

Phillumenist

by Lynne Belluscio

ebay has made it possible to find things for the Historical Society that will add to our collections.

Last week I was elated to see a photograph of Jacob LeRoy on ebay and I immediately put in a \$100 bid. The bid held all week, but in the last seconds, I lost it by \$2.50. Ugh!!! It would have been great to have for the LeRoy collection, but such is the fate of ebay.

I've been luckier on some smaller items – like matchbooks. Somebody has been selling his matchbook collection - - one at a time - - and there have been some LeRoy matchbooks that I have been able to buy. They're interesting because sometimes there is an address or a phone number. Some of the older books only have a three digit phone number.

Collecting matchbooks, I discovered with a Google search, is called "phillumeny," and a matchbook collector is a phillumunist. (And no, it's not in my spellcheck!) Apparently, a matchbook collector in England, coined the name in 1943. Some phillumunists collect other items connected to matches, including match boxes and matchbox labels.

Matches are like mouse traps - -everyone wanted to invent a better one. In the early 1800s, match heads were treated with a variety of chemicals. Called "Lucifers" they were all dangerous. Sometimes they would ignite with just a little friction in your pocket. Others were so poisonous that the factory workers who made matches were sick all the time. White phosphorous was used on the tips of some wooden matches. There was enough phosphorous in a box of matches to kill a person. In fact, some people committed suicide by eating match heads. For safety reasons, white phosphorous was replaced by red phosphorous.

In nearby Niagara Falls, a British company, Albright and Wilson, was manufacturing white phosphorous matches, but in 1910, they discontinued production because the federal government prohibited its

interstate trade. They switched to red phosphorous.

Matchbooks were introduced in 1892 by Joshua Pusey. Two years later the Diamond Match Company purchased the rights to the matchbook. Of course the popularity of the matchbook increased as Americans became hooked on smoking cigarettes.

Every restaurant, bar, business gave away free matchbooks. It was part of advertising. When people were married, they had matchbooks printed to give away to wedding guests. I have matchbooks that my in-laws gave away at their 50th wedding anniversary.

For obvious reasons, we don't store matchbooks with matches. They are carefully removed and the books are flattened and filed alphabetically in an archival box. In some ways, they are much like our ball point pen and pencil collection. They don't take up a lot of room, but they do reflect the business and people of LeRoy. If you have any of these items – ball-point pens, pencils or matchbooks, bring them over to the Historical Society and we'll add them to the collection.

