



Editorial

“The Sky is Falling!”

Well, with this being the beginning of a new year and it being our

500th issue and all, now seems like an appropriate point at which to stop and take stock. Will there be a 600th issue? At our present rate of publication, that would be in 2020. A lot can happen in 17 years. Just look at all the changes that have taken place in the hobby in the last 17 years!

- 1986 Diamond Match Co. closed its Springfield, MA plant
- 1987 Third Atlas Match Co. merged with Diamond to form Atlas/Diamond
- 1987 Keystone-Lehigh Matchcover Club formed by merger of the two clubs
- 1987 Ohio Match Co. defunct
- 1987 Universal discontinued all fancy covers (Uniglo, Cameo, Jewelite, etc.)
- 1987 Swedish Match bought out Bryant & May
- 1988 Carolinas Matchcover Club changes to Southeastern Matchcover Club
- 1988 Denver Strikers Matchcover Club formed, Denver, CO
- 1988 Universal closed its last plant in US
- 1988 Diamond Brands bought what was left of Universal
- 1989 RMS membership passes #8000 mark in June
- 1990 Southeastern Matchcover Club defunct
- 1991 Mid-Hudson Matchcover Club forms
- 1991 Mid-Hudson Matchcover Club defunct
- 1991 Pacific Northwest Matchcover Club forms
- 1991 A Lindburgh cover was auctioned for \$4,000
- 1992 Front Striker changes into American Matchcover Collecting Club
- 1992 Mermaid Club founded, AMCAL
- 1993 Huggable Bears Matchcover Club formed
- 1994 Wolverine Matchcover Club formed, MI
- 1994 Last Bryant & May plant in England closes
- 1994 Casino Club formed at '94 RMS Convention
- 1994 c. 1910 Diamond Washington Crisps cover sells for \$4001
- 1996 RMS membership passes #9000 mark in January

- 1996 Golden Orange MC defunct as it merged with Long Beach Matchcover Club
- 1997 Southeastern Matchcover Club formed, FL
- 1997 Military Matchcover Club formed
- 1997 Tobacco Club formed
- 1998 Texas National Matchcover Society formed
- 1999 Military Club defunct
- 1999 International Matchcover Club dissolved
- 1999 Keystone-Lehigh MC scaled down
- 1999 Great Lakes Match Club formed, MN
- 2001 Texas National Matchcover Society defunct

Whether there will be a 600th issue depends, of course, on whether there will be an RMS in 2020. I would imagine there would be, simply because there will always be collectors, although the RMS of 2020 could be substantially different, certainly so if trends of the last decade and a half continue.

Notice, for example, how many clubs have disappeared since 1987—seven. True, clubs have come and gone throughout the history of the hobby, but the failure rate here seems to be definitely higher. How many major/regional clubs have appeared and made a go of it during that same period?—three (Denver Strikers, PNMCC, and Great Lakes)

My analysis of the state of the hobby in our Jan/Feb 2000 issue demonstrated rather bleakly that RMS membership had shrunk 30% over the previous ten years, that membership and participation in almost all clubs and hobby events were falling substantially, and that, indeed, the entire hobby had very noticeably shrunk.

That was three years ago. Has anything changed? Yes, it's continued to get worse. Here are just a few representative figures:

RMS Membership:

1999 - **1080**
 2000 - **1001**
 2001 - **761**
 2002 - **795**

A M C A L

Attendance:

1999 - **86**
 2000 - **81**
 2001 - **60**
 2002 - **75**

RMS Conv. Attendance: 1999 - 233
2000 - 235
2001 - 144
2002 - 170

RMS Membership Secretary/Treasurer Terry Rowe notes that the annual official membership numbers aren't all that accurate because many members send in their dues late. Still, the steady erosion of numbers is obvious.

The really sad side to this is that the 'workers' in the hobby—the hobby activists—are doing more for the hobby now than has ever been done before, but, as far as expanding the hobby, we're being swamped by a tidal wave of negative change.

If there is a bright side to all of this, it's probably that none of this is the hobby's 'fault'. It's all been caused by external matters that we have no control of—the collapse of the domestic match industry, the murderous anti-smoking campaigns, and the resulting ongoing decrease in both production and availability of contemporary matches. And, hence, the disappearance of more than a third of collectors.

The grim side [*as if all this weren't grim enough*] is that, barring some totally unforeseen, cataclysmic, positive event, the hobby is going to continue to shrink. It's got to. All the indications are that we're going to keep losing collectors—in two ways. More and more of the 'dip-your-toe-in-and-see-if-you-like-it' collectors are leaving because the hobby now demands more time, effort, and money to build collections, and they really weren't all that interested in the first place. We kept a lot of those 'fringe' collectors in the past, when covers were easy to obtain and you didn't have to turn to buying so often. But not now.

The other way substantial numbers of people are being lost is that fewer and fewer *potential* collectors are entering the hobby to begin with. Why? Because the covers aren't there anymore to stimulate interest...and I don't mean things like declining interest in trading. If you look at how

people got started in this hobby, the vast majority started by picking up matchbooks while on trips, vacations, outings, etc. That's what sparked their interest, but that's not happening anymore. Now, when the family travels, the chances are that they're probably not going to see any matches at all, and, if they do, how interesting are they going to find those blank or stock matchbooks? True, that night club or strip joint right around the corner might have some snazzy matches, but are Mom, Dad, and little Johnny ever likely to find out? Uh-uh. Witness new people coming into RMS, for example:

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| | 1999 - 74 |
| New RMS members: | 2000 - 69 |
| | 2001 - 61 |
| | 2002 - 59 |

...and that's with the RMS web site, incredible tool that it is. I shudder to think what the numbers would be without the web site!

Well, I don't mean to beat you over the head with all this, but just as an individual collector I can see the symptoms of this across-the-board decline all around me—less mail in my mailbox, less hobby-related e-mail, fewer people at conventions, a tremendous drop-off in mail trading, fewer people at club meetings, and on and on. I've been aware of all of that for years, but it all really hit home recently when I was working on my Dated collection, which I have organized by years, and for each year I have first the regular commercial covers and then all the convention covers. As I was working my way through the years in the albums, I suddenly noticed that by 1995 the convention covers heavily outnumbered the regular covers, and by 1999 it was virtually all convention covers...the regular Dated covers were almost non-existent [*and I have 7,200+ Dated covers/boxes, so I have a pretty good sampling*]. It's a sad state of affairs.

In our type of society, we always associate growth with health, but we *can* be smaller and still be perfectly healthy. So I predict there *will* be a 600th issue...*someone* will be reading it.

[Part II next issue...]