

Elkhorn Details

by Dave Thorpe

The Elkhorn miner's lamp is one of the least understood lamps. Its category is "uncommon", and over the course of several years of collecting, you can usually find one worthy of being placed on the trophy shelf. Yet with this particular lamp, lingering questions creep into the mind as it quietly stares at you from its perch. Each Elkhorn seems to be a bit different from the others...some with reflector braces, others without...some with a cap brace or solder remnant, a few with no evidence that one ever existed. Reflectors vary in size, shape, and finish. Water levers, stamping, and hooks vary. It is a scenario that is difficult to make sense of. Still, we wonder like a new parent: does my baby have all the right parts? Though the Elkhorn was born years ago and can not be compared today with others on the assembly line, we can come close to 'knowing' by examining unfired examples... a category that is rare. After seeing hundreds of Elkhorns in various states of preservation, I will try to draw some conclusions that are reinforced by the study of a few mint lamps.

Seventeen years ago, I received in trade my first Elkhorn from the late Ralph Blankenbeckler. It was well used and did not have cap braces. I questioned him about this, and was told that some were manufactured without them. He directed me to a hand drawing of an Elkhorn from the Underground Lamp Post. There were no cap

braces. This was little proof, but his lifetime of experience collecting gave me pause for consideration. Not too long ago, Eureka published a photo of an Elkhorn box with the added stamping: "WITH BRACE", indicating that a brace was optional. But did it refer to the cap brace or the reflector brace? The picture on the box showed a lamp with neither cap brace nor reflector brace. I have seen many Elkhorns without cap braces, but almost



Unfired Elkhorn without cap brace or reflector brace, note long hook.

all have evidence of solder showing that a brace was once there. Restorers are very good at removing solder remnants, but telltale signs of cleaning and polishing generally give away their work. Occasionally, an Elkhorn would turn up with no brace and no solder.

Brass Elkhorns have a lacquered factory finish that is often worn off completely. Even in unfired examples, this clear coat is usually checked and cracked with aging to expose tarnished brass between the cracks and a bright brass under the lacquered areas. An unfired Elkhorn with intact lacquer indicates that no "aftermarket" soldering can have taken place.

I have recently found an unfired Elkhorn with no cap braces (*see photo opposite page*). The first thing one might notice is that it also lacks a reflector brace. (Just like the lamp pictured on the Elkhorn box). These lamps were fitted with a flat collar around the gas tube that would hold the reflector fast whether it was braced or not. More scrutiny reveals that the hook is a very long one, which was said by Jim Van Fleet to resemble a "shepherd's crook". In fact, all of the true braceless Elkhorns seem to have the longer hook. Elkhorns I have seen *with* braces, however have a more typical short hook! The longer hook may have made the lamp less likely to fall off the cap for the low-seam coal miners who often removed the brace to allow some swiveling.

An Elkhorn found with a short hook and no cap brace has most likely had the brace removed. Check carefully for solder remains. Look for the long hook on models without braces.

Now for the reflector brace. Elkhorn lamps are found most commonly with the inner recessed reflector. Braces found with this reflector are deep to accommodate the recess. Simple reflectors are also seen on these lamps, and in these cases the brace is shallow, resembling that found on Buddy cap lamps...almost. Buddy reflectors have a locating dimple in the reflector as well as a notch in the brace. The Elkhorn lamps have neither.

Elkhorns with cap braces generally have reflector braces

The reflector braces are found in brass and nickel plated finishes. The nickel braces are found on lamps with nickel reflectors, and of course nickel plated lamps. But not all nickel reflectors necessarily have nickel braces. The trivia is getting deep!



Elkhorn fully loaded: cap brace and deep reflector brace, short hook.

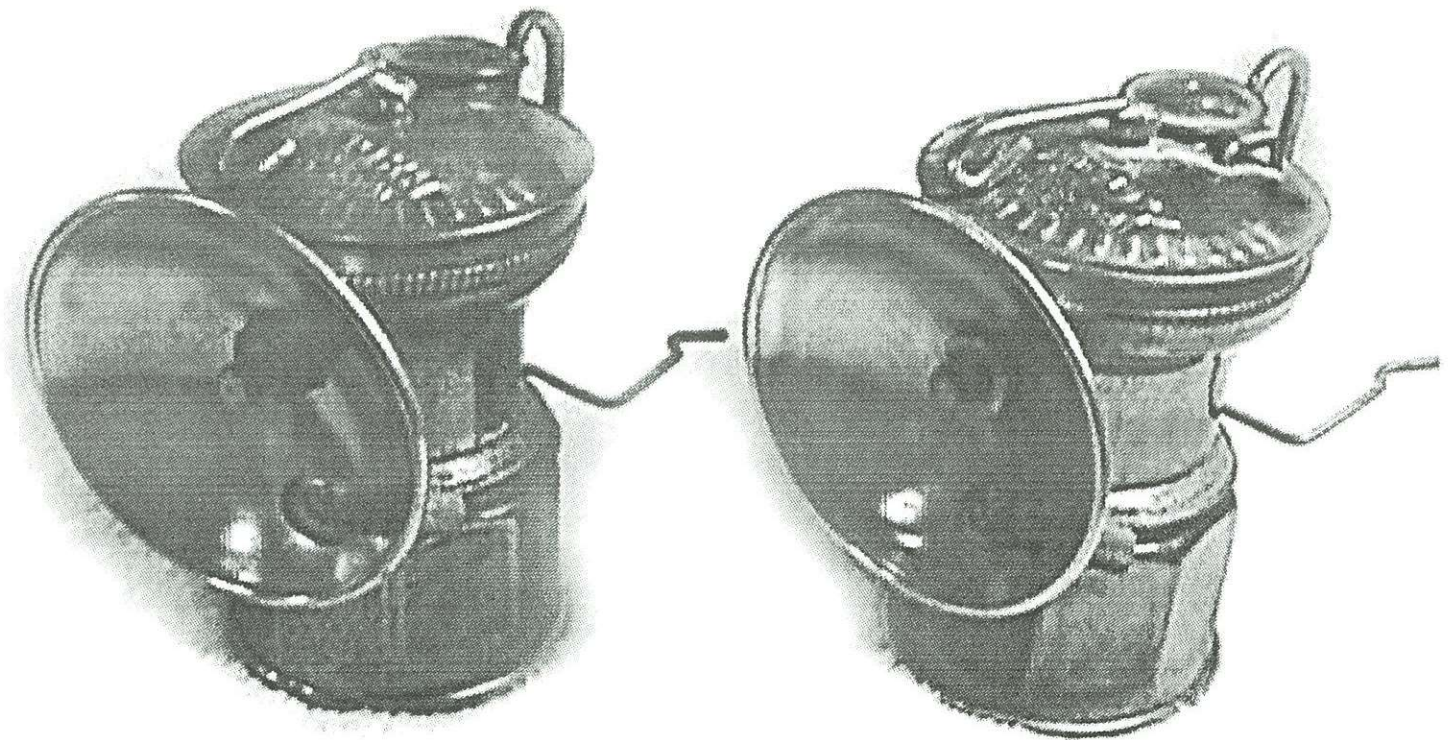
Finally, it must be mentioned that there are two distinct Elkhorn tank styles. One is nearly identical to the *short-style* Buddy lamp (see photo below). Both lamps were made by Ashmead. The top stamping is in large bold letters, just like the Buddy lamp. The water lever is round wire, like the Buddy equivalent. This variety of lamp has never been found without cap braces, or without a brass reflector brace. The difference between this Elkhorn and a Buddy are slight (see below).

The other tank style (photo previous page) is shaped like an AutoLite tank. The stamping on top is of smaller letters than the Buddy-

like counterpart. The water lever is crimped sheet metal, similar to that of the *tall-style* Buddy lamp.

While Buddy lamps are seen with a variety of bases, Elkhorns came with just one, as shown. Occasionally, Elkhorns are found with superintendent's handles.

An Elkhorn lamp in proper condition merits a position on the upper tier of the trophy shelf. Small differences from one lamp to another may represent the way the lamp was manufactured or the need for an upgrade.



Elkhorn

Buddy

At left is an Elkhorn with the "Buddy style" conformation. Unlike the "standard" Elkhorn, its tank is less rounded, it has large letter stamping, and a simple reflector with a shallow reflector brace. On the right is a Buddy. Both were made by Ashmead. Slight differences between these two lamps are: 1. The Buddy's reflector has a locating dimple in the reflector and a notch in the brace to accommodate it. 2. The water doors are hinged from opposite sides, and 3. The names stamped on top.