

TWO DIFFERENT CANDLESTICKS FROM THE SAN LUIS VALLEY OF COLORADO

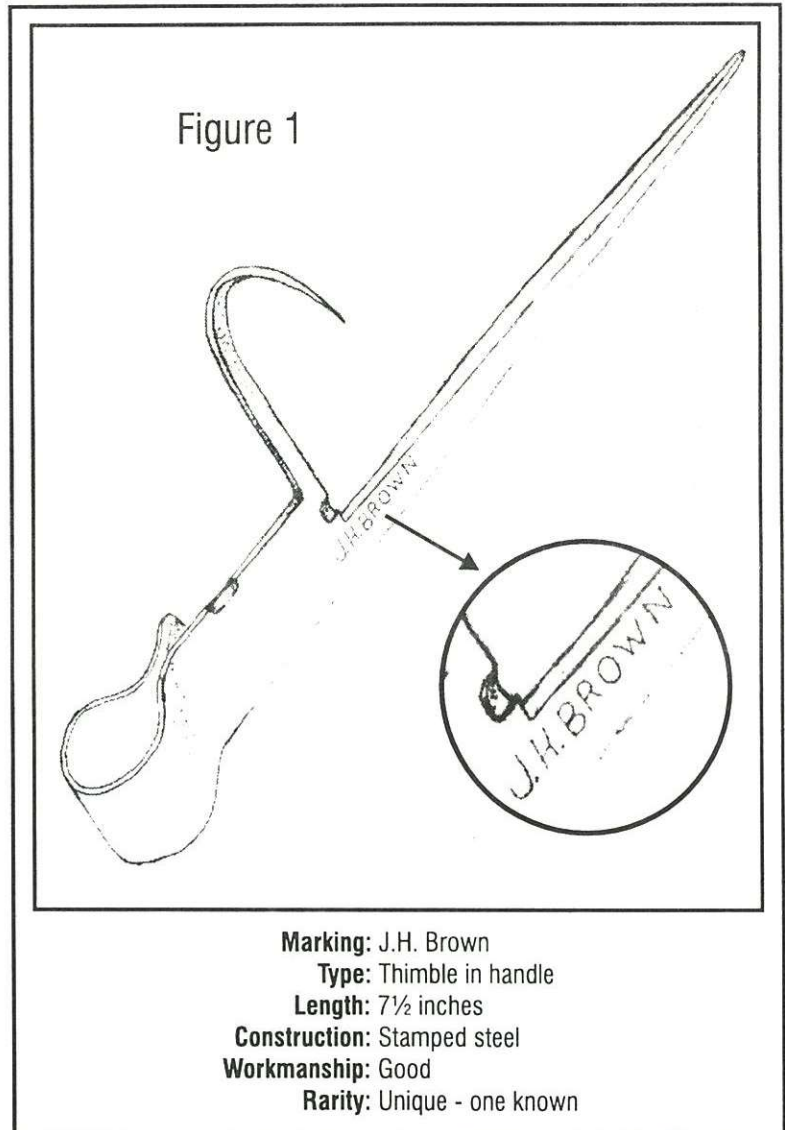
by Roger Peterson

The San Luis Valley of Colorado is a huge basin located in the south-central area of the state. It encompasses approximately 9000 square miles and the southern portion of it spills into New Mexico. From it flows the headwaters of the Rio Grande River on its southward journey to Texas. Some of Colorado's oldest towns and sites are located here: many dating from the 1600's. The valley's biggest claim to fame, other than its absolute beauty, is agricultural and ranching. The basin is surrounded by some of the most majestic mountain ranges to be found in Colorado: the Sangre De Cristos to the east and the San Juans to the west are both well endowed with "14 ers" to captivate your view.

The valley floor has little mining to look upon with the exception of a couple high quality turquoise sites; one at Villa Grove in the northern area of the basin and the other located near the home of Jack Dempsey at Manassa, Co. However, in the mountains surrounding the valley, many metal mining camps existed. Summitville, Creede, Carson, Bonanza, and Crestone are but a few of the towns that existed because of mining activity.

In recent years some very nice and unique mining artifacts have been found at yard sales and in antique shops in the area. The two candlesticks featured in this article both came from such sources. It is assumed that they originally came from mining towns in the area but nothing conclusive has come along to support this with absolute fact.

Figure 1 is interesting in that the thimble for a standard sized mining candle is in the handle of the stick. The method of construction appears to be stamping /drop



forging out of one piece of metal. Although the item is very rusty and pitted the edges, thicknesses, radii, etc. all seem to have been very concise and clean-suggesting this item was mass produced (as opposed to being a one-of-a-kind blacksmith model). The gang stamped name (assumed to be that of the Manufacturer) J.H.BROWN as well as the absence of excessive file markings, also seems to support the mass-produced theory. The metal used to construct the stick is very high

quality, with the thimble retaining a high degree of its original “spring” in spite of the rusting that has taken place over the years. The relieved areas on the front of the hook and on top of the handle appear to be a part of the design as opposed to having occurred in the rusting process and may have been the location for a “snap-on” accessory such as an extra thimble, cutter, crimper etc. If anyone has a similar candlestick in their collection I would love to hear from them as to the particulars of their device.

Figure 2 is a more conventional design that also has some characteristics suggesting a mass production approach. Quality of workmanship and material is very good. The seam formed where the handle comes forward to the thimble is a brazed joint (a “double shaft style” as defined in Henry A. Pohns book *THE MINERS FLAME LIGHT*). There is evidence of file work that would indicate each candlestick received individual attention before being shipped. However, many of the radii, bends, edges, etc. are identical on the two known samples (even though they differ in length- 10.5” Vs. 12.5”). This, along with the very cleanly gang stamped “HOFFRITZ 8” suggests a portion of the manufacturing process was controlled and repetitive. Nothing is known of Hoffritz — although it has been rumored there was a mercantile/mining supply company of that name serving the Bonanza District that has not yet been able to be substantiated. Additionally, the significance of the suffix “8” is unknown — it appears on both existing artifacts (which as noted above differ in length). As suggested above, a comment from anyone who can shed any light on the history of these candlesticks would be greatly appreciated. ✕

