

James W. Queen & Company

J. Roger Mitchell

Anyone who has ever tried to research the history of a mining artifact usually encounters a grim realization. Information about the artifact is harder to find than the item itself. This is not the case with the mining lamps and other mining instruments which were once supplied by James W. Queen & Company, Philadelphia. The information about his products presented in this article was drawn from many sources. The lamps featured here are extremely rare.

The Queen Company's greatest claim to fame were the microscopes and transits which

they manufactured. These were sold and exhibited all over the world, and are among the most sought after instruments among collectors of scientific antiques. Collections of Queen instruments exist in most of the major museums in the United States.

Besides these instruments which might have seen use in an assayers office or in underground surveying, Queen supplied "Anemometers, Safety-Lamps, Water Gauges, Aneroid Barometers, [and] Thermometers

for Miners." The anemometers made by Queen were the finest in the world, as were all of the instruments which the company made themselves. The anemometers were sold not only for mine use, but also to measure the flow of air in public buildings. Calibration was achieved by attaching an anemometer to each end of a large

able to identify six examples with the Queen Company stamping. Of the six lamps, five are featured in Queen's catalog of meteorological instruments issued in 1882 and again in 1888. The controversial question is, "did Queen make these lamps?" This is unlikely, as the catalog states that the miners' safety lamps were "of the best English make."



*Queen microscopes - Delaware County Institute of Science collection.
Photo: Dave Williams.*

beam and rotating at a known velocity ranging from a fraction of a mile per hour to that of a cyclone.

Another specialty of Queen's was their thermometers. Only the finest German glass blowers were employed in their manufacture, at a separate factory in the glass industry center of Vineland, New Jersey.

The rarest of the Queen products are their miners' safety lamps. After an extensive survey, the author was only

However, the sixth lamp revives the controversy. A lamp in Lester Bernstein's collection is stamped with the Queen Company name, and with the patent date of December 18, 1883. This patent (No. 290510) was issued to an American named John Lloyd Williams of Shenandoah, Schuylkill County,

Pennsylvania. The patented feature of this lamp was an added wick tube which was used to extinguish the flame without having to open the lamp. This was an important feature in the presence of an explosive fire-damp atmosphere.

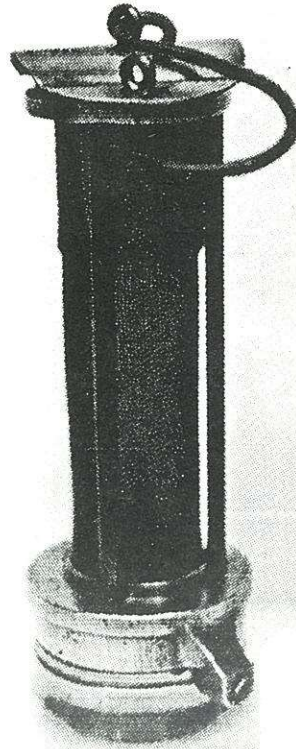
Speculation as to the actual manufacturer of this lamp centers around the Everhart Brass Works in Scranton, PA.

Queen Safety Lamps

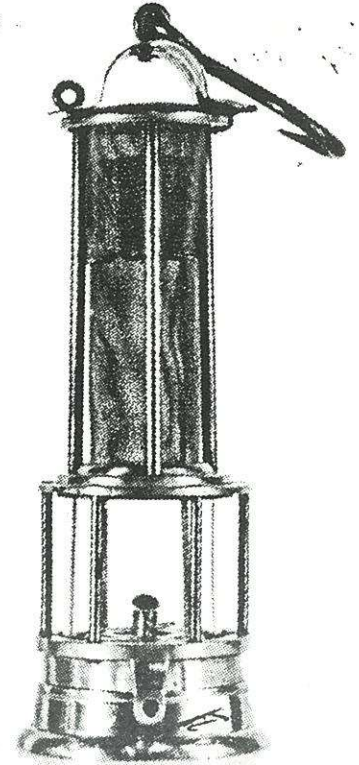
James W. Queen was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1811. His parents were Irish immigrants. He started working at the age of seven and by the age of thirteen had only attended school for one year. Soon afterwards, he was apprenticed to John McAllister, who was the leading scientific instrument dealer in Philadelphia at the time. By 1836 Queen had become a partner in the firm, and would remain so for seventeen more years. Queen went into business for himself in 1853 and advertised as "Optician, Importer and Dealer in Optical, Mathematical and Philosophical Instruments." In 1859 he took on a partner named Samuel L. Fox and named the new business James W. Queen & Company.

Queen withdrew from the business in 1870. He died on July 14, 1890, and was buried in Laurel Hill Cemetery in Philadelphia. Shortly after his death his wife Abby endowed a large portion of his fortune to establishing the James W. Queen Memorial Library which is located at 33rd and Wharton Streets in Philadelphia.

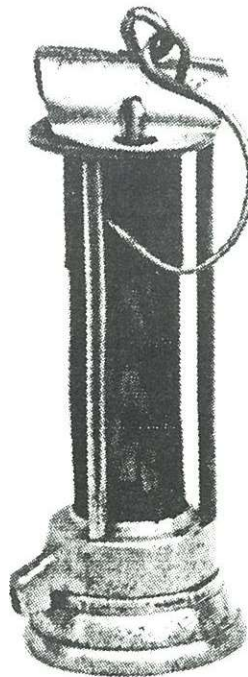
Following Queen's retirement, Fox took on two new partners and by 1877 turned the company into a virtual department store of scientific instruments. Items from this period are signed J. (or Jas.) W. Queen and Co. The signature "Queen and Co." began to appear in the late 1880's. Over the years as the company grew, it changed owners and names several times: Queen-Gray (1912), Gray Instrument Co. (1926), Biddle-Gray Corp (1963). The Biddle-Gray name was dropped in 1967, but the Gray line of electrical instruments are still in production today.



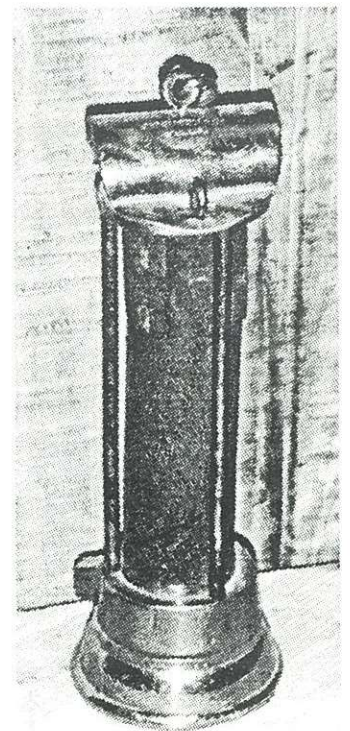
8 1/2 "
(Lester Bernstein collection)



10 1/4 "
(Lester Bernstein collection)



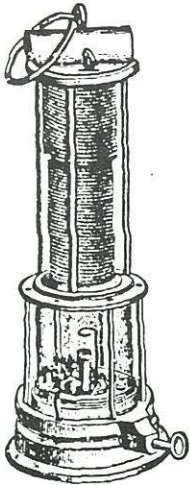
9"
(J. Roger Mitchell collection,
photo by Dave Williams)



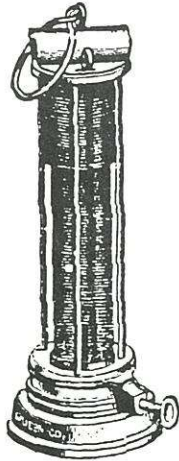
10 1/2 "
(Brad Ross collection /photo).

MINERS' SAFETY LAMPS,

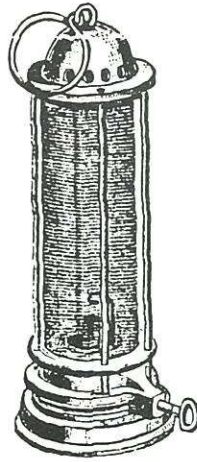
OF BEST ENGLISH MAKE.



No. 14,526.

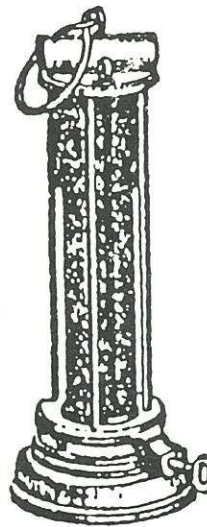


No. 14,525.



No. 14,528.

Three safety lamp models from Queen catalog.



**ANEMOMETERS,
Safety-Lamps,**

WATER GAUGES

Aneroid Barometers,

THERMOMETERS,

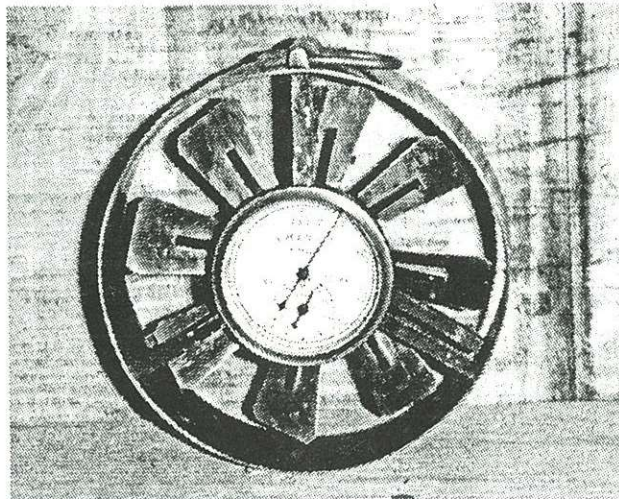
For Miners. Priced and
Illustrated Catalogue of
120 pages on application

**JAMES W. QUEEN & CO.,
Philadelphia, Pa.**
18-17

Advertisement.



Queen & Co. Phila.
Thermometer, 11" tall (J.
Roger Mitchell collection, photo
by Dave Williams).



Queen &
Co. Phila.
Anemometer
(Harold
Bailey
collection,
photo by
Brad
Ross).

Sources

The Queen factory and brass foundry were featured in an article in Scientific American for April 28, 1888, and were shown on the cover.

The history of James W. Queen & Company was found largely in a reprint of the Company catalogs, with an introduction written by Deborah Jean Warner of the Smithsonian Institution. My sincerest thanks go out to her and to Gretchen Worden, director of the Mutter Museum in Philadelphia. Without their help this article would not have been possible.

I also wish to thank Lester Bernstein, Harold Bailey, and Brad Ross for providing pictures. Lastly, I thank John Bell, Dave Williams, Tony Moon, Mark Ballard, and everyone who contributed to this article.