

# 100 Years of Aladdin Lighting 1908-2008

J. W. "Bill" Courter

The Aladdin brand of "coal oil" lamps has been lighting homes for 100 years. Antique lamp collectors celebrated the 100th milestone, September 25, 2008, at their annual Gathering (convention) last year in Indianapolis. We lighted lamps on banquet tables after which lucky winners won the table prizes. This year our convention is in Louisville, Kentucky.

The Aladdin lamp brought dependable light to millions around the world without electricity. Aladdin light is a bright light with no smoke, no odor, no noise and no pumping-up. An Aladdin lamp erases the darkness and fills a room with warm, joyful light – where you want it – and when you want it. The Aladdin lamp is the last surviving non-pressure, kerosene, incandescent mantle lamp made in the world today.

The Aladdin lamp works as well today as 100 years ago. Thank goodness!

I endured a horrific power outage due to an ice storm last February in western Kentucky. I survived 20 days without power or water using my gas log for heat, grill for cooking and Aladdin lamps for light. Some would gladly pay for a grilled salmon steak, candlelight dinner and delightful company; however, the ambiance wore thin with day after day of the surrounding damage to trees and nature's beauty buried in darkness of ice and broken limbs.

I burned three Model B glass lamps made during the 1940s and a Model 23 glass lamp sold today. I prefer glass lamps because the kerosene level is visible for easy maintenance and refueling. One lamp burns 50 hours on one gallon of fuel.

It pays to have a supply of kerosene on hand for power outages-as well as extra mantles and chimneys. You may need to light up during total darkness and stores may be closed. Many stores in Paducah were completely without power during the ice storm and sold cash only for the first days. Kerosene, batteries and other supplies disappeared quickly. Many roads were closed by fallen trees and power lines on the ground. Some 20% of the electrical system was down and 600 miles of lines were rebuilt! Some 800,000 homes lost power.

Aladdin lamps lengthened the day for homes around the world. They were manufactured in England beginning in 1919, Australia beginning in 1923, Brazil beginning in 1960 as well as sold or assembled in many other countries. The Aladdin burner became the "heart" of portable "Blue Flame" heaters, stoves and lanterns.

Technically, kerosene fueled lamps were obsolete when Victor Johnson trademarked his lamp "Aladdin" in 1908. Cities were promoting new-fangled electricity to light downtown streets and stores. "Great White Way" postcards extolling the fun and awe of the new electric lights are fun to collect for your home town.



Aladdin Knights logo celebrating 100 years of Aladdin lamps.

Edison promoted direct current (DC) during the late 1800s but Westinghouse won the battle on the practical level with alternating current (AC). DC simply could not be transmitted great distances.

Never-the-less, Johnson improved his Aladdin selling better lamps and improved models for the next 40 years. The markets in rural areas were strong and good light helped families with housework, sewing, homework and reading enjoyment. In 1931 Johnson stated that *Aladdin Mantle lamps eliminated practically every similar product throughout the world and was the only scientific product for home illumination using a safe and cheap fuel, where electricity and gas were not available.* At that time "Aladdin" products were protected by 359 patents in force, 105 patent applications pending, 45 new patents in preparation, as well as 124 registrations of trade marks in the USA and foreign countries.

The company was expanding in foreign markets and beginning production and sales of electric lamps.

The company advertised their new electric line:



– from *Hearth-warming Aladdin Kerosene Lamps*  
– come *heart-warming Aladdin Electric Lamps*



Electric Aladdin lamps of unique design were sold until 1956, and they are now more than 50 years old!

With proper care, an Aladdin kerosene lamp can last a lifetime, attested by the large number of "antique" Aladdin lamps still in use today. Collectors seek all models of Aladdin lamps beginning with the first lamps sold in 1908 through Model 23 that is made today.

The name Aladdin and the model number are located on the wick-raising knobs. Beginning about 1930 The Mantle Lamp Company of America started making glass Aladdin lamps, popular with collectors, who especially cherish the ones found among family treasures.

The brass lamps and burners (most were nickel plated for ease of cleaning) were made for Aladdin by Plume & Atwood Mfg. Co., Waterbury, CT until 1963 when they were imported from England. Today they are made in China. An 8-page *Brief History of Aladdin Lamps* is free from the author – J. W. Courter, 3935 Kelley Rd., Kevil, KY 42053.

Aladdins were made as table lamps, hanging lamps, floor lamps, wall lamps, and as caboose lamps. The company created special glass colors, made modern paper and glass shades, and deco electric lamps. All are collectible, practical and useable today.

Aladdin lamp article continues on page 36



Henry Hellmers and Bill Courter, Alexandria, IN, 1973. Hellmers made virtually all of the Aladdin colored glass. He is known for his glass formulas for Akro Agate, Cambridge, L. I. Houze, Erickson, Lancaster Lens and Owens-Corning, among others.



Sign and posters sold in 2008 auction. The 3-fold sign \$1400 and posters \$100-200 each.

## How The Aladdin Mantle Lamp Works

The success of the Aladdin lamp is based on superior performance compared to other kerosene lamps. In fact, the original marketing technique was a no cost, no risk, in-home trial. Aladdin salesmen identified homes without mantle lamps by the poor flickering light of wick lamps. The homeowner was offered a mantle lamp with fuel to use for one week. After the trial, the homeowner could return the lamp or purchase it. The vast majority of consumers spent \$4.50, or more, for an Aladdin lamp to replace their 25-cent wick lamps. The key reasons consumers were willing to purchase the more expensive Aladdin lamps were economy in use, safety, product quality and amount of light produced.

The Aladdin lamp produces four times more light per gallon of kerosene than wick lamps – equivalent to 50 candlepower of white light. Wick lamps produce light by the process of burning kerosene to produce a large flame. Such lamps are essentially liquid fueled candles with bigger wicks.

Collectors today burn water-clear kerosene or lamp oil. Kerosene was called coal oil or earth mineral oil in the past. We do not use colored or scented oils.

The Aladdin mantle glows with a brilliant white light. In terms of the amount of light produced, the incandescent mantle is more efficient than a wick lamp. The mantle, which is made of a special mixture of rare earth oxides, produces light by a process called incandescence. Incandescence is the same process by which filaments electric light bulbs produce light. Careful observation will reveal a small blue flame below the mantle. This blue flame produces heat and is very hot, because of the burner design, thereby heating the mantle to glow and emit white light.

You can often spot an Aladdin because the chimney is slim and taller than used on most other oil lamps. The tall chimney creates a draft to draw more air needed to make strong light.

Proper use and care of the Aladdin mantle lamp requires some attention. The recommended procedures are explained in the instruction manual that comes with every new lamp. The key points involve proper adjustment. The Aladdin lamp, just like a fine engine, must warm up to proper operating temperatures for best performance. The warm-up process takes about ten minutes. It is important to observe the mantle carefully for a period of 10-15 minutes after lighting and adjusting the wick as needed.



Model 1 Table lamp, embossed foot, with 201 shade, 1909. \$600+



Model 4 Parlour Lamp with 204 cased green shade. 1912. \$2500.



Model 4 Student lamp with 205 shade, 1912. \$4000+



Model 11 table lamp with 550 Swiss Scenic shade, 1922-28. \$500.

## Timeline

**In 1907 Victor S. Johnson (VSJ)** formed Western Lighting Co. and sold German Practicus mantle lamps, probably as a distributor for the Connecticut Trading Co., a major importer. He bought brass founts from Plume & Atwood Mfg. Co. (P&A), already in the process of developing their own mantle lamp at that time.

VSJ formed The Mantle Lamp Co. of America (MCLA) in Chicago on Feb. 27, 1908, to sell the Practicus and other imported lamps. Johnson applied for the trademark "Aladdin" for "kerosene and alcohol mantle-burners and mantles and chimneys" on Nov. 13, 1908 stating the mark had been used continuously since Sept. 25, 1908.

**Early Years – 1908-1913** – Meanwhile at Plume & Atwood, Charles Wirth assigned patent 901,139 (filed April 10, 1908, patented Oct. 13, 1908) for a mantle burner to P&A who sold this burner to anyone who wanted it. Johnson sold this burner under the name Aladdin. We also know of Contraco, Sunlight, KIM and O. 1. & 1. marked burners. It seems fortuitous that Johnson selected MCLA as the company name because he manufactured mantles for the lamps he sold. The Practicus and the first Aladdin burner used cap mantles. Early models were sold by style numbers, not by model numbers.

Charles H. Smith patented improvements for the "Aladdin" burner (patents 987,022 and 988,902) which he assigned to MCLA in 1911. These patents became Model 3 and gave Johnson ownership of improved burners and Kane Kap mantles. P&A continued to manufacture burners, founts and parts for Johnson and the MCLA for many years.

**Aladdin's Success – 1914-1927** – Models 4 through 11. These were years of marketing the steady improvements as new models of Aladdin lamps were introduced. Models were designated to help consumers order replacement parts. Model numbers were put on the burner knobs beginning with Model 5. All used Kane Kap mantles. In retrospect, model numbers were stamped on some earlier replacement parts. This period of time saw intensive marketing, advertising and growth-five show rooms were opened in U. S. A, and export sales were established in Australia (1918) and England (1923).

The company was awarded a gold medal and blue ribbon at the Panama-Pacific Exposition in 1915. The MCLA offered \$1000 for any lamp equal to the Aladdin-a claim never collected. The first floor lamp was an expensive Model 6, of which only two examples are known today. The company deviated from standard shape and finish for Models 7 and 8.

**Colorful Years – 1928-1938** – Model 12, introduced in 1928, used Lox-On mantles and chimneys, claiming new Instant Light lamps. The Lox-On principal was likely more marketing than fact, and guaranteed Aladdin's market for replacement parts the next 70 years. Model 12 brass lamps continued to be sold for many years; however, the company made a series of glass founts, introducing new designs and colors every year or two for Aladdin's side-draft burners.

Side-draft Models A & B in early 1930s allowed colorful glass founts to be used. Johnson purchased the Lippincott Glass Factory in Alexandria, Indiana (in late 1926) where Aladdin manufactured chimneys, shades and glass lamps until 1952.

The company established the town of Aladdin which appears on some road maps of the time.

Aladdinite parchment shades were followed by Adolph Whipple's colorful Whip-a-lite shades. Aladdin's vase lamps and colorful shades were so popular that customers wanted shades for electric lamps.

The company created a series of electric lamps sold as E-numbers or Vogue lamps, later as Aladdin Electric Lamps. Henry Hellmers was employed in 1935 to develop new colors of glass. His moonstone, Opalique, Velvex and Alacite glasses were popular for kerosene and electric lamps as well as dishware. Unique finials were either made or purchased for electric lamps. Aladdin made a wide variety of floor lamps in both kerosene and electric styles.



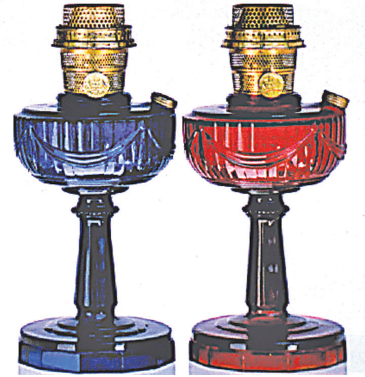
G-70 "Aladdin Deco" figurine lamp with original pleated shade, 1935. These lamps are similar in style to Lalique. \$3000.



G-130 Aladdin Deco experimental color, 1936-37.



Corinthian B-125 white & green moonstone glass with mantle fully illuminated. The Model B burner is one of the most reliable and easy to restore and use. This is the first Aladdin lamp bought by the author. Original price in 1936 \$5.45, cost at antique shop in 1965 \$6 and collector value today \$200+.



B-76 Cobalt Tall Lincoln Drape with scallops (\$1000), 1940; B-77 Ruby Tall Lincoln Drape (\$700), 1941.



G-343 Alacite Lady with dog, original shade, 1951.



P-406 Pottery "Ugly" with original shade, 1951.



M-448 Metal "Ugly" with original shade, 1953.

## Timeline (cont.)

**Advertising & Marketing** – The MLCA allocated ten percent of retail sales for advertising and promotion, printing many posters, handbills, postcards, etc. Aladdin was known as the "House of Long Letters." The company was early in radio advertising. Smilin Ed McConnell promoted Aladdin lamps on radio, sang hymns and popular songs to his "sweet-hearts" and became known as the Aladdin Lamp Man.

**Trade Mark Battle – 1934-1935** – Aladdin Manufacturing Co., Muncie, Indiana, a competitive manufacturer, made and sold Aladdin Portable Electric Lamps. This company took advantage of MLCA advertising. Aladdin Manufacturing Co. was enjoined by court decision from using the name Aladdin on lamps in 1935.

**Aladdin Deco Lamps** – Eugene Schwartz was Aladdin's designer and inventor in Alexandria, Indiana. He created unique designs including colorful figure lamps termed Aladdin Deco. These lamps have become highly valued by Aladdin and non-Aladdin collectors alike.

**Alacite Years – 1939-1942 and 1946-1951** – These were primary years when the company sold kerosene and electric lamps made of Alacite glass. Don Carey calculated that 21 different molds of electric lamps were made per year during these time periods. The company experimented with Alacite dishes, smoking items, and light switch covers, sold in Chicago and Portland-few of these items turn up elsewhere. The popular ruby and cobalt kerosene lamps were sold for a short time. We speculate that these colors would have been made for many years had the War not interrupted production. Henry Hellmers left Aladdin to make colored lenses for the War.

**Aladdin Caboose Lamp – 1939-1992** – Caboose lamps were a special product developed by Roy Hall for a unique market-lighting train cabooses.

**War Years – 1943-1945** – Aladdin received permission to use brass for kerosene burners, considered essential for lighting homes in rural areas. However, some lamp parts were made of steel, such as wick raisers and oil fill caps. The caboose pots were made of galvanized steel. Glass lamps continued to be sold although the number of lamp styles was greatly reduced.

In England and Australia, however, new models and styles of Aladdin lamps were being produced.

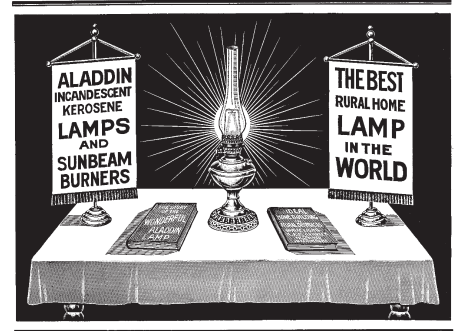
The company competed successfully making ski stoves and PL-1 lanterns for the War. These operated on either kerosene or gasoline. Aladdin published A-Ladd-In-SerVice Newsletters to honor and keep in touch with servicemen overseas.

Victor S. Johnson Sr. died August 29, 1943.



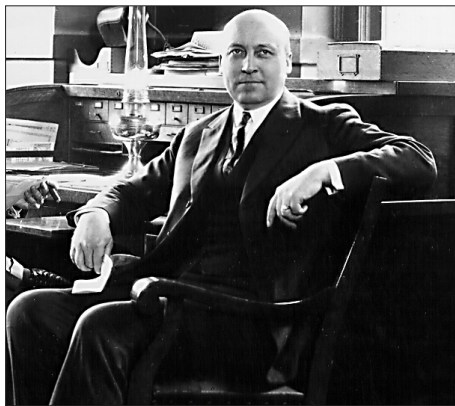
Commemorative lamp with new green shade. The large wick knob is marked Model 23A. These lamps finished in Japanese Bronze were sold to collectors only in 2008.

# "ALADDIN"



THE MANTLE LAMP COMPANY OF AMERICA  
CHICAGO, U. S. A.  
Branch Offices:  
Waterbury, Conn. Portland, Ore. Montreal, Can. Winnipeg, Can.

Best in World, cover of 1912 advertisement brochure.



Victor S. Johnson, 1882-1943. Photo in 1924 with Model 11 Aladdin lamp. Johnson founded the Mantle Lamp Company of America in Chicago in 1908. He died suddenly in 1943. V. S. Johnson Jr. moved the company to Nashville in 1949 under the name Aladdin Industries, Inc.



Eugene Schwarz and Ethyl Wimmer, inventors and designers, with Aladdin electric lamps and shades, 1950. Schwarz created the Aladdin deco figurine lamps, pleated shades holding many patents.



Rare sales case complete with Model 1 table lamp, 201 shade, chimney, wicks and cap mantle. Exhibit in 2008 display room, Indianapolis courtesy Jim Christner.

## Timeline (cont.)

**Post War Years – 1946-1951** – Victor S. Johnson Jr. took over the company after his discharge from the service. In 1949 he moved the company from Chicago to Nashville, Tennessee, including production from Alexandria, Indiana. The MLCA changed their name to Aladdin Industries Inc. in 1949.

During this period the company began to subcontract production of kerosene and electric lamps. Many Washington Drapes have unusual tinted colors, likely being made in different glasshouses.

Aladdin developed character lunch boxes that became popular products leading to Hopalong Cassidy electric lamps.

**Ugly Electric Years – 1952-1956** – Virtually all U.S. kerosene and electric lamps were now subcontracted. Collectors refer to the “modern” electric lamps as ‘ugly.’ These lamps, however, are loved and collected!

A flood in Connecticut destroyed all tooling for Aladdin lamps and Model B burners in 1955. Model C, developed by Carl Bramming, was never as good as Model B. The 0500 lamps seen in Nashville photographs were apparently not put into production and are rare today. Alexandria was closed in 1952.

Aladdin developed Magic Touch lamps in 1954, years ahead of their time before becoming practical. The line of Aladdin electric lamps ceased after 1956.

**Export-Import Years-1957-1973**-Nashville was winding down lamp sales, primarily selling through the export division. Glass and aluminum lamps (fitted with Model C burners) were imported from Brazil and Models 21C and 23 from England ca. 1969 to 1973. Colorful new glass shades were made for the US market.

The first book on history of Aladdin lamps was published in 1971.

**New Era – 1974-1999** – Aladdin reissued Short Lincoln Drape lamps, and many more glass shades, sparking new life in U.S. markets. Paper shades were phased out as well as the caboose lamp. Special anniversary lamps were made in 1978 and 1983. Limited edition Grand Vertique lamps were made for Aladdin by Fenton beginning in 1992.

In 1999 the Aladdin lighting division was sold to 14 Aladdin Knight investors, who formed the Aladdin Mantle Lamp Company (AMLC), now established in Clarksville, Tennessee. Aladdin lamps are still made today.

**Aladdin Icon Passes** – Victor S. Johnson Jr. (June 12, 1916 - January 19, 2008) an industrial and civic leader in Nashville, Tennessee was one of the most influential people of his era. He was president Aladdin Industries, Inc. 1943-1985 and chairman of the Board 1951-1985.

**Century Mark-2008** – Collectors of the Aladdin kerosene lamp celebrated 100 years on September 25, 2008. The AMLC has reissued a commemorative parlor lamp to celebrate 100 years of Aladdin lighting!

**The Aladdin Lamp is Timeless** – Auer von Welsbach’s 100-year+ old incandescent mantle technology (1885) still works today! An Aladdin lamp still emits 50 CP of white light and 2000 BTU of heat safely from kerosene.

## Models of Aladdin Lamps

(Stamped on wick knob except 1-4)

| Model | Years Sold   |
|-------|--------------|
| 1     | 1908-1909    |
| 2     | 1910         |
| 3     | 1911-1912    |
| 4     | 1912-1913    |
| 5     | 1913-1914    |
| 6     | 1914-1917    |
| 7     | 1917-1919    |
| 8     | 1919-1920    |
| 9     | 1920-1922    |
| 10    | 1921-1922    |
| 11    | 1922-1928    |
| 12    | 1928-1935    |
| A     | 1932         |
| B     | 1933-1955    |
| C     | 1955-1963    |
| 21C   | 1963-1969    |
| 23    | 1969-present |

## About the Author

J. W. "Bill" Courter discovered the "Magic of Aladdin" when he bought a kerosene Aladdin lamp for emergency light in 1965. The strong, white light of the Model B Corinthian stimulated his curiosity. His search for other Aladdin lamps and historical information resulted in *Aladdin: The Magic Name in Lamps*, a book published in 1971. The book, reprinted nine times, was revised completely in 1997. The book's companion, *Collectors Manual & Price Guide*, helps collectors identify and study their kerosene lamps. In 1987, *Aladdin Electric Lamps* was published for those collecting early electrics. It's companion, *Aladdin Electric Lamps Collector's Manual & Price Guide* followed in 1988.

Courter, who is known as the Bright Knight writes and publishes "The Mystic Light of the Aladdin Knights" newsletter. This name was taken from ceremonies the Aladdin company held to recognize and to honor key personnel in the 1920s. Company officials were appropriately called High Mogul, Good Knight, and Restless Knight. Today's Knights call themselves Chimney Knight, Sir Lamps A-Lot, and similar names that reflect their collecting interests. The ladies create two Aladdin quilts every year, calling themselves Ladies of the Knights. "The Mystic Light" is mailed to over 1200 subscribers in 49 states, seven provinces of Canada, England, Italy and Australia.

The Bright Knight calls the Knights together each year to share their collecting interests. Hundreds of Knights schedule their vacations to attend these Gatherings, where they conduct seminars, hold an auction, exhibit their lamps, and make new friends. For more information Courter's website is: [www.aladdinknights.org](http://www.aladdinknights.org). The website for the non-profit National Association of Aladdin Lamp Collectors, Inc is: [www.aladdincollectors.org](http://www.aladdincollectors.org).

Discovering another brand of kerosene lamp, Bill published *Angle Lamps Collector's Manual & Price Guide* in 1992. Angle lamps were manufactured in New York City at the turn of the century. Most are hanging oil lamps and they are highly collectible with amber, blue, ruby and etched chimney tops. His latest book (2008) is *Center-draft Kerosene Lamps 1884-1940* documents the development of improved lamps that preceded the Aladdin.

Courter grew up in rural New Jersey and attended Rutgers University, where he received his Ph.D. Professor Emeritus of Horticulture at the University of Illinois, he authored more than 200 publications in his agricultural specialty, including the book *Vegetable Gardening for Illinois*.

In 1999 Bill led a group of collectors to purchase the Aladdin lighting division of Aladdin Industries LLC. He was CEO & president of the Aladdin Mantle Lamp Co., Clarksville, Tennessee, until he retired again in 2002.

Photos courtesy of Bill Courter, Don Carey and the National Association of Aladdin Lamp Collectors, Inc.  
 Caveat: Some shades are valued higher than the lamp. Many Aladdin shades have been reproduced.

## Antique Lamps to Light Up Louisville

Kevil, Kentucky - Collectors of antique lighting will hold their annual convention July 29 to August 1 at the Crowne Plaza Louisville Airport Hotel. Sponsored by the National Association of Aladdin Lamp Collectors, it will be their 37th convention.

More than 600 collectors from the United States, Canada, England and Australia are expected to attend. Aladdin lamps that lighted homes throughout the world and were manufactured there as well as many other countries including Brazil, Argentina and others.

The world-famous incandescent kerosene Aladdin lamp officially became 100 years old on September 25, 2008. Why has the Aladdin lamp survived for 100 years? The answer lies in the basic science of incandescent lighting and constant improvements by Victor S. Johnson beginning when he branded the famous lamp in 1908. Johnson formed the Mantle Lamp Company of America in Chicago, Illinois. The company was renamed Aladdin Industries, Inc. and moved to Nashville, Tennessee in 1949.

Collectors of antique lighting gather every year to study and learn from research and history of lighting beginning with rushlights and whale oil to discovery of new fuels and technology in lamp improvements. Gathering events include a huge show & sale, educational seminars, an auction of collectible and antique lamps, door prize of a handmade quilt, room trading and closing banquet ceremonies.

The Rushlight Club, oldest lighting club in America, will hold their

summer quarterly meeting in Louisville. The Night Light Club, collectors of miniature lamps, will participate as well as The Historical Lighting Society of Canada, Historic Lighting Club of England, the Guild of Lamp Researchers, and collectors of the Fairy Lamp Club.

Every antique lamp, prized in collections today, once furnished essential light in a home or for a business, or factory. These lamps lengthened our grandparent's days, improved their education, lighted their theaters and improved all of our lives. This history comes alive in educational display, seminars and workshops. The Antique Lamp Show & Sale is open to the public on Saturday, August 1 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. See recent photos at [www.aladdincollectors.org](http://www.aladdincollectors.org).

Although Convention events are sponsored by Aladdin collectors, the seminars and Lamp Show & Sale include antique lamps of all kinds, including early electric lamps. Victorian lamps and lighting are especially strong among the dealers who come from as far away as Minnesota, Florida and Pennsylvania.

For information about collecting antique lamps, books and the newsletter "The Mystic Light of the Aladdin Knights" contact Bill Courter, 3935 Kelley Road, Kevil, Kentucky 42053, Phone 270-488-2116 or [brtknight@aol.com](mailto:brtknight@aol.com).

For information about Louisville and the 37th Gathering or the Lamp Show & Sale please contact Bob and Karen McPherson, General Knights, 303 Maple Avenue, Peewee Valley, KY 40056, Phone 502-243-9107 or [McPfly@aol.com](mailto:McPfly@aol.com).

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## 20th Antique Lamp Show & Sale