

# 1980s Population Explosion!

*[Note: I'm using RMS figures here because I don't have the stats for the hobby at large]*

We all know why hobby membership has declined...but what caused membership to explode in the early 1980s? In 1975, RMS membership was 969; by 1985, that had more than doubled to 1901. Membership had been increasing slowly and steadily since 1941, declined in the 1960s, and began to increase again in the 1970s. But, there was a huge, and relatively sudden surge in the early 1980s. Why? What was suddenly different? Was the hobby or industry suddenly doing everything right, or had something changed outside the hobby?

## **External Factors:**

- > Economically, the early 80s were fairly good times, and certainly promised even better times to come. These were the Reagan years. The nation endured a deep recession through 1982, but it helped curb runaway inflation, and by 1983 Reagan's policies saw the economy rebound.
- > A good economy means people have more leisure time and more money to spend.
- > A good economy also means more travel, and picking up matchbook souvenirs is how so many collectors in the past got started in the hobby.
- > There were far fewer competing electronic diversions (very little gaming, no texting, no cell phones, no Facebook, no Twitter, etc.)
- > The U.S. was not engaged in any major conflicts in the early 1980s. More potential collectors at Home
- > The domestic match manufacturing industry was at its peak, in terms of production.

## **Internal Factors:**

- > Covers abounded! They were plentiful, accessible, varied, and interesting...Universal was cranking out all of its wonderful Fancies.
- > Judging from the bulletins, at least, there seems to have been more publicity for the hobby, especially in the form of newspaper articles, through the 1970s, and perhaps that bore fruit in the early 1980s. Of course, there were more collectors then.
- > There were more clubs operating in the early 1980s than ever before. More clubs mean more publicity and more new members drawn into the hobby.

So, what do you think? The economy? No major wars? Hobby advertising?

Initially, I had thought that the most telling factor was that the Baby Boomers, almost 20% of the American population, were beginning to retire by the advent of the 1980s, but upon doing some quick math I learned that the Baby Boomers weren't old enough to retire in the early 1980s. After all, *I'm a Baby Boomer, and I didn't retire until 2013 [of course, I started my career late and stayed in it for 40 years, so I wouldn't be particularly indicative in any event].*

Well, back to the drawing board.

I could regale you with my own concluding suppositions here as to what the deciding factor(s) might have been, but this time I think it's much more tantalizing to let you come to your own conclusions. You may well discover factors that I haven't even considered here.