

Just How Bad Is “Bad”?

For most collectors, I would imagine, the process of collecting includes throwing out some covers from time to time—some collectors routinely trash all Nationals; others regularly dispose of bobtails, etc. But what about those covers that are unstruck, but banged up, color-faded, dirty, stained, and so forth?

When I sort through covers (usually comfortably settled in the living room while watching a good movie), I occasionally come upon a cover that catches my eye because its condition is poor, and there's always that moment of agonizing over whether or not it should be thrown away. Where does one draw the line? What guidelines are to be used? Should *any* cover *ever* be thrown away?

Well, let's tackle the last question first. Should any covers ever be thrown away? After all, there might be some collector somewhere who would want it. True, but 1) it's not worth your time and effort warehousing such covers 'in case' you someday meet up with such a collector, and 2) (*and this is the telling point for me*) by taking such covers out of circulation, you're helping to maintain the hobby's material at a certain level of quality—a microcosmic example: watch what happens when someone dumps such covers on a freebie table...everyone complains that now he or she has to wade through such 'garbage' to find acceptable covers. So, yes, definitely, there are some covers that should be destroyed.

But, where *does* one draw the line? What is acceptable and what is not? Do you throw out a cover if the striker is discolored? What if the cover has a hole in it from a tack? How badly can the corners be bent? What if the cover has creases, indicating that it has been crumbled or crunched at one time or another? ...And there are a thousand other such conditions one could list, any of which might cause the collector to have second thoughts about retaining such covers. What to do...What to do.

The answer is surprisingly simple, and, yet, exactly what one would expect....'The guidelines are whatever the individual collector decides they are, and whatever he or she would feel comfortable with.' In my own case, I look at the cover in question, probably seeing unseemly folds, areas where the cover has become unintentionally embossed by the match heads, and so on, and I simply ask myself, "Would I be embarrassed to send this cover to someone else in a trade?" That's the deciding factor. If I answer "Yes", the cover goes into the garbage.

Of course, it's not always that simple. I'm not going to throw away a banged up Navy Ship cover that I don't have!...or a DQ!...or a Crown...etc., etc. There's a good chance that I might otherwise never see a better replacement cover. So, I don't mind admitting that I have a number of 'precious' covers that I wince at every time I happen to see their deplorable condition! But, I'm not willing to extend that same mercy to other covers in my 'less-preferred' categories. Other collectors may use that same logic to justify saving *all* covers simply because they don't have those issues. But, as I see it, the collector should always be aware that with the inclusion of each poor-quality cover into a collection, the overall quality of the collection is thus degraded more and more...lower and lower.

So, from the above discussion, I put forth, for your consideration at least, the following conclusions: 1) As the individual collector, *you* decide what's keepable and what's disposable; 2) But, *don't* send questionable covers to other collectors unless they have already indicated that they would be willing to accept such; 3) Generally, you should be culling out unacceptable material whenever you can—you're not only doing yourself a favor, but all of your fellow collectors a favor as well.