Patent Models, Prototypes, Copies — or Just Modern Fakes?

by Al Winters

Patented miners candlesticks are very collectible and it is almost beyond belief that inventors could apply for and receive approximately 88 patents for a simple metal device used to hold a candle. The Washburn, patented in 1872, was the first candlestick to receive a patent and the Huuskanen, received the last patent in 1917. Patented miners candlesticks seldom have a stamping and often do not exactly resemble the patent drawing.

When a candlestick is marked and resembles the patent drawing you can be sure of its authenticity. When it resembles the patent you can be fairly sure of its authenticity. The unmarked Powell candlestick (patented June 1899 in Lead, SD) for example, follows the patent drawing exactly but is made of round rather than square stock. It was found in the immediate area where the inventor lived which gives it some authenticity. The Peacock (patented Aug. 1900 in Altman, CO) is not marked and only partially resembles the patent drawing. Three examples are known to have come from the Cripple Creek area which gives them authenticity. One of the examples however, is constructed differently than the other two. Does it perhaps represent a patent model, prototype, a period copy, or an outright fake. The minor design change of two identical sticks would significantly reduce the manufacturing cost?

A blacksmith would come up with what he thought was a new and better idea for a different locking mechanism, fuse cutter addition, flame snuffer, or what have you and build a model incorporating his new idea. If the finished product looked promising, he would possibly apply for a patent and take the prototype to a manufacturer to get a quote for machine production. If there were flaws in the original design an improved model was often pounded out and perhaps resubmitted. Three different examples of the Werntz candlestick (patented Dec. 1888 in Placerville, CA) are known and are assumed to represent the inventors attempt to improve his design. On the other hand do the two which do not exactly follow the patent drawing represent a patent model, copy, prototype or fake?

At the manufacturing plant, the blacksmith prototype may again require modification to improve the design, reduce costs or to facilitate machine production requirements. Whatever the reason, major changes in design were sometimes experienced. The Bernier candlestick (patented Aug. 1899 in Victor, CO) is a good example of what I believe is a manufacturing change. The actual hook and thimble arrangement of the production stick compared to the patent drawing is certainly a good example of a design change to reduce cost of machine manufacturing.

The following candlesticks compare the patented stick and what may be a patent model, a prototype, an old copy, or fake. In most cases the questionable stick is built much stronger and more mine resistant than the patented production example.

The first example is the Fielding & Peterson which was patented in Grants Pass, OR in 1903. The patented stick was produced from machine stampings with a very unique locking device and is certainly one of the more practical folders. A similar stick is essentially the same size but is handmade with a perfection that can only be obtained by a gunsmith or similar craftsman. The precision of the locking device and fitting of the parts is marvelous to behold. When you hold this stick you have to ask yourself why would anyone go to the trouble to make a reproduction of the Fielding & Peterson? It is simply too difficult a task to complete for any potential returns.

Left: patent model, copy, prototype?
Right: genuine Fielding & Peterson compared to the unmarked example.

Opened up: the real thing and the other version.

The next example is that of the Jones patent which was patented in Oregon City, OR in 1883. The rare patented sticks are both marked and unmarked. The example shown is owned by Chuck Tesch and is unmarked. It is 6 inches long, delicate and would last in a mining environment but a few shifts. Another stick of similar design is 9 inches long and blacksmith made. The construction is crude, very substantial and could be expected to last in a mine

setting. One has to ask however; Why would anyone reproduce a stick with a design that simply wouldn't work? The candlestick came from Northern California via a grandson from Butte, MT.

Above: Jones patent stick.

Above and below: Jones-like sticks.

Right: a genuine Eureka stick.

The next example is the "Eureka" or Pateneaude stick (patented in Helena, MT in 1883). The patented stick is both marked and follows the patent drawing exactly. When unfolded the reciprocating folder is 7 ? inches long. The weak characteristic of the stick design is the flimsy hook. The spike is secured by means of a tapered lug which fits into a tapered slot in the handle. The hook depends solely on the spring in the handle steel to hold it in the upright or folded position. This compares to another stick that is larger and built the same, but the locking device is secured by an additional tightening nut. It is of very good construction and presently believed to be in the collection of Mike Bergman. In the past, this stick was the subject of discussion concerning authenticity but in my opinion represents either a patent model

(it is cheaper to manufacture without a tightening nut) or an after market improvement by the inventor to try and make the stick sturdier.

Right: a Eureka folder — folded.

Not quite a Eureka — patent model, copy, prototype or fake?

The "not quite" Eureka, unfolded.

In the examples shown the sticks similar to the patents appear old. Other examples of candlesticks similar in design to patented sticks exist, but you can never be 100% sure, so it is up to the collector to determine the authenticity. A seller or proud owner is far less likely to claim a stick is a modern reproduction, and patent model status is nearly impossible to substantiate without additional documentation. Is it a Patent Model, Prototype, Copy or Fake? You be the judge!