

The California Vigorit Powder Company

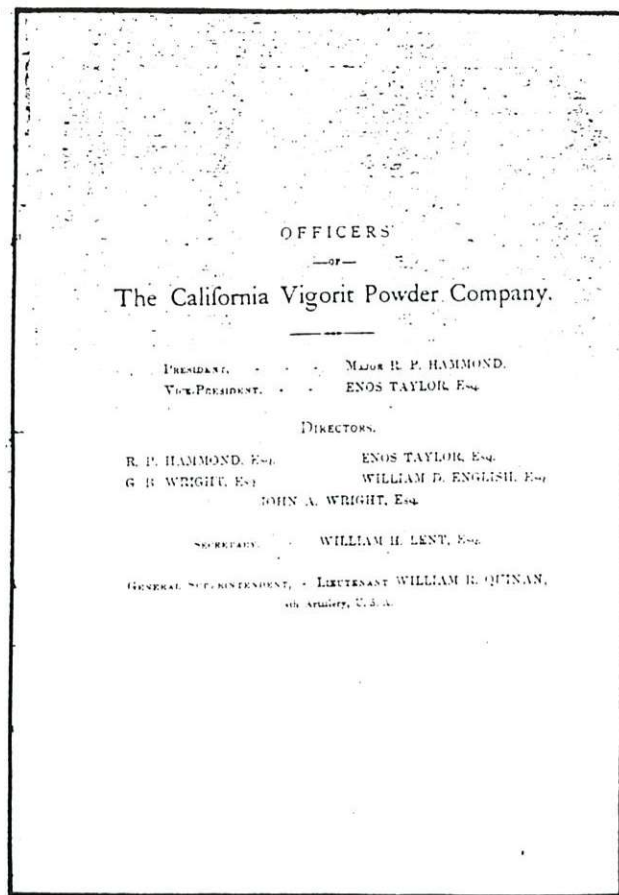
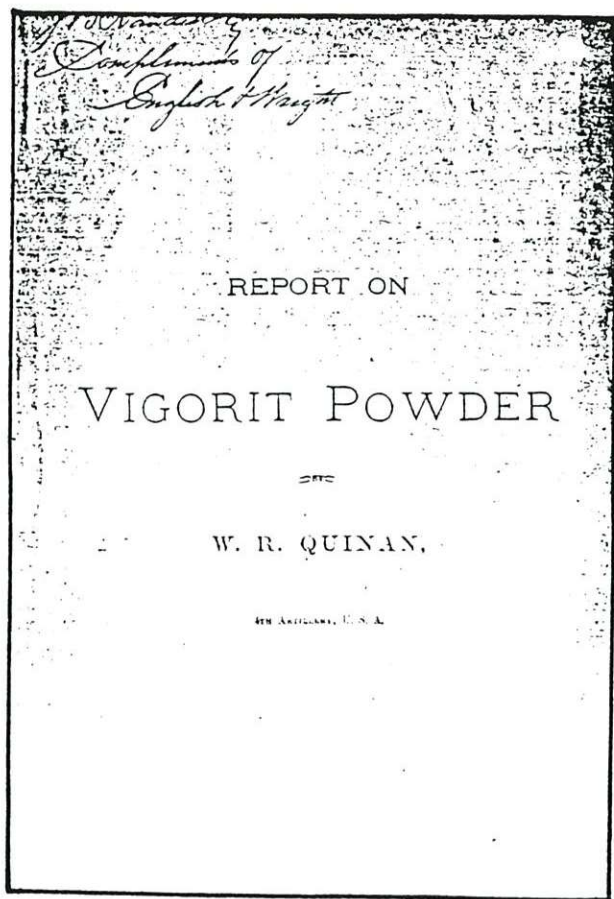
by Mark Bohannan

The Vigorit Powder Company was incorporated in California on September 18, 1877. It appears that experimental work, if not actual manufacture of Vigorit powder had been going on for about a year prior to incorporation.

The original Vigorit powder seems to have been based on a formula developed by Carl Gustav Bjorkmann of Christiania, Norway. Dr. John William Hood is believed to have brought Bjorkmann to America with him in 1876. The Vigorit powder consisted of 20 parts of potassium nitrate, 20 parts of potassium chlorate, 10 parts of "cellulose," 10 parts of dried ground peas, 10 parts of sawdust, and 30 parts of "nitroline." A practical underground test of this powder was made in the Consolidated Virginia Mine in Virginia City, Nevada under the supervision of James G. Fair. The powder proved to be highly satisfactory, but the cost was prohibitive to compete with the powders of other companies.

In November of 1876, Charles de Lacy of San Francisco patented a similar, but simpler powder consisting of 30% nitroglycerine, 10% wood nitrocellulose, 20% potassium nitrate, 20% potassium chlorate, and 20% sawdust. It is believed that in practice, the wood nitrocellulose was not used.

In 1879, there were two grades of Vigorit powder, No. 1 containing about 45% nitroglycerine, and the other dry ingredients in about the same proportions mentioned above, and No. 2, which contained about 35% nitroglycerine and no potassium chlorate.



Front cover and back page of a 24 page pamphlet from 1881.

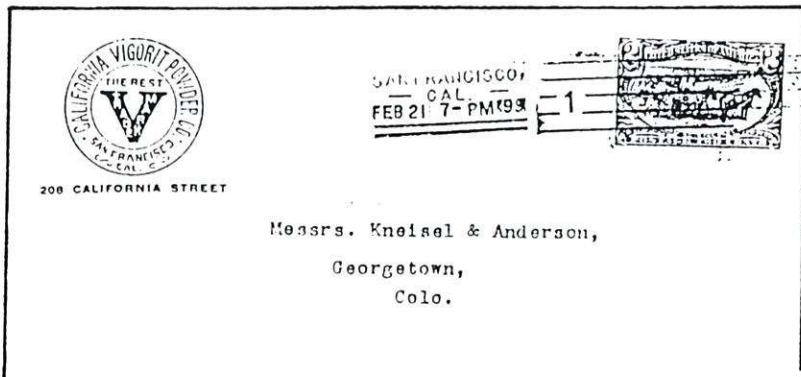
On January 15, 1879, the company was reorganized as the California Vigorit Powder Company with a capital of 20,000 shares of a par value of 100 dollars each, of which 16,020 shares were actually issued.

The Giant Powder Company filed suit against the California Vigorit Powder Company on September 8, 1879, for infringement of the reissued Nobel dynamite patent which has been sustained in the eastern courts. Judge Field declared the reissued patent invalid as being broader in scope than the original patent. This suit was of great importance because it upset the last of the patents under which the Giant Powder Company had attempted to monopolize the manufacture of active base dynamites. By this court decision, the manufacture of all but Kieselguhr (the basic dry component of Nobel's original patent) dynamites was thrown open to anyone.

Mr. W. R. Quinan, manager of the California Vigorit Powder Company patented a gelatine dynamite on January 10, 1882 which he called "DETONITE," but it contained too much nitrocellulose and was not a practical explosive.

<p>MANUFACTURERS OF DYNAMITE, MINING, BLASTING, IMPROVED STUMP AND "DEWET" BLASTING, VIGORIT "LOW" POWDER DEALERS IN CAPS AND FUSE. WORKS, POINT ISABELLE, CONTRA COSTA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA.</p>	<p>ADDRESS ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO P. O. BOX 111 DENVER, COLO. <u>Dec 5,</u> 190<u>1</u></p>	
	<p><u>Kneisel & Anderson,</u> <u>Georgetown, Colo.</u> BOUGHT OF CALIFORNIA VIGORIT POWDER CO. OF SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA. H. B. GEE, Colorado Agent, 55 and 59 Jacobson Building. TERMS <u>60 days - Less 2% 10 days after arrival of goods.</u></p>	
<p>120⁰ - 1/8 x 6 - 40% Dynamite - 6000 20⁰ - 1 1/8" - 40% Dynamite - 1000 130⁰ - 1/8" - 40% Dynamite - 7500 14500 @ .1210</p>		<p>1754.50</p>
<p><u>F. O. B. Georgetown</u></p>		

<p>MANUFACTURERS OF NITRO-GLYCERINE BLASTING POWDERS ALSO VIGORIT "LOW" POWDER FOR BLASTING ROCK, FLAGG, WOOD, ETC. "VIGORIT" CAPS AND FUSE. WORKS POINT ISABELLE, CONTRA COSTA CO., CAL.</p>	<p><u>Denver, Colo.</u> Nov. 4, 190<u>1</u></p>	
	<p>Messrs. Kneisel & Anderson, Georgetown, Colorado. BOUGHT OF California Vigorit Powder Co. OF SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA. TERMS H. B. GEE, COLORADO AGENT.</p>	



Envelope from Vigorit Powder Co.

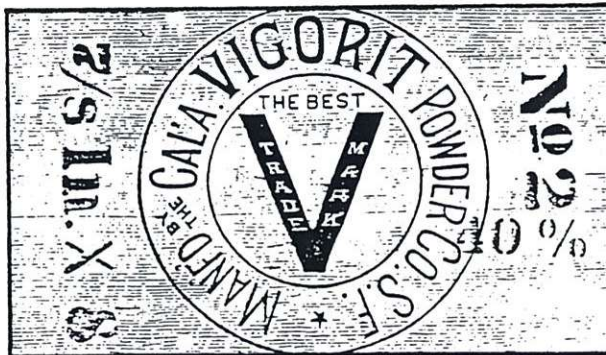


Fig. 1

Two different stamped 50 lb. box ends are known. "Packed By" (not illustrated) and "Manf'd By" (Fig. 1). Fig. 1 Don Tucker collection. Fig. 2 at right is the emblem from a stick of Vigorit Powder from the collection of Herb Dick.

VIGORIT POWDER.

NO ACCIDENT HAS EVER HAPPENED.

ALL POWDERS manufactured by the California Vigorit Powder Co. are SUBMITTED during the course of manufacture TO SCIENTIFIC TESTS for safety and strength. They are tested for Safety against Friction, Fire, a Temperature of 219° Fahr., and the various shocks to which Powder is liable in practical handling.

The following qualities are common to all grades of Powder manufactured by the Company: **Safety, Non-Leakage; Freedom from Noxious Gases; Uniformity and Strength.** If customers desire the EXACT STRENGTH of any Powder shipped to them will be GIVEN in Foot Pounds.

DETONITE.

This is an explosive to which new principles and recently patented. It is the Strongest Powder ever placed on the Market, in this country or abroad. It is the Safest Strong Powder ever made. For very refractory rock this Powder is the most economical in the market.

VIGORIT, No. 1, XX.

This Powder is Stronger than the Highest Grades of Hercules or Giant. It is only surpassed by "Detonite." It is suitable for hard rock.

VIGORIT, No. 1.

For general work this Powder has no superior. It has the advantage over Giant, Hercules or Yellow in safety and freedom from noxious fumes.

VIGORIT, No. 2.

Equal to any corresponding Grade in the Market.

LOW POWDER.

VIGORIT, L. P.

This is a Powder suitable for Black Blasting, Low Blasting or the vast majority in which Black Powder can be used. It is STRONGER THAN BLACK POWDER, having from three to ten times the explosive strength, depending on conditions. It is Superior to Judson Powder, in being more uniform in the use and more convenient in handling.

Best Qualities of FUSE and CAPS sold at Lowest Rates.

CALIFORNIA VIGORIT POWDER CO., ENGLISH & WRIGHT, Agents
 No 217 Pine St., San Francisco.

June 1882 advertisement.

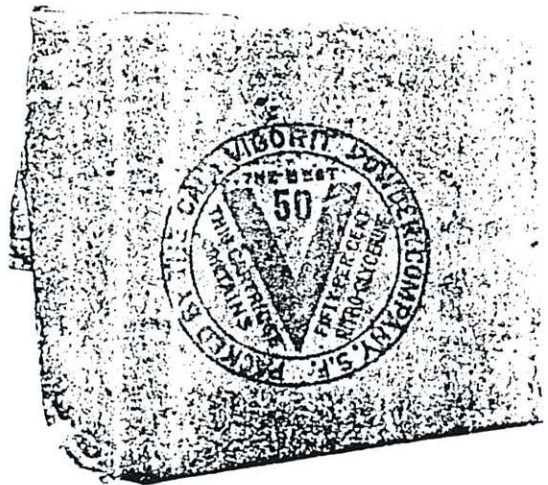
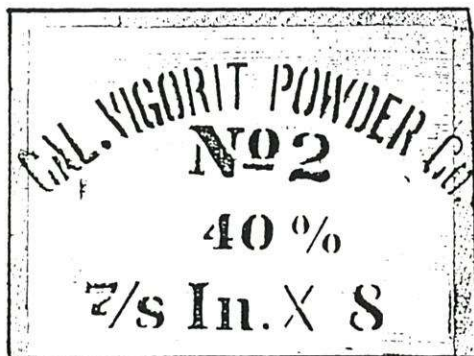


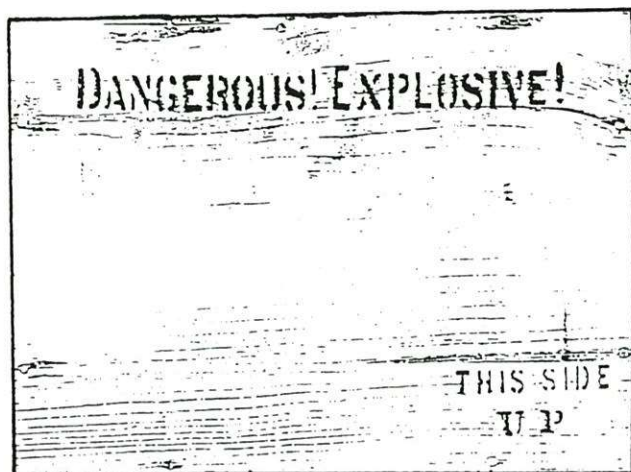
Fig. 2



(end)



(end)



(top)



(side)

Shown above are the two ends, tops, and side from a 25 lb. Vigorit Powder box. From the Mark Bohannan collection.

It is thought that the plant was shut down from 1889 to 1897 during the explosive price wars of the 1890's. In 1901, its capacity was 150,000 pounds a month which was increased to 300,000 pounds in 1903.

The California Vigorit Powder Company bought their acid from the Stauffer Chemical Company. The acid was paid for with stock in the Vigorit Company. By 1902, the Stauffer interests had acquired sufficient stock to gain control of the California Vigorit Powder Company, which was then sold to DuPont in 1903.

On October 31, 1906, the entire assets of the California Vigorit Powder Company were sold to the California Powder Works and the company was terminated.