

What Ever Happened to...? (I)

There have been a myriad of match manufacturers, big and small, in the United States since the industry since its inception in 1836. The companies I've selected here are the more recent names that collectors will be familiar with. In most instances, we see their names on the covers we sort through each day. I've also included a few major foreign manufacturers.

-Advance Match Co.: This short-lived Chicago-based company produced sought-after early Girlie issues, but succumbed to the pressures of World War II. It folded in 1944.

-American Match Co.: There were four companies with this name, but this most recent Zanesville, OH, manufacturer started in 1956. It was finally purchased by Maryland Match Co. in 1975.

-Bryant & May: Bryant & May was established in 1843 and became the match production giant in the United Kingdom. In 1926, it combined with a British match importer and the Swedish Match Company to become the British Match Corporation. In 1973, BMC merged with Wilkinson Sword to form a new company—Wilkinson Match. In the early to mid-1980s, Bryant & May closed most of its factories in England closed. In 1987, Swedish Match bought it out. In 1988, Bryant & May ceased operations in Australia, bringing Australian domestic production to an end. In 1994, the last Bryant & May plant in England closed, and British domestic production came to an end.

-California Match Co.: This small California manufacturer formed in 1975, in San Diego. It soon moved operations to Mexico in an effort to cut business costs, but it had closed by c. 1987.

-Canada Match: Canadian company that started in 1963; it went out of business in 1986

-Chicago Match Co.: This well-known company started in the 1930s. It had issued the first Hillbillies and early Girlie issues. Production stopped in the mid-1960s, and the company was dissolved in 1968.

-Columbia Match Co.: Based in Ohio, this manufacturer was founded in 1938 by James H. Weaver, an employee of Diamond Match Co., in Mentor, OH. It was dissolved in 1971 but reformed and continued. It issued the first 24-strike in 1980. Match production halted in 1985; the company relocated to San Diego and now concentrates on match-making machinery.

-Cougar Match Corporation: This small Canadian manufacturer started in 1991. It was purchased by Atlas in 2001, but it had already ceased production before then.

-Crown Match Co.: One of the most revered manufacturers by collectors, this Los Angeles company started in 1933. It took over, or came out of, the old Hellman Match Co., Los Angeles, in 1934. It produced what are today highly sought-after covers famous for their beautiful art work, especially to be seen in the Chinese Restaurant category. The company didn't survive World War II, however, and closed in 1942.

-Eddy Match Co.: Eddy was the first to manufacture matches in Canada (1851)...and the last (1998). It eventually merged with Atlas Match Corporation. It still operates in Canada as Eddy Match, but it no longer is a manufacturer.

-Federal Match Co.: One of the greats, Federal was formed in 1923 by merger of 9 companies. It absorbed Bean & Symonds Co. and New Hampshire Co. in 1928. In 1931, Federal became part of Ivar

Kreuger's International Match Corp. when it was purchased by Vulcan Match Co., one of Kreuger's subsidiaries. It was later purchased by Pan American Match Corp. (a Diamond holding company) in the Kreuger bankruptcy auctions in July, 1937. It merged with Union Match Co. in 1938, and both were consolidated into Federal Match Corp. Both Federal and West Virginia Match Corp. merged into Universal in 1941.

-Jersey Match Co.: Elizabeth, New Jersey's Jersey Match Co. was founded in 1935 by Ruth Katz, Nat and Sully Fruitman (the Fruitmans had already formed the earlier Atlas Match Co. in 1932, and it was shutting down, so they apparently regrouped to form the Jersey Match Co.). The company dissolved in New Jersey in 1944, but apparently was still in production in New York City, since there is at least one dated cover from 1948. That was its Swan Song, however.

-King Midas Match Co.: Another Los Angeles company, it formed c. 1939 and was probably already out of business by early 1942 since there doesn't seem to be any WW II Patriotic issues.

-Lion Match Co.: One of the major players in the industry, the original company was formed in 1917. The company went out of business twice. Second Lion Company emerged in 1924. It was purchased by Diamond in 1929/1930; it somehow was sold off later and became independent again. It merged into Lion Match Corp. of America in 1965; operated in California from 1937-1967. Revived in 1980. May have bought out the old Atlas Match Co., Hercules Match Co., Jersey Match Co., Manhattan Match Co., Merit Match Co., and National Match Co. It merged with Match Corp of America in 1965 to form Lion Match Corporation of America. It ceased matchbook production in 1993.

-Lone Star Match Co.: very short-lived San Antonio company started in 1955 and defunct in 1956.

-Manhattan Match Co.: Founded by Nat Fruitman, Jesse Markel and Louis Lipset in 1936 in Elizabeth, NJ, incorporated in 1938. Probably already out of business by early 1942. It was formally dissolved in 1948.

-Maryland Match Co.: Founded by Joseph Shapiro in Baltimore, 1934; purchased from American Match Co. in 1975; incorporated in 1979 as Maryland Match Corp.; relocated to Canada in 1980; last U.S. plant closed in 1984.

-Match Corp. of America: This Chicago company was formed out of Beacon Products Co. in 1935 and merged with Illinois Match Co. in the same year. It later merged with Lion Match Co. in 1967. For awhile, starting c.1965, Match Corp. sold matches in England through Matchmakers Ltd. Match Corp. was dissolved in 1977.

-Mercury Match Co.: This Zanesville, OH, company formed in 1946. It was sold to American News in the early 1950s, which became the beginning of American Match Co. Production had stopped in 1956, and what was left was sold to Atlas Match Co. in early 1960s.

-Merit Match Co.: Another short-lived Elizabeth, NJ, company. It was established c. 1941 [*bad timing!*] and out of business c. 1945.

-Monarch Match Co.: California company started in 1946. 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, and in 1980 Monarch had disappeared.