

HOBBY HISTORY

“Lucifer Lights” of Mechanicstown, MD

by Mike Prero

[The following comes to us from an unnamed book in a Maryland library that James Williard, MD, came across]

“In the one and a half story limestone building (former blacksmith shop) on the south side of West Main Street, almost across the street from the brownstone residence of Jacob Weller and wife Anna Margaret, matches were made from about 1825 to perhaps 1850. Later the building was raised to two stories. It is believed that Jacob Weller himself developed the process of cutting a wooden block, dipping the ends into a sulfur-oxidant mixture, and then cutting the matches free.

It is said that Jacob had examined French friction matches. It is quite possible that his son Joseph (1807-1875) assisted in match production as a young man. However, Joseph and wife Susanna Reifsnnyder early moved to Baltimore.

As a merchant in Baltimore, Joseph showed outstanding ability as a business man and cooperated with his father in finding outlets for matches and metal products of Mechanicstown.

Donald E. Ward says that Joseph Weller sold his general store in Baltimore to the Hutzler family. The edge tools and Lucifer matches of Mechanicstown were supplied as far away as the West Indies...Boxes containing 75 matches were sold for 12 1/2 cents.

In 1970 a match box marked “Lucifer Lights 12 1/2 Cents” was found in an attic in Alexandria, Virginia. In 1835 a newspaper of Washington, D.C. announced the arrival of a supply of lucifer

matches in neat boxes at 12 1/2 cents. It is possible that these came from Mechanicstown.

Jacob Weller also sold medicines, and his medicine wagon is recorded in the Frederick Court House. No authentic picture of Jacob is said to exist. Pictures of the Match House and other views of the Thurmont area were published in a book, Gateway to the Mountains, by George W. Wireman in 1969. The match house suffered at least two disastrous fires. It was pictured widely in National Air Mail Week in 1938. The tilt hammer of the edged-tool factory served as a morning alarm clock for the town.

[Note: To avoid duplication of names of towns, the Western Maryland Railroad insisted that the name of Mechanicstown be changed. After much discussion, the citizens adopted the name of “Thurmont” around 1898.]
