

The 20th Century Mining Lantern

by Hal Post and Tony Moon



Figure 1. 20th Century Lantern (left side)

burner tip. It's marked on back PATENTS AND DESIGN APPLD. FOR, 20th CENTURY MFG. CO., MADE IN U.S. OF AMERICA. The glass lens is also marked 20th Century.

[Foreword by Hal] At the recent 2015 Ouray Show, I noticed Bob Schroth showing an unusual lamp to Tony Moon and Paul Johnson early in the setup. Since it caught my attention, I joined the group to see what was going on. The lamp turned out to be a 20th Century lantern and by a stroke of luck, both Tony and Paul had the lamp already. Bob had it for sale so after an exchange of some cash it came home with me. It's always good to be in the right place at the right time. I was vaguely familiar with the lamp but I wanted to know more. This article presents a little more information about the lamp and its manufacturer gleaned by Tony and me from numerous discussions.

As shown in Figures 1 and 2, the lamp is an early carriage-type nickel-plated brass lantern known as the 20th Century Lamp and advertised for mining use. It's 13 1/2 in. high with a 5 in. dia. circular bottom with a steel clutch handle/hook. The burner portion has red and green colored jewels on either side and a glass lens with a 6 in. reflector. A swing open front with clasp allows access to the burner area and its fish tail



Figure 2. 20th Century Lantern (front & right side)

The 20th Century Manufacturing Co. was founded by Lewis F. Betts on April 13, 1897 to become one of the five most successful automobile, motorcycle and bicycle lamp manufacturers in the U.S. Betts was born Dec. 23, 1829 and died May 18, 1911 at the age of 82. He was employed by Dietz and Company of New York, a manufacturer of lamps, burners and carbide fixtures, for nearly 25 years during which he patented a tubular street lamp (Patent No. 218,917 on Aug. 26, 1879) to be followed by at least an additional 25 patents for various lamps and improvements. During the last 30 years of his life, he and his brother Charles are widely credited with more improvements in lanterns than any others connected directly or indirectly with the lantern industry. On June 4, 1895 Betts was awarded patent No. 540,605 for a kerosene bicycle lamp called the 20th Century Bicycle Headlight. To manufacture the lamp, Betts created the Betts Patent Headlight Company with articles of incorporation filed in New York City on Nov. 18, 1895. On April 13, 1897 the company was refinanced and renamed the 20th Century Manufacturing Company with George Wilson as president and Betts a member of the Board of Directors. At various times the company occupied quarters at No. 10, No. 17 and No. 19 Warren St. in New York City before moving to 420-422 Ogden St. in Newark, NJ in 1910. The first carbide lamp of the company was advertised in October 1898. It was based on a design patent filed by then president William P. Crary as No. 29,789 on Dec. 13, 1898. This lamp established many of the common features to be shared with other 20th Century carbide lamps manufactured over the next 20 years. The second carbide lamp manufactured by the company known as the Model No. 2 Cycle Gas lamp was based on a follow on patent filed by Crary as No. 677,400 on July 2, 1901. This lamp, which became one of the most successful bicycle carbide lamps ever manufactured, is the lantern modified for mining and hand lantern use by 20th Century.

The wide range of lamps available from 20th Century is shown in a typical vignette from an envelope dated 1908. The envelope also included illustrations of lamps connected to a central acetylene generator for use in boats, motorcycles, small automobiles, and bicycles.



Figure 3. Typical Advertising Vignette (compliments of Steve Loftin)

The Scott Supply & Tool Co. of Denver, Colorado advertised the 20th Century Lamp as a Miner's Hand Lantern in the Dec. 5, 1901 issue of Mining Reporter noting it's equipped with a "clutch hook to hang the lamp to rocks."

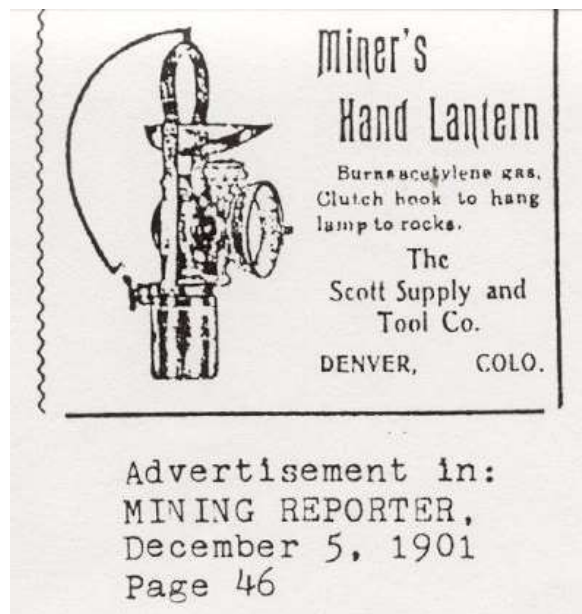


Figure 4. Scott Supply Ad for 20th Century Lantern (from Henry Pohs' notes)

Like other carbide carriage/bicycle lamps around 1900 such as the Full Moon and Columbia Model C lamps, manufacturers made modifications to the lamps to take advantage of a new opportunity for sales, that of the mining market. Typically, the introduction of a handle or hook did the job. In the case of the modified 20th Century bicycle lamp, the manufacturers added a larger diameter base, a bail with handle/hook and an umbrella top to shield the burner for use in wet mines.



Figure 5. Left - Henry Pohs' Lamp; Right - Tony Moon's Lamp; both in Bronze Finish

Only a half-dozen or so of various versions of this lamp are known in museums and private collections marking its rarity. Both nickel-plated brass and bronzed finishes are known. Likewise, two different diameter reflectors are known as well. An early brochure describes the lamp with a 3 ½ in. diameter reflector as the “miners” hand lamp and a second identical version of the lamp with a larger 6 in. diameter reflector as an “auto” or portable hand lantern. The description of the lantern versions mentioned other applications for the lamps including firefighting, camping, dark roads, hunting, fishing, boating and barge use, along with the mining and vehicle options making sure a buyer could find some use for the lanterns. An examination of the lamp shows how simply the manufacturer created the larger reflector option by attaching it to the smaller diameter reflector with its glass lens. Of special note is the 20th Century lamp on display in the Cripple Creek Museum in Teller County, Colorado. This lamp is identified as the personal mining lamp of Winfield Scott Stratton. Stratton discovered the Independence Lode near Victor, Colorado on July 4, 1891, and became the Cripple Creek district's first millionaire. The 20th Century Mfg. Co. continued a successful lamp business until electric lighting overtook the kerosene and carbide lamp business. Sometime between 1915 and 1919, the 20th Century Manufacturing Co. was sold to Stevens and Co. of Manhattan. Stevens continued to manufacture the lamps at least until 1921. During the life of the 20th Century lamp production, it is conservatively estimated that over 1 million lamps were manufactured. These lamps were regarded with the highest reputation for quality and customer satisfaction largely due to the interchangeability of parts and service after sales. As to the modified bicycle lamp advertised for mining use in 1901, an illustrated list of 20th Century lamps dated 1907 shows both lantern options were still available, the larger reflector model as No. 12 and the smaller reflector model as No. 14.



Figure 6. W. S. Stratton Lamp



Figure 7. 1907 Illustrated 20th Century List (compliments of Neil Tysver)

Dave

20th CENTURY ACETYLENE GAS "MINERS'" AND "AUTO" HAND LANTERNS.

High-Class Hand Lanterns for Special Purposes, Miners, Firemen, Camps, Boats, Automobiles, and Wherever a Great, Broad Light Ahead is Needed.

"MINERS'" HAND LANTERN
 Height over all, 14 in.
 Weight, 30 oz.
 Diameter of Reflector, 3 1/2 in.
 Capacity, 6 to 8 hours' burning.
 Price, either finish, \$5.50.

Is little trouble and gives a grand light for such purposes. The bail handle is rigid, and the shield over the top of the lamp guards against heat and glimmer of light. The clutch hook enables the lamp to be easily hung on edge of rocks or on beams, etc. A lamp designed by a mining engineer. One lamp will reflect a bright light over a section of mine sufficient for several miners to work by.

Firemen also like this Hand Lantern. Entering a room full of smoke, the light of oil lamp will be put out, but not so with this gas lamp, which casts a most penetrating light, also the hand lantern for Camps, Dark Roads, Hunting Fishing, Etc.

GAS "AUTO" HAND LANTERN.
 What has been stated of the Miners' lamp also applies to this, with its more powerful reflector giving a largely increased light. This lamp attaches to Vehicles same as Auto Lamp and therefore makes a combination of Automobile and Hand Lantern, and this combination lantern is also frequently selected for Boat and Barge uses.

Diameter of Reflector, 6 in. Weight, 35 oz. Otherwise same as Miners' Hand Lantern. Either Finish, Price \$6.50.

Figure 8. 1901 Cropping from a 20th Century poster advertisement (compliments of Paul Johnson)