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## The First Printed Matchcover: Who Done It?

(No, this isn't the Joshua Pusey story for the 10,000th time! Read on...)

Everyone who sees your collection eventually asks, "How far do matchcovers go back?" "Who made the first printed advertising matchcover? What's your answer?...Well, what *is* your answer?...Let's see, there's Lion, Diamond, Ohio, Atlas, Republic, Monarch, Mercury, Crown, Universal, and a whole bunch of others. What about the old Columbia Match Company?....Hmmmmmmm...

Your guest thumbs through your album pages, while you frantically try and do some quick, mental detective work in order to come up with the answer...There are a few WW I covers around, and Stuart Bergman, TX, has a dated 1914 Political cover, so these must go back to at least the early 1900s. That lets out Universal, Chicago, Lion, and most of the rest well-known manufacturers, since they weren't around then.

You're not stymied yet, though, because you're into old covers and the stories behind them, and you know that there are at least two major companies that are old enough to at least qualify as possibilities: The Ohio Match Company, established in 1895, and the Diamond Match Company, in production in 1881. Aha! Now you're at a three-pronged fork in the road: Ohio, Diamond, or some other company, probably long defunct. As the vast majority of collectors would, you go for Diamond! Why not? It's old enough, and it's the one that purchased the rights to Pusey's matchbook in the first place...*and* it's the one that handled the first major national matchbook order in 1902. You also recall that Diamond has the only known 1896 Mendelson Opera Co. cover (even though it was handwritten, not printed). Yep, Diamond certainly seems to be the best possibility.

You might even be able to come up with a date. You remember reading Bob Oliver's information on early Diamond manumarks in the July issue of the Sierra-Diablo Bulletin. Their earliest manumark carried an 1892 date, but they were not actually issued until 1896. *Eureka! That's it! "The Diamond Match Company, 1896!"* Your guest is suitably impressed by your answer and now no longer sees you as a crackpot eccentric...now, you have risen to the rank of scholarly sage. You both retire to the living room to view the slides you brought back from Hawaii.

Well, that's the answer I would have come up with, but it now appears that that answer is incorrect. Would you believe "*Kaeser & Blair, 1895*"?

In December, 1989, I happened to be doing some groundwork for an upcoming article by corresponding with R.E. Kaeser, Chairman of Kaeser & Blair, Inc., Cincinnati, OH. Manumark collectors will at once recognize Kaeser & Blair as an old, established firm whose association with matchcovers goes way back. In one of Mr. Kaeser's letters, he stated, "...we authentically believe we were the first to produce a printed matchcover, a business advertising matchcover." Assuming that is accurate, the date would have to be around 1895, between the company's founding date of 1894 and Diamond's first printed covers in 1896 (that's assuming that Diamond's first covers in 1896 *were* printed). Or, it's possible that Kaeser & Blair did the printing *for* Diamond's first matchbooks.

So, where does all this leave us? Exactly where researchers have found themselves from time immemorial...knowing more than we did before...but still in a quandary!