

U.S. Tool Co. Oil-wick Lamps

by Dave Johnson

Considering the large number of coal mines that have operated in Southwestern Indiana and Southeastern Illinois, one might have expected at least several area firms to enter the oil-wick market. However, only the U.S. Tool Co. of Vincennes, Indiana is known to have produced oil-wick lamps in this area, and then only for a brief period in 1908-09.

The only reference made to this little known producer appears in the 1908-09 Vincennes City Directory. The U.S. Tool Co. was listed as a manufacturer of tools (type unspecified) located at the Northeast corner of Barnet and 3rd. One C.R. Anderson was listed as President, with L.K. Koontz as Vice-president, and J.S. Surbaugh as Secretary/Treasurer. No information is available on any of these individuals.

It seems odd that a firm would attempt to enter the oil-wick market at such a late date. This is akin to entering the buggy whip business after the introduction of Henry Ford's Model T.

Although they appear to have produced oil-wick lamps for only one year, they did produce a wide variety of styles. In 1975 a box containing 10 U.S. Tool Co. oil-wicks was purchased from an old hardware store in Terre Haute, Indiana by an antique dealer. In this box were 7 distinct stamped styles with 3 duplicates. I was lucky enough to be able to purchase the 3 duplicates from the dealer who is a collector of old lighting in general. He refuses to let go of any of the others. All 10 lamps found were manufactured entirely of tin. All of the varieties are marked: U.S. Tool Co. VINCENNES, IND. inside of a shield emblem identical to that found on the Grier Bros. lamps. One variety has the STAR Trademark in the shield as well. Workmanship is excellent on all varieties. Does anyone else out there have a lamp manufactured by the U. S. Tool Co. or any advertising for the lamps?

