

Mysterious Gorham Match Safes

By Neil Shapiro

Recently, a sterling silver match safe was sold at a public auction that bore the marks, GORHAM MFG. CO. on one side of the bezel, and HAND MADE, STERLING, 618 on the other side of the bezel. Between the words “hand” and “made” there was a larger than normal space for reading these words.



Match safe marked “Gorham Mfg. Co. and “Hand Made, Sterling, 618”



Bezel of Gorham match safe

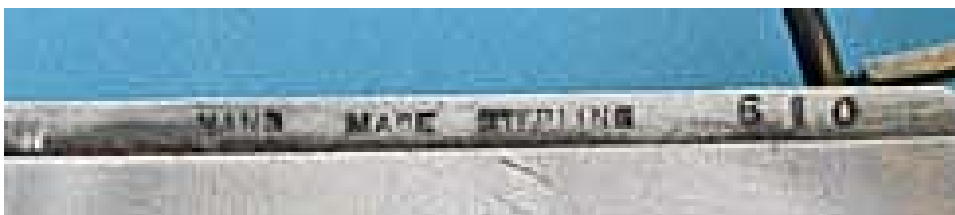


The other side of the bezel of the Gorham hand made match safe

This match safe lacks of the familiar Gorham marks of a “lion”, “anchor”, and “G” which is very unusual for a Gorham sterling silver match safe. In fact, it is the only non-figural, sterling match safe known to lack the Gorham marks.

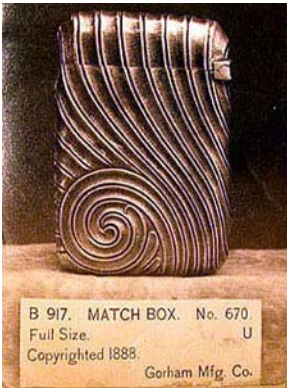
Another interesting fact about this safe is the spacing between the word “hand” and “made”. There are a number of match safes that have this unusual spacing for these two words but no one has ever seen a match safe with these words and this spacing that has a maker’s name on it. This is the first one. Below are four other examples with these identical words and spacing.





The match safe with the number 641 on the bezel is a plain cased example as is the one with the Gorham mark. The match safe with the emblem of the Military Athletic League has the number 610 on the bezel.

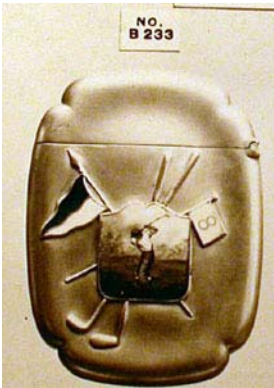
The example with the Moorish ornamentation has no number on the bezel and the other safe has a set of crossed gold clubs with an enameled golf flag on the front of the case. It is numbered 670. The number 670 is problematic as Gorham made a fully marked match safe number 670 in 1888 that looks nothing like the golf safe. The same is true for number 610. These would not be a unique occurrences as in at least two instances Gorham made match safes with the same number but different shapes and designs (see # B3804, p.97, *Gorham Match Safes*). Gorham did, however, make a number of match safes that use golf paraphernalia in a stylistically similar manner to the hand made one marked 670. Two examples from the Gorham Archives of golf safes having the Gorham marks are below.



This is an archival image of #670 first made in 1888.



Archival image of #610



Gorham enamel & silver safe #B233 (Image #1)



Gorham silver safe #B206 (Image #2)



Hand made #670



Hand made with no number



Hand made #641



Hand made #610



Notice the enameled golf flag in image #1 it is almost identical to the flag (image



from #B233) (image from #670) in the hand made example. Image #2 has a set of golf clubs that look similar to the hand made example with the number 670 on the bezel.

All four safes that are marked hand made and have no maker's marks are heavy and very well constructed. None of them are thin pieces of silver that are easily stamped out in the factory. The golf motif safe has both clubs and the flag applied to the side of the case as does the Moorish looking example. All three unmarked examples have cases that are shaped exactly as some Gorham marked cases are shaped, a technique that Gorham repeatedly used in their production.

Even though the Moorish motif safe is inscribed with the date, "Feby. 15, 1901" it is possible that the safe was made circa 1870 – 1890 and the inscription added at a late date. The 1870 – 1890 period is when Tiffany, Gorham, Woods & Chatellier, and Dominick & Haff were making Persian designed objects many of which had intricate scrollwork applied as surface decoration to simulate a "Mooreque style". The Gorham golf safe #B233 was made in 1898 which leads this writer to believe that Gorham made special order safes over a 20-30 year period which they did not wish to put their name or mark for some reason.

At this point it is not possible to definitively conclude that the unmarked match safes are made by Gorham, but certainly there are enough similarities to suggest that the unmarked safes are made by Gorham. Perhaps there are other examples that may help with the attribution of the unmarked match safes.

Other match safes have “hand made” stamped on them but they do not have the unusual spacing nor do they lack the maker’s mark. Below are some examples from the Woods and Chatellier Co.



The author would like to know if other collectors have any hand made safes with or without maker’s marks. If the reader does have any examples please send an image to the author at nshapir1@nycap.rr.com.