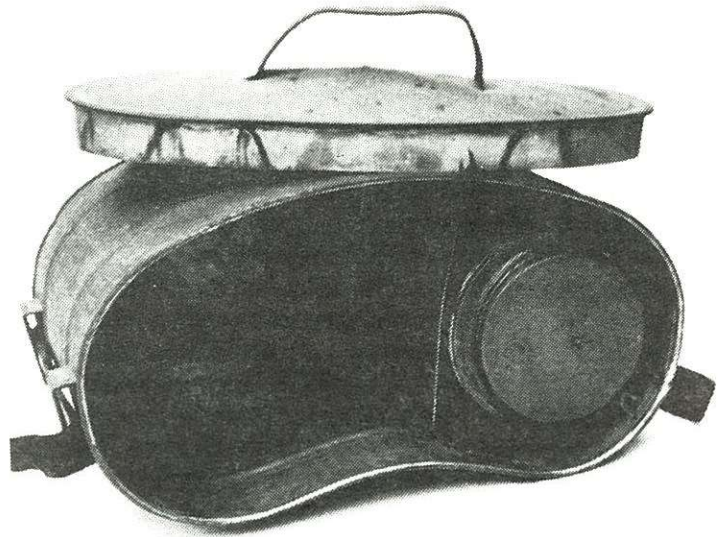


A LEADVILLE MINERS' LUNCH PAIL

by **Jim Steinberg**
Pasadena, California

Anyone who has seen enough photographs of groups of miners, has likely noticed the presence of the ubiquitous tin lunch pail. In just about any group photo of miners going on or off shift, usually several have their lunch pails in their hands. The most frequently observed style of pail appears to be the round pail that is similar in shape to a paint can, with a cup on the top. While this design shows up in a number of fairly old photos, the design remained in use for many years. Among collectors, I have heard some speculation that cold food went in one compartment and hot in the other. Recently, while reading a book based on the diaries of a coal miner, I ran across a description of the use of the pail. The book was *The Long Tunnel, A Coal Miner's Journal* by Meade Arble, published in 1976 by Atheneum, New York. When gearing up for work in a Pennsylvania coal mine, Meade was about to purchase an ordinary thermos, but was admonished by a shop keeper that it wouldn't hold enough water. It was explained to him that a regular miner's lunch pail (the round type) could hold a lot more water. The round silver miners lunch pail which he did buy, held a tray in the top for food, leaving the bottom for a generous amount of water. Meade was told that miners carried thermoses only for coffee in addition to the water that was in their lunch pails.

The smaller section contains a tin, screw top cylinder 5.5 inches tall by 3.5 inches in diameter. The divider is soldered all the way down to and across the bottom of the lunch pail to prevent liquid from passing from one compartment to the other. The lid of the pail snaps into the top and has a handle to assist in opening the pail.



In addition to the round lunch pails, there are a large variety of other miners' pails that are encountered. How frequently any given style or design of pail was used by miners is a matter for speculation. Recently, I obtained a tin lunch pail with a brass manufacturers tag on it. The tag reads "Manufactured by Western Hardware Co., Leadville, Colo." This pail is equipped with metal loops on the sides for a leather shoulder strap, of which some of the original strap still remains. The lunch pail is made of galvanized tin about 10 inches wide by 8.5 inches high with a curved back to ride against the hip. Inside, the pail is divided into two compartments. The larger comprising about 3/5 of the total space.

