

American Can Company Plant and Date Codes

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John Kynor, Sr. discusses tin manufacturers on pages 146-151 of his *Blasting Cap Workbook* and provides a partial listing of date codes on pages 150-51.¹ At the time John published his *Workbook*, this information was virtually unavailable, and his research was the first of its kind for blasting cap tins. Today, collectors of beer cans and tobacco tins have compiled more information about the plant and date codes used by American Can Company.² An abbreviated version of the company name (e.g., A.C.CO.) is sometimes found on blasting cap tins, along with a number (e.g., 10), and perhaps a symbol (e.g., a “bowtie”). The number identifies the place of manufacture, and the symbol indicates the date of manufacture. An A or A- may follow the plant code. More recent research by a member of the Brewery Collectibles Club of America (BCCA) has resulted in the compilation of a more complete list of American Can Co. plant codes.³ Combining and analyzing data from these lists yields the table included on the last page of this article.

On blasting cap tins, American Can Co. plant and date codes may be found on the top of the lid, the lip of the lid, or even the side of the tin. Many times, only the plant code will be printed on the tin. John Kynor writes that seven blasting cap manufacturers used tins made by American Can Company: DuPont, Hercules, Trojan, M.C. Mfg. Works, Austin Powder, General Explosives Company, and Atlas. He also identifies three of American Can Co.’s manufacturing plants that were involved in making cap tins for these companies. One is indicated by the plant code 10 A (a plant originally owned and operated by Mersereau Mfg. Co., located in Brooklyn, N.Y.). The second is identified by plant code 11 A (a plant originally owned and operated by Somers Bros., also located in Brooklyn, N.Y.). The third is identified by plant code 15 A. This plant was operated by Haas and Assman, also of Brooklyn. Haas and Assman Company was a tinware factory founded as John D. Haas Company by German immigrant John D. Haas in 1870. By 1894, the company was going by Haas & Assman. A fourth Brooklyn-based manufacturer, Ginna and Company, also made blasting cap tins. Ginna was acquired, along with the other companies, by American Can in 1901. Although Ginna received code 14-A, no blasting cap tins have been discovered with this marking. However, some tins from Metallic Cap Manufacturing Company are marked “Ginna & Co.” In the early 1880s, Stephan A. Ginna established Ginna & Company, operating from a six-story building at 11 and 13 Hubert Street. In 1885, Ginna & Company moved across the block to 53-55 Beach Street, another six-story building finished that year. This building still stands and is used for office space.

¹ John C. Kynor, Sr., *Blasting Cap Workbook, Tins and Boxes* (Belen, New Mexico: B.B.B. Ltd., 2008).

² Rusty Cans. Com, “American Can Co Codes,” <https://www.rustycans.com/HISTORY/DatingCodes.html>, accessed April 8, 2023; “American Can Company, Canning Code-Production Dates,” <http://www.mbcinfo.com/KarasekHome/CanCodes/index.html>, accessed April 8, 2023.

³ Jules Kish, “American Can Company Canning Codes,” May 26, 2017, <https://www.bcca.com/acc/>, accessed April 8, 2023.

American Can Company was incorporated in 1901 and acquired more than a hundred smaller, competing manufacturers that together represented about 90 percent of tin can manufacturing in the United States. Included was Mersereau Manufacturing Company of Brooklyn, New York. Mersereau was established in New York by Edward Mersereau and John Seabury in 1887. The February 21, 1897 *New York Tribune* reported that, “One of the best-known houses in this line is the Mersereau Manufacturing Company, of Brooklyn, who make practically everything in the line of boxes for the drug, spice, confectionary, tobacco, and other trades, also signs, showcards, and advertising novelties. Their factory is complete in every detail and is managed by those who have been in the business from its inception.”

Mersereau was taken over by the American Can Co. on March 25, 1901. Many products manufactured by Mersereau prior to its acquisition by American Can Co. are labeled with the “Mersereau Mfg. Co.” name. However, no blasting cap tins have been discovered so marked, even though it is almost certain that Mersereau was making cap tins before 1901. Tins manufactured after 1901 at the Mersereau plant were labeled with the American Can Co. name (or its abbreviation) and plant code “10A” or (10 A).⁴ Here’s an example of one of Doug’s tins, a rare Austin Powder Company tin. (This is the only example we are aware of with white-painted corners.) In this case, the plant and date codes are printed on the front (long) side of the tin below the Austin logo.



The plant and date codes on this tin are shown below and indicate this tin was made by American Can Company at the Mersereau manufacturing plant in Brooklyn, New York in 1937 (the “bow tie” symbol).

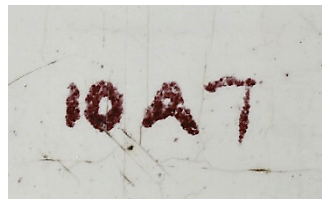
⁵ John Wood, “The Mersereau Manufacturing Company, Brooklyn; Notes,” <https://johnwood1946.wordpress.com/2011/09/03/the-mersereau-manufacturing-company-brooklyn-notes/>, accessed April 8, 2023.



Here's an example of an Atlas tin in Doug's collection that is practically identical in design to the rare Austin tin pictured above.



In the case of this Atlas tin, the date code is printed on the lip of the lid.



We know from our table of codes that this tin was manufactured by American Can Co. at its Mersereau manufacturing plant in Brooklyn, New York, in 1949.

Here are two tins from Jerry's collection. The codes reveal that the Hercules tin was made at Haas and Assman Company in Brooklyn in 1922, while the Metallic Cap tin was made by Ginna and Company in Brooklyn before 1901.



Here's a page from a 1910 American Can Company catalogue that shows the use of code 10A for boxes and tins made in Brooklyn.

**OBLONG SLIP COVER LOCK CORNER
BOXES**
ONE-PIECE BODY

MADE AT BROOKLYN (10A)

Catalog No.	Factory No.	Length	Width	Height	Approx. Shipping Weight Per 1000
390	11a944a	1 ³ / ₄	1 ³ / ₂	1 ¹ / ₂	80 lbs.
391	11a944	1 ³ / ₄	1 ³ / ₂	1 ¹ / ₂	85 lbs.
392	11a944d	1 ³ / ₄	1 ³ / ₂	1 ¹ / ₂	85 lbs.
393	11a944b	1 ³ / ₄	1 ³ / ₂	1 ¹ / ₂	90 lbs.
394	11a944e	1 ³ / ₄	1 ³ / ₂	1 ¹ / ₂	90 lbs.
395	11a944c	1 ³ / ₄	1 ³ / ₂	1 ¹ / ₂	95 lbs.

Another important maker of blasting cap tins was Somers Brothers. Somers Brothers was a pioneer in tinware production, and one of the most significant manufacturing firms in Brooklyn, New York, from 1869 to 1901. According to a modern evaluation of the site as a historic building,

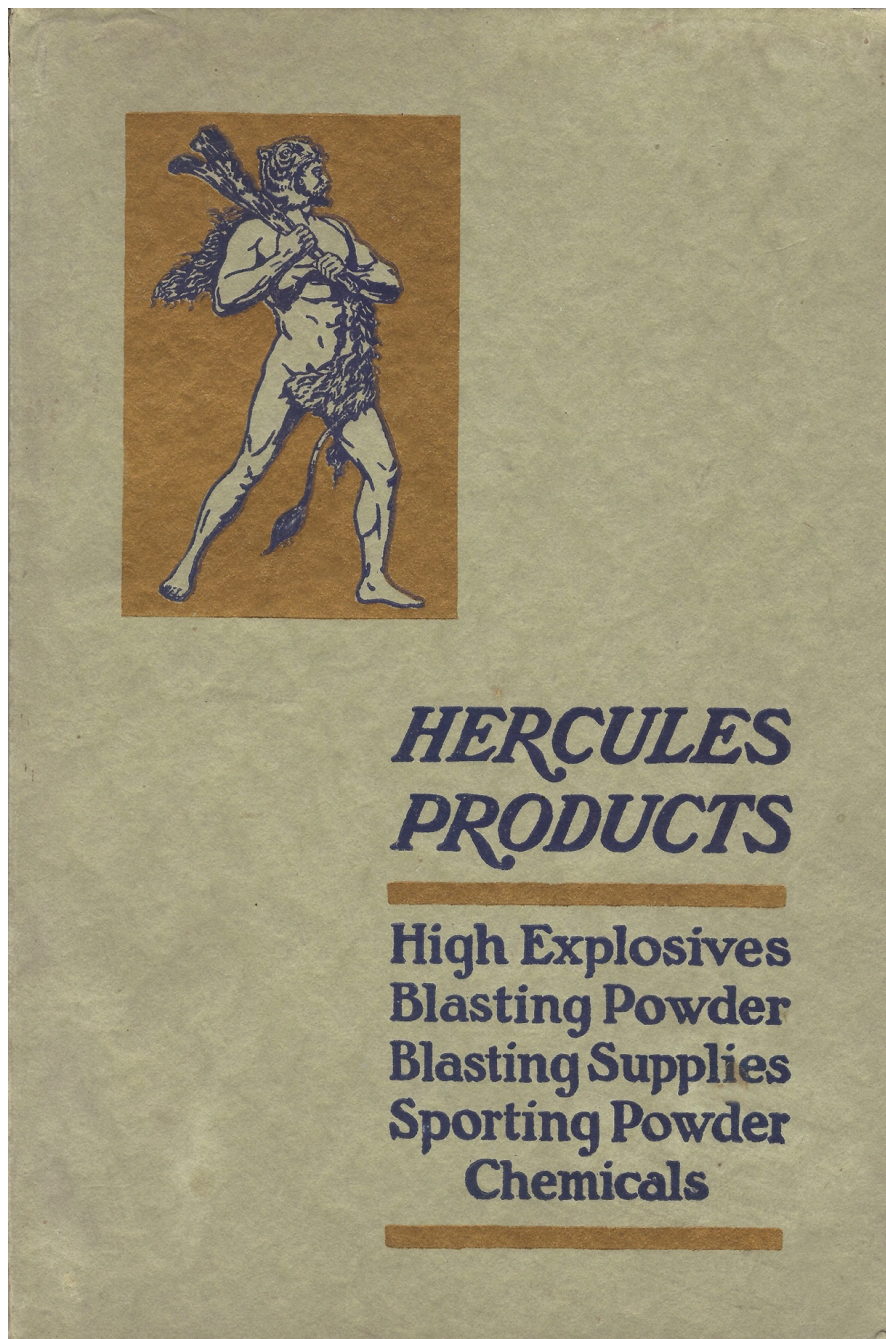
In 1878, the Somers brothers—Daniel, Guy, and Joseph—began to use a lithographic process of Daniel Somers’s invention to print images on tinplate sheets, and custom equipment to cut and shape the sheets into containers. These processes set the firm apart as one of the earliest American companies to market tinware with integrated decorative surfaces rather than separate paper labels.⁵

Like the others, Somers Brothers was absorbed by American Can Company in 1901. Tins manufactured at the Somers Brothers plant after the date of its acquisition by American Can Co. bear the plant code “11 A.” Here are three Hercules Powder tins from Doug’s collection. All three have the American Can Co. plant code 11 A printed on the lower right-hand corner of the lid, indicating that these tins were made at the Somers Bros. plant. Sadly, no date code is printed on these tins.



⁵ NYC Preservation Commission, “Somers Brothers Tinware Factory - Designation Report,” October 29, 2019, 5, <http://s-media.nyc.gov/agencies/lpc/lp/2640.pdf>, accessed April 8, 2023.

Despite the lack of date codes, a wonderful 1918 *Hercules Products* catalogue in Doug's collection helps to date the tins to that general time period.



*1918 Hercules Products Catalogue*⁶

⁶ Hercules Powder Company, *Hercules Products*, 1918.

The following descriptions and illustrations appear on page 79 of the above catalogue.



HERCULES BLASTING CAPS

The efficiency of any high explosives depends directly on the violence of the initial shot, causing detonation. It has been proven conclusively by the Government Testing Station, and by our own tests, that good results cannot be secured from Blasting Caps having a strength less than the standard No. 6. For this reason we market no detonators under the Hercules brand weaker than No. 6.

Blasting Caps should not be stored with explosives, and special care should be taken not to allow them to come in contact with moisture.

Hercules Blasting Caps consist of a small copper capsule, having a caliber, or inside diameter of 0.2205 inches, which allows ample room for the insertion of a standard sized fuse. In the bottom of the shell is a charge of Fulminate of Mercury, nitrovene or tetryl mixture. This is detonated by the spark from a fuse, which in turn detonates the explosives.

The following table describes the Blasting Caps illustrated on this page:

	Hercules No. 6	Hercules No. 8
Color of box.....	Red	Green
Length of shell.....	1½"	2"
Caliber of shell.....	.2205	.2205
Approximate distance between top of charge and top of shell.....	7/8"	1¾"
Weight of charge in grains.....	15.4	30.8
Weight of charge in grammes.....	1.00	2.00

Catalogues with illustrations like these are helpful in dating tins, particularly if the first or early use of a particular illustration can be located. However, many sources, especially hardware

catalogues, used illustrations long after they were obsolete. Even DuPont's *Blasters' Handbook* used the same illustration of a "scrolly-style" logo bottom from the first edition (1918) to the tenth edition (1939). This, despite the fact date codes on the modern style of tins indicate that DuPont discontinued the use of such tins by 1920. An even more egregious example of the use of an obsolete image of a tin is a Farwell Hardware Company of Minnesota ad from 1958 that still features a "scrolly-style" tin.

Here are two more examples from Doug's collection: both are round, "scrolly," 100-count tins from DuPont, a No. 5 and a No. 6.



Here are the plant and date codes on the two tins.



The plant and date codes on the No. 5 tin appear to be 11-A-1-10. The “10” at the end of the code almost certainly means 1910. There are several other tins known with dates like this. Because the implementation of date codes did not begin until 1919, many tins of this era have no date code or date. As we have learned, the plant code 11-A refers to the Somers Brothers plant. The “1” after the plant code 11-A on the No. 5 tin is still a mystery.

AMERICAN CAN COMPANY DATE CODES

1919 •	1935 ✕
1920 ••	1936 ⚡
1921 •••	1937 ⚡
1922 ••••	1938 ⚡•
1923 •—•	1939 ⚡••
1924 +	1940 •⚡•
1925 O	1941 \
1926 OI	1942 //
1927 OII	1943 <
1928 OIII	1944 ◇
1929 O—	1945 ◇• ◇•
1930 —	1946 ◇••
1931 ==	1947 ◇••
1932 ≡	1948 ◇••

(Other American Can Company codes are known. However, these can be safely assumed to be associated with a run of known date codes. For example, it is impossible that an unknown code on a scrolly tin could be for a production run in the 1930s.)