

# Making Every Cover Count!

by  
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There are probably as many ways to collect as there are collectors—and as many ways to maintain those collections. To each his own, after all! Any covers can be collected, and the individual collector determines (for his own collections) what categories, in what condition, and what particular parameters (only front-strike, for example). It's the same with keeping a count of those covers, but...

In my own collections, I just automatically assumed right from the onset that I should maintain a current count of what I had in each of my various collections. Why? So I could always know where I was in those particular collections. If I collect *Classiques*, for example, and it's accepted that only 33 were ever issued [*true*], and I currently have 28, then I know I still have 5 others to find to complete my collection. Thus, knowing how many covers I have in my collections is useful knowledge.

But, using *Classiques*, perhaps, is unfair, since that's the only category I can think of wherein we actually know what the end number actually is. In basically all of the other categories, we have no idea of how many different covers were ever issued, and there's no way to find out [*no one is ever going to access manufacturer records, if those even still exist, and make public how many orders were filled for Filigrees, Features, etc....and for categories such as Indians, Bears, and the like, such summary information was never kept track of in the first place*]. So, does keeping count of my covers help me at all there?

Yes! In *two* venues! The next best thing to actually knowing how many covers were issued in a specific category is knowing how many covers are *listed* in those categories [*although it's a poor second, it's the best information available*]. If the American Ace listing shows 12,650 such boxes, and I have 8,412, then I know where I stand in that category, *relatively*.

There are a couple of caveats with listings, however. There are number of listings that are not being

currently maintained [*Uniglos, for example*], so that definitely lessens the value of the listing. Additionally, many listings do not reflect, at least yet, the *ultimate* number of known covers in that particular category. For example, my own DQ listing currently lists 3,941 covers, but the late Harry Branchaud had 5,000+ DQs in his own collection [*I saw them!*]. Ideally, a listing should reflect *all* known covers in that category, but, in practicality, the lister doesn't have access to everyone's collections and, thus, the listing often lags behind reported total numbers for individual collections.

Finally, unlisted covers are always turning up, so the listings are always being updated [*of course, that's a minor problem compared to the two previous ones*]. Navy Ships are a good example. Few collectors are as enthusiastic, persistent, and methodical as Navy Ship collectors, and the Navy Ship listings had been going for over 50 years...and unlisted Navy Ship covers are *still* turning up today.

Keeping a count of your covers, then, shows you where you are in relation to the listed number of known issues. The second advantage of such counts is that they show you where you are in relation to *other collectors*—your competitors! Yes, I know that collecting is an individual activity, etc., and we're happy with whatever we each obtain, but, in my perspective, your peers *are* your competitors. They're after the same covers you are; they're building collections in the same categories you are...and if you see that they're all building bigger collections than you are...well, what does that tell you about your collections? [*Someone's going to bring up the question of numbers vs quality—I have 6,000 Uniglos, but you have the first 1,000 ever issued—or, I have 2,400 Navy Ships, while you only have 1,300, but you have all the hard ones, and I don't—that's a discussion for another time; I'm only dealing with numbers here*].

My point, here, [*from my perspective, of course*] is that it's to your advantage to know how many covers you have in your collections. Those numbers have the same function as page numbers in a novel, or mileage signs on a highway—they tell you where you are and how you're doing. So, now that I have you where I want you, and you all agree with me [*!*], let's move on to the actual mechanics of maintaining those cover counts.

Some collectors don't count covers, but count albums. That's not very helpful, number-wise. “I have 5 albums of Foilites.” What size albums? What type of pages are being used? How many pages per album? Is every page filled?—Not helpful.

There's no substitute for actual cover counts. The question is, how are you going to do it? The usual complaint I hear from collectors who don't keep counts is that “It's too late. I'm not going back and counting all those covers now!” Well, if you actually had something like 100,000 Restaurants, I might agree that that would be something of an undertaking, but 99% of collectors don't. So, if you're starting from a zero-count position, each time you happen you go through one of your collections, just take a few minutes and do a count. That's all it will take to get a current total, just a few minutes. Eventually, you'll have counts for all your collections. After that, every time you add any covers to that collection, you just add that number to your running total.

In my own collections, at the beginning of the first album, I have a tally sheet. It shows ‘Date’ and ‘Total’. Each time I update that collection, I update the tally sheet. Easy! And, that tally sheet shows me how my collections have grown over the years, which is....satisfying!

Now, I must admit, I *do* have a personal axe to grind in all of this. Every five years, I run the ‘Largest Collections Known’ survey in the *RMS Bulletin*. If you're not keeping counts of your collections, no one can benefit by knowing you have the largest collection ever assembled of Dated Auto, Crowns, etc.