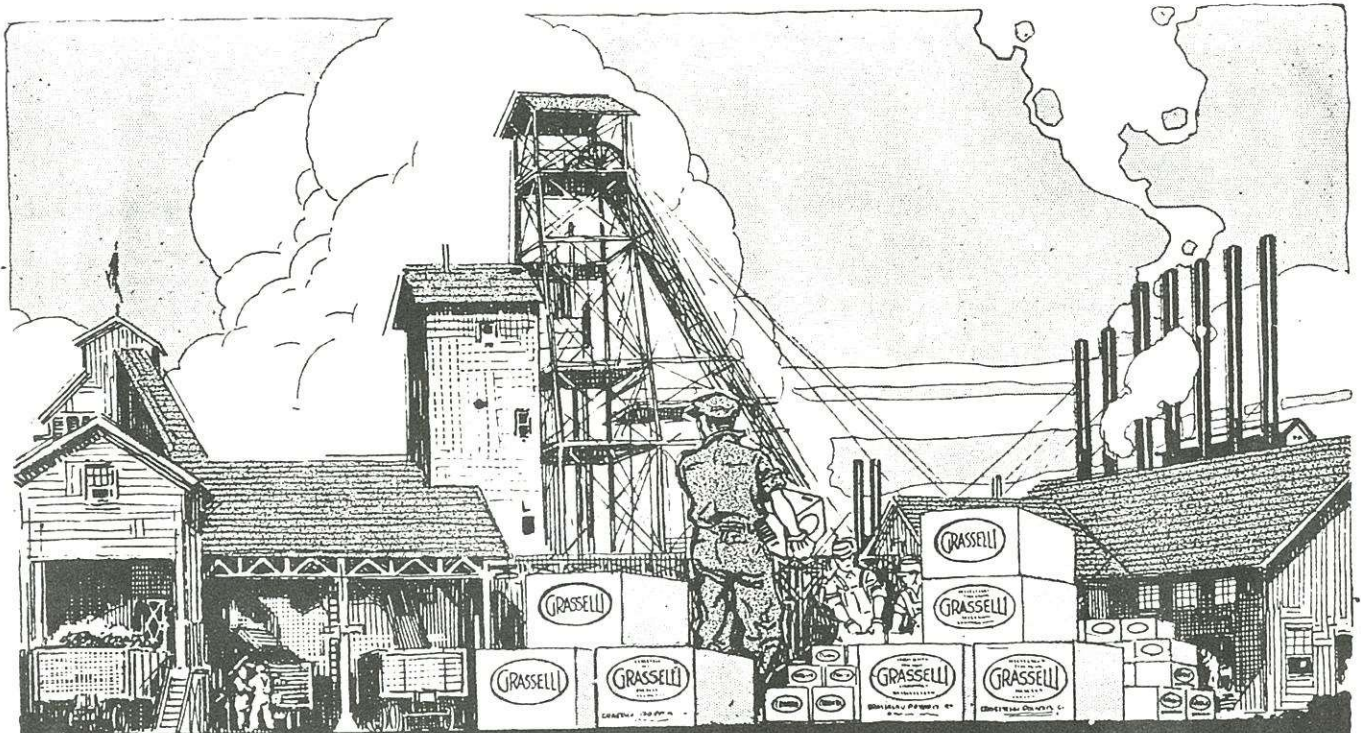


# BLASTING CAP TINS



# GRASSELLI EXPLOSIVES

by Bob Schroth

In 1839, Eugene Ramiro Grasselli established a chemical plant located by the Erie Canal and within a few hundred feet of the Cincinnati city limits. Eugene Grasselli came of an Italian family, which since medieval time, had been druggists and chemists. The ancestral records go back to 1440 when at Torno, on Lake Como, the Grassellis were established as makers of medicine, chemicals and gun powder.<sup>1</sup>

Caesar Augustin Grasselli, the fifth child, began working for his father at the age of fifteen. Many years later, when this same boy became the Chairman of the Board of the great Grasselli Chemical Co., he

wrote: "I cannot remember the time when I was not interested in chemistry and did not expect to follow my father in this business."

In the spring of 1867, the young Grasselli moved his family to Cleveland where he opened a chemical plant. An extraordinary executive and chemist, he built a huge organization based on the model supplied to him by an old friend: John D. Rockefeller. His primary achievements were increased production and diversification. During his lifetime the assets of the companies under his control grew from \$600,000 to over \$30,000,000.<sup>2</sup>

In 1917, Grasselli acquired the Burton Powder Co., the American High Explosives Co., and the Cameron Powder Co. These companies were then merged into the Grasselli Powder Co. incorporated July 12, 1917. From 1917 to 1928, the Grasselli Powder Co. was a major producer of explosives, supplying many different types and strengths of dynamite, black blasting powder, and permissible powders. Many other blasting supplies were manufactured: blasting caps, electric blasting caps, safety fuse, rheostats, blasting machines, and galvanometers. Grasselli Powder Co. grew and soon had branch offices all over the eastern United States.



C. A. Grasselli died July 28, 1927. Outside the realm of the chemical business, he had won several important distinctions. King Victor Emanuel III had knighted him in 1910 with the Order of the Golden Crown of Italy. In 1923, Pope Pius XI bestowed upon him the decoration of St. Gregory the Great. Two American universities had conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Science. For many years he had been president of two savings banks. I doubt if Mr. Grasselli had much spare time. A year after his death, on October 1928, the Grasselli and Du Pont interests were merged, and one hundred fifty thousand shares of Du Pont stock, with a market value of over \$64,000,000, were ex-



*Round Grasselli 100-cap No. 6 marked "spelter."*



*Square Grasselli 100-cap No. 6 marked "zinc." Also reported in 25-cap size.*

The company targeted most of their advertising at the coal and farming market east of the Mississippi. I do not think they ever advertised in any of the western mining trade magazines. The company bragged in their advertisements: "For every blasting job there is a Grasselli explosive exactly fitted for that job."<sup>3</sup>

changed. Now let's get down to facts. With buddies like Rockefeller, Du Pont, the King of Italy, and the Pope, C. A. Grasselli and his company turned out to be much bigger and more interesting than I ever thought it would be.

Collecting the Grasselli line of blasting cap tins can be a very challenging experience. There are many styles, shapes, and sizes of their tins. Their colorful blue and white paint adds to any collection. So far, #5, #7, and #8 strength cap tins are unknown to me, though they were advertised. An interesting note: some #6 cap tins are marked "Chemicals Zinc Explosive" while others are marked "Chemical Spelter Colors Explosives." Webster's Dictionary defines *spelter* as: "Zinc cast into ingots of commerce," and *zinc* as "A bluish-white, metallic element, usually found in a combination." It is unusual for a cap tin to advertise other company products in this way.

### References

1. William Haynes, *Chemical Pioneers*, 1939.
2. Andy Martin, *Blasting Cap Tin Catalog*, 1991.
3. Keystone Consolidated Publishing Co., *Mining Catalog*, 1925 edition.



*Small 25 cap No. 6 tin.*



*Cardboard ink blotter, (red, white, and black), actual size (Dave Thorpe collection).*