
The Thick and Thin Of It

One of the general ways a collector can differentiate between older and newer covers is by the thickness of the paper stock. Certainly prior to World War II, but generally before 1960, covers were of heavier, thicker stock. One can feel the difference immediately; they're harder to flatten, harder to fit in slotted pages....and yet...they smack of, dare I say, 'superior quality'. Unlike the length issue, the advent of vending machines in the later 1930s doesn't seem to have been a factor here in whether covers should be thick or thin. Anyway, by 1960, domestic match manufacturers, almost as a concerted group, switched to a significantly thinner base for covers. There was some overlapping, however. Monarch and Superior products, for example, come to mind. Those covers tended to be thicker than their peers elsewhere for a number of later years.

From the manufacturer's point of view, I'm assuming the shift from thicker to thinner was purely a cost savings decision, since less materials would equal less production cost. A modern example, in fact, would seem to back that up. When Universal introduced its original Uniglo covers, they were quite thick, perhaps because of the demands of the texturing process. Not too many years later, as Universal was desperately trying to save itself from extinction, it replaced its Uniglo with a much thinner version called "Uniglo II". The original slimming down of the industry's covers may have even had its impetus amidst the shortage of materials experienced during World War II. But, from the collector's point of view, is one actually better than the other? Hmmmmmmm...

I think for most of us, there's at least a psychological image of the thicker cover being better than its successor...as in 'thicker, richer, better-made'. The thicker covers bring up memories of better art work, much more availability, greater craftsmanship--the Golden Age of Matchcovers, in fact.

On the other side of the ledger, perception meets reality. Once the collector begins working with the thicker covers, he or she quickly discovers that there are some definite disadvantages. The additional thickness, for example, meant, at least in the past, that such covers would often be more difficult to mount on slotted pages. The corners would be more likely to 'catch' and tear, and the slots, themselves, would often have to be manually widened to accommodate the thickness. And, at least in my experience, the thicker the cover, the more difficult it is to flatten. But, it's difficult to overcome the immediate association of 'thick' with 'old'! And 'old' frequently means 'treasure'! And, to be sure, that association is true, whether the 'old' translates into sought-after footers, such as a 'Quality' or 'Safety First', or that marvelously intricate and eye-appealing art work, etc.

The thinner covers, on the other hand, have always seemed to me to be at least more 'collector-friendly.' Even though they're significantly thinner, it's not necessarily always the case that they are 'flimsier' (in a 'cheap' sense) or more poorly made. Perhaps there were improvements in the necessary technology, but in any event one could certainly argue that the thinner covers are, in fact, the better made covers of the two types. Plus, not only are they easier to flatten and eventually mount on those slotted pages, but the outside surfaces of these newer covers are literally much slicker, and thus provide an additional reason why they are easier to insert in slotted pages. Also, when dealing with the thinner covers in bulk, the collector finds that the postage for mailing them in trades is less (because they don't weigh as much, and more can be packed into that envelope), more pages can be fit into an album, and they generally take up less room all together...in stacks, bundles, boxes, etc.

So, am I going to get rid of my thicker covers?.....Heck no!