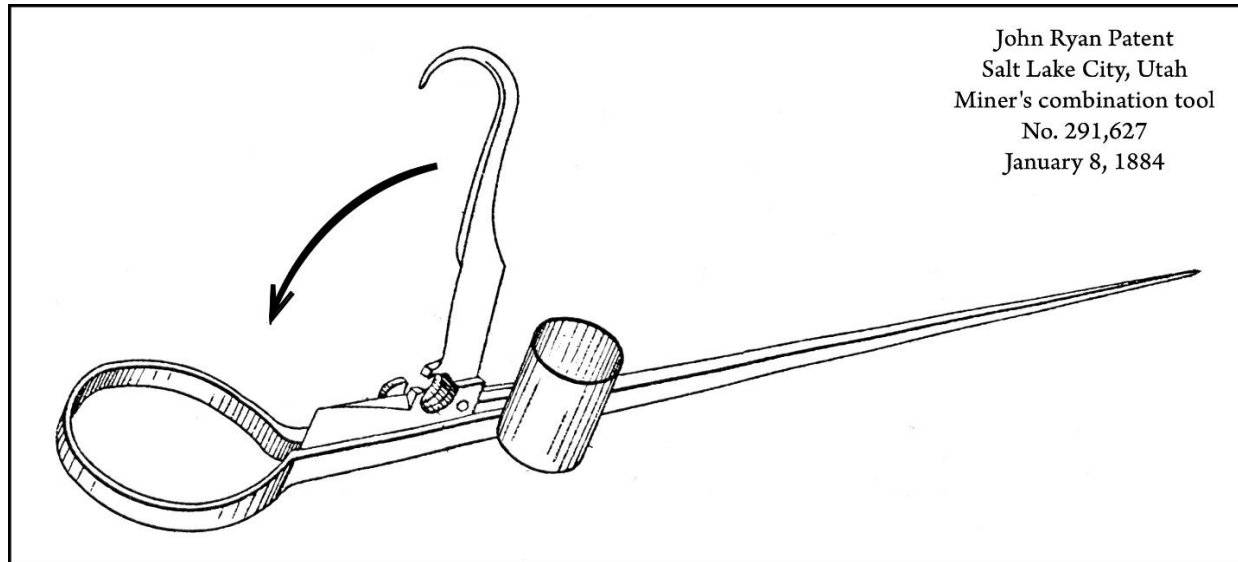


John Ryan Candlestick Patent 1884

by Wendell Wilson



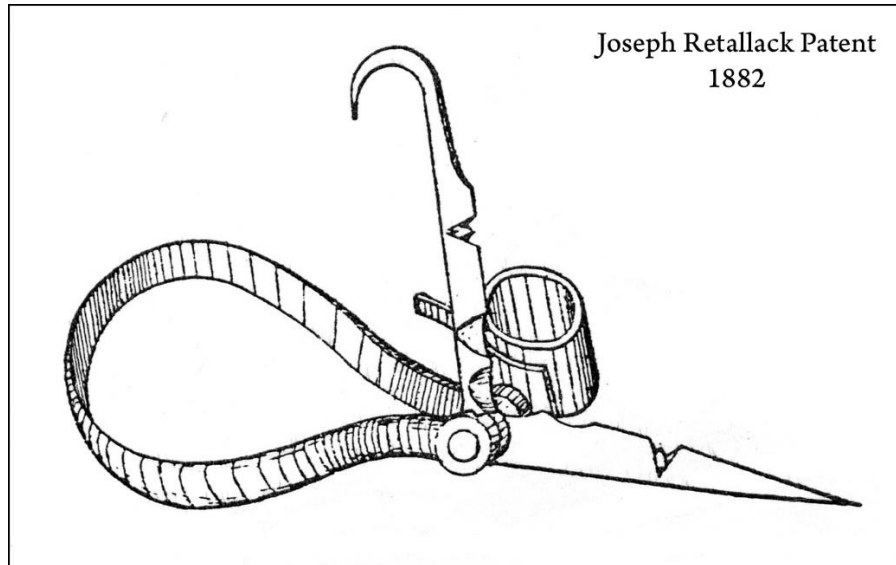
John Ryan Patent Drawing, 1884

John Ryan of Salt Lake City, Utah, received patent number 291,627 on January 8, 1884, for what he called a “Miner’s Combination Tool.” Actually, it’s just a folding hook design with a scissors-type fuse cutter and a circular notch for cap crimping. It is certainly a good idea, but the thimble lacks a thumb lever or even a slit that could help it grip a candle. Without a tightening mechanism of some kind, the candle would just fall out. This serious oversight suggests that John Ryan was not a member of the mining or mine blacksmithing community; if he was, he would have known better. Consequently, the search to positively identify him in the old records is much more difficult. More on that shortly.

DESIGN HISTORY

C. Cleaves

Precedents for John Ryan’s design *might* include some of the candlesticks made by Charles Cleaves in Weaverville, California. Cleaves came up with a couple of similar ideas around the same time but apparently made no attempt to patent them, so his dates are not precisely known. But he had established himself as a blacksmith in 1880 and had settled in Weaverville sometime between 1880 and 1886. In one of his models the hook serves as a cap crimper, and in another the bottom end of the hook protrudes on the underside of the stick and has a sharp blade for chopping off a fuse, so the folding hook functions as both a fuse cutter and crimper, though not both on the same side like the Ryan design.

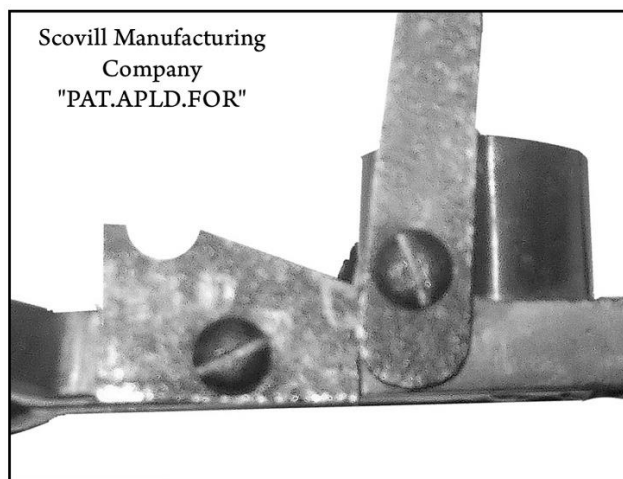
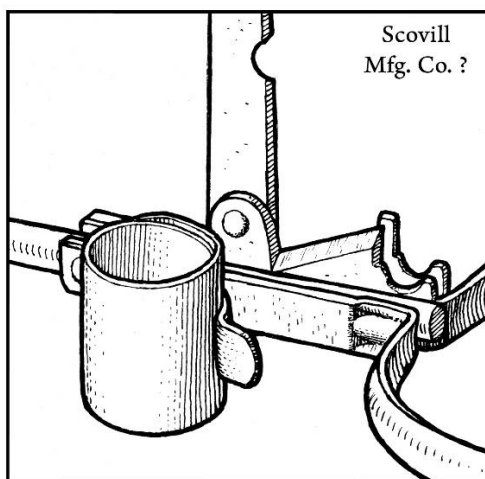


Retallack Patent

Only the Joseph Retallack patent of 1882 appears to definitely predate John Ryan's patent in using the folding hook as both a fuse cutter and crimper. (The John C. Martin patent of 1883 had a hook crimper but a separate jack-knife blade for fuse-cutting).

Scovill Candlesticks

The two Scovill Manufacturing Company candlesticks (Figures 468 and 429 in *Antique Miner's Candlesticks*) have a very similar raised and angled cutting blade and crimper slot—we might even call it “distinctive”—but they are undated. Possibly they copied Ryan's patented design some years later; one says “PAT.APLD.FOR,” and we may speculate that the patent was denied for that reason.



Other (later) Patents

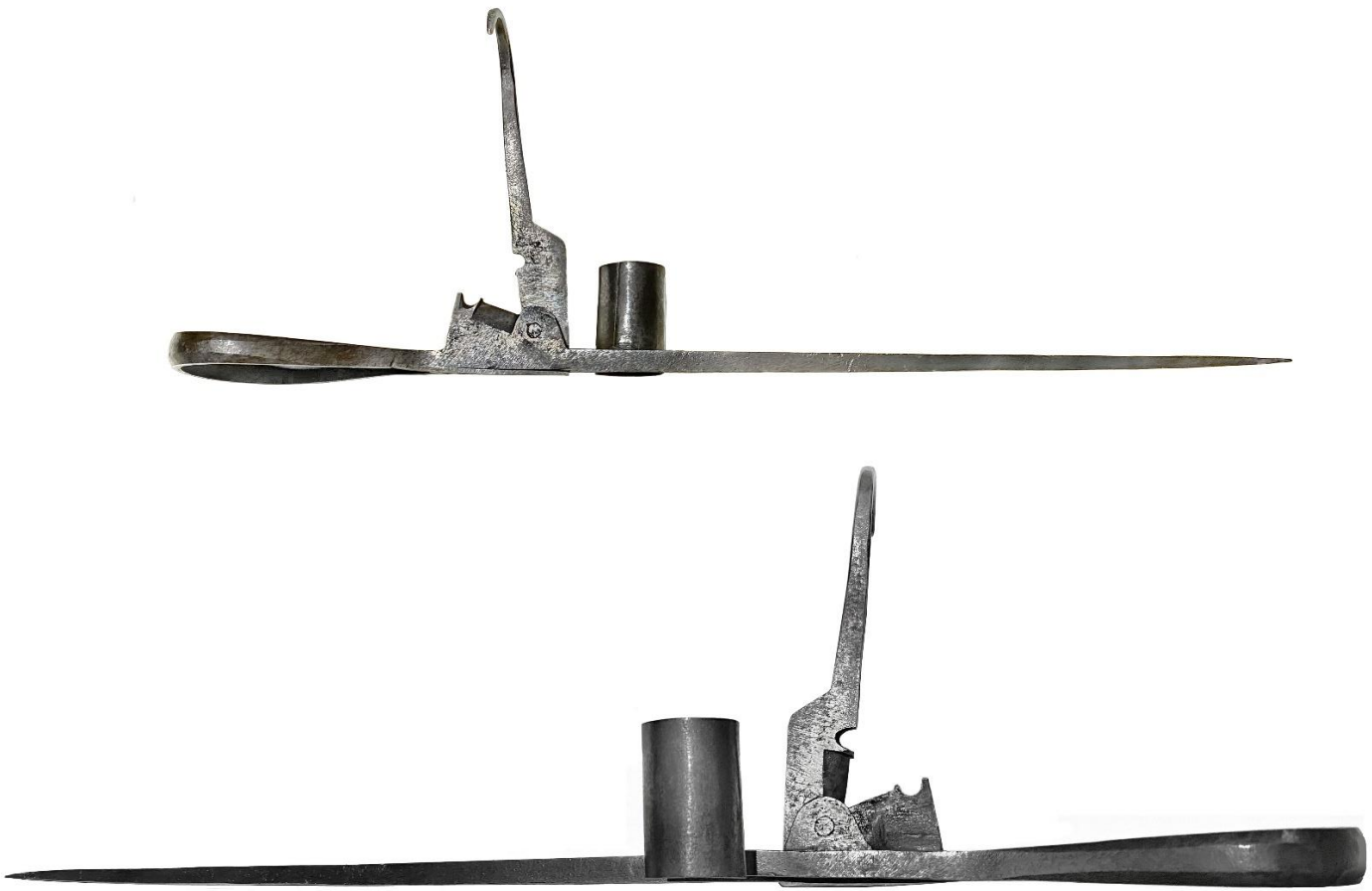
Other inventors subsequently patented miners' candlesticks with built-in fuse cutters and crimpers, including Gustavus Peterson (1889), Henry Mixter (1889), Andrew Carter (1895), Adolph Sjöholm (1896), John D. Campbell (1897), James Bray (1897), Charles McCready (1897),

Antoine Nissen (1898), Frederick Herbst (1900), Alfred and Joseph Howard (1900), Charles Cornell and Felix Troughton (1901), Antonio Viera (1910, 1912) and Frank Pleban (1913), among others. Still other blacksmiths built crimpers and cutters into their sticks, but did not try to patent them, and consequently left no reliable dating of their work.

Al Winters Candlestick

Up to now, there have been no known examples of the John Ryan patent. However, Al Winters has a candlestick that, although unmarked, might very well be an original John Ryan patent candlestick, but with some modifications and improvements. It is all steel, 13 inches long, and has the characteristic guillotine-style, raised and angled blade as well as the shoulder on the hook.

Minor deviations from the Ryan patent include: (1) The crimper slot is positioned at the top of the angled blade (as in the Scovill examples), rather than at the bottom end of the blade as shown in the patent drawing. (2) It has a bar-spring to keep the hook tight in either the raised or lowered position. (3) The blade is an integral part of the handle/spike (which makes most sense from a fabrication standpoint), whereas in the patent drawing the blade is a separate piece of steel hinged to the hook and brazed in between the two sides of the handle. Oddly enough, the Ryan patent drawing clearly shows a cylindrical thimble with no apparent means of tightening it around the candle. Al Winters' candlestick *looks* identical in that respect but does have a slit which will spread.



Al Winters' candlestick

JOHN RYAN

But what of John Ryan himself? As mentioned above, the design suggests he never used a miner's candlestick himself, or made them for miners. Furthermore, the issuance of the patent was greeted with total silence by the mining community. There was no published review in the professional journals such as the *Mining and Scientific Press* or the *Engineering and Mining Journal*, nor was there even any attempt to advertise examples for sale.

At the time that my book *Antique Miners' Candlesticks* was published in 2021, I had been unable to learn anything definite about John Ryan. But upon further study, by process of elimination, there now seems to be only one candidate. On the 1880 census for Salt Lake City, there is only one person named John Ryan who was born before 1870: this John Ryan, age 28, was said to have been born in Michigan of Irish parents around 1852, and was listed as a "laborer," living with his wife Emma and three young children (Thomas, Mary, Kathran) in the Ninth Ward of the city.

The 1890 census was unfortunately destroyed by fire in 1921, so the next step was to check the 1900 census—taken sixteen years after the patent was granted. There again is John Ryan in Salt Lake City, the same person as on the 1880 census, still married to Emma L. and with six more children (all born after 1880: Hartly, Ida, Jessie, Bertha, Ruby and Monitor), and now working as a "[coal] deliveryman." So, it is established that there was only one John Ryan living continuously in Salt Lake City from 1880 to 1900, making him our only known prospect.

John Ryan continued to live there for many years, in 1910 working as the driver for a brewery, retiring by 1920, and dying there on March 25, 1934 at the age of 88. His obituary mentions that his son, Thomas Adam Ryan (1876-1942), was living in the mining town of Park City, Utah, at the time—perhaps he is the connection to mining. This, of course, does not rule out the highly unlikely possibility that some other John Ryan may have arrive in the state in 1884 and stayed just long enough to file his patent application before leaving, but Occam's Razor says that John Ryan of the Ninth Ward is our man.

John Ryan's descendant, Ralph Knight Ryan, filled out the particulars of his life, as recounted at familysearch.org ("George T Hirons AKA John Ryan Story"), and noted the difficulties in tracking his name. He was born George John (or John George) Hirons in Amherstburg, Ontario, on November 12, 1845, the son of Mary Ann Pollock and Thomas Hirons (1822-1891). He was christened at Christ Church, the Anglican Parish there, so, despite living much of his life in Salt Lake City, he was not from a Mormon family. He and his family moved from Ontario to Detroit by 1862, and shortly thereafter John served as an infantry drummer during the Civil War. He was discharged in 1870, but he liked military life, so he enlisted for another five years.

For a time, John Hirons was stationed at Fort Douglas, Utah, where he met and married Emma Linda Rich (1854-1932) in 1874, inexplicably *changing his surname* from Hirons to the somewhat similar-sounding Ryan. Together, John and Emma had at least eleven children. Records show that John and Emma returned to Michigan for his mother's funeral in 1887, and several more times to visit family, in 1896, 1897 and 1901. On U.S. census records he always claimed to have been born in Michigan rather than Canada.

NOTE: In 1900 there was also a John H. Ryan living in Salt Lake City (born 1860 in Iowa, father born in Ireland, wife Mary, working as a bookkeeper), but that was 16 years after the patent was granted, and he was not the same person as the John Ryan known to have been living in Salt Lake City in 1884-1885 when the patent was granted.



John and Emma Ryan

Taking a different tack, I checked the *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City's principal newspaper at the time) for the years 1884-1885. There was a "transient vagabond" by the name of John Ryan, involved in a bloody street fight and subsequent court appearances, and there was also a John Ryan of the ninth ward who was indignantly demanding that people stop confusing him with the indigent John Ryan. There was also a John Ryan mentioned as being on the Salt Lake baseball team, probably the John Ryan of the ninth ward, since there seems to have been no other except for the transient vagabond (who was habitually drunk); he was also involved in some construction on the Mormon temple in 1885. And that is all, except to add that his young son was stepped on by a mare that had gotten loose and was seriously injured.

So, the best evidence indicates that John George Hirons/Ryan of the Ninth Ward is by far the most likely person to be the patentee of the John Ryan candlestick.