

## RUSSIAN MATCH HOLDERS

Featured In: Vol 2 #3 July 1, 2000

By Neil Shapiro

---

To understand the history of Russian match holders it is necessary to know a bit about the Russian system of hallmarks and some aspects of Russian silver and gold smithing. Up until the late 19th and early part of the 20th century Russian silver and gold was not marked in a unified manner; each locality marked their pieces differently.

Once the marking of Russian metals was standardized, the "Koloshnik" mark showed the initials of the director of the assay district, as well as the Zolotnik Standard. The Zolotnik is a Russian denomination of weight, equal to 4.5 grams or 1/96 of a Russian pound (later it became 1/72 of a pound). Thus a conversion table for Zolotniki to carats has values that run from:

- 1 zolotnik = 10.4166/1000 = 1/4 carats
- 4 zolotnik = 41.66 /1000 = 1 carat
- 84 zolotnik = 875/1000 = 21 carats
- 88 zolotnik = 916.67/1000 = 22 carats
- 91 zolotnik = 947.92/1000 = 22.75 carats
- 96 zolotnik = 1000/1000 = 24 carats

Hence, 96 zolotniki equal 24 carats in the USA system. If a piece did not meet the silver or gold standard it was stamped with the cyrillic letters N.P. which transliterates as English i r (see Figure 1) that meant it was rejected by the assayers.

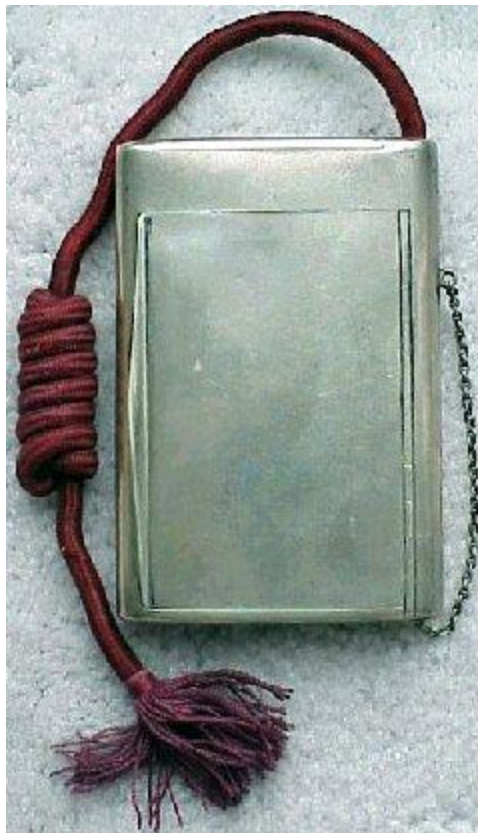
Н            i    P            r

FIGURE 1

The other marks that often appear with the Koloshnik mark are a girl's head with a "kokoshnik" (a peasant head dress) looking right or left. The profile right was introduced in 1908. There are often other marks that may signify regional designations (Greek letters) or places of assay (see appendix # 2) or import marks.



Maker is Sazikov. Firm founded in 1793 in Moscow. In 1842 opened a branch in St. Petersburg and in 1846 received the Imperial Warrant. Firm closed in 1917. Known for its high quality silverware. Exhibited at Great Exhibition, London, 1851.



“KOKOSENİK” mazas used from 1906-1908

	Assayer mark “L. K.” for Andreyevich for Kamov imperial mark.		Assayer region Assayer mark “D. B.”
			
	Ass.		Moscow region Assayer L. S. Lebedev
	Sakhalin region Assayer A. Solodov 1895-1903		St. Petersburg region Assayer 1897-1903 1898-1903
	Facing to the right Assayer Assayer Tarkis 1908-1911		Assayer mark used on imported products until the 1904 Imperial “Sibir” mark for Moscow
	Circular assayer mark used with “A.”		The “hammer type” assayer mark for articles that were not required to be assayed
	For silver and gold articles weighing less than 25 gram space assayer		
			
	For silver and gold articles weighing more than 25 gram		Kappa for Siberia region
			
	Mark for St. Petersburg Region		
	Mark for Moscow region		

To review; Russian silver and gold for the period that match safes were made (1845 - 1925) had:

1. Maker's mark
2. Assayer's mark or tester's initials
3. Silver standard mark
4. City hallmarks

There were several important centers of gold and silver workers in Russia during the 1845 - 1925 period. They were Moscow, St. Petersburg, Velikiy Ustyug, Tobolsk and the Baltic Provinces and Finland. Moscow work tended to consist of traditional designs. Thus from 1860 on the 17th century style of cloisonné enamel work was resumed with its tendencies toward an "oriental" look.

St. Petersburg craftsmen developed a new style that had a western orientation yet retained Russian characteristics. From about 1830 through 1930, Russian aristocrats favored English design and Russian silver work showed evidence of that liking. The idea of combining European art with Russian technical genius produced great pieces of art, e.g., Faberge.

Veliky Ustyug was noted for its niello work and the Baltic Provinces and Finland sent most of their greatest silver and goldsmiths to Russia and St. Petersburg, in particular. It is interesting to note that many of Faberge's finest workers were Finnish.

Faberge's firm received the Imperial Warrant in 1884-85 and had branches in Moscow (from 1887), Odessa (1890 - 1918), Kiev (1905 - 10) and London (1903 - 15). The firm was especially noted for its guilloche enameling and stone carving techniques.

Many of the finest Russian match holders used enamel\* as a decorative element.

There are many different ways of using enamel on match holders. Some of them are:

#### **Incised enamel:**

1. champléve (cavity fusion enamel): depressions are made in the metal and filled with colored, opaque enamel.
2. basse - taille: enamel is laid in depressions that are carved in low relief. The different depth of the carvings give different shades of color.
3. guilloche: metal is incised, by machine, with parallel, intertwined, concentric or circular lines to form a wave-like pattern. Translucent enamel is laid on so the incised pattern remains visible.

#### **Cloisonné:**

1. metal ridges are soldered on a plate in an outline and form compartments that are filled with enamel.

2. plique-a-jour: a filigree design is made of silver wire and its strands are soldered together. The openings are filled with transparent enamel. Hence, you wind up with a stained glass window effect.

From a technical point of view, enameled match holders represent the most complicated craftsmanship of the Russian smiths. Many decorative techniques were combined with enameling to produce an integrated whole; some of them are punching, chasing, engraving and guilloching.

Briefly, chasing is a continuous decoration achieved by moving the punch while it is being hit by a hammer. While simple punching is just what it sounds like, a hammer hitting a punch to mark the metal.

Also important to all match safe collectors is the nielloed technique that is frequently found on Russian safes. Niello is an alloy of silver, copper (or zinc), lead and sulphur. Proportions varied with the maker. Niello is black or grey-black in color and is used to fill engraved decoration.

To make niello, the above ingredients are mixed together, heated and allowed to cool. Then it is ground to make a fine powder and moistened with boracic solution. The paste that results is applied to silver and gold that has been carved. The piece is then fired and the niello adheres to the metal. After the firing is completed the extra niello is ground off and the surface is polished.

While much of the Russian nielloed work is attributed to metal workers from Tula, a city south of Moscow they were, in fact, made in Moscow or St Petersburg.

Finally, it is important to remember that at the end of the 18th century a law was passed stating that silver articles could not be below "84" silver standard therefore all Russian silver match safes made between 1845 - 1917 are, at least, of that quality.

I hope that this brief article helps collectors to identify their Russian match holders and appreciate some of the techniques used to create them.

\*" Enamel is a form of glass flux made from siliceous sand and colored with metal oxides." ( p. 39,von Solodkoff).

---

## SOURCES CONSULTED

Paulsen, Paul E. GUIDE TO RUSSIAN SILVER HALLMARKS,1976

von Solodkoff, RUSSIAN GOLD AND SILVERWORK. 17TH - 19TH

CENTURY. Rizzoli International Publications, Inc. New York, 1981

Photos courtesy of John Capano.



Gustav Gustavovich Klingert

Firm founded in 1865 ended in 1917. Exhibited at Chicago World's Fair, 1893. Until 1899 his mark was in Latin characters, thereafter in Cyrillic. Trademark style is use of filigree tracery.



Russian smoker's combination cask of rounded oblong form with reeding, with match safe compartment and taper tube with knarled wheel, the cover with applied gold monogram. St. Petersburg, circa, 1895. 7oz. I think it is from the Grikurov workshop.

