

Baldwin Look-alikes

Dave Johnson and James Van Fleet

Frederic E. Baldwin patented the first miners' acetylene lamp manufactured in the United States in 1900. Baldwin is known to have had a brief partnership with Albert H. Funke, of New York City. "After Baldwin received his patent in August of 1900, Funke obtained a license to the Baldwin patent rights to manufacture a mine acetylene lamp." (Clemmer, 1987). The Full Moon carbide lamps were advertised in the *Engineering and Mining Journal* in that same year. Baldwin himself incorporated in Pennsylvania in 1907 as the Baldwin Lamp Co., which became in 1909 the Scranton Acetylene Lamp Company.

Other attempts at marketing his product include the short lived F.E. Baldwin Manufacturing Co. of New York, 1909. Throughout this period, Frederic Baldwin was probably contracting out the manufacture of lamps and lamp parts. Some tin-can style Baldwin lamps bear the monogram WV&B on the water feed lid. This was probably William Vogel and Brothers, tinsmiths from Brooklyn, NY.

Sometime in 1906, Baldwin entered into an arrangement with the John Simmons Co. of Brooklyn, NY for the manufacture and distribution of his carbide miners' lamps. The Sim-

mons Co. proved to be a good choice to guarantee the success of the carbide lamp. John Simmons and their agents in San Francisco and Montreal aggressively marketed the new lighting device. Dozens of advertisements for the Baldwin cap lamp appear in *Engineering and Mining Journal* between 1909 and 1915, including several cover ads.

Simmons also defended the product and the Baldwin patents in court, and a legal case from 1914 gives a description of the marketing and packaging of the Baldwin Carbide Pit Lamp for miners:

"There was difficulty in introducing the lamp to the intended users. Miners were not familiar with acetylene, and had to be taught its uses. Miners supply stores did not carry calcium carbid [sic]. The carbid on the market was usually in lumps too large for use in a cap lamp, and in some states mining inspectors would not permit the use of acetylene lamps in the mines. These difficulties, however, appear to have been largely... overcome in mines where safety lamps are not required, and the plaintiffs have sold the Baldwin lamp to the number of 900,000 or thereabout. The Baldwin lamp was packed in a pasteboard box with an extra carbid container... and equipped also with a wire for the purpose of cleaning the small opening of the gas burner, which wire was attached to a flat



The radical evolution of Baldwin cap lamps, 1906 - 1912. From the Smithsonian Museum Collection.



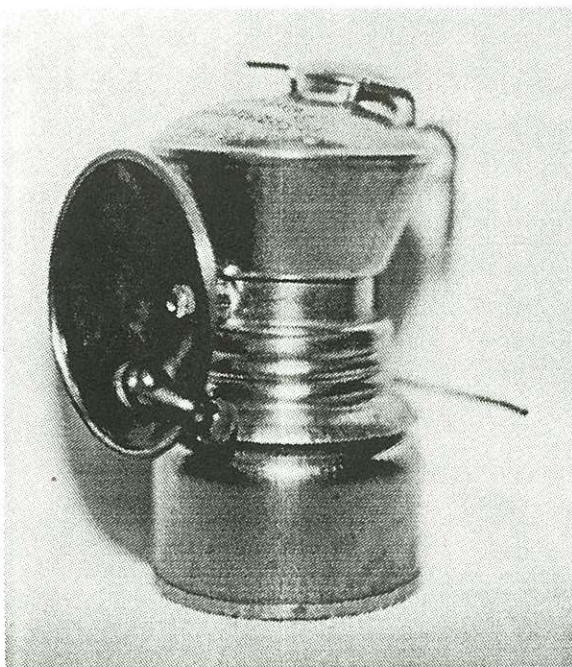
Baldwin lamp ca. 1911 with original box and shipping package. Note the burner tip cleaner on the metal disc. From the White brothers collection. Photo courtesy Dave White.

piece of metal of singular shape with a hole through it...In the box with the lamp and the extra carbid container and the cleanser was a circular, containing printed instructions to users in four or five different languages."

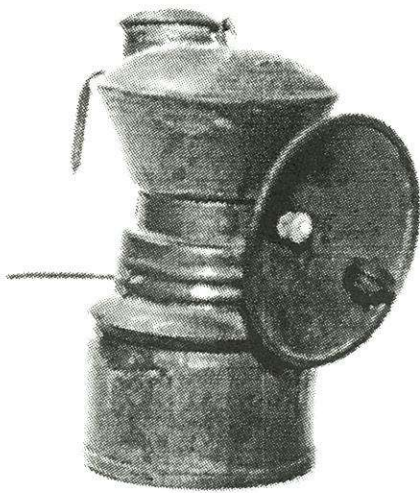
Simmons advertised an offer to send free samples to mining engineers and mine superintendents, packaged as the lamp previously described and shown in the photo above.

A very interesting sidelight on the Baldwin lamps is the reason for the legal case cited above. John Simmons Co. sued Grier Brothers Manufacturing in October 1913 for unfair competition, because:

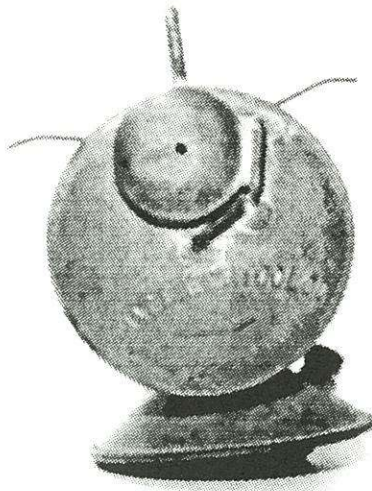
"Some time in the ...year 1913, the defendant began the manufacture and sale of its lamp, called herein the "Grier" lamp. That lamp was designed to imitate the Baldwin lamp. This conclusion cannot be resisted from a careful consideration of the testimony and of the exhibits. It is similar in design. It was packed in a similar box. It contained the extra carbid container. It contained the cleanser, even with the piece of metal attached thereto, with a hole in it, and it contained an almost verbatim copy of the circular which accompanied the Baldwin lamps... [It] is true that there appears stamped in the brass which forms part of the top of the Grier lamp the name 'Grier Brothers, Pittsburgh, Pa.,' with a star, yet such stamping is on the same part of the lamp as the stamping of the Baldwin lamp."



"Exhibit A." Grier's imitation of the Baldwin Pit Lamp. (Dave Johnson collection).



What Cheer Tool Co. lamp. Photo by Jim Van Fleet.



What Cheer lamp (illus. by Pohs)

Baldwin and John Simmons won their unfair competition suit, forcing Grier Brothers to remove the lookalike lamp from the market in January 1914.

Meanwhile, several other American carbide lamp manufacturers were apparently taking advantage of the success of the Baldwin/Simmons cap lamp, and producing virtual imitations. The What Cheer Tool Co. of Iowa sold such a cap lamp. Subtle

details suggest that Grier Bros. manufactured this piece for What Cheer just as they had done with their oil wick lamps. Funk Brothers Manufacturing Co. of Chicago Heights, Illinois also marketed their own stamped Baldwin look-alike. Though Funk Brothers (no relation to Al Funke) were listed in the 1914 Thomas Register as acetylene lamp manufacturers, the Grier connection is possible here as well.

It's hard to say if Baldwin himself profited from his arrangement with John Simmons. By 1913 he had set up his own company to manufacture the Zar lamp, and after 1917 and his last lamp patent, Frederic Baldwin disappears from the historical record.

References:

Baldwin et. al. v. Grier Bros. Co. 215 *Federal Reporter* 735, July 7, 1914.

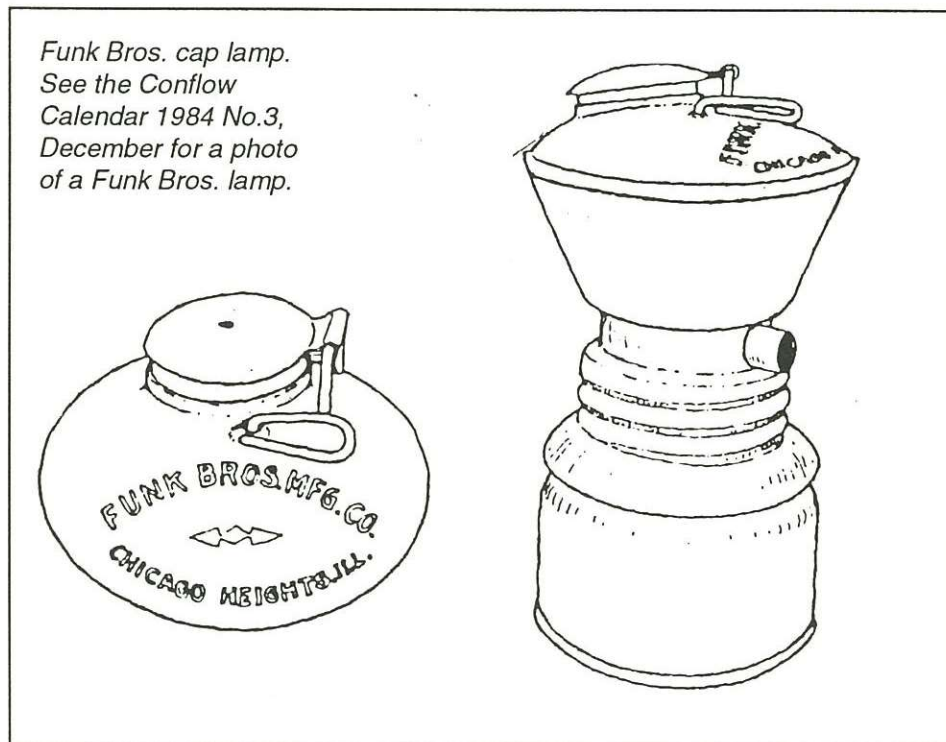
Clemmer, Gregg, *American Miners' Carbide Lamps*. Tucson, AZ: Westernlore, 1987.

Pohs, Henry. "Carbide Lamp Discoveries." *Underground Lamp Post*. v.3 n.6, Spring 1981, p. 1.

Pohs, Henry. "What Cheer Tool Co." *Underground Lamp Post*. v.4 n.3, Fall 1984, p.1.

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Funk Bros. cap lamp. See the Conflow Calendar 1984 No.3, December for a photo of a Funk Bros. lamp.