

# The Aetna Powder Co. & Aetna Explosives Co.

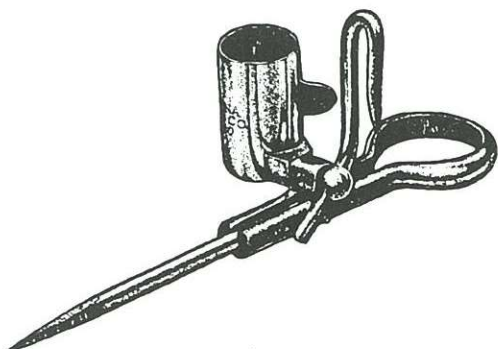
by Bob Schroth

The first time I saw a embossed Aetna Blasting cap tin, I knew I had to get it. Then while in the hunt for honing antiques I would on occasion come upon other Aetna products, I never really knew the difference in the true companies. This will be a brief description of what I have been able to find out.

## The Aetna Powder Co.<sup>1</sup>

Aetna Powder Co., was one of the companies organized in the early 1880's when an increasing demand for explosives and the upsetting of the Nobel Patents gave a new impetus to the dynamite industry. Their trademark was the Lion Brand. Aetna Powder Co. was incorporated in Indiana on April 3, 1880. They proved to be a major player in the dynamite industry of the era.

Aetna powder was carefully packaged in well made cartridges, cartons, and boxes, which pleased the consumers and for a time set the standard in this respect for other American powder manufactures. These high quality packing standards turned out to be Very desirable as far as collectors are concerned. I have a few early boxes and tins from this company. I can only wish to find the elusive Aetna Powder Co. folding candle stick.<sup>3</sup>



*Aetna folding candlestick. Illustration by Wendell Wilson.*



BLASTING CAPS

**If you want to get the best results  
from your dynamite,  
Use Good Detonators**

Nothing less than a No. 4 detonator is fit to explode any kind of dynamite, and a No. 5 is better. A forty per cent dynamite fired with a No. 3 detonator will do no better work than a thirty-three per cent dynamite fired with a No. 4. The man who saves ten cents on the price of one hundred detonators by buying a low grade, is sure to lose several dollars in explosive force which he fails to get out of the dynamite.

Lion Detonators are of the highest quality and are not made in any grade less than No. 4.

See page 16 for table of explosive charges contained in Lion Detonators.

*From Aetna dynamite booklet.*

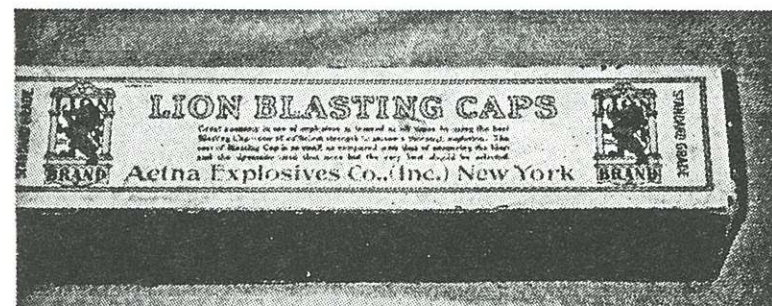


# The Aetna Explosives Co.<sup>1</sup>

Aetna Explosives Co. was the name given to Aetna after it was purchased by du Pont around 1913. This came about in a plan designed by R.J. Moxham, then a director of the du Pont Co. He believed it would be desirable to purchase and consolidate into one company the principal competitors of the du Pont Co. including particularly The Aetna Powder Co., Keystone National, Giant, and Brewster Co. A start was made towards the acquisition of their stocks. This was successful except in the case of the Giant Powder Co. whose stock was quietly acquired by the Atlas Powder Co. while negotiations were going on.



obtained enormous war contracts. By January 1916 these amounted to over \$30,000,000. As the war progressed the company became more of a munitions concern, and less concerned with commercial explosives. In late 1917 Aetna had been so badly involved through war-expansion and a few disasters in the munitions business that a receivership was inevitable.



*Lion Brand cap tin box (Bob Schroth collection).*

The new company was finally incorporated in New York on November 24, 1914. The companies absorbed, included the following: Aetna Powder Co., Keystone National Powder Co., Pluto Powder Co., Jefferson Powder Co., Miami Powder Co., and F. K. Brewster Inc. Along With 60% of the stock of the Kingley Wood Pulp Co. By this time the European war had created a large and rapidly increasing demand for explosives from warring nations. The Aetna officials now concluded to go after some of this attractive war business and soon obtained enormous war contracts.

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## Aetna-Grasselli Cap Tin

This Grasselli No. 6 is almost identical to the round Aetna and the Hercules dark green tins. It is a royal blue with black printing.<sup>2</sup> The similarity of these three Lion Brand tins suggests that Grasselli may have been involved with the Aetna - Hercules merger of 1921.

A recap of this merger is as follows. Due to an antitrust court decree breaking up the du Pont holding, a new Hercules Powder Co. was incorporated on Oct. 17, 1912. The new Hercules Powder Co. bought the Independent Powder Co in 1914, and the Aetna Explosives Co. in 1921.

It is known that in 1917 Grasselli acquired the Burton Powder Co., the American High Explosives Co., and the Cameron Powder Mfg. Co.



*The royal blue No. 6 Grasselli: a relabeled Aetna product?*

Aetna No. 6 Lion Brand tins are painted dark green with "Aetna Explosives" printed on the edge of the lid. The Hercules tin is the same except that the edge of the lid reads "Hercules Powder Co. Wilmington Dela." All the tins have the same Lion Brand trade mark. It is unusual for a #6 tin to be painted blue in color. Most #5 tins are Blue, #6 orange, #7 brown, And #8 Green. As always, there are exceptions to the rules. I guess that is what makes collecting so much fun.

### References

1. Arthur P. Van Gelders, and Hugo Schlatter. History of the Explosives Industry in America.
2. Andy Martin's Cap Tin Catalog.
3. Wilson-Bohrink, A Collector's Guide to Antique Miners' Candlesticks.