



# THE UNDERGROUND LAMP POST



- NOT A HIPPIE NEWSPAPER -

Vol. I, No. 6

Spring, 1971

The Underground Lamp Post, devoted to old mine lamps, carbides, and candleholders. Mini-editor: Henry Pohns, 4537 Quitman St., Denver, Colorado, 80212

## 1971 National Speleological Society Convention

We have the following notification from one of the NSS chairmen:

"During the 1971 NSS Convention at Virginia Polytechnic Institute in Blacksburg, Virginia, a display of carbide lamps, miner's lamps, candleholders, & other pre-electric mining lamps is going to be held. Along with the display there will be a trading post set up where lamp tramps can get together and trade, sell, and buy other lamps and lamp parts while at the same time envying others lamps and bragging about their pets. The display will be held in an atmosphere depicting the history of pre-electric miner's lighting techniques.

The lamps will be displayed in a locked display room with a guard standing watch through the duration of the display. The lamps will be displayed for one day, possibly two days if the demand is great enough.

It is my hope that you will have some interesting and rare lamps that you would like to put on display. If you do, would you please send me a list of lamps that you would like to display and I could notify you as to which lamps we would like to use. My address is:

Larry Johnson  
Box 3072 E. Pritchard  
Virginia Polytechnic University  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061 "

Eastern cavers and Lamp Tramps may well be able to participate. Anyone interested be sure to drop Larry Johnson a note.

Our fellow lamper Chuck Young in Fairfax, Virginia, recently has found a reference to a "STANDARD" carbide lamp manufactured by the John S. Cummings and Co. of Tunnelton, West Virginia. It was made of brass in three parts: a water bowl, a gas chamber, and a carbide holder. The carbide holder could be changed while the lamp continued to burn. Does anyone else have any information on this lamp?

Carbide and the Milkman. My brother Jerry recently asked about carbide lamp parts at Gain Hardware in Denver. He found no parts, but did hear an interesting tale from one of the men there. It seems that milkmen used to use carbide lamps on their rounds; and the more unscrupulous of them, on finding a delivery of their competitors' milk, would lift the lids and drop a little grain of carbide in each bottle. The milk thus doctored would sour within a few hours, inducing the soured customer to switch dairies. - Donald Davis

Brilliant Search Lite. Stan Lefond in Connecticut needs a cap burner unit to fit with his Brilliant Search Lite belt generator carbide-water unit. Anyone having parts to trade or to sell or anyone having literature on these items are invited to correspond with Stan. Address to: Mr. Stan Lefond, Amax Exploration, Inc., One Greenwich Plaza, Greenwich, Connecticut, 06830.

Editorial. The Lamp Post has been very well recieved by many Lamp Tramps, Speleologists, and Candleophlies; Each month brings several more requests for copies and additional names for the mailing list. Most ask about subscription rates, etc. I always explain that the continued appearance of The Lamp Post as an "occasional" (not a periodical) will depend upon three things: my wife's patience, the continued semi-availability of an office copier at my work, and the elasticity of our household postage budget. I will try something other than first class postage this time; hope all copies arrive in good shape. Many thanks to all who have helped in the past. H.A.P.





SOME TRICKS of the MINER'S TRADE  
for OIL and SUNSHINE WICK LAMPS;  
plus ODD NOTES.

by  
George E. Bayles  
Cincinnati, Ohio

The old miner's "lard oil" and "sunshine" wick lamps are apparently simple little gadgets; popularly known as "pit lamps", "teapot lamps", or "oil wick cap lamps", their operation and maintenance was a bit tricky at times. About all that was required for mechanical repairs was a piece of scrap tin, possibly from an old pipe tobacco can, some solder and a soldering iron, and maybe an odd piece of #6 or #8 steel wire for a replacement cap hook. But did you ever try to put a wick in a new lamp? ... or try to replace the wick in an old one? ... or try to burn sunshine in a "lard oil" lamp? ... or try to raise the wick in the tube spout when it had burned down too far for a good light?

Procedures to meet these problems are approximately the same for both "lard oil" and for "sunshine" lamps.

● NEW WICKS

Putting in a new wick, or "wicking up" a new lamp for the first time, requires the correct material if the lamp is to operate properly. Ordinary cotton store string won't do; neither will soft cotton rug yarn, and especially none of the modern day synthetic fibers. You might be lucky enough to find a ball of lamp wicking in some of the local hardware or supply stores in an old mining area, but it is doubtful. Finding such a "treasure" is about as easy as finding any of the old "standard miner's" candles. But don't give up hope; cotton plumbers wicking makes a good substitute.



WRAP LENGTH EQUALS:  
"X" + 1" or 1½"

Measure the distance from the tip of the wick tube spout, down the tube, and across the base of the lamp font. That distance plus 1" to 1½" will be the diameter of the wrap that you must make. Roll up across a thumb and the next two fingers of one hand (the same as you would a length of string you intended to save) a number of wraps of the wicking, usually 10-15 for smaller lamps, more for the larger ones. When compressed, the wicking loop roll should make an estimated snug fit at the top of the lamp tube wick spout.

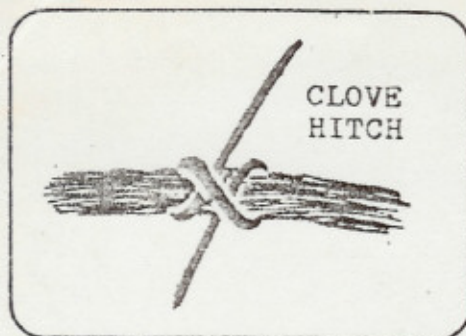
For larger lamps you will have to resort to a peg board or to 3-4 partly

driven finishing nails in a scrap of lumber, since your fingers normally will not reach far enough. Tie the loop with a double clove-hitch and cut off the leading strand from the ball of wicking, allowing 4-5 inches of extra strand length beyond the tie.

Don't, I repeat DON'T, try to force the wick down the tube spout. If you do you will be in for one h--- of an aggravating and frustrating experience. Even if you are successful, you will still not have a good job, as you will not be able to adjust the "fit" of the wick for the proper capillary action of the fuel in the wick to support the size flame you may want for a light.







With a little trick you can do the whole job easily in about 10 minutes, less with practice, and without the aggravation.

This, then, is the trick. First, directly across the loop of wicking from the clove hitch tie, cut all the strands of wicking, making a bundle tied in the middle. Put the extra 4-5 inches of strand length you left beyond the tied loop down through the fuel reservoir top and blow sharply like you would blow a note on a horn (lip action not necessary). The single strand of wicking will almost jump out of the wick tube spout.

By that strand, pull the wicking in from the bottom of the tube spout. If it seems to be too tight, do not try to forcibly haul it on through, but back it all out, remove one strand and try again. Repeat as often as necessary. If it pulls too easily, your wicking loop was too small in thickness. Back it all out, loosen the clove-hitch a bit, and add one or more strands of wicking of the same length as the rest in the bundle. After you have pulled the wicking in place and it fits snugly with the clove-hitch completely out of the wick tube spout, give the wicking a few twists. Then slip one blade of your shears through the wicking loop at the tie, cut across all strands again, remove the extra length of wicking and tie, and push the resulting wick down into the tube spout until only about 1/8th of an inch is left above the tube spout. Fill the lamp with oil and let it soak until the wick is fully "loaded". For "sunshine" lamps you should use sunshine fuel, but if you do not have any, regular oil fuel will do. Light the lamp and let the flame burn the wick down to its own adjustment. If the flame is too small for the desired light, the wick is too tight. Pull out one or more strand of wicking with a tweezers until you get the desired height of flame.



#### • SUNSHINE LAMPS

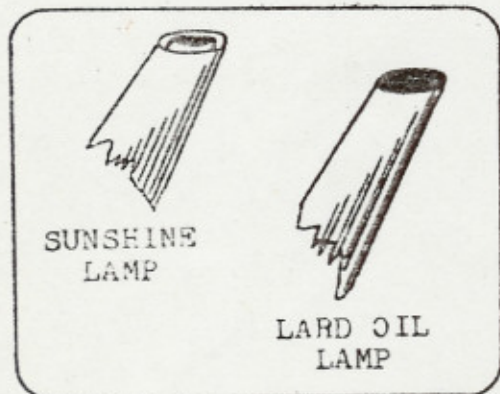
How do you differentiate between lard oil lamps and sunshine lamps?

Easy. Lard oil lamps have a single thickness of metal in the wick tube spout, with no trimmings except possibly a drip collar. Sunshine lamps, however, have a number of characteristics:

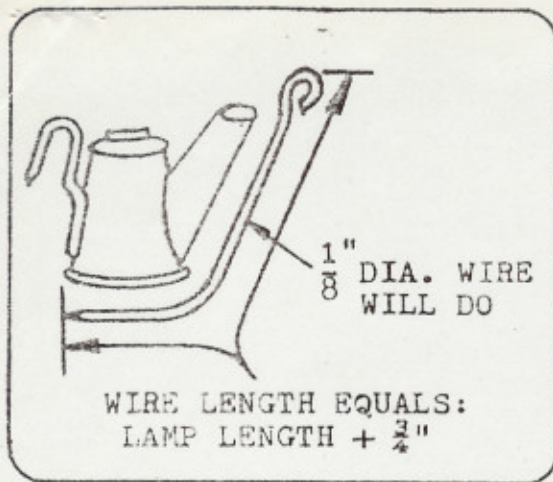
- a double wick tube spout in which the wick will be in the inner tube; the outer tube will be closed at the base to make an inert air chamber to hold warm air against the inner tube as a "heater";
- the lamp may have a copper tip on the wick tube spout with a copper rod extension going down inside the tube to the base of the reservoir;
- the lamp may be factory equipped with a heater wire and loop;
- any lamp marked as **\*ST\*AR\*** is a sunshine lamp.

Remember that each lamp type was designed for its own type of fuel. You can successfully burn both oil or sunshine fuel in a "sunshine" (double tube spout) lamp, but you cannot burn sunshine fuel in a lard oil (single tube spout) lamp without resorting to another miner's trick.

Cut a length of #12 gage (.105 dia.) copper wire, 3/4" longer than the distance from the wick tube spout tip across the bottom of the lamp. See illustration on next page. Make a loop of about 1/4" diameter at one end of the wire. File the other end to a sharp point. Pull out a single strand of wicking close to the top of the wick tube spout and push the sharp end of the wire into that space, down through the wick until it crosses the lamp







the lamp base. The small wire loop will lay on edge across the wick tip. This wire will form a "heater" which keeps the wax sunshine fuel melted in the bottom of the font so that it will rise in the wick.

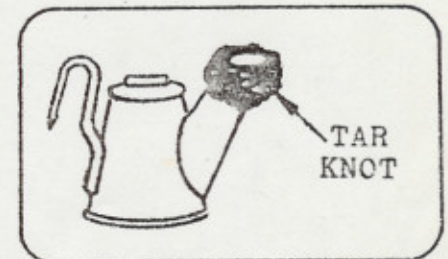
Many "lard oil" type and "sunshine" type lamps both had drip collars or flanges near the top of the wick tube spout. These collars have been found on the following brand name lamps and quite possibly on others:



- |                   |                   |                            |
|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| • J. Anton        | • Grier Bros.     | • Liberty                  |
| • J. Anton & Sons | • Trethaway Bros. | • Crown, Sterling          |
| • G. Anton        | • C. George       | • G.B. )                   |
| • C. L. Anton     | • U.S.A. Eagle    | • *ST*AR* ) Several models |

#### • TAR COLLARS

Perhaps you have picked up an old oil wick cap lamp looking about as "onery" as an old well-used lamp can look, and having a heavy accumulation of tar, etc., built up in a knot at the top of the wick tube spout. When you clean up that lamp DO NOT REMOVE THAT ACCUMULATION. It took some miner who really cared for his lamp many months of regular use and loving care to build up that knot. It served him well as a drip collar before the lamp makers caught on and made the metal collars.



#### • MORE ON WICKS

Should the wick in your lamp be too high, simply push the wick down a bit in the tube spout. If the wick has burned down too low and should be raised, how do you pull it up? You don't. You may pry it up a bit with a nail or a piece of stiff steel wire, but take it easy. Dig the wire into the wick at a low angle, almost through the wick, and twist the wick as you pry up, or all you will raise will be a few odd strands and not the whole wick. Most miners at work in a mine did not have a convenient nail or bit of wire. But they raised the wick up anyhow with another "miner's trick". Before refilling the lamp, and with the wick oily and the lamp still warm, they inverted the lamp and rapped the base of the wick tube spout sharply on their boot heel a few times. That did it! That also is the reason for the battered condition of the base of the wick tube spout on a number of old used oil wick lamps. You may have noticed a "half moon" of metal, or a loop of twisted wire at the base of the wick tube on Trethaway or on Crown lamps. These were not put there to re-inforce a weak spot, but rather were designed to serve as "bumpers" or "shock absorbers" to "take the rap". (Editors note: Thus the saying, "Knock your lamps, men.")

#### • FUELS

Common fuel for most single-tube (lard oil) lamps was, as the name implies, lard oil, although a number of other commercial animal or vegetable oils could also be used. Household oils of the time burned much more freely and cleanly, but were too expensive for miners. To have used sperm oil, as is sometimes suggested, would have been like burning gold, if that were possible to do. Usually, what most miners wound up with as a lamp fuel was a combination of black strap grease and kerosene which smoked like the devil, but which was very cheap. The miners swiped the black strap from the mine car wheel bearings, or from the supply gun. But this fuel wasn't legal because of the smoke. The legal standard lamp oil was "summer yellow cottonseed oil" or equivalent. That is what the miners used when the mine inspector was present - or due to be! A modern-day





substitute for lard oil is either a machine shop cutting oil or, if you can get any, cottonseed oil. That (cottonseed oil) is just what most cooking oils are, but check the ingredients on the bottle at the grocery store; some cooking oils are mostly corn oil, and that isn't so good!

"Sunshine wax" is something else. It was made originally by the old Standard Oil Co., before the anti-trust bust-up, and was quite similar to modern-day paraffin candle wax with slightly more mineral oil content. You cannot find any of the original stuff in old miner's supply stores any more, but by experimenting,

you can come close to duplicating it. Simply melt up a 5-10 cent store common paraffin candle (or a block of jelly-glass paraffin) and while molten, stir in 1/2 teaspoon of mineral oil to lower the melting point to about 110°-115° F.; paraffin melts at 130° F. Allow the mix to cool. It will be solid to about 110°, but will soften like putty when warmed in your hands. To fill your lamp with the "sunshine wax", just scrape off some shavings on the edge of the opened lamp fuel reservoir and push the wax down in with your thumb or finger.

#### • CLEANING

The "easy" way to clean up a very old "cruddy", greasy, or otherwise filthy oil wick cap lamp, is a question I wish I could answer. It seems that there isn't any "easy" way, but patience and light rubbing with #000 or #0000 steel wool dipped in kerosene or diesel oil will usually do it fairly well. Remember when cleaning up an old lamp - PLEASE spare that tar knot at the wick tube spout. It is a sort of a "badge of honor" of service and should be preserved.

#### • EDITOR'S NOTE

There are several additional cleaning aids to try also:

- 1) Alternate soaking and brushing in household vinegar will remove many kinds of corrosion;
- 2) A wire brush on a 1/4" drill will remove dirt and grime; but many collectors do not like to use a wire brush at all; brush lightly;
- 3) Jewelers rouge and a polishing wheel will clean and shine detail metal parts;
- 4) Household chemical copper cleaners will also work well, if you use enough elbow grease; be sure to wash away all the chemicals.

#### • ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Those readers who enjoyed this article by Mr. Bayles might drop him a note in care of your mini-editor; I'll forward it to him. Anyone with similar information on various lamp subjects and "lamp tramp" stories are invited to submit them for inclusion in a future issue of The Lamp Post.

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More on the N S S Convention Lamp Display. After page one of The Lamp Post was typed and printed we have received another communication from Blacksburg, Virginia. Larry Johnson advises that Bob Page will help him with the display. Again, anyone interested can send a list to Larry Johnson who will in turn notify what lamps are welcome to avoid duplications. They will then be sent to Bob Page's home during a certain date. They can be insured for several thousand dollars and the NSS will reimburse back for insurance fees and for postage after the convention. Bob Page will take care of them. There will be a VPI-NSS guard in the display room at all times and the lamps will be in locked display cases. Bob Page will remain after the convention, insured, all expenses paid by NSS.

The above is quoted from Larry Johnson's latest letter. Don't write to The Lamp Post - write to Larry Johnson, Box 3072 E. Pritchard, Virginia Poly U., Blacksburg, Virginia, 24061. GLICKHAUF (German miners Good Luck)

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Reminder. Why not type up an article or an advertisement for the fall issue?