

HOBBY HISTORY

Superior Match Company

by Mike Prero

For over half a century, Superior Match Company was an integral part of the American match industry...and the source for an important part of any collector's collection, and, although the company itself is now defunct, many of its covers will always be sought after by most collectors

Headquartered in Chicago, IL, the company was founded in 1932 by Harold Meitus, whose son, David, would eventually start Atlantis Match Co. in 1971 [*a stick off the ol' book!*]. Although never destined to be a giant, such as Diamond or Universal, Superior quickly established itself as a force to be reckoned with. In 1938, Superior introduced the first of its now famous line of Girlies. This was the first of the Elvgren Girls sets [*15 sets in all*]. Ten years later, in 1948, Superior began its series of Petty Girls sets [*9 sets*]. In 1952, it put out its only D'Amario set; 1953 saw the beginning of its Thompson Girlie sets [*5 sets*]; and, in 1958, came the Live Model Series [*9 sets*], most of which featured photos instead of drawings.

Superior's Girlies were so successful, in fact, as far as collectors were concerned, that they usually overshadowed Superior's other great categorical contribution...Hillbillies. Chicago Match Co. had been the first to introduce Hillbillies in 1948, but Superior quickly proved to be "superior!" Several other companies also jumped on the bandwagon and began issuing them, as well (Monarch, Mercury, Regal, etc.), but none ever matched the high quality of art work seen on the Superior Hillbillies, which first appeared in 1949 and remained in production until 1960. Indeed, the Superior Hillbillies are to other Hillbillies as the Crown Chinese Restaurant art work, for example, are to other similar covers.

Later, in 1972, Superior launched a major

offensive within the industry, introducing several new types of covers: "Camera Color" (its entry in the color-photo category), "Grenada" (its Cameo-type cover), and "Orleans" (a Filigree-type). "Pearlstone," by the way, which many collectors automatically associate with Universal covers, is also a Superior trademark.

Superior, incidentally, was also the last domestic company to abandon the "wide striker" on its covers. The extra width strikers are something we normally associate with Pre-War covers, but Superior continued to use noticeably wider strikers into the early 1950s.

On the corporate side of the picture, Superior's story is the typical tangled web of wheeler-dealer buy-outs, mergers, and take-overs. Superior was taken over by Momart Co., Inc., in 1946. Twelve years later, in 1958, the company was sold to Sutherland Paper Company and then merged into it in 1960. In 1966, Superior merged with California's Monarch Match Co. of San Jose, from which comes the now familiar "Superior/Monarch" manumarks. In 1968, the entire enterprise was taken over by Gulf & Western Industries, Inc. From there, the company was sold to the James River Corp. of VA in 1979.

Finally, Richard Meitus, whom I assume was yet another son of the original founder, bought Superior back in 1985....happy ending?...almost. By 1985, the American match industry as a whole had already begun to collapse, and eventually, with only three exceptions, Superior and all the rest disappeared. Superior's production site in Chicago closed in 1990, but I suspect actual production of covers had already ceased some time before that. Only D.D. Bean, Diamond, and Atlas (Bradley Industries) were to remain of the once great and thriving American Match Industry.