

A Cheapskate's Guide For Getting Covers

What's the biggest problem in the hobby today? Rubber bands breaking? Receiving "postage due" trades? Strikers falling off old covers? No. It's much more basic—getting covers. As the American match manufacturing industry collapsed, as disposable lighters came into vogue, and smoking became everyone's scapegoat [*not to mention a pot of gold for federal and state governments*], the availability of matchcovers has significantly dwindled. You just *don't* see that inviting basket of matchbooks on the counter of your favorite restaurant, hardware store, or massage parlor any more [*well, I don't see them on the counter of my massage parlor anymore!*].

So, the problem—what to do?; what to do.? Without covers, you have nothing to trade, your collection stagnates, and, probably, so does your interest in collecting. I just heard from a collector last month who's shelving his collection and turning to something else; it's just too difficult for him to find new covers anymore. One has to wonder how often that's happening these days, and just how much of the hobby shrinkage is due to that. It's a serious problem, so let's see what we can do about it...

- **Go to club meetings!** Covers abound...freebie tables, club members passing out dupes of covers they've recently acquired, club members giving you covers they've specifically been saving for you because they know what you're looking for, covers given away as bingo prizes, etc. etc. Also, by attending club meetings, you give other collectors a chance to get to know you and your needs.

- **Go to conventions!** Covers abound even more!...overflowing freebie tables, people stopping you in corridors, restaurants, and poolside in order to give you covers, collectors handing you envelopes stuffed with covers they've been saving for you all year, covers from raffles, covers from games, covers from room hopping, covers from shucking contests—my first AMCAL convention, I brought home over 10,000 covers!

- **Get your friends and relatives involved!** There's only one of you; there's a lot more of them! Usually, they'll be only too happy to look for covers for you. It's simple, it doesn't cost them anything, and it's an easy way to make you happy. Sis and your no-good bum of a brother-in-law go out to dinner....she slips whatever matchbooks she comes across into her purse. Uncle Harry vacations in the Caribbean...he pockets those hotel matchbooks just for you.

- **Go hunting yourself!** It's a myth that matchbooks aren't available anymore. They're there; you just have to look harder. Hotels still have them; restaurants still have them. A few days ago, a fellow teacher just gave me three matchbooks he picked up for me at a Sacramento restaurant. You can't even smoke in California restaurants anymore, but many restaurants still give out matchbooks—it's good advertising. And, for goodness sakes, if you're anywhere near a casino, drop in and get as many of their matchbooks as you can. At the very least, you can then turn around and trade them for other types of covers. And if you're near to one of the Indian casinos, all the better. Their matchcovers don't flood the hobby like those of Reno, Vegas, and Atlantic City, so they're in big demand.

- **Advertise locally to buy accumulations!** So far, we've discussed ways of getting covers for free. Here, you have to normally buy covers (although some respondents will just *give* you their matchbooks). Still, this is usually the cheapest way to buy covers. You're buying in bulk, you're buying dupes, you're often buying sight unseen—I never pay more than 2¢ or 3¢ a matchbook