Organizing Your Covers

Almost immediately after starting to collect, one has to make some decisions as to how to organize these budding collections...and it's even more imperative when you consider the large numbers of items that will be eventually dealt with—thousands! Moreover, it's organization that turns a simple accumulation into a formal collection.

A collector's 'collection" is actually made up of mini-collections, based on those categories that the collector has chosen to focus on. Often, it's the categories, themselves, that will dictate the logical way to organize the covers. For example, there are some categories within the hobby that are collected **by catalog number**. Let's take Girlies and Navy Ships. Every known cover thus far has a specific catalog number assigned by ongoing catalog supplements. Collectors ask for certain covers by such numbers, and, thus, it's almost a given that such a collector will need to organize his collection by those catalog numbers, have his dupes ready for trading by those numbers, and so forth. There are other categories that assign specific numbers to their covers, but after we get beyond Girlies and Navy Ships, which are both very popular categories, many collectors don't pay attention to existing numbers, and thus don't feel obligated to organize by those tags. I'm a case-in-point, myself, when it comes to American Ace boxes. I collect them, but I don't use the listing. I suppose I would if I were more serious about that category, but, in my own case, I just have too many other categories that constantly divert my attention, and so I don't have the time or inclination to collect and organize by the list. It's the same with a few other large categories, such as Jewels, Jewelites, Foilites, Matchoramas, and Filigrees. And, there are a number of smaller categories wherein dedicated collectors have put forth the time and effort (and often expense) to maintain numbered listings—Judi Wittwer, AZ, maintains the *Classic Collectible Souvenir listing;* Dan Bitter, OK, maintains the *Jupiter One-Eight* listing; Donna Longenecker, PA, maintains the *Outback Restaurants* listing, and so forth. But, interest in such small categories has been small, and, so, the listings have not dominated the categories as in the cases of Girlies and Navy Ships.

Another predetermined format can be seen with a collection of Dated covers. How does one organize those? Duh! Of course, **chronologically**! They could be organized in some other fashion, but it's pretty obvious that, since they're all dated, organizing them by year is the most logical way to go. Such a chronological format also lends itself to some other categories, as well. For example, I have my chain hotels organized by **state > city > alphabetizing (if necessary) > chronologically**. I do this with my Holiday Inns, Best Westerns, Hiltons, etc. Thus, if I have seven different covers from the Santa Barbara Holiday Inn, the oldest one goes first, and so on. That's easy to do with stock designs in any chain hotel collection. With the non-stock covers (all those 30s, for example), you can at least get the chronology pretty close.

The vast majority of collectors' categories, however, are not subject to lists, catalog numbers, or dates, and so it may not always be clear right from the beginning as to how such collections should be organized—and, certainly, a format that works for one category may not work for another, or, at least, there may be several workable choices available. Let's take a look...

The traditional method of organizing most covers has always been **alphabetizing**. It's clean, it's easy, everyone knows how to do it (so it's standardized), and 99.9% of all covers have a predominant name that lends itself to alphabetizing. Thus, my Crowns are alphabetized, as are all my old covers, all my small categories, and some of my large categories, as well. Where such an organization rapidly loses its efficiency and ease, however, is with many of the bigger collections. Imagine checking for one "S" restaurant cover amidst your alphabetized collection of 26,000 restaurants. You'd end up having to page

through over a thousand "S" covers! In such situations, alphabetizing is still logical, but some refinement is called for.

Normally, the collector would move to a **state > alphabetizing system**, breaking up the collection into states first, and then alphabetizing the covers within each state. And, for huge categories, such as Hotels, Motels, Restaurants, and Banks, even this would have to be broken up even farther, usually: **state > city > alphabetizing**. There are usually other choices, though. Staying with our Restaurant model, the collector could organize by ethnicity > alphabetizing (Japanese Restaurants, Korean Restaurants, and so on), or ethnicity > state > city > alphabetizing. How about something like: type (diners, drive-ins, hotel restaurants, etc.) > state > alphabetizing? Anything that makes sense is normally workable. The general rule is that the larger number of covers one has to work with, the more refined the organizational format has to be. There is one little drawback to that, however...*there's a drawback to everything!*

The disadvantage to the 'refined' format is the corollary to the general rule stated above. Namely, the more refined the organization, the more covers that *aren't* going to fit into the format. Why? Because the more sub-categories you create within your collection, the more demands you make on your covers. Again, using our Restaurant example, if you employ a straight alphabetized system, all you need on a cover is the name of the business. But, with a more complex organization, now that same cover needs a business name, city, state, restaurant type, etc...and we all know that there are some covers that don't carry any state and/or city location, for example. Thus, there are some covers which won't fit into such a format...but they're still part of that collection...so, what to do?

Solution, you simply work around that problem. I use two ways, myself. If I need a location for a cover that doesn't have a location, I use the location in the manumark. Yes, I know—that location might not actually by the location of the business (the manumark might say Cincinnati, and the restaurant might actually be in Dayton)—doesn't matter! As long as I'm consistent in my 'error,' I'll always be able to find that cover—and, after all, that's the main point in having your covers organized in the first place—finding what you want, when you want it, and presenting everything in a logical manner.

The other way in dealing with the above problem is to simply create a sub-category for such covers and then just put, for example, all the no-location covers together, alphabetized. Actually, I use both such solutions at the same time...because there are even manumarks that have no given locations!

Well, let's get away from alphabetizing; there are other formats available in some cases—some quite creative. Military collections, I suspect, would be broken down **by Branch** (I actually have mine: state > city > branch > alphabetized). How about **by color**! This can work quite well for those categories noted for their colorfulness (Fancies, for example). For years, I had my Christmas collection organized by color—all the blacks together, reds together, etc.). It made for quite an appealing display. Eventually, though, because Christmas is definitely one of the bigger categories, I ran into the same problem I initially described with simply alphabetizing—the sub-categories were growing too large. So, I had to reorganize them into another, more easily handled, format. I still have some smaller categories arranged by color, though (Satin, for example). It's certainly also possible to organize **by design**. World War II Patriotics come to mind here...there are all those different stock designs, and there are so many of all of them! So, that's how I have them arranged...even if it means separating sets. It's much easier to locate covers and determine if what you have in your hand is needed or a dupe. I do the same thing with my stock Girlie sets. I mount 1 complete set to start off with, and then I break that 5-cover set into the 5 designs, putting all similar designs with different advertisers together. *Well, I hope this has given you some ideas. I'd be interested in your own ideas, as well.*