

California Match Companies

by
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When we think of match companies, we invariably tend to identify locations in the Midwest and East--Chicago, St. Louis, New York, etc. That's understandable, since the great majority of manufacturers were located in those areas. But, as a Californian, I must needs stand up for my own native region!

While California can't hope to match *[ha ha! pun!]* those eastern locations, its match manufacturing history is nothing to sneeze at. Case in point, I present the following (in alphabetical order):

[In the 1800s, there was quite a variety of wooden match manufacturers popping up here and there over the years in both San Francisco and Los Angeles. And, interestingly enough, the majority of these seem to have been located in Northern California. That means there was an eventual shift of the California industry to Southern California, beginning by at least the 1930s. Why? Hmmmmmm....It does seem to parallel the shift from matchboxes to matchbooks. But, it could also parallel the growth in population in the southern part of the state. Still, we'll skip over these early manufacturers and go right to the more familiar paper match manufacturers]



CALIFORNIA MATCH CO. (1975-c. 1987) This company, founded by Gary Walden, was the state's last manufacturer. Located in San Diego, its demise, perhaps, was fated by bad-timing more than anything else. The company appeared just before the collapse of the industry in the 1980s and, just as most of the established manufacturers, couldn't compete with labor costs and foreign competition. Towards the end, the company tried to cope by moving operations across the border, into



Mexico, but that effort proved fruitless, as well.

CROWN MATCH CO. (1933-1942) This famous and cherished company took over, or came out of, the Hellman Match Co., Los Angeles, in 1933/1934. It produced highly sought-after covers, renowned for their beautiful art work, especially to be seen in the Chinese Restaurant category. There are 3,079 covers currently listed.

HELLMAN MATCH CO. (1933-1934) This short-lived L.A. company changed into Crown Match Co. (one way or another) in 1933/1934. In testimony to its brief existence, only 16 covers are listed.

KING MIDAS MATCH CO. (c. 1939-dissolved 1944) This well-known company probably was already out of business by early 1942 since there doesn't seem to be any WW II Patriotics. *[If only it had been better known during its existence!]* Also, of the 844 covers currently listed, all of the dated issues run from 1939-1941. It, also, was located in Los Angeles, but it certainly left a greater legacy for collectors than the Hellman or Los Angeles companies.

LOS ANGELES MATCH CO. (?) Probably *very* short-lived. 1930s? Only 9 covers are listed

MONARCH MATCH CO. (1946-1966) *[Finally a company in Northern California!]* Well, at twenty years, it managed to become the longest-lived of the California companies. It merged with Superior Match Co. in 1966 (post-1966 covers carried a "Monarch/Superior" manumark); in 1967, Brown Co. (parent company of Superior) was taken over by Gulf & Western Industries, Inc. In 1979, Gulf & Western sold Brown Co. to James River Corp. of VA. Its trademarks include Granada (Cameo-type, 1972), Orleans (Filigree-type, 1972), Camera Color (1972), and Jumbo King (240-strike, ?)

