

Our 500th Issue!

by
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Since this is our 500th issue, I thought it would be appropriate to review the *Bulletin* and examine how it has evolved over the years. The more I got into it, the more interesting I found the entire exercise. Before I start, however, I should note that one can't review 500 Bulletins without doing some critiquing, but readers should keep in mind that whenever I happen to give an opinion here on another Editor's Bulletin, I'm always aware that it's easy to do so with the advantage of hindsight, and I'm especially cognizant of Herbert Bayard Swope's words...“I cannot give you the formula for success, but I can give you the formula for failure—which is: Try to please everybody.”

First, the *Bulletin*, except perhaps for the first several issues, has always been an extension of the Editor's personality—it can't be any other way; otherwise, you don't have an Editor—you have a typist. Certainly, there must have been times over the years where some RMS administrations have exerted more influence over the Editor than at other times, but at least a large portion of bulletin content has always been determined by the Editor. So, let's start off by listing those people who have fashioned the *Bulletin* over the years:

Ed Perkins, 1941-1944 Horace Rush, 1944-1950 Dorothy Fiorello, 1950-1951
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Horace Rush, 1951-1951 Forney Sprenkle, 1951-1954 Ed Perkins/H Rush, 1954-1955 Walt Mensch, 1955-1957
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Ernestine Abbott, 1957-1973 Frank Gosztyla, 1973-1984 Bill Hollmann, 1984-1988 Bill Retskin, -1988-1994
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Note also that the first five editors were also the Secretaries.

Originally, the *Bulletin* was a “*Letter*” issued in letter/newsletter form from 1941-1944. The first issue was a single page. From there, length varied from 3-4 pages for the next 30+ issues. Through the 1950s-1970s, it doesn't look as if there was a set number of pages, as lengths routinely vary from 10-18 pages, but eventually the *Bulletin* settled into a 16-page format (with larger convention issues) by 1990. In 1995, the length was increased to 24 pages, 28 pages in 1998, and 32 pages beginning with this issue.

Although there were some combined *Bulletins* and the like, the *Bulletin* was pretty much a monthly publication up to the mid-1960s. Then, starting in 1966, as a cost-cutting move, the *Bulletin* was cut back from twelve to ten issues per year, and in 1968 it went to the six annual issues we have today.

Despite a spate of *Bulletins* in the early 1990s which had a lot of wasted space, maximum use of space has been characteristic of the *Bulletin* over the years...and well it should be; the *Bulletin* is the single biggest expense that RMS has. We'd better darn well cram as much on those pages as is reasonable. Font size has usually been 12 pt, but often 10, and sometimes even 8 can be seen.

But, content overshadows everything else, and when thumbing through earlier *Bulletins*, say up to the 1980s, one notices three glaring differences—relatively few lists from 1957-early 1980s, few cover pictures until at least the latter 1970s (but you might expect that because the lack of technology), and a rather astoundingly small percentage of cover/collecting information, again from 1957 through the 1980s, although this begins to gradually climb beginning in 1984).

Here's a content analysis of *Bulletins* every four years, starting from 1944. Trying to be consistent, I used the first two issues of the year, purposely avoiding the post-August 'Convention issues' so the results would not be unduly skewed. Even still, I had to make a few adjustments as to which issues were analyzed; for example, the January 1944 *Letter* contains a long eulogy to RMS President Bob Lockard, so I substituted the March issue. The percentages represent how much of those bulletins were devoted to the topic noted at the top of the column.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Editor</u>	<u># of Pages</u>	<u>Cover/Collecting Info</u>	<u>Social Info</u>	<u>RMS Business</u>	<u>Ads</u>	<u>Letters to Ed</u>	<u>Other Club Info</u>
1944	Perkins	4		5.0%	46.3%	0.0%	11.3%	0.0%
1948	Rush	4	37.5%	11.2%	18.7%	23.8%	0.0%	0.0%
1952	Sprenkle	9-10	46.2%	5.0%	20.5%	15.5%	0.0%	1.0%
1956	Mensch	12	60.0%	1.6%	15.7%	35.4%	1.6%	1.6%
1960	Abbott	14	43.7%	30.0%	13.2%	23.5%	2.8%	2.8%
1964	Abbott	12	27.5%	33.8%	18.3%	17.9%	0.0%	2.5%
1968	Abbott	10	27.5%	14.5%	48.5%	21.0%	0.0%	3.5%
1972	Abbott	14-16	12.5%	11.7%	38.7%	28.3%	0.0%	4.7%
1976	Gosztyla	12-20	16.6%	9.6%	25.1%	25.9%	0.0%	3.7%
1980	Gosztyla	12-18	34.3%	9.4%	33.9%	28.8%	6.9%	6.5%
1984	Hollmann	16	11.9%	6.5%	32.9%	30.5%	3.4%	3.1%
1988	Retskin	16	23.4%	9.8%	37.6%	25.9%	5.0%	1.2%
1992	Retskin	20	20.6%	5.2%	38.0%	8.7%	6.2%	5.0%
1996	Prero	24	36.7%	1.3%	24.6%	3.3%	3.3%	1.6%
2000	Prero	28	65.8%	2.3%	20.5%	7.8%	10.4%	3.2%

From 1960 to the early 1980s, it's pretty obvious, the "collecting" theme was almost uniformly lost, and the *Bulletin* simply became an instrument to hype club business, run ads, and to a lesser extent pass on social information....Look, for example, at this notice in the May 1962 *Bulletin*: "*Unfortunately, due to several reports and, fortunately, due to the welcome many ads for this issue, we are unable to have a regular column on covers.*"—that entire issue was all convention news, other RMS business, and ads. Not a single cover was even pictured anywhere! That issue took the "matchcover" right out of "matchcover" collecting! [In fairness, though, keep in mind that the "collecting theme" represents a bias of mine; the next Editor after me could have a completely different point of view. That's why I started off pointing out that the *Bulletin* is an extension of the Editor's personality]

In any event, later on, the late Kent Morris was certainly correct when he complained that the RMS Bulletin was basically pre-convention news from Feb-Aug and post-convention news from Sep-January. The *Bulletin* has always contained some convention news during the year, and that's certainly to be expected, but such coverage became an obsession in the 1960s and 1970s. As an example of this "convention mania," just look at the front page headlines from 4 consecutive bulletins in 1977 (May/June, July/August, September/October, and November/December): "R.M.S. Convention," "R.M.S. Convention," "Post-Convention News," and "Convention Cover News." With billions of covers in existence and the entire world to canvas, the convention overshadowed everything.

[Readers should be aware that some RMS business 'stuff' is mandated in the Bulletin. The Editor has to run some publicity for the convention, has to run the display rules, has to run Outstanding Collector of the Year rules, Hall of Fame announcements, amendments to the constitution, membership information, etc.]

There have been a number of controversies over the years regarding the *Bulletin*. At the 1961 convention, for example, it had been moved during the business meeting that the Editor receive an annual \$175 compensation for work on the *Bulletin*. At that point, one Earl Scott asked from the audience "what we get for the \$175." A long discussion followed and the motion was eventually voted down. Scott thought his actions were misrepresented in the following November *Bulletin* editorial. He wrote a rather scathing letter which was printed in the January 1962 *Bulletin* and answered by the Ed., etc. Most problems dealt with content, though. In the June 1960 *Bulletin*, for example, Ed. Ernestine Abbott notes that she's received multiple complaints about the minimum coverage given to covers, and her answer was that she wasn't getting enough reader input *[Any editor today will tell you if he or she relied on reader input, bulletins would be basically blank! On the other hand, we, as editors today, have much more information and sources to draw upon].*

By the mid-1960s, in fact, there were so many complaints about running complete newspaper articles (instead of summarizing them) *[and there were a lot of newspaper articles about collectors run in the early 1960s Bulletins]*, s-t-r-e-t-c-h-i-n-g text simply to fill space, all the space given over to advertising, and having a 'split' bulletin (part for the serious collector and part for the social collector), and more, that from Oct. 1965 - Mar. 1966, a Bulletin Committee actually investigated such complaints, and it was concluded that some were justifiable and some were just personal grudges *[and notice how the social content of the Bulletin was drastically reduced right after that].*

Notice how much ad space there was in pre-1992 issues compared to later *Bulletins*. The 1960s and 1970s were the high point of the big advertisers—Hobymaster, Beachcraft, and Frank Tripodi. Tripodi's ads, especially, usually ran from 3-7 pages! Also, since at least 1990, membership has been steadily declining, so we see a corresponding decline in ads run *[Now, I can't even get people to run ads in our "Free Ad" issue each January!]*. Personally, I wouldn't want to see a return to *Bulletins* which were so heavily laden with ads.

And, as far as the incredible amount of space devoted to 'RMS business,' aside from the convention coverage running amuck in the 1960s and 1970s especially, a 'dubious' advantage that I have as the current editor is that I don't have to deal with lengthy lists of new members! When RMS membership was at its highest in the 1980s, the membership report in each issue would run from 2-4 pages! Now, it runs one.

In defense of earlier Editors *[if they need any defense]*, we later Editors have significantly more room to play around with, and it's incredibly easier now to find good 'collecting' information with such

things as the internet, scans, and e-mail. When I'm working on an article, for example, and I get stuck because I don't have the appropriate covers or all the appropriate information to pass on to readers, I just e-mail some knowledgeable collectors, and within an hour or two I have what I need!

This surge in technology that has occurred in the last 10-20 years, aside from making a nicer looking *Bulletin* possible, has made it much easier to compile lists, and store and retrieve information (thanks to the pc); communication between collectors (i.e., sharing news, etc) has been greatly enhanced (thanks to e-mail); and the world's information is literally at our fingertips now (thanks to the internet).

Well, I've saved the most controversial item for last [*so I can hit and RUN!!*]. Now, mind, I say the following in neither positive nor negative terms; it is not presented with any particular derogatory purpose in mind; I merely present it as 'food for thought,' a neutral observation based on a very glaring fact [*notice how I'm making sure all of my escape routes are in place before I make said observation*].

I simply find it interesting that the highest amount of social content and the longest sustained period of low collecting content both come from the only female editor that we've ever had...

[Oh! You sexist, male, chauvinist PIG!]

OK, crucify me! That's what the stats show! I hasten to point out, though, that one couldn't draw any valid conclusions from that fact, simply because it's only based on *one* female editor, and *one* is not a valid sampling of anything. Ergo, no conclusions are possible. I *merely* thought it was interesting. I could be followed by another female editor whose stats were quite different...

[Actually, I'd be surprised if a succeeding female editor's 'stats weren't considerably different than my own!....a little Groucho Marx there]