

# Tools of the Trade

by  
Mike Prero

To get any job done...you need the right tools! *[which is why I never worked on cars]*. Your hobby work is no different. There *are* required tools, although, for any specific tool mentioned here, someone is undoubtedly using his or her own alternate solution. The tools I present here are based on my own collecting procedures.

## Basic Needs

**ALBUMS:** Rather than let your covers pile up in boxes and then face the daunting task of sorting and mounting them in the hundreds or even thousands, you should start off putting them in albums right off the bat. Most collectors use 3-ring binders in whatever size you prefer. I prefer the large 3" binders, but you won't need that size for very small categories that you happen to collect.

**PAGES:** Most collectors are using plastic pages with individual pockets for each matchcover. They're the most expensive of the available options. Far cheaper are the paper pages designed to have the matchcovers slip into pre-cut slots. These don't afford the protection of plastic pages, though, and as of this writing no one is making them anymore, so you'd be looking for used ones.

**PEN KNIFE:** Since 95% of collectors strip the matches out of most matchbooks, you'll need a pen knife or similar instrument for easy opening of the staple [I use a letter opener, myself]. Be careful

## Later Needs

**LISTS:** Once you get settled into your categories, the use of lists allows you to seek exactly the covers you want instead of using a shotgun approach in your searchings. Lists specify exactly which covers are known to exist in particular categories. If you collect Girlies or Navy Ships, these lists are absolutely mandatory. Lists for other categories are optional. There are lists for Girlie, Group I, Diamond Quality, and hundreds of other types of covers. You can see which categories have been listed, who did them, and how current they are by using the Master List of Lists at <http://matchpro.org>

**SORTING BOXES/TRAYS:** You'll eventually find that you need places to temporarily put your incoming covers that you have quickly sorted out. You won't want to keep dragging out the albums every time you get a new cover. Shoe boxes, etc. aren't very satisfactory. Most are not a convenient size, for one thing. Much better, for instance, are the cardboard boxes that cases of sodas come in.

with anything that's too sharp or you'll invariably end up damaging covers.

**HAND VISE:** Covers recently stripped of matches will need to be flattened for easier handling. You can put unflattened covers directly into albums where they'll be eventually flattened by the weight of the other pages, but you definitely need to flatten them before you send them off in trades, so a small vise does a nice job. Keep in mind you'll be doing these by the stacks.

**POSTAGE SCALE:** For weighing trades and determining correct postage [nothing will lose you a trader or any other type of correspondent faster than presenting him or her with "postage due" correspondence!]

**PAPER, TAPE, & SCISSORS:** Although most collectors simply bundle stacks of covers with rubber bands because it's so convenient, it's actually better to use paper strips to create wrappers. There are ways that rubber bands can damage covers, and, if they're left on the stack long enough, they'll break anyway.

**CLUB MEMBERSHIP LIST(S):** This is a great hobby, but you're not going to get very far by yourself. After all, it's little ol' you versus millions of matchcovers. You need help...in a variety of ways, so you need to establish contacts with fellow collectors. Each club you join will furnish you with a membership list. RMS's is the biggest. Ideally, you should belong to RMS, the closest regional club to where you live, and at least a couple of other clubs around the country. Almost all such lists also give the member's collecting categories and indicate whether he or she is willing to trade.

**MAGNIFYING GLASS:** The older you get, the more you need one!

**MISCELLANEOUS:** You'll need an array of run-of-the-mill desk supplies, although what exactly depends of the preferences of the particular collector. But, we're mainly talking about, items such as rubberbands (although paper strips are better), index cards (for labeling), paper clips, etc.

Just take said box and run a divider down the middle, and you have a perfect three to four-row match-cover tray. I also use an upright cardboard box divided into 36 pigeon holes, each labeled with a different category. You should be able to find the later commercially available in stationery stores and in teacher supply catalogs.

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:** If you're not going to become knowledgeable about what you're collecting, you're probably not going to be a very successful collector. You'll find a glossary of hobby terms fairly essential, for example. You'll also want to keep articles on your categories, information that gives you an historical perspective on the hobby, the industry, and your covers. etc. Your lists, indices, checklists, specialty club catalogs, and so forth, will all become part of your reference library.

**COMPUTER:** Although few collectors actually catalog their entire collections via computer (for most of us that would be far too large a task), the database possibilities alone would warrant the purchase and use of a computer in your hobby activities. And, you'll find yourself needing to make records or various things, such as trades, etc. Plus, e-mail allows almost instant communication with other collectors; the internet affords you almost limitless research options, etc. Additionally, the hobby is currently shifting to electronic bulletins, rosters, and auctions. And, by the way, be certain to make backup copies of your work and store in different locations, one of which should be outside your home (the cloud, etc.)

**SCANNER:** Very useful for sending cover pics to other collectors or perhaps you've written an article for a club bulletin (the editor will want accompanying cover pics). Of course, these days I suppose you could just use your cell phone, but the resulting pics are of a huge size, byte-wise, and scanners will picture the cover without the surrounding desktop, etc.

*As you move through your collecting career, you'll invariably pick up other items to meet your specialized needs, but items noted here will meet the more-or-less universal needs.*

*....Happy collecting!*