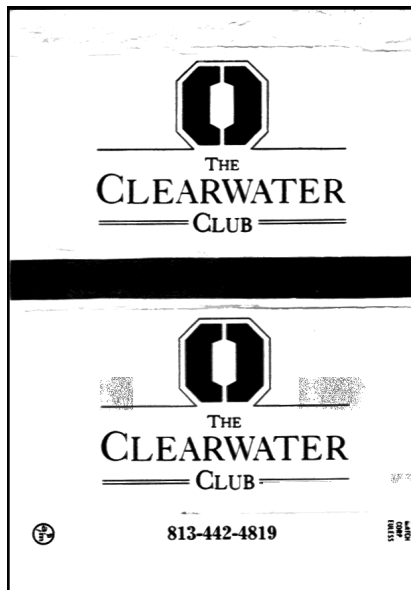


Boxes!

by
Mike Prero

Boxes! Some collectors love them...some collectors hate them...but they've always been there...and, of course, boxes were around much earlier than matchcovers. The hobby, Phillumeny, started with people collecting labels...and the labels came from boxes. And, then there's the fact that in most areas of the world, boxes and their ensuing labels, are still looked upon as the main phillumenic item for collectors (that would be in Europe, Africa, and Asia, at the very least).

Just about all of the foreign boxes we see here these days are Japanese imports, but we have a respectable box tradition in this country, as well.



Although there was once an enticing variety of manufacturers for domestic boxes, just in the last century alone—Diamond, Ohio, General, Universal, Acme, America's Own, Maryland, American Safety, Federal, and so on—just about all domestic boxes today are carry either a Diamond or Atlas/Diamond manumark.

Box enthusiasts, I believe, tend to be rather more 'die-hard' collectors than many fellow cover collectors...probably because of the obstacles they have to overcome on a regular basis...which gets us into the reasons why many collectors try to avoid boxes when they can. I can think of several.

First, there is the fact that boxes, being greatly outnumbered by covers in this country, are not as plentiful, and many collectors strongly tend to gravitate to what's most easily available (although, if you stop to think about that, that's somewhat contrary to one of the basic points of collecting 'collectibles' in the first place—scarcity!). Even though box production in the U.S. predates matchcovers by several decades, matchbooks were eventually produced in such great quantities and in such overwhelming varieties, that the total number of boxes and box-types issued pales in comparison to that of matchbooks.

Second, and a much bigger obstacle traditionally to collector interest, is the size of the boxes. With matchcovers, the collector is faced with three basic sizes: 20s, 30's, and 40s. That means the collector can plan eventual pages, albums, spacing, etc., because all domestic manufacturers recognized those sizes and pretty much stuck to those sizes. But, it's much more difficult to deal with boxes, since domestic manufacturers, for the most part, didn't standardize their box sizes in relationship to the corresponding issues from other companies. And since the 1980s, of course, when foreign boxes began appearing here in significant numbers, the variety of sizes has become an increasing headache...at least to those of us who see the size issue as a problem to begin with.

That, in turn, has lead to other problems relating to the collecting of boxes. Because of all the 'odd' sizes that the collector has to deal with, for example, there were never any slit pages standardized for all those boxes, so at least the non-box specialists are continually faced with the question of just how to deal with all these things. Initially, when early collectors were using hand-sewn pages, one could tailor one's sewing to what was needed at the time, but as soon as albums with pages specifically designed for matchcovers appeared, boxes were orphaned. Later, I believe, beginning in the early 1980s, there were pre-cut pages for Ace and Pocketbox issues, because they were the two most commonly issued boxes in the US in recent times, but that didn't help with all the other sizes. Today, we have plastic pages, but to date I haven't heard of any such pages designed especially for all these myriad box sizes. I assume that other collectors simply do as I do and fit them into any plastic pocket that will hold them, but there's often much left-over space in the pocket, etc. (It's similar to the problem that we have of putting 10s in such plastic pages).

The final problem, and the one that I have always found to be the most irritating and the most frustrating, is just getting the little critter open! Although Ace and Pocketbox boxes traditionally open quite easily and cleanly, for the most part the rest are 'challenging,' to say the least! Many foreign boxes, especially, seem to have been sealed with Super-Glue!

Still, I don't want to leave on a negative note. I wouldn't consider my collection complete without the corresponding box issues, so I certainly don't ignore those boxes that fall within my want areas...but they *do* tend to sit around in shoe boxes rather than in the albums with their matchcover cousins! *Perhaps we can get some tips from our fellow box-specializing collectors. If I receive any, I'll share them with you.*