

GORHAM MATCH SAFES AND THEIR ARCHIVAL RECORDS

By Neil Shapiro

Would not every match safe collector like to know who actually made their safes, who chased, etched or decorated their safes? Even better, if the safe was made for a specific individual wouldn't the collector like to know for whom it was made? And even better yet, all collectors would like to know how many of a particular safe were made over the course of time.

The answers to some of those questions have been found with regard to the Gorham Corporation's match safe production from 1855–1930. George Sparacio and I, working under an IMSA grant, have been sifting through hundreds of thousands of archival documents at the John Hay Library at Brown University in Providence, RI. The preliminary results of some of that work are shown below as they were presented to IMSA members at the Manchester, UK meeting in 2005 and in California in 2004. Our preliminary report from 2004 follows:

The Gorham Corporation has a large number of very detailed records on all of their products. To search for their production of match safes the researcher needs to examine their Costing Ledgers, the Samples and Specials Costing Boxes, the Photographic Albums and other miscellaneous records.

Since Gorham appears to have made match safes from 1855 until well into the 20th century it is not possible to limit the search to a particular time period, nor is it possible to look only in certain logical places for match safes, e.g., silver manufacturing. Match safes are found in every conceivable record location, ecclesiastical, silver, gold, jewelry, specials, samples, copper, bronze, etc. To fully search all of Gorham's records means sifting through hundreds of thousands of documents. After two long research visits we have looked at about 100,000 documents of all descriptions. [The number of documents reviewed has significantly increased since the preliminary report was written.].

When the study is completed we will be able, in many cases, to know the maker, the person who ornamented the safe and in some cases how many were made. We will determine who did the work on the safes by cross referencing the payroll records with the work assignments. Gorham designated certain rooms and particular desks in those rooms to individuals and particular kinds of work. On each cost record are the amounts of safes made that day. Each time that Gorham made another order of the same safe they added the totals made to the cost record. Hence, by adding up all the recorded entries, a total of safes made will be determined.

Finally, we hope to upload all the data to the IMSA web site so that anyone will be able to access this information from anywhere that they have the facilities to logon.

How Gorham actually manufactured match safes will be an essay for future IMSA newsletters.

Big Match Box @

PRICES APPROVED
JUL 1 1898
F. O. Lawton

DATE MADE
JUL 1 1898

PRODUCTION NUMBER
B 197

PRICES APPROVED
AUG 5 1898
F. O. Lawton

SUPPLIES

Silver		
Making, apply	35	20
Wire		
Stamping		
Spinning		
Turning		
Casting		
" Chas.		
Piercing		
Ivory		
Stoning		
Bobbing		
G. R.		
Burnishing hand		
" lathe		
Finishing		

Cost of coin

Share of Dot

Cost of coin & application

TOTAL COST

Net 6.00

B 7 with Cuban dollar applied

B 6 with Appl 1/2 coin on one side Enam 1/2 S Play on the other

PRODUCTION #, SPECIAL, SILVER
RETAIL DIVISION

DATE SAFE MADE
March 18, 01

MATERIAL, WEIGHT, COST
Silver 1/2 oz. 1.50

WHERE MADE G. R. M. TIME, COST
Drawing 1.00
Stamping 1.00
Spinning 1.00
Turning 1.00
Casting 1.00
" Chas. 1.00
Piercing 1.00
Ivory 1.00
Stoning 1.00
Bobbing 1.00
G. R. 1.00
Burnishing hand 1.00
" lathe 1.00
Finishing 1.00

ENGRAVED, COST, TIME
ETCHED, COST, TIME

FINISH SHINE, TIME, COST

OXIDIZED FINISH, TIME, COST

NET PRICE \$4.50 EACH

SAME SHAPE AS "B 4"
PRE-PRODUCTION DRAWING

KIND OF FINISH
NUMBER MADE

32 made

244 vol 10
1899

Match and Stamp Boxes & Cases

DATE	DATE	1899	1899	1898	1898	1898	1898
NO. #	NO. B	157	158	159	160	161	162
WEIGHT		5.10	6.00	7.10	1.50		1.12
MATERIAL		3.85	4.20	5.10	6.80	7.50	8.00
TIME		1.75	2.10	2.50	3.00	3.50	4.00
Stamping		3.00	3.50	4.00	4.50	5.00	5.50
Drawing		1.00	1.20	1.50	1.80	2.00	2.20
Spinning							
Pressing							
Turning							
Casting							
" Chas.							
Piercing							
Engraving							
Clasping							
Stoning							
Bobbing							
G. R.							
Burnishing Hand							
" lathe							
Finishing							
Revised							
Chasing							
Adding							

Net 7.50

Documents from the Gorham Archive. Upper Left - A typical cost slip for match safe B198 and B197. I have drawn annotations to delineate what can be learned from looking at these slips. Notice that the generic shape of the match safe box is B7 and B6 respectively. Gorham frequently used the same shape with different ornamentation. Upper Right - A special safe made to order for someone. It has these words etched on it: THEODORE ROOSEVELT VICE PRESIDENT 1901. Note that only 32 safes were made. Lower Left - From a costing ledger. Note the special cost for the safes made in its New York City manufactory at the bottom of the page.

Lists of the tables that I used in the database. This will be available to all IMSA members and has all of this information as it applies to each individual safe along with archival and real images of the safes. The motifs, types, decorations, finishings and materials are all taken directly from the Gorham records.

MATERIALS: Aluminum, Brass, Bronze, Copper, Enamel, Glass, Gold 10K, Gold 14K, Gold 18K, Gold 22K, Gold green, Gold inlaid, Gold red, Gun metal, Iron, Ivory, Mixed Metal, Mother of Pearl, Platinum, Silver 950, Silver plate (electro), Steel, Sterling Silver.

TYPES: Exhibition, Experimental, Martele, Production, Sample, Special.

DECORATIONS: Acid etched, Applied work, Brite cut, Champleve, Chasing, Cloisonne, Cuban coins, Diamonds, Embossing, Engine turning, Engraving, Etching, Gilding, Hammering, Initials, Inlaid gold, Jewels, Mixed metals, Monogram, Niello, Oxidation, Painted enamel, Pearls, Piercing, Plain box, Push stone, Raised border, Repousse, Ruby, Stamping, Stones, USA coins.

MOTIFS: Animals, Art deco, Art Nouveau, Asian, Basketweave, Border design, Botanical, Cartoons, Cherubs, Classical design, Cuban coin, Devils, Dragon, Drinking, Enamel, Equestrian, Faces, Fairies, Figural, Flags, Floral, Fraternal, Gambling, Geometric, Golf, Hammered, Hunting scene, Indians, Insects, Mask, Man, Mixed metal, Monogram, Myths, Nationalistic, Nudes, Paris Exhibition, Patterns, Political, Presentational, Rococo, Schools, Scrolls, Sea creatures, Smoking, Snakes, USA coin, War, Women.

FINISHINGS: Bobbing, Burnishing, Coloring steel, Fluting, French Finish, Gilding, Gold wash, Green rouge, Hand burnishing, Lathe burnishing, Polishing, Red Rouge, Stoning.