

C. Cleaves Candlesticks: a Comparison of Examples

by Dave Thorpe



A mint castellated standard C. Cleaves candlestick (Tony Moon)

Those who collect candlesticks are familiar with the brand marked C. Cleaves, and are aware of the three basic varieties: a standard model as shown above from Tony Moon's collection, and two mechanical varieties with built in fuse cutters. But there are many variations even within these categories, for Charles Samuel Cleaves, of Weaverville, California was a solo blacksmith, and it is said that no two sticks were alike. While certain similarities suggest that a jig may have been used in the basic formation, the variability in detail shows that each finished product was unique. This article outlines these details and variations. On the last page is a a table of measurements.

Charles Cleaves probably did most of his work prior or around the turn of the century, for it is known that he died of a heart attack in 1918 at the age of 58. Family members relate that he learned his blacksmithing in Chicago. At his shop in Weaverville he also made spurs, bits, and bells for team horses.

Standard Variety

The standard, non-mechanical stick is made of one forged piece of steel. The greatest variations are found in the thimble. The upper edge is usually appointed with either a castellated square-cut trim or spikey points that resemble flames.



The stick shown above from my collection has the flamed thimble, while Tony's stick on the previous page is castellated. Below are closeups showing the detail.. Additional variations involve the decorative stamping. All thimbles are stamped "C. Cleaves", but they are additionally marked with four "eyebrows" or with eyebrows and a dot or "eye" beneath the brow. Of the the ten sticks studied, the flamed edge is slightly more common by 6 to 4. Of the sticks with brows alone, most have the flamed edge. Of the sticks with both eyes and brows, most are castellated. Essentially then, all combinations exist. None of the standard sticks were found with the star stamping as on some mechanical models.



Typically, the castellated thimble shown left has both eyes and brows while the flamed thimble shown right has brows alone. Exceptions exist.



The lengths of the standard sticks varied from 8 1/4 inches to 12 inches. While it is true that some of these sticks could have been shortened, their gradual taper suggests that most were within 1/2 inch of their original length. Only Tony Moon's stick had seen such minimal wear that one could be sure that it had not been shortened. This was the longest, measuring 12 inches.

The tip of an unused stick should have an additional beveling in the last quarter inch as shown in the closeup left. It is only by this detail that one can be absolutely certain that the stick's length is "as manufactured".

A four-sided bevel at the tip of the spike indicates very little wear, and ascertains that the stick has not been shortened.

The photos right above show two sticks from the left hand side. There is a similarity in design of the area where the hook joins the shaft with a ramp up to a flat step, but these are so varied that it that they must have been done by hand.



As seen from the thimble side, there are differences in small details. The stick shown left has a step in the shaft of the hook down low near the thimble which is absent on the other. The left hand stick is also beveled along the edge of the hook.

Consistent Measurements of the Standard Series

There is no standard length for these sticks which vary from roughly 8 to 12 inches. Some measurements though are the same from one stick to the next. These are:

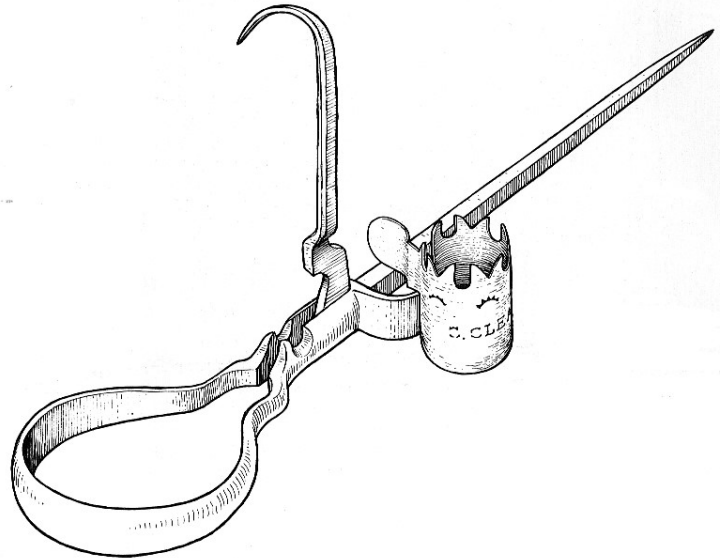
Thimble height: 1 3/8 inches

Thimble arm height: 1/2 inch

Shank dimensions: .22 in. wide X .25 in. high

As will be seen later these dimensions are not the same for some of the non-standard C. Cleaves sticks.

Folding Hook Model



This model is highly prized and much more scarce than the standard model. Of the five examples studied, all thimbles have a flamed edge. Two are marked with eyes and brows, two have brows only, and one has stars (more on this mark later). The stick shown left in the photo is Todd Town's. It is mint/unused and measures 12 1/4". The stick to the right belongs to Al Winters and measures 10 1/4". The major difference between the two is the width of the forward handle which is much wider for the longer stick. The illustration above, done by Wendell Wilson, belonged to Ted Bobrink. This stick is 12" long and appears to have the narrow handle. Yet another hook-folder measures only 9", but it is not known if this stick was shortened. As a rule, the folding hook models tend to be longer than the standard, but exceptions abound.

The thimble height, thimble arm height, and shank dimensions are exactly as those for the standard model.

Folding Bar Model

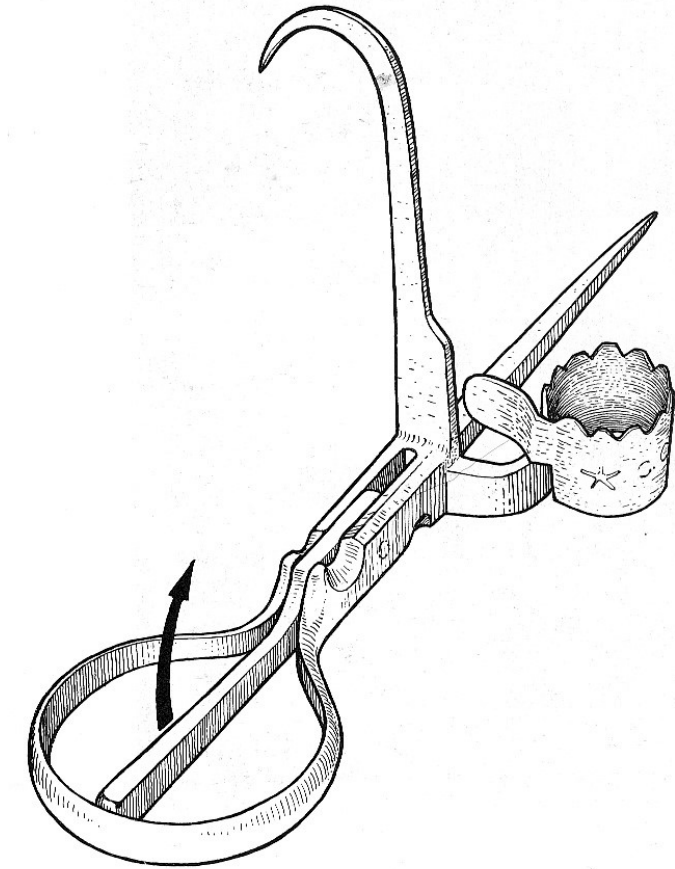
The folding-bar sticks are as rare as the hook-folders. The bar which folds into the handle will crimp blasting caps in the bottom notch and cut fuse on top. Wendell Wilson's illustration of another Bobrink stick shows how the mechanism works.

The photo below of Bob Guthrie's stick is an outstanding example with several variations from the norm.

1. **Fancy fluted hook.** Note: all other sticks studied have a standard hook as show in illustration (left).

2. **Thimble edge is a wavy pattern** (as in the Wilson illustration). Other bar-folding sticks are found with flames or castellations.

3. **Thimble height is short:** only 0.83 inches, with shorter thimble arm: 0.4



inches. Note: all other bar folding sticks studied here have standard height thimbles.

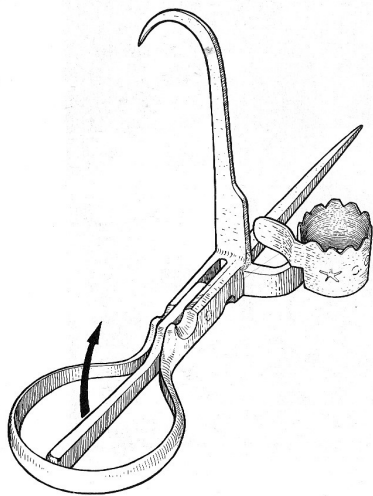
Guthrie's stick and the one shown in the illustration above were the only ones with short thimbles.

4. **Five-point stars** are stamped into thimble beside and above the name stamping. Note: other bar-folding sticks have the brow or the brow plus eye stamping.

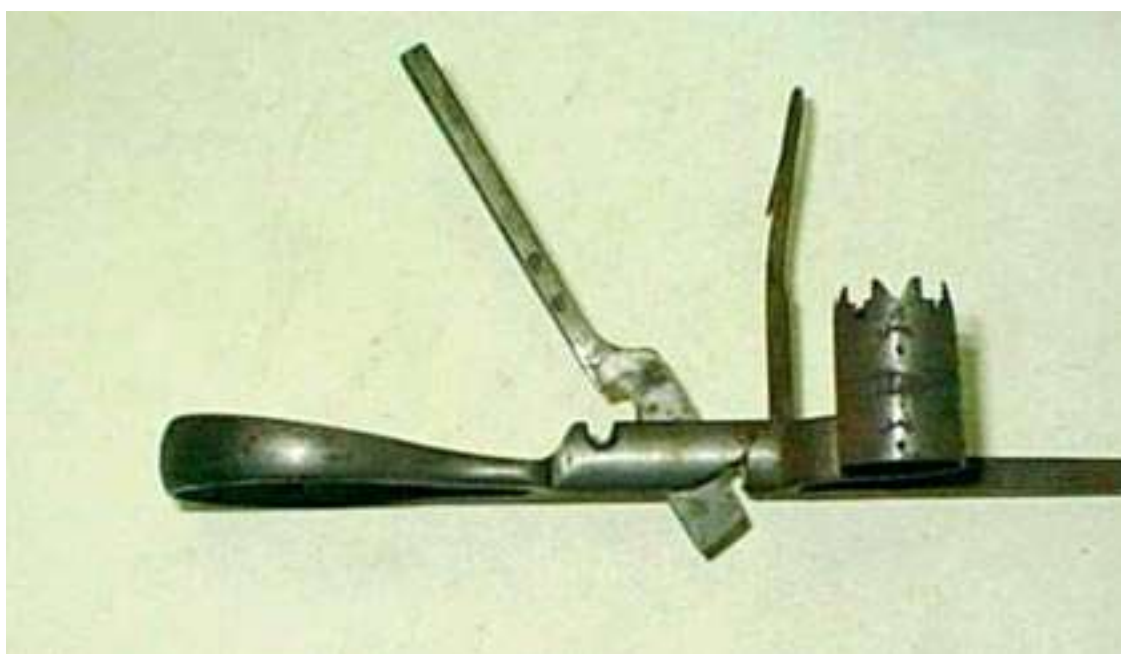
Bob Guthrie's bar-fold stick.



Folding Bar Model (continued)



Shown below is another folding-bar model with a host of variations. This one is a full 13" long and has the pear-shaped handle usually found only on the hook-folding models. Also note the double row of of brows and eyes on the thimble. Finally, this is the only bar folder reported with a castellated thimble.



13-inch bar-folder with castellated thimble and double row of decorative stamping on thimble.

A Simple Cleaves



This stick belonging to Al Winters is different from the rest. Roger Peterson also owns such a model. The handle is teardrop shaped unlike the usual pear shape of the others. The hook is simpler. The thimble has no serrations on top and is only .82 inches high. The thimble arm is

even shorter than Bob Guthrie's bar-folder, measuring only 0.3". There is no decorative stamping on the thimble, only the maker's name. The hook comes off the left hand side of the stick rather than straight up like the other sticks. This is a rare one.

Is the "C." Really Backwards?

Many have looked at the stamping on the thimble and believe the "C." is backwards or perhaps even a "D" or "J". Having looked over this batch of sticks, I believe that it really is a forward "C." The left hand side of the "C." is usually incompletely stamped and the feet or "serif" portion of the C is very prominent which makes many of the stampings appear reversed or D-shaped.



The photo above shows one of the more normal "C." stampings. This stamping was the most clear of all the sticks I studied, and it happens to belong to Al Winters' simple stick (above). The clarity of this stamping may lend credence to the belief that this simple C. Cleaves stick is the earliest.

A Summary of Observations

Ten standard sticks were examined. About half were marked with the brow design and the other half were marked with the brow plus eye. They were split randomly between a flamed edge and castellated. The lengths varied from 8 1/4 to 12 1/2 inches with a length of 9 1/4 inches appearing on three. Thimble heights were all roughly 1 3/8 inches. The height to the top of the hook varied from 3.1 to 3.6 inches. The height of the arm holding the thimble was consistent at 1/2 inch. Shank dimensions were similar: .2" wide by .25" high.

One simple stick shown previously, belonging to Al Wintes was 8.5 inches long. The flat-edged thimble height was shorter: .82 inches. Hook height was 3.1 inches. Arm height was very short: .3 inches. Shank dimensions were also smaller: .18" wide by .25" high.

Five hook folding sticks ranged from 9 to 12 1/4 inches long. All of these thimbles had the flamed edge, but markings varied: about half had brows alone and half had brows plus eyes. One had stars. Thimble heights were similar to the standard sticks, however their folding hooks were considerably taller: 3 3/4 inches (one was 3 1/2 inches). Arm heights and shank dimensions were also similar to the standard style.

Five bar folding sticks ranged from 8 to 13 inches in length. Two were flamed, two had the wavy patterned thimble, and one was castellated. The wavy patterned thimbles both had star markings. These also had shorter thimbles (0.83 inches), and shorter thimble arms (0.4 inches). Both brow-plus-eye marked sticks had a double row of these designs, one above the name stamping and one below. Shank dimensions were similar to the standard series.

Only three sticks showed the beveled tip, indicating the certainty that they had not been shortened. One was a standard stick, measuring 12 1/2 inches, one was a hook folder, measuring 12 1/4 inches, and one was a bar folder at 13 inches.

You Be the Judge

As a final note, a stick owned by Bob Guthrie is shown with the thimble oriented differently from the others. One wonders if this model was bent into this shape after manufacture. The thimble arm is longer than the others, and more I look at it, the more it looks like that's the way it was made.

