Lilian Evans Korea Candlestick

By Wendell E. Wilson

Don Schoenly recently acquired a miner's candlestick of the Korean type, that is, steel with silver wire inlays hammered in. Typically, these candlesticks were made as presentations to welcome newly arriving American mining engineers and supervisors at the Oriental Consolidated Mining Company (known as the Unsan Mines) in Korea. At least 28 such candlesticks are known, nearly all of which carry names or Korean characters and/or dates in silver.—See *Antique Miners' Candlesticks* (Wilson, 2021). The company had a 400-square-mile mining concession located about 25 miles north-northeast of Anju in what is today North Korea.

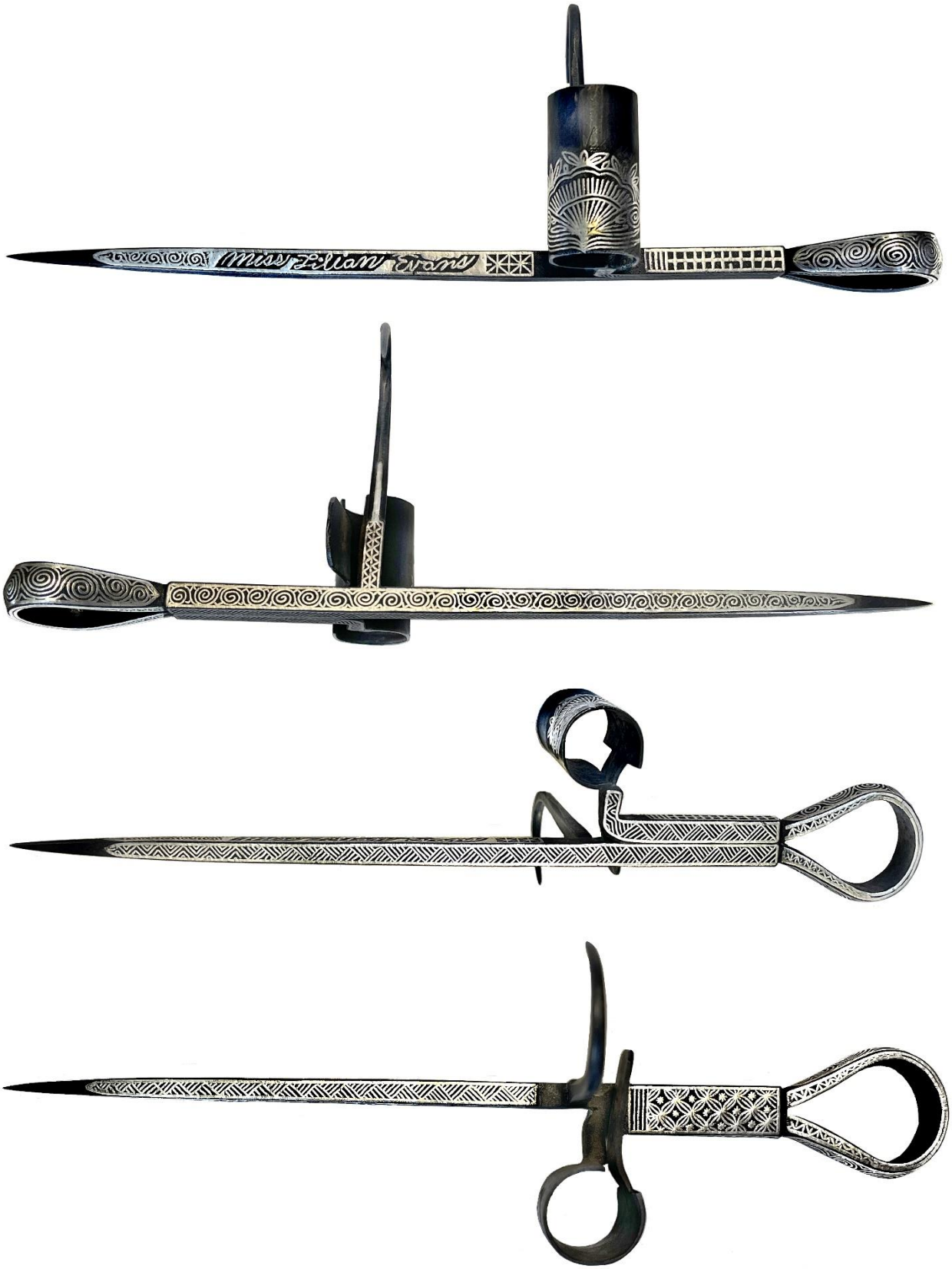
Don's new stick is unique in that it carries the name of the *spouse* (or rather fiancé) of a mine foreman: "Miss Lilian Evans." Like nearly all Korea candlesticks, it has the thumb lever in the wrong position, so that pressing it with your thumb *tightens* the thimble instead of loosening it. Most of the stick, except the top part of the thimble, is covered with the usual Korean designs.

The "Miss Lilian Evans" Korea candlestick.

The first reference I found to Miss Evans appeared in *The New York Times* for July 1, 1915; it announced:

> The Marriage of Clair Byrum Woodford, a son of the late James H. Woodford of Hudson, Indiana, and Miss Lilian May Evans, a daughter of the late William S. Evans of London, England, took place at 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon, in the chapel of St. Thomas's Church, Fifth Avenue and Fifty-third Street. …in the Autumn [they] will go to Korea to live, as Mr. Woodford has been in the mining business there for the last twelve years. Mrs. Woodford met Mr. Woodford first in England, and has been living in New York for some time.

It is clear from this that Clair B. Woodford (1876-1929) had been working in Korea at least since 1903 (and *his* own Korea candlestick probably still exists somewhere, though it has yet to be found). But why does Lilian's candlestick bear her *maiden* name of Evans? It must have been given (or sent) to her as a gift before their marriage and therefore prior to her arrival in Korea, so it probably dates to the time of their engagement in 1914 or 1915.



The "Miss Lilian Evans" Korea candlestick, 9.6 inches long.

Lilian had been born in London on August 19, 1886. Considerably more detail about Lilian (later Lillian), her husband Clair, and their life in Korea is given in an article entitled "Clair B. Woodford, Whitley County Miner in 19th century Korea," (actually it was the early 20th century) published by Robert Neff in the *Korea Times* on February 13-14, 2021:

> On January 17, 1901, a group of young men from Whitley County, Indiana began one of the greatest adventures of their lives — a three-year-contract as supervisors at the gold mines in northern Korea owned by Oriental Consolidated Mining Company (OCMC). [NOTE: There is no indication that any of these men had credentials as mining engineers.] One of these men was Clair Byrum Woodford, a handsome youth with blue eyes and brown hair.
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> Woodford was only 24 years old (he turned 25 while enroute), but unlike his peers he was experienced. He had served in the Spanish American War (but never left the United States or saw combat) and was a carpenter by trade. His cousin, Thomas R. Marshall — a successful lawyer and friend of the OCMC's, probably facilitated his selection to the group of young men.
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> For many of these men, getting to Korea was the hardest part of their adventure. They traveled by train to San Francisco without any problems, but three days after they boarded the steamship, they encountered a "regular typhoon" that left most of them violently seasick. On the next leg of their journey — Japan to Korea — aboard a small coastal steamer, an oil lamp broke and set fire to the cabin. According to Homer Hulbert, the editor for the *Korea Review* (a monthly published in Seoul at the time), it was "the prompt application of the *biceps Americanus*" that prevented the ship from being lost at sea.

Clair B. Woodford, 1917 passport photo.

When they finally arrived at Jemulpo (modern Incheon) they were then forced to walk — in the dead of winter — to the mining camps north of Pyongyang. Many of the men suffered from the cold and exhaustion and several quit before the year was up but not Woodford; he seemed to relish the work, and once his contract was completed, he signed another one and then another one.

Life at the mines was exciting but dangerous. There were frequent accidents that often claimed limbs and lives; tigers and wolves prowled the mountains, and occasionally claimed the lives of unwary miners or their family members; bandits — especially Chinese — often raided the regions surrounding the mines; and there was the occasional war. As we have seen, and if we are to believe the miners' accounts, these dangers paled in comparison to the sea journeys to and from Korea.

Every couple of years or so, Woodford returned to the United States to visit family and friends. In 1905 he complained that while aboard the steamship he was "sometimes thrown from his bunk and his trunk would tumble from one side of his room to the other. It was necessary at times to fasten the dishes to the table or to place a railing around the table to keep the dishes and the victuals from falling to the floor."

Life at the mines was also very lonely. Many of the miners were avid letter writers — even if their letters were only filled with complaints of nothing to write about — and Woodford seems to have been no exception. For his 34th birthday, he received a "postcard shower" of 40 birthday cards in one mail shipment. He declared it to be "the most refreshing shower he had experienced for many a long day."

He also reciprocated with his own presents which he hand-carried or mailed back home including: "a number of curios and relics of an ancient civilization consisting of knives of various kinds, from small ones to large saber-like swords, and Chinese razors, metal gods and images, silver opium pipes, strings of money, a bride's ornaments, candle sticks [?!], wooden chains, an iron police 'billy' club, silver and brass utensils and ornaments, a finely mounted leopard skin containing the head and claws, a magnificent black bear robe, silk work of the Chinese and Japanese, hunting bows, and a vast variety of other articles…"

There was another person he frequently corresponded with — an English woman named Lillian May Evans, whom he had met in England when he traveled to the United States via Europe in 1911. It was a memorable trip and he was quite smitten with her. We can imagine that he spoke of her quite fondly to his cousin, Thomas R. Marshall — who was now governor of Indiana and would become Vice President of the United States in 1913.

For nearly four years, Woodford and Lillian maintained their long-distance relationship but in late 1914 or early 1915 he proposed to her and she agreed to marry him. On June 30, 1915, Woodford (who will now be referred to as Clair) married Lillian in Manhattan, New York and then traveled to Indiana on their honeymoon where they remained for a couple of weeks before they sailed for Korea.

Lillian got the full treatment of the sea voyage. According to a letter from the happy couple, “they had a very rough voyage of about three weeks and did their share in feeding the fish.” Fortunately, they arrived safely and were soon “comfortably situated in their new home [at the mines] with a Chinese cook.”

The reference to the Chinese cook probably appealed to many of their friends in Indiana, but life at the mines was not that comfortable. Some miners' wives complained about having to sweep snakes out of the attics and floors in the morning. Living near the [stamp] mills was deafening as the machinery could be heard from miles away. Disease was rampant (including Spanish Influenza) and the mortality rate of children was quite high — despite the OCMC having some of the best medical facilities on the peninsula.

On April 17, 1917, the Woodfords had their first daughter, Rae, and almost exactly three years later (April 22, 1920) they had their second daughter, Elizabeth. It seemed like the family was happy. They lived in a fairly nice house, Clair made more than $200 a month — quite a princely sum; and the small rough-mining-town-atmosphere had transformed into a thriving American small-town community — complete with clubs, library, school, movies, tennis courts, electricity, running water and phones.

But life in the gold mining camps could be extremely difficult — especially for families. It was an isolated region with little interaction with the outside world, leaving the mining community no other option but to entertain itself.

The Oriental Consolidated Mining Company's club house in the early 1920s.

As in any small community, there was an over-familiarity with one another that was perpetuated by busybodies and their petty — but sometimes lascivious — gossip, biases and jealousies. There were arguments, fist fights, cheating, broken marriages, suicides

and even murders at the mines — likely caused by the boredom and depression of living in such a closed community.

The Woodfords were no different. They say that every story has at least two sides, but, unfortunately, this tale doesn't even really have one, as we are forced to try and piece it together from stray bits of information in newspapers, documents and correspondences from other families. We know that sometime in late 1925 or very early 1926, Lillian left Korea and returned to the United States — possibly New York — abandoning her husband and their two daughters.

On April 5, 1926, Clair and the two girls arrived in San Francisco and returned to Indiana where the girls were able to celebrate their birthdays with their relatives, but we can assume that it was not a very joyous occasion, as there was one person still missing — their mother. On May 15, Clair filed for divorce, stating that he believed his wife was residing in New York City but apparently did not elaborate on why she had left him. Throughout the summer, Clair and the girls remained in Indiana awaiting the court's decision, which was announced in October — it wasn't good.

The court granted Clair a divorce from Lillian, stipulating that he would pay the court fees. Furthermore, it granted custody of Rae (9 years old [she died 1972]) and Elizabeth (6 years old [she died 1989]) to Lillian with the stipulation that he could "visit them at reasonable times." He was probably devastated but there was little he could do so he returned to Korea and working for the OCMC.

Lilian Evans Woodford with her daughters in 1920.

It is frustrating not to know more about the events surrounding Clair's divorce, especially when we have this gem of gossip from a letter sent home by one of his fellow miners (also from Indiana) at the OCMC's Tabowie mining camp:

> "Everyone has plenty of Korean servants to bring them the latest camp gossip — from petty affairs to real scandal, which sometimes happens. One event took place while I was in camp and my servant told me in the morning that a certain one of the men in camp and a school teacher had been given four hours and a half to get out of camp and head for the railroad, fifty-five miles away."

Who was the unnamed miner and who was the school teacher?

For the next couple of years, we know very little of Clair's activities save that he was steadily growing sicker and sicker with tuberculosis. Working and living in close quarters, this disease took a heavy toll upon the Korean miners as well as the Western foremen and their families. By the summer of 1928 it was clear that he was losing the battle with the disease. In late October, he informed his friends in Indiana that he had "somewhat improved" and would shortly sail for the United States. He arrived in California — presumably very weak — where he spent his final months until his death in San Fernando on February 5, 1929, just short of his 53rd birthday.

However, the story does not end here. Prior to his death, Clair made a will in which he bequeathed his $3,000 estate to his daughters. He further declared his ex-wife to be "unfit to act as guardian for the children" and asked that Lois Irene Marshall be granted custody. Lois's deceased husband was Thomas R. Marshall — the 28th Vice President of the United States (1913-1921) and Clair's cousin. It was partially through Marshall's assistance that Clair first went to work for the OCMC in Korea — in fact, most of the early miners from Indiana had some connection to Marshall.

The Marshalls had been unable to have children of their own and in 1917 unofficially adopted Clarence Ignatius Morrison, a sick baby boy (a twin), and — according to Wikipedia — referred to him as Morrison Marshall but nicknamed him Izzy. A contemporary newspaper, however, claims he was [re]named Thomas Marshall Jr., and was often called Tommy. Regardless of the name, the boy died before his fourth birthday, and, four years later, Thomas Marshall died leaving Lois a lonely widow.

When Lois learned of Clair's arrival, she left her home in Arizona to stay with him in California and tend to his needs. It was probably about this time that the two girls were brought from New York to be with their father in his final hours. One newspaper account claims that Clair had been granted custody of the children, and that after he died they were turned over to Lois. But shortly after his death, Lillian contested the will, declaring that regardless of any clause in Clare's will, "she was the natural guardian." Superior Judge

Ruben Schmidt agreed and allowed Lillian to retain custody. According to one newspaper article:

> "Mrs. Marshall showed her disappointment at the judge's decision, but smiled at Mrs. [Lillian] Woodford. The latter, who has been employed in New York since the divorce, said she would obtain employment here [in Los Angeles] immediately."

Apparently, Lillian found employment as a nurse in Los Angeles [where she died on November 23, 1941]. Lois Marshall returned to Phoenix, Arizona. It is unclear if the women ever spoke to one another again.