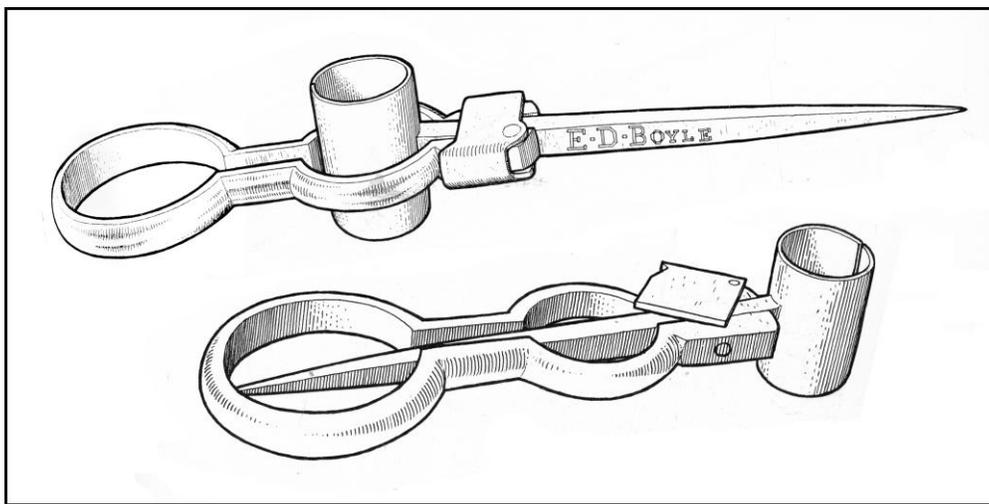


The Boyle Candlesticks

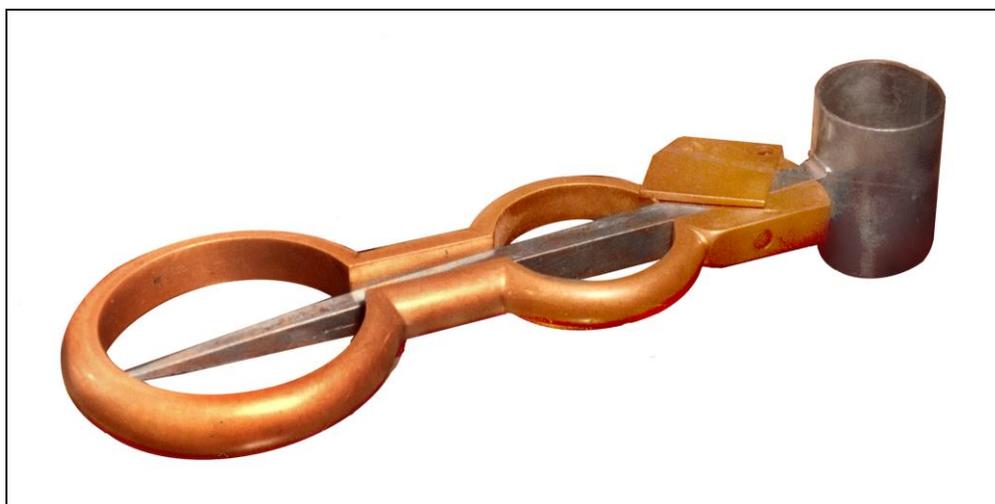
Wendell Wilson
minrecord@comcast.net
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One of my favorite miner's candlestick designs is referred to by collectors as the "Boyle" or "Comstock" candlestick. For artistic elegance as well as virtuoso craftsmanship it is hard to beat. The handle (which is brass on some and steel on others) is formed in the shape of two connected circles, and the reciprocating spike/thimble is held in place, open or closed, by a brass or steel clasp. Two of them are illustrated as drawings in my 1984 book on miner's candlesticks:



The "Boyle" name comes from the pristine, polished, steel-handled example shown above (and in the photo below) that is preserved in the McKay School of Mines collection, engraved "E. D. Boyle" (Emmett Derby Boyle, 1880-1926, Governor of Nevada from 1915 to 1923). It was given to him in 1899, the year of his graduation from the University of Nevada mining school, by the blacksmith at the Alta mine on the Comstock Lode in Virginia City, of which his father Edward M. Boyle was superintendent. Emmett Boyle's family donated it to the McKay School of Mines on June 1, 1926, following Emmett's death. Unfortunately the blacksmith's name is lost to history, so I prefer to name his creations after the only original recipient known by name.





At the time I published my candlestick book, only the two illustrated examples of the Boyle candlestick were known to me. The second one (shown above), was originally owned by Thomas Francis McCormick Sr. (1860-1929), superintendent of the C & C mine, the Consolidated Virginia mine and the Ophir mine in Virginia City, Nevada. It is in mint condition, has a steel spike-thimble and a brass handle and clasp. McCormick had a career spanning 51 years on the Comstock, and rose to one of the highest positions in Virginia City mining. He “was one of the last of the executives of the boom period on the Comstock” (obituary, *Reno Gazette-Journal*, July 25, 1929).

The McCormick stick was inherited by his son-in-law, William H. Marks and then his grandson, William Leslie Marks (1918-1994). In the 1980s it was on display in the historic Crystal Bar in Virginia City, which Marks owned and which had been in the family since 1916. Today the Crystal Bar is still there but has been taken over by the Virginia City Visitors Center. I recently spoke to the woman there and she was unaware of any such artifact, so it was probably reclaimed by the Marks family after William’s death in 1994.

In the late 1990s, Roger Peterson turned up evidence of a few more. He had been in New Hampshire on a business trip, and during his off hours paid a visit to a local antique mall in Keene. Lo and behold, there in a showcase in one of the unmanned booths resided a brass-handled Boyle candlestick (in a very dirty, corroded and frozen state). He was unable to speak to the owner, but he purchased it from the caretaker and subsequently had it authenticated at the MacKay School of Mines.

When business again took Roger to New Hampshire he went back to the same antique mall intent on making contact with the owner in order to find out more about the history of this important relic. Revisiting the same booth at the mall, he was shocked to find *another* brass Boyle stick in the showcase! It was in the same poor condition and frozen up but obviously old and authentic (and almost four times the price of the first find!). Of course Roger purchased that one, too. This time the caretaker was able to put him in touch with the owner, an antiques dealer from Antrim, New Hampshire.

The antiques dealer's story (Roger didn't make a note of his name) was as follows: After the close of WWII he had been discharged from the military at Long Beach, California, and started wandering back toward New Hampshire. But when he arrived in Big Bear Lake, California he liked it so much that he stayed there for many years, running an antiques shop. Sometime during that stay in Big Bear Lake he bought a collection of mining items (mostly carbide lamps) from someone (unnamed) in Arizona. Included were five miners' candlesticks, which, as he recalled, were all of the Boyle style: three of them brass-handled and two steel-handled. These he had carried with him back home to New Hampshire. Unfortunately, by the time Roger finally got to him the dealer had already parted with the other three, and would not reveal the buyer's name. But at least Roger had acquired a second one of the five, and he carefully cleaned and unfroze them both to get them functional again. —And the mysterious buyer of the other three examples *did* subsequently show up, apparently...

Shortly after Roger acquired the second of his two Boyle sticks from the Arizona hoard, Leo Stambaugh heard from Errol Christman that a drill-collector named Timothy Rath in Manchester, New Hampshire, was offering to trade two Boyle sticks—one brass-handled and one all steel—for rare drills that Leo owned. The steel one has a steel clasp, so it represents a third variety. They made the deal, drills for sticks; a fuzzy photo (below) from Leo's now-gone museum shows the two Boyle sticks, both apparently in pretty good condition.





Leo shared with Roger the information about the trade, but by the time Roger chased Rath down he had already resold the other Boyle candlestick, and had no records regarding whom he had sold it to. Apparently it went to some other collector in his area. It has not yet turned up again, so an all-steel Boyle stick is still out there in New Hampshire somewhere. But I am happy to say that back in 2014, Roger Peterson kindly sold me one of his two brass-handled Boyle candlesticks (pictured above), and told me the story behind it. Thank you, Roger! Now if I can just find a steel one...