

Coal Advertising Signs

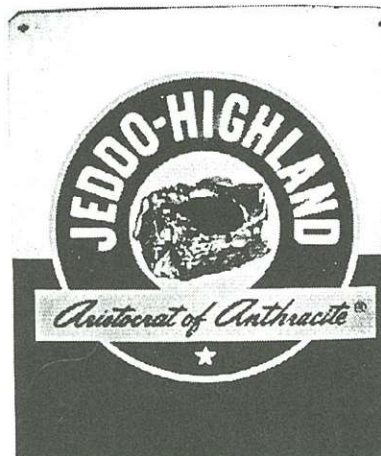
by Dave Johnson

Coal advertising signs can be a colorful addition to a mining artifact collection or they can be the basis for a collection on their own. These signs can be cardboard, painted tin, porcelain over steel, or painted wood. The painted tin signs can be flat or can have embossed (raised) lettering or graphics.

Coal advertising signs can advertise coal mining companies, coal brandnames, coal distributors (wholesalers) and coal retailers. Many times coal signs advertise a combination of these. The East Kentucky Red Comet Coal sign advertises Red Comet Brand Coal sold by The Crystal Ice & Cold Storage Co., a retailer. The Royal Blue Coal sign advertises Royal Blue Brand Coal (from Royal Blue, TN) sold by the Harmony Farmer's Store of Harmony, Minnesota.



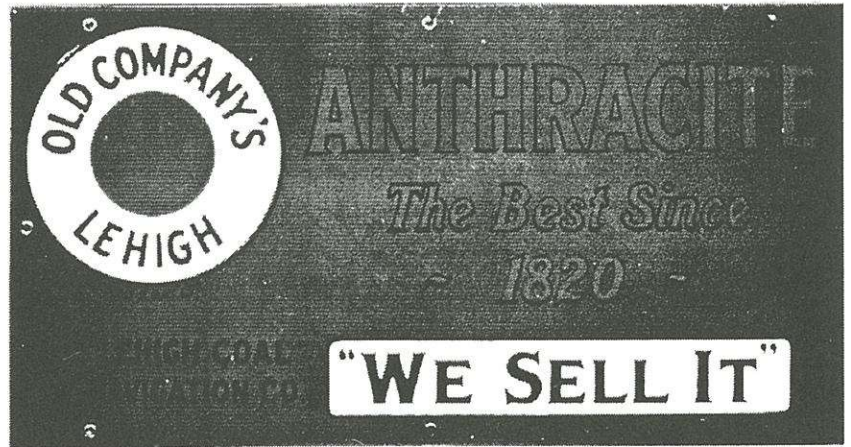
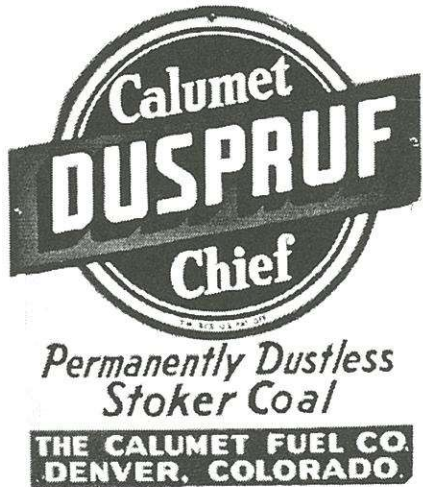
The Jewel Coal, Jeddo-Highland, and Blue Coal signs advertise specific brandnames alone.



The Leatherwood Coal sign advertises one of the many brandname coals offered by the Blue diamond Coal Co. Blue Diamond had extensive operations in Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia. Many of the brandnames were associated with specific coal veins that ran through numerous mining properties, sometimes owned by the same company and sometimes owned by numerous firms.



Coal from a specific well-known vein might be mined and sold under the same name by more than one coal mining company. In most cases each coal mining company had their own brandnames that only they used, such as the Calumet Chief Coal mined by the Calumet Fuel Co. of Denver, Colorado, or Old Company's Lehigh Brand Coal mined by the Lehigh Coal & Navigation Co. of Pennsylvania.



As with most signs of any type price is dictated by several factors such as condition, rarity and aesthetics. Any metal sign showing rust is diminished in value, the more rust or missing paint, the lower the value. I have passed up some rare pieces because they didn't show well. Chips in porcelain signs diminish their value in the same manner.



The flat tin Kenneth Coal sign with its yellow background and plain black block lettering is not as aesthetically pleasing or worth anywhere near as much as the Smith Bearcreek Coal sign with its embossed lettering and figure, and its three types of lettering. The older rectangular Blue Coal sign with its embossed lettering and better graphics is many times more valuable than the later (1952) square flat tin Blue Coal sign (see previous page).

Although I have been collecting mining artifacts for 30 years, I have only been collecting coal signs for three years. I made the mistake of starting to collect them after they became much scarcer and more expensive than they were some years ago. I have found that the best source of coal advertising signs, especially those in great condition is antique advertising shows and dealers who specialize in advertising pieces. I have seen comparably few signs at flea markets and those I do see are generally in poorer condition than those at advertising shows.

There are many other signs related to mining that are not advertising such as mine bell or level signs, safety signs, directional signs and information signs. I will be doing an article in the near future of other mining signs.

