

Girlies! Just How Far Do They Go Back?

I was thinking about Girlies [*not unusual*] as a reflection of societal values. I would expect to see Girlie covers beginning to appear in the 1920s. Prior to that, I would think, American values wouldn't have tolerated such covers. But, the 1920s brought in radical changes to such values—shorter dresses, women smoking, etc. In the 1930s, nudity in burlesque reached its height, and Girlie covers were in full swing. In 1938, Superior introduced the first Girlie sets.

This is just an hypothesis, though, as there are hardly any pre-1920 covers to examine. Still, looking through the largest Girlie single collection (the Girlie Club catalog), there is, perhaps, some indirect evidence. Examining the Girlie listings' some 5,600 covers, there's only one cover from the 1920s—#2717, a Union Match Quality). Indeed, there are no Diamond Match, no Diamond Safety First, no Lion Safety First, no Green Hat, etc. There is one Jersey Safety First (#578), but that's dated from 1935-c.1943

There is a smattering of covers from the 1930s—2 DQs (#s 2716, 4686), a few Talls (XL) (#s 4568, 4706, 5277, as examples), a few older Lions, some older Diamonds, Crowns, and so on. There's even a Merchants Industries cover actually dated 1936 (#3262), but only that one cover from the 1920s, and certainly nothing from the shadow years of 1892-1919. It should also be noted that the vast majority of the covers noted above aren't nudes, but rather bathing suits and silhouettes.

But, is that because my hypothesis is correct, or because earlier Girlies have simply not yet come to light? In the interest of fairness, it could be either. Although, I could point out that the search for such has been going on for some 80+ years, and nothing seems to have come to light so far. Still, that absence of Girlie covers might even be the result of there simply being no occasion for such. After all, matchbooks weren't that widespread prior to even 1925, so perhaps the opportunity to use a Girlie in a cover design never even occurred!

In any event, it would be interesting to identify the earliest Girlie cover. Is there a collector out there

somewhere who has a Diamond Match Girlie tucked away in an album? Or, dare I even dream, an Approved Match No. 7? Perhaps it might be something altogether different. One can only dream.

If you have old (and we mean *old*) covers, take a look and see if any of them are Girlies. If you come up with something, please send me a scan, and we'll see where it falls within the chronology of Girlies. Hopefully, some startling discovery will come to light!

At the very least, we should come out with a more complete picture of just how far Girlies go back in matchcover history.

