

## VARNEY PATENTED POWDER SPOON

By Leo Stambaugh

Just about anyone collecting mining artifacts knows of Nathan Varneys candlesticks. At least eighteen brand name candlesticks by Varney have come to light, including a very sophisticated folder.

Not many collectors, however, may be familiar with a miners spooning-tool patented by Varney. Assigned patent number 531,347 and dated December 25, 1894, the patent information sheet is quite specific and detailed regarding its use.

Commonly referred to as a drill or powder spoon, this type of mining tool is used to clean rock cuttings from drill holes. Powder spoons found underground typically consist of a simple iron rod about 1/4-inch in diameter with a spoon like shape hammered from one end. Lengths vary from several inches to several feet. During the process of driving a drill hole, the spoon was inserted into the hole frequently to keep the hand steel against a hard surface instead of being cushioned by the powdered rock.

As shown in the patent illustration, the Varney Spooning-Tool is a bit more complicated than other powder spoons. The specifics of its use were two-fold; one— flexibility of the

handle could accommodate crooked drill holes and two— the helical shape of the handle enabled its use with a screw like motion to remove cuttings.

The patent information claims that no model was provided with the drawing. This may indicate these unique mining tools were never produced, though it shows itself well as one more mining artifact to keep an eye out for.

