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# Collecting Manumarks

by  
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For those new to the hobby, a “manumark” is that little line(s) under the striker that identifies the company that is responsible for the cover’s production, one way or the other. On the very old covers, collectors also often use the “footer” at the bottom of the cover (i.e., “Diamond Quality,” “For Safety,” etc.) in conjunction with the manumark for identification purposes.

Collecting manumarks represents a fairly technical side of the hobby, I suppose, but it offers a number of benefits to those who “dare to dabble.” It certainly teaches you a lot about the historical and geographic make-up of the match industry over the years. Manumarks also show take-overs, mergers, buy-outs, etc. within the industry, but most of all a study of manumarks allows the collector to gain a better insight into what the hobby is based on. It’s something like the difference between just knowing how to drive and actually knowing how to work on your car [*I’ve never mastered the latter, myself*].

The covers in your collection now take on a multi-dimensional quality. Whereas before, the covers simply represented defunct hotels, for example, now those same covers also tell you something about the history of the industry, the rarity of the cover, and (my own particular favorite) the age of the cover.

The first problem you’re faced with in collecting manumarks is deciding exactly what it is you’re going to collect. Yes, you’re collecting manumarks, but are you going to only collect manumarks from actual match manufacturers (i.e., Lion, Universal, Monarch, Eddy, etc.), or are you going to collect every different manumark line(s) you can find? That’s an important question, since *most* manumarks are actually from advertising agencies, novelty companies, and the like—the middlemen of the industry. These non-manufacturers simply line up the advertisers and then job the actual printing of the cover to the manufacturer or printer while taking care to have their own company name put on as the manumark. Many of these companies are rather tenuous, hole-in-the-wall affairs. The result being that there are literally thousands of these “ad agency” type manumarks, with more popping up all the time. So many, in fact, that for my own purposes I decided not to include these when I originally began collecting manumarks. Also, since my interest is in the manufacturers, these “middleman” groups, although especially essential to the process in recent years, aren’t normally primary to the industry.

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I *did* made a compromise between the two types of manumarks. A few of the “ad agency” type companies have *very* long associations with matchcovers (i.e., Kaeser & Blair, E. I. Plottle, and Willens & Co.). Kaeser & Blair, in fact were printing covers as far back as the 1890s! *These* companies I’ve *always* kept track of.

Truth be told, I didn’t actually have a manumark collection, as such, since I didn’t actually save a sample cover of each manumark. I’m only interested in them for research purposes, so I photocopied each different manumark I found and put the “copies” into an album. Thus, I suppose, I maintained a manumark “catalog” rather than an actual collection.

The next problem you have to deal with is exactly how picky you are going to be when it comes to what constitutes a “different” manumark. What if both manumarks have the same wording, but one is in all caps? What if everything is identical, but on one the manumark is upside down? It’s your collection; you’re free to make whatever calls you feel comfortable with [*I collected all variations*].

Finally, how do you organize them? I arranged them alphabetically, by company, and then by age. By the way, you know that hole in the top of many older covers that you never really cared for? Well, now you’re going to hate them because that hole goes right *through* the manumark you’re trying to read, often rendering that cover useless for your purposes!

Well, after going through all of this, you’d better believe that your eyes are going to widen with awe each time you run across some rare or unknown manumark. The challenge is always there; the “hunt” is always on!

Still, in actual fact, there aren’t many collectors who collect manumarks; it’s not for the feint of heart. And, I must admit that a few years ago I changed directions, myself. I still collect manumarks (the actual covers this time), but now I only collect by company—one each of any variation of the company name. The locations don’t matter. So that, for example, I’d be interested in both of these covers:

Lion Match, NYC  
Lion Match Co., NYC

Because the company names, as shown, are technically different. But, I wouldn’t be interested in the second cover indicated here:

Lion Match Co., NYC  
Lion Match Co., Chicago

Because the company name is the same; it’s only the location that’s different. And now I *do* collect all those manumarks from all those novelty companies, advertising companies, and the like, and that (using the collecting parameters I’ve set up for myself) is a nightmare! The little companies especially, they often seem to *never* print their names in the same format. For example, for the same company, I might see:

A. T. Ames, Little Rock, Ark.  
A. T. Ames Co., Little Rock, Ark.  
Adam T. Ames, Little Rock, Ark.  
A. T. Ames & Son, Little Rock, Ark.  
Ames & Son, Little Rock, Ark..

*All* from the same company, and each, for me, collectible. You might ask, “Why collect all the variations?” I do because, again, it often shows an evolution of the particular company. For example, there originally was a Superior manumark, but after that company’s merger with Monarch, a Superior/Monarch

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manumark popped up. Additionally, I maintain a listing of such, so I also tell myself I'm compiling a little bit of history for future collectors and researchers.

Thus, you can already see that I've collected manumarks in three different ways, so far (!), so I can categorically tell you that if *you* are going to collect such, be ready to deal with a numerically *big* category! I've only been collecting them in the latter format for a fairly short time, and I already have some 4,700, so we're potentially looking at...tens of thousands?

One of my own little quirks, here, by the way, is that I also try to collect these in 20-strike size only. I have some in other sizes, including boxes, but I try to focus on 20 strikes; they're just easier to handle, store, etc. I would hope to be able to replace those other sizes with similar manumarks on 20-strikes, but I'm sure that won't be possible 100% of the time. Oname, for example, didn't make 20-stikes.

Still another facet of collecting manumarks is the housing of such a collection. In my own particular circumstance, I'm never going to have the money—or the space—to put the largest of my collections (Zip Codes, Towns, and Manufacturers' Manumarks) in plastic pages and 3-ring binders. There are just *too many* covers! So, although I'd dearly love to do it otherwise, I have my manumark covers currently in large trays, sorted by state—and, yes, I do have a niche for those manumarked covers where the state can't be figured out! Eventually, there will be too many such trays, though, and I'll simply have to box the covers up and store them in the garage—all the while looking for, and adding, more!

