

Collecting American Legion

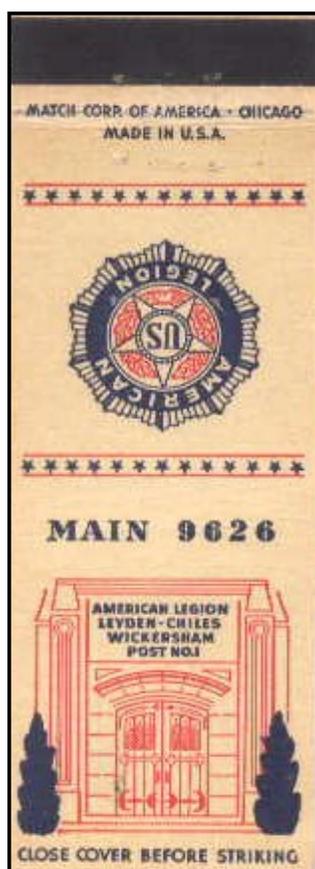
by
Mike Prero

American Legion is one of the Fraternal categories and is the biggest of the Military fraternal groups, both in number of members and in number of existing covers. That makes it a prime category for me! I love the challenge of a large series, and most of these covers are numbered by location, so that makes organization

easier than many other large categories the collector may find himself working with. Thus, collecting American Legion covers is both a challenge and a delight...and, even better, it's all ongoing, with no end in actual sight, since no one is certain just what covers or how many actually exist, and no one that I've ever heard of has ever claimed to have a 'complete' collection. So, it's not like collecting Classiques, for example, where there are 33 known to exist, you acquire all 33, and then...yawn!...what's next? Ah! *This* is my kind of category!

A little background to get us going...The American Legion was chartered by Congress in 1919 as a patriotic, mutual-help, war-time veterans organization, a community-service organization which now numbers nearly 3 million members -- men and women -- in nearly 15,000 American Legion Posts worldwide. These Posts are organized into 55 Departments -- one each for the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, France, Mexico, and the Philippines.

The American Legion's national headquarters is in Indianapolis, Indiana, with additional offices in Washington, DC. In addition to thousands of volunteers serving in leadership and program implementation capacities in local



communities to the Legion's standing national commissions and committees, the national organization has a regular full-time staff of about 300 employees. The American Legion is incorporated by an act of Congress and is organized into local Posts which, for purposes of coordination and administration, are grouped into Departments. [<http://www.legion.org>]

And thus, most American Legion covers carry the particular Post # that they originated from. The easiest way to organize these covers, then, is numerically, going from Post #1 to...?. Although, it's not quite that simple, since the Posts aren't consecutive nationally—they're consecutive within their particular Department (state). So, there's a Post #1, for example, in *each* of the 50 states, plus the Departments outside the country. What does that leave us with, then? Most collectors, myself included, house such a collection by state, and then by Post #, making Post #1 in Alabama the starting point.

As with any large category, though, (Banks, Christmas, Uniglos, and so on) no matter what organizational system one chooses, there are always at least a few covers that either don't or can't fit into the existing system. Opening up my first American Legion album, then, I actually don't see that Post #1, Alabama, cover first. Instead, I begin with two small sections: one for general American Legion covers with no location (Nationals) and one for more specific covers that I simply haven't been able to identify the Post # and state for.

Of course, a collector could opt for some other system—grouping them, perhaps, by stock design and then by state and Post #, or alphabetically, or...? Whatever works for the collector is the bottom line. But, one way or another, they *do* have to be methodically organized because there are a lot of potential covers to collect here. I have over a thousand, and for all I know there could be five times that amount in existence.

As with all of the Fraternal, most of the covers in this category are of stock designs, and, since the American Legion has been around for almost 100 years, those stock designs have changed several times over the decades. Thus, from that perspective, there are a number of sub-series within the larger whole. Another similarity shared with other Fraternal is that these aren't particularly beautiful or attractive covers...but then, that's not why we're collecting them anyway. There are very few Fancies to be seen, for example, at least based on my own collection, although there are some nice Raised Ink issues.

As you could guess, most of the covers are front-strikes, encompassing the 1950s-1970s period, although there are certainly more recent issues going up to the 1990s, at least, along with older issues going back...? Well, I don't know, but I can see some old Jerseys, an Albert Pick or two, a few Crowns, etc.

And, speaking of manumarks, all of the major manufacturers are to be seen here, with Match Corp, Monarch, and Superior having issued most of the stock design covers. There is also a sprinkling of 'jobber' manumarks, especially with the newer covers.

Conjunctives? Lots!—Christmas, Girlies, Dated, Woodies, Metallic, Patriotic, Sets, Beer...How about sizes? Again, as would be expected with Fraternal, at least 95% are 20-strikes. Indeed, out of the 1,018 covers I had at least count, I only have twenty 30-strikes and three 40-strikes...and no 10s, Jewels, Midgets, or other sizes.

There are 1,019 listed as of March 2005. I do the listing. I have dupes if anyone would care to trade for same!