

Dinner-Pail Lanterns

Dave Johnson

A unique type of mining collectible is the small variety of "Dinner-Pail" or "Dinner-Bucket" lamps, or more correctly lanterns patented prior to 1900. While nearly every miner carried a tin dinner bucket of some type and a very large number survive today, only a handful of dinner-pail lanterns are known to survive. I know of only five varieties, three of which I have been fortunate enough to obtain. They apparently weren't well received and failed to sell well to cost conscious miners. As well as providing an additional source of light, all examples were able, if desired, to heat the liquid compartment.

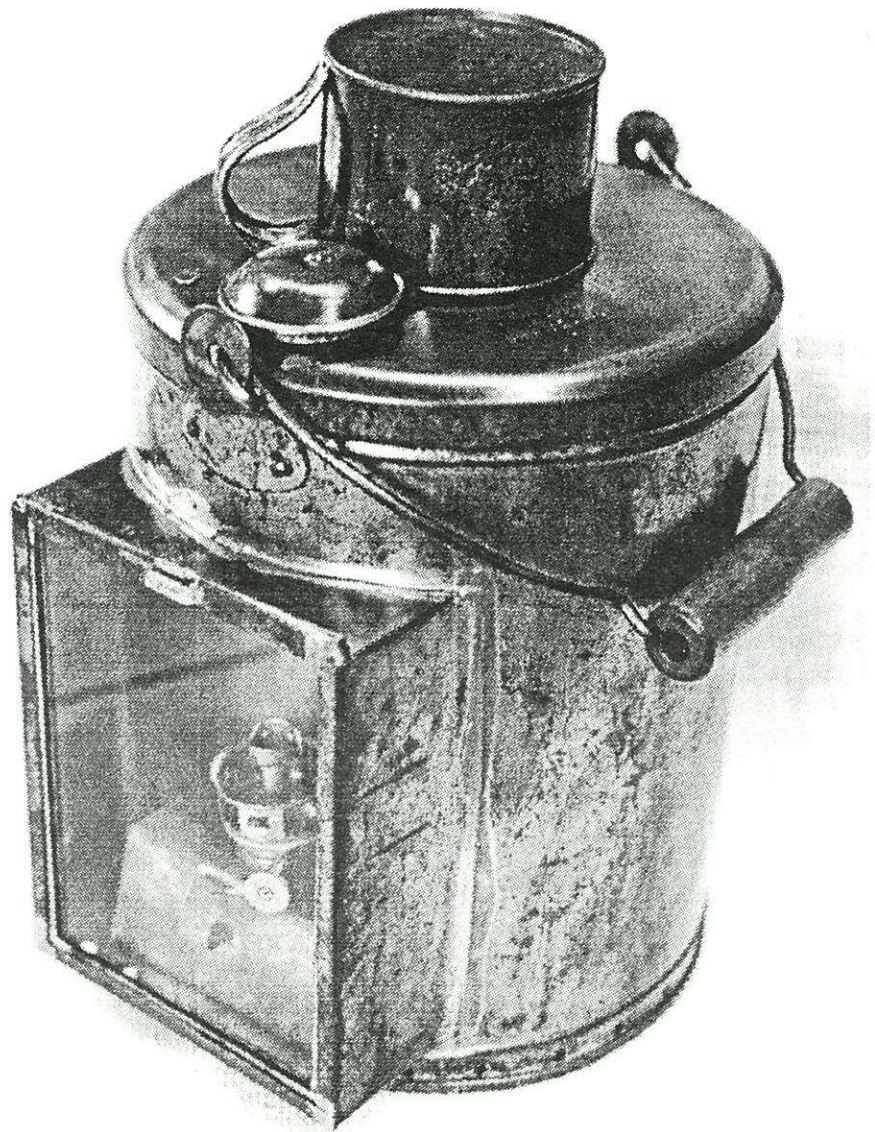
The three examples in my collection represent the three shapes of almost all other standard non-lantern dinner-pails: round, oval and oblong. To date, I have located four patents for these unique dual purpose lighting devices. The earliest of these patents, Number 120,442, was granted to Ketcham and Ketcham on October 31, 1871. This patent drawing shows a dinner-pail with a round lamp in a chamber in front of the food compartment and below one end of the liquid compartment which forms the cover.

Patent Number 198,294, granted to Jos. Haight of Port Chester, NY on December 18, 1877 reads; "Upon one side of the cover is secured a receptacle for coffee, etc., and directly opposite this receptacle is an aperture for direct escape of smoke from the lamp. The cover may be turned so as to bring either the recep-

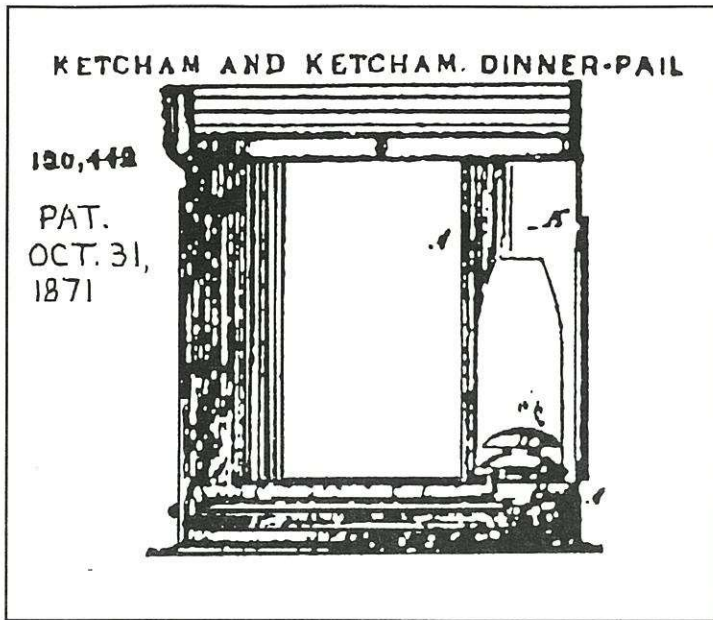
tacle or the aperture directly over the chimney of the lamp."

Both the oval and cylindrical examples pictured here have the Octo-

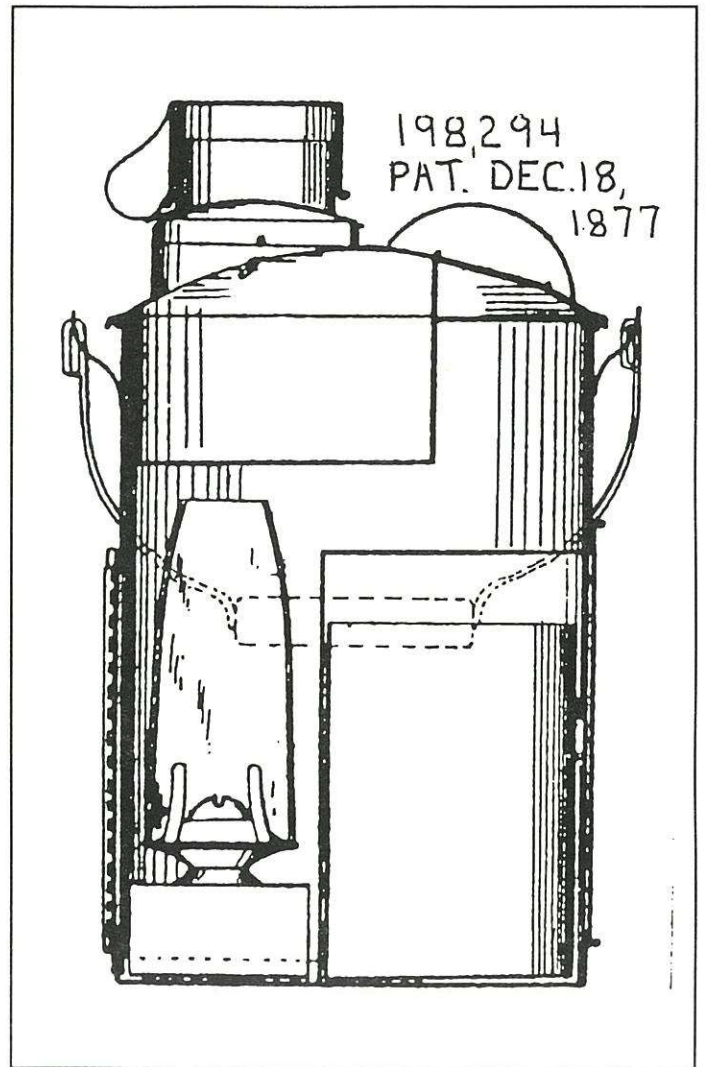
ber 31, 1871 and December 18, 1877 patent dates stamped on them. Both have liquid containers that are reversible and the covered aperture described in the 1877 patent. While



Cylindrical dinner-pail lantern, stamped with both 1871 and 1877 patent dates, (author's collection.)



Patent drawings corresponding to patents found stamped into both oval and cylindrical dinner-pail lamps.



the vent covers are slightly different, the brass clip holding them in place is identical. Both have sliding doors in front of the lamp chamber to access the lamp. The oval dinner-pail has a curved door with mica, rather than glass. In order to slide the door up to remove the lamp the liquid chamber must be removed. On the cylindrical dinner-pail there is a sliding door with glass that can be slid up and out without removing the liquid compartment. The lamp in the second pail is larger and held in place by a brass clip. On this pail the food compartment slides out of the bottom and is held in place by a brass spring clip. The oval pail's food compartment is accessed by removing the liquid compartment and an inner lid that fits into the body of the pail. Both pails are well constructed. The oval pail was recently acquired from Roger Mitchell, who acquired it

(Left) Oval dinner pail stamped with both above patent dates, (author's collection, photo by Roger Mitchell.)

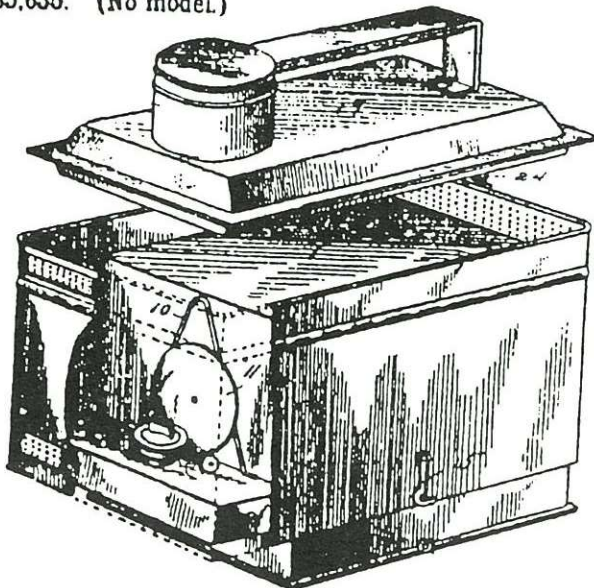
from a dealer who had purchased it more than 20 years ago at an auction south of Wilkes-Barre, PA. The cylindrical pail was acquired from Dave Gresko at the Louisville show.

The third pictured dinner-pail is rectangular in shape and features a heavy "bullseye" lens. The lamp wick can be adjusted by a removable brass knob that inserts through a hole in the side of the pail. The knob stores in the food compartment. This dinner pail is stamped with the patent date of April 20, 1897. On this date patent number 581058 was granted to Harry E. Bryan and William T. Harriman of Cadiz, Ohio. This is the only example of the three pictured that has a flame reflector and said reflector is described in the patent. The patent also indicates the lamp's ability to heat the removable liquid compartment. As with the cylindrical example, the food compartment drops out the bottom of the bucket and is held in place by a brass hook, as indicated in the patent drawing. The only differences are that on the actual



581,058. DINNER-PAIL AND LANTERN. HARRY E. BRYAN and WILLIAM T. HARRIMAN, Cadiz, Ohio. Filed Mar. 31, 1896. Serial No. 585,635. (No model.)

Rectangular dinner-pail lamp and corresponding patent, (author's collection.)



pail the hook is located at the end of the pail opposite the lamp. The patent drawing indicates a tin handle soldered in place, while the pail as manufactured has a bail handle similar to the other two examples. Also on the actual pail the cup is located at the center of the liquid compartment rather than at one end. This pail was obtained from an auction of an old hardware store's stock near Brazil, in the Indiana coal mining region.

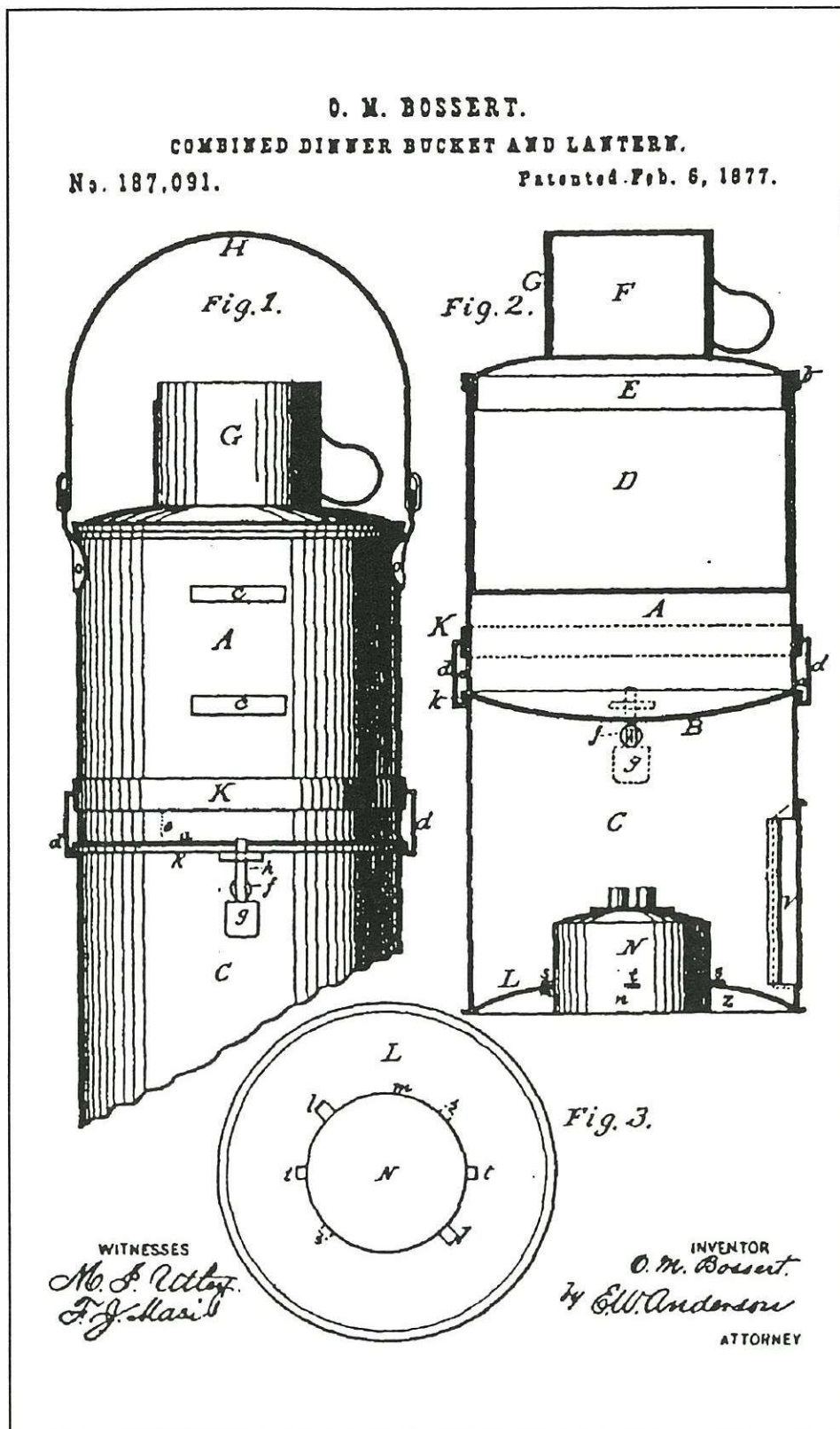
A fourth patent for a “combined dinner-bucket and lantern” number 187,091, was granted to Obadiah M. Bosert of Parnassus, PA on February 6, 1877. This is the only patent that states that the pail is specifically for the use of miners, serving two purposes: first, to heat the food and drink contained therein and, second, to “serve as a lantern guide for such persons, many of whom have to start out before day, and do not return home, especially in the winter months, until after nightfall.”

According to the patent for this pail it differs from the others because; “when the device is raised by its bail, the lantern case drops as far as the arm correcting it with the bucket will allow, thus affording draft space. This space is closed and the vent opened when the apparatus is set down”.

I know of no example of this pail that exists and do not know if it was ever manufactured.

Of the other three pails which are pictured here, I have no information on who the manufacturer of each actually was. Since the two earlier examples have patents issued to different parties in different states either party could be the manufacturer, either could have contracted with a jobber to produce them or a firm could have purchased both patents and manufactured the pails on their own.

I would appreciate any information that any of our readers might have regarding these or other varieties of dinner-pail lanterns.



A fourth patent for a dinner-pail lantern is the only one found thus far which is specifically designed for the use of miners. A stamped example is yet to be found.