

The American

Dave Thorpe

Ever since I found an “American” cap lamp, Errol Christman has called me “Dave Thorpe, all American.” Made in Evansville, Indiana, this lamp is one of the rarest to be found today. The reflector distinguishes it from all other lamps: it is shaped like a flower.

Known to collectors as simply “The American,” the lamp was a product of the American Lamp and Specialty Co. I spoke with the historian at the Evansville Public Library. As a boy in the early twenties, he remembered the store on 1204 Main St. where the lamp was made. He described it a novelty or “nick nack” shop. He even remembers the lamp, adding that “they were all over Evansville at one time.” This is not to say that the lamp was a toy, for the owners Powers and Miller were heavily involved in the coal mining industry. They were the principle stock holders in the Sunlight Mine which sits at the north edge of Evansville.



The American, nickel-plated, (D. Thorpe collection.)

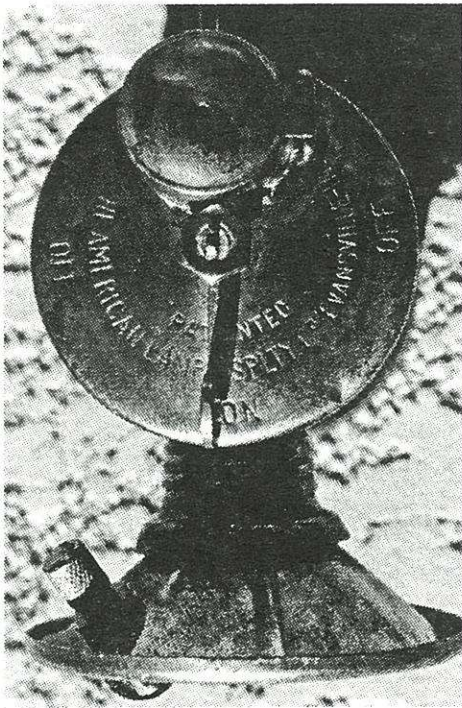
The American’s patent was applied for in 1917 and granted in 1918. City directories first list the American Lamp and Specialty Co. in 1922, at which time James H. Powers (the lamps’ inventor) was president. In 1924 his treasurer and partner, Edward J. Miller, became president. After this date, the company is no longer listed.

The lamp shown left, is brass and belongs to Errol Christman. The lamp above, from my collection, is nickel-plated. There are other differences. The tank on Errol’s lamp is about 1/4” taller than mine. My hook is of smaller diameter and wraps around under the tank to touch the screw threads. Errol’s hook extends only down the flat surface of the tank.

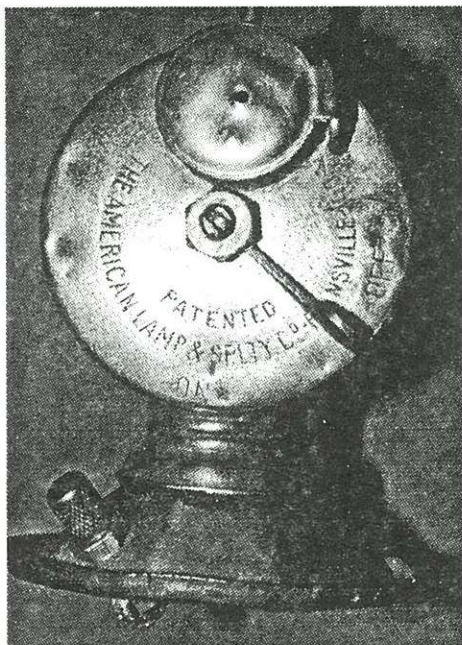
The stamping is also different. My lamp has the word “OFF” stamped on each side of the top, with “ON” in the front center. Errol’s has only one “OFF” stamped on the left hand side, with “ON” in a similar central location. This difference may be explained by the dissimilarity of the actual water droppers. On my lamp, the tip of the dropper resembles a pair of tweezers. This bears some



The American, brass, (Errol Christman collection.)



"OFF" is stamped on each side of the lamp.



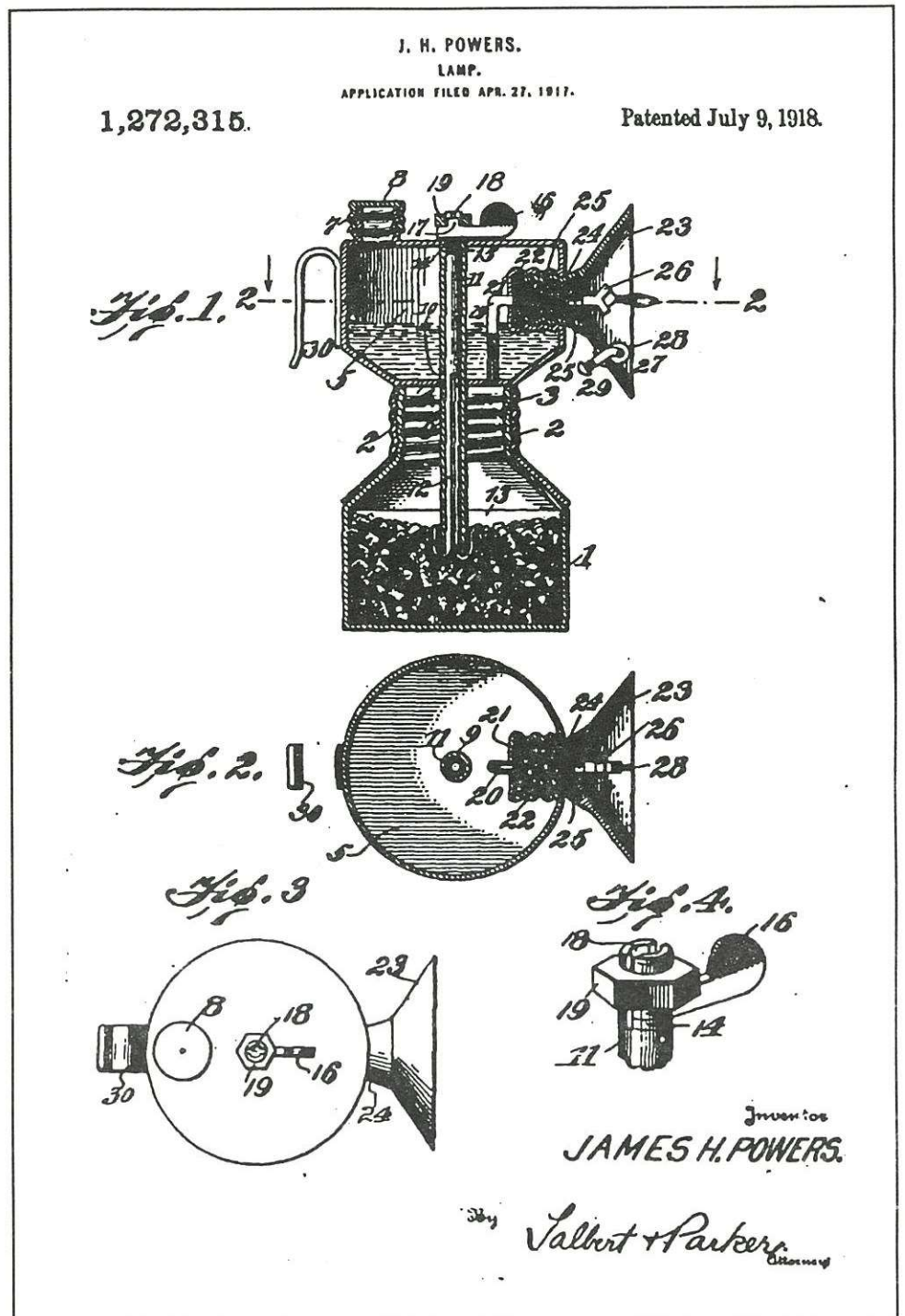
"OFF" appears on left side only.

resemblance to the patent illustration. On Errol's, there is a round ball: a standard feed similar to that seen on the AutoLite.

The patent illustration differs from the lamps in several ways. For one, it uses a narrow spade mount. The waterdoor is a screw-cap in the patent and hinged on the actual lamps. The reflector socket in the patent is recessed into the tank, whereas a much cruder external

attachment appears in the manufacture. Finally, the flower-style reflector is not seen in the patent. The water lever is faithful to the patent, and in fact is the subject of the patent.

Only four cap lamps exist with screw-socket reflectors. Each is very rare. They are: the Square-top Anton, Justrite's The Buddy, the H. Gall lamp, and of course, The American.



1918 patent for the American.