

## **A Tinderbox Match Safe Hybrid**

By Neil Shapiro

Prior to the invention of friction matches in 1826 fire and light were difficult to achieve. Generally one needed a spark and fuel, and the appropriate item to be lit. Usually the spark was achieved by the use of flint and steel. Special tinderboxes were created for homes that were not easily portable, as well as smaller ones that could be carried on the person. This essay is about a tinderbox match safe combination, a transitional hybrid.

Description:

This small metal box has two hinged sides and a steel attachment for striking the flint on the side.

On the edge of each lid are finger lifts to make the box easier to open. The striking steel is shaped in a soft curve around the box.

The box measures 2/1/2" x 1 3/4" x 1". It has a simple, etched scroll design on both sides and a vacant cartouche on one side.

The really interesting thing about this box is the ridged match striker on the opposite side of the steel. A small piece of flint is included in the box.

Brief History:

Tinderboxes were commonly used in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Once the friction match was in common use the tinderbox's usefulness diminished and by and large they became hard to find save as curios.

The tinderbox match safe in this essay was purchased by the writer in Spain. It may have begun life as a tinderbox but found a second life as a match safe or it may have been created as a dual purpose container.

It is possible the ridged striker was added to an existing tinderbox because someone was uncertain if the newfangled friction match was going to be successful and replace the reliable flint and tinder. Another possibility is the dual purpose box was made in rural area where friction matches were not easily obtained and the maker of the box was anticipating the availability of the friction match but until that occurred he needed to ignite a fire with flint and tinder.

How the tinderbox was used and what it contained:

- 1- Good tinder was necessary. In the home they took a piece of linen and simply charred or burnt it.
- 2- Flint. Flint is a hard, tough chemical or biochemical sedimentary rock that breaks in a conchoidal (a smooth curving fracture) manner.
- 3- Before the friction match the tinderbox held Sulphur matches - bits of wood tipped with a mixture of chlorate of potash and sugar.
- 4- Steel with a fair amount of carbon in it as low carbon content makes it difficult to create a spark.

- 5- Holding the flint in one hand and the steel in the other the user struck the flint against the steel to create a spark. The spark ignites the tinder, which ignites the Sulphur match and you then had a light for your candle, fire, etc.
- 6- One of the two openings held the tinder and the flint and the other opening held the Sulphur match.

Note: In the outdoors a tinder fungus (something that infects the outside of some trees- it looks like a horse hoof) was collected and used to receive the spark. Other things received the spark as well, e.g., rotten wood



Tinder fungus

As match safe collectors it is interesting to see a transitional piece – an object that incorporates the past and the present, that is, if the present was circa 1915 or so, before the widespread use of the lighter and the end of the use of match safes.



Closed, steel on left side



Striker



both compartments opened



Steel close-up

