

## Fox and Cock Fable Match Safe

By Neil Shapiro\*

The USA has manufactured thousands, maybe millions of match safes, very few of them, if any, feature fables as their primary design theme. Even fewer have construction characteristics of a Tiffany made match safe. This is an essay about one such safe.

This safe visually tells the Aesop's fable of the cock and the fox. In brief, the tale reads that the fox tries to lure the cock to come down from the safety of the tree as all the forest animals have agreed not to kill or eat one another. The cock response to the fox is to tell him they should wait for the two dogs who are coming down the path so they could all be friends together.

Upon hearing this the fox says he should be off as perhaps the the dogs may not have heard of the new agreement. The moral of the tale is that a trickster can be tricked.

This match safe, 2 1/2" x 1 1/4" x 3/8", features a rose gold fox in an underbrush of yellow gold grass. The tree trunk is patinated silver and the cock has a rose gold body and a yellow gold plume of tail feathers. The leaves on the tree are yellow gold and extend into the lid, and the entire scene is incised in a sterling silver case.

At this point I'd like to have the reader see and read other American match safes that feature fables, or at least humorous motifs. But save for an example made by the Gorham Mfg. Co. of the famous Brownie cartoon character I can find no other American-made match safes that feature humor, much less, specific fables as their primary design characteristics.



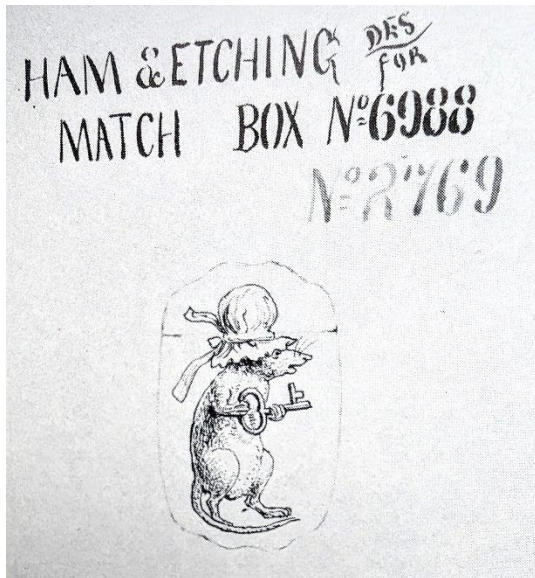
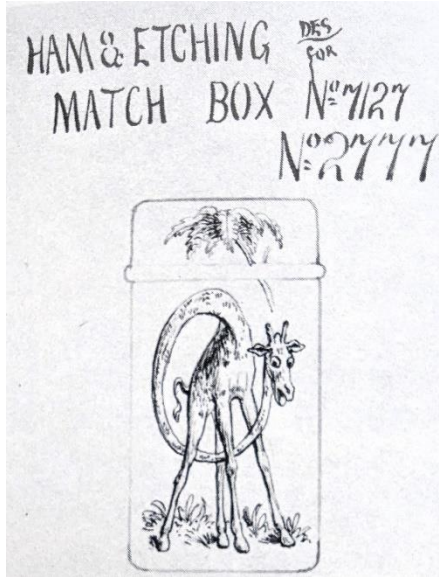
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Example of two Brownie safes by Gorham Mfg. Co.

In the Tiffany Archives there are drawings of three proposed match safes that are humorous, but to date, no one has seen an actual example. The three examples are below:



3 drawings of safes from the Tiffany Archives

As you can see the working drawings show a giraffe with his extraordinary neck, the injured cat being taunted by a bird, and the mother mouse holding a key to the cheese box. All are cute and humorous, but there is no evidence that Tiffany ever made them.

But the safe that this essay is about seems to be the only one featuring a fable so besides the unique motif I'd like to focus on two other features that make it special.



One is this safe has all the signs of an unmarked Tiffany manufacture. There is an applied silver striker, two protruding silver hinge pins, an extended over edge design on the lid, and an extended edge of the spring push that is almost 1/2" long and reaches back into the deepest rear corner of the lid. (See *IMSA Newsletter*, March 2005, for a full explanation of these characteristics.)

Another trait that this safe and others of its ilk share is the extended edge on the lid that covers the bezel. It is worth noting that in 1880, Charles T. Grosjean, the Tiffany silver designer, introduced the famous flatware design, Lap Over Edge. The handle design in this pattern has rolled edges usually on the back but sometimes on the front. This makes the edges of the handle thicker than the middle. (Carpenter, Charles R., *Tiffany Silver*, 1978, p.109.) This thick ridge on the match safe lid is limited to this set of match safes and coupled with the other defined characteristics leads to an attribution of Tiffany involvement in the manufacture of this and similar safes. \*\*

The second feature is the technique used to inlay the different colored metals into the body of the safe is based upon a patent by W.M. Hedges, US #221,231, November 4, 1879. Prior to this invention the artist who made a safe with this type of inlay must carefully make a channel or outline for the metal that is to be inlaid using a tool called a burin or graver.

In the case of the fable safe the artist, prior to the Hedges patent, would have drawn a fox, tree, cock, leaves, and grasses into the body of the safe. Once these outlines were created and the various colored metals inlaid and secured to the base, the metals would have been made flush to the base. Then using a fine burin, the artist would have incised lines into the colored inlay to finish the metal drawing.

With Hedges' invention some of this work is done mechanically. The artist would take a sheet or plate of the desired metal, e.g., silver, and use that as a foundation for overlaying another metal, e.g., rose gold, in the desired shape of the design. The two overlaid metals would be then heated (sometimes called sweating) and caused to adhere to each other. This conjoined plate is then passed between rollers under pressure until it is reduced to the desired thickness. By using this process, the artist gets a uniform back and a multicolored surface. The entire piece has a uniform strength and thickness which can be chased, engraved, and otherwise finished.

After consulting with other knowledgeable collectors, the fable safe appears to be the only American safe known to use a fable as its decorative motif and the only one created in what George Sparacio and this writer think is an unmarked Tiffany construction technique.

Finally, it calls into question why so few American match safes are humorous and why Europe and the UK produced so many witty and clever safes. Did American manufacturers lack a sense of humor?

\* With help, hints, and images from George Sparacio

\*\* I studied images of 1,750 safes in Sanders' book and 3,200 safes in Antonelli's book. In a total of 4,950 images only 3 had the physical characteristics of the Tiffany construction and were not listed as being made by Tiffany. While 31 were listed and identified as having the Tiffany mark.

It should be noted that Tiffany & Co. never produced all its goods in-house. It had partnerships with many foundries, jewelers, and silversmiths who would produce goods

that were sold under the Tiffany label. The Gorham Manufacturing Company, for example, produced silverware for Tiffany; the jeweler Gustav Manz produced jewelry that was sold under the Tiffany name, as did many European firms. The unmarked Tiffany safes may have been manufactured by another company for Tiffany and retailed by Tiffany.

Interesting notes:

- 1- The Metropolitan Museum of NY owns a link bracelet, made by the firm of A.J. Hedges & Co. which utilized their patented process for mottling yellow, white, red, and green gold, a technique inspired by Japanese metalwork.
- 2- In 1880, in New York City, A.J. Hedges & Co. moved to Maiden Lane and Tiffany & Co., was on Broadway, (around the corner.) Maiden Lane and Broadway intersect one another (See 1880 image below.)

