

Small Categories Series

Japanese Universal Boxes

Come on! Did you even *know* there were Japanese Universal boxes? I didn't. But then, I'm not a box collector, as such, so if it's not an Ace or a Pocketbox, or if it's not a conjunctive to one of my categories, I don't pay attention. As it happened, though, I happened to be looking at an old article from the 1980's by Joe DeGennaro, and it was about Japanese Universal boxes...And guess who typed the original article?...*Me!* So, I guess I *did*, once, know about the boxes, but I had long since forgotten about them...So, this will be a learning experience for us both!

Japanese boxes have been around for many years; in fact, Japan had the earliest phillumenic clubs that I know of, going back to 1905, I believe. And, of course, by now we're all used to seeing boxes here that have been made in Japan...But Japanese-*Universal* boxes? Hmmmmm.

The boxes, which all say UNIVERSAL MATCH/CORP. ST. LOUIS/PRODUCT/OF JAPAN, first appeared in 1986. Paraphrasing Joe, Universal said at the time that they could, and would produce any size that other companies selling Japanese boxes produce, excepting pyramid or tent types.



This was another move on the part of Universal to salvage an already sinking ship. But it certainly wasn't enough, even with all of its other measures, such as producing a cheaper Uniglo (Uniglo II). The following year, Universal threw in the towel. Today, what was once the premier manufacturer in the US, and the darling of collectors, is but a memory.

I don't have any stats on them, but Joe mentioned in 1986 that he had already located 50 of them, so I'm guessing that there must be more than a handful produced before Universal's demise the following year. Just looking through a box of boxes that I keep for traders, I found the four pictured here. Notice that two are Holiday Inns—so, if you'd like to see if you have some yourself, what better place to look than a stash of Universal boxes?!

Unfortunately, and this is why I, personally, don't collect Boxes in general, these particular boxes don't come in the standard Ace or Pocketbox size, which, from my point of view, means they're more of a hassle to deal with and store...and they don't open as easily as the Aces and Pocket boxes, either.

Now, if you're a box collector, you probably already knew most of this, but for the rest of us I'm assuming this was fairly eyebrow-raising news.

