

HOBBY HISTORY

The Meitus Touch!

by Mike Prero

One of the ‘thrills’ in research [*OK, I have no life*] is to spread out all you’ve learned in front of yourself and discover patterns and trends. When you do that with the American match industry over the last 100 years, it becomes apparent that the industry has historically been a tightly knit little ‘club,’ as it were.

As a matter of fact, it wouldn’t be stretching things all that far to describe the entire industry as something of an extended family business. That’s true on two levels. Metaphorically it would be true in that there is a long history of employees of one company eventually setting out on their own and establishing their own companies. For example, Robert Alberts, Charles Williams, and Jerome Bamberger, all former employees of Universal, founded Atlas Match Co. in 1960.

Literally, though, the American match making arena has also had a few families that have dominated a significant percentage of the industry.

The Fruitman brothers, Nat & Sully, are a good example. They founded one of the older Atlas Match Co.’s in 1932, then the Jersey Match Co. in 1935, and finally Nat established the Manhattan Match Co. in 1936—all highly cherished by us paleophillumenists.

But not even the Fruitmans can equal the Meitus family of entrepreneurs for unprecedented scope, audacity and shear, unadulterated business acumen. After all, you can’t argue with success!

So, who were the Meituses? Well, it all started with the formidable patriarch of the family, Harold Meitus. It was Harold who started the ‘budding’ trend when he founded Superior Match Co. of Chicago, IL, in 1932..

Although Superior was taken over by Momart Co., Inc. in 1946 and then underwent a variety of buy-outs, mergers, and the like (i.e., it merged with Monarch Match Co. in 1966), Harold had pointed the family in the right direction and shown that the name of Meitus was one to be reckoned with in the American match making industry. What’s really interesting in the Superior story, though, is that Richard Meitus, one of Harold’s sons, eventually bought back Superior Match Co. in 1985. (A-w-w-w-w. Isn’t that nice?). What he did with it, I don’t know, because by 1985 the American match industry was already set to collapse. By 1990, Superior was gone.

But, other things had been going on in the meantime within the Meitus dynasty. For example, where did Richard come from? Well, when Superior merged with Monarch back in 1966, it was Richard who ended up running the company.

So, now the Meitus family had both the Superior and Monarch companies going. But, there was another son, David. What was he up to? He founded Atlantis Match Co., also in Chicago, in 1971.

With Superior, Monarch, and Atlantis now all gone and only three domestic manufacturers left, I assume the 58-year saga of the Meitus family is finally over...but the family, itself, is still in existence...and you never know...given its history, the Meitus touch might appear again.