

HOBBY HISTORY

The Washington Match Company

by Mike Prero

The Pacific Match companies featured in our last issue's column weren't the only match companies that Tacoma, Washington, could boast of. It was also home to the Washington Match Company, not to be confused with a similarly named nineteenth century company in Washington, CT.

This company was founded in the late 1800s. While I can't be any more specific than that, I would guess we're talking 1890s, and, since it went out of business in 1903, that would mean that it would fit rather nicely into the empty space left by the first Pacific Match Company going out of business in 1896.

It was started by Lucius T. Holes, and at first it was known as the Washington Parlor Match Company. When it was incorporated in 1901, the name was shortened to the Washington Match Company.

Holes was also an inventor, and the impetus for incorporating the company was apparently his development of new match making machinery that was far superior to anything currently on the market.

The thinking was that Diamond Match Company, with its improved machinery, had secured control of the English market by purchasing a controlling interest in Bryant & May, London. Diamond's machinery was capable of turning out matches to every one of Bryant & May's.

Then Diamond invaded the Germany market, and soon its machinery was grinding out matches

there, while the Germany machinery was relegated to the background.

Thus, the question was: if Diamond Match Company could secure control of the world's match markets by reason of its improved machinery, what was to keep the Washington Match Company from doing the same with its even better equipment—equipment with twenty times the capacity of anything currently in existence?! Further, the machinery could produce any type of match.

Sounds good to me! Must have sounded good to Holes's investors, as well. So...what happened? Incorporated in 1901; out of business two years later. If you're expecting some great, climactic answer, you're out of luck. I have no idea why the company went out of business.

Perhaps Diamond, seeing the potential competition, bought them out. That would make sense. Diamond had been buying companies right and left since its inception in 1881.