

Some Early AutoLites

by Dave Thorpe

Sometimes pictures are worth more alone than with a text analysis. Presented here are three very early AutoLite cap lamps. The first one recently found by Glen Hostlaw bridges a gap between the others.

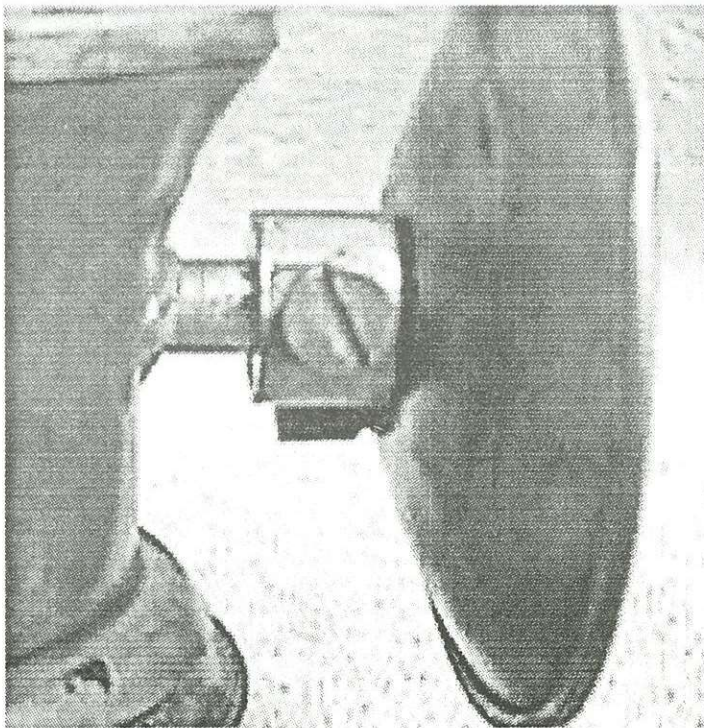
Lamp #1 Glen Hostlaw



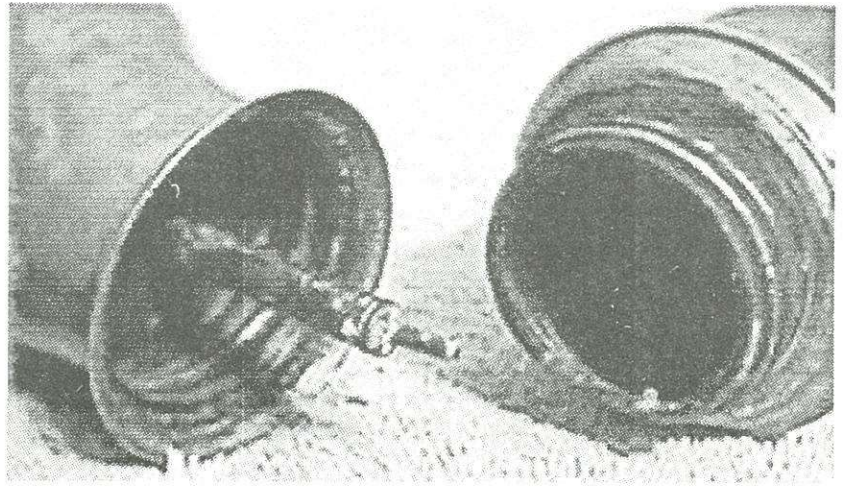
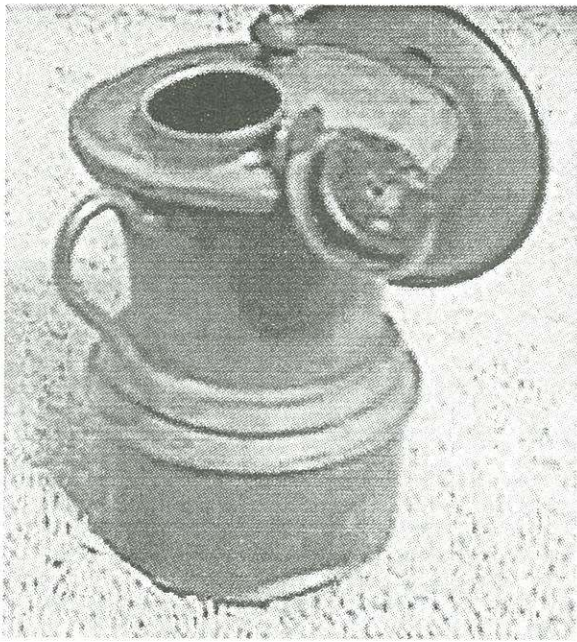
Notable for the 'boat-style' water door and simple water lever.



Smooth base of note.



Yep, this is the right reflector, right down to the set screw.



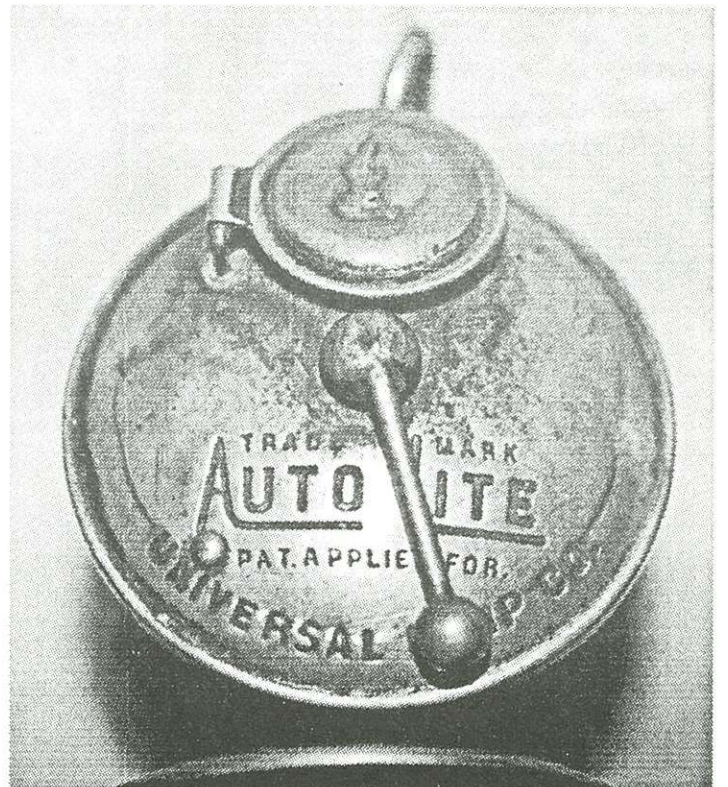
A couple pics for those who have to get personal.

Lamp #2 Mark Bohannan

(More recent)



Base is double knurled base.

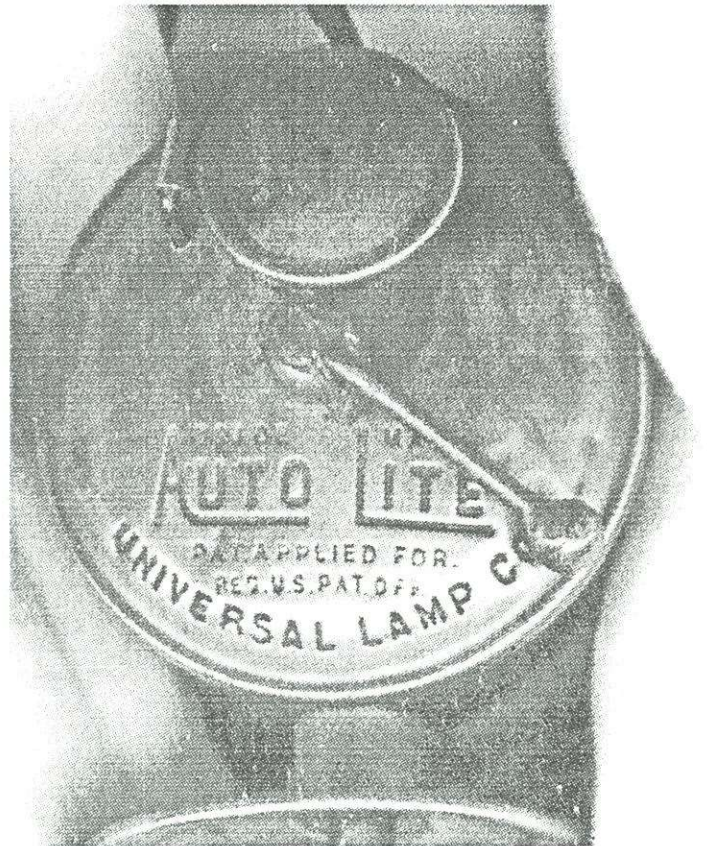


Changes include single raised dimple to stop water lever, double thickness waterdoor, and ball at end of lever

Lamp #3 Dave Thorpe
(Later yet)

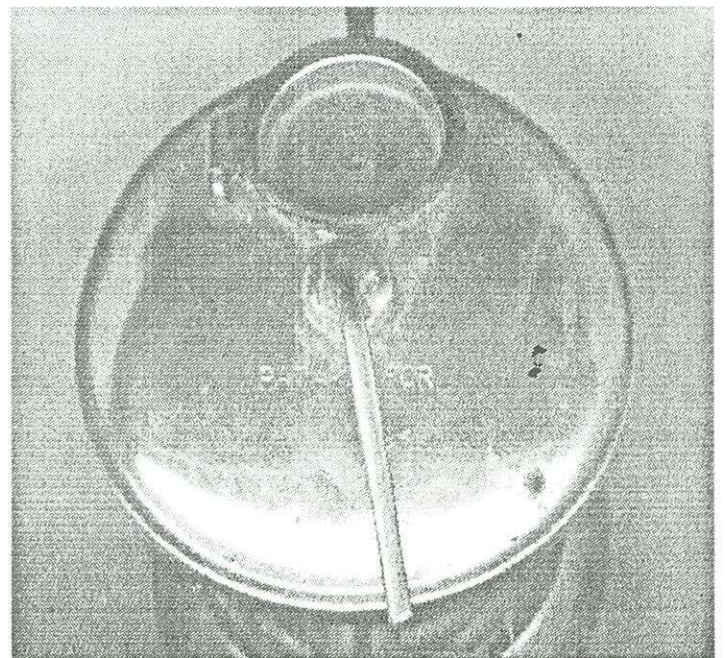


Lamp has now acquired rear braces.



The locating dimple is gone. Additional stamping is added: "REG US PAT OFF"

Lamp #4 Dave Thorpe
(earliest)



Simple lever, inset waterdoor, and smooth base are identical to lamp #1.

Stamping on top reads:
"PAT APLD FOR"

Analysis

With the recent discovery of lamp #1 by Glen Hostlaw, the early AutoLite series is unequivocally united.

It is known that in his earliest lamp manufacturing of the 'AutoLite', Sherman collaborated with Meyer Stein, whose product was 'The Springfield Lamp'. Stein, in fact seems to have been in charge of metal-smith operations. Indeed, the watertanks for all of these lamps are identical in dimension to 'Springfield Lamps'.

Perhaps the earliest progenitor lamp for these two manufacturers was the rare S&S lamp (? Sherman and Stein). That lamp had a similar, but narrower tank, but used the same lever and water door as the two earliest AutoLites shown here. The smooth carbide chamber of the S&S, also appears to be identical.

At some point in time, it is known that Sherman began to have certain lamp parts manufactured by Chase Brass, of Waterbury Connecticut. I will suggest that this point in time coincided with the manufacture of Glen Hostlaw's Lamp #1. The reason relates to the double knurled base. This base uses knurling that matches the knurling on later AutoLite tanks that clearly did not utilize the tank dies of Meyer Stein, and which was made at a time when Sherman had moved his entire facility from Springfield to Chicago, and was clearly known to be using Chase products for his assembly.

Much of the above is clearly my own speculation, but I have more! The recent discover of a booklet describing the manufacture of the AutoLite shows an illustration of the plant...this is a massive complex, multistory, and covering several

acres of land. Universal Lamp Co. (AutoLite) made only two items at the time: a cap lamp and a carbide container (also coincidentally made of brass).

It is inconceivable that such a huge plant could be used to manufacture two small items. I would postulate that the illustration of this huge plant is actually a rendition of Chase Brass Works of Waterbury, Connecticut. This facility is known to have made many brass products, including some lamps for Simmons (Pioneer).

I would be very interested if someone in the Connecticut area might be able to dig up some photos of the Chase Brass facility. It would certainly prove me right or wrong!

Mark Bohannan's Lamp #2 is novel, for it is the only one with the single raised dimple to stop the water lever. I have seen a single-dimple AutoLite in Errol Christman's collection.

For collectors, AutoLites have often been categorized by the reflector, either 'setscrew' or held on with a nut over a threaded gas tube. When it comes to rarity though, one might best separate them by tank shape. The earliest lamps share a tank shape identical to Meyer Stein's Springfield lamp. All lamps shown here are of this design. The later lamps, of which people are most familiar, used a more bulbous tank. These more modern lamps are found with setscrew reflectors as well as conventional. These lamps, whether setscrew or not, are relatively common.

Check your early AutoLites for evidence of solder on the back, a sign that it once had cap braces. Some did and some did not. Any early-tank AutoLite, that is entirely correct is highly collectible. By the way, the reflector my Lamp #4 is not correct! It is a Baldwin push-on, somewhat similar to the S&S. I may change this out someday for an early setscrew!