

THE ANDERSON MATCH-SAFE CANDLESTICK

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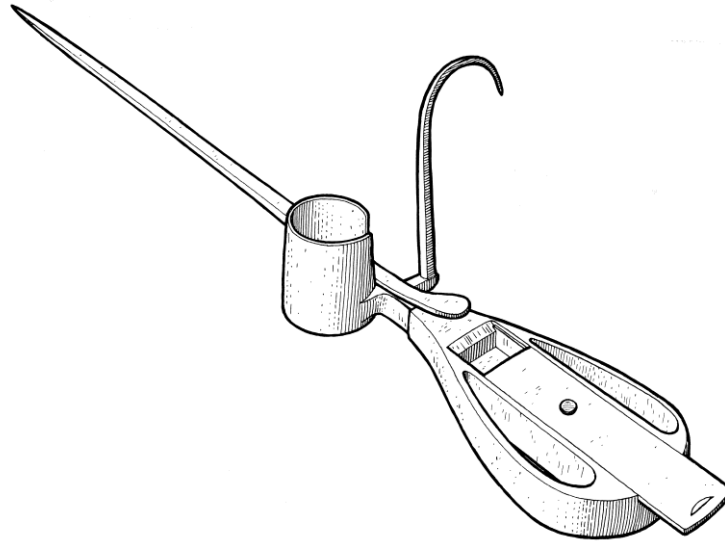


Figure 358 (shown above) in my book on *Antique Miners' Candlesticks* (2021), shows an 11.5-inch match-safe candlestick with an aluminum handle housing the match compartment, and a sliding door and set screw, from the collection of Tom Stranko. The caption reads:

The aluminum match-safe handle has a sliding aluminum door secured with a screw. The [steel] thimble is brazed onto a bracket which is attached to the [steel] spike with a screw, and the [steel] thumb lever is riveted to the thimble—though not in a good position for spreading the thimble. The hook folds down forward, and it appears possible that the thimble could be rotated into a horizontal position, and the thumb lever folded flat against it.

A second example of this model (shown here in the photos) recently came to my attention, courtesy of Don Schoenly, and is now in his collection. It was formerly in the Peter Gregory collection, and before that in the Harry Rapp collection, and was illustrated in the Rushlight Club's book *Early Lighting; A Pictorial Guide* (first edition, 1972; second edition, 1979).

Don's example shows a series of grab ridges *inside* the thimble, designed to keep the candle from slipping out. This feature, as far as I know, is unique among miners' candlesticks. The handle includes a striker surface for lighting a match. The thimble is secured in a slot or groove by a screw and cannot be rotated.

The most interesting thing about Don's example is that it identifies the maker, via the engraved script inscription "Made by Wm. Anderson 1901." Unfortunately, the name William Anderson is

far too common to allow an unequivocal correlation with a specific person. However, the challenge is worth pursuing anyway, and who knows? We might get lucky.



Note the grab ridges inside the thimble



Note the strike patch for lighting matches

The foremost source of information is the U.S. Federal Census for the Western states where candlesticks were used. Since the candlestick is dated 1901, the 1900 census is clearly the place to search for possibilities. It turns out that there were 38 blacksmiths in the whole United States named Wm. Anderson, as listed in that census. Of these, the following four lived in Western mining states where candlesticks were used:

(1) **William Anderson**, blacksmith, age 22 in 1901. He lived with his mother Christina in Washington, Nevada County, California, right in the Gold Rush country. He was born in Sweden in 1879, immigrated in 1897. If he didn't actually work for a mine, he was certainly in the midst of miners who needed candlesticks.

(2) **William Anderson**, blacksmith, age 19 in 1901. He lived in Madrid, Santa Fe County, New Mexico. He was born in Michigan (copper country?) in January 1882, and his sister was born in

Illinois in 1883. His father, also named William, was a mining engineer born in Scotland, who immigrated to the US in 1868, so William Jr. has a mining connection, too.

Madrid, New Mexico, is a small town of about 200 people located about 20 miles southwest of Santa Fe. Was it much of a mining town? Apparently, it was. According to the town's website:

Located just south of Santa Fe New Mexico, in the mineral-rich Ortiz Mountains, Madrid is in the oldest coal mining region in New Mexico. There is evidence of primitive mining in the Madrid area as early as the mid-1850s. By 1892 the yield from a narrow valley known as "Coal Gulch" was large enough to warrant the construction of a 6.5-mile standard gauge railroad spur connecting the area to the main line of Santa Fe Railroad. Coal Gulch later became the town site of Madrid. By 1893 a seven-story anthracite breaker was constructed and by 1899 all coal production in the area was consolidated at Madrid. The town flourished as a "Company Town" of some 2500 people. In 1919 Oscar Joseph Huber was hired by the Albuquerque and Cerrillos Coal Company as full-time superintendent of mines. Under his capable leadership Madrid became a model for other mining towns to follow.

(3) **William Anderson**, *mine* blacksmith, age 22 in 1901. Lived in Bessemer, Gogebic County, Michigan. Born in September 1878 in Michigan. Lived with his mother Laura and brother Edgar, a (surface) miner. Iron mining began in the Bessemer area, in the far-western corner of Upper Michigan, in 1883. From 1884 to 1958, a period of nearly 75 years, the iron ore shipped from all of Gogebic County totaled over 245 million tons. Miners used candlesticks (a candlestick stabbing was reported there in 1902), so there was plenty of incentive for innovative blacksmiths.

(4) **William Anderson**, blacksmith, age 37 in 1901. Lived in Manistee, Michigan, born February 1864 in Sweden, I would rule this one out, as the western shore of lower Michigan was not a mining area. There are some coal deposits in the central part of the state, but Manistee on Lake Michigan just does not seem like a conducive place to inspire mining inventions.

So there are three obvious candidates for the maker of the match-safe candlestick, and no way to distinguish them. Of course, the maker may be none of these. Perhaps he was simply not listed in the census as a blacksmith. And unfortunately he never tried to patent his invention, so patent records are of no help. A google search trying to tie "miner's candlestick" to "William Anderson" (or "W." or "Wm." or "Bill" or "Billy") turns up nothing. Likewise a Newspapers.com search produced nothing useful. But at least we know his name, now.

The signature on the candlestick is so carefully done that it must have been a mark of pride. The fact that it was inscribed instead of stamped with dies suggests that perhaps Anderson was not a blacksmith, but he did have manufacturing facilities of some sort at his disposal. And the fact that at least two identical examples were made suggests that they were marketed somehow, and proves that the design was not just a one-off. Likewise, the aluminum handle had to be cast from a mold, and who would go to all the work of designing and making such a mold just to cast one example? If there are two such candlesticks, others might well turn up someday.