

Organizing Your Dupes

They're the bane and blessing of the hobby...duplicates! Think of all the time you spend storing, sorting, and matching, just to find that you already have it! Drat and curses!

But, of course, if it weren't for those duplicates, most of the covers in our collections wouldn't be there!, and there would be little or no trading, few lots at the auctions, practically nothing on the freebie tables, etc.

For most of us, duplicates are our 'stock and trade'! And whether you don't have enough, or you're overloaded, you have to have some sort of system for organizing them...or you're doomed to be hopelessly lost and confused for the rest of your collecting career. *[By the way, for the purposes of discussion, here, 'duplicates' is defined as any covers you, yourself, don't wish to keep]* Over the years, I've seen a variety of systems, each designed to meet the general needs most of us feel, and the specialized needs of the individual collector.

One of the best systems I know of, and one that I early on stole from Dave Hampton to use for my own dupes, utilizes trays and index cards. The trays are regular cardboard trays that a case of soda cans come in (or you can take any sized box and cut it down to your specific needs. The soda trays are readily available at any supermarket, and they comfortably accommodate two rows of covers laid on their sides. The trays are then divided: first, with one cardboard divider right down the middle to create the two rows, and then; second, using marked 3x5 index cards, into whatever categories you wish. I've got everything from AAA to Zoos, alphabetically. You can also use the index card dividers to record which collectors you've already sent those covers to, and the dates.

The advantages of this system are that you get a high degree of organization while utilizing a system that is cheap, easy to work with and easily expandable. When a trader writes and tells you he's looking for Big Boy restaurants or pictures of suspension bridges, you know right where to find them...and your trader is suitably impressed at the ease with which you have filled his needs!

The only disadvantage of this system is that the trays take up room (but what doesn't in this hobby!). I try to cut down on that by stacking trays, three to a stack. That tends to bend the tops of the index cards on the bottom two trays, so you'll need to devise some supports for the trays to actually rest on.

And, you can certainly get fancier if you wish. Dan Bitter used wooden trays that actually fit into a cabinet, so he can stack them and they never touch each other. Since I stack my trays in a closet of a far bedroom, I tend to use this system only for 'oddball' categories (ones in which there is not much demand). For the large categories (Foilites, Cameos, Holiday Inns, etc.) that I have to access every day, I have a box for each right in my hobby room where I answer my mail. In each box, there are stacks of covers, banded with paper, with notations on each to let men know which traders I have already gone through that stack for.

I use my computer every day, recording data on my trades, generating lists, etc., but I have yet to find a practical way of using the computer to keep track of all my dupes, and who I've sent what to...the tremendous variety of covers that we deal with seems to prohibit such a use. You'd be inputting data constantly.

There are many systems for organizing your dupes. This is simply one.