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Collectin' 'n Tradin' Part II

by
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Notice in the previous article that I've twice made the distinction between "accumulations" and "collections" here. Not only are they different animals to begin with, but each has its own characteristics when it comes to being bought or sold. Accumulations, for example, being unorganized, having dupes, probably some or many used, etc., will go for pennies a cover. Actual collections, on the other hand, will go for more.

How do you find such stashes in your community? You have to advertise, one way or the other. Inadvertently, or indirectly, you advertise every time the local paper does a story on your collection. Anyone who's been so spotlighted can attest to the consistent fact that for the next several days after the article appears, the collector gets calls, cards, and letters from people within the community who have accumulations and collections that they want to get rid of....usually that means they wish to sell them, but you'd be surprised how often such people simply wish to see their matchcovers go to someone who will appreciate them—for free. Such contacts are one of the side benefits of being written up locally, so, if you haven't already, you should approach your local newspaper and present your idea for an article on your collection. It's actually even easier now than it used to be, because editors/reporters are always looking for tie-in approaches to the whole smoking debate.

To really root out the covers in the garages, closets, and attics of your community, you need to be more aggressive in your advertising. And, again, there are different levels of intensity to choose from. On the one hand, you can make up flyers—even simple 3x5 cards—and post them in public places...i.e. supermarkets, many coin laundromats, etc. have public bulletin boards; you can ask your local hobby shops to post them where customers can see them; and so forth. On the other hand (and this is the method that I like best, here), the most efficient direct advertising is....direct advertising! Put an ad in the paper or some weekly circular. You'll get responses...because there are lots of covers out there!

The calls you get as a result will vary. Not every one will pan out for you. Some callers will be hoping to make a killing..."What? 4¢ a cover?!! Why these gems are 25 years old!" You'll need to do some explaining about what's 'old' in the hobby. "What? Why this here's a rare cover, sonny. This business doesn't exist anymore!" You'll also have to explain that most businesses advertised on covers no longer exist. And, of course, some callers won't understand that the sentimentality they have for particular covers doesn't translate into value from the buyer's perspective.

But, I've always found that on each ad I've run it's turned out to be worth the cost of the ad, sometimes spectacularly so. A couple of years ago, for example, I received a call from a gentleman whose son had accumulated thousands of covers. When I went to look at them, they turned out to be all Casinos, several hundred of each type! Another time, I obtained several large ice cream tubs, full to the brim with old covers—DQs, Midgets, and the like.

Some people will keep your ad and call you months later, when it's more convenient or when they've had the grandson get the matches out of storage, etc., and I've had more than one person who has turned out to be a 'repeat customer.'

Some helpful tips to follow when trying to obtain accumulations from someone include:

- 1) Always bring along at least one club membership card to verify that you are a serious collector (that seems to put a lot of people at ease. After all, they've invited you to their home, but you're a complete stranger).
- 2) I always also bring along at least one album of covers to show the person, just in case they express an interest in either the hobby or are just curious in what will happen to their covers.
- 3) If the person does express an interest in the hobby, I always have club applications and can direct them to the RMS web site if they are on-line.

You should be able to buy such accumulations from local non-collectors for a few pennies per cover. Be sure and take a look at what you're buying first, though. Non-collectors will have no idea of condition, etc. You may find, for example, that although the accumulation has lots of nice, old covers, that the strikers have turned brittle and there's no hope of stripping them without they crumbling. You're also bound to find lots of dupes included in most batches, along with Nationals and struck covers. These things should all be explained to the seller. You'll be surprised, though, by the significant number of people who will simply give you the covers outright.

Well, so much for accumulations. Occasionally, you'll come across an actual collection, big or small, and, not surprisingly, the seller is going to be looking for more money than the owner of an accumulation. When trying to reach agreement on a price, remember, it's not what the covers are worth (because no one can say what they're worth)...it's what they're worth to you. In any event, you may possibly come across a collection (or even an accumulation) that is so big that you just can't afford to buy it. One strategy you can use here is to go in with, or quickly find, a fellow collector who will be a partner in the purchase. That cuts the cost to you in half. Erich Miethner and I used to do that in order to buy Navy Ship collections. It worked well. In any event, if you're not going to purchase such a collection/accumulation, for goodness sake don't just walk away from it and leave the seller with no options. Direct the seller to the RMS web site, where he or she can see what other outlets there are. Or, direct the person to the nearest club or other collectors. The point is, getting those covers into the hobby one way or another benefits us all in the long run.