



Editorial

Defacing Covers: I

Well, I suppose you could say that we almost all of us deface covers right from the beginning...we remove the matches! But, that's a given, and that's not what I'm talking about. And, I'm not talking about 'accidental' defacing, either—ruining a cover when taking the staple out, brushing against a brittle striker and watching its crumbled form tumble in slow motion to the floor, or knocking over a glass of wine onto a set of covers (*which I did once!*).

I mean purposely changing the appearance of a cover for any reason—whether it's for convenience, esthetics, or downright fraudulent purposes. It's been done since the inception of the hobby in the 1930s; it was common in the hobby's heyday in the 1980s; and you can still see some of it happening today.

The earliest form of defacing, and the one that still brings the most frustrated grimaces to collectors today, was bobtailing—cutting off the striker portion of the cover. Apparently, the main impetus for that was the reasoning that the striker area had nothing to do with the advertising and artwork on the cover, and, it might have even been argued that, in fact, it detracted from the overall beauty and look of the cover. But, bobtailing offered some other 'advantages', as well. Removing the striker area also removed the 'used/struck' portion of the cover, so that it wasn't necessary to always look just for mint-condition covers. A collector could pick up a struck cover in otherwise pristine condition and simply remove the offending portion.

Also, remember that many Pre-War covers had the striker material laid over the staple, thus making it difficult for collectors to remove the staple without tearing up the striker anyway...so...snip! snip! All gone!

Another early form of defacing that must have

appeared almost immediately was writing on or otherwise marking covers. It's a natural turn of events for any collector to feel the need to label, number, or catalog his or her collectibles—along with making other suitable notations, such as date obtained, place obtained, etc. Unfortunately, collectors haven't always been aware of the ramifications of such or the proper procedures.

For example, if it's absolutely necessary to write on a cover, the two golden rules are: 1) always do it on the inside, and 2) always do it LIGHTLY in pencil. Someone else is probably going to end up owning that cover eventually, and they may wish to remove that writing...so make it easy for them. In earlier years, collectors wrote in pen, made notations on the front of covers (putting in dates, circling locations, etc.). Also, especially in the 1960s-1980s, some collectors stamped their personal logos and or dates (in ink) on the inside of all of their covers. Perhaps they were trying to track trades...but that's permanent defacing.

It's difficult to know for certain which defacing procedure became popular next, but I'd make an educated guess in favor of trimming the corners off the bottoms of covers. That was a direct result of collectors trying to get the darn little things into those fancy, slotted pages...a problem, by the way, that continues right up to this very day for collectors who still use such pages. And it wasn't just the collectors' idea...it may not have even been their original idea at all! I've seen old commercial matchcover albums which came with the suggestion and instructions for doing such, and since the manufacturer was trying to sell the use of its slotted pages, this particular type of cover defacing may well have originated there.

Chronologically, I'd plump for switching strikers next. Here, a collector would take a bobtailed cover and try to 'fix' it by reattaching the striker from another cover, using a piece of tape on the inside. This was before the appearance of Scotch Tape, so we're still talking about an old procedure here.