



Flats

What? Yes, I know...heresy! But, you know that at least a *few* collectors collect them...and not just until something better comes along...They *collect* flats! The question that others may have is...*why*?

The question arises because Flats have never been considered *real* covers, since they have never actually been issued for use as matchbooks, have never held matches, and have never entered circulation as such. Their only *raison d'être* was as salesmen's samples or the result of an incomplete production process. Thus, Flats may almost always be readily recognized by the absence of staple holes and the tell-tale creasing that delineates the saddle.

All of which constitutes the main reason usually given by collectors of Flats as to just *why* they collect them....they're pristine examples of matchcover art. Indeed, judging by my own experience, at least, that's what initially draws your attention to them in the first place, even before you notice the missing staple holes and no creas-

ing. They *are* typically pristine, without the nicks, bent corners, and such seen on so many covers that *have* been in circulation, and, worse, in and out of album pages.

I'm sure collectors of Flats could also voice other reasons for collecting them. They might well argue, for example, that although the hobby at large doesn't consider them valid covers, still, they *do* constitute a distinct category in and of themselves. A *peripheral* category, perhaps, but a category none-the-less—maybe something akin to match safes and salesmen's sample books.

I'm not sure just how far back Flats go, but they exist from at least the 1930s on. I've seen Crown flats, Federal flats, and so on. I once happened across a 1930s matchcover album which actually had a Jersey flat that came with it, as advertising.

Personally, although I don't collect them in any circumstance, myself, I don't think Flats deserve the degree of stigma that they seem to carry in the hobby...as long as they're not pushed to be accepted as regular covers.

What do you think?