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Collecting Dated Covers

by
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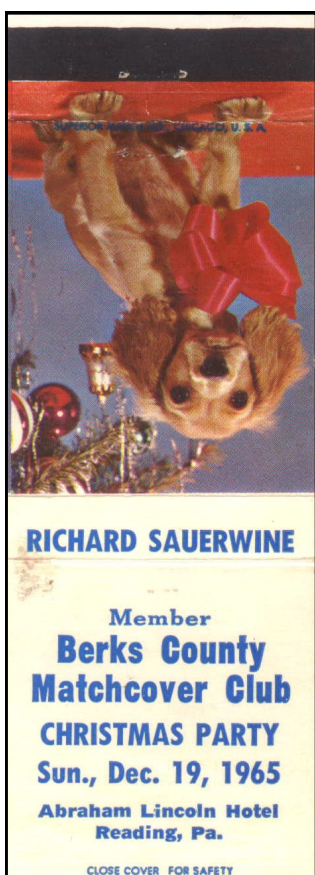
“Oh, that one looks interesting! How old do you think that one is?” That’s one question you’ll never have to struggle with when you’re dealing with DATED covers. The year is right there on the cover! It has to be the year, not just ‘April 15,’ for example. The whole idea of a dated cover is that the date gives you the year in which the cover was issued. That’s crucial.

There are three varieties of Dated covers: covers that give the specific date, covers that give the ‘range’ of years, and covers that give a founding date plus how many years it’s been since then.

Covers that give the specific date, such as the one pictured here on the left, are the easiest, simply because they’re the most obvious...“Placer County Fair, Aug-14-21, 2000.” Perfect!

Covers that give the ‘range’ of years, such as the one pictured here on the right, give the initial and current dates...“1896-1996.” Typically, these are anniversary covers, and they’re also obvious and easy to deal with.

Covers that give a ‘founded’ or ‘established’ date with the number of years that have passed since then also tell the issuing date of the cover, except, here, you have to do



the math to figure it out. For example, the cover on this page has “Growing since 1916” (founding date) and on the back it says, “Now in our 57th year of Service”. Thus this cover was issued in 1977 (1916+57=1973). Voila! A dated cover!

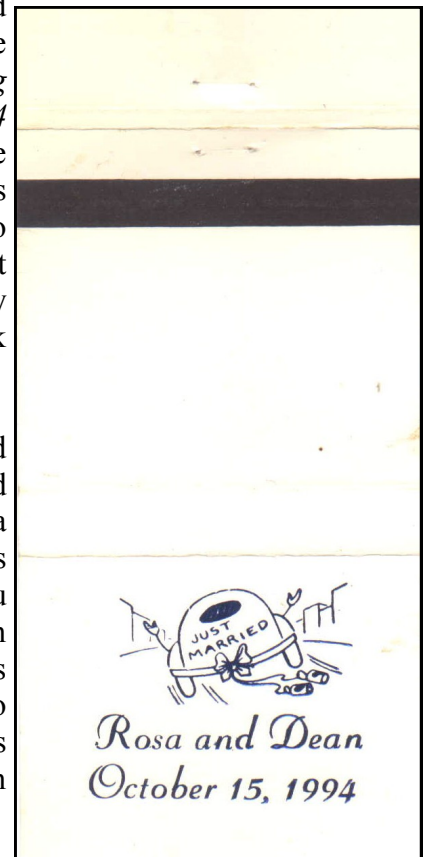
Of course, you always need to at least keep in the back of your mind that that 1977 m-a-a-y not have actually been issued in 1977, but this is really just a technicality that we overlook. A perfect example of this ‘technicality’ can be seen with many of the Convention covers that come out each year...the cover may have been issued for the 2002 RMS Convention but actually appeared several months before, in 2001. The same thing happened with the first Millennium covers. They all said “2000,” but they came out in 1999. This is just a technicality, though, as we’re only talking about a few months difference, so we live with it, especially since we can’t possibly come up with a more exact system.

And [here’s where I go way off on a tangent, but this is really interesting] we actually ignore ‘technicalities’ like this every day. It’s so common we don’t even think about it. The biggest example is the Gregorian Calendar, which is the most widely used calendar in the world and the one we use—all the dates are wrong!! If you were born in 1936...you *weren’t!* If you married in 1957...you *didn’t!* Did World War I start in 1918?—uh-uh!

In 1582, Pope Gregory XIII had decided that it was time that the Christian world stop using the old pagan Julian calendar that they had been using for the last 1,500 years (one of Caesar’s contributions). Thus, he set his scholars to work on developing a Christian calendar, based, not surprisingly, on the birth of Jesus (hence the BC/AD system we’ve been using ever since). The problem, however, was calculating exactly when Jesus was born. The *Bible*, after all, gives no year, although it does give two periods. Pope Gregory’s Church scholars came up with their answer, and that’s the point that is used as the division between the BC and AD years. Modern archaeology, though, has shown that the two time periods

given for Jesus’s birth in the *Bible* conflict and indicate that He could have been born anywhere between 4 BC and 6 AD [although, based on King Herod’s death, it would be sometime between 8-4 BC]. Thus, every date that has been written in the last 421 years is somewhere between 6-14 years off, one way or the other! Well, no one is going to go back and change all those dates, so it all just becomes an interesting bit of trivia...a technicality that we live with every day and no longer think about.

OK class, back to Dated covers. We’ve covered what dated covers *are*, so let’s go over what dated covers *aren’t*. They aren’t covers that give a founded/established date and something such as “serving you for over 40 years.” No good. You can’t figure out the final date from that information because there’s no way of telling ‘how many years over 40.’ Therefore, you don’t know what to add to the founded/established date. Chances are it was only one or two years over, but that’s an assumption that you can’t build a date on. *Nope!*



Dated covers are also *not* “Ingamar and Zelda, February 14th, 1982.” We’ve all seen these wedding/wedding anniversary covers. They are *not* dated covers. They give the date of the wedding or anniversary, but they don’t normally date the issuance of the cover...because, more often than not, those covers were printed or stamped with the names and date by a catering company for that specific wedding celebration, but the blank covers themselves had been sitting around in a caterer’s or printer’s storeroom for who knows how many years—so, they’re not real dated covers. However, I know collectors who save such wedding anniversary covers as a category by itself. They can certainly use those covers to date the particular celebration, just not the cover.

This is a big category. Thank goodness so many sources saw fit to proclaim specific years (There’s nothing more frustrating to a Dated cover collector than to come across a “150th Anniversary!” cover only to discover that the bozos didn’t include from when to when!...no dates!). The biggest single source is Banks and Savings and Loans (love those bankers!), but other major sources for Dated covers include sports schedules, fairs, reunions, and, of course, conventions. The largest Dated collection I know of is...my own!...7,262...And, there are certainly many more. I even have more, myself, but they’re in other collections, because Dated, although definitely one of my favorites, is not my *top* priority; it’s actually pretty low in the scheme of things. Thus, if Pres. W.D. happens to send me a dated DQ [*hee hee!*], that covers goes into my DQ collection instead of my Dated collection. And, that may well be the only example I ever see of that particular cover, so...

As far as variety is concerned, this category literally includes everything, because you’ll find dated covers running across all sizes, trademarks, manufacturers, topics, etc. And, when you come to think about it, since the dates are incidental to the rest of the text...they’re *all* conjunctives! So, comb your dupes and you’re bound to come up with some Dated covers.

Trading in this category can be frustrating, simply because almost all of the collectors who trade in this area only want “pre-1960,” or “pre-1950,” or “pre-1941,” and so on, which leaves you with all those other Dated covers with no trading prospects. If that’s the situation, your alternative is to sort them out into their conjunctive categories and trade them off that way.

In any event, I love this category because dates mean ‘History,’ and I love History! And, just as we see in History, those dates allow you to organize your covers in chronological order, and, with chronological order, you can then begin to see trends, which, in turn, allows you to see more of the ‘big picture.’ Not surprisingly, then, I have my collection organized by year, then size. Currently that collection runs from 1932 to the present. There *are* earlier Dated covers...but I don’t have them!

One thing you’ll notice right away when putting together such a collection is that beginning around the mid-1980s the number of such covers issued rapidly declines. This corresponds to the advent of the anti-smoking campaigns and the collapse of the American Match Industry. Unfortunately, by the time the collector gets to the late 1990s, just about the only dated covers being issued are Convention covers. Case in point: a couple of years ago, California celebrated its 150th anniversary...and, to my knowledge, not a single Dated cover was put out to commemorate the event. *And, of course, the moral of all this is...“The Golden Age of any topic has already passed you by!”* All we can do now is gaze with longing eyes on yet another era that we missed. Still, even though this particular Golden Age has ended, the covers from that period are still available, so collectors can certainly still collect.

Anyone want to trade?