

Signs of the Times

by Dave Johnson

An interesting addition to a mining artifact collection are some of the many signs that were used in mines. These signs can be broken into three broad categories:

- Safety or warning signs
- Signal signs
- Information signs

These signs can be cardboard, painted metal, porcelain over steel, painted wood and oilcloth fabric.

Of these materials, the porcelain signs appear to be the most sought after and coveted by collectors, at least this is what their pricing indicates. The porcelain signs are the most enduring since the porcelain is less susceptible to weather above ground or wet underground conditions than are cardboard, painted tin, painted wood or oilcloth signs over long periods of time. Blue and white porcelain generally indicates an earlier time period than the more common white, black, and red variety. Signs made by the Stonehouse company are highly sought after. The company name is often printed in the lower right-hand corner in fine print.

Many porcelain signs are reproduced today, and are done so amazingly well. Oil Company and Coca-Cola signs are the most copied lot, but fakes are turning up in the mining sector. Look for gray porcelain on the back of the sign as an indication of authenticity, though I'm certain that even this could be reproduced.

As can be seen in the photos, most of the signs shown here are in pristine condition. Those signs from the Carey Mine in Ironwood, Michigan and the Quincy Mine in Hancock, Michigan were found in the company warehouses after the mines closed. This is the condition that most collectors prefer, however, reality dictates that not many unused signs survived. Most signs that saw use in the mines above and below ground were either weather damaged or abused, or both. Thirty or more years ago traveling through old mining areas, while rock collecting with my parents, I can recall seeing signs around many old mines in out-of-the-way areas of Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, and Canada. They were all badly weathered, rusted and usually full of bullet holes. These were not very appealing collector's items, although I have seen signs in this poor condition in museums and in private collections.

My preference, like that of most, is for mint or near mint mine signs which limits the availability of pieces. Mint mine signs are about as common as rare mint lamps.

The purpose of this article is merely to point out the variety of mine signs, not to give a history of mine signs or of a specific manufacturer. The signs from my collection are biased toward the Michigan copper and iron mining areas, reflecting the areas I have frequented the most.

- NOTICE TO EMPLOYEES -
ALL LIGHTS IN THIS BUILDING
ARE TO BE KEPT TURNED OFF
WHEN NOT NEEDED FOR WORKING.
- COPPER RANGE CO.-

Blue and white porcelain. From Copper Range Co.,
 Baltic Mine, Baltic, MI.

TELEPHONE CODE

FOREMEN	- 2 LONG
ELECTRICIANS	- 6 LONG
MACHINISTS	- 2-2-2
MUCKING MACH. REP.	- 1-2-1
NUMBER ONE HOIST	- 1 LONG
MAY RAISE HOIST	- 3 LONG
AUXILIARY HOIST	- 4 LONG
IS WINZE HOIST	5 LONG
WHITE RAISE HOIST	- CALL OPERATOR
CHERRY HOIST	- " "
IS WHITE RAISE	- 1-3-1

STATION CALLS ARE THE SAME AS SHAFT
 SIGNALS. FOR EXAMPLE. SHAFT COLLAR - 2-1

IN CASE OF ACCIDENT NOTIFY SUPERVISOR
 AT ONCE.

Blue and white porcelain, from
 Bunker Hill Mine, Kellog, ID.

MANWAY

Red and white porcelain, from Carey Mine, Ironwood,
 MI.

RAISE CLOSED

Painted tin from Idaho.

TO LADDERWAY

Red and white porcelain, from Montreal Iron mine,
 Montreal, WI.

TO HOISTING SHAFT

Red and white porcelain from Carey Mine, Ironwood,
 MI.

THE PENNSYLVANIA BITUMINOUS CODE

IN ALL SHAFTS AND SLOPES WHERE PERSONS,
 COAL AND OTHER MATERIALS ARE HOISTED BY
 MACHINERY THE FOLLOWING

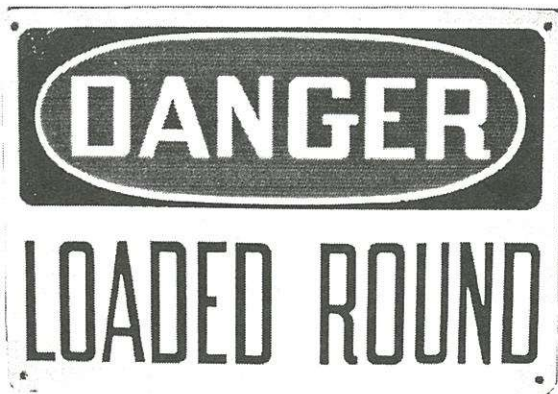
CODE OF SIGNALS
 SHALL BE USED

1 RAP or WHISTLE	TO HOIST COAL
1 RAP or WHISTLE	TO STOP CAR OR CAGE WHEN IN MOTION
2 RAPS or WHISTLES	TO LOWER CAR OR CAGE
3 RAPS or WHISTLES	TO HOIST PERSONS

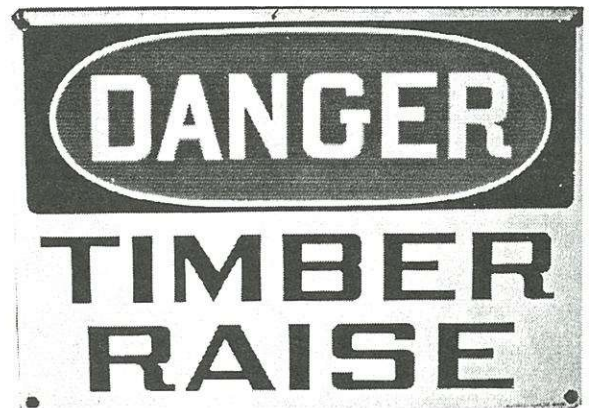
THE ENGINEER SHALL SIGNAL BACK WHEN
 READY, AFTER WHICH THE PERSON SHALL GET
 ON THE CAR OR CAGE, AND THEN ONE RAP OR
 WHISTLE SHALL BE GIVEN TO HOIST.

4 RAPS or WHISTLES	TO TURN THE STEAM ON TO PUMPS.
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Blue and white porcelain, cage
 signal sign.



Stonehouse sign from Quincy Mine, Hancock, MI. Red, white, and black.



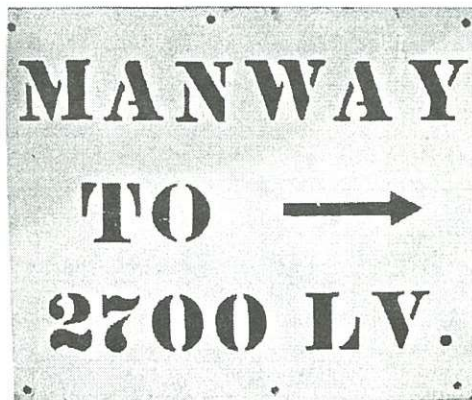
Stonehouse from Quincy Mine, Hancock, MI. Red, white, and black.



Stonehouse coal sign. Black and yellow.



Stonehouse from Quincy Mine, Hancock, MI. Red, white, and black.



Painted tin from Butte, MT. Black on yellow.



Stonehouse, yellow and black.



Stonehouse cage bell sign. Red and white.



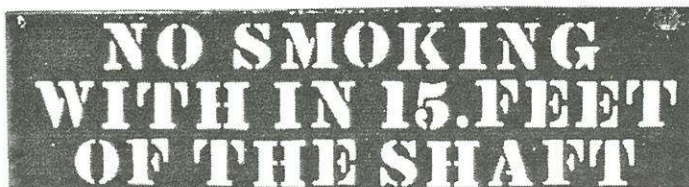
Painted tin cage sign from Butte, MT. This is for a two-level man cage. Black and white.



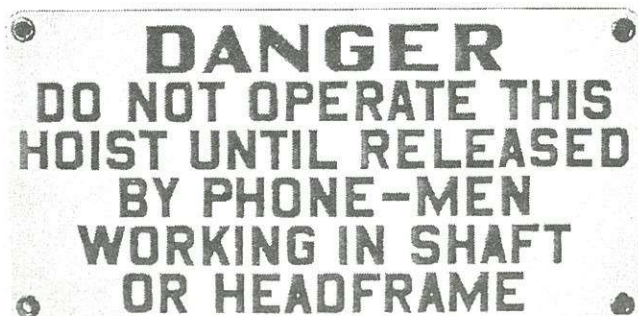
Porcelain coal mine sign. Black and yellow.



Red and white porcelain from Carey Mine, Ironwood, MI.



Red and white painted tin from Idaho.



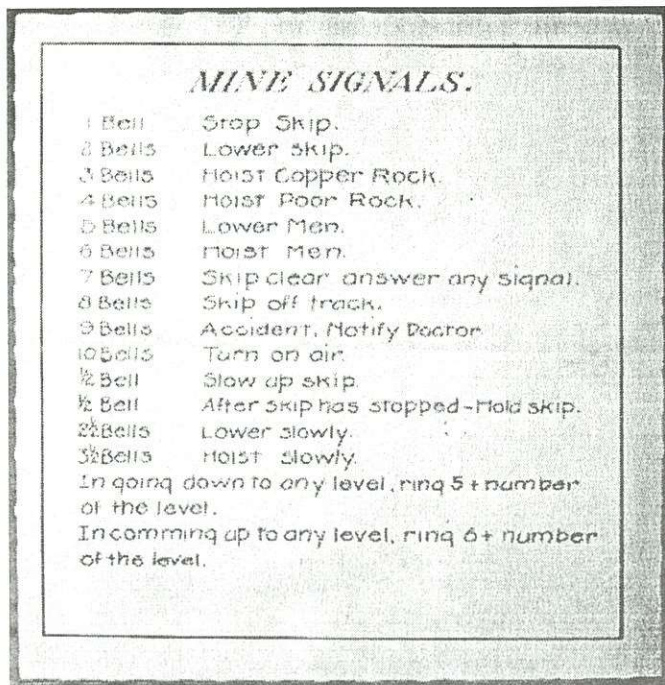
Red and white porcelain from Carey Mine, Ironwood, MI.



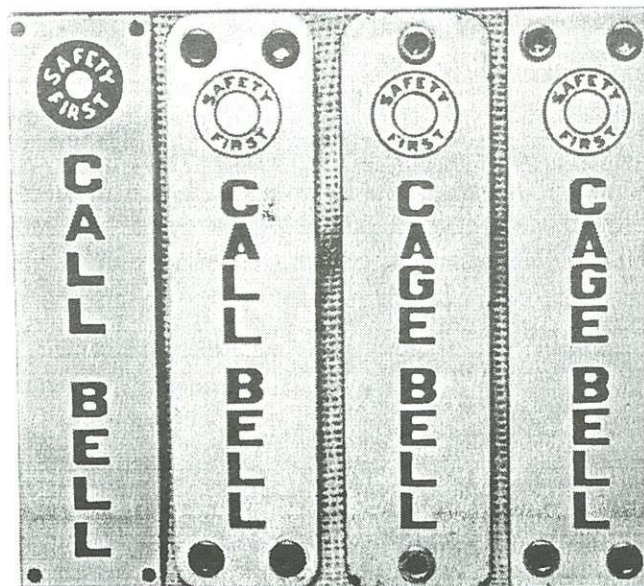
Red and white porcelain from Carey Mine, Ironwood, MI.



Red and white porcelain from Carey Mine, Ironwood, MI.



Cardboard, from Tamarack Mine, Calumet, MI.



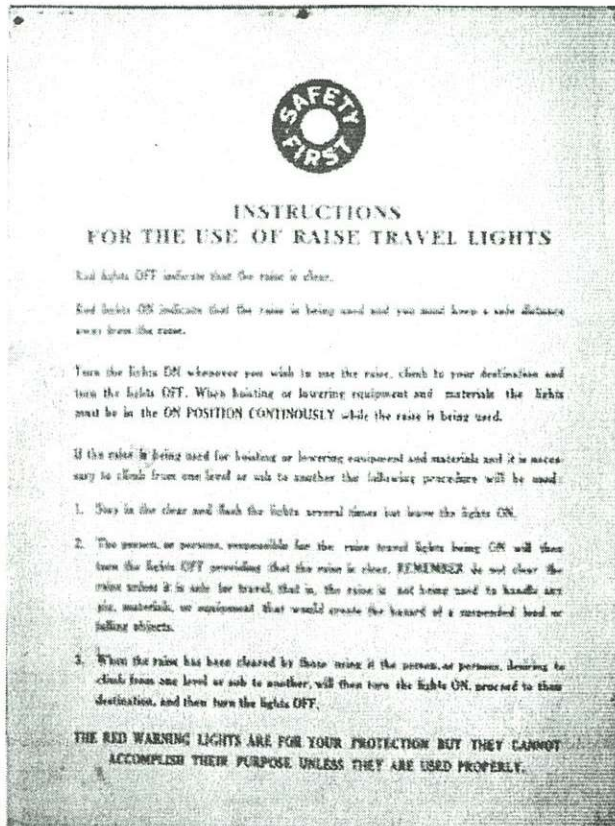
Porcelain from Ironwood, MI.



Stonehouse porcelain. Red, white, and black. From Quincy Mine, Hancock, MI.



MSA Co. of Pittsburgh, PA. Porcelain: red, white, and black.



Cardboard instruction sign from Carey Mine, Ironwood, MI.



Standard Signs, Inc.(porcelain) Safety sign from Carey Mine, Ironwood, MI.

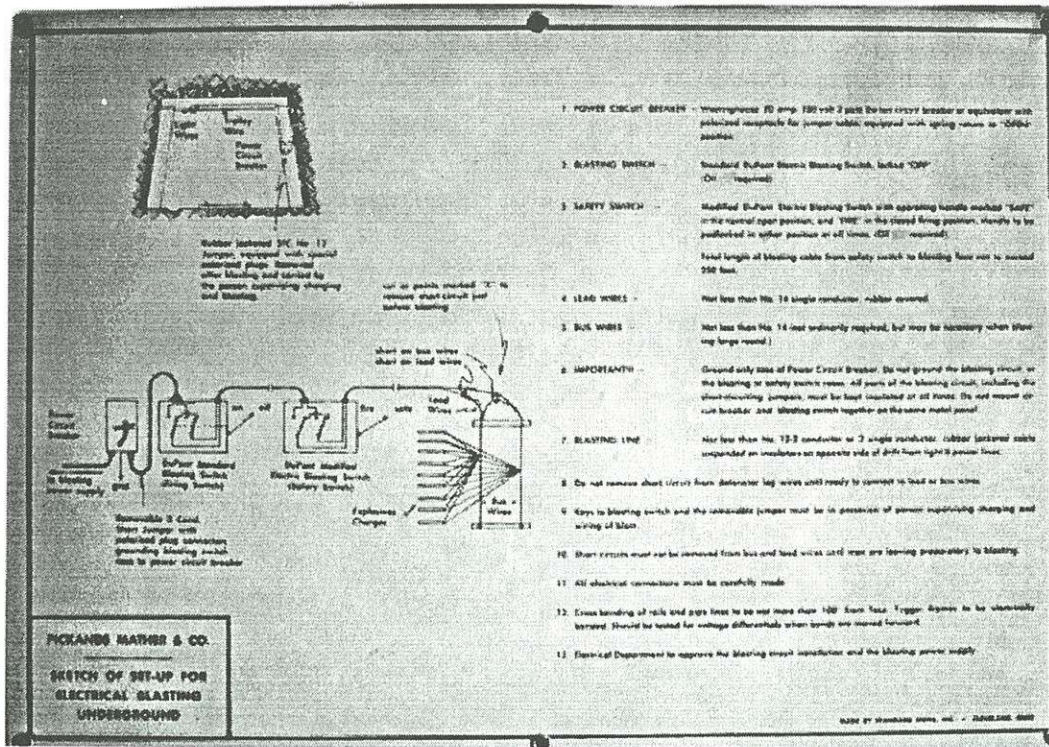


Red and white porcelain, from Carey Mine, Ironwood, MI.



Red and white, from Ironwood, MI.

Standard Signs, Inc.
Porcelain
blasting sign
from Iron-
wood, MI.



NOTICE
EVERY EMPLOYEE MEETING WITH AN
ACCIDENT OR INJURY OF ANY KIND
MUST POSITIVELY REPORT TO HIS
FOREMAN ALL THE FACTS CONCERNING
SAME BEFORE LEAVING THE PREMISES

Green and white porcelain, from Calumet
& Hecla, Calumet, MI.

TELEPHONE SIGNALS

GENEVA ENGINE HOUSE	- 1 LONG BELL
GENEVA POLICE BOOTH	- 2 LONG BELLS
DAVIS MINE SURFACE	- 3 LONG BELLS
GENEVA 30TH PUMP STATION	- 4 LONG BELLS
PURITAN ENGINE HOUSE	- 5 LONG BELLS
DAVIS PUMP STATION	- 6 LONG BELLS

Cardboard
signal sign
from Geneva
Mine, Iron-
wood, MI.

**DISCONNECT
BLASTING
SWITCH**

Red and white, from Ironwood, MI.

Cardboard
signal sign
from Aurora
Mine, Ironwood,
MI.

TELEPHONE SIGNALS

To call any station from another of the same group, simply ring the number of that station given in the list below. To call a station in the other group, push the button on the side of the box, while ringing. Thus: two rings at a station on the mine group will call the Dry, but two rings with the button pressed will call the Office.

OFFICE GROUP

Railroad Station	1 Ring
Office	2 Rings
Manager	3
Captain's House	4
Master Mechanic's House	5

MINE GROUP

Supply House	1 Ring
Captain's Office or Dry	2 Rings
Boiler House	3
Hoisting Engine	4
Pump Station	5