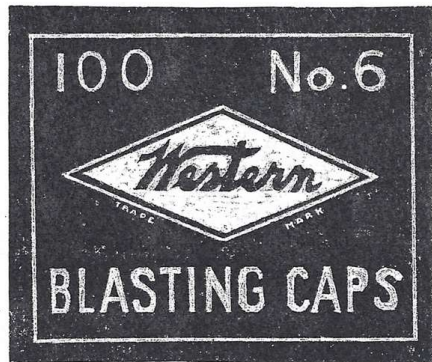


# Early Western Blasting Cap Tins

Douglas Miller

The earliest blasting cap tin used by Western Cartridge Company is identified by Andy Martin as a "Western, No. 6, Plain." Andy dates the tin to between 1930 and 1950. It is red with metallic gold edges and lettering. Andy's Blasting Cap Tin Catalogue states that the tin comes in both 100-count and 25-count examples, and he illustrates the tops of both tins in his catalogue. John Kynor tells me that plain 25-count tin also comes in a dark red.



WESTERN, No. 6, plain

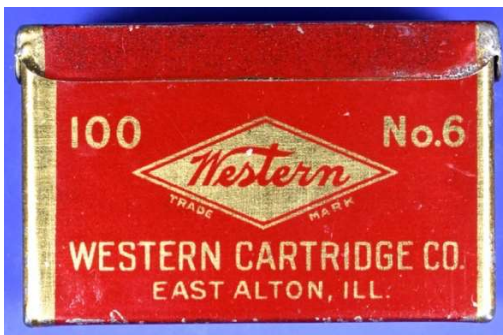


WESTERN, No. 6, 25 CAPS, plain

I would love to find an example of the 25-count tin. Here's the 100-count tin from my collection.



The most distinguishing characteristic of this tin is its plain lettering and the fact that it contains no detailed warnings on the sides or ends. This early tin is quite desirable in my view, and it is hard to find in good condition.



When I first started collecting blasting cap tins, I was on the lookout for this tin because Andy said it was “rare.” I spotted this tin on eBay some years ago. From the photos, I could only catch a small glimpse of one end of the tin, but I suspected that this was the early tin I was looking for. This Western tin is analogous to the early, square Illinois tins I wrote about on April 18, 2021.



I noted that there are two versions of the early, red Illinois tins in my collection. One is bright red with gold lettering, the other is a darker red, brown-toned tin, also with gold lettering. The brown-toned tin in my collection is noticeably taller than the bright red tin. The Western tin in

my collection closely matches my bright red Illinois tin both in color and size. My early Western tin is 1 5/8 inches (4.1 cm) tall. The bright red Illinois tin in my collection is also 1 5/8 inches (4.1 cm) tall. The tops of the two tins also have identical dimensions, 2 1/2 inches (6.5 cm) by 2 1/8 inches (5.5 cm). John Kynor tells me that the Western 100-count tin also comes in the darker red color but is the same height as the bright red tin. John has written that both the Illinois and Western tins appear to have made by the same company, but the maker of the tins is unknown.

John Kynor has written that Western never used a round tin. Western did make an oval, 10-count tin. It is blue with white lettering and is extremely rare. As a result, it is represented in very few collections, although Jack Purson's collection is among them. The 10-count oval tin has warnings that are more similar to the later Western tins, so my guess is that it was produced after the Western, No. 6, Plain tins. Here's a photo of some of Jack's rare 10-count tins. The Western tin is on the left.



Western Cartridge Company was founded by Franklin W. Olin in 1898.<sup>1</sup> Olin had received his engineering degree from Cornell University in 1886. After working at powder mills in the eastern United States, he was one of several investors who, in 1892, established the Equitable Powder Company at East Alton, Illinois. Olin founded Western Cartridge Company to manufacture sporting powder and shotgun shells for settlers of the Great Plains. His shotgun shells used primers manufactured by large, eastern ammunition firms. In 1900, the firms with primer manufacturing facilities raised prices to reduce competition from independent manufacturers of shotgun shells, like Western Cartridge Company. In response, Western formed Union Cap and Chemical Company (U.C.C.Co.) as a joint venture with Austin Cartridge Company of Ohio. U.C.C.Co. manufactured primers, blasting caps, and .22 and .32 rimfire cartridges at East Alton. The Western ammunition bore a W.C.Co. headstamp and the product packaging bore a Maltese Cross as part of the company's trademark.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this description is taken from the Wikipedia entry for Western Cartridge Company.

<sup>2</sup> The Cartridge Collector's Exchange, <https://www.oldammo.com/december17.htm>, visited June 5, 2021. The image of the early Western cartridge box and a portion of the description are taken from this website.





Union Cartridge and Chemical Company made blasting caps for sale under its own name, and used embossed tins bearing the Maltese Cross and the initials U.C.C.Co.



Although Western was primarily an ammunition manufacturer, the manufacture of blasting caps was natural for the company because the processes for drawing metallic cases for primers, rimfire ammunition, and blasting cap shells were quite similar. Moreover, the same chemicals used in cartridge primers were also used in blasting caps. In 1909-1910, Western Cartridge Company changed from the Maltese Cross trademark to a diamond with the Western name inside. John Kynor believes the earliest Western blasting cap tins with the plain logo and sides probably appeared after WWI. At some point, Western Cartridge Company also made blasting caps for Illinois Powder Company, which would explain the strong similarity over the years between the Western and Illinois blasting cap tins.