McMasters Oil Wick Lamp

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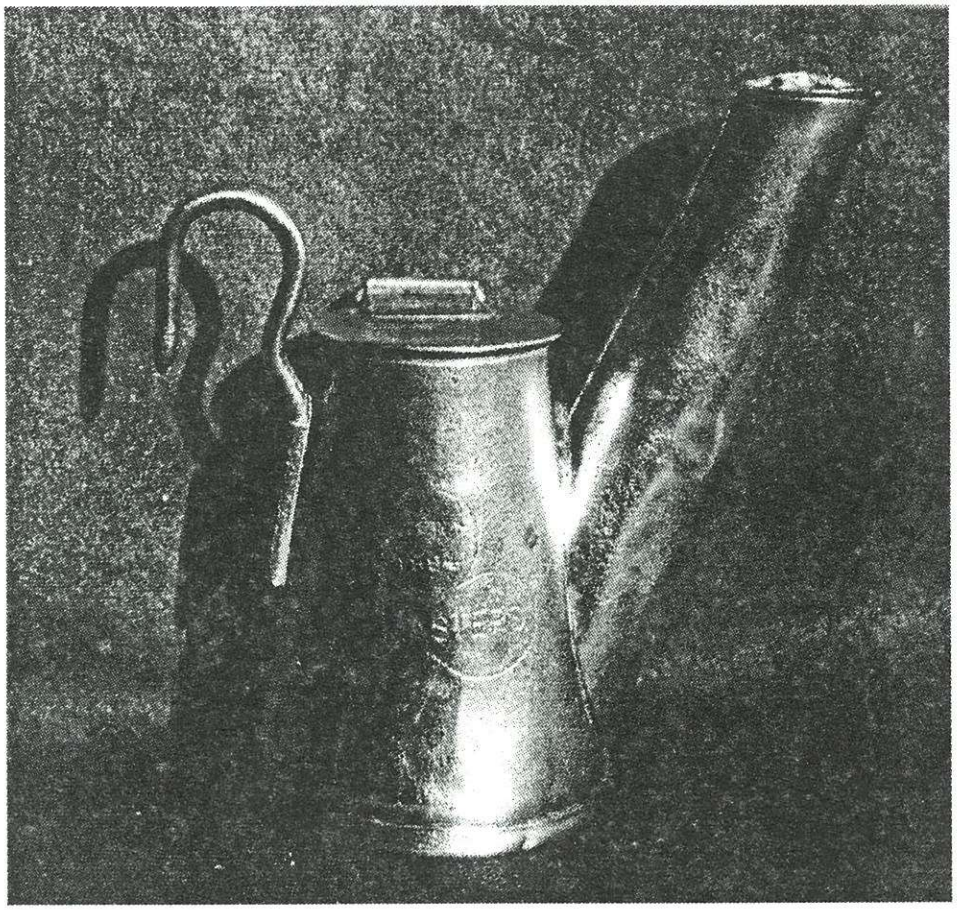
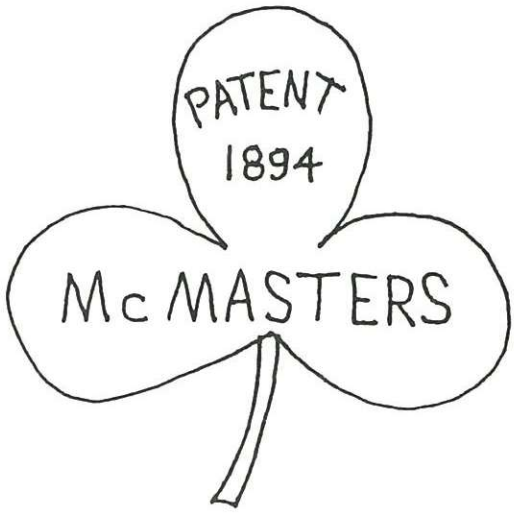
With oil wick lamps the problem of how to easily advance the wick has been addressed by a variety of innovations. On May 8, 1894 William P. McMasters of Munhall, Pennsylvania, received Patent No. 519-616 for improvements in oil wick lamps.



McMasters lamp (from author's collection) and stamping below.



According to the patent: "My invention relates to lamps for miners' use, and is designed to overcome the numerous difficulties which have arisen in the use of these lamps. Heretofore, the wick being loosely coiled in the body of the lamp when the same was drawn out through the wick-tube, it became tangled and knotted and could not be forced out through the tube. As cottonseed oil is used in most lamps of this character and this oil contains a heavy sediment, the wick lying upon the bottom of the bowl became so gummy and filled with residue from the oil, that it prevented the oil being drawn up therethrough and the wick became useless. Moreover, the oil running out into the wick tube became heated and caused great waste, as it is well known that oil when heated burns much more rapidly than when cold."

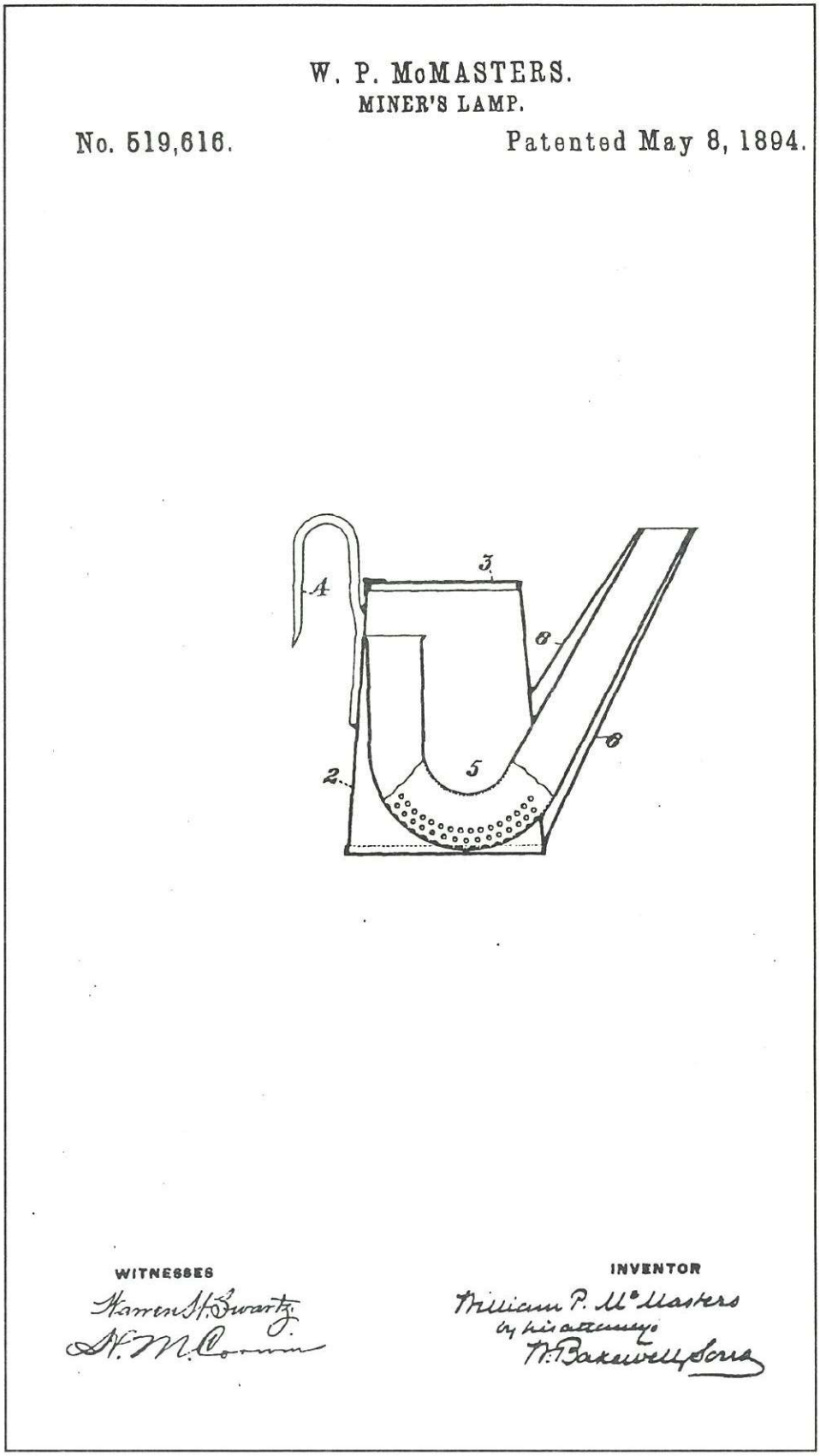
In the patent McMasters states: "My invention overcomes all these difficulties, and to that end it consists in a lamp having a hollow body or bowl and a wick-tube which is extended within the bowl a considerable distance so as to contain the wick throughout the major portion of its length, this tube having perforations to allow the oil to saturate the wick. It also consists in a wick tube extended

within the bowl and passing through a hole in the side of the same size as the tube, whereby the oil is prevented from becoming heated by running up the tube, as well as in the construction and arrangement of the parts as hereinafter more fully described and set forth in the claims."

The patent states that the lamp is to be "made of block tin as usual." McMasters followed with an explanation that: "The operation of the device is as follows: The lid being opened, the wick is inserted in the wick-tube and forced therethrough until it protrudes from the other end. The lid is then closed, and the oil entering the tube through the perforations saturates the wick and is drawn up to the point of combustion." This being the case, "the wick cannot become tangled or knotted as it is enclosed in the tube and the sediment cannot settle in the wick and make it gummy, and moreover the oil cannot run out into the wick tube, as it only enters the tube through the perforations in its lower side."

The example of the McMasters lamp shown here follows the patent drawing completely. However, unlike described in the patent, this example is 100% brass, including the perforated wick tube extension in the font.

The McMasters lamp is common looking in overall shape. Its only outstanding external feature is the three leaf clover stamping on the font. It is not until you open the cap that you see the uniqueness of this lamp. This lamp measures 2 3/8" in height to the top of the cap. The spout is 3 1/2" long and the base measures 1 1/2" in diameter.



1894 patent for McMasters oil wick lamp.