

A Canadian Oil Wick Cap Lamp

by Dave Johnson

Nova Scotia has been a long-time source of coal for use domestically and abroad. The Nova Scotia coal deposits are divided into the Sydney, Cumberland, and Pictou Coalfields. Canada has one-sixth of all the coal reserves in the world, almost as much as the entire continent of Asia, and second only to the United States.



The Sydney coal field, the largest and most valuable in Nova Scotia, is situated on the north eastern coast of Cape Breton Island, extending from Mira Bay on the south to Cape Dauphin on the north, a distance of thirty miles, and has a general dip northeast under the Atlantic. The field embraces the mining communities of Morien, Birch Grove, Reserve, Dominion, Glace Bay, New Waterford, and Sydney Mines. The city of Sydney is situated about midway between the northern and southern extremities of the field and on the western fringe of the productive coal measures.



Coal was first mined in the Sydney Coalfield by the French military from outcroppings in 1685. Later, in 1720, organized mining was conducted in the Blockhouse Seam in the Morien Basin. For the next 100 years, outcrop mining was done in various parts of the field. In 1825, the General Mining Association was formed and, two years later, an effort was made to do systematic mining in the Sydney Mines and New Waterford Districts. In 1849, the Crown conveyed its interests in the minerals of the Province to the Government of Nova Scotia. In 1857 the General Mining Association, which until then held under sub-lease all the mineral areas of the Province, in consideration of certain concessions and privileges, surrendered its holdings to the Government of Nova Scotia, reserving, however, for its own operation certain areas in Cumberland, Pictou and Cape Breton Counties, totaling 30 square miles. Shortly thereafter, several mining companies were formed and mines were opened in the Glace Bay District. In 1901 the General Mining Association sold out its interests in Sydney Mines to the Nova Scotia Steel & Coal Company.

In the Cape Breton Coalfield, the Glace Bay District contributes 46 percent, the New Waterford District 37 percent and Sydney Mines 17 percent of the coal produced in the area. Due to submarine conditions, it is not possible to accurately determine the tonnage yet recoverable from this field. Already approximately 219,000,000 tons has been extracted and it is estimated that 257 million tons of economically recoverable coal is still available within proven areas of the Dominion Coal Company, Limited and 23.5 million tons within the area of the Old Sydney Collieries, of a quality equal to that being mined at the present time, and that the recoverable coal, without regard to quality or economic feasibility, within the limits of five miles seawards from the shore is approximately 947 million tons, sufficient to last for nearly 200 years at the present rate of production.

The Cumberland Coalfield consists of a basin-shaped strip of coal stretching from Chignecto Bay in the west where the seams dip under the Bay of Fundy, in a South-Easterly direction to the Town of Springhill, a distance of 25 miles.

The basin is approximately 12 miles wide, lying between the Cobequid Highlands in the North, East and South, and is entirely located in Cumberland County. The coal areas are located mainly in the Joggins River and Hebert areas in the North and at Springhill near the Eastern end of the basin; this latter area being the most important in the field.

In the Cumberland Coalfield, the coal areas at Springhill, in common with those in other districts in Nova Scotia, were originally leased in 1825 to the General Mining Association by the Duke of York. When the lease was nullified in 1857, having in 1849 released to the Government of Nova Scotia all its interests in the minerals of the province, the General Mining Association, as compensation for loss of rights was permitted to select and retain certain limited areas. Among these were four square miles of coal lands at Springhill. Lack of transportation facilities prevented coal being mined other than at the outcrops by farmers for their own use, until 1870. With the prospect of rail transportation becoming available, a Company known as the Springhill Mining Company was formed. This Company leased from the Government certain areas outside the limits of the General Mining Association holdings, and systematic coal mining on a moderate scale began.

In 1878 the workings had reached the boundary of the General Mining Association property and in the following year this area was transferred through the Crown from the G. M. A. to the Springhill Mining Company. A few years later the Springhill and Parrsboro Coal and Railway Company was organized.

These two companies were merged in 1884 under the title of the Cumberland Railway and Coal Company, which began mining on a much larger scale. In 1910 the Dominion Coal Company Limited absorbed the Cumberland Railway and Coal Company. Springhill was the site of three mine disasters in 1891, 1956 and 1958, which killed 125, 39 and 74 miners respectively.

It is reported that coal was first discovered in Pictou County, at Stellarton, in 1798 and that in 1807 the first license to mine coal was issued to John McKay. In 1817, Adam Carr obtained a lease from the Crown to mine and export coal. In 1825, through the prerogative of the Crown, the then Duke of York obtained a lease of all the mineral rights in Nova Scotia, with the exception of a few small areas already leased or held under grants.. Messrs. Rundell, Bridge & Rundell of London, received a transfer of the Duke's lease which they subsequently transferred to a Company known as the General Mining Association.

In 1827, the General Mining Association came to Pictou County and sank the Store Pits on the Foord Seam. By 1829 they had completed a six mile long railway, which connected the mines to the wharf at Abercrombie. It is worth noting that the first steam locomotive on the American continent ran on this line.

In 1849, the mineral rights were vested in the Province of Nova Scotia and in 1857 the original lease of the General Mining Association was nullified. As partial compensation for loss of their original rights, the General Mining Association was permitted to select and retain certain limited areas, amongst these were four square miles surrounding the town of Stellarton.

It had been the intention of the General Mining Association to work the iron deposits as well as the coal. A blast furnace was erected at the Albion Mines and iron ore was sent in from the Springville District. These efforts at iron smelting proved unsuccessful and the project was soon abandoned.

The Acadia Coal Company was organized in 1864, securing leases adjoining those of the General Mining Association, They sank the Thorn Pit on the MacGregor Seam in 1866. This pit was soon abandoned as the Acadia seam, which was more commercially promising, was discovered about two miles to the westward at a location that is now the site of Westville. The working of this seam was successful and led to the formation of the Inter-colonial Coal Company, which acquired leases to the south of the Acadia properties and sank the Drummond Slope to work the Acadia Seam.

In 1871 the Nova Scotia Coal Company was formed, leasing coal lands to the north of the Acadia areas. They sank the Black Diamond Slope, also on the Acadia Seam. This latter area was sold to the Nova Scotia Steel & Coal Company, Limited, in 1889. They sold it to the Acadia Coal Company in 1893. In 1872 the Vale Coal & Iron Manufacturing Company was organized. They purchased leases of coal lands at Thorburn and began operations in the MacBean Seam.

In the same year, 1872, the Halifax Coal Company was formed, purchasing all the mining rights of the General Mining Association in Pictou County. In 1886, the Acadia Coal Company, the Halifax Coal Company and the Vale Iron & Manufacturing Company all merged under the title of the Acadia Coal Company, Limited.

In 1900, the Nova Scotia Steel & Coal Company Limited, after securing the leases of coal lands between New Glasgow and Thorburn, sank the Marsh Shaft on the MacKay Seam. In 1919, the Acadia Coal Company was purchased by the Nova Scotia Steel & Coal Company and thus came into the merger of the British Empire Steel Corporation in 1921. The Pictou Coal Field today is largely depleted, although certain sections of the field still contain pockets of mineable coal. The coal field lies about 9 miles inland from the shore of Northumberland Strait and just beyond the head of the tidal water of the East River, at which point we find the Town of Stellarton.

The area occupied by the productive coal is comparatively small as the coal belt extends, roughly, only ten miles in an East and West direction, with a minimum width of three miles. The Town of New Glasgow is situated on the northern boundary of the coal field and lies approximately half-way between its eastern and western extremities. New Glasgow has been the commercial and industrial center of northern Nova Scotia, known best for its ship building industry.

New Glasgow, Nova Scotia was the home of the only Canadian producer of marked oilwick cap lamps that I am aware of. The lamp is stamped:

THOMPSON & Co.
MAKERS
NEW GLASGOW, N.S.



I have been unable to obtain any information on this manufacturer to date. Given the extent of Canadian coal mining, it is surprising that more mine lamps were not produced in Canada, at least marked lamps. In my collection I have a Canadian Fleming's Special carbide handlamp and an H.L. Piper hanging oilwick lamp.

This double spout lamp, of all steel construction, is well made and most resembles a cross between a Grier Bros. and George Anton face lamp. It stands 2" tall to the top of the lid and has a bottom diameter of 1 5/8".

Has anyone else found other marked Canadian mine lamps?

Source: The Louis Frost Notes 1686-1962.