

Manufacturers and

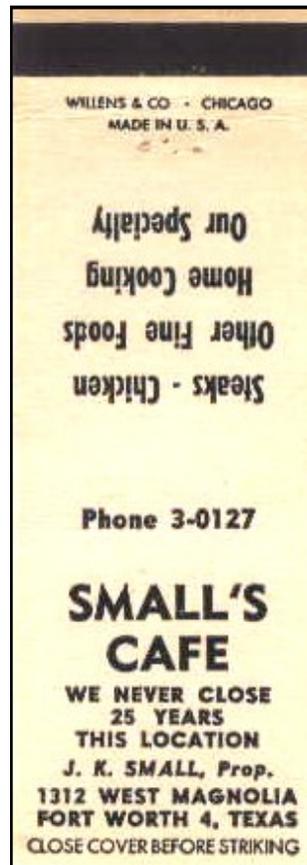
As a new collector coming into the hobby in 1983, I was most certainly dazzled by the incredible numbers and varieties of covers to be collected, but, perhaps at least partially because I was a teacher, I was also already interested in writing and researching. Thus, I distinctly remember seeing at the time what was probably my first example of industry/hobby research. It was *Manufacturer's & Agent's Imprints As Used On Matchbook Covers (1947-48)* by A. J. Eichenlaub and revised and edited by Horace Rush.

I always remembered that work, and, later, I was even able to obtain my own copy. In any event, for some reason, it struck a chord with me, and I never forgot it. So, last year, when I started listing manufacturers and their distributors around the world, and starting a collection of such to coincide with the listing, it wasn't long before I began making some mental comparisons.

Even though Eichenlaub and Rush's work dealt primarily with manumarks in existence in the 1940s, while the list I was doing focused on the actual manufacturers and distributors since the inception of the match, a glaring difference was at once obvious. There has been a huge increase in distributors in recent times, and, of course, we're already aware of the decline in domestic manufacturers, themselves.

The 'distributors' referred to here are what Eichenlaub referred to as 'agents' and what others would call 'jobbers' today--the individuals and businesses that now act as the middlemen in the industry. They get the orders and then either pass the orders on to the manufacturer or get the matches from the manufacturer and have them inserted into the covers that they have already arranged to have printed.

Originally, distributors were fairly rare in the industry. The manufacturer—Diamond, Lion,



Universal, and the like—all had their own sales forces—professional salesmen who went out and directly procured orders for them. (We've all seen examples of salesmen's sample books). That basic system of sales continued on from the industry's early matchbook years, through the industry's golden age of the '40s and '50s, and on into the 1980s. Then, of course, everything changed!

Society changed; the economy changed; the industry changed; and the

hobby, as a result, changed.

Distributors In The 1900s

already drastically shrunk, but was continuing to shrink at an alarming rate. The surviving manufacturers such as Diamond, Atlas, and D.D. Bean no longer relied on forces of salesmen to canvas territories, collect, and turn in orders. Instead, the 'jobbers'-'agents'-'distributors' now filled that function. These ranged from individual entrepreneurs such as the hobby's own Judi Wittwer, Wayne Eadie, and Tom Gray to the myriad of printing, calendar, novelty, and advertising companies that now flourish coast to coast.

And this is the change I noticed when doing my Manufacturers and Distributors list. That list gives the name of the company, city, state, dates, and what type of company it is (printer, advertising co., etc.). First, I noticed that the number of different distributors was vastly larger than that of the manufacturers. Of course, anyone in the hobby would have already known that, but here on paper it was now glaring. Then, the dates showed that the switch to independent distributors coincided exactly with the collapse of the domestic match industry in the 1980s.

The chronology is actually quite definite and remarkable. Up to the 1980s, judging by the manumarks that appear on the covers, there were only a relatively few 'jobbers' to be seen. Some, such as Edward I. Plottle and Geiger Bros., had already been around for half a century or more, and the venerable Kaeser & Blair has been producing covers for over a hundred years. The majority of jobbers, though, tend to be small, independent businesses that either don't last long, or at least don't last long as distributors for matches. Like the Etruscans, they appear on the scene briefly and then disappear forever. *[I had to get an historical reference in there].*

So, the jobbers are there, in the decades prior to the 1980s, but quite sparsely, only here and there between the issues of the match companies, themselves. Then, they become more commonplace in the 1980s, and in the 1990s they mushroom into a commanding dominance.

I currently have some 2,500 manufacturers and dealers listed, and this chronological trend becomes more concrete with each addition. All in all, a rather interesting and dramatic shift in the industry, I think.

By the later 1980s, most of the domestic manufacturers were gone and the market for matchbooks and matchboxes had not only

Geiger Bros., Lewiston, ME. EM.



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