Filigrees

by
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Well, right off the bat, I'm at a disadvantage here because these photos don't demonstrate what a *Filigree* actually is. The scanner can't capture the relief surface of the matchcover—the ups and down—and that's what a filigree is: a cover with a random, plastic-bubbled surface.

Aside from the bubbles, themselves, these covers have the same feel as a Uniglo—a soft, plastic, almost "oily," feel. The bubbling is random, which I stress because when you find the bubbling channeled into designs, you've crossed over from a *Filigree* to a type of *Florentine*. In any event, it's the feel of a Filigree that tells you right away that this is not an ordinary cover, that it's something special. And, special it is, which is why it's collected as its own category.

Uniglo and *Florentine* are both Universal trademarks, so it's not surprising to see, then, that *Filigree*, itself, was a Universal Match Corp. trademark for such covers. Universal produced them from 1969 to 1987. They were quite a popular type of 'Fancy" cover, judging from the numbers that exist—and from how many of the competing match manufacturers copied the process. Lion had its *Stipple Finish*; Maryland had its *Rhapsody*; Monarch/Superior had its *Orleans*; etc.
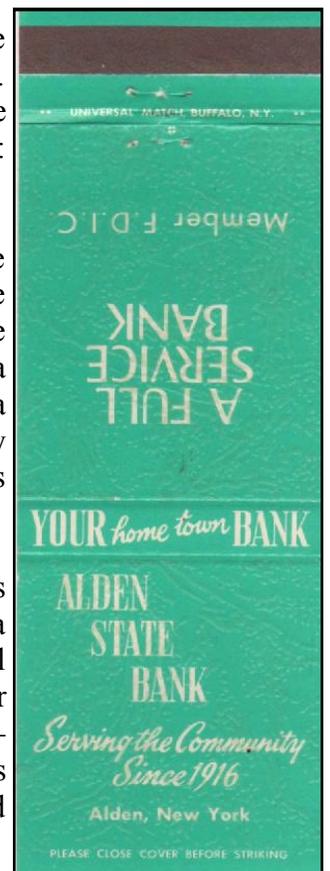
I'm a *Filigree* collector, myself, but I believe I first became familiar with them when working on my Bank covers. There are lots of Fancies to be seen in any Bank collection, and that includes Filigrees. And the variety of Filigrees is very satisfying, indeed—20s, 30s, 40s, Filigree Jewels and Jewelites; even Filigree American Ace boxes; all in singles and in beautiful sets. I don't remember ever seeing any Filigree 10s, though. Can't see any in my own collection.

There is a listing of *Filigree* covers, but users should definitely be aware that it includes Filigree-like covers—IF you only look at the term "Filigree" as meaning the Universal covers. The listing, then, is actually a "Filigree-like" listing, wherein any cover that is an actual Filigree or like a Filigree is included.

The original listing was initiated by Jim Moffett and then taken over by Evelyn Hovious. Ruth Richmond handled the list from 1981-1989, taking the list up to 6,063. Margo Houser added a supplementary list of older issues not yet listed. Today the list is dormant. There are still many unlisted covers, but no one has stepped forward to continue the listing.

The first *listed* 150 Filigrees were made by Universal. However, by June 1970, Atlas Match, using a similar process, issued its first Filigree-type match, #152 on the Filigree list. This matchcover has a much different pattern, but is still of the Filigree type. Atlas also issued 3 covers from the China Doll in San Diego. These covers are perhaps the hardest to obtain of the early filigrees.

Monarch Match, joining Atlas and Universal, issued its first Filigree-like cover early in 1972. This cover is #564 on the Filigree list. By then, Atlas had issued 5 covers and Universal, who owned the trade name *Filigree*, 458 covers. Soon, most of the major match companies had climbed on the band wagon and issued Filigree-like matches. There have been many sets, 31 single jewels and many 10 strikes. One of the earliest dated Filigrees is dated "1881-1971".
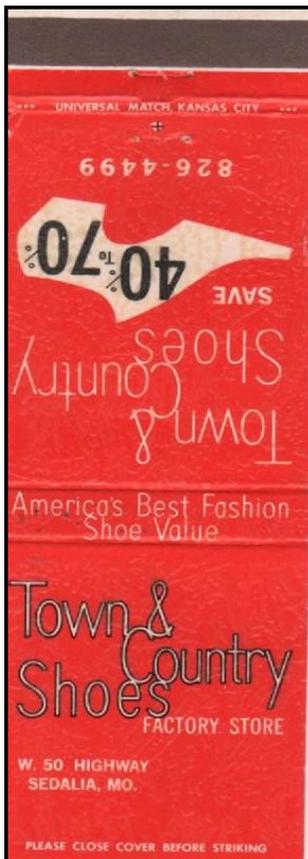
Many banks had Filigree sets consisting of from 2 to 16 covers to a set, with captions or information about the bank's services on the inside. The Marines and the Navy also issued Filigree Jewelites in their recruiting campaigns. The early Filigrees are scarce (only a caddy or so was issued with a case of regularly ordered matches).

Unfortunately, and to my way of thinking, inexplicably, collecting interest in all of the Fancies has drastically dwindled since the late 1980s. But, I have a theory as to why. I believe that collectors are more concerned with cover subject matter than cover beauty or quality....hmmmmmm.

The largest collection I know of was that of Helen Hollmann, PA, who reported having 11,318 in November 2010, so this is a *big* category!

This would be a good time to start collecting Filigrees; they should be easily available.