

HOBBY HISTORY

The Tortured History of the Match: II

*[Excerpted from Diamond Match Company's
Fifty Years of Match Making 1878-1928]
[so keep in mind that this was written in 1928]*

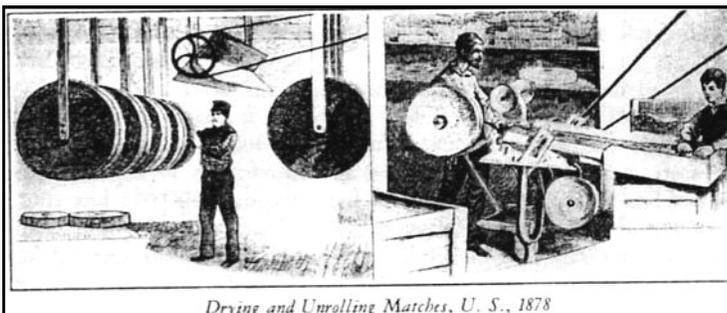
“The next process is ‘unrolling.’ The circular bundle of splints is placed on an axel of the ‘unroller’, the ends of the belts unfastened and passed together between two cylinders, then separated and made fast to two axles, one over and the other under the machine. These axles turning unwind the bundle, the matches being held between the belts being liberated at the point where they separate. The double matches are now taken to the cutting and boxing table. At these tables they are cut through the center by a knife worked by a pedal. They are then boxed. One knife suffices for two girls; while one is cutting the other is boxing. This work goes on with bewildering rapidity, there being no pause between different operations, each movement passing into the succeeding one, making a continued motion. A practised boxer and cutter is able to turn out three thousand boxes in a day. The phosphorus compound for the heads of the matches containing also glue or gum, chlorate of potash, and the coloring, is first fused in a pot, and then more thoroughly mixed by grinding in an iron mill. During the grinding care has to be taken to prevent combustion from friction. For this purpose a man stands ready with a small broom charged with water, which he sprinkles on any sparks that appear. The chief difference between the

parlor match and the common match is that the former contains no sulphur, its place being supplied by stearic acid or some other combustible.

“There is one difficulty attendant upon the manufacture of matches which makes it an employment to be shunned by those who are able to find some other means of subsistence. The acid fumes thrown off by the phosphorus during the various processes frequently cause among the people employed a terrible disease, which attacks the teeth and jaws. To such an extent did it prevail at one time in Germany that the attention of the government was called to it. The dippers are most likely to suffer in this way, in consequence of having to stand for hours over the heated slab upon which the phosphorus is spread. Persons with decayed teeth are most susceptible to this disease, and therefore they are carefully excluded from the factories. Indeed, the principle employees are young people of both sexes. No antidote has yet been discovered, and the natural course of the disease is to rot the entire jawbone away. This generally occupies several years., with a constant discharge of matter inside and outside the mouth. The pain is not very acute, but the sufferer seldom survives the natural course of the disease. Sometimes an operation is successful, and many have been performed at the New York Hospital. Sometimes it has been found necessary to remove the whole of the jawbone. Thorough ventilation and careful attention to cleanliness will



Cutting and Boxing Matches, U. S., 1878



Drying and Unrolling Matches, U. S., 1878

do much toward preventing the disease in the beginning, and these points are sedulously regarded in the better class of match manufactories.”

The story continues in our next issue.