

Miner's Candlesticks of Nevada

by Jack Ramsdell

Jack Ramsdell ranks among the most preeminent authorities of miner's candleholders. Onetime owner of an enormous collection, Jack has painstakingly compiled an extensive history of the miner's candlestick indigenous to the western United States. An excerpt of his favorite topic, candlesticks of Nevada, is now shared with EUREKA! In the following article two sticks and their heretofore unpublished photos are described.

Safety Candlesticks

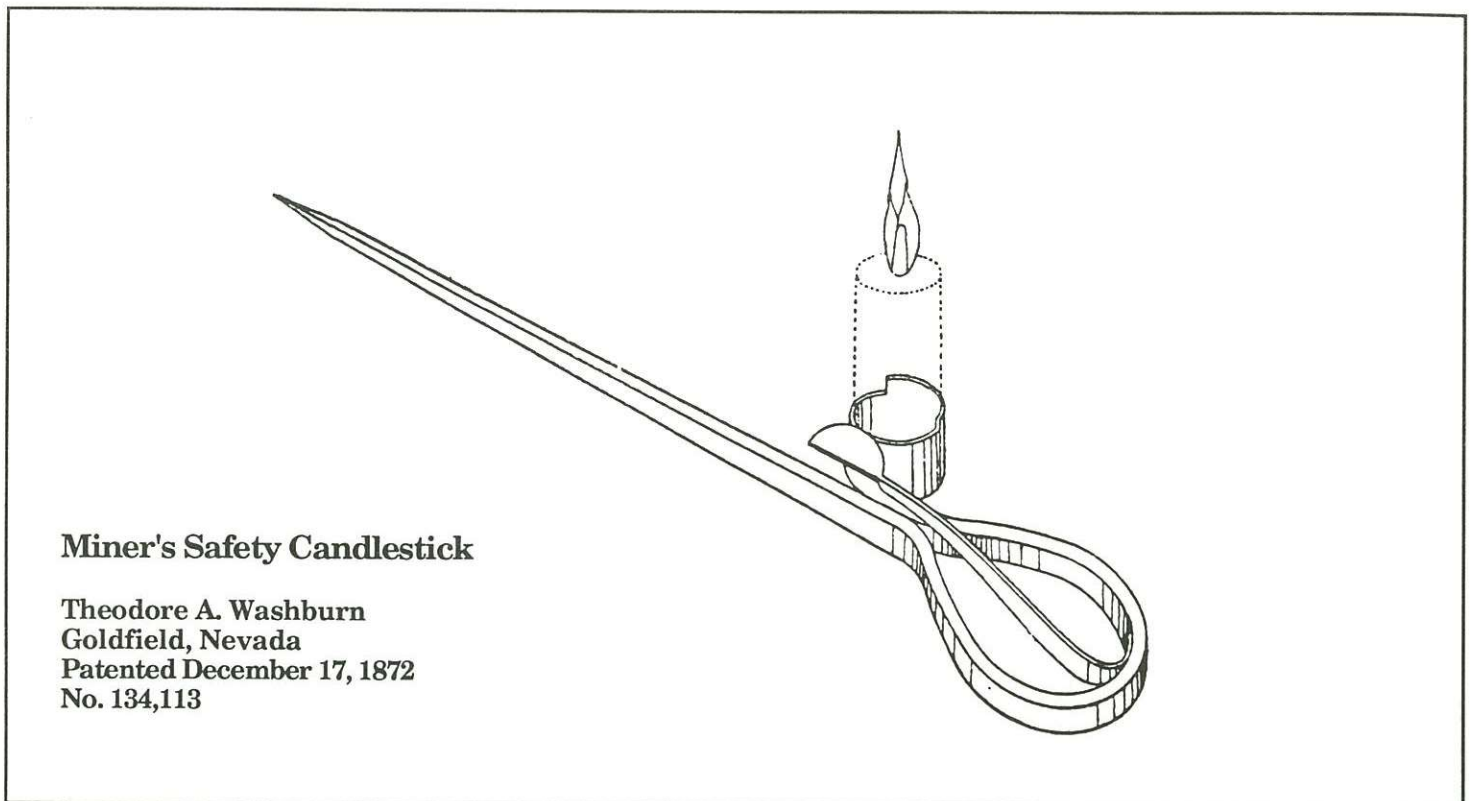


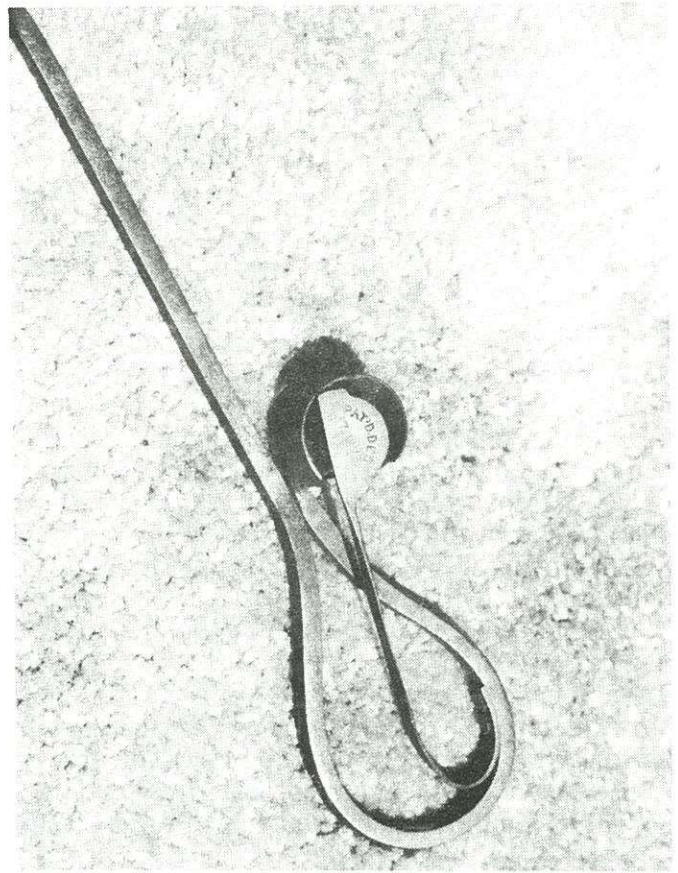
Fig. 1 Patent Drawing

Of the 88 miner's candlestick patents issued by the United States Patent Office from 1872 to 1917, thirty-eight are known to have been manufactured.^{1, 2} Four patents were issued to Nevadans. The first patent ever granted for a miner's candlestick, patent No 134,113 was issued to Theodore A. Washburn of Gold Hill, Nevada December 17, 1872. This candlestick was designed to address the problem of accidental fires. Its

use probably could have prevented the disastrous Sierra Nevada hoisting works fire of 1877. Reporting on this fire, the *Gold Hill News* stated, "It is generally thought that someone had left a candle burning in a miner's candlestick and that when it was consumed to the end, dropped to the floor and ignited the planks which are as dry as so much match wood."

The Washburn candlestick incorporated a blade attachment (Fig 1 & 2) which served to extinguish the flame once the candle had burned down to the top of the socket. Once burned down, the heat from the flame would soften the tallow against which the blade pressed and the spring tension would gradually force the blade across the socket, thus extinguishing the flame. The Washburn candlesticks (two known) are prize possessions of collectors of mine lighting devices.

A candlestick recently found in the Yellow Jacket mine in Gold Hill, Nevada also appears to address the problem of the burning candle stub falling through the thimble. This candlestick (Fig. 3) has a fishtail spike arrangement for securing it into a timber or rock crevice. Its extended length is 15 1/2". The spike is 2 1/4" long and the three elbow jointed sections are each 4 1/2" long. The rotatable spoon-shaped section that covers the bottom of the thimble to prevent the candle from falling through the thimble is 2 1/4" long. The candlestick is made of steel, 5/8" wide and 1/4" thick with much rust. A similar wooden elbow-jointed candleholder is shown on page 34 of reference #3.



*Fig. 2 Washburn candlestick
(John C. Johnson collection)*

References

1. Ramsdell, J. D. and Wagner N. S. (1982), **Patents Miner's Candlesticks**, Privately printed, unpaginated.
2. Wilson, W. E. (1983), **Miners' Candlestick Patents**, Mineralogical Record Inc., Tucson, 81 p.
3. Rushlight Club (1972), **Early Lighting, A Pictorial Guide**, Published by Rushlight Club. 129 p.

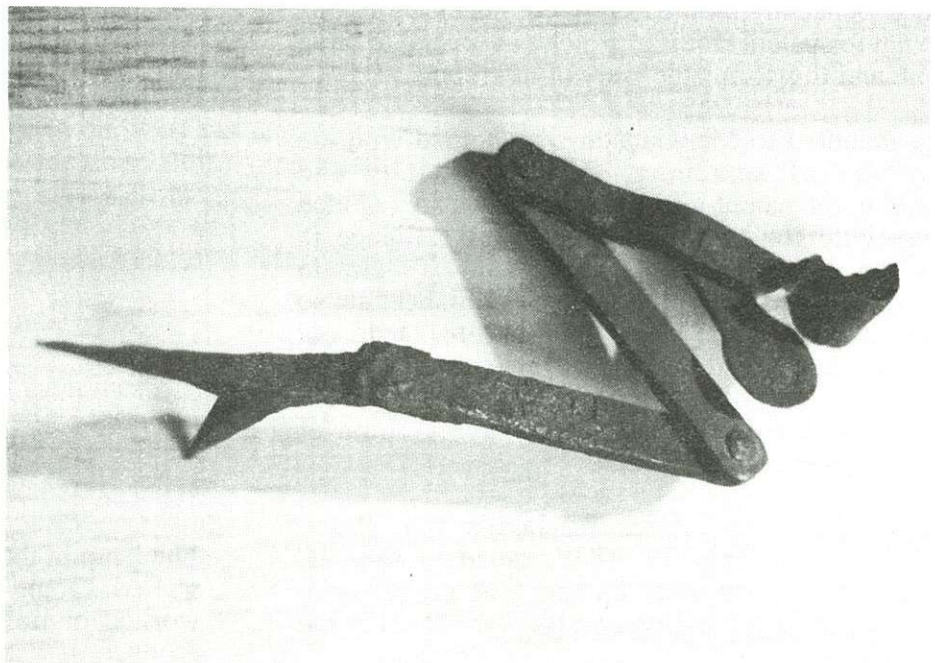


Fig. 3 Fishtail Candlestick (Ron Bommarito collection)