

A Tiffany Match Safe Story

By Neil Shapiro

A gold and enamel match safe with the Tiffany Co.'s name stamped on one side of the bezel was recently offered at a public auction with the possibility of having been made for the Paris Exposition of 1900.(Figure 1) Close examination of the match safe and some research revealed that this match safe could not have been made by Tiffany for the 1900 Exposition.

Tiffany did participate in the 1900 Paris Exposition, but as the firm did for the 1893, 1900, and 1903 Expositions, Tiffany created special marks for the items exhibited in those expositions. But for the 1889 Paris Exposition Tiffany did not use a special mark for their wares and the gold and enamel safe offered in this auction does not bear any special exposition marks.

The marks on the bezel of this safe are a diamond with the letters, "L S" within it, the word "Tiffany" followed by "Co.", and a stamped double eagle head assay mark. There are also scratched marks on either side of the bezel.(Figures 2 & 3)

The initials "L S" belong to a well-known French jeweler, Georges le Saché (1849 - ?), who made objects for most of the important retail jewelers in France from at least 1872 until 1920, when his mark was retired.

The mark, Tiffany & Co., was used by the Tiffany Company for many years, in one form or another. But usually when Tiffany sold items made in France they were marked, "Tiffany & Cie", not Tiffany & Co. Tiffany did have a retail shop in Paris and Tiffany did sell items made for them by other non-USA manufacturers, e.g., England, France, Russian, and maybe other places as well. Their mark for this type of ware was usually, Tiffany & Co. and then the country of origin under their name.

The stamped double eagle heads are France's 18k gold mark (or higher) for hinged or linked items made for the domestic market.

While Tiffany & Co. did participate in the 1889 Paris Exposition and they did not mark their wares for this exposition with any special marks they were interested in showcasing their own products to garner awards and recognition. They would gain nothing from having a match safe made Georges le Saché, a Frenchman, in their exhibit.

At the time of the 1889 Exposition, Paulding Farnham, Tiffany's designer, was crafting items in an American Indian style as well as some "Saracenic" or Moorish-style work. (Figure 4) This match safe is not in either style.

This match safe has only the double eagle French assay marks and no import marks (usually an *ET*, in brackets), something the French would have insisted upon for the Expo exhibits.

It may be clearly stated that this gold and enamel match safe was not made for the 1889 Paris Exposition, but there were Tiffany Co. match safes made expressly for the 1889 exposition. One, American Indian style match safe, currently exists in a private collection, another exists in a public museum collection and others, in the same style exist only as drawings in the Tiffany Archives. Below are the archival drawings and photographs of the existing match safes.(Figures 5,6,7,8)

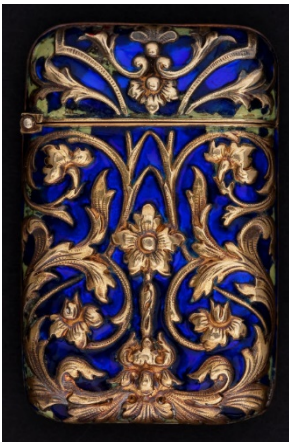


Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

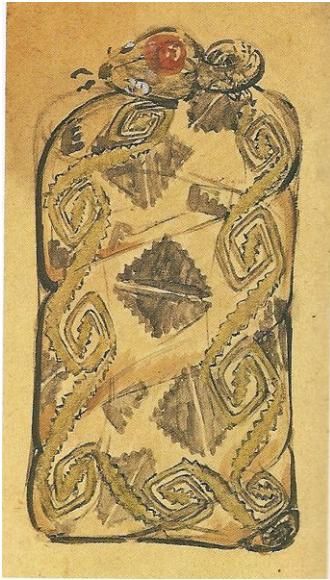


Figure 5



Figure 6 (close-up of safe in upper left corner)



Figure 7



Figure 8

Note:

All the gold and blue enamel match safe images are from the Heritage Auction online catalog and the images of Tiffany's match safe drawing are from Loring, John. *Paulding Farnham: Tiffany's Lost Genius*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, 2000. pp. 72-73.

Raven's head safe: c.1889, Tiffany & Company, NY is from, Shinn, Deborah Sampson, *Matchsafes*, Scala Publishers, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, 2001. p.25, The materials in this safe are, iron, gold, pearls, turquoise, rhodonite

Shinn, Deborah Sampson, *Matchsafes*, Scala Publishers, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, 2001. p.25

Just for fun, here is an American safe that resembles the French safe's design.



Made by Wm. Link, Philadelphia, 1910-1915. Production #4, Sterling silver and cobalt blue enamel.