before, so I thought it warranted a few observations; we're actually a pretty fun-loving bunch!]