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” (?).
1926. **Description:** Founded in Tacoma in 1924, the Pacific Match Company produced over 80 million wood stick matches per day at its peak production. White pine from Eastern Washington and Idaho was turned into brand name matches such as Sunset, Fire Chief, Lite King and Red Head in the factory at 3223 So. Union Avenue. Pacific Match closed in 1964, largely due to competition from the Diamond Match Company of Ohio. Bowen 2647.

[http://search.tacomapubliclibrary.org](http://search.tacomapubliclibrary.org)

07-22-1939. **Description:** This horse drawn wagon loaded with pioneers was entered by the Pacific Match Co. in the July 22, 1939 Golden Jubilee Parade. A sign on the side of the wagon reads "We don't make all the matches in the country... we just make the best of them." The sign on the front of the wagon identifies the driver as Mr. James E. Sales, born in 1853, the first white child born in Tacoma. He would have been 86 years old at the time of the parade. Pacific Match Co. was located at 3223 So. Union Ave.

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**Description:** Pacific Match Company in 1948. The company was founded in 1924 by O.V. Snyder and F.J. Cronkhite. At this time their daily output was 50 million matches and O.V. Snyder served as president, T.J. Anderson as vice-president, and F.J. Cronkhite as secretary-treasurer. This facility is currently owned by the Tacoma Public Schools.

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**Description:** Office and officers of the Pacific Match Co. Inc. in 1929. Seated at desk, Osee V. Snyca. President-general manager. Standing, 2nd from left, John O. Pasnick, bookkeeper; 6th from left, Tobi J. Anderson, bookkeeper; 5th from right, Fredrick J. Cronkhite, secretary-treasurer.

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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.

It’s too bad. From the viewpoint of a non-industry person, at least, Washington was certainly an ideal place to make matches, if not sell them—right on the coast for easy shipping access, abundant forests, plenty of room to expand...but, in the end, it just wasn’t enough. Pacific Match Co. had always had competition, both right at home and nationally from the big boys such as Universal, Diamond, and Lion. In between, there were also the West Coast companies: Crown Match Co. and Monarch Match Co. It’s rather amazing, actually, that the company lasted as long as it did. Tacoma must have taken a substantial hit when the company finally folded.

Thus ended the story of Tacoma’s line of Pacific Match companies. They left their mark 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.

As far as the covers go, I only have 15 listed, and, personally, I only have the one pictured on page one, so they’re certainly not abundant. As for boxes, I have these three examples from my ‘Trademarks’ collection. Just from the numbers, here, it would be a pretty good guess that the Pacific Match companies always had their focus on wooden matches for boxes, rather than paper matches for matchbooks.

If anyone has examples of either covers or boxes from the Pacific Match Co. not shown here, I’d appreciate receiving scans. Your covers may be hitherto unlisted, and I’d like to see what the Sunset, Lite King Safety, etc. boxes looked like.

Perhaps our members in the Washington-Oregon area could come up with something.