

Collecting Manumarks

A “manumark” is that little line(s) under the striker that identifies the company that is responsible for the cover’s production, one way or the other. On the very old covers, collectors also often use the “footer” at the bottom of the cover (i.e., “Diamond Quality,” “For Safety,” etc.) in conjunction with the manumark for identification purposes.

Collecting manumarks represents a fairly technical side of the hobby, I suppose, but it offers a number of benefits to those who “dare to dabble.”

It certainly teaches you a lot about the historical and geographic make-up of the match industry over the years. Manumarks also show take-overs, mergers, buy-outs, etc. within the industry, but most of all a study of manumarks allows the collector to gain a better insight into what the hobby is based on. It’s something like the difference between just knowing how to drive and actually knowing how to work on your car [*I’ve never mastered the latter, myself*].

The covers in your collection now take on a multi-dimensional quality. Whereas before, the covers simply represented defunct hotels, for example, now those same covers also tell you something about the history of the industry, the rarity of the cover, and (my own particular favorite) the age of the cover.

The first problem you’re faced with in collecting manumarks is deciding exactly what it is you’re going to collect. Yes, you’re collecting manumarks, but are you going to only collect manumarks from actual match manufacturers (i.e., Lion, Universal, Monarch, Eddy, etc.), or are you going to collect every different manumark line(s) you can find?

That’s an important question, since *most* manumarks these days are actually from advertising agencies, novelty companies, and the like. These non-manufacturers simply line up the

advertisers and then job the actual printing of the cover to the manufacturer or printer while taking care to have their own company name put on as the manumark. Many of these companies are rather tenuous, hole-in-the-wall affairs. The result being that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of these “ad agency” type manumarks. So many, in fact, that for my own purposes I decided not to include these. Also, since my interest is in the manufacturers, these “middleman” groups aren’t primary to the industry.

I *have* made a compromise between the two types of manumarks. A few of the “ad agency” type companies have very long associations with matchcovers (i.e., Kaeser & Blair, E. I. Plottle, Willens & Co.). Kaeser & Blair, in fact were printing covers as far back as the 1890s! *These* companies I *do* keep track of.

Truth be told, I don’t actually have a manumark collection, as such, since I don’t actually save a sample cover of each manumark. I’m only interested in them for research purposes, so I photocopy each different manumark I find and put the “copies” into an album. Thus, I suppose, I maintain a manumark “catalog” rather than an actual collection.

The next problem you have to deal with is exactly how picky you are going to be when it comes to what constitutes a “different” manumark. What if both manumarks have the same wording, but one is in all caps? What if everything is identical, but on one the manumark is upside down? It’s your collection; you’re free to make whatever calls you feel comfortable with [*I collect all variations*].

Finally, how do you organize them? I arrange them alphabetically, by company, and then by age.

Well, after going through all of this, you’d better believe that your eyes are going to widen with awe each time you run across some rare or unknown manumark. The challenge is always there; the “hunt” is always on!