

RMS: The Leader

Although there was an initial meeting of a few collectors in 1939, it was in September 1941, in Pocasset, Massachusetts, with 45 collectors from 8 states and the District of Columbia, that RMS was officially formed (originally as the Rathkamp Memorial Society of Matchcover Collectors). It was the first and, at the time, the *only* club in the world specifically for matchcover collectors. In the ensuing years, although other matchcover clubs appeared from coast to coast, and in other countries, RMS became the recognized national hobby organization.

But why, and how, did that happen? Well, don't expect to get any definitive answer here! I've been going through hobby literature, both noted and obscure, for a quarter of a century, and not only have I never seen these questions addressed, but I don't recall even seeing a single word about it. From this *absence* of information, it would seem that, as the hobby evolved, it was simply a given that RMS was the national organization and other clubs around the country would be seen as regional.

If that's the way things actually happened, why? It was only 2½ years later, in 1944, for example, that the New England Matchcover Club formed. As it developed, why wouldn't *it* have staked out a claim for being the national organization? Was it simply because RMS was there first? Was it because RMS had the bigger membership (about 100 in 1944)?

Or, did the New England club, even at its onset, already recognize that RMS was the premier club. Alas, that's the most likely scenario. Too bad. If it had been otherwise, I would have been able to write a great drama, here, about the gargantuan struggle between clubs to determine just who would ascend to the top of the hobby hierarchy. *It is* the most likely scenario, though, because I'm guessing that the original founders of the New England club were already members of RMS, especially since RMS began in Massachusetts...and that's in New England. In that sense, then, The New England club may simply have been something of a local spin-off of RMS.

As a further indication, in 1945, the Empire Matchcover Club was founded in New York...also in the Northeast. In 1950, the National Capitol Match Collectors Club formed in Washington, DC, right at the southern edge of the Northeast.

Well, what about the early clubs that formed far away from RMS and the Northeast? Say, all the way out in the West. In 1950, the California Matchcover Club appeared. Why, in the early formative years of the hobby, would a club some 3,000 miles away acknowledge the leadership of RMS, especially when RMS, itself, was only a few years old at the time? Why wouldn't *it* make a bid for that leadership role? Membership, perhaps. By 1950, RMS could boast approximately 300 members. And, of course, the bulk at the country's population was to the east, and so was the majority of collectors at the time.

Still, I can't help thinking that there might have been a real opportunity for the West to flex its muscles in this regard when all of the California clubs came together to form AMCAL in 1955. I've never seen any indication in the records, though, that the founders of AMCAL ever envisioned it to be a challenge to RMS. It was merely formed as a focal point for collectors here in the West, a focal point for a convention.

Would it be too much of a stretch of the imagination to picture the western collectors 'rebellious' against a then basically eastern RMS? Apparently. Although...such a scenario wouldn't necessarily be all that far-fetched. When I first came into the hobby in 1983, as a California-based collector, there

...But How?

were a lot of grumblings that were voiced to me, as a new collector, that RMS was basically an Eastern-based club that paid little or no attention to collectors anywhere west of the Mississippi.

But (back to reality), I've never seen or heard of any reference to any type of challenge, serious or otherwise, to RMS's position...or its entitlement to such a position. At best, all there's been is the occasional disgruntled collector who, rightly or wrongly, dropped out of RMS because of perceived grievances...No plots, no conspiracies...nothing.

So, did RMS simply gain this position by default? And what were RMS's aspirations right at the beginning, back in 1941. I've never seen anything to suggest that the founders envisioned anything more than just a club for matchcover collectors, certainly no dreams of building a hobby empire with RMS presiding.

Well, none of the founding members are with us today, and it's a moot point now. Things have settled into the current reality and no rebellions are stirring against the given status of things. Still, it's tantalizing question.