

A Box of Scrap Metal

by Jim Van Fleet



Collectors of mining artifacts and memorabilia have long recognized hardware stores, former mining supply companies and warehouses as great places to find mining lamps that never were sold off the shelf. Most of these old establishments are gone, or were cleaned out of their mining related stock fifteen or twenty years ago.

Isolated stocks of old mining supplies still exist, and one of them yielded up its treasures this spring. The author was contacted by a businessman from New Orleans who was in the process of cleaning out a warehouse of miscellaneous stuff, the remains of a family business.

What he had found was a large plain cardboard box with the words "min-

ers lamps" written on the side. He opened it, and counted out over 300 miners' oil wick lamps. Three styles of lamps were represented:

— J. Anton & Son drivers' lamps with a brass body and tin spout, having a brass spout guard.

— the same style drivers' lamp having a tin spout guard.

— Hardsocg Mfg. Co. face lamps, a sunshine style lamp made of tin, with unusual vent holes around the base of the spout.

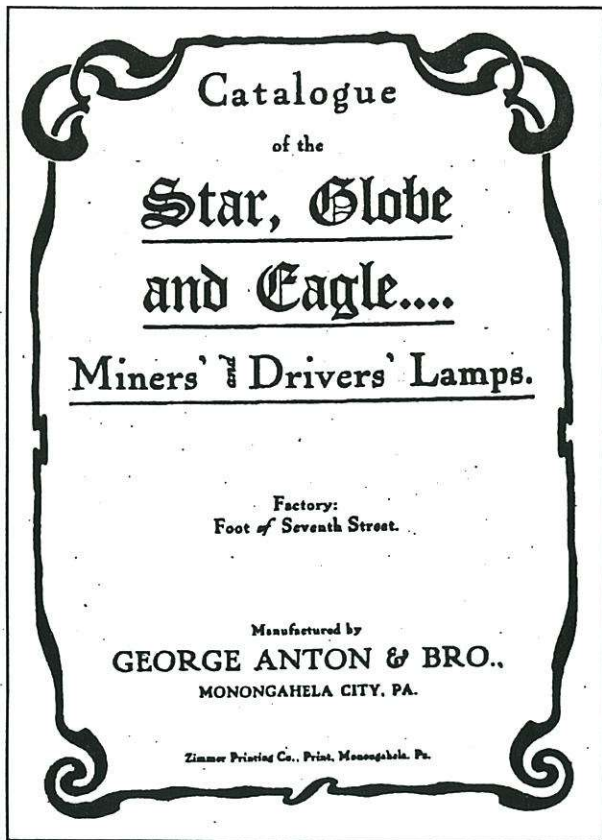
The lamps were apparently unfired. Although they had never been used, some of the lamps showed signs of having sat in storage for over 75 years. Despite the damp Louisiana

climate, however, many of the brass lamps looked brand new.

Less fortunate were the original boxes in which the Anton lamps had been sold. These were shoebox style containers which probably held a half-dozen drivers' lamps, and only a few examples were present. The boxes crumbled, but the paper labels on two box lids were rescued.

The boxes provide the first clue as to the age of these oil wick lamps, and their journey to New Orleans. Although the drivers' lamps are marked J. Anton & Son, the box label indicates that they were sold by "Geo. Anton & Bro., Monongahela City, Penna."

Bill Spence has done research on the



the demise of the wick lamps, and it closed in 1918.”

George T. Anton and his brother took over the Anton mining supply business from their father John, changed the company name on their catalog and box labels, but apparently never marketed an oil wick lamp under the new company name. They continued to produce the “J. Anton & Son U.S.A. Eagle Trademark” miners’ and drivers’ lamps.

This narrows the production date and original sale of the lamps to 1905-1918. The next clue to their journey was also found in the warehouse in New Orleans. As boxes continue to be sorted through, an interesting glass paperweight has surfaced. The logo is “Tradewater Coal Company, Miners and Suppliers,” from Kentucky.

Research in the Edkins Scrip catalog shows this company existed from 1903 to 1907.* They may well have bought the Anton drivers’ lamps and Hardsocg face lamps for sale through their company store.

How the lamps traveled in such a large lot from Kentucky to Louisiana will probably never be known for

Anton miners’ lamps, including interviews with family members. Bill reprinted a catalog (see cover illustration above) provided to him by the family, and included the following company history:

“Around 1874 brothers George, John and Christopher each set up a workshop to manufacture wick lamps for local coal miners. Subsequently George and John combined their operations, marketing their lamps worldwide under the George Anton name. In 1905 George Anton withdrew from active participation in the business, and the firm’s name changed to J. Anton & Son. That son’s name was George T. Anton, and after his father’s retirement the company name would change again to George Anton & Brother. Although the two younger brothers tried to make the conversion to carbide lamps, the business could not survive

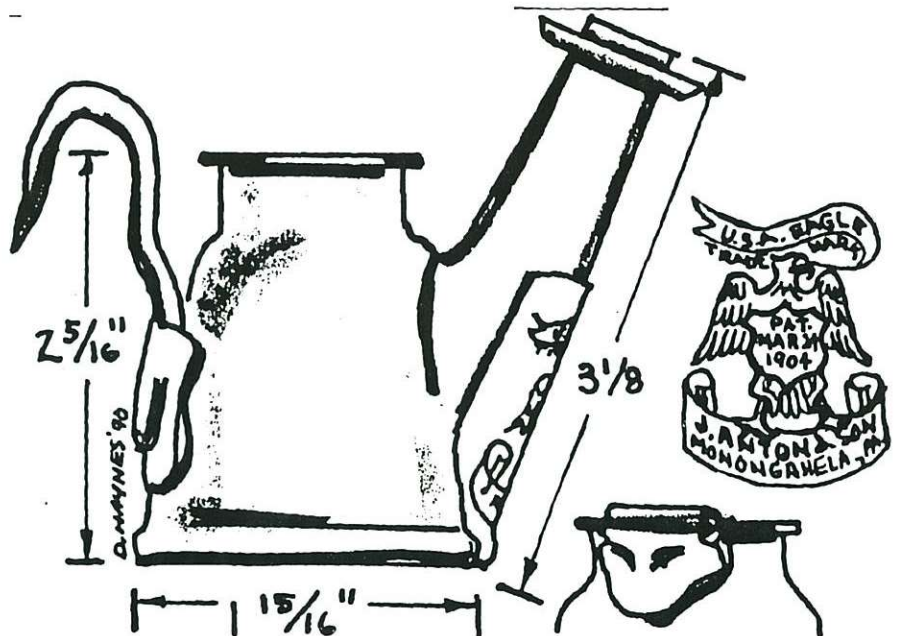


Illustration of brass Anton lamp by Dottie Haynes.

certain. It is likely that they were bought when the Tradewater Coal Company went out of business. Whatever the circumstances, many collectors have benefitted by adding this unusual Hardsocg lamp to their shelf, or by upgrading their Anton lamps.

An example of each lamp and an Anton box label have been donated to the COMER Museum, West Virginia University, to record this historic find and keep them available for research purposes.

* 20,000 Coal Co. Stores in the United States, Mexico, and Canada.
Gordon Dodrill.



Paperweight advertising Tradewater Coal Company.



The now infamous load of oil wick lamps.