

The American Safety Mine Appliance Co.

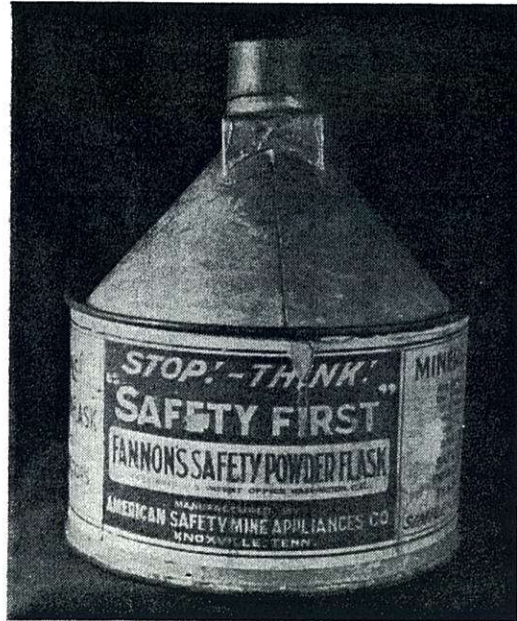
Knoxville, Tennessee

by Dave Thorpe

When collecting mining artifacts, I often wonder: was this really designed to be used by miners? This is especially true with blasting items and scales. But there was no question in my mind when I recently found this galvanized steel powder flask shown below. The red and white label tells it all. First, the word "mine" is part of the company's name. Then, on the left, the label boasts: ENDORSED BY CHIEF MINE INSPECTORS. On the right side is written: MINERS- Are safer in the handling of Powder when they use the FANNON SAFETY POWDER FLASK. No question here, but who was Fannon? I had never heard of the company.

Dave Johnson had written about his recent acquisition of the Toplis Carbide Flask by the same company. No one seemed to know anything about The American Safety Mine Appliance Co. of Knoxville, Tennessee. Now I was *really* curious.

After many phone calls, I finally was in touch with a historical society in Knoxville known as the McClung Collection. It is part of the Knox County Public Library. There, I spoke with Brian Miller who checked *every other* year from 1915-1930 of the Knoxville city directory for a listing. No luck, but he advised me to write him a letter expressing my interest, and he would look into it further.



Right side view



Left side view

One week later, he wrote back:

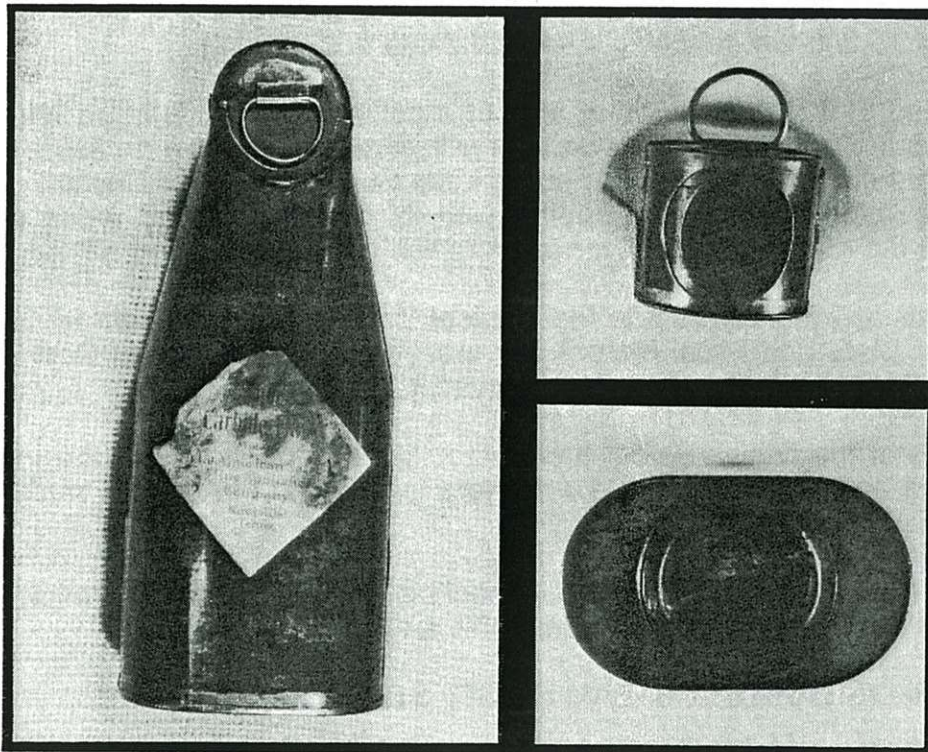
"In response to your call and letter I followed several leads. Unfortunately they all turned into deadends. So, I decided to check every year of the city directories during the span of time you indicated.

In the 1924 Knoxville city directory the following listing is found: American Safety Mine Appliance Co. (Pat Fannon) 300-8 N. Gay. However, when I looked up the address in the directory there were only small businesses at the location. Pat Fannon was living at the Hotel Helen 301 West Depot Ave., which is just a short distance from where his business is said to have been located. Neither he nor the company are to be found in the 1923 or 1925 city directories."

Little wonder that no one knew anything about the company. The business appears to have been in operation for only one year, and Pat Fannon's lodging in Knoxville was quite temporary. He appears to have been operating out of someone else's shop.

The Fannon Powder Flask sports a handle and thumb lever. The lever operates a spring-loaded copper sliding door which opens across the spout. The significance is that copper will not generate a spark, and that the flask is always closed when the miner releases his grip.

The Toplis Flask, shown below has a screw-cap, but it is located on the bottom and only needs to be removed for the day's first filling. The top is a rotating cylinder that pre-measures a load of carbide. The top cannot come loose or be positioned in any way that would allow accidental spillage of carbide. One can imagine what a catastrophe it would be if a miner discovered, too late, that his carbide flask had inadvertently opened, and he had lost all his fuel!



Toplis Carbide Flask, front, top and bottom views. (Dave Johnson collection)