

The Edward K. Rollins Miners' Lamps

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In an excellent article in the Mining Artifact Collector, issue Number 21, Winter 1994, Tony Moon asked the question "Who is E. K. Rollins?" He writes that Rollins was granted a patent on June 12, 1883 for a miners' oil wick cap lamp that would subsequently bear the names of eight manufacturers. Recently one of my friends moved to Scranton, PA, and sensing an opportunity, I asked her if she would do some research into the his-

tory of these lamps and companies. Her research was so useful I asked if she would co-author this article.

Unfortunately we still cannot answer Tony's question with certainty. The original patent application was submitted March 22, 1882. Edward K. Rollins of Scranton, PA, assignor to Hunt Bros. & company, Ltd., was granted the patent for a miners' lamp on June 12, 1883.

Despite a thorough search of the business directories and other historical sources at the Scranton Public Library we did not find a listing for Edward Rollins. We assume he was a tinsmith and worked at the time for the Hunt Brothers. Since we could not find more about Rollins, we concentrated on the companies that made these very popular lamps.

The Rollins lamp must have worked well, because the same lamp with only minor variations was manufactured by eight companies for over 40 years. All of these manufacturers were in Scranton, PA or the immediate vicinity. Many of the individual makers were involved in more than one of the companies. Alexander E. Hunt had the greatest longevity in the business, beginning in Hunt Bros. in 1879 and continuing through 1912 as the Alex E. Hunt Co., a wholesale hardware company. The eight lamps identified bear logos from "Hunt Bros & Co.," "Hunt & Connell," "Alex E. Hunt," "Quinn & Murray," "Quinn Bros.," "J.J Murray," and finally "Trethaway Bros." We've constructed a flow chart to make it easier to follow the chronology.

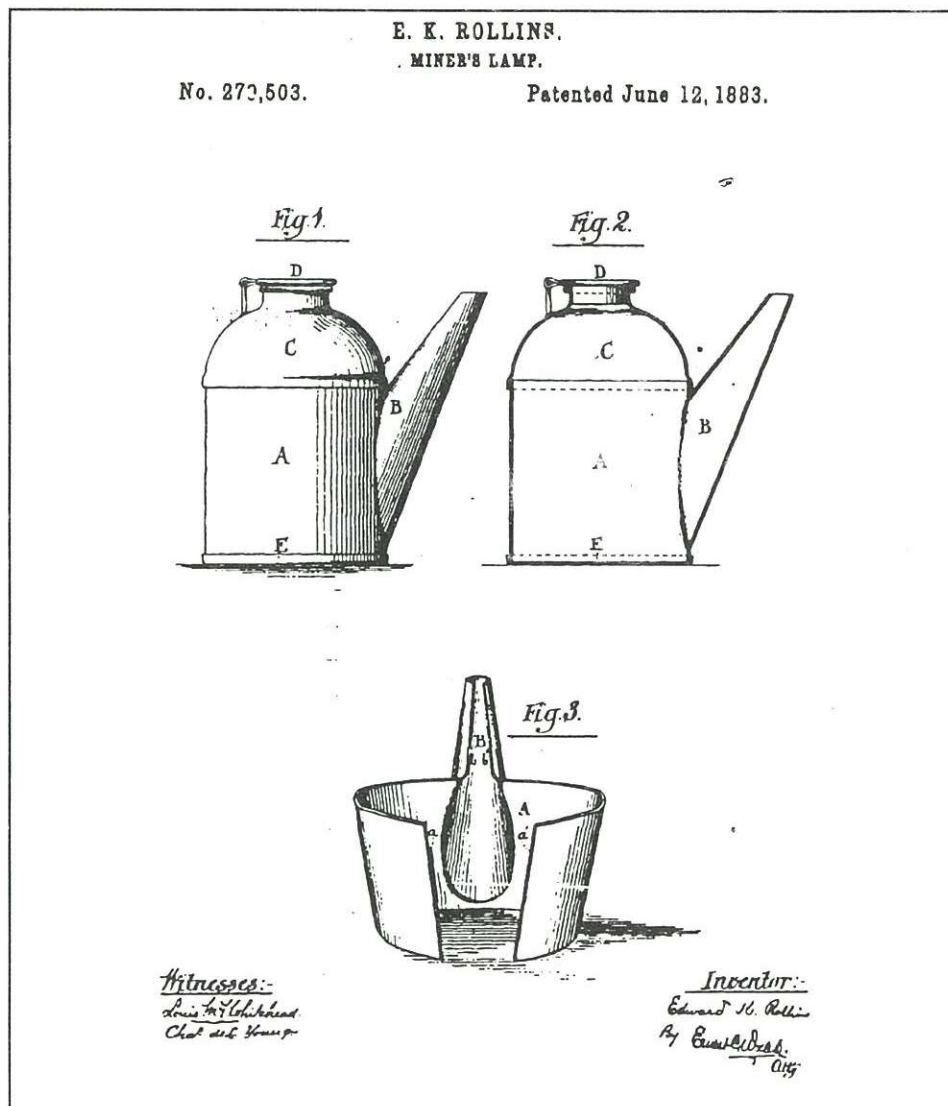


Figure 1.

Copy of U.S. Patent No. 279,503 to
Edward K. Rollins

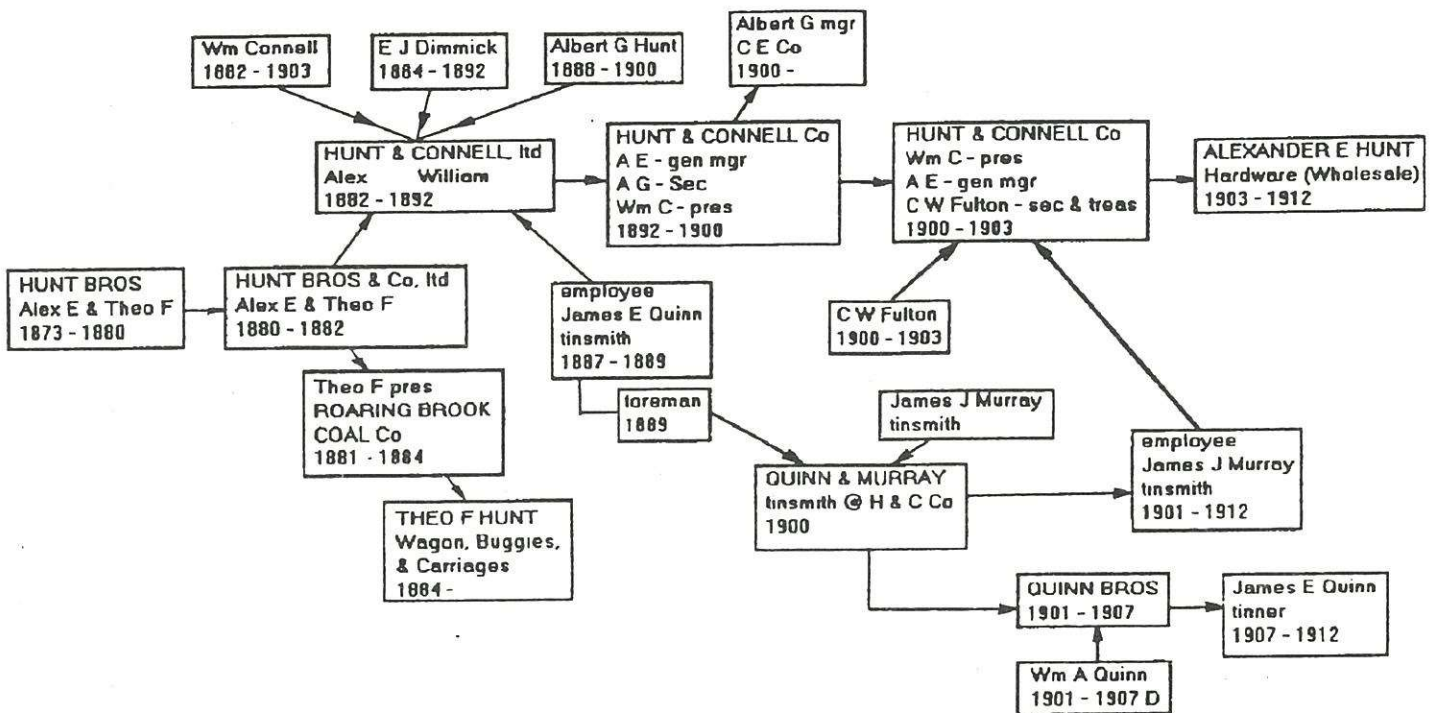


Figure 2.
Flow chart showing the chronology and linking of the lamp manufacturers.
From Business Directories of Scranton Public Library.

The first of the eight companies listed is Hunt Bros. Business directories list Alex E. and Theo F. Hunt as hardware dealers at 430 & 432 Lackawana Ave. from 1873-1880. Alex and Theo went on to form Hunt Bros & Co., Ltd., which operated from 1880 until 1882. A lamp with the "Hunt Bros." logo has a "Pat. A'pl'd. for" stamped on the spout.

Assuming that this refers to the Rollins patent, since the lamp is of identical construction, this would indicate Rollins worked for the Hunt Bros when he first began development of this style lamp. The patent application is not dated until 1882, after Hunt Bros. had become Hunt Bros & Co., Ltd.

The two Hunt brothers then went separate ways, with Theo becoming president of Roaring Brook Coal Co., and later forming a wagon and carriage company. He was no longer listed in the mining lamp business. After the Hunt brothers split, Alex teamed with Wm. Connell to form Hunt & Connell Ltd., operating from

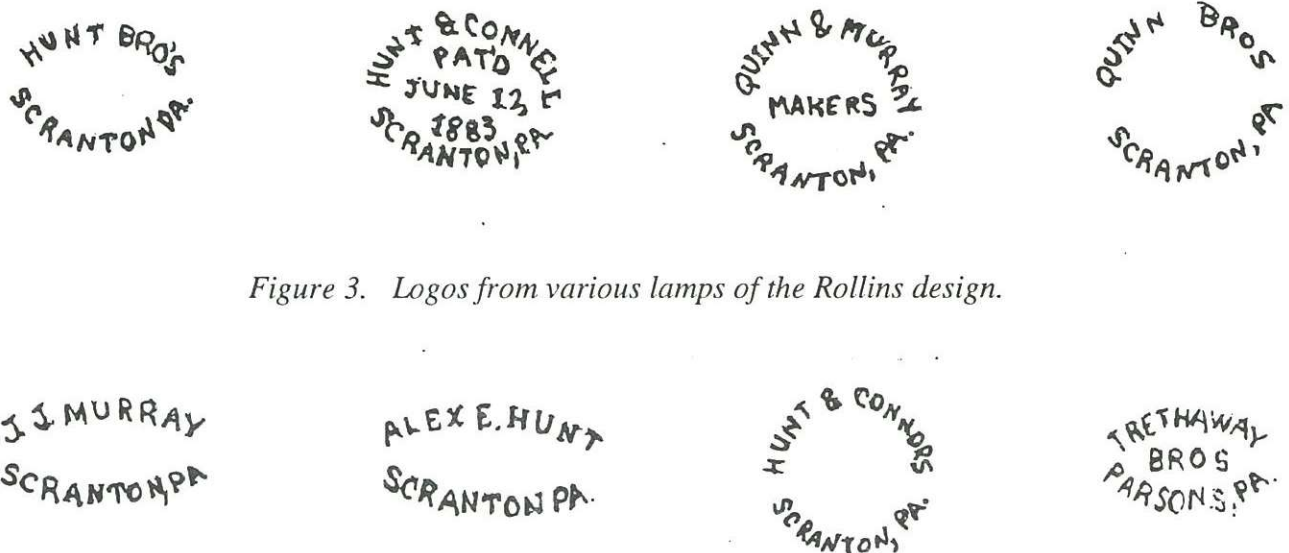


Figure 3. Logos from various lamps of the Rollins design.

W. P. Connell & Sons,
Wholesale and Retail Dealers in
HEAVY SHELF HARDWARE,
MINE AND MILL SUPPLIES,
CARPENTERS' TOOLS,
Stoves, Furnaces and Ranges,
PLUMBERS, GAS AND STEAM FITTERS,
118 & 120 Penn Avenue, and 308 Centre Street.

Figure 4. Advertisement from Scranton Business directory, 1888 for the "other" Connell Hardware Company.

1882-1892. They produced the familiar lamp with the Rollins patent date.

Most of these lamps had tin font and spout in a single molded piece, with a brass shoulder and neck and a tin lid. Some lamps were made in all tin. In 1892 the Hunt & Connell Co. was formed with Wm. Connell as president, Alex E. Hunt as general manager and Albert G. Hunt (Alex's son) as secretary. They remained in business until 1903. William Connell appears in the Scranton Directories for many years, and in a number of business ventures ranging from hardware to bank president to land developer, a very prominent businessman of that era in Scranton. Somewhat

confusing, until the present research, were the addresses of the various Connell companies. There were *two* William Connells in Scranton at that time, apparently unrelated. The other Connell, Wm. P. Connell, was also in the hardware business, first with Henry Battin 1873-1886 and later with his sons Frank and Frederick at 118 Penn Ave. in Scranton. He was not involved in any of the companies that manufactured the Rollins' lamps.

James Quinn first appeared in the Scranton Directories in 1879, listed as a bartender. Two years later he was listed as a tinsmith for Hunt & Connell, Ltd. He became foreman in 1899. In 1900 James E. Quinn joined with James J. Murray to form Quinn

& Murray and they made lamps under the Rollins patent. Curiously, the business address is 434 Lackawana Ave., the same as Hunt & Connell! Were both Hunt & Connell and Quinn & Murray producing the same lamp with different logos at the same address at the same time?

Quinn & Murray lasted only one year. After 1901, James J. Murray is listed as an employee of Hunt & Connell. This probably accounts for the relative scarcity of Quinn & Murray oil wick lamps, since they were only made for one year.

In 1901, James E. joined with his brother Wm. A. Quinn and made Rollins patent lamps under the label

of "Quinn Bros." This company is listed in the Scranton Directory until 1907, when it disappears. Wm. A. Quinn died in 1907, but James E. is still listed as a tinner at 438 Larch through 1912.

James J. Murray is listed as a tinsmith at the Hunt & Connell address of 432-434 Lackawana until 1907. By 1912 he is listed as a tinsmith at 450 Wright. This must be the address for the lamps made by J. J. Murray until he disappears from the Directory about 1912. My lamp made by J. J. Murray is of the same font/spout construction as the Rollins lamps, but has a reinforcing shroud between the font and spout.

Another lamp of this same patented construction in Dave Johnson's collection has a label of "Hunt and Connors". We searched all the Di-

rectories for a listing of this company and found none. Interestingly enough a Patrick Connors appears in the 1907 Directory as a tinsmith with Lennon & Co. He is also listed later in the 1912 Directory as a tinner with Roche & Walsh Co., a plumbing company. The same Connors? There is no known association with any of the other players in this complicated weave of lamp manufacturers.

After 1903 Wm. Connell pursued his interests in banking, and the lamps then bore the name of "Alex E. Hunt" and continued to be listed in the hardware section of the city directory until 1912. In Tony Moon's article, he notes that the Alex E. Hunt lamps had two lettering styles; one roman and one straight. He also shows two styles of bottoms on Alex E. Hunt lamps. One bottom is flat, the same as the "Hunt & Connell" lamp, and

the second has a concave domed bottom typical of Trethaway Bros. lamps. Evidently Trethaway became the final player in this dynasty, manufacturing lamps under the Rollins patent after 1912. This seems like an unfitting end for a patented lamp that had persisted for so long. Even in those days there must have been corporate mergers and takeovers!

REFERENCES:

Scranton City Directory, 1873-1912.

"Local History" vertical files, the Scranton Public Library

Moon, Tony. "The Patented Oil Wick Lamp of E.K. Rollins." Mining Artifact Collector, issue 21, Winter 1994.

Young, Chuck. unpublished manuscript.



Figure 6.

Photo of the Murray lamp following the Rollins patent.