

## Improving The

As a collector, have you ever stopped to think why the matchbook is the way it is? You know...a rectangular piece of cardboard that flips open vertically to expose the vertically oblong matches that are stapled inside and having a striking surface affixed to the outside. I have! [Yes, I know. I have too much time on my hands...but a writer thinks of these things!]

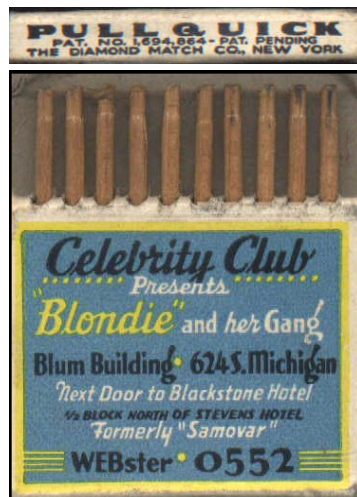
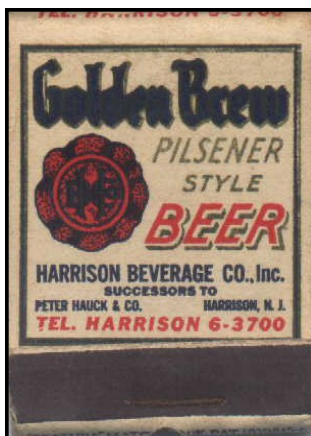
The obvious, and all too easy, answer is “because that’s the way its inventor, Joshua Pusey, made it! He did have his reasons, after all. He wanted a more convenient container for what was, up to then, boxed matches. So he came up with a light piece of folding cardboard cover to house said matches. Ah, but how to keep the matches in the cover! What about that? Easy, staple them! OK. But how to get the little wonders to ignite...after all, they had to be rubbed against something. Pusey could have included a striking surface of some sort as a second and separate item to accompany the matchbook, but that would mean two items to carry about on one’s person, two items to keep track of...and two items meant that if one was lost...the other was worthless. Inefficient! No, Pusey came to the logical conclusion that the striker and the match cover should be one item...after all, matchboxes of the time (1880s) already had shown that that was the simplest and most logical way of doing it. And so, voila! The matchbook was born over 100 years ago, and that’s basically the same matchbook we have today.

But, there’s always another option, and, as businessmen soon learn...it’s usually your competitors that come up with it! Thus, in the century that the matchbook has been around, manufacturers have attempted to ‘improve’ the packaging in a variety of ways. Of course, cynically speaking, since the main goal in business is not necessarily to perfect your product, but rather to simply sell as many as you possibly can, one can easily see the vast majority of these proposed changes to the matchbook as basically window dressing, playing upon our modern idea that ‘if it’s new, it must be better!’ [*Certainly, that’s been the prevailing philosophy of the California State Department of Education for the past 20 years, and we Californians can bear witness to its resulting multitudinous bounty—I just had to get that in*] Indeed, there’s not much on the matchcover that hasn’t been modified by someone, somewhere, at some point.

### The Opening:

Starting with how the matchbook opens, Pusey went with the most obvious method. Since the matches

*typical matchbook*



*American Pullmatch, opened*



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## Matchbook: I

are manufactured in a vertical position, to be held at the bottom with the head at the top, Pusey made his matchbook open in a similar position, north-south, with the book opening up at the bottom to then expose the matches. But Diamond Match Co. tried the ‘opening at the top’ idea with their ‘PullQuick’ matchbooks, produced in the 1930’s and 1940’s. This was a fairly radical departure from Pusey’s concept, and, in fact, the PullQuick was actually more of a box-with-no-drawer than a real matchbook. The matches were fixed, head down, in a box-like structure (still made of cardboard, though), and there was no ‘enclosing top’ at all. The user simply pulled the match out quickly, and the match ignited as it came out, due to the resulting friction with the surrounding striker material. This new and ‘exciting improvement’ never became popular, and the design faded away...but not the idea of a matchbook that opened at the top.

The ‘Click’ matchbooks were also designed to open at the top. These were Italian-made in the 1940’s and 1950’s, and, while I don’t intend to cover foreign books here in the same detail as domestic issues, the Click matchbooks were available here in the U.S., and most collectors who have been collecting for awhile have seen at least one or two. The top ends of the matchbook were curved, which can be seen in the picture below, and one side would close over the other with a ‘click!’ (hence the name) and lock the matchbook when the user applied a little pressure. Did it improve Pusey’s concept? No...but it was new and different! It never caught on either.

Well, how about a matchbook that opened on the side, like an actual book? That had been tried in the 1930’s by the American Pullmatch Co. and the Canadian Pullmatch Co. These were basically PullQuicks with the matches adhering to the insides of a folding cover, but the cover opened sideways, instead of at the top, to expose the opposing two rows of matches, as can be seen in the example of the Canadian Pullmatch below. The user then pulled out the self-igniting matches in the same fashion as the PullQuicks. The Pullmatch booklets were much closer to being *matchbooks* than Diamond’s PullQuicks. Ingenious...but again, unpopular. The people had spoken. Matchbooks should open at the bottom!

Still, there were all sorts of remaining facets of Pusey’s matchbook that might present further possibilities for change—the striker, the size, the shape, the texture, the matches, and the staple! Who knew what some manufacturer might stumble across that would ignite the customer’s interest! The quest continued! We’ll take a look at striker innovations in our next issue.

*Italian-made ‘Click’ match book, with curved ends at the top. This one is shown opened. The side not shown pulls down and is thus out of the*



*Canadian Pullmatch, opened*

