

Collecting Before RMS

There really was a hobby before RMS's 1941 inception. It's history is murky, but it's there. It has its roots in matchbox label collecting in the 1800s. At that point, that's all Phillumensists had available to collect. That was going to change, though, with Joshua Pusey's invention of the matchbook in the early 1890s.

Diamond purchased the rights to Pusey's matchbook in 1894... two years later we have the famous handwritten Mendelson Opera Company matchbooks...but matchbooks still weren't collectible because they were all blanks (unless someone wrote on them). Enter Kaeser & Blair, a printing and advertising company founded in Cincinnati in 1894. They produced the first printed covers c. 1895-1896 (or so the claim is made, but no one has disputed it thus far...*see last issue's article on "The First Printed Matchcover"*). Now, the ball was rolling! Still, matchbooks weren't common, weren't varied, and weren't widely available; ergo, collectors' interest still hadn't be aroused yet. The real turning point had to be 1902...that's when the first huge order came in for matchbooks with printed advertisements on them—Pabst beer ordered 10 million!

Now we have just about all the ingredients needed for the hobby...just add a few years for the idea to take hold and *Voila!*...we have matchcover collectors in evidence by at least 1918. (The late Evelyn Hovious is an example. She started collecting while serving soldiers at a local Red Cross during W W I). Add in another decade or so for collectors to realize that they were not individual oddities and that they *were* others with the same interests, and you have early clubs appearing in the 1930s.

M. A. Richardson organized the earliest club that I know of, the Blue Moon Match Label Club, in 1934. By the mid-1930s, things were well under way. Ernest Damron started the United Match Label Collectors Club in 1936 and changed the name to United Matchonians in 1938. Also in 1936, a group of collectors formed a club that put out the *Match Folder News*. There were even clubs outside the U.S. For example, the Guiana Hobby club was situated in British Guiana, and South Africa had the African Collector's Exchange. Of course, this shouldn't be surprising since label collecting was already much more established overseas.

And, just as our bulletins tie the hobby together today, there were a variety of earlier matchcover publications circulating in the 1930s. *Match Lights* (1936-1941) was put out by Jess Heuzell from Kansas City; *Match Pack Notes* (1936-1940) was available out of San Francisco; *The United* (1936-1951) was the United Matchonian newsletter; *Match Folder News/The Voice of the Collector* (1936-1936? was around briefly; and the *Matchonia & Hobby Advertiser* (1938-1939) was produced until it turned into the *Collector's Forum*.

All of this was the 'breeding ground,' so to speak, for the core of collectors who would eventually form the Rathkamp Matchcover Society, the first club to really specialize in matchcovers. Those early pioneers, such as Henry Rathkamp, Tom Torrent, Bob Oliver, Ken Riggs, and the unsung collectors who came before them laid the foundation for the RMS we have today—the largest matchcover-collecting organization in the world.

For a "modern" collector, such as myself, one can't help but sigh sometimes when thinking of what a great collecting era those early collectors lived in—to be surrounded by Safety Firsts and Diamond Qualities, to anxiously await the latest release of Colgate covers, to scour the town for new Midgets....

...Ah, those were the days!