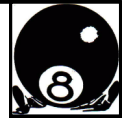**EDITORIAL**

Perspectives From The Editor's Chair

This issue brings to a close my 11th year as Editor for RMS. Looking back on those years, and seeing where I am now in my editorial endeavors, I can truthfully say that doing the *Bulletin*, although time-consuming, is actually fairly easy...all one needs is lots and lots of ideas and lots and lots of information.

The ideas are the easiest part. Some are based on input from other people—fellow collectors, readers, RMS officers, etc. The vast majority of *Bulletin* topics, however, comes from me. They're my ideas, based on what's happening in the hobby at the moment, covers that have recently crossed my desk, my collecting preferences, fleeting whims, etc. But, almost all of those ideas would never come to fruition if I didn't have lots and lots of appropriate information, and that's the harder part, although it's undoubtedly much easier for me than it was for my predecessors, going all the way back to the inception of the *Bulletin* in the early 1940s. Still, there's the rub! Where do I get that continuing flow of life-giving information?

First, as any editor of a hobby bulletin could say, input from readers is essential, wonderful, and cherished...but it only makes up a very small percentage of the finished product...simply because only a little of it ever comes comes in—silent majority, and all that. Most editors would agree, I think, that the biggest source, by far, is the editor's own resources. For example, I'm at a stage in my collecting where I have about 300,000 covers in my albums and a healthy trading inventory. That alone has been an immense help to me as an editor—I'm never at a loss to come up with covers which would be interesting to write about, or, in reverse, if I start out with the topic I can almost always come up with the appropriate covers to show with the eventual article.

And if I can't, then I rely on my next huge reservoir—technology. There's not a day that goes by when I don't thank my lucky stars that this society is now tied into computers, scanners, desk top publishing, and e-mail. That's why I have it easier than my predecessors. There is simply no way I could do what I do by pounding out bulletins on a typewriter. An example quickly comes to mind. In 1994 B.I. *[Before Internet]*, I began working on an idea about a series of articles spotlighting famous cruise ships of the past. I had the idea; I knew I had the covers in my Ship Line collection; but, I didn't have the information. I had to go to the local library, hunt down the appropriate books, extract the useful information, retype all that text at home, go to some place that had a Xerox machine and photocopy the ship pictures from the books, and then cut and paste everything together in a coherent way to get the articles I wanted. I ended up with a series of good articles that ran for eleven issues, but it was a long, slow developmental process. It took me about a week, and I had to leave the house and go to at least two different destinations in town. If I were to do the same series today, I could do the whole thing in one afternoon from the comfort of my hobby room *[which, by design, is close to the kitchen!]* The information and pictures would be available on the internet, the covers are right on my shelves, and my desk top publishing program allows me to easily integrate everything into the final product.

A different, and more current, example: As I write this, I'm working on an article examining club membership within the hobby over the last eight years. Once again, I had the idea, but not the information. I needed membership figures for all the clubs for the last eight years. I save every roster I get, but I was missing a lot of them, so I simply used e-mail to contact collectors who might have those missing figures, and those who could help came through with the data over the next several days. It was easy, and it was the next best thing to my actually having the numbers at my fingertips to begin

with.

Indeed, the internet and e-mail have, as no other form of communication before, basically turned all of us individual collectors into one, giant 'hobby brain'! Every time I get stuck because I don't know something *(and that happens a lot)*, I know that there are collectors *on-line* that have the answer. *Tap-tap-tap-send* and I have what I need within a few minutes or a few hours. And, everyone in the hobby, on-line or not, then benefits from that because that information, which was previously locked up in one collector's head, has now been made 'public' where everyone can learn from it. *[Although, I admit, such sharing of information <u>can</u> go too far! I.e., the woman behind me in the post office this morning...on her cell phone!]*

Who can say what the future holds for the hobby? Will we ever bounce back to larger number of collectors? And where will technology take us from here? I can dare some predictions *[you knew that was coming]*. We already have the technology to make bulletins available on the internet. Sierra-Diablo has had theirs up for a couple of years now. Imagine discontinuing the hard copy bulletins *[don't get scared; this is just 'imagine']* in favor of a bulletin that members read on-line. No printing and mailing costs! Do you know how much that would lower your dues?!! *[Neither do I, exactly, but it would be down to a couple of dollars a year!]* The bulletin is any club's single biggest expense. On-line bulletins would virtually eliminate that expense. And, there would be other benefits, as well. You could archive those bulletins in your own library at home, without the big stacks of old bulletins you may have lying around now. Or, you could just copy and archive those articles that appeal to you. And, if you downloaded an index of previous issues, such as the one currently on our web site, you would have an instant research library for your hobby needs...right at your fingertips. You could also read each bulletin in living color, just the way the editor creates them. Additionally, any web links or e-mail addresses appearing in a bulletin would be just that...links that you could quickly click on and be connected to. Ohhh, one cannot help but dream!

Well, why aren't we doing that? Because we're still at an evolutionary point where many people still don't have personal internet access, just as when there was a point when many people still didn't have telephones...*although, come to think of it, almost everyone has a cell phone! [except me...but, then, I don't use ATM cards, either] Can cell phones access the internet yet?...hmmmmm!*

And by the same token, we could do away with hard copy rosters, another major expense for clubs. Again, Sierra-Diablo has had theirs on their web site for years and only mails out hard copies upon request. Another advantage of that is that the on-line roster could be updated daily, if needed. Thus, it would always be current. Hard copy rosters are already at least partially obsolete by the time they hit your mailbox and only grow more so with each passing day.

And [I'm on a roll now!], this would be a good spot to get in a plug for the idea I put forth over a decade ago—a unified hobby roster, just like the collector data base I've maintained for years...*One* roster, *everyone's* on it, *one* central location *[internet]*, *equal access* for all collectors. It gets shot down every time I bring the idea up. Local clubs don't want to give their rosters up. They still see it as a drawing card into their particular club. That was probably true enough in the days when most collectors steadily traded by mail, but no more. These days, people join the clubs for the auctions and the meetings with their peers...*although the latter is steadily dwindling and may some day be just a quaint activity that occurs as a by-product of an isolated social gathering here and there.* I predicted years ago *[yes, friends, I did!]* that many of the local clubs would eventually disappear in favor of East-West regional organizations *[i.e. AMCAL - UES] [maybe EAST-WEST-SOUTH..gotta give those Floridians credit!]*