

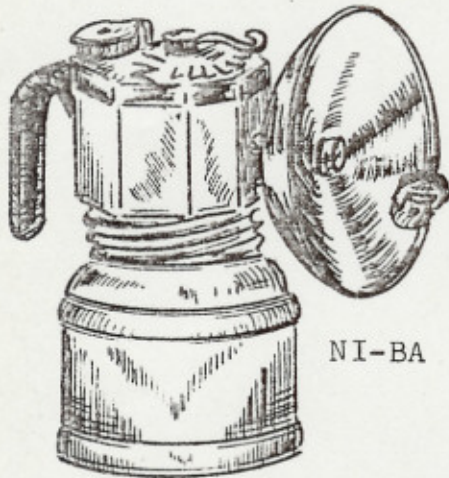
THE UNDERGROUND LAMP POST

- NOT A HIPPIE NEWSPAPER -



Vol. I, No. 10

Spring, 1973



NI-BA

The Underground Lamp Post, devoted to old mine lamps, carbides, and candleholders. Mini-editor: Henry A. Pohs, 4537 Quitman St., Denver, Colorado, 80212. For LAMP TRAMPS everywhere.

NI-BA brass carbide cap lamp. A recent report from Neal Bullington in American Fork, Utah, tells of a brass carbide cap lamp marked NI-BA in raised letters on both the top and the bottom. It also has an octagonal top and a round bottom design. The reflector screws on; the flat cap bracket is held on by two rivets and has a rectangular cut-out running most of its length. A new name to add to our lamp registry.

MINER'S CHOICE - Within several days of each other we received notice of the new name Miner's Choice as a brand name to add to the oil wick cap lamp

registry lists from two different sources. Both Chuck Young and Craig Ellenfield wrote to tell of their new acquisitions. Chuck also has another new name, but part of it is obscure on the side of the lamp -SANNER, from Shamokin, Pa. Who can add to it?

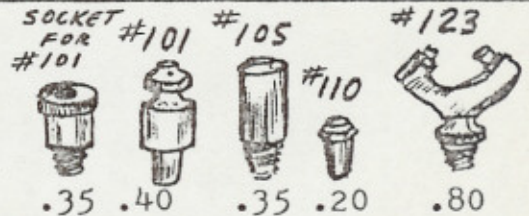
SIMMONS - Donald Davis reports that he has acquired a Simmons carbide cap lamp with a 2" diameter porcelain coated reflector; seems to be original manufacture. The lamp came from a burned-out hardware store in Canada.

One reader has suggested that the Ever Ready carbide cap lamp top wick burner shown in the last Lamp Post issue could have been for temporary light while refilling either the carbide or the water. Fuel evaporation problems?

LITTLE GIANT - Used Little Giant 8-hour carbide hand lamp for trade. Write: Larry Matthews, 206 W. 38th, Apt. #122, Austin, Texas, 78705.

SUMMER LAMP-IN - For those who can make it, we're planning our annual summer get together to trade, show, tell, display (and even brag a little) about our lamps for Denver this summer. The week-end of June 23 and 24 has been set. Details will follow, but it will be a very informal gathering again.

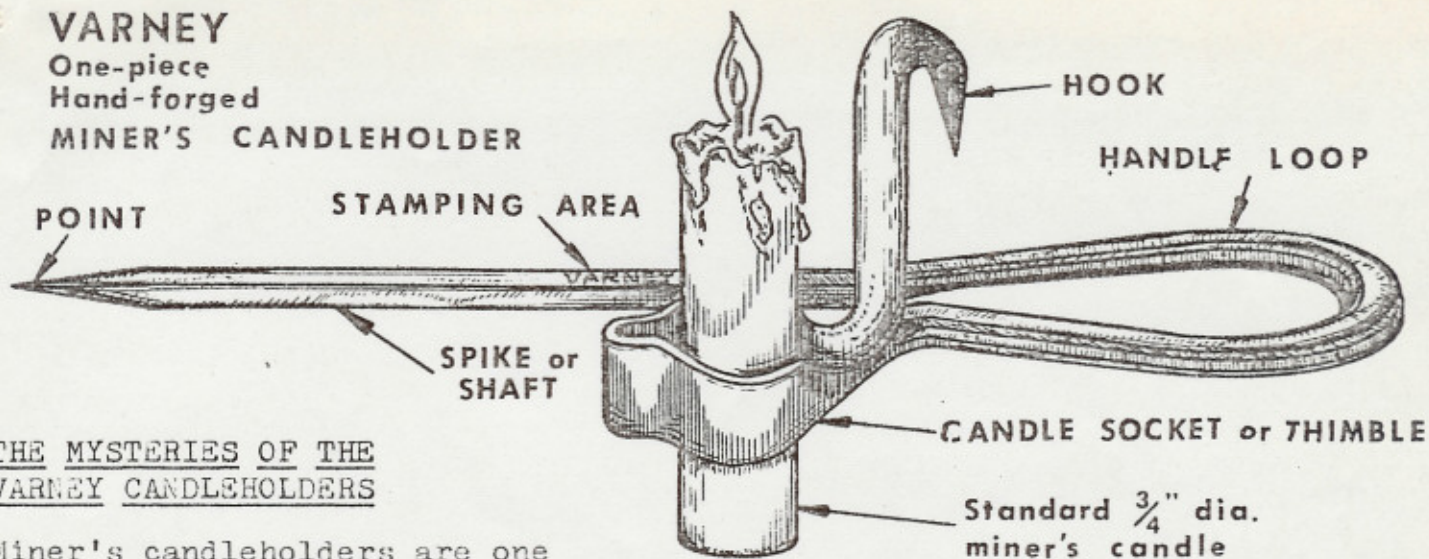
ENGLISH PREMIER - Donald Davis offers new brass lamps and burners for sale. He has a limited number of three English Premier hand carbides as follows: #67 for \$9.75, #61 for \$11.00, and #64 for \$15.00. These are 8-hour lamps of tinned steel. Also the standard #85 brass Premier cap lamp (both round hook and flat) at \$6.75 each plus .50 mailing charge. Donald also has the illustrated Premier tips in his inventory. The #105, #101, and #123 burners can also be used in Wolf lamps. The two-piece and the fishtail tips are obsolete - no more after this limited stock is gone. Donald will take trades for any of the above, and has many different parts and accessories for antique lamps for trade. What do you need and have? Write him at: Donald G. Davis, P.O. Box 25, Fairplay, Color., 80440. Tell him you saw it in the Lamp Post.



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Craig Ellenfield, 339 Biltmore Ave., Lynchburg, Va., 24502, also wants to buy and trade for carbide lamps. He says he may have some originally-boxed Sun-Ray cap lamps soon. If so, someone will talk trade.

VARNEY
One-piece
Hand-forged
MINER'S CANDLEHOLDER



THE MYSTERIES OF THE
VARNEY CANDLEHOLDERS

Miner's candleholders are one of the unique reminders of early Colorado history and heritage. Underground light was dim and unpredictable before electricity became common. Candles often served to light the miner's working areas.

Nathan E. Varney of Denver, Colorado, initiated several modern day questions with his 1900 design for a miner's candleholder. This type of candleholder was unique to the mining occupation - it could be hung on a timber nail or on a rock projection in the mine tunnel; it could be stuck into a crack in rock or wood; or it could lay steady on a reasonably flat surface. Some miners even hung their candleholders on the front of their soft caps.

Old mining supply catalogs of the period identify Varney's famous relic as a one-piece, hand-forged miner's candleholder. He also built specialized forging tools and rolling equipment for shaping steel bar stock into what has now become a cherished collectors item. The center portion of a 1/4" square steel bar was flattened to approximately 1/32" thick x 1" wide x 4" long. This center portion was then formed into a 3/4" diameter socket for the candle. The short end was rounded to 1/4" diameter and bent into the hook. The long end was shaped into a handle loop which extended past the candle socket as the spike point. Often the handle loop was re-forged into an 8-sided octagon shape.

Varney usually stamped his name on the shank of the spike near the candle socket. But Varney candleholders have also been found unstamped or marked with the name of the mine where they were used. Collectors have identified the following names on Varney-type candleholders:

VARNEY	ROYAL	BONANZA	L. A. SAYRE & SON
DENVER	SIERRA	TRIUMPH	& TRADEMARK
COLORADO	OCCIDENT	CLEAN CUT	
IMPERIAL	RUSSELL	SPARKLE	

Standard size candleholders for the 3/4" diameter miner's candle ranged from 8" to 12" long. Smaller sized sample Varney candleholders have also been discovered.

What Varney started 70 years ago has today developed into a friendly discussion among collectors. Did Varney make all the candleholders in Denver as one group maintains, and stamp a selected name on them when a particularly large order made it economically practical? Or, as others speculate, did he license production of his design in other locations?

It is known that Varney did at one time move some of his equipment to Newark, New Jersey, and set up operations in conjunction with L. A. Sayre. An old packing box label identifies these as "Varney's Colorado Pattern" miner's candleholders. But what about the others? Slight variations in length or in the bending could be the result of either the hand-forging or of the many different mine blacksmiths. The recurring pattern under many names suggests the one single source. The stamped lettering is the same style on almost all of the different named holders. But how many more names are there? What economics could support only Denver production as opposed to local manufacture in many mining areas? What other elements of mystery are hidden in the dark shadows of these mine lighting devices?

Nathan Varney didn't stop with his one-piece design. Miners and engineers of 65 years ago frequently wanted a candleholder for underground work which could be conveniently folded and placed in the pocket. The owner of a pocket candleholder always knew where to find it. Varney's U. S. patent #1,011,878 of December 12, 1911, covered a beautifully designed folding candleholder as shown in the illustrations below. It was all steel construction, nickel plated, and measured approximately 10" long when opened up for use.

The essential feature of the design was the two-way swivel of the hook on the handle plate. It remained very rigid when either opened or closed. Both the hook and the spike were carefully sheathed when folded. The design included a locking system for both the open and the closed position. Closing of the spike compressed the spring plate portion of the candle socket. The resulting tension served to hold the folded parts tightly in position.

Unfortunately, miner's candleholders were being quickly replaced by carbide lamps at the time Varney invented his folding candleholder. He produced only a limited number, very few of which are accounted for today.

Earl Stiegelmeiers "Lamplighter" Museum on U. S. 40 west of Denver proudly displays one of these reminders of our early mining legacy. Two others are known to be in local collections. The mystery - what happened to the rest?

