



## Editorial

### The Continuing Shift In The Hobby: I

...I was thinking the other day [*that happens occasionally*], that it now seems fairly safe to say that most of the useable covers that will have ever been produced in almost all categories...have *already* been produced, at least domestically! And, many of the hobby's traditional categories are no longer being added to, at all. You're not going to see Hospital covers anymore; no more Bus, Taxi, Train, covers; no Hardware, Jewelry, Laundry, National and State Park covers; already there are drastically fewer and fewer Hotel/Motel/Restaurant covers, traditionally the mainstay of the industry...and, thus, the hobby. Try walking into your local fast food, paint, or department store and asking for matches. *Nope!* There was a time...but not today.

That puts a distinct premium on covers now in existence. Older covers, of course, have always had an added attraction for most collectors, but this is different. A Train cover is special now, simply because they don't make them anymore; a Ship cover is special now, simply because...they don't make them anymore.

I think this explains, in part, anyway, the distinct shift in the last ten years or so from a 'bartering' economy' within the hobby to a 'money' economy. If one goes back to the very first hobby bulletins, it becomes readily apparent that covers have *always* been sold within the hobby, but, until the last decade or two, it was never the 'norm'. The norm was always trading, usually one for one, and any physically able collector could go out into his or her own local community and easily gather as trading stock just about whatever the collector was interested in obtaining. Not so true anymore. Now, *some* hardy collectors still do that, but it's no longer as easy as it was, nor is it anywhere nearly as rewarding. That leaves most collectors today with only one main option for obtaining covers— buying.

There are several different modes of buying, but they all involve...*buying!* The options here include: 1) scouring a local community, offering to bulk buy collections and accumulations; 2) bulk buying from other collectors that have surplus stock; 3) bulk buying by from estate collections; 4) buying specifics from other collectors; and 5) auctions, of which there are several different kinds—convention/swapfest auctions, bulletin auctions, silent auctions, collector-owned on-line auctions; and ebay.

With the lessening availability of 'free', easily accessible covers locally, and the corresponding drastic drop in trading, this increasing emphasis on buying has also focused more attention on collector-oriented events. As an editor, I try and keep my finger on the pulse of the hobby, and more and more I hear from collectors that they're disenchanted with such-and-such convention, or that swapfest, or blank's club meeting because of things like...“no sellers,” “mediocre auction lots”, struck and damaged material on the freebie tables, too much time focused on non-cover and non-collector-oriented activities. When I hear people complaining, these days, about a particular event, it's not because of poor hotel services or bad food, as was the case when I first became an editor in the early 1980's; it's about, in one way or another, how their attempts to secure more covers for their collections have been stymied. The focus of their attention is on *obtaining covers; everything else is secondary*. Now, that's not *everyone's* view within the hobby; some people are more interested in the social aspects. Nothing wrong with that...but the pendulum, I believe, has definitely swung the other way.