

Do You Count Your Covers?

I always used to think that that was a somewhat silly question for a collector. "Of course!" was my automatic answer, and I just assumed that every collector did...but, it turned out that not all collectors do keep track of how many they have of this or that, or even how many they have in total.

When I started collecting back in 1983, it was a given for me, basically a carry over from my coin collecting days, I suppose. I was already in the habit of keeping a detailed inventory of just what coins I had, and so when I switched to matchcovers *[I couldn't collect coins and have kids at the same time, I found...you'd think my wife would have mentioned that ahead of time!]* I started, and still maintain to this day, a running tally of how many items I have in each collection.

In the front of the first album of each category I have a sheet where I keep the tally for that particular collection. Each time I add new covers and boxes to the collection's albums, I simply add those numbers to the last total shown on the tally sheet. Thus, I always have a current figure available for each category...well, as current as it's going to get, since, for most of my categories, I only make such additions once or twice a year, when I have enough items (and time) to go through to make it worthwhile dragging out all the albums and matching up whether what I'm holding is a dupe or a soon-to-be new addition. In some cases, I hate to admit, years go by before I work on that category again. Just the other day, for example, checking my tally sheet for Holiday Inns, I noticed that I haven't made any additions since December, 2000! I have a big shoebox of HI covers waiting to be worked with; I just haven't gotten around to it (sound familiar?).

In any event, the point is keeping a running tally is soooo much easier than one day eventually sitting down to count each cover and box in your collections. With larger collections, such as Foilites, Hotels, Restaurants, etc., you'd be counting thousands of covers! I'd hate to think of the time and effort it would take me, for example, to count my Banks and S&Ls (48,000+)!

And, since the advent of my trusty computer, I now easily have all those category totals in a database that automatically calculates the total number of items I have altogether, and it automatically adjusts that figure accordingly each time I make updates to my particular categories. No fuss! No bother!

Thus, I started counting as soon as I started collecting, and, almost as soon, I became Editor for Sierra-Diablo. So it wasn't very long before I started wondering how my collection totals compared to those of other collectors. Did my 250 Midgets, say, comprise a sizeable collection? I couldn't tell without seeing what other collectors had. Thus it was that I started canvassing the hobby for appropriate numbers in all categories. In 1987, I ran the first of several annual "Largest Known Collection" surveys. The results were really interesting. But, with the advent of the internet, gathering this information now is so much easier. In 2001, I ran a much more complete survey in the RMS Bulletin that proved to be very popular with collectors. Collectors *want* to know numbers; it's useful information; it shows how many are available in each category and just how far you have yet to go in that category...if you're aiming for as complete a collection as possible. Some collectors might not be doing that, aiming instead for just the rarest and hard to get items, but most collectors, I believe, aim for reasonably complete collections, which means everything in that category, not just selected samples. So, if I'm collecting Towns, and I have 7,894, and I see that Tom Valachovic has 31,902...that gives me a pretty good idea of where I am in my Towns collection at that point!....The next big such hobby survey is coming up next year...so start counting!