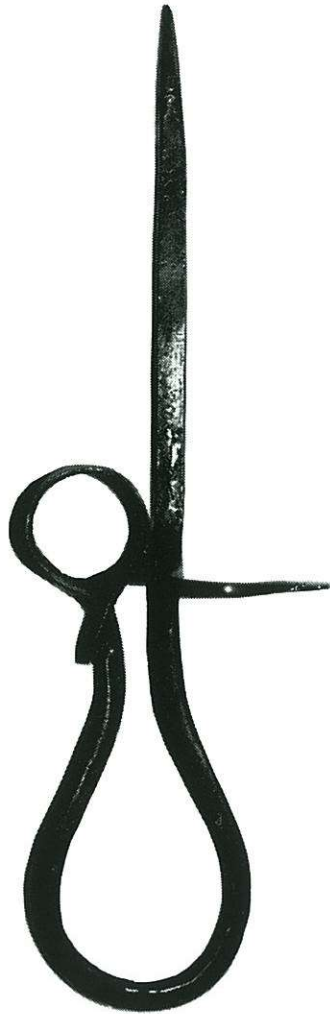


Steel Mastodons

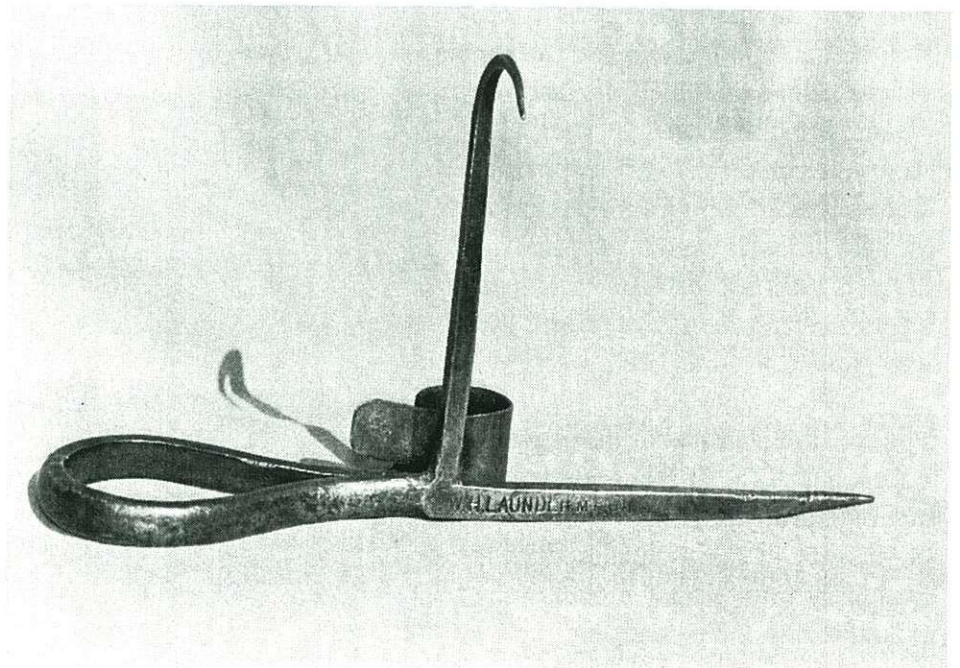
by Dave Thorpe



The stamped name on a candlestick can transform an otherwise plain artifact into a Picasso.

Even crude “blacksmith” candlesticks show a great deal of workmanship and ingenuity, for they are forged from a single piece of steel into a spike, thimble, handle, and hook. From a historical perspective, they reflect a narrow window of mining Americana from the latter 19th century. Still, they are awarded a low status by collectors, and can hardly be given away.

One subtle feature, however, will transform an otherwise typical stick into an item that will be coveted by many. That small aspect is the presence of a gang-stamped name. Not a hand inscribed dedication, or individually stamped letters (detected by their uneven line), but a single die stamping that is replicated from stick to stick. What is it in a gang stamping that fires up the collector’s mania?



(ABOVE AND RIGHT) *Who was W.H. Launder? At least two sticks manufactured by this blacksmith have been found. Many believe that he lived and worked in the mining district of Bodie, California.*

Without analyzing the general psychology of those who have, for various reasons, become infected with the spirit of collecting, it must be accepted that we all, to one degree or another, are enthusiasts of history.

As an archeologist digs through old building rubble, analyzing each bit of block and mortar for its significance in time, he occasionally uncovers an item that provides a quantum leap in his interest and knowledge. It might be a type of tool, an

On his way home he may bring a few bits of limestone from the past with him to sell at the local flea market. Every chip was recovered from miles below the surface. Every bit reflects time as it was millions of years ago. But only the stones with fossils will sell. Even the non-scientist can identify them.

As the Siberians performed monumental feats of digging through layers of ice, eons old, the world yawned...until a frozen mastodon was found. Clearly, others such as this

an identifying gang-stamp, it is nearly as dull to a collector as an amorphous wad of steel. It is like another bit of mortar to the archeologist, like a chip of limestone to the geologist, or another scoop of ice to the Siberian...just part of the job.

The C. Cleaves stamped candlestick is a fabulous instrument. It has a graceful scalloped and spiked thimble. The edges of the hook are beveled and the handle is perfectly formed. Little is known of Mr. Cleaves, but he surely appreciated art. Several other gang-stamped sticks such as the W. H. Launder, the



icon, or a pot... something he has seen before in similar form. It would be made by the same civilization in time, perhaps by the same person, he can *identify* it. This man-made creation gives a new meaning to the dig, and yields many conclusions.

A geologist may bore through endless layers of strata noting the chemical composition of the minerals. Every change is routinely logged as he toils in documenting earth's history. But when he brings up an ancient fossil, things suddenly become very interesting. He has found a visual imprint of life as it was.

one lived in the area. It was a glimpse of life preserved.

The same interest is ignited with the discovery of a gang-stamped candlestick. It is like finding the blacksmith's own footprint. But this imprint is frozen into his steel creation for eternity. It will be found on many of his sticks, as if his feet had tread over wet cement.

Though the plain blacksmith stick was indeed made by some person and is novel in its own right, without

S Mather Butte, and the E. A. Sherwood are occasionally found. *Their* intrigue lies in learning what kind of people *these* blacksmiths were.

(ABOVE) C. CLEAVES CANDLESTICK. *Though all sticks of this maker share similarities, such as the gracefully scalloped thimble and the peculiar thumb lever, many varieties exist.*