



Editorial

What Is Collecting, Anyhow?

When I first entered the hobby, I was told that the difference between a “collection” and an “accumulation” was that a collection was organized in some logical way. Over the years, that definition has stood the test of time, but it seems to me that there’s more to true collecting than just alphabetizing your covers and putting them into albums.

Perhaps it would be easier to start off by eliminating what true collecting *isn't*. It isn't gathering covers as some sort of investment; it isn't putting together pages of bird covers because they're pretty; and, it isn't buying up all the railroad covers you can because they go with your miniature train sets. All of these activities, and many more, are part of the hobby, and they're all valid reasons for being interested in covers. Any individual is entitled to gather covers for whatever reason makes sense to him or her, but I don't believe they define real collecting...at least, admittedly, to my own way of thinking.

There's a certain “fanaticism” that marks true collecting—a nice fanaticism, a willingness to go to extraordinary lengths to meet your collecting needs: going miles out of your way to hit those little towns that you hope will have covers; driving for hours to attend club meetings; asking a clerk for an entire caddy of matches when it's assumed that only one or two should be taken.

More than anything else, true collecting is a philosophy, or (if you're into Yuppie jargon,) a “mind-set.” It transcends the items being collected in favor of a “bigger picture.” It's knowing the background of what you're dealing with, the

technical ins and outs, the questions that remain to be answered, and wanting to find the answers. It's a pride in achievement at what's been accomplished, but always knowing the end's not in sight.

And because of this, it *doesn't* matter how your collecting is viewed by others. A collector collects because of internal, not external, reasons. The real collector, whether he or she is collecting DaVinci paintings, coins, matchcovers, or strands of barbed wire, isn't collecting for strokes from friends, relatives, and the community at large. The collector collects because the *collector* values the activity. I've been collecting matchcovers for years now, and my wife still thinks I'm crazy...but it doesn't matter; *I* value it.