

EARTHQUAKE BOXES

BY LANE GRIFFIN

The earthquake that devastated San Francisco on April 18, 1906 destroyed the financial and manufacturing community which supplied goods and services to the western United States. Its effects were particularly detrimental to the mining camps of California and Nevada who relied on bay area businesses for their supplies. Like a diastema or hiatus of geological terms creating an unconformity (a distinct break in the continuity of the rocks), the earthquake caused a break or disturbance in the appearance of manufactured items.

Apparently the manufacturing equipment for mining supplies, including explosives, blasting caps and their containers were destroyed in the earthquake and new or improvised packaging was necessary to identify their products. The most obvious mining related example of this is the California Cap tin paper label that was used to explain the lack of their characteristic embossed lid . See figure 1.

In addition to cap tins, unusu-

ally labeled dynamite boxes whose manufacturers were located in the San Francisco bay area and were encountered in mines being worked in 1906-07 are suspected to be 'earthquake boxes'.

The California Powder Works was located in an area subject to the effects of the quake and an unusual box has been found in several mines (Fairview, Nevada, Manhattan, Nevada) of that era. This box was encountered in association with an 'earthquake tin' which adds validity to its earthquake related origin. The series of Hercules boxes displayed (figure 3) show the style of labeling just before 1906, the 'earthquake box', and the style shortly thereafter.

Another box of this era (figure 2) that is possibly an 'earthquake' is a variant of the older style of box

but with E.I. Dupont replacing the California Powder Works on the logo. This box had no Dupont label on the back and one example was found in the Victor district, Churchill county, Nevada, a mining camp which only

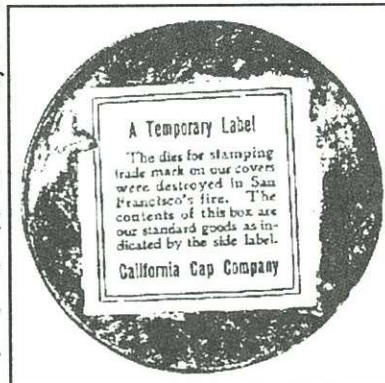


Figure 1: California Cap Tin lid with 'earthquake paper label', 1906, courtesy Andy Martin.

worked during 1907.

The Giant Powder Company was another large powder company from the bay area. Evidence of their change in labeling format as a result of the earthquake can be found in box ends unlike any previous designs. The ends of Giant's earthquake boxes are lightly inked and more crude in design than boxes before or after. One of these boxes is shown in figure 6 with an early box design. The ends of this box are stamped with the standard Giant eagle design but turned inward and one end has a crude inked Giant Powder Company logo unlike any other. This box was found at Goldfield, Nevada which was being extensively worked during 1906-07.

Another unusual box design is shown in figure 4 and is particularly interesting because of the address on the end which is different from any other printed on a Giant box.

Despite the fact that Giant Eagle gelatin box ends were being used

as ends for Giant powder type boxes there appears that there was a need to fabricate an eagle box end as well. Shown in figure 5 is an end that is distinctly different from those before or after and is printed with a purple ink. One of these ends was found at Golden Arrow, Nevada and one at Goldfield, Nevada, both camps active during 1906-07. In comparison, figure 6 shows eagle boxes from before and after the earthquake.

'Earthquake boxes' are unique and quite rare and therefore can be very collectible. They help provide a

glimpse into a past where mining camps were very dependent on the manufacturing capability of a single source. This source was susceptible to the forces of nature, forces which even today are held in utmost respect. If another earthquake equivalent to the 1906 trembler was to hit the bay

area most assuredly a disruption in goods and services would occur that would heavily impact the west.

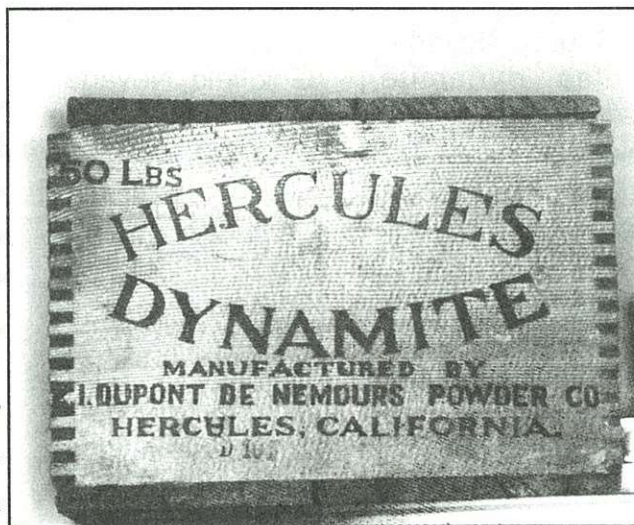


Figure 2:
E.I. Dupont earthquake box.

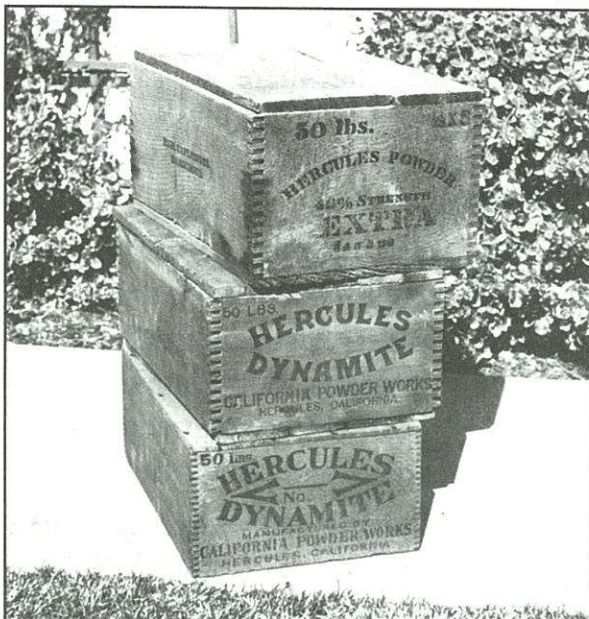


Figure 3:
 Bottom Box- Hercules dynamite box, 1905, Ray district, Nye County, Nevada.
 Middle Box- Hercules dynamite, 'earthquake box', note different style of lettering, Lovelock, Nevada. This box was found with 'earthquake cap tins'.
 Top Box- Hercules Powder, 1908, note that Hercules no longer used the term dynamite for its nitroglycerine based products after 1907, Jessup district, Pershing county, Nevada.

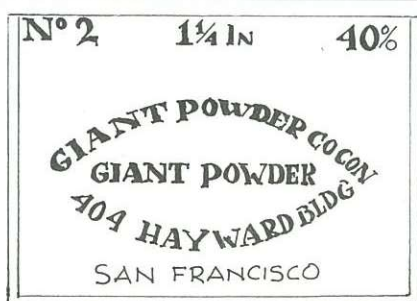


Figure 4: Design of Giant Box, Giant Powder, 'earthquake box', courtesy Andy Martin

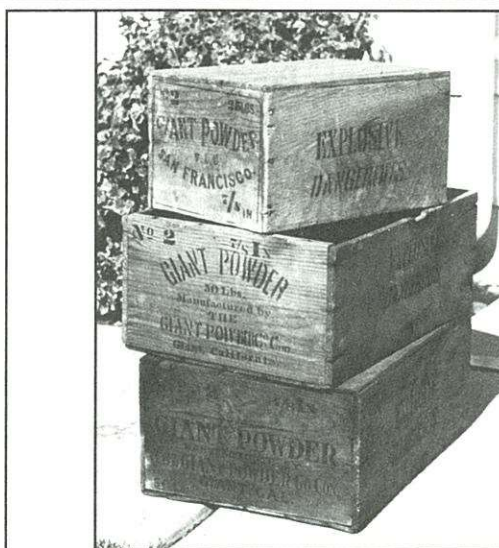


Figure 5:
 Top Box- Giant Powder, 1905, Goldfield, Nevada.
 Middle Box- Giant Powder, 'earthquake box', note poor quality of stenciled end, Goldfield, Nevada.
 Bottom Box- Giant Powder, post 1907 style box end, Goldfield, Nevada.



Figure 6:
 Top Box- Giant Eagle gelatin dynamite, 1907, Seven Troughs district, Pershing county, Nevada.
 Middle Box- Giant eagle gelatin dynamite, 1905, Rays district, Nye county, Nevada.
 Bottom Box: 'earthquake box', Goldfield, Nevada, (this box was nailed).