

# A Tentative History

Lion Match Co.'s "Feature" matchbooks have been some of the most popular items in the hobby since their official appearance in the early 1930s. Thick and heavy, they have that substantive feel that usually spells quality at the first touch. The art work is beautiful, creative, and, usually, superb. But the story of the Feature pre-dates the "Feature" trademark by some 40 years, taking us all the way back to the very first advertising matchbook, itself—the Mendelson Opera cover of 1889—for the innovator of that momentous concept (putting advertising on a matchbook) also extended it to the match sticks, themselves, as can be seen below. From the beginning, then, match sticks have been fair game for first, text, and later, art. These first hand-printed sticks would eventually lead to machine-printed sticks, and, in turn, that would be the stepping stone to Features.

From 1889, we can trace the next printed stick (that I've been able to find) to 1905-1909. Ron Nelson, NE, has a beautiful Diamond "Patented Sept. 27-1892 Licensed Match" from this period advertising E. B. Banner cigars, and it has printed sticks (machine-printed, now). From here, the going is fairly easy. The Washington Crisps matchbooks [reported on and pictured in RMS Sep/Oct 1995 issue] have printed sticks. These are Diamond "Licensed Match" covers. The owner, Jim Stauffer, calculated their date at 1910, and the manumark would support that. We can find printed sticks in the 1915-1916 period in a Diamond "Approved Match No. 7" Safety First from the US MARINES, Paris Island Post Exchange (Rich Greene's). The printed sticks say "U.S. MARINE CORPS."

Diamond Safety Firsts (without the "Approved Match No. 7") are also known to have had printed sticks in some issues (1915-1920). There is a Harvester Bourbon matchbook, for example, with "Harvester Bourbon" on the sticks, and Marc Edelman, PA, also has a Knights of Columbus World War I cover (c. 1918) which falls into this category. The matches are composition

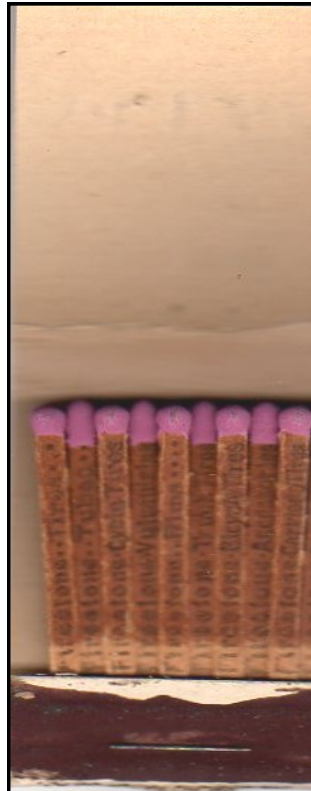
*Mendelson Opera cover*



*Diamond S-F [outside]*



*Diamond S-F [inside]*



*Lion Contour/Feature*



## of The Feature

paper with small bulb tips and have “Knights of Columbus” spelled out on each one.

From there, we can go right to Diamond matchbooks with the “DIAMOND MATCH” footer (1920-1923). Bob Borton at one time had several with printed sticks, so we know they existed here, as well. By now, one could find printed sticks from other manufacturers besides Diamond. Rich Greene has an interesting Lion matchbook from the 1920s that has printed sticks. These advertise VA-JEL (a woman’s prophylactic!).

Now, here is where it really gets interesting! Sometime in the 1920s, the “leap” was made from printed sticks to actual Features. Gary Unruh, KS, has a full-Feature Lion Safety First (1919-1928) which is an example of such early Features [*reported and pictured in RMS Sep/Oct 1997 issue*]. It has the words “Blue Band” across the sticks and some floral art behind the words. It has two combs, and the tip of each match looks like the end of a lit cigar. There are very few of these early Features known, and technically they are “pre-Features,” since the “Feature” trademark hadn’t been introduced yet.

It wasn’t until 1930 that the trademark by Lion appeared. This was the basic 20-strike, 15-stick, “Feature” matchbook. The three combs of 5 sticks each were thicker and wider, presenting a broader surface for the art. By 1935, Feature-like matchbooks were being produced by Bryant & May. Through the late 1930s-1950s, Features reached their peak—all sorts of Features:

- 21 Features: 30s size with three combs of 7 sticks each
- 30-STICK Features: 30s size w/two combs of 15 each (but I have 30-STICK Features with three combs of 7 sticks each)
- Giant Features: Starting c. 1936, these were Giant matchbook with one large Feature comb
- Display Features: These were Lion Displays (cardboard popup inside), appearing c. 1940, with Feature match sticks
- Knot Hole Features: Appearing around the same time as Displays, these Features had a hole in the front panel so you could see the matches w/o opening the book.

### - C o n t o u r F e a t u r e s :

L i o n ’ s famous die-cut covers, first seen in 1951, with Feature match sticks

- P o s t e r  
F e a t u r e s :  
Postcard-wide Features introduced in 1956.

[ S p e c i a l  
t h a n k s t o  
R i c h G r e e n e ,  
G a r y U n r u h ,  
R o n N e l s o n ,  
B o b B o r t o n ,  
a n d T o m  
W a d d e l l ]

*Lion Display/Feature*



*Lion 21 Feature*



*Lion 30 STICK Feature*

