

Match Manufacturers:

Lion Match Co.

What a company! Its Golden Age is long over, eclipsed by a number of other giants in the industry, and today it is no more, but it *was* truly something to behold.

Unlike the Ohio Match Co., which seemed to sacrifice innovation for security, Lion Match was always a mover and a shaker within the industry, not afraid to gamble on new lines and new ideas. It paid a price for that risk-taking streak. The company went out of business twice, before it finally disappeared for good in the 1990s, and it had its ups and downs in between, but to the collector...the Lion Match Co. is a doubloon in a sea of copper pennies!

After a false start in 1917, Lion started in 1924. It merged into Lion Match Corp. in 1965; it operated in California from 1937-1967. It was revived in 1980 only to disappear for good in 1993 amid the general late-1980s industry collapse. Its major production centers were Brooklyn, NY, and Chicago, IL.

Along the way, Lion Match may have taken over the old Atlas Match Co., Hercules Match Co., Manhattan Match Co., Merit Match Co., and National Match Co., but the records I have been able to find are so sketchy that it's impossible to really pin down such takeovers.

There's no doubt about Lion's contributions to the industry (and the hobby!), however. Lion Safety Firsts were issued from 1919-1928; its famous "Green Hat" trademark appeared in 1926. In the same year, Lion introduced its "Drunkard Match" (self-extinguishing). From 1934-1943, Lion produced its famous "Midget" line.

In the 1930s, perhaps the most cherished of all the Lion trademarks appeared—the "Feature." There's nothing like holding an old Lion full-book Feature in the palm of your hand. You notice right away that it's not like any other cover. It's heavier; it's thicker; and you know when you open it up that it's going to be a veritable feast for the eyes (sigh!). To see the cheap imitations and printed sticks that were produced in the last two decades, by Lion and other companies, is enough to make the collector cry. But, that's progress.....it *is* progress, isn't it?

Lion certainly didn't stop with the Feature, though. Lion also started its famous "Giant" line in the 1930s. Around 1941, production of the odd-striker type began, along with its "Eez-L" cover. Around the same time, another innovation—the "Display." In 1951, another of its famous trademarks made its appearance for the first time—the "Contour."

1956 proved to be Lion's zenith, perhaps. Lion's "True Color," "Poster Features," and "Model Match" appeared, and around that time, Lion also managed to come up with its "Wagon Tongues," "Stipple Finish," "Taffeta," and "Aztec." After that, it was downhill for the next 40-odd years.

Pictured here is a great 1927 dated Lion Safety First

