



EDITORIAL

e-bay's Impact On The Hobby

If you know me, you know that I've always been a strong advocate of technology within the hobby. I started using a computer in the mid-1980s, and now, thanks, to my computers, the internet, e-mail, scanners, and my zip drive, I put out three different club bulletins, have created and currently maintain four different web sites, and probably maintain more cover listings than anyone in the hobby...so, I love technology!....*but*...

I'm concerned about the stampede of collectors to e-bay. More and more we hear, "Did you see this on e-bay?" "Did you hear what happened on e-bay?" "Guess what this guy wanted for this set on e-bay!"...and on and on. E-bay is definitely a success...but is the hobby the better for it?...I don't think so.

I don't have a problem with covers being bought and sold. They've always been bought and sold, and they'll be bought and sold whether e-bay exists or not. The problem that worries me is that before e-bay, almost all of that buying and selling was taking place within the confines of the hobby. Now, e-bay has attracted a significant slice of that activity—and e-bay is outside the confines of the hobby. That bothers me.

Why does that matter?—Well, for one thing, there's a flow of covers out of the hobby. Who are these people who are buying covers on e-bay? Well, some of them are certainly collectors we're well acquainted with, but many buyers, perhaps even most, are not cover collectors at all. And, are they buying "General" covers? Are they buying Hotel/Motel/Restaurant covers? Of course not! They're Coca-Cola aficionados, beer can collectors, railroad enthusiasts, political button collectors, and the like. And what they're doing is 'cherry-picking' the hobby. That Coca-Cola collector is siphoning off Coca-Cola covers from the hobby...and that beer can collector is taking out Beer covers from the hobby...and those railroad enthusiasts are walking away with Railroad covers...and on and on. That's always happened to some degree, but with the advent of the internet, e-mail, and e-bay, the process has been greatly accelerated. That bothers me.

There's also a detrimental side to 'our own' collectors utilizing e-bay, even when the covers they buy and sell stay within the hobby—even when they use e-bay to buy covers from non-collectors and bring those covers into the hobby! E-bay has definitely cut into the hobby's own auctions—convention auctions, bulletin auctions, club auctions. That bothers me. Those in-house hobby auctions raise funds that support hobby activities. Most club officers, for example, will point out that a member's annual dues don't even cover the annual cost of producing and mailing his bulletin to him. The difference is made up in other ways, and the local bulletin auction is the main avenue for doing that. Look at our own club. For \$10 a year, we're giving you twelve eight-page color bulletins, and we even mail them out first class! How can we afford to do that?....our monthly bulletin auctions. How did the RMS Bulletin manage to go from 16 to 24 pages?...we started a bulletin auction.

So, is my whining here going to change things? No. And I'm certainly not going to look my fellow collector in the eye and tell him that he doesn't have the right to get on e-bay and try and sell that .25¢ cover to someone who's willing to pay \$100 for it. I just thought that it was worth the effort to look at one of the the 'other sides' of the technology factor.