

FRASSE AUTO TORCH

I was always curious about the Frasse auto torch on page 123 of *More Vintage Blowtorches* owned by Graham Stubbs. The air valve in a vertical position on the stem of the lower pump support is something I had never seen before. I was a bit skeptical about its authenticity. I thought it was more likely that someone had modified the lower support to insert an additional air valve. If that was true, then this was just a modified brand labeled White model 16. If this torch was not



modified, it was one I really wanted to have as part of my early auto torch collection. I thought that it was unlikely that it was authentic because the torch appeared difficult to hold. At best, I would only be able to fit three fingers around the pump cylinder that also serves as the handle. I sent an Email to Graham and asked the questions I was most curious about. I also expressed my interest in acquiring it. We had a significant amount of correspondence about the torch. Based on his responses, I felt comfortable enough with the torch to want to investigate it further and restore it (pictured left). Thankfully, Graham was kind enough to work with me and allow me to acquire it.

When I received the torch, I completely disassembled it and did a preliminary cleaning of all the parts. After the cleaning I found many interesting things. The first, and most important, was that the lower support and air valve housing was truly one unit. The part had been cast as one piece and the shape of the lower support was readily identifiable as being uniquely White and then later Turner-White. The lower support also had a brass removable plug at the rear for cleaning the passageway with a wire. That same feature is on another of my White model 16 auto torches.

The picture to the right shows the lower support assembly removed from the torch. The shape is clearly unique to White torches. The valve housing is part of the casting and is not threaded onto the lower support.



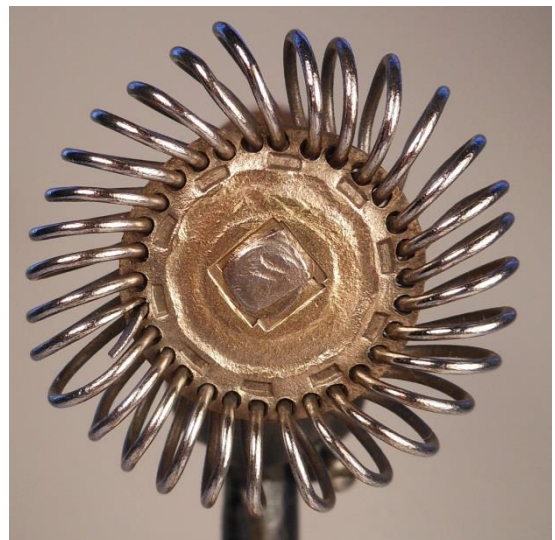
The picture to the left shows the individual components of the lower support

The second feature I found interesting was the control knob. When I received it, there was a large amount of sludge covering the part. Before cleaning, it was impossible to discern any amount of detail on the knob. What appeared to be a typical White model 16 wire wrapped steel hub turned out to be something very different. At first glance, there were some differences between this knob and other White 16 control knobs. I didn't, however, think a lot about this. In my experience, variations in White model 16 control knobs are not unusual.



After a thorough cleaning, it was obvious that the hub of the control knob was brass (see picture on left). I have never seen a brass White 16 control knob. The brass control knob hub was a lot more delicate than the steel hubs. It has steel wire coiled around it. The steel wire is very tensile and has quite a bit of spring to it. But the differences don't stop there. The manner in which the hub is attached to the control arm (rod) is quite unique.

In the pictures below you can see that the hub is secured to the control arm with four brass wedges. I assume the rod is square at the hub end. These wedges, or keys, are somehow pressed into place and apply outward pressure to the hub to keep it from moving. After that, the end of the control arm is smashed flat to keep the hub from slipping off.



I remember seeing this once before but, unfortunately, I cannot remember where or when. It is not unusual to find something like this on an early torch. I have disassembled and restored many torches that predate 1905 and it is relatively common to find parts and systems that were over-engineered. Today's standards would consider this overkill.

The third feature in which the Frasse differs from other White model 16 torches is the fill plug and filler hole on the top of the tank's upper bronze casting. In the picture below the fill plug for the Frasse is on the left, a standard White 16 plug is in the middle, and a later model Turner 418 plug is on the far right.



None of the above plugs are interchangeable with each other. The Frasse plug is unique and a standard 16 plug will not thread into the filler hole of the Frasse upper casting. The upper casting of the Frasse differs in other ways from standard White and even Turner-White model 16 torches.

In the picture below a White model 16 is at the top of the frame and the Frasse is on the bottom. On the White torch, the area around the filler hole is significantly raised and much wider than on the Frasse. There is also a recessed area around the filler hole that contains a lead washer to ensure a tight fit. On the Frasse, the raised area is immediately outside the threaded filler hole. This raised area helps to seal the fill plug that has a leather washer on the bottom.



The differences between this Frasse torch and other White model 16 auto torches are significant. All would require a large amount of tooling changes. It's impossible to be sure, but I believe the control knob and top bronze casting on

the tank, along with the related plug, are original parts to a very early White 16. I think the air valve on the stem of the lower support and, more obviously, the soldered on label (below) are changes made for The Frasse Company.

The Frasse soldered on label was of great personal importance to me. The Frasse Company was located at 38 Cortlandt Street in New York City. I have found



records of Frasse being at that location in both 1901 and 1904. This Frasse/White torch dates from exactly that time period. Cortlandt Street is a relatively short block. It is directly across from the World Trade Center site. I have been on that street countless times when I would commute into New York City from New Jersey. I would travel into The World Trade Center and walk across the street and onto Cortlandt Street to visit customers in lower Manhattan.

I was working in New York City on 9/11/2001. This torch dates from a time 100 years prior to that date. The Frasse auto torch is a beautiful and unique torch. I keep it where I can see it at all times. For me, it is a positive and tangible reference to a much earlier and simpler time in the history of that area in New York City.

Below is a photo of Cortlandt Street as it was right around 1900. The Frasse Company at 38 Cortlandt Street was probably one of the narrow buildings on the left. It was clearly a cobblestone street and I don't see any cars or parking meters. And how about that three horsepower wagon?

A much better time and place indeed!



Thank You Graham!