

# HOBBY HISTORY

## Tacoma's Pacific Match Companies

by Mike Prero

When researching the past—in any field—one often encounters sketchy records at best, and no records at worst. That's at least partially the case with delving into the Pacific Match companies of Tacoma, Washington—"companies" because there were more than one, but how many?

Tacoma's first match manufacturer was also the first Pacific Match Company. It was established by one Nelson Whitaker c. 1886. It was eventually purchased and closed by Diamond Match Company in 1896.

Here's where it becomes 'ify.' In 1995, Mike Farmer, of Olympia, WA, dug up a 1911 *Tacoma Daily Tribune* article referring to an apparent second Pacific Match Company getting ready to open in Tacoma. The article referred to 'start-up and pre-production machine installation.' I haven't been able to find any other reference to this particular company, so it couldn't have lasted very long, if, indeed, it opened at all.

In 1924, the third Pacific Match Company opened. This one was founded by O. V. Snyder and associates, who had relocated to Tacoma from Wheeling, WV, where he had apparently worked in the match industry previously.

This company had much more success than the previous two. It would last 40 years. By 1953, the company was one of Tacoma's major industries and employed 150 people at its 20-acre plant, producing 80 million matches a day. At one point, when Canada's Eddy Match Co. closed its British Columbia plant, the Pacific Match Company was the only manufacturer left in North America that used pine for its matches instead of aspen or

cottonwood.

Over the years, Pacific Match Company came out with its own variety of trademarks, including: "Sunset" (box, c. 1920s), "De-Lite" (?), "Fire Chief" (?), "Dependable" (box, ?), "Lite King Safety" (box, ?), "Tacoma" (?), "Red Head" (?), "Strike-Out" (wooden match), "Junior" (?), "Ideal" (?), and "Favorite" (?).

Unfortunately, especially for Tacoma, the high cost of labor and materials forced the eventual closure of the company in 1964. This turned out to be a 'preview of coming attractions' for the American match industry. The larger companies were able to hold out for another 15 or 20 years, but by 1987, almost all had succumbed to the same pressures.

Thus ended the story of Tacoma's line of Pacific Match companies. They left their mark of on the industry, and today a collector can rightly be proud of especially the older Pacific issues that he may still be able to find.