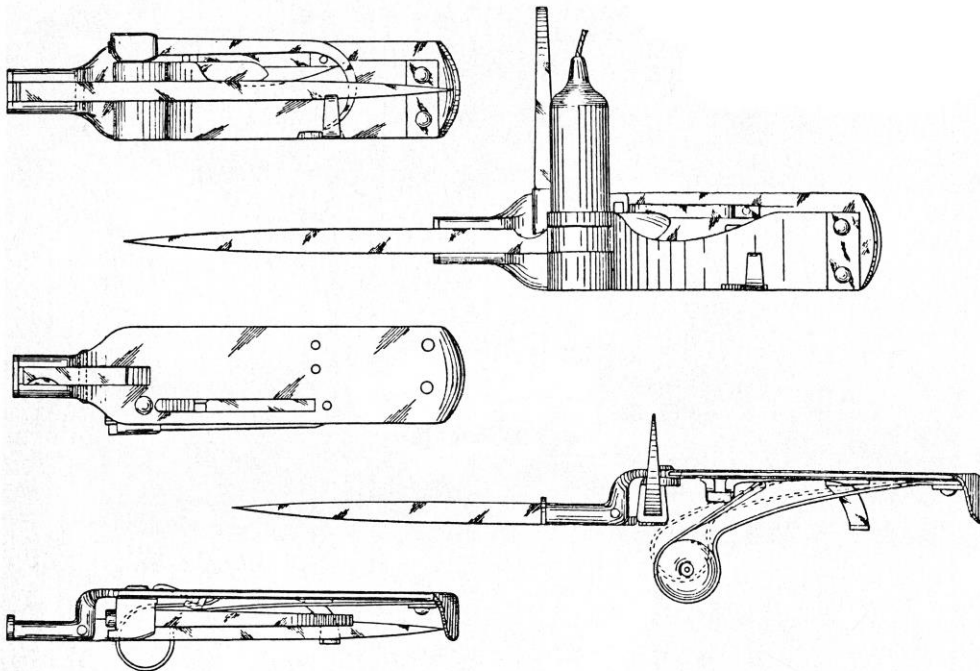


The Varney Folding Candlestick

Wendell Wilson

The simple one-piece VARNEY candlestick, along with its variously named but identical models, is the most common and widely collected of all the brand-name candlesticks. The elegant design was invented by Nathan Eldon Varney (1850-1915) sometime in the late 1800s, and it eventually came to dominate the candlestick market until carbide and electricity made candles obsolete.

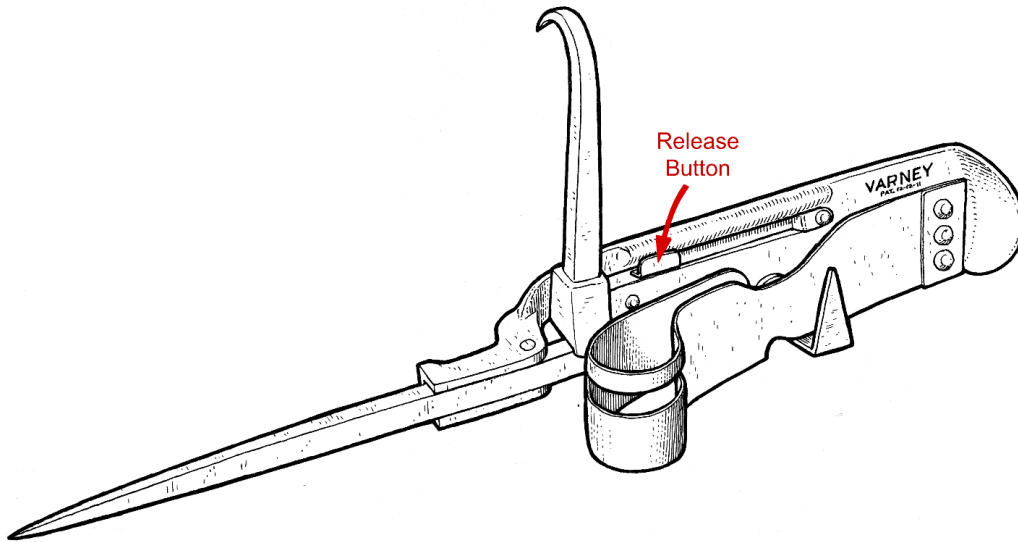
Varney was born in Windham Center, Maine, in 1850 and, at the age of 20 he moved to Creede, Colorado, where he opened one of the first assay offices there. He subsequently spent time in many of the important Colorado mining camps including Cripple Creek and Boulder. After 15 years in the mining communities he moved to Denver in 1885 and established a small manufacturing plant, where he eventually produced thousands of his one-piece candlesticks—and a very limited number of his folding model.



Patent drawings

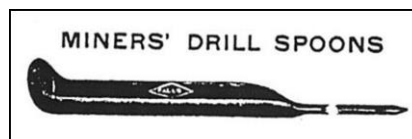
On December 12, 1911, Varney was granted patent no. 1,011,878 (illustrations shown above) for an intricate folding model. The Varney folding candlestick, which he called the “Pocket Stick” (stamped “VARNEY PAT. 12-12-11”) is among the most mechanically novel of all folders. A release button locks the hook in the raised or folded position, and the spike folds into a slot in the

thimble to be secured by a rotating triangular clasp. Oddly enough, the thumb lever is inaccessible, but pulling outward on the thimble has the same effect, loosening its grip on the candle. This sounds simple enough to operate, but the construction was far from simple. The candlestick had to be assembled from eight separate pieces using six solid rivets and three rotating rivets with washers. Upon completion it was then nickel-plated; although the ad says that it is polished steel, the plating on my example is obvious. The price in 1911 was \$1.50.



The components are as follows:

(1) The main body of the handle is a heavy, complexly sculpted shape with a scoop-like end apparently designed to serve as a drill spoon for clearing a drill hole. (See a similar scoop below.)



- (2) The sheet-metal thimble made of spring steel is attached to the handle by ...
- (3) a little cover plate and three rivets.
- (4) The bar-shaped locking lever is attached by a small rivet and is inset into a rectangular slot cut into the handle.
- (5) The triangular rotating clasp is attached with a rotating rivet and washer.
- (6) The tapered spike is attached by a rotating rivet and is cradled in a small trough-shaped part of the handle.
- (7) The round hook base (notched on the end, and apparently crimped somehow to allow it to rotate but not fall out) is inserted through...
- (8) a carefully sculpted rotating block that is affixed to the handle with a rotating rivet and washer.

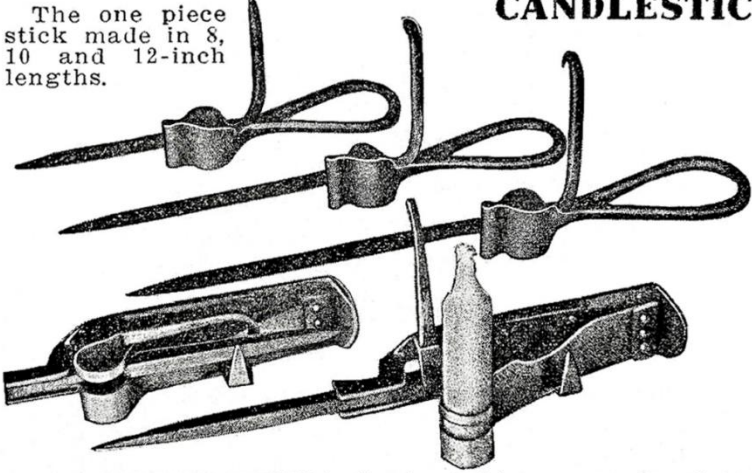
To fold up the 9¾-inch candlestick the locking bar is depressed to release the hook, which is folded down about halfway, freeing the notched lower end so that the hook can be twisted into a

downward-pointing position and then folded the rest of the way down into the handle. This frees up the reciprocating spike, which can be folded over into the slot in the thimble. Pressing it all the way down (against a little spring pressure from the thimble) puts it in a position where the rotating triangular clasp can be turned so as to tightly secure it. Folded it measures 5¾ inches.

The total construction is rather heavy, weighing in at about 7⅛ ounces, as compared to other folders like the Rice patent (1¾ ounces), Aetna Powder Company folder (2¾ ounces), Patenaude “Eureka” patent (3¼ ounces), Eck patent (3¾ ounces), Fielding & Peterson patent (4¾ ounces), and the Kaba & Pelham patent (5¾ ounces).

**THE VARNEY GROUP MINER'S
CANDLESTICKS**

The one piece
stick made in 8,
10 and 12-inch
lengths.



Pocket Sticks mailed for \$1.50
each, if not found with dealer.

MY POCKET STICK is the best thing ever offered in this
line. Open, 10 inches. Weighs 7½ ounces. Steel, polished.
Strong, serviceable.
For descriptive folders and quantity prices address
N. E. VARNEY, 1830 Lawrence St., Denver, Colo.

Because Varney's invention of this folding model came near the end of the candlelight era, when candles were being replaced by carbide lamps, it failed to sell well, and was not stocked by many hardware vendors. It was also rather expensive for the times, a luxury item for any miner. Consequently, examples are rare and sought after today.

A wonderful story was told by the late Tommy Bish in the Spring 1989 issue of the *Mining Artifact Collector*, probably accounting for most (but not all) of the currently known examples:

Some years ago, a friend of mine who lived in Sutter Creek, California, had purchased the entire contents of an old, established mining museum that had closed because the owner had passed away. In removing the literally tons of mining and gold rush relics from the old building, erected in 1852, my friend ventured into the darkness of the ancient basement just to make sure he hadn't missed anything. On a shelf along one aged brick wall he found a waterlogged box containing something like fifteen or so folding miners' candlesticks. All were clearly marked with the Varney name and patent. Would you believe I managed to

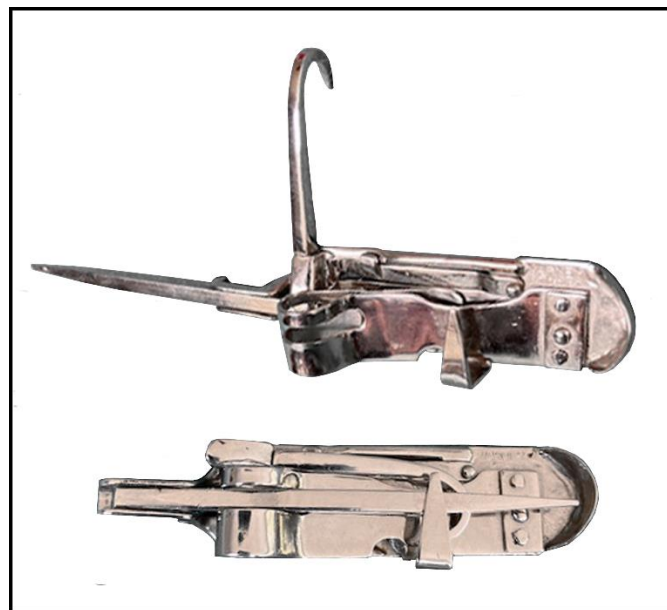
purchase two of these folders at the then outrageous price of five bucks apiece? I had never paid over a dollar or so for the other four folding Varneys I owned. (To pay 25 to 50 cents for ordinary miners' candlesticks back then was considered almost outrageous.)

(Tommy L. Bish was Technical Editor of *Gun World* magazine in the 1960s, a writer for a number of magazines including *True* and *Rifleman*, and a skilled gunsmith, gun collector, and avid mining artifact collector since the late 1930s.)



Original box – Larry Click collection (now missing). Is this one of the Tommy Bish examples?

A few years ago, in an incredible demonstration of master craftsmanship, Roger Peterson created a perfect copy of the Varney folder. This would be difficult enough to do, given the mechanical complexity of the device—but just to make the job *extra* challenging, Roger made it *half-size*, just about 2 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches folded! It's pictured below—Wow!



Roger Peterson's half-size replica