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## The Pocket Revolvers of Eli Whitney Jr.

The elder Ely Whitney (1765 – 1825) was best known for his invention of the Cotton Gin – a machine which made the separation of cotton fiber from the seed more efficient and faster. Although there is some controversy over how much of this machine he actually invented himself, and how much dates back to ancient times, and he merely improved on it is not the purpose of this article; suffice it to say that Whitney's machine and patent put the American South on the global map of agrarian "Power Houses", it inadvertently caused the enslavement of thousands of Africans, and in an indirect way, was a cause of the American Civil War. Eli probably didn't see it that way, and he probably would be surprised to know that some historians today credit him, along with James Watt, with starting the Industrial Revolution...

Eli Whitney Sr. was oblivious to all that. His invention was notable, no doubt, and he spent much of his time and effort trying to defend his patent in court against a multitude of imitators. It was not until the last year of the patent protection that he saw some success in the courts, not enough time though to make any significant amount of money from his invention. In the mean time, Whitney had all but abandoned his cotton machinery ventures, and moved north, to New Haven, Connecticut where he started a factory producing muskets for the US government. He called his armory "Whitneyville", a name which would soon become famous in gun makers' circles.

Eli Sr. died in 1825, at a time when his son Eli Jr. was only 5 years old. The armory would be run in the interim by his nephews Philos Whitney and Eli Whitney-Blake, until such time as the rightful heir would reach the age of majority.

Eli Jr. was educated at Yale and Princeton, and, at 21, returned to the family business in 1841 and assumed the role of manager and owner. Eli got his first big

break in 1847 when Sam Colt approached him with a proposal to manufacture 1,100 Colt Walker's for the American Army. Colt had lost his factory in Paterson, NJ when his first venture went bankrupt, and he had no facility to execute the Walker contract – Hartford was not yet built at that time.

Whitney gained a lot of valuable experience from this venture, and in 1850 he introduced a revolver of his own design. However, as the "ratchet" mechanism was an integral component of Colt's patent, Whitney had to make due with a cylinder which was advanced by hand. In 1852 he introduced another, employing two triggers, one to release and lock the cylinder which still had to be rotated by hand. Whitney was ready for the day when Colt's patent would expire though, and in 1857 he introduced the Whitney Navy and pocket revolvers. The competition from Colt's 1849 pocket and 1851 Navy was stiff, but the demand for side arms was strong due to the Western expansion and the looming war between the States. Between 1860 and 1866, Whitney produced more than 31,000 pocket revolvers. Many of these were purchased privately by soldiers going to war.

The end of the war, and the expiration of Rollin White's patent, brought about a change in the landscape of gun manufacture – no longer was the military the primary customer to look toward, it was now the private citizen, either in need of protection in the big cities, or the adventurer going West. Percussion arms were obsolete, and the cartridge was king. The sudden flooding of the gun market with surplus military arms caused many a gun maker to go out of business, and the competition for customers among the surviving makers changed how guns were made: the 1870's and 1880's was the heyday of the rim fire "Suicide Special". Small, concealable and often cheaply made guns flooded onto the civilian market, and the major makers had to either participate, or get out of the game. Colt, after

attempting to keep pace, decided to abandon the small "personal" pistol market, citing an inability to compete in price, and unwilling to compromise on the famous Colt quality. Others, such as Remington, S&W, Whitney, Hopkins & Allen and Bacon battled for market share with the likes of Lee Arms, A.E. Prescott, Otis Smith, and F.D. Bliss, some better than others. The more "respectable" makers stuck with more conservative model names such as "4th Model" (Remington), "Model No. 1, 1 ½ etc" (Smith and Wesson, Whitney), whereas their lesser counterparts came up with such colorful names as "Dictator" "Tramp" and "Swamp Angel". Eli Whitney remained at the helm of his firm throughout these changes, and throughout his time at Whitneyville continued his father's early venture into long arms. Whitney muskets, carbines and repeating rifles are well known and respected. By the mid-1800's however, the market for these small arms had been saturated, business was diminishing and Eli felt his years. His son, Eli Whitney III had no interest in continuing in his father's foot steps, and so, in 1888, the company was sold to the Winchester Repeating Arms Co.

During his time at Whitneyville, Eli Jr had created a legacy for himself as impressive as that of his father. His Navy of 1857 was the first practical closed-frame revolver, and therefore superior to Colt's 1851 Navy, and many of his designs and innovations have stood the test of time. Whitneyville revolvers are a subject of collecting of their own; the many types, models and variations could keep a collector busy for a lifetime. With the expiry of Rollin White's patent for the bored-through cylinder, together with advancements in rim fire cartridge design and manufacture, a whole new generation of small pocket revolvers was possible. Whitney capitalized on these advancements and produced an array of very well made, dependable side arms which were small,

light, easy to handle and attractive to look at. Whitney's post-1870 rim fire pocket guns are of excellent quality, often intricately engraved and plated in nickel, silver and gold, and, in contrast to the more common "Suicide Specials" they still fetch a good price.



**Whitneyville Model 2 in .38 rim fire.  
Rare 1 1/2 inch barrel.**

I currently have a dozen or so Whitney's waiting for customs clearance, among them four super rare Model 1's in .30 rim fire. They are so rare the RCMP didn't know they existed! Recently discovered as a variant of the usually .22 caliber No. 1 Model, they were erroneously advertised as No. 2's however their design and size is identical to the No.1, except for the caliber.

**Swiss Gun Maker Durs Egg of London**

Durs (Urs) Christian Egg was born in Oberbuchsiten, in the Canton of Solothurn, Switzerland on Christmas Day 1748, into a prominent family of gun makers. His father Leonz, and brother Johann Jakob both worked in the same trade and later his own sons and nephew would carry on the family tradition in England.

Durs left his family in Switzerland at an early age, first to work with his brother in Huningen, Alsace, before emigrating to London in about 1768. Egg was employed there by famous London gun maker Henry Nock where he undoubtedly honed his skills in making the English style of weaponry – shotguns, rifles, handguns and apparently even some swords. His most successful line of firearms would be handguns however, and he received several patents for his improvements to locks and details of various mechanisms, the first in 1803 and another in 1812. Egg established his first shop in 1772, in Panton Street, Haymarket. Later he moved to Leicester Fields, back to Haymarket and finally to London-proper in 1816. He had shops at Pall Mall, Strand and Colonnade Pall Mall. Egg became one of the most renowned London gun makers, with an appointment to the royal court. His sons Henry and Charles John would succeed him in 1831, after his death at age 82. The name "Egg" has nothing to do with the chicken – it is a derivative of the Germanic name Odgir, or Edgar.

Durs Egg signed pistols fetch high prices among collectors and I am proud and fortunate to be able to offer one such piece. It's the only one I have ever owned.



**D. EGG LONDON signed single-shot box lock percussion pistol from the famous shop of Durs Egg.**

**2017 / 2018 Show Calendar**

Now that I am semi-retired, I will have more time to go to shows and auctions both here and in the US. The notables are Las Vegas, Atlanta, Portland and Tulsa in the US, and Calgary, Kamloops, Chilliwack and Victoria here in Canada. These are all combination knife and gun shows, and I am planning on being at each and every one of them. Most recently I was at the Victoria show for the first time. It's a small show, but allowed me to be "exposed" to a different crowd, and new products. Although sales for me were relatively flat, I made a few excellent purchases, at very good prices. I am happy to say that I was able to pass these savings onto my customers.

The next show is the two-day Christmas show in Chilliwack November 18 and 19, where I will have my usual table. The great thing about these shows are the show visitors who come up and offer their collections for sale. Some excellent buys to be had here!

It will be quiet over the holidays, with shows starting again in March, April and May. Check my website for dates.

**The .41 Short Rim Fire – Deadliest Round in the West!**

It is well known that the .41 short rim fire cartridge was used as early as the 1860's through as late as the 1940's as a round to fit a myriad of cartridge derringers and pistols from the common Colt single shot

and the Remington Model 95 double barrel derringer, to the less-often encountered "crab claw" derringers of the National Arms Co. and Moore's Firearms. Some manufacturers made guns exclusively for this and only this caliber. An interesting specimen would be the Colt Cloverleaf or "House Pistol", also known as the Jim Fisk model because of the infamous shooting death of the New York robber baron in 1872 by one Edward Stokes over the affections of a woman. The coroner's report pointed out the devastating effect the .41 slug had on Fisk's body...



**National Arms No. 2 Deringer in .41 short rim fire**



**.41 short rim fire cartridges of 19th century manufacture**



**The last commercial manufacture of .41 rim fire was made in Brazil in the 1990's**

The .41 rim fire has had a bad rap among collectors as a weak and ineffective cartridge however some recent ballistic experiments concluded that the original, 19th century ammunition was powerful and very effective. Some 300,000 guns of various manufacture were made in the course of 80-some years, lending more than a little credibility to the fact that this was one bad-ass bullet...