

J. R. Watts Perfection Oil Wick

Dave Johnson

*(Right) Front view of wick raiser
on the Perfection oil wick lamp
(author's collection.)*



*(Below) Side view of Perfection
lamp.*



Another unique approach to dealing with the problem of how to advance the wick on oil wick lamps is seen on the Perfection lamp. On July 5, 1892, Julius R. Watts, of Springfield, Sangamon County, Illinois, received patent no. 478,487 for improvements in miners' lamps.

Information about Julius R. Watts is very sketchy. The 1890-91 Springfield City Directory lists Mr. Watts as a "colored" miner living at 308 W. Allen St. He appears in the directory through 1900. The 1891-92 City Directory lists him as a miner with the Central Coal Company, the same period in which he patented his lamp. Julius Watts died on October 3, 1918. This is the only lamp patent I have found where the inventor can be identified as a black inventor.

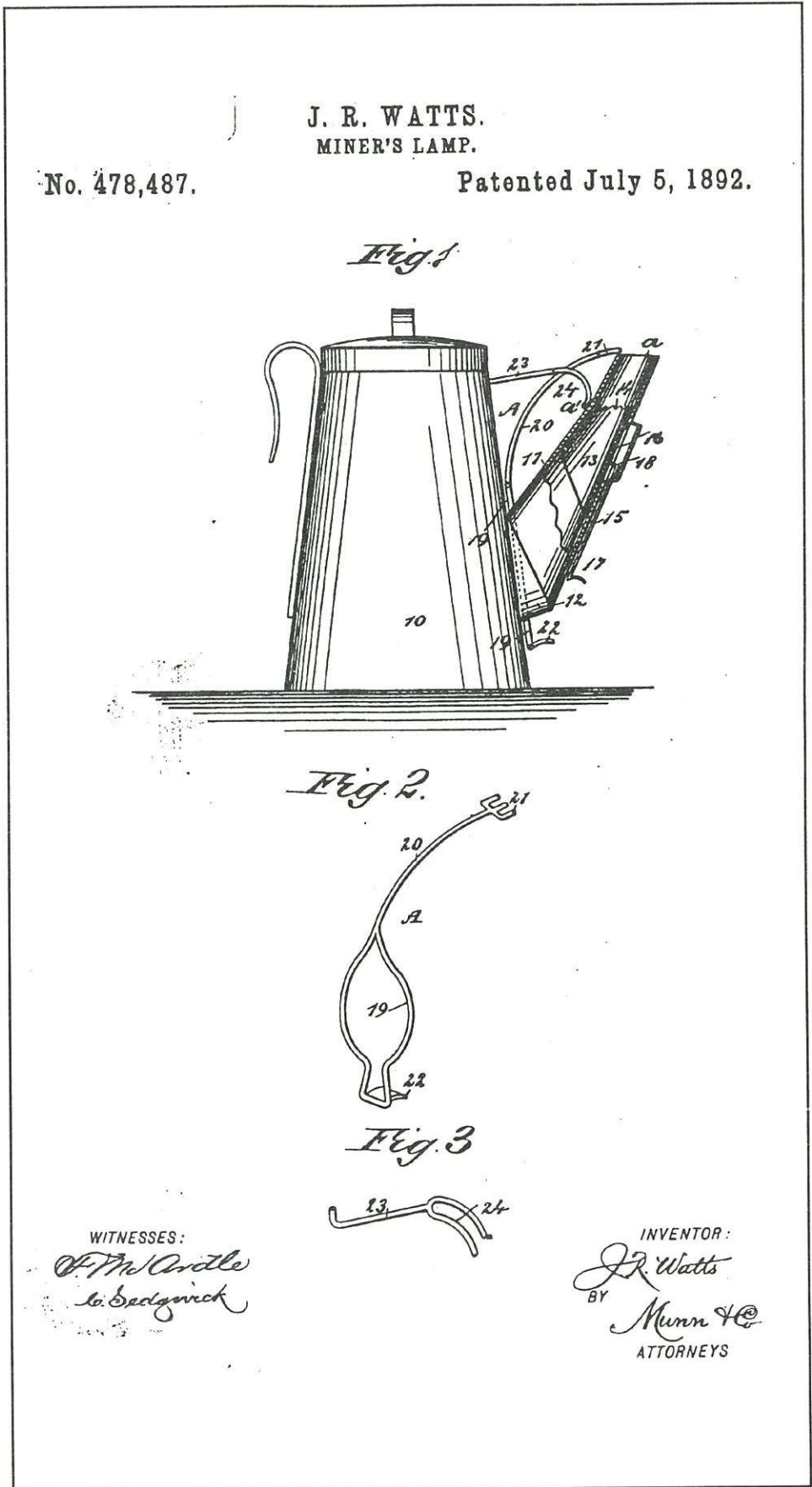
According to the patent, Watts' invention "relates to an improvement in miners' lamps known as "pit lamps," and has for its object to produce a lamp of simple, durable, and economic construction, and to provide a means whereby a miner without removing the lamp from its support may expeditiously and conveniently raise and lower the wick and thus increase or diminish the power of the light."

The lamp as produced, looks nothing like the patent drawing but retains the essential concept of the patent, without the two external pieces between the font and spout. As in the patent drawing there is a conical insert in the wick tube with a serrated edge to grip the wick and an external lever to slide the serrated cone.

The example of the lamp pictured here measures 2 1/8" in height to the top of the cap. The spout is 2 1/8" long and the base is 1 1/8" in diameter. Very few examples of this lamp are known to exist.



Stamping found on the Perfection oil wick lamp.



J. R. Watts' patent for the Perfection oil wick lamp.