AUSTIN POWDER COMPANY
A New Blasting Cap Tin

Douglas K. Miller

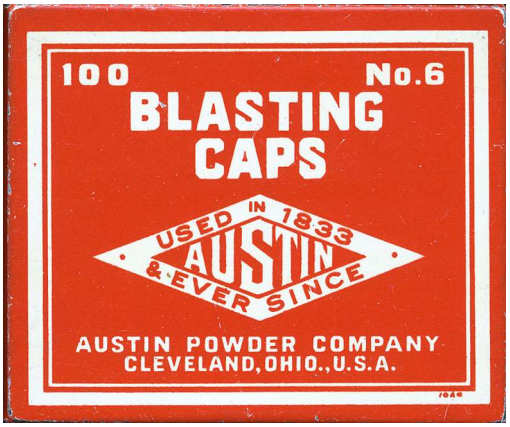
On October 29, 2013, I purchased a blasting cap tin that I was pretty sure I did not have in my collection. I say "pretty sure," because much of my cap tin collection is still packed away, a result of our having done some extensive remodeling of our home and my needing to get my mining artifact collection out of harms way while the work was done. In many ways, the tin was quite similar to other Austin tins I'd seen on eBay and that I have in my collection. A photo of the top of the tin was prominently displayed in the listing. No. 6, 100-count Austin tins don't come up very often; however, they come up often enough that I believe most bidders thought that this was one of the two more common 100-count Austin tins. But as I examined the tin more closely, I began to suspect that the tin was different from any other Austin tin I'd seen or read about before – and it is the differences between this tin and the other Austin tins in my collection (and its similarity to tins by other manufacturers) that tell the most interesting part of the story.

Five brothers from Vermont founded Austin Powder Company in 1833. They had travelled west to find a suitable site for a powder mill. The found ample raw materials in Kansas City, Missouri, but little market, so they turned back and eventually settled in Ohio, along the Cuyahoga River, just south of Cleveland, where they established the first powder mill in Ohio. In 1867, the brothers incorporated the Austin Powder Company, and the company has been in business ever since. Today, Austin Powder Company manufactures a full line of industrial explosives and provides blasting services to customers throughout the world.

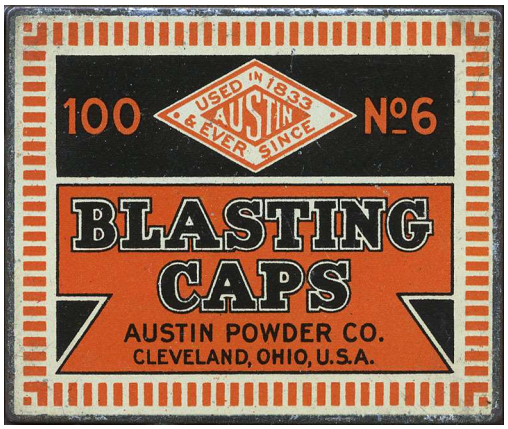
Knowledgeable collectors, most notably Andy Martin and John Kynor, Sr., have observed that the blasting caps sold by many companies were probably manufactured by a few large companies, like California Cap Company (Martin 1991, 20-23; Kynor 2008, 20-21). They were then packaged in tins made by large manufacturers of tin cans, such as American Can Company, which were imprinted with the individual company logos. The tins in my collection and the most recently discovered Austin tin seem to provide strong evidence in support of both of these observations.

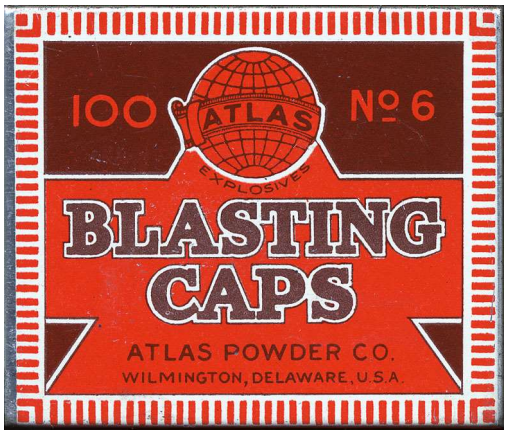
Up until the discovery of the tin I'm writing about, it was believed that there were only three varieties of No. 6, 100-count Austin tins. All three of the previously known varieties are referred to in Andy Martin's *Blasting Cap Tin Catalog* (at pp. 5-6) and John Kynor's *Blasting Cap Workbook* (at pp. 110-12). Color pictures of the three tins are also shown in Plate 32 of John Kynor's *Workbook*. I will use Andy Martin's reference system throughout this article. The three previously known Austin 100-count, No. 6 tins are described below.

The first Austin tin is red with white letters (described in Andy Martin's *Cap Tin Catalog* as **Austin, No. 6,** and dated as having been manufactured between 1920-1950) (Martin, 16). This tin is very similar to later versions of Du Pont No. 6 tins, particularly **Du Pont, No. 6, style "A"**. Pictured below are the lids from the Austin tin and from a Du Pont, No. 6, style "B" tin. The Du Pont, No. 6 style "B" tin differs from the style "A" tin only in having the words "REG. U.S. PAT. OFF" printed beneath the Du Pont logo.



The second Austin tin is painted white, orange and black, and has metallic or "gilt" edges. It is referred to by Andy Martin as **Austin N^{o} 6** and is dated by Andy as having been used between 1920 and 1950 (Martin, 16). As Andy notes, the tin is very similar to the **Atlas N^{o} 6, square, globe "B," Var 2** tin (Martin, 16, 12-14).





The third No. 6, 100-count Austin tin is painted dark red with gold lettering and gold edges. It is referred to by Andy Martin as the **Austin No. 6, Var 2**, and is said to have been used between 1910 and 1930 (Martin, 16). It is very similar to the much more common **Illinois, St. Louis, Var 1** tin. I do not have an example of this Austin tin in my collection, but it is pictured at Plate 32 of John Kynor's *Workbook*.

The newly discovered Austin tin, which is a fourth example of a 100-count, No. 6 Austin tin, is striking and beautiful.

It is nearly identical to the **Austin N^{o} 6 tin** in my collection and described in both Andy Martin's *Catalogue* and John Kynor's *Workbook*, but it has white as opposed to gilt edges. In this regard, it is most like the **Atlas, No. 6, square, Globe "B", Var 1**, tin.

The messages on the sides of the newly discovered Austin tin are:

BLASTING CAPS
DANGEROUS
HANDLE CAREFULLY

KEEP
DRY

KEEP
FIRE AWAY

The messages on the ends of the new Austin tin are:

AUSTIN POWDER
COMPANY
CLEVELAND, OHIO, U.S.A

Other than the differences between the companies' trademark symbols, the messages on the Atlas and Austin tins are identical. Here is a side-by-side photo of the Austin tin and of the analogous Atlas tin.

The Atlas and Austin tins are identical in size - 1 1/2"' x 2 1/8" x 2 ½". However, unlike the white edges on the Atlas tin, the "white" on the Austin tin is slightly "buff" in color - a nice contrast to the black and red lettering. As tin collectors, we might have suspected that an Austin tin like the one recently discovered also existed, given the strong similarity between the previously known varieties of Atlas and Austin tins and the fact that two Atlas tins in the same pattern, one with metallic or gilt edges and the other white edges were known to exist. But it is especially gratifying to find an example of such an Austin tin.

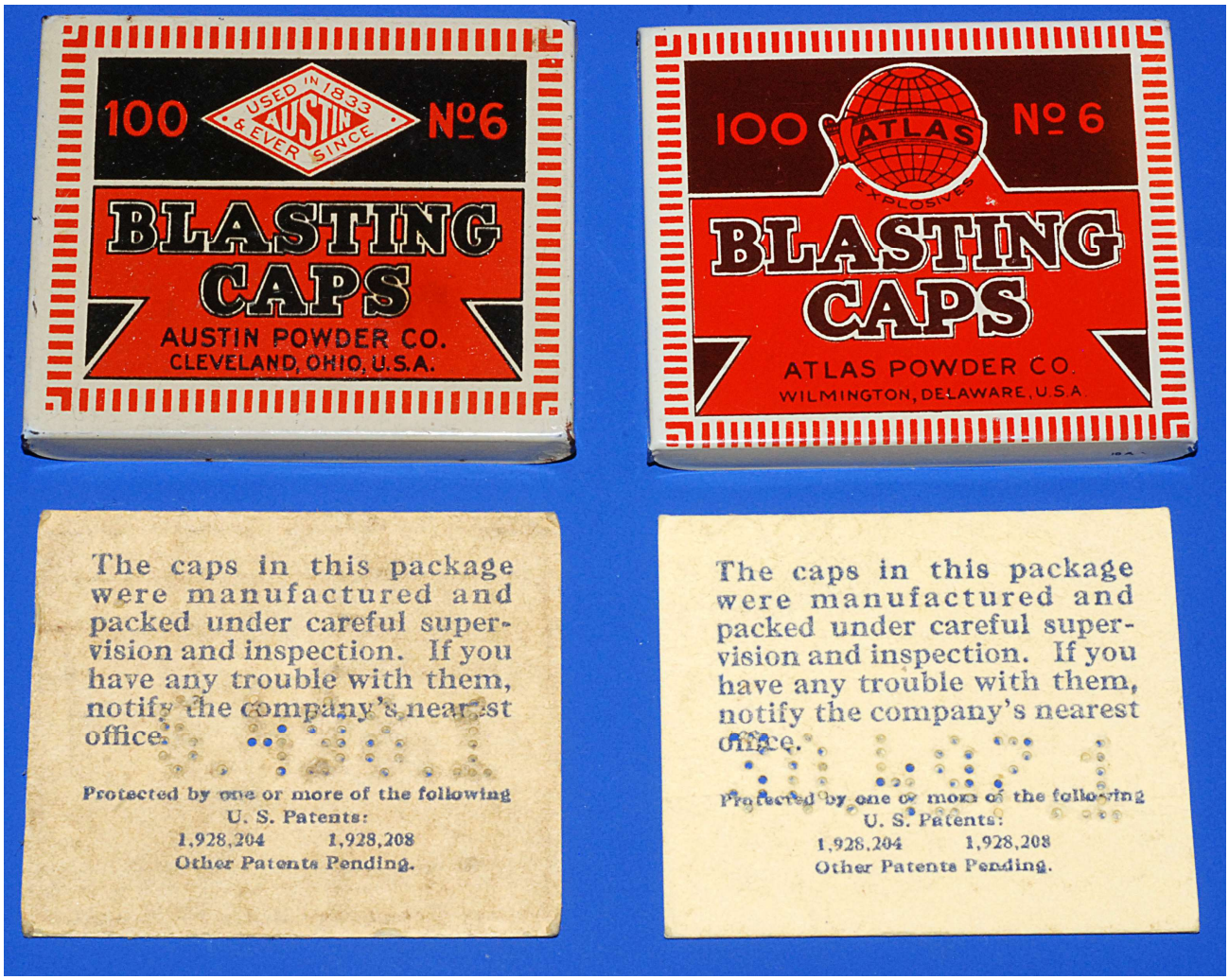
Both the Austin and Atlas tins appear to have been manufactured by American Can Co. If you look very closely at the photos of the newly discovered Austin tin, you can see the American Can Co. notation on the bottom front of the Austin tin. It reads "A.C.CO.10 A (x)."

A similar notation appears on the lip of the top of the Atlas tin. It reads "10 A [and a symbol that looks like a 7]." John Kynor has done a detailed study of such markings (Kynor, 150-51).

Similar American Can Co. markings appear on the lids of the red Austin and Du Pont tins pictured in this article.

The new Austin tin is in excellent condition and includes a "warranty card" with company patent numbers.

I have another **Atlas, No. 6, square, Globe "B", Var 1** tin that contains an identical “warranty card.”



The patent numbers are for patents 1,928,204 and 1,928,208 issued in 1933 to Sylvester B. Large and assigned to Atlas Powder Company.

Patented Sept. 26, 1933 **1,928,204**

UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE

1,928,204

DETONATOR AND COMPOSITION FOR THE SAME

Sylvester B. Large, Tamaqua, Pa., assignor to Atlas Powder Company, Wilmington, Del., a corporation of Delaware

Patented Sept. 26, 1933 **1,928,208**

UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE

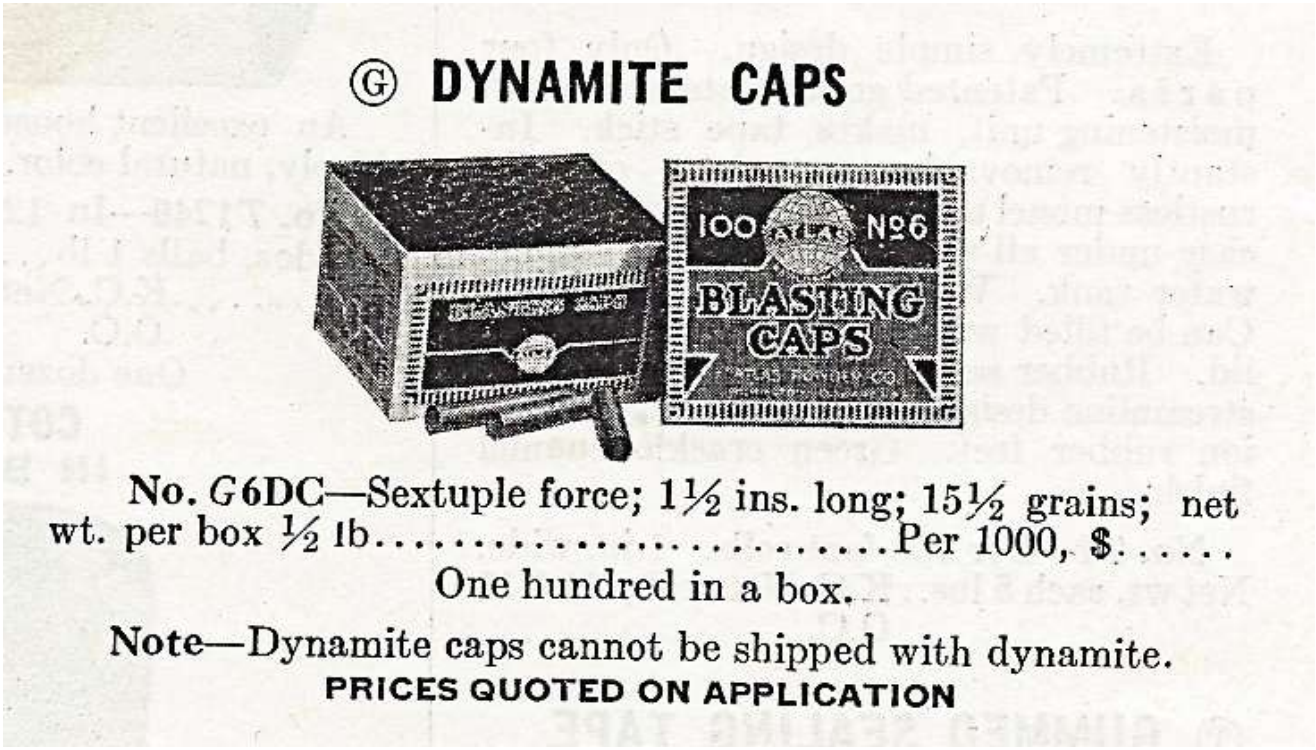
1,928,208

SAFETY DETONATOR

Sylvester B. Large, Tamaqua, Pa., assignor to Atlas Powder Company, Wilmington, Del., a corporation of Delaware

This strongly suggests that Atlas Powder Company in fact manufactured the blasting caps sold in those Austin tins that resemble the Atlas tins. Similarly, it is probably fair to conclude that Du Pont manufactured the caps that were sold in those Austin tins that mimic the Du Pont tins. John Kynor has reached the same conclusion, noting that the caps in Austin containers were secured either from Atlas or Du Pont (Kynor, 110). American Can Co. likely manufactured the containers for the Austin, Atlas and Du Pont tins pictured in this article.

The date of the newly discovered Austin tin is more difficult to determine, but presumably, it falls within the same date range as the similar **Atlas, No. 6, square, Globe "B", Var 1** tin. Andy Martin places the date range for this Atlas tin as between 1920 and 1945 (Martin, 14). For the **Austin N^{o} 6** tin, the one with the metallic or gilt edges, Andy places the date range as between 1920 and 1950 (Martin, 16). The "warranty cards" that I found in my analogous Atlas and newly discovered Austin tins with the white edges suggest that these two examples were manufactured and sold after 1933, the date of the patents. A picture of the **Atlas, No. 6, square, Globe "B"** tin appears in a page from a 1936 advertising catalogue of the Richards & Conover Hardware Co. that I have in my collection.



My best guess is that the newly discovered Austin tin and the analogous Atlas tin, as well as the caps they contained, were produced in the mid to late 1930's and in the 1940's.

References

1. Some of the best historical information about Austin Power Company may be found on the company's website. The sources used for this article were: "Austin History," at http://www.austinpowder.com/about/history.html, last visited July 27, 2014; and "About Austin Powder," at http://www.austinpowder.com/about/index.html, last visited July 27, 2014.
2. The books on blasting cap tins written by Andy Martin and John Kynor, Sr., are my Bibles of tin collecting, and are themselves likely to become collector's items. Every collector of cap tins should own copies of both. They are the principal sources of information about the tins discussed in this article:
    a. Martin, Andy. 1991. *Blasting Cap Tin Catalog.* Tucson, AZ: Old Adit Press.
    b. Kynor, John C., Sr. 2008. *Blasting Cap Workbook, Tins and Boxes – A Photo History of 30 Years of Collecting With Some Comments, Facts, Suggestions, Opinions*. Belen, NM: B.B.B. Ltd.