

A Biography of Henry “Harry” Rathkamp

by Bob Oliver

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Harry Rathkamp, for whom our Society is named, was born August 26th, 1883, in New York City. He joined the United States Navy as an apprentice at the age of 14; and had the proud distinction of being the youngest Spanish-American War Veteran who served under Admiral Sampson on the USS NEW YORK at the Battle of Santiago.

He was fond of boxing and had considerable experience both as a principal and referee in the ring. He was married at the age of 20, and was the father of twins at 21! He reared a family of seven children all of whom lived near his home at 8 Elliot Place, Newport, R.I.

He was always a hobbyist and started his collecting career with stamps which he finally sold to begin anew with matchbook covers. He told me that he found more fraternity and sincere good fellowship in the cover game than ever before. He specialized in Group One, liked the Army-Navy covers best and collected all kinds besides. He also had a wonderful collection of old beer steins which had a place of honor in his special hobby basement. The latter was a real privilege to see and it has been

my good fortune to have spent many hours there.

Harry proved to be a very fine host at the first large meeting of cover collectors which took place at his home on Labor Day week-end, 1939.

The writer and his many friends were greatly shocked at the news of Harry's sudden death in 1940. However, I know that he would have been extremely proud if he could have foreseen the fine society which bears his name, and the great progress which the hobby has made. This is especially true as you will now see as I quote from a letter which he wrote to me away back in 1938.

“With the thousands of match cover collectors thruout the world today, how many of us have taken an imaginary glimpse into the future? With the constant additions appearing on the market, and the fact that the game must still be considered in its infancy, I feel that I am not far wrong in suggesting that the future should be the most important study of the powers who are guiding the destiny of our beloved hobby. I feel that we should have one simple, common sense form of working agreement that must be universal and accepted as a whole, instead of the independent theories of the individual. Can you picture 10 or 20 years hence with the present method of unorganized symbols and crude means of identification? Where would the

stamp game be if Scott had as many competitors as Heinz has pickles?

I sincerely hope that the above suggestions won't be read in a spirit other than the way they were intended. I want to assist in building for the future, and, at least, they may be accepted as food for thought.”