

Oil Wick Venting Devices

by Dave Johnson

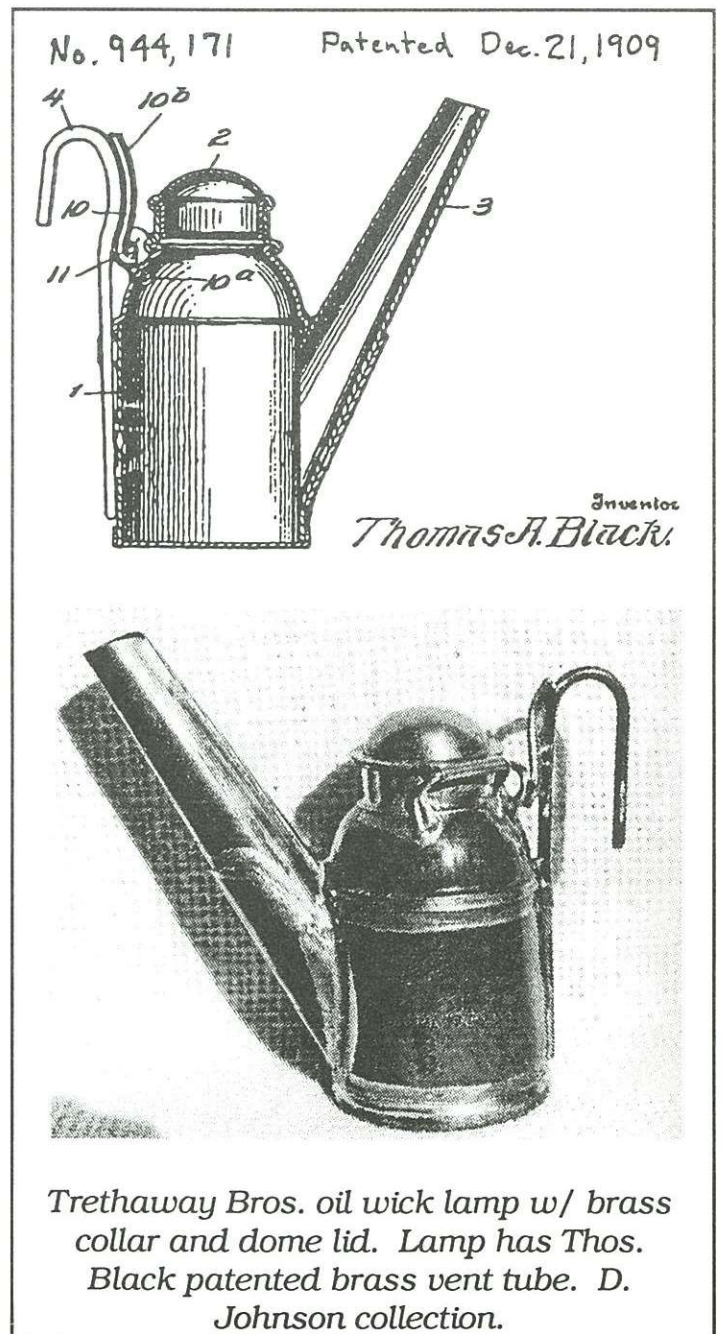
Early on oilwick lamp producers recognized the need to ventilate the fuel vessel (font) of their lamps. In the vast majority of cases a vent or breather hole was merely punched through the cap. In a few cases more care and effort was expended to produce a more complex venting system. At least five oilwick lamp patents address venting as a part or as the whole of the patent.

Trethaway produced lamps with vent tubes in the center of the cap and at the back of the cap. By placing the tube toward the hook, or rear of the cap, the liquid fuel was less likely to spill through the tube as the miner leaned forward. A more elaborate patented vent tube was devised by Thomas A. Black (see article in Eureka 13 p. 30-31) and was produced on a single model of Trethaway Bros. lamp.



Felix Patent oil wick w/ brass vent tube in cap. Dave Johnson collection.

Several manufacturers produced venting that consisted of more than just punched holes but for which no patent exists. The most commonly seen example of this is the simple brass vent tube seen on numerous varieties of Trethaway Bros. lamps. This same type of vent tube is found on Felix oilwicks. The idea for the vent tube on Trethaway Bros. lamps could well have come from Felix. The Felix Lamp was patented in July of 1894, the same year that Trethaway Bros. started manufacturing lamps. In 1896 Felix won a patent infringement law suit against Trethaway Bros. as a result of their producing a lamp almost identical to his lamp.



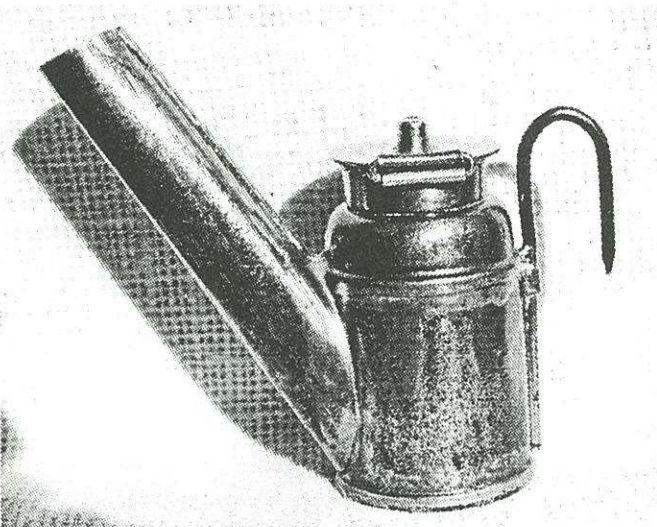
Trethaway Bros. oil wick lamp w/ brass collar and dome lid. Lamp has Thos. Black patented brass vent tube. D. Johnson collection.



Copper Trethaway Bros. driver's lamp w/ brass cap and vent tube. D. Johnson.



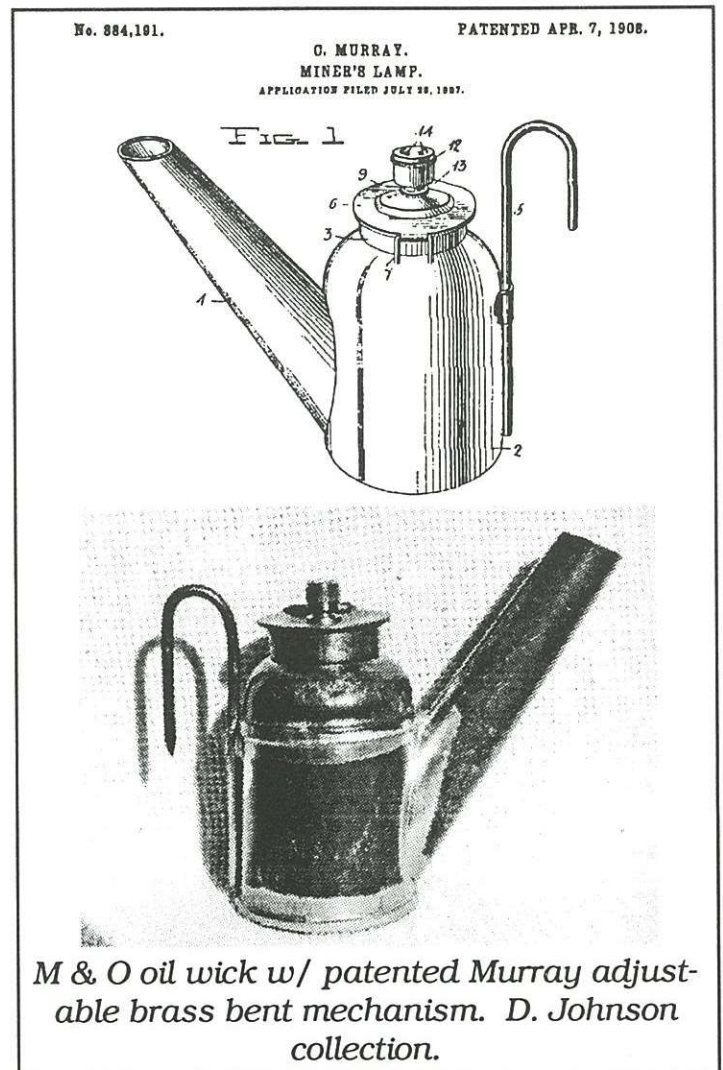
Copper and brass Trethaway Bros. oil wick with brass vent tube located at the rear of the cap. D. Johnson collection.



The CROWN lamp w/ brass collar and brass cap with vent tube. D. Johnson collection.

The CROWN brand lamp produced by Wm. Tunnessen employed a raised vent on some of its brass capped lamps (see article in Eureka 17).

The most complex vent mechanism was an adjustable vent found on M & O oilwicks. The patent (No. 884,191) for this particular device was issued to Charles Murray, of Trevorton, Pennsylvania who assigned one-half of the patent to Charles O'Connor - thus the source of the M & O brandname, (Murray & O'Connor) on April 17, 1908. This device consisted of a perforated knurled brass knob that could be opened or closed on threads. The extra machining necessary to produce this device would



have added significantly to the cost of producing the lamp. Judging by the few examples that exist today the M & O lamp did not enjoy widespread sales.

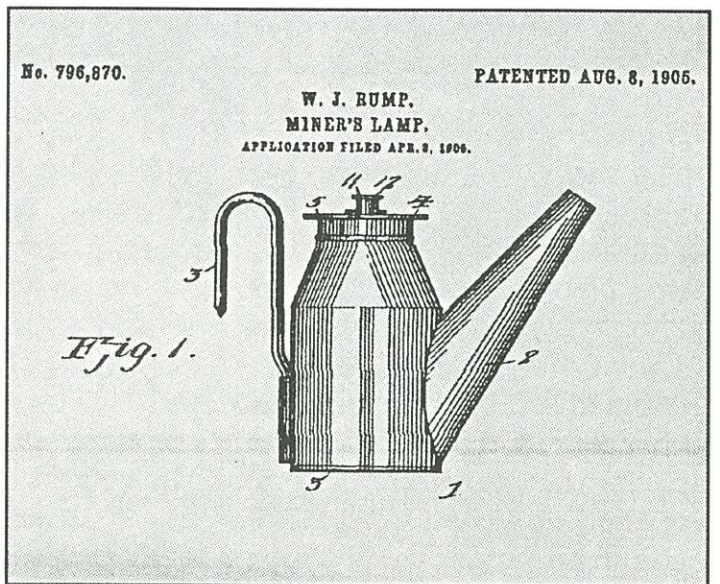
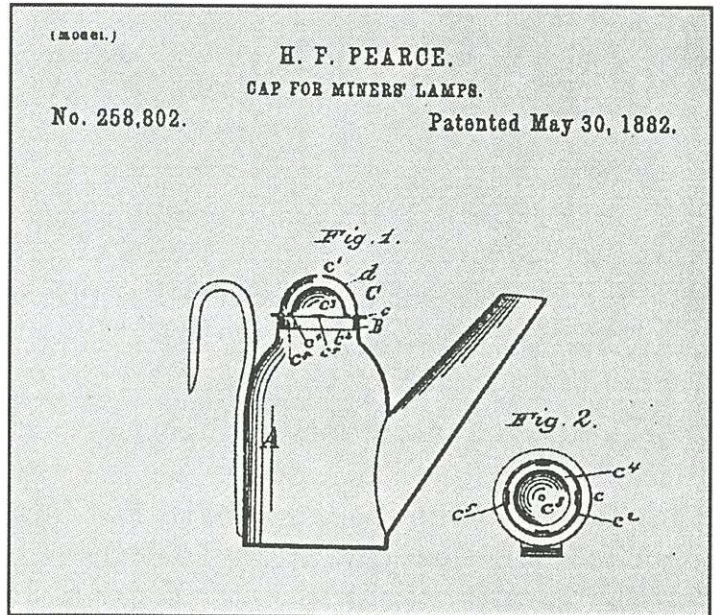
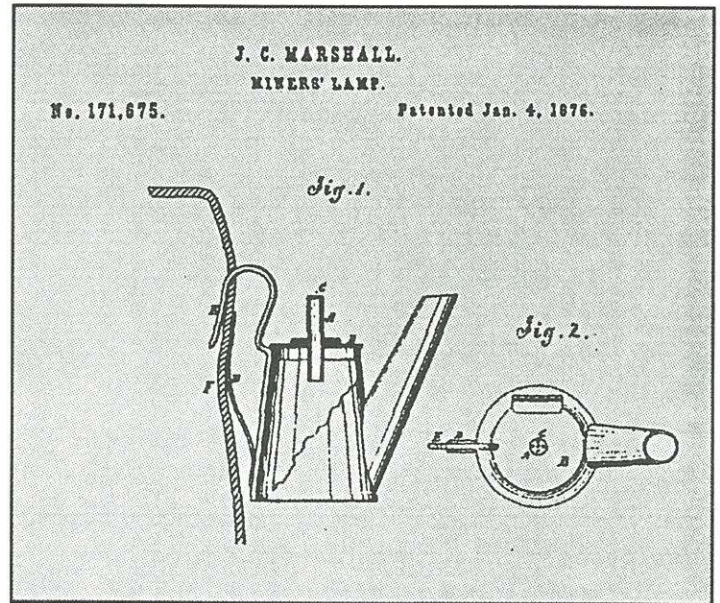
The first patent (No. 171,675) for a lamp utilizing a vent tube was issued to James C. Marshall, of Girardville, Pennsylvania, on January 4, 1876 (see patent drawing). This was followed on May 30, 1882 when patent (No. 258,802) was issued to Henry F. Pearce, of Hyde Park, Pennsylvania, for a multi-perforated oilwick cap (see patent drawing). William J. Rump of Ravine, Pennsylvania, received patent No. 796,870 on August 8, 1905 for an oilwick with a vent tube in the cap.

One of the two pictured German silver oilwicks (following page) has a short brass vent tube similar to those used by Trethaway Bros., just much shorter. The second German silver oilwick (below), marked: Thos. R. Tasker, has a very elaborate and decorative vent tube. The three unique all brass oilwicks appear to all have been made by the same hand. The vents on all three are very similar. The door type cap hinge on two of them are identical, as are the wick tube on the same two lamps.

As can be seen in all the accompanying photos, the presence of a vent device consisting of more than a mere hole punched through the cap can add a great deal of appeal to a lamp for collectors. Happy Hunting!

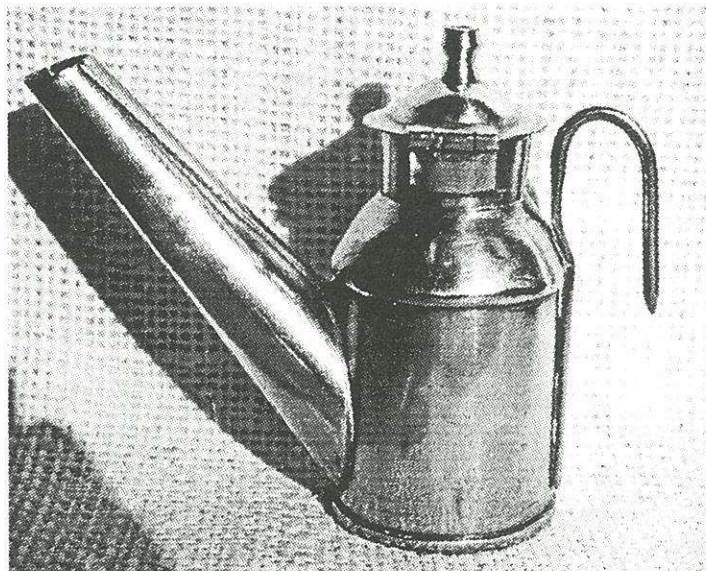


German silver oil wick engraved "Thos. R. Tasker" with brass hook and unusual brass vent. D. Johnson collection.



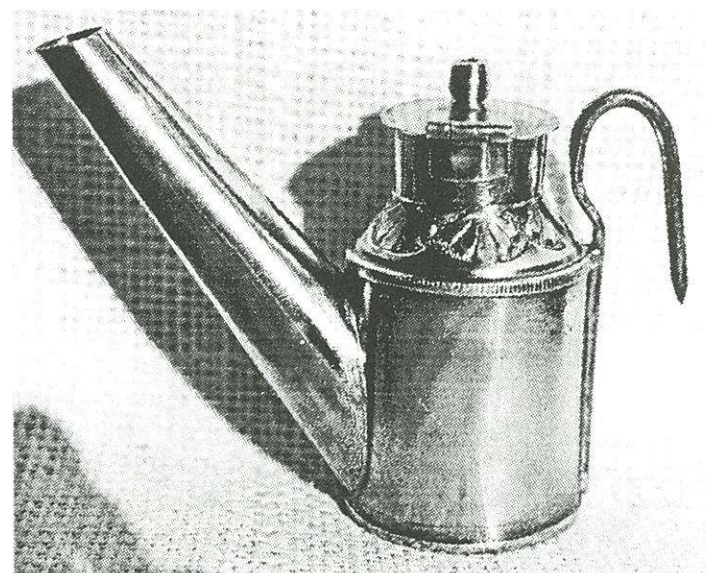


(above) Unmarked oil wick made of German silver w/ brass bottom, hook, and vent tube in the cap.



(above right) Unmarked all brass oil wick w/ unusual cap vent.

(right) Unmarked all brass oil wick w/ unusual cap vent. Note the fancy engraving on the shoulder.



(below right) All brass oil wick w/ unusual cap vent. Font is stamped: J. Parfet.

(below left) Oil wick w/ brass conical vent tube. All lamps from D. Johnson collection.

