

An Early Gabriel Werntz Candlestick

Wendell Wilson

Gabriel Werntz (1832-1913) was a Pennsylvania-born blacksmith who settled in Grizzly Flat near Placerville, California, in 1867. On Christmas day in 1888 he was granted patent no. 395,097 for a unique miner's candlestick design. It could be disassembled (the hook, thimble and spike came apart) and then reassembled for pocket carrying in such a way that the spike point and hook point were protected. The spike could be reversed so that the point was protected inside the handle, and the hook could be laid down and locked with the point protected inside the thimble. (The reason for the thimble being detachable is a mystery, since it remains in the same position in both the open and closed configurations.) A snuffer attachment was also available; it carried the patent date and could be tightly stowed as well.



Type D Werntz candlestick, assembled

Werntz candlesticks came in at least three main variations as described by Al Winters in his 2004 article, “Development of Werntz candlesticks,” in *Eureka* magazine. These are designated A, B and C in my 2021 book, *Antique Miners’ Candlesticks* and in my more detailed 2024 article “The Gabriel Werntz candlesticks” posted in *Eureka* magazine. I recently acquired from Steve Rush what appears to be a fourth variation (let’s call it type D). Steve had gotten it from Leo Stambaugh, who had obtained it from the collection of the late Roger Peterson.

Type D varies from the others I have seen in having a permanently affixed (rather than removable) thimble, but according to the *Mining and Scientific Press* (March 2, 1889), that was an option: “This socket may either be secured permanently on the side, or may be provided with lugs” for attaching it. Unlike all others, the thimble has a sawtooth edge around the top which would have precluded the use of a candle snuffer attachment—perhaps not yet invented by Werntz. Other than that, the design almost exactly matches the other known type A and B versions. It is even

possible to lock down the detached hook against a small and inconspicuous raised nub, exactly as on the other styles, though it is not at all obvious how to do this unless one already knows how the others work. The hook point does not lock through a hole in the thimble (as in Types A, B and C) but rather into the vertical gap against the base of the thumb lever.



Type D Werntz candlestick, disassembled

The Type D candlestick illustrated here is well-crafted, though not quite as highly polished as a Type B example that I also have. The lack of a thimble compatible with the use of a snuffer suggests to me that it is a pre-patent example (i.e. pre-1888), an early stage in the development of Werntz's invention.



Type D in stowed configuration



Type B stowed configuration