

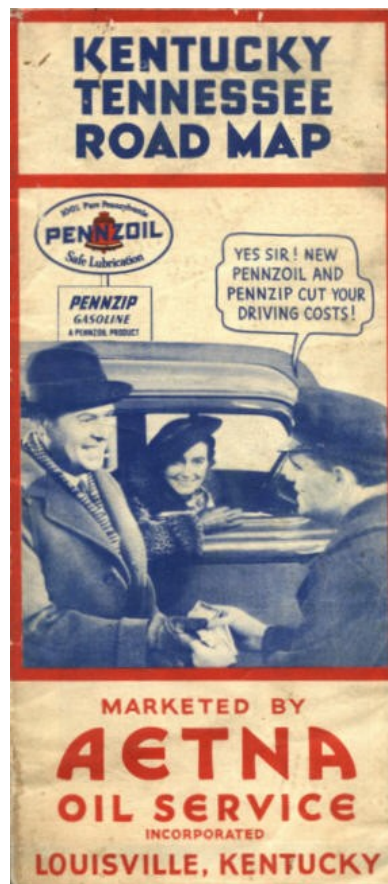
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AETNA, The Brand and the Maps

by **Walt Wimer, Jr.** (RMCA #7)

THE BRAND AND COMPANY

The Aetna Oil Co. of Louisville, Kentucky was founded in 1923. The company operated a refinery in Louisville that had grown to 10,000 barrels per day by the 1950s. For a refiner their market area was rather small, just Kentucky and southern Indiana. In the early 1950s they merged with fellow Kentucky oil company Ashland Oil & Refining based in the Ohio River town of Ashland. While the two companies merged in the 1950s, the Aetna brand would live on for another decade as an Ashland subsidiary before Ashland elected to phase out Aetna and rebrand their stations to the larger Ashland brand in the early 1960s. Before that happened, some 800 sites in the two states were flying the Aetna flag. By today's standards, that might seem like a lot of stations in just two states. However, one must keep in mind that in the 1950s there were still many rural sites with gasoline that amounted to little more than a "Mom & Pop" store or a garage with a pump or two. This was especially true in a more rural state such as Kentucky. So it would seem rather likely that less than half of the 800 sites were full "service stations." In the early 1960s the brand disappeared from the highways of the two states, replaced by Ashland. Ironically, the Ashland name itself is all but gone today since the somewhat recent merger of the refining and marketing operations of Ashland and Marathon. Since that joint venture began around 1998 more and more Ashland stations have been converted to Marathon.

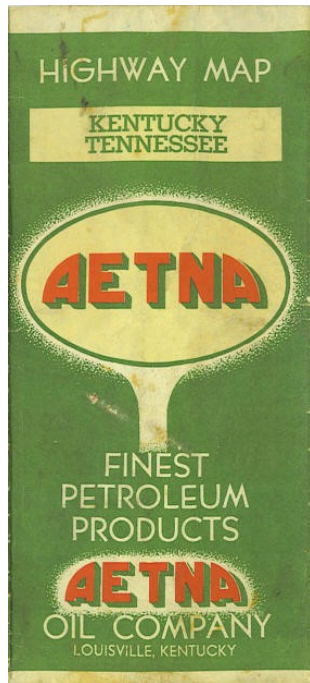


1935 Pennzoil/Aetna cover, Richard Horwitz collection

THE MAPS

To the best I can determine the first "Aetna" map really wasn't Aetna, it was a 1935 Pennzoil! Prior to World War II Aetna Oil Co. was a distributor of Pennzoil motor oils and lubricants. Thus, the first map they issued was a Pennzoil map with an overprint at the bottom that reads "Marketed by Aetna Oil Service, Louisville, Kentucky" in red lettering in the white dealer block. The 1935 Pennzoil map by Gousha certainly isn't common, but it is quite scarce with the Aetna overprint at the bottom of the cover, which shows a station dealer with a couple and a 1930s car.

It appears that the first "real" Aetna maps came out in the late 1930s to around 1940 as undated Midwest Map issues. There are two different cover designs from this period known, both of which feature a large oval Aetna pole sign. These are known with both a green and white background, but exact dates for these maps have not been determined. Both are tri-fold maps with Pennzoil motor oil and US Tires logos prominently displayed on one panel.



Jim Wakefield collection



Gary Spaid collection

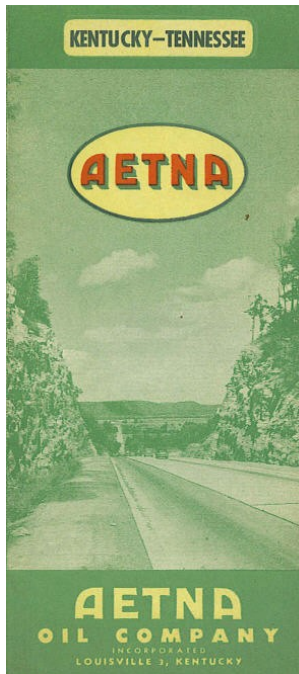
c. 1940 Aetna road map covers

About 1941 Gousha took over Midwest Map Co. with both company names appearing on most maps of that vintage. The Aetna maps are no exception. The 1941 cover also changes quite a bit as gone is the plain color background and in its place is a photograph of a mountain road. Not surprising, since Kentucky was the company's main market. Superimposed over the mountain road scene is the familiar yellow oval pole sign. Also gone with the 1941 map is any mention of Pennzoil and customers are urged to use "Aetna Motor Oil".

For reasons unknown, after the war Aetna changed mapmakers from Gousha to Rand McNally, where they would remain through their final issues in the 1950s. The 1946-49 maps have the same cover design, featuring a different mountain country road scene from the 1941 issue.



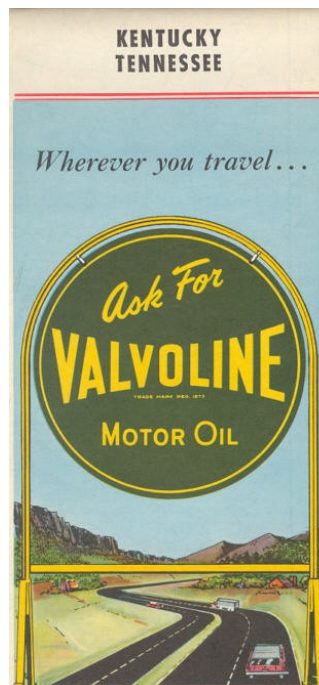
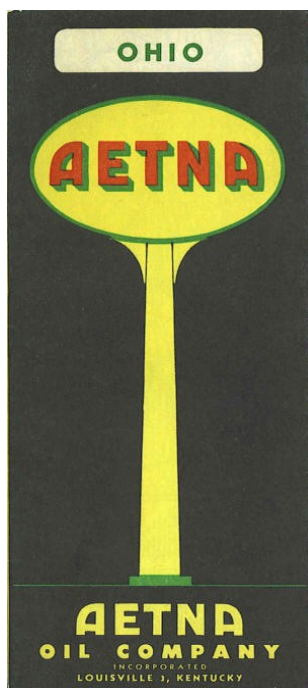
1941 Aetna cover,
Jim Wakefield collection



1946 Aetna cover,
Walt Wimer collection

Both of these photo designs are done in green tones to blend in with the rest of the map cover. One panel of the 1946-49 issues shows a drawing of an Aetna station, and at least by the 1949 issue the company had taken on a credit card exchange with Sinclair with the maps showing the familiar green & red “H-C” circle logo on that panel by the station.

By 1950 Aetna had gone to a rather distinctive all black cover with a large yellow oval pole sign. Coming out around the time of the merger of Ashland and Aetna, this design would turn out to be the last for the Aetna brand.



*1950 Aetna cover,
Jim Wakefield collection*

*1959 Valvoline front & back covers,
Walt Wimer collection*

This cover had a run of at least seven years. The 1950-52 issues are of the tri-fold design, but from 1953 on they are of the accordion fold style. With a seven year run, this is the most common Aetna map cover design. But even so, one went for \$20 on eBay recently!!

While the black cover was the last true Aetna map, the brand hung around a few more years on the back of a map design issued by Ashland to promote their Valvoline motor oil brand, also gained by a merger of Ashland and Valvoline around the same time as the Aetna takeover. This cover was issued in the later '50s and featured a large dark green Valvoline motor oil curb sign over a four lane highway on the cover. On the back cover there is a gas station under three logos, Ashland, Aetna and Frontier, with the wording "Signs of Highest Quality Petroleum Products." Little question that this map was designed to push the Valvoline brand, which has become nationally known, and covers the period of transition during the rebranding of the Aetna and Frontier stations to Ashland (Note: The Frontier here was the Frontier Oil Refining Corp. of Buffalo, which had no connection to the Denver based Frontier Refining Co., well known in the Rocky Mountains at one time and still surviving as a rather minor brand in Colorado). Being a two-state marketer, Aetna never issued maps of a lot of states. Besides Kentucky/Tennessee and Indiana, Ohio and Illinois are known, but there may be others!!

OTHER COLLECTIBLES

For those gasoline map collectors who dabble into other gas/oil collectibles, there are some from the Aetna brand, but like their maps, they are mostly on the scarce side. There are some 12-15 different pump globes, however, all but a couple are fairly rare. Signs and oil cans come up from time to time, but again are rather limited. Especially rare is anything with the early "mountain" logo used in the late 1920s/early 1930s. To my knowledge that logo never appeared on a road map and globes with that red & white logo are among the scarcest of Aetna items.



Aetna logo, 1926-35



Aetna logo, 1930-38

Another Aetna road map uncovered

RMCA member Alan Eastlund responded to the article on Aetna road maps in the last issue of the Legend, reporting that he has a Pennzoil/Pennzip road map that also appears to have been issued by Aetna Oil, with their logo at the bottom of the front cover. Shown at right is the map, with a detail of the logo below. This Rand McNally map is dated 1939.

It's always nice to hear from Legend readers, especially when they have new road maps to report. Anyone have any other Aetna maps not shown previously? How about any Shamrock maps not mentioned in this issue?



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