

Match Manufacturers:

Ohio Match Co.

Until its demise, the Ohio Match Co. was the second oldest operating match manufacturer in the United States. It began in 1895, only a few years after the inception of Diamond.

Originally, as with all of the early match manufacturers, Ohio made only wooden matches. Later, with the advent of book matches, Ohio began its journey to become one of the true giants of the industry. Located in Wadsworth, OH, its plant was the largest in the world, producing more than 300 million wooden and paper matches each day. The facility covered 18 acres. A second plant was located at Mancos, CO. Earlier production sites included NY, NY; Los Angeles, CA; Spokane, WA; St. Louis, MO; and San Francisco, CA.

Over the years, Ohio was not one of the more innovative manufacturers, but, instead, chose a more conservative “slow, but steady” approach to its future. Some of its more famous trademarks include: “Junior” (Ohio’s version of the Midget, issued in the 1930s), “Ohio Blue Tip” (for both its box and book matches), and “Rosebud” (better known in its box version). Other box trademarks were: “Armadillo,” “Chief,” “Fife and Drum,” “Ohio Noiseless,” “Ohio Safety Matches,” “Pilot,” and “Royal Star.”

Ohio *did* dabble in innovation from time to time, though. In the mid-1930s, Ohio daringly introduced the first 16-strike, for example, but it failed and was ultimately discontinued. It was also the first in the industry to regularly produce reverse-strikers...and that was way back in 1938!

Also notable for paleophillumenists was its use of its distinctive 1930s’ footer...“*for Safety*” (always written in script in 2 lines).

The company was founded by E.J. Young. In 1928, it was purchased by Diamond, which then turned around and sold half to Ivar Kreuger. When Kreuger’s international match empire collapsed in 1932, Diamond reorganized Ohio in 1936. By 1948, when the Ohio Match Co. had again become independent, it was considered one of the three largest match manufacturers in the world.

In 1957, it became a subsidiary of Hunt Foods & Industries; Hunt Foods & Industries, in turn, merged with Simon (Norton), Inc. in 1968. Ohio was then purchased by Bradley Industries, Inc. (which also went on to become the owner of Atlas) in 1976. Later, the company was listed as a foreign corporation, indicating foreign ownership.

The Ohio Match Co. was a casualty of the same 1980s collapse that caused the end of many another domestic manufacturer. When the Wadsworth plant closed in 1987, that was all she wrote! The causal factors were the same. Rising costs, especially, of course, labor and declining sales. At the same time, more and more inexpensive imported matches from foreign sources were appearing in competition with the domestic brands.

So now Ohio is just another remembered name in the history of the industry and in the minds of collectors as they thumb through their albums and remember yesteryear. Gone, but not forgotten, then, the Ohio Match Co. left its mark on both the hobby and the industry.