

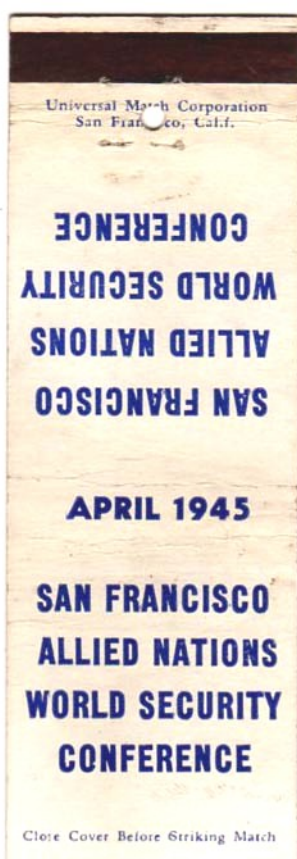
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Dating Your Covers

by
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I suppose that there are some collectors who don't wonder about the age of their covers, but most do, I think...part of the natural curiosity that comes with us, especially since what we collect is so historically oriented to begin with. So, how does one tell the date of those covers?

Well, covers that are dated, of course, pose no problem, nor sets that are known to have been issued in a certain year, but, for the vast majority of covers, unless you're ready to make a career of studying covers, the best you can hope for is narrowing down your guess to within a factual range of years. For example, if the cover you're trying to date is a front-striker, you know it's pre-1978 (the last front-strikers appeared in



1978), but let's try to narrow it down even further.

We'll say the cover happens to have a Universal trademark. Looking in some handy reference, such as a bulletin article or list, you find that Universal was founded in 1925. Now you know that your cover was issued somewhere between 1925 and 1976. You also notice that aside from the cover looking old, it's a Tall, or Extra-Long, meaning that its length is noticeably longer than normal covers. Consulting your reference sources, you find that Universal stopped issuing Talls around 1936. Now, you know your cover was issued between 1925 and c.1936. Unless your particular cover happens to have some further identifying features, such as a unique footer or a special trademark, the 1925-1936 range is about as good as you can hope for....with *this* method.

Let's try a more modern cover. It's a reverse-striker, so you know it's basically 1973 or later (the switch from front-strikers to reverse-strikers was mandated in 1973, but companies were allowed to use up current stocks, and front-strikers were still appearing as late as 1978; also, companies such as Ohio had come out with some early reverse-strikers [referred to as "back-strikers"] as early as the 1930s, but you'd notice if the cover you were trying to date looked that old).

This time, you're looking at an Ohio Match Co. cover with no other distinguishing features. Checking your references again, you see that Ohio Match Co. ceased operation in 1987. Now you have it narrowed down to 1970-1987, and that's about as far as you can reasonably expect to take it.

So far, we've only considered covers with manumarks by the actual manufacturer, but, as you're well aware of, there are many covers that carry a manumark of some printer, novelty shop, or individual entrepreneur, and more and more of these are being cranked out all the time [just look at your Convention covers!]. If you're trying to date one of these, you'd ordinarily be treading on very thin ice, simply because many of these are fly-by-night operations, any Tom, Dick, or Harry can get his name on a manumark, and the hobby just hasn't historically documented these types of covers. If you're dealing with an older cover, with a more well-known company, say a Kaeser & Blair, or a Willens & Co., you'd do better.

The problem of dating covers is being worked on, however, from several different angles. Bill Retskin, I believe, was looking into dating covers by phone numbers; I'm working on it by using manumarks (currently, there are over 2,000 manumarks documented with a specific date or range of dates); and, others, of whom I am unaware, may be working on the problem, as well.

And remember, to get an actual pinpointed date for a specific cover, it doesn't *have* to have the date printed on it. It can say "25th Anniversary"...."founded in 1941". All you have to do is a little math, and...voilà!...1966! After that, the cover can contain good clues, but you're not going to get a specific date. You might readily see that your particular cover is a World War II Patriotic, so you can postulate somewhere between 1941-1945.

