

May/June 2006

When Is Big.. Too Big?

by
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As soon as I started in this hobby, I immediately began putting my collected covers into slotted album pages. In fact, as I remember now, when Dean Hodgdon, OK, originally sent me an 'introductory packet' to the hobby, the sample covers he enclosed were already on slotted sheets, so, perhaps, that's what set me on the path of album pages so quickly.

Over the years, I have steadfastly held to that standard. The more covers I added to my collections, the more pages I filled, and the more 3-ring binders I acquired. Originally, those pages were the paper, slotted pages that were the standard when I entered the hobby in the early 1980s. I believe Dan Bitter, living right here in the Sacramento area then, gave me my first such pages to get me started (he did *a lot* to get me started back then). Then, slowly, over recent years, I have been converting all those pages to the plastic-pocketed pages are soooooo much better! And, at the same time, since the hodge-podge assortment of album colors and sizes that I had thus far accumulated cried out to be reorganized into something more befitting my obsession for organization and orderliness, I began to switch all my albums to black, 3" 3-ring binders...a process that will probably continue well into my declining years. The point is...I was finally getting everything 'just right'!

Still, there were always covers and boxes that I counted as part of my collections, yet never made it onto pages and into albums. At first, these were just some foreign odds and ends and boxes...those annoying, frustratingly odd-shaped, odd-sized boxes that wouldn't fit in *anything!* (except a shoe box...*hee hee*). So, over the years, as the rest of my collections expanded into more pages and more albums, those oddities just continued to pile up in all those shoe boxes. Well, that was bad enough in itself. But...

I had already been an Eks collector, and my 5,000+ Elks collection somehow ended up in a couple of huge photo-type albums that the late Warren Marshall had earlier given me. Indeed, those two albums are so large that the garage was the only place I could store them. So, not *all* of my collections, it seemed, were destined to end up in those black, pristine binders so neatly arranged on the myriad of shelves in my

hobby room. Thus, I had already resigned myself to ‘a few exceptions’ to my organizational goals.

Then, *it* happened...Actually, it was three *it*'s happening within the space of just a couple of years. As all of my Fancy categories petered out—no more Filigrees, Cameos, Matchoramas, Foilites, Jewelites, etc. (because the companies went bust), and as trading, which had been my main source of incoming covers, also dwindled, I found that I was looking for more categories to collect in. That's when Fate stepped in. I started collecting Towns...and then...Zip Codes...and then...Manufacturers and Distributors.

I started off by cannibalizing my trading stock, which, fortunately for me, was abundant...and those three huge categories quickly began to take shape, each almost immediately numbering in the thousands. Ah, lucky me!...or was I?

As the three collections continued to expand at a healthy rate, I began to become somewhat alarmed. The incoming covers were piling up, and I came to realize that I would never have the money for all the additional pages and albums nor, more importantly, the room for all the required albums. After all, I began calculating, the Towns alone were going to one day amount to over 20,000+...and then there were the Manufacturers and Distributors—those covers were going to probably number at least 5,000+...and [*the piece de resistance!*] the Zip Codes! *If I'm shooting for one cover for every zip code, I reasoned, that collection alone could end up near 100,000 covers! Hmmmmmm! Let's see...16 20s to a plastic page for 100,000 covers = 6,250 pages, and with some 75 pages per 3" album...that would be 84 albums just for Zip Codes!*

Consequently, I found, not only would the cost of pages and albums be prohibitive for such large collections...but I'd have to have a warehouse to put them in. This “big” is just...*too big!* So, did I give up? Of course not! Once those little collecting genes start percolating, it's almost impossible to ignore them. Once the call has sounded, the gauntlet has been thrown...the challenge cannot be ignored.

Trays...definitely, trays!...in the garage! I hate to do that. I like having my covers handy, especially when I'm looking for something to use in an article. I lose visibility and convenience this way, but, there's no getting around the efficiency of cost and space when using trays. And, as for the garage, while there are lots of locations around the country where it would just be too humid to store covers in the garage, *I* am fortunate enough to live in California, right on the edge of the Sacramento Valley, so humidity isn't a problem here [*even though it's been raining steadily here since December!*]

Those big collections haven't reached the size yet where I have to start worrying too much about organizing the trays, but dividers will be necessary within each tray, the trays will have to be labeled, and then it will be necessary to arrange them in some meaningful order. Some collectors have been lucky enough, or diligent enough, to find dresser-type stands with drawers that act as the trays. They're very nice. In my own case, I rather expect that I'll have to settle for stacking the trays in cabinets. Fortunately, I had the foresight to install the old kitchen cabinets in the garage the last time I remodeled the kitchen, so I have lots of cabinet space in the garage. Now, I just have to find a way to keep the trays stacked without them crushing the ones underneath. *Minor problem, I'm sure.*

But I'm not the first to face such obstacles. For a collector of practically anything...it comes with the territory! I'm open to suggestions. Have you solved similar problems in a different fashion altogether? See any flaws in my solution? Let me know, please...*quickly!* The trays are filling up!