

Wet Mine Lamps

Dave Thorpe

Some collectors call it the “matchbook reflector”. Its purpose is not obvious to those who think of reflectors as concave affairs. Some miners’ lamps (Scranto, XRAY, and Hansen) were made with reflectors that tilted forward so as to direct the light downward. The Baldwin Lamp Co. had a different idea in mind when these curious lamps were offered. According to advertisements, they were specifically designed for use in wet mines. There is nothing more aggravating than to have a perfectly burning carbide light doused by a single drop of water in its descent from the roof. What are the chances of this happening? Pretty good in a wet mine.

A concave reflector deep enough to shield against water droplets carries the disadvantage of blocking light thrown off to the side. Peripheral vision was thought to be of some importance, for very flat small reflectors were popular with coal miners. Many preferred *no reflector at all*.

The wet mine lamps were advertised in the various forms shown here during the 1909 - 1915 era. The lamps shown here are just a few examples of the variety made.

The earliest Baldwin model (shown on this page) has no top stamping,

but the base is stamped “PAT’D” on the bottom.

An oblong steel wire loop is soldered to the front of the tank. It acts as a retainer for the reflector which is easily slipped down in or removed from its slot. The hook and cap



Early wet mine Baldwin lamp.

braces are also steel. Fine etched lines in the brass encircle the water tank indicating that this part was formed by the more limited production process known as metal spinning rather than die stamping. The water door is single thickness con-

cave brass, attesting to its early 1910 era vintage.

The next example in the Baldwin line-up is from Dave Johnson’s collection (opposite page). The retainer has been changed to a flat brass strap, and the hook and brace are also brass.

Not a bad idea to prevent rusting in a lamp designed for wet mines. The reflector on this model is made of aluminum.

The latest Baldwin shown is from Len Gaska’s collection (opposite page). The retaining bracket has been done away with in favor of a push on reflector. Reflectors such as this one were advertised as separate accessories in early mine supply catalogs. If a box of these are found, many collectors will be able to assemble a complete wet mine Baldwin!

The last model was found in Sweden by a German collector (opposite page). Eventually finding its way to Dave Johnson, this lamp is clearly based on the Baldwin design. The steel reflector is small compared to the genuine Baldwin. It is soldered to the lamp.

Wet mine cap lamps are fairly rare and belong to the early-teens era. Their funky appearance makes them a must for the serious collector.

RIGHT: Baldwin with push-on steel reflector(Len Gaska collection).

BELOW RIGHT: Baldwin with flat strap retaining brace and aluminum reflector (Dave Johnson collection) .

BELOW LEFT: Swedish lamp based on Baldwin design (Dave Johnson collection).

