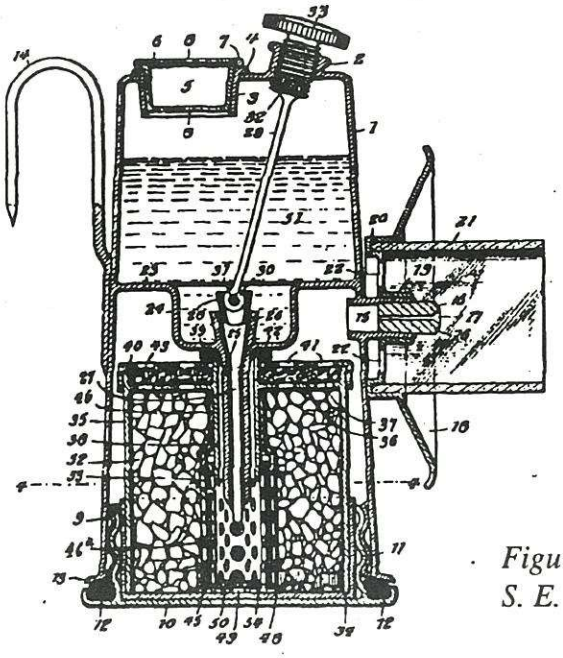
Figure E: S. E. Simmons cap lamp (Errol Christman collection, photo Dave Thorpe).



S. E. Simmons

by Mike McLaughlin

Figure B:
S. E. Simmons Carbide Lamp Pat. No. 976,611. Granted Nov 22, 1910.

The small town of Litchfield, Illinois lies between Springfield, Illinois and St. Louis, MO. It was there, on February 14, 1868, that Samuel E. Simmons was born and would later grow up to be the inventor of the rare S. E. Simmons carbide cap lamp. Samuel and his wife Stella had four children, two boys and two girls.[1] One of his children, the late Ted Simmons, Sr. was gracious enough to provide personal family information during conversations with Gregg S. Clemmer in February and March of 1981.[2] Most of the information contained in this article can be attributed to the foresight Mr. Clemmer had to document this historical data for present and future generations of mining artifact collectors and enthusiasts.

Samuel E. Simmons was a very gifted mechanic, a skill which seems to be prevalent in many lamp inventors. He was an active coal miner and had his own small workshop at home. There are many similarities with Samuel Simmons and Harry Gall.[3] Both were inventors, mechanics, tinkerers, had their own home offices and workshops, and patented their own carbide lamp. It appears that Samuel took a bigger manufacturing step and had more lamps made. (Fig. A)

While living at 430 South Jackson St. in Litchfield sometime in 1909, Samuel supposedly developed his first lamp. Within a year or so, he was granted Patent # 976,611 on November 22, 1910.[4] The original application was filed on Oct. 4, 1909. (Figs. B, C) Samuel set out to make improvements to carbide lamps and their inner workings. "The object of the invention is to provide a device which will be compact and simple in form,

Figure A: Samuel E. Simmons seated at far left with his brothers Clarence and Charlie

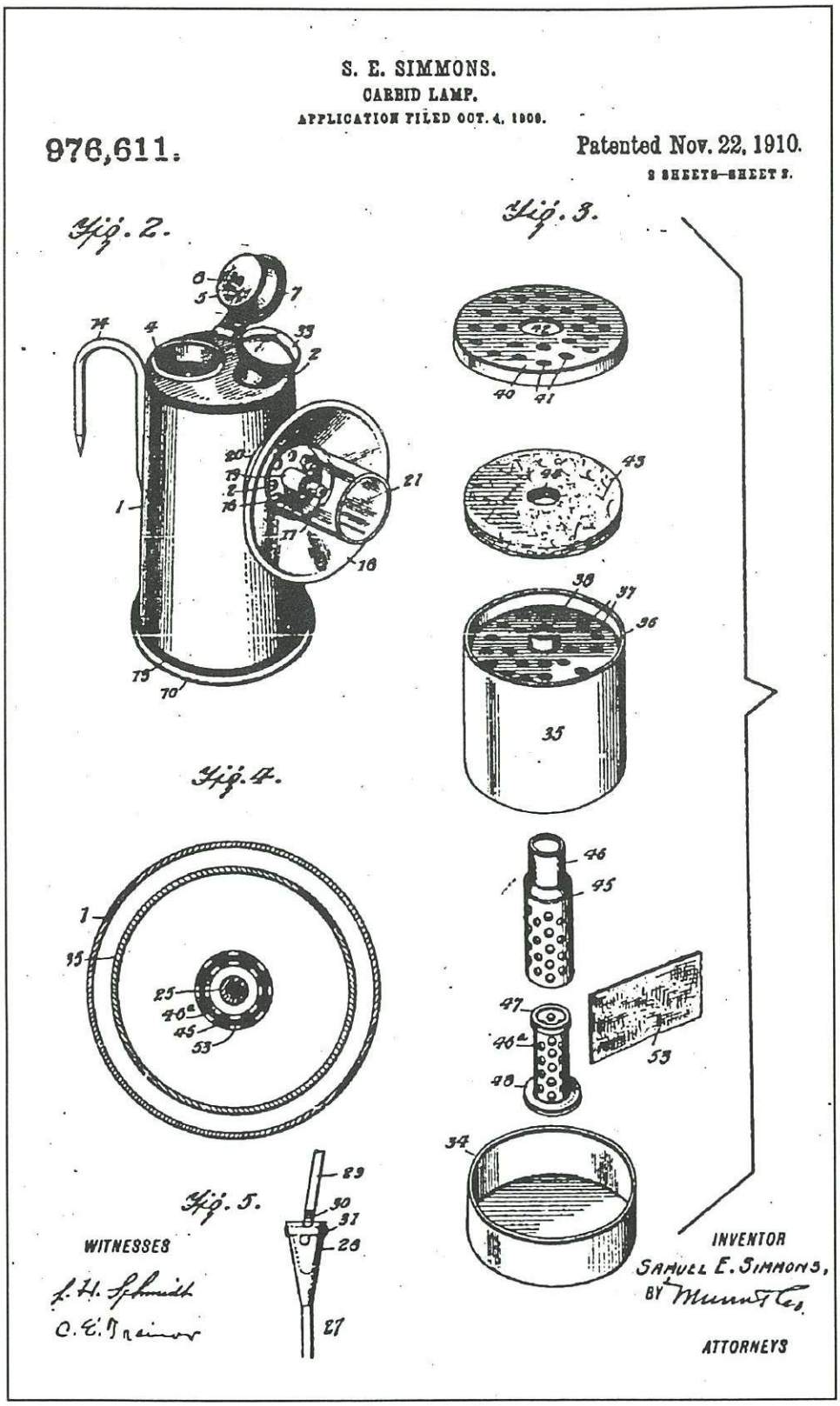


Figure C

S. E. Simmons Carbide Lamp Pat. No. 976,611. Granted Nov 22, 1910.

containing both the water tank and generator in one receptacle, and wherein the admission of the water may be nicely regulated."[5]

In 1912, Samuel moved to a home at 802 Randle St. in Litchfield. There he set up his company, the "S.E. Simmons Mfg. Company." One mining artifact linked with this address is a business envelope. (Fig. D) This envelope pictures the S.E. Simmons miner's carbide cap lamp and gives the 802 Randle St. address as the headquarters. The envelope measures 3 ½" by 6 ½" and is printed with black ink. At this address Samuel is speculated as having contracted with a St. Louis, MO. firm to manufacture his carbide lamp on a larger scale. Gregg Clemmer's research introduces the Handlan Buck Mfg. Co., located at 212 North 3rd St., as the likely firm. There seems to have been a business problem between Samuel and the St. Louis firm which manufactured the lamps and further production was ceased. No records exist at this time showing how many lamps were made and according to today's count, there are only a couple of known examples of this very rare lamp.

The S. E. Simmons lamp is approximately 3 ¼ inches high. The incuse stamping on the side of the lamp reads "S. E. Simmons Mfg. Co., St. Louis, MO. Pat'd." Surviving examples of this lamp are made of brass (Fig. E). According to Mr. Clemmer, some lamps may have been made of copper and would truly be a scarce find.[6] Water is added through the top of the lamp by opening a hinged water cap, and flow is regulated by a threaded valve also located on the top. The base lip

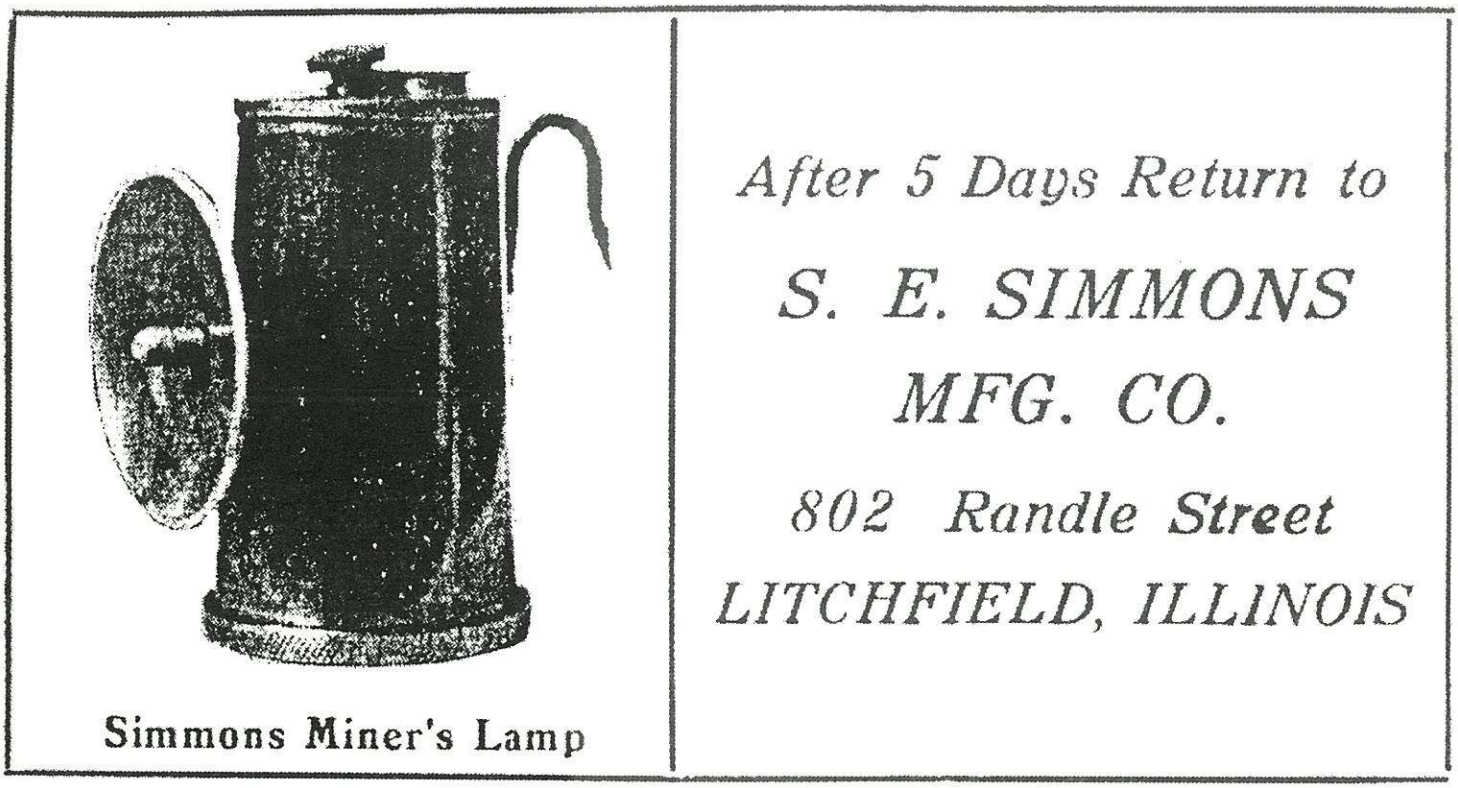


Figure D: S. E. Simmons business envelope (enlargement of logo). (Author's collection).

unscrews and exposes a cup area inside where carbide is then added. Patent drawings of the S. E. Simmons reflector are a source of much mystery to lamp collectors. The bizarre appearance of the reflector and its function have now been sorted out after further patent research.[7] It seems that Samuel invented a glass tube or "flue" that could be inserted into an "annular groove" or circular ring located in the reflector just outside numerous air vent holes. Sufficient air is supplied to the burner tip through these vent hole openings, and the "flue" which surrounds them protects the flame from drafty air currents. This glass flue allows the light from the flame to shine off the reflector for illumination. As of this date, no known specimen of this reflector has been found. Unlike the patent drawing, the reflector pictured on the S. E. Simmons business envelope seems to be similar to a simple Baldwin push-on variety.

Samuel's last known address was 202 E. Martin St. in Litchfield. He supposedly moved there in 1916. Family records indicate that Samuel quit working in the mines in the 1930's, and passed away on February 13, 1943 at the age of 75. He is survived by four of his five grandchildren.

One last mining related item to look for would be a screw-top carbide can manufactured by S. E. Simmons.[8] To this date there are no known stamped examples to report on and no patent information has surfaced showing what one would look like. Maybe if one of our readers turns up a drawing of this can, some unmarked examples could be identified.

References

1. Judith Simmons Stewart, Personal communications, Feb. 1994.

2., 4., 6., 8. American Miners' Carbide Lamps, Gregg S. Clemmer, Westernlore Press, Tucson, AZ, 1987. Pages 25, 88-89, 111.

3. EUREKA!, Issue 7, July 1993, "H. Gall" by M. McLaughlin. Pages 16-19.

5., 7. U. S. Patent and Trademark Office, Search Room, Crystal City, VA., Pat. No. 976,611. Pages 1-4.