

# Unfinished Pieces

*by Dave Thorpe*

Those who travel to Florence, Italy are generally drawn to a statue that is considered by many to be perfection in marble: Michelangelo's David. The building where it is housed could be mistaken for an old cathedral — but Italians know it as the Galleria dell'Accademia. At the far end of a dimly lit hallway his form stands out from the light of overhead windows.



Walking towards the David, a visitor is aware of other eerie stone figures arranged along the sides of the corridor. They are a group of Michelangelo's unfinished pieces known as Slaves. Each is a tall block of white marble partially carved into the form of a man. A shoulder and arm emerge from one section; a head and partial torso appear in another. The impression is that of humans frozen in a struggle to break free. In fact, Michelangelo is famous for saying that he worked to liberate forms imprisoned in the marble.

On occasion I have found miner's carbide lamps that were incompletely assembled at the factory. Perhaps they sat on a parts shelf awaiting an assembly that never came. Like Michelangelo's Slaves, they want to tell a sad story. While complete lamps knew a life in the coalmines, these juveniles never left their creator's home. With no further anthropomorphisms or comparison to Italian art, I will introduce unfinished carbide lamps I have collected over the years.

It was the late 1980s when I first met collector Stephen Loftin in his Nashville home. He has a penchant for the eclectic. After playing with his electric-arc plasma ball and doodling graphics on his state of the art Amiga computer, we went to the lamp room. Here, I was shown a few pieces of Ashmead lamps obtained from a former employee of the company. What a treasure! The pieces gave a glimpse of what it was like in the small factory. The most complete piece was a base where the screw cap was not yet crimped and the bottom seam still not fully rolled. Over twenty years later I bought these same parts via an internet auction.



Recently an antique dealer from Ironton, Ohio contacted me about four Ashmead lamps he had come across. Ironton lies directly across the Ohio River from Ashland where the lamps were manufactured throughout the 1920s. Of the four, two were Elkhorn lamps and two Buddys. All were unused, but none had reflectors or reflector braces. They had never been completed for duty and their different styles represent different periods of manufacture. One may only speculate as to the background of these four faceless soldiers. The two Buddy lamps are gilt painted, a finish I have not seen before on Ashmead lamps.



Finally, I have come by two steel bases for late model Justrite hand lamps. At first glance they appear to have brass lids. But these "lids" have uncrimped edges and predrilled holes — they are in fact the unassembled lower portions of water tanks.



I am a longtime collector who needs something a little offbeat to entertain. These unfinished masterpieces do just that!