

FANCY BISBEE CANDLESTICKS

by **Wendell E. Wilson**
4631 Paseo Tubutama
Tucson, Arizona 85715

The Bisbee area is certainly the most famous and historic of all Arizona mining districts. Steve Eady has given a brief history of the district in an earlier issue (MAC #8, p. 11) and Ted Bobrink has written about touring one of the Bisbee mines (MAC #5, p. 30) and seeing the porcelain mine bell signs still being used.

Bisbee has been a fairly prolific producer of mining collectibles. The most famous is the Justrite "Copper Queen" model of Little Giant 8-hour carbide lamp (see Ted Bobrink's article on this lamp in MAC #8, p. 12). Among candlesticks there is the Varney-style model made by a local mining company blacksmith, some of which are stamped "C.Q.C.M.CO." for Copper Queen Consolidated Mining Company (see Wilson and Bobrink's book, *A Collector's Guide to Antique Miners' Candlesticks*, p. 53). I've even seen open-ended wrenches, for use with drill rigs, that have "Copper Queen" cast into them.

There were four or five private blacksmithing establishments in Bisbee during the first years of this century. It is probable that one of these is the source of several surviving fancy candlesticks which, with the Copper Queen lamp, are the most elegant and desirable of all Bisbee collectibles.

Shown in Figure 1 are two views of an extraordinary pistol-grip candlestick, obviously some kind of presentation piece. The current owner is a retired antiques dealer in Phoenix who obtained it many years ago from members of the O'Brien family in Bisbee. It is inscribed to "N. O'BRIEN" and is dated "MARCH 1905." The initials "L. B." and "T. M." are also present...perhaps the initials of the presenters. The inch markings along the spike were ostensibly for measuring fuse, and the cross-hatched areas for striking matches.

"N. O'Brien" may be connected with "Jack" O'Brien, a "troublesome Irishman" who (according to Lynn Bailey's *Bisbee, Queen of the Copper Camps*) was involved in a barroom altercation in Bisbee in 1881 in which his fellow countryman Peter Hogan was killed. The 1904 and 1914 Bisbee directories list numerous O'Briens (Ed, John, Terry, Thomas, Dennis and William), all of them miners or muckers but none with initial "N." Nevertheless, the presence of O'Brien families in Bisbee is a least definitely established.



Gardner mine, Bisbee, Arizona, ca. 1905
(Arizona Historical Society)

BISBEE CAN

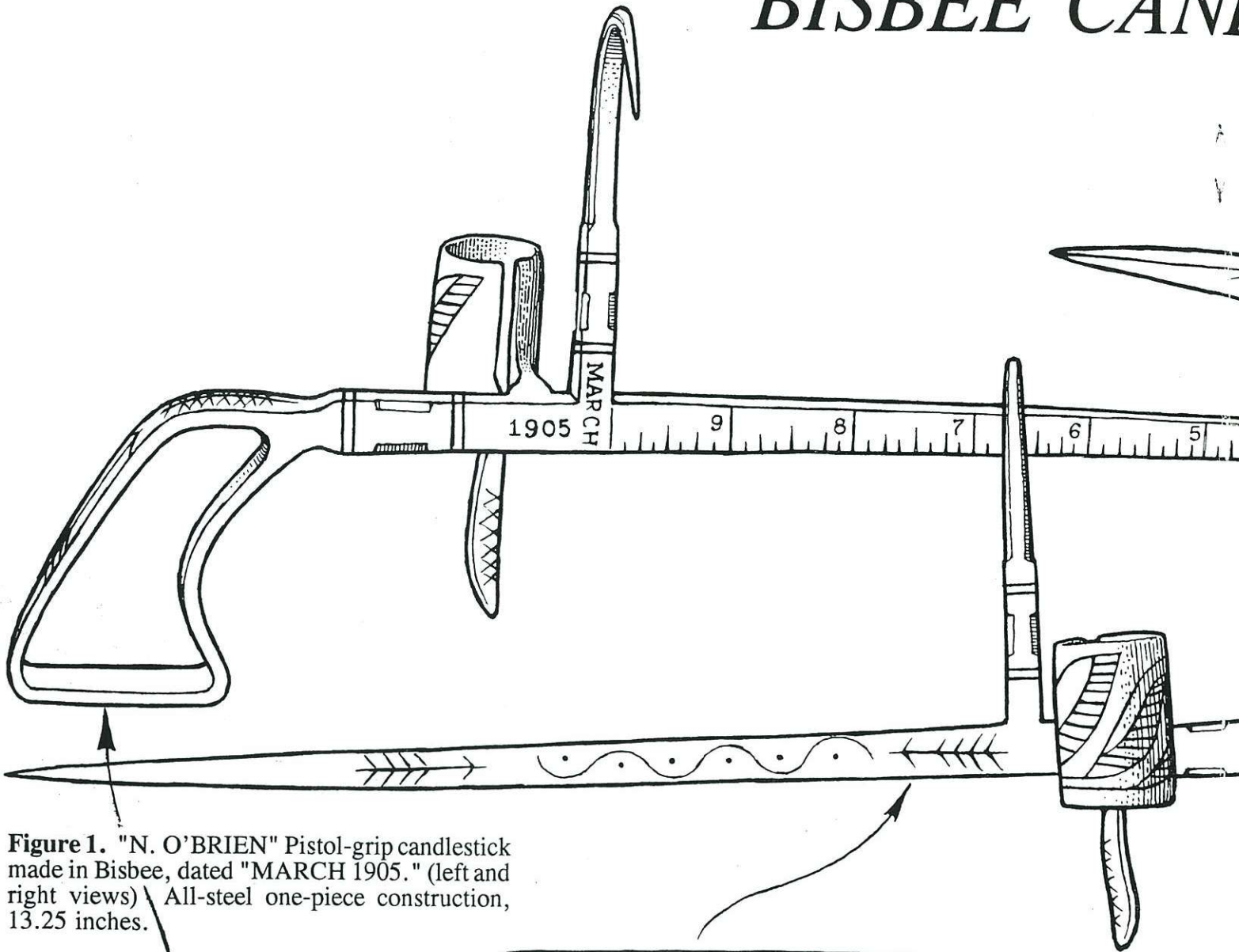


Figure 1. "N. O'BRIEN" Pistol-grip candlestick made in Bisbee, dated "MARCH 1905." (left and right views) All-steel one-piece construction, 13.25 inches.

N. O'BRIEN.

L. B.

T. M.

CANDLESTICKS

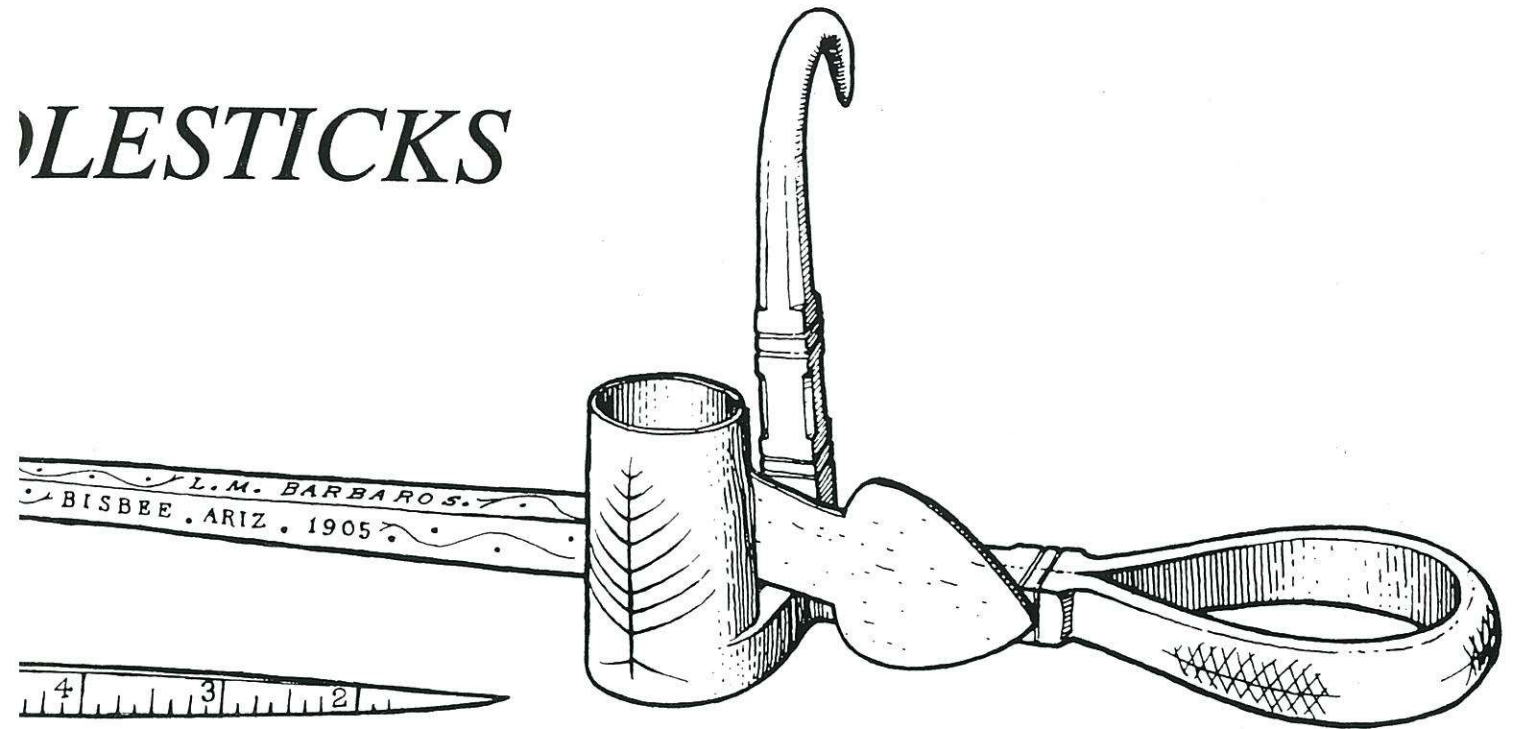


Figure 2. "L. M. Barbaros" candlestick made in Bisbee, dated "1905." All-steel one-piece construction, 11.25 inches. Ted Bobrink collection.

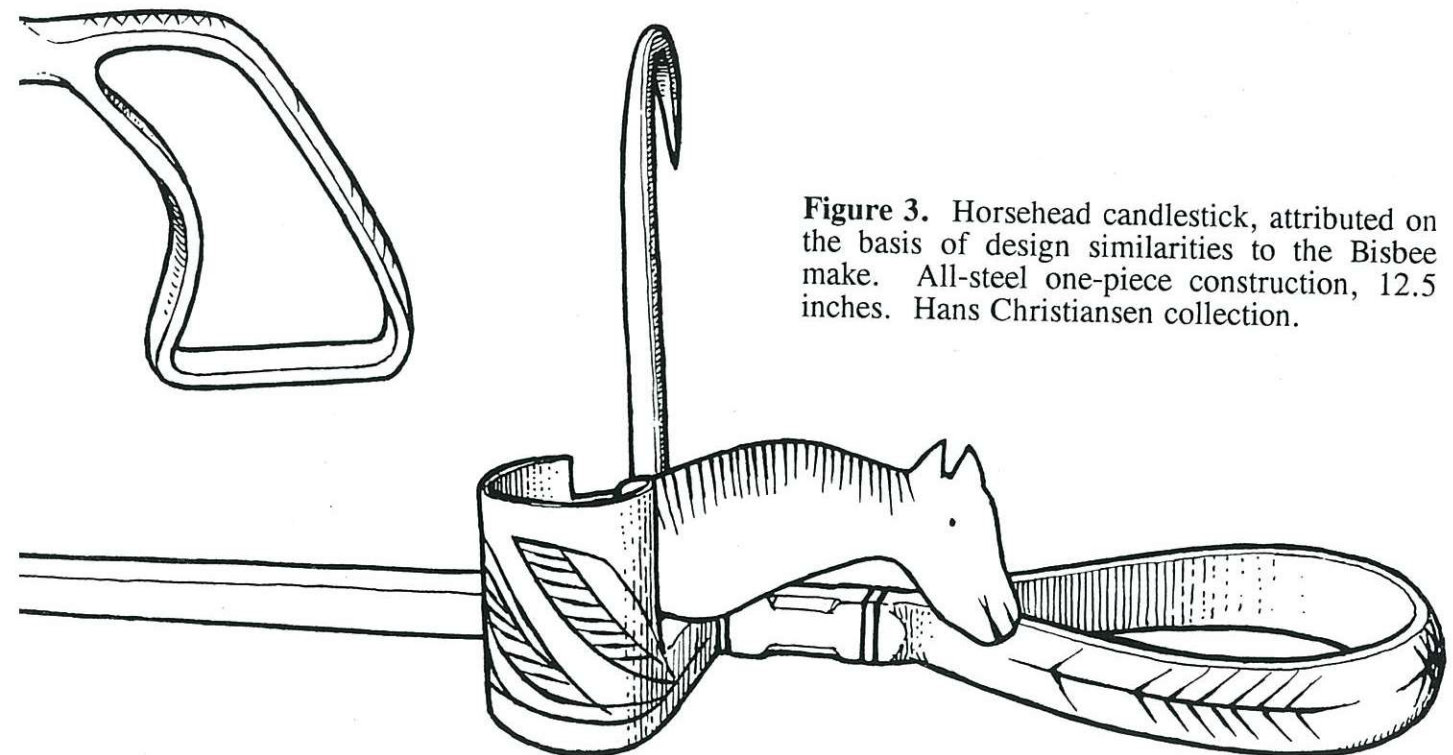


Figure 3. Horsehead candlestick, attributed on the basis of design similarities to the Bisbee make. All-steel one-piece construction, 12.5 inches. Hans Christiansen collection.

This candlestick is clearly by the same hand as two other known examples. Figure 2 shows a candlestick with identical hook embellishments, cross-hatching design on the handle, and wave design with dots on the spike. It is actually marked "Bisbee, Ariz.," is dated in the same year, and carries the name "L. M. Barbaros." Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the initials "L. B." on the O'Brien candlestick match those of L. M. Barbaros. Barbaros may have been the maker of both, or more likely the recipient of the one bearing his full name and the presenter of the one bearing only his initials.

The possibility remains that "T. M." are the initials of a mine instead of a person. Although none of the major Bisbee mines had names beginning with "T," F. L. Ransome's 1904 U.S.G.S. Professional Paper on Bisbee lists several minor claims (the Tunnel, Triangle, Top Gallant, Truro, Twilight, Tip Top, Tack, Tamarack, Tuscarora, Trotter, Transatlantic, Tombstone, Thurdell and Thordenshall mines). Still, that seems like a long shot.

In any case there is known to have been a Peter Barbarus living in Bisbee and working as a miner in 1914 (according to an old city directory). So at least the presence of the family is confirmed.

The candlestick shown in Figure 3, an unusual horse-head model, carries wing-like designs on the thimble, arrow designs on the handle, and cross-hatching which perfectly match corresponding features on the pistol-grip example. And the combination of double grooves separated by edge bevels on the neck matches the design of both the Figure 1 and 2 candlesticks. It is not dated or inscribed, and was not previously known to be a Bisbee stick, but the similarities with the other two make it virtually a certainty.

The design features of the three candlesticks shown here, (especially the bar-bar-bevel-bar-bar filing on the handle neck and the wing pattern on the thimble) should allow other similar candlesticks to be attributed to the Bisbee maker. If any reader notices these features on a candlestick in their own collection, please send us a photo or make arrangements to loan it to us and we'll illustrate it in the MAC.



A group of miners at the Spray shaft, Bisbee, Arizona. Could one of them possibly be either N. O'Brien or L.M. Barbaros? (Arizona Historical Society)