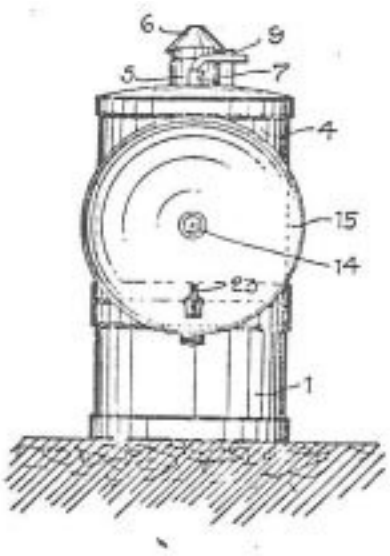
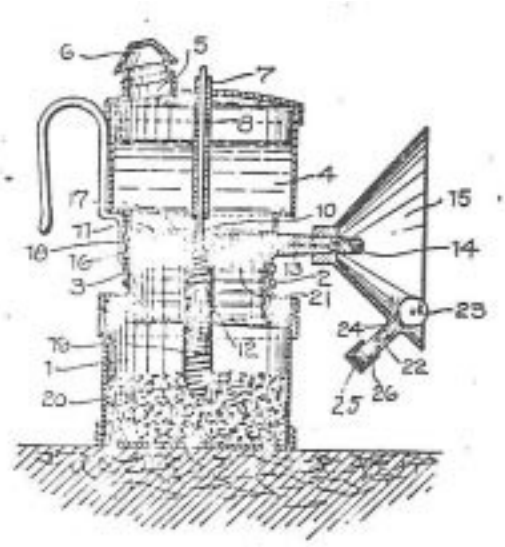
Indiana Roach

Dave Thorpe

A 1913 patent was given to Alonzo Roach of Linton, Indiana for a miner's carbide lamp. The patent is thought to be the first to use the reflector mounted flint-wheel igniter. A lamp that has been in Larry Click's collection for some time is thought by its owner to be a Roach patent lamp. It was originally found by Gary Doolittle, of Terre Haute, Indiana, a town only 40 miles from Linton. Another similar lamp shown below was found in Terre Haute. Looking at the photo, one can see some similarity of the tank to the patent drawing, but on closer inspection, the water chamber appears to be an inverted Baldwin base with a separately applied top. The bottom chamber is likely a Simmons/Baldwin base with a screw cap for the threaded section. The patent drawing has a more squared base and tank. The water door is different as well. A Baldwin reflector was added by Larry. Other lamps, without a known manufacturer, having similar construction have been found in the Terre Haute area. One with the hand stamping "ROOF" on the tank is derived of Guy's Dropper parts. The Roof lamp, interestingly has a reflector quite similar to the lamp shown in the patent drawing. Another Indiana lamp made from two Auto-Lite bases, is in Al Quamen's collection. This lamp bears the stamping "JACK SMITH" on a separately applied top.





Left: photo of lamp. Right: patent drawing of Alonzo Roach's patented lamp.

Defending his claims that this is an authentic Roach lamp, Larry quotes veteran collector Al Quamen: "Looks to me that you have a better "Roach" Lamp than the one in Terre Haute...". A side-by-side comparison of Larry's lamp and "the one in Terre Haute" is shown below. The lamp on the left has the burner exiting the tank, while on the other it comes out of the threaded section.

Paul Kouts, whose research has included the Alonzo Roach patent has noted that in the early teens there were few facilities capable of stamping brass, and that many of the smaller manufacturers used parts stamped from the same plant, one of which was Chase Brass of Waterbury, Connecticut.

Left: "The lamp from Terre Haute", owner Andrew Peacock states that a Guy's Dropper base was originally found on this lamp, the Baldwin base shown was added. The water chamber is not an inverted Baldwin base. Right: Larry Click's lamp is shown in contrast.

Says Paul: “My opinion on these recent lamps -- they do appear to be of Alonzo Roach's origin. But, I still hold hopes of seeing one that is still a little closer to the patent depiction. I noticed what appeared to be differences in the tank heights, so while working with Word 2000 graphics I played around a bit. From the attachment you can see this difference is fairly obvious. While the pictures are not to the same scale, the white box outlines measure the height and width of relative areas of the lamps. The ratios indicate that if the water tanks are the same diameter, your lamp has a tank height 37% greater than Ron's. In addition to your observation of the gas tube placement, the valve nipple projecting above the water tank may also be different and warrants a closer examination. Because of the details of the internal water feed, I still think both lamps have a high probability of being a Roach origin lamp. "

Andrew Peacock makes some interesting observations about the water-feed and the patent description. "The Roach patent describes (page 1, lines 109 - 111) raising the rod to allow the water to flow down to the carbide chamber to seep out from between the coils of the spring (distributor). Most of the spring in my lamp is missing, but the one [on Larry's lamp] is pretty much intact, as shown in the drawing. I tried running water through my lamp and found that it would only flow when the control rod was raised above a notch cut into the water tube, near the bottom of the reservoir. The flow could not be controlled accurately simply by raising the rod; all I got was a gush of water. This is where the spring coiled around the water tube comes in, permitting the water to seep out slowly into the surrounding carbide. This intermittent water flow must have made for an inconsistent flame. Later in the patent (page 2, lines 14 - 19) it again refers to moving the rod "upwardly and downwardly" to clear the opening of the water pipe, should it become plugged."

At any rate, until more is known about this lamp and the Roach patent, it is for the individual to decide whether the lamps shown here are indeed Roach patents. There is no question in the Larry's mind though: "I'm going to call my lamp a Roach!"