

HOBBY HISTORY

A Short History of Match Safes

[Excerpted from Maureen Timm, "Collecting Match Safes and Match Books", *Collectibles*, May 2006]

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, craftsmen created lidded safes and open holders made from painted tin to platinum and gold. The most valuable of the pocket match safes are those created of precious metals and stones and signed by the foremost jewelers of the mid-19th and early 20th century. Tiffany & Co., Unger Brothers and Gorham Manufacturing Co. in the United States; Sampson Morden in London and Peter Carl Faberge of Imperial Russia. These early Faberge examples were selling for as much as \$10,000 each in the late 1970s.

Some match safes were celluloid covered advertisements and others were souvenirs such as the glass liberty bell that was sold to tourists visiting the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition.

Some match safes were made in the form of pigs, cockroaches, the man in the moon and even tombstones.

Among the scarcest match safes are silver pocket safes with enameled pictures, most of which depict pretty girls or mythological scenes such as St. George slaying the dragon and safes that have lids that flip up like those on modern cigarette lighters.

Larger safes and holders were made to hang on a wall or to rest on a table. Most of the ones that have survived are made of cast iron or painted tin. Those made of paper-mâché, glass or ceramic are rare and desirable.

The most sought after table safes are the mechanicals, designed to dispense just one match to a customer in hotels and cigar stores. These

safes having moving parts that extract a single match from the container.

Some people use match safes for cigarettes and others use them as miniature wall-hung planters. Collectors may find other uses for the endless variety of cast iron, glass, china, and brass match safes.

The small and compact match safes can be found at flea markets and garage sales or in old trunk in the attic. Wall safes are often sold with old kitchen equipment. [Thanks to Harold Cruson, CO, for send in this information]

