

## AN INTERESTING HIGHGRADER

By Roger Peterson

For the newer members of our mining artifact collecting fraternity, “Highgraders” candlesticks have long been rumored to be a method whereby the miner could augment his often meager income. By inserting any free gold nuggets he found in the mine into the hollowed-out handle of the stick and covering the nugget with candle wax he could safely smuggle the high-grade from the mine and later convert it for his own use. Some collectors have questioned the authenticity of this purported practice but I believe it to be true. Some years ago when I was very new to this hobby, I read an article in an early mining journal (circa 1900) in which a mine official was lamenting about this very practice and how costly it was to the mine owners. I wasn’t smart enough to pay the seemingly high price the book dealer wanted for the document in which the article resided. In later years when I realized the significance of what I had passed up, I went back to the book store, but alas the journal was not to be found. Whether it still remained in the store (which is absolutely *full* of all kinds of books) or had been sold is still a mystery. I sure wish I would have been smart enough

to buy it when I had my hands on it! (As I recall, the bookstore is on the main downtown street in Nampa, Idaho. If someone was a lot wiser or more thorough than me and acquired this document— call me!)

The miners candlestick shown in figure one presents some unique variations that I have not seen before in this area of mining artifacts. It was found in an antique shop in Northern Colorado a couple of years ago. I have been unable to determine if the stick actually came from Colorado, or, as it so often the case, had been transplanted to this locale from some other mining district.

The method of construction would suggest an item that was manufactured in some quantity. The symmetry of the design and its component parts is very good— the edges, bends and forming used to make the candlestick are very sharp and concise. The “Highgrader” handle design is likewise very consistent and well formed. All of this indicates to me that the item was not made individually by a blacksmith but rather turned out in volume.

The last and probably most compelling evidence to support the

“manufactured” theory is the presence of *embossed* (raised) letters on the thimble. Unfortunately the thimble is somewhat pitted in the area of the embossment so the letter “X” is the only one that stands out clearly. There appears to be lettering before and after the “X” but it is unclear as to just what it is. It has been suggested that the embossment may be “IXL” signifying manufacturer by the knife company of that name who also made miners candlesticks (See Wilson? Bobrink “A Collectors Guide to Antique Miners Candlesticks”, page 32). Interestingly, the marking technique used on that device, although on the inside of the handle hoop, was also *raised* lettering!

If this candlestick is indeed a mass manufactured item, to my knowledge it represents the only one which utilizes a “Highgrader” style of handle in it’s design; a feature that I’m sure was not well received by the various mining companies! It would also signify that there may well be other examples of this design awaiting discovery. If anyone can shed further light on this interesting candlestick, I would appreciate hearing from them at the address below:

Connie and Roger Peterson  
 14211 State Highway 49  
 P.O. Box 214  
 Amador City, CA 95601  
 (209) 267-0848

Thanks and good hunting!

