

## Cap Lamp Value: Not Just a Function of Rarity

by Dave Thorpe

Most mine lamp collectors have "favorite" pieces that exist either in their own collection or on their fantasy wish list. How many times have we heard each other say "I know this particular lamp isn't all that rare, but I just like it!" Well, worry not fellow collector, you are not weird, for your list of favorite pets is probably very similar to everyone else's. How can that be, isn't rarity the determining factor of value? The answer is probably closer to no than yes.

Let's look at five desirable lamps. Lamps which almost everyone wants, and yet whose desirability is much greater than their actual rarity.

### *Ever-Ready, X-Ray, Force-Feed, Zar, & Maple City*

Well, yes, they're all rare, but not extremely rare. Just as a woman must meet some level of classical physical beauty to be desirable, so must a lamp be somewhat rare... but having passed that arbitrary threshold of physical acceptability, it is personality from there on..., and these lamps have **PERSONALITY**.

Any psychologist will tell you that many factors make up that nebulous term we call personality, and the same thing applies to lamps. The first thing a good lamp has to have is an identity... or a name (preferably stamped in). A lamp without a name will never make headlines, it can never be gossiped about, or even boasted about: "My Maple City has a knurled knob on top!" There is nothing sadder than an orphan or a lamp with no name. Just look how the "Non-Justrite Victor" has struggled for an identity, borrowing its name from an advertisement and another company. It would be so much happier just to be stamped somewhere. And that "Scoby" just stands around so stark and plain, can't it just say something like its sister, the Maumee? Yes, a good lamp needs its name, not just a patent date, stamped into its body. The Maple City proudly displays this on the side of the water tank, making it more desirable than the "anthracite", a lamp that is just as rare and made by the same company.

We like our lamps to be different, but not too different... to be unique, but not eccentric... in short: to be cute. Some lamps are just too far removed in design to be desirable. The Arnold's Carbide Candle is too tall and too weird; and God forbid, the Lu-Mi-Num looks more like a hand grenade than a lamp. Ah, but the elegant Ever-Ready: doesn't it remind you of an underwater diver with a bell helmet? And the graceful lines of the X-Ray transcend even its unique engineering design. It demonstrates art without being too gaudy or cutesy. An example of the latter is the Sun-Ray. Smiling Mr. Sunshine stamped on top surrounded by a halo of numbers would be a better logo for a box of margarine, than something a hard working miner would consider his companion. Even its close relative, the I.T.P. ("It's Trouble Proof... if you hadn't guessed) strays a little too far into the land of hokey.

So a lamp should be different and unique, but not weird or sappy. The ZAR certainly makes our grade. Even though the market has been infused with dozens of unfired examples, it remains highly coveted. Of the barrel-design lamp, it is the most complex in form. Its flint wheel juts forward, its waterfeed peeps up like a periscope, the top and bottom edges overhand the body... the lamp draws attention without being obnoxious.

A "fun" person either tells us or does something interesting. Behold the Force-Feed: its name tells us something about the lamp, and what's more, the feed (on some models) actually pumps up and down. The harder to find Hansen will always play second fiddle. The Maple City tells us the story of an industrial park, the Maple City oilers, and of the mysterious fire that ended the lamp's production.

Some lamps will just never get no respect relative to their rarity, but the lamps listed above will always be on most collector's top ten list. My personal favorite: the Maumee Duplex of course.