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The Future of Matchcover Collecting

When I finally learned that Diamond had closed its last match manufacturing plant (Colquet) in 2017, it made me stop and think the unthinkable...*What happens to the collector if and when the US match manufacturing industry disappears?*

From its inception, the hobby has depended on the domestic industry to provide the covers that we collect. We're not big on labels; we're not even that keen on boxes; it's matchcovers we're after...and that, almost by definition, means the source has to be US matchbooks. That was never a problem until the anti-smoking ordinances swept the nation, beginning in 1985. Unfortunately, as smoking was banned in more and more businesses, those businesses (shortsightedly) gave up on furnishing matches to their patrons, and the once common bowl of matches on the business counter disappeared. That was a blow for collectors, but it was worse for the manufacturers.

When I began collecting in 1983, the US match manufacturing industry seemed to be at its peak. Diamond, Ohio, Universal, Atlas, Lion, DD Bean—all the old giants of the industry were cranking out new covers left and right...but how quickly things changed. With the sudden drop in cover availability, the hobby shrank, and, with the lessening of business and the parallel pressure from foreign competition, the industry shrank! Ohio gave up the ghost in 1987; Universal gave in the following year; Lion closed in 1993; Atlas was sold in 2016; and Diamond (as a manufacturer) became defunct in 2017.

Currently, there's only one US company left that manufactures matches—DD Bean., and rumor has it that *it's* experiencing problems. Thus, the once booming domestic match manufacturing industry is hanging on by a thread. So, it's not unreasonable to ponder the prospect of its eventual disappearance altogether. What happens to the hobby and the matchcover collector *then?*

Well, let's cut to the chase. The hobby is totally dependent on collectors; no collectors = no hobby. So, are collectors going to vanish when the domestic industry ceases to exist? Of course not! Our numbers may be slimmed down even further, but true collectors will always collect. Besides, what does the end of match manufacturing in the U.S. actually mean? It certainly *doesn't* mean the disappearance of the matchbook in America. It just means that all such matches will have been imported. The designing and printing of the covers will, in most cases, still happen in the U.S.

But, there's a much more important reason why collecting will continue. Collectors don't rely on newly issued covers, from whatever source. At least 99% of what we collect is older material—that Restaurant cover from the 1960s, this Casino cover from the 1990s, etc. Think of all the covers you collected last year. How many of those were actually new issues from that particular year? Zero-few!..Especially these days. No, what we go after not only has *already* been produced, but they're still easily available. Currently, the US has 125 years of producing matchbooks. At one point it was noted that some 12,500,000,000 matchbooks circulate during the course of one year in this country. The result is that there are at the very least many hundreds of millions (and probably *billions*) of existing covers that have yet to be collected! Even if new matchbooks were to entirely end, collectors today, and future generations, will still be happily collecting.

I'm not rooting for the domestic match manufacturing industry to end, but, if and when it does...who knows, it might even increase the value of our collections!