

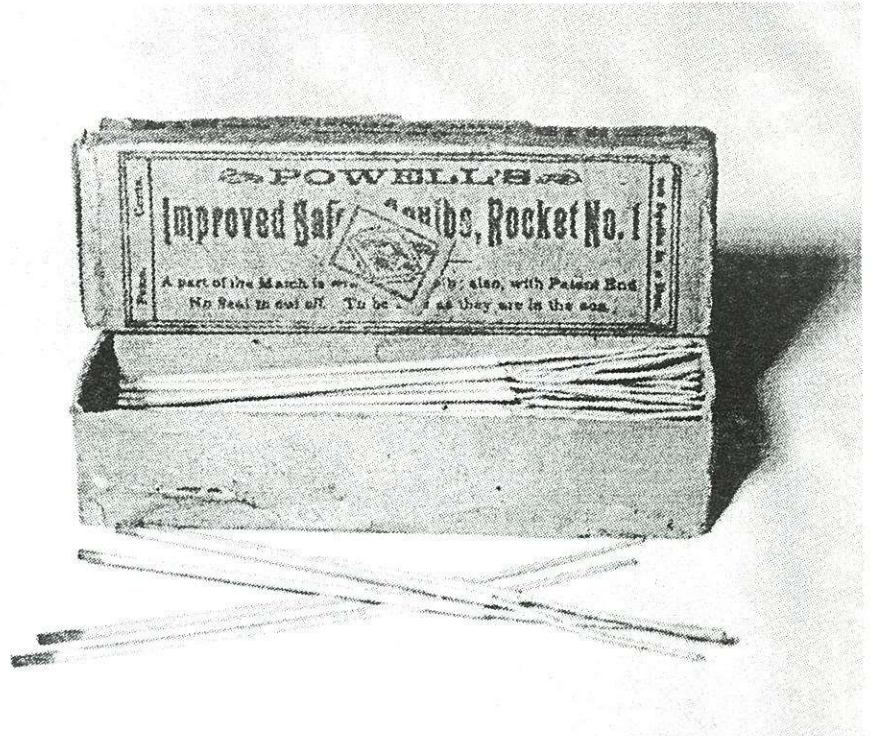
Squib Tins

Jim Van Fleet

Lester Bernstein was kind enough to send me recently a photograph of his collection of miners' squib tins. It was surprising to see the variety of shapes and sizes available, and a little bit of research dug up a few interesting variations.



Miners' Latest Improved Squib Box.



Cardboard box of squibs. Bill Lorah collection.

Squib tins or “boxes” as they were often called, were metal containers used to transport miners’ squibs underground safely. The squib was a peculiar design of fuse used for lighting charges of black powder. The mechanics of blasting with squibs and powder have been explained in previous articles in [Eureka!](#) Suffice it to say that these little paper devices are self-propelled rockets, and needed careful handling and storage!

Squibs came packaged in paper cartons, and the miner was obliged to transfer them to some type of container to transport them to the working face. Most such tins were designed with an oval profile, long enough to accommodate the squibs without bending them, and often with an internal divider to create two chambers within the tin. The most common design has a sliding removable lid which fits tightly over one end of the tin, and often the lid has a match striking surface embossed on it.

(left) Anton squib tin.

Most of these tin examples were unmarked, and this short article can't deal with all of the known variations or markings which have been found. The most famous squib box which has been found in some numbers is the brass, multiple-compartment 'GAIL & AX'S "NAVY" SQUIB, MATCH, AND TOUCH PAPER SAFETY BOX PATENTED JANUARY 27, 1885.' This was doubtless produced as an accessory by the tobacco company of the same name. The Gail & Ax's is unusual in that it could be opened at both ends, with spring-loaded lids which would snap safely shut, and compartments for squibs and matches.

The most famous squib box is of course the rarest, and the author had never seen an actual example until Lester shared his photograph. This is the "Miner's Latest Improved Squib



Assortment of squib boxes from Lester Bernstein's collection.

Miners' Squib Cases, I.C.
 No. 23R5071 Round. 1 1/4 x 7 inches.
 Weight, each, 2 ounces.
 Price, per dozen, 44c; each, 36c

Miners' Lamp.
 No. 23R5073 One Hook. Weight, each, 2 ounces.
 Price, each, 8c
 Per dozen, 83c

Miners' Canteens, I.C.
 No. 23R5079

Quarts.....	1	2
Holds quarts.....	1	1 1/4
Inches.....	2 1/2	7 1/2
Weight each, ounces.....	8	10
Price, each.....	8c	\$0.19
Per dozen.....	96c	1.33

No. 23R5080 Miners' Candlestick.
 Forged steel. The most popular pattern.
 Price, each.....30c

Water Dippers.
 No. 23R5090

Tin Bottoms, I.C.

Quarts.....	1	2
Holds quarts.....	1	1 1/4
Inches.....	5 1/4 x 3	8 1/4 x 3 1/4
Weight each, Oz.....	4	5
Price, each.....	8c	7c

No. 23R5092 Copper Bottoms, I.C. Two quarts; holds 1 1/2 quarts; weight, 8 ounces; size, 6 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches.
 Price, each.....13c

Climax Fruit Jar Filler.
 No. 23R5098 Made with standard thread to fit any ordinary screw top jar. Mason's included. Out represents filler in position, attached to a fruit jar. By using this the cook can take the jar right to the kettle, filling the fruit in HOT, so that it will KEEP perfectly. The thread of jar is covered; this prevents juice getting on same and cementing the cap so it can't be unscrewed. If jar is too full, it is easy to empty some back into kettle. Price, each.....5c

Box" manufactured by J. Anton and Son, Monongahela, PA. The advertisement for this tin shows the hinged lid similar in design to the Anton oil wick lamps. From the photograph, it appears to be tin with a black enamel finish, and slightly shorter than a standard squib box.

Other marked squib boxes include oval, tin examples marked "Nesco" on one end, and similar tins marked simply "squibs."

"Miners' Squib Cases" were advertised in the Sears, Roebuck Catalog of 1902, and an oval squib box appears in a hardware supply company catalog from Pittsburgh as late as 1924.

It hardly seems possible with such a simple device, but there is actually a patent for a squib-box, issued to Charles H. Rice of Hazleton, PA in 1907. The patent describes the typical item as well as the function of the two-compartment design (next page).

(left) 1902 catalog excerpt from Sears, Roebuck & Co., Catalogue No. III.

PHOTO CREDITS:

A selection of squib tins from the collection of Lester Bernstein.

Advertisement from the Catalogue of the Star, Globe, and Eagle . . . Miners' and Drivers' Lamps, reproduced by Bill Spence.

Sears, Roebuck & Co., Cheapest Supply House on Earth, Chicago. Catalogue No.III, 1902.

Frick and Lindsay Co. Pittsburgh, PA 1924.

U.S. Patent 863,447. August 13, 1907. Squib-Box. Charles H. Rice, Hazleton, PA.

OVAL SQUIB BOXES

Oval.....per dozen \$0.45



Fig. 8075

OIL FLASKS

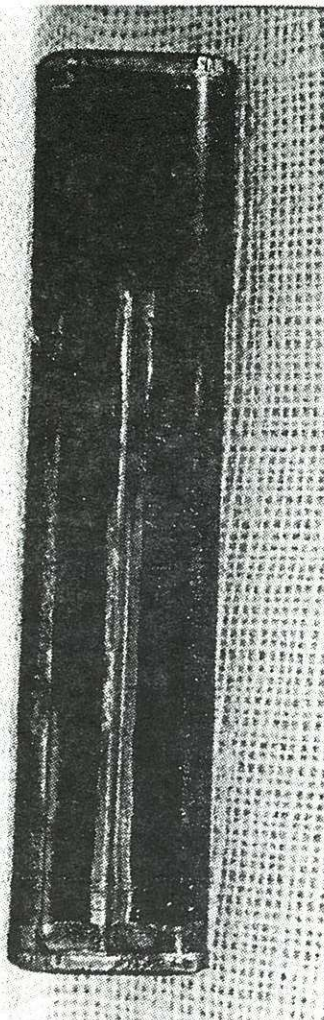
Bottle-Shape or Pocket

1 pint.
Tin Top and Brass Top.
Prices on application.



Fig. 8076

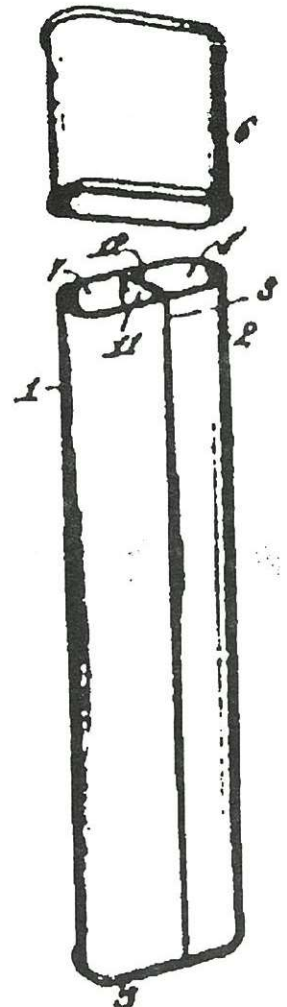
1924 catalog excerpt. From the Frick and Lindsay Co., Pittsburgh, PA.



863,447. SQUIB-BOX. Charles H. Rice, Hazleton, Pa.

Filed Feb. 2, 1907. Serial No. 355, 506.

A squib box consisting of a body portion formed from a pair of separate sections, each of said sections having the ends thereof bent to overlap, the overlapping portions of one section inter-engaging with the overlapping portions of the other section thereby forming a longitudinally extending and centrally-disposed reinforced partition, means for securing the inter-engaging portions of the sections together, a bottom secured to one end of the body portion, and a cover for the box.



1907 Rice patent for squib box. (Patent description above, patent illustration right, and an example from Dave Johnson's collection left). What distinguished this box from previous boxes was the manner of construction whereby the body was formed from two separate pieces joined in the center. This folded center joint provided reinforcement to prevent crushing of the box body from external forces. The example shown left is stamped with the patent date August 13, 1907 on the side of the container.