

A Unique Three-piece Miner's Candleholder

by Wendell Wilson

Thimble-hook candleholders (those lacking a spike and handle) have been used very rarely in the history of mining, mostly in the Bisbee, Arizona, mines and in the Michigan Copper Country. In those districts, many Cornish miners who worked there in the 19th century brought with them the habit of sticking their candle to the front of their cap or hat with a lump of clay. A few blacksmiths improved on this practice by combining a simple steel or copper candleholder thimble with a hook, eliminating the need for clay and probably reducing the weight on the front of the cap. This soon gave way to the use of more versatile candlesticks complete with spike and handle.



Illustrated here is a remarkable (and, as far as I know, unique) three-piece steel candleholder. The source location is unknown, but it does have a round hook instead of a flat, Midwest-style hook, so perhaps it's from Arizona. Black oxide pitting shows that it is over 100 years old, probably ca. 1880. The design consists of (1) a partial thimble with two flanges, each penetrated by a square hole, (2) a curved retaining plate to complete the thimble, with hook, and (3) a tapered L-shaped fastener with a D-shaped cross-section that, when inserted through the two square holes in the thimble, holds the retaining plate tightly against the candle. The wedge shape of the retainer allows it be tightened just by pressing it in hard on the flanged end. The retaining plate has a cross-wise groove for the fastener that prevents the plate from slipping up and down. It's very skillfully made, and is really quite a clever design which would have been patentable, but there is no stamping to identify it and no such patent is known.