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Fordyce Beals

One of the most influential industrial designers and inventors of the 19th century was Fordyce Beals, the man whose name is remembered with the Remington Beals Model 1858 Army and Navy revolvers, the .31 pocket, and the Whitney Beals "Walking Beam" revolver. Beals' patent of 1854 evaded Colt's revolving cylinder patent successfully, and a later patent of September 1858, calling for a solid frame with top strap, and a mechanism linking the cylinder pin and loading lever (ram rod), was superior to Colt's 1860 Army. Beals' design was sturdier and simpler to use and maintain. Reloading was also faster as the solid frame used a cylinder pin which would release the cylinder in one movement, compared to the wedge on Colt's open frame design which required the shooter to remove the barrel assembly from the frame in order to gain access to the cylinder.



Remington Beals First Model Pocket Revolver in .31 percussion from 1857

Fordyce Beals was born in 1807, in Pittsfield MS, to Robert and Nabby Beals. Little is known about his early life, however by the early 1850's he was working as an industrial designer for the Ames Sword Company of Chicopee Falls, MA. In 1856 Eliphalet Remington received a US government contract for 1000 Jenkins Carbines, for which he required specialized machinery, owned by Ames from a previous US contract.

As part of the purchase deal, Remington also received Ames' designer, Fordyce Beals. Beals already owned a patent for an improvement to the percussion revolver, and in 1858 he received the patent which would be the foundation to Beals' most famous creation, the Remington Beals martial revolvers.

In 1856, with the addition of Eliphalet's three sons, the firm officially became "E. Remington & Sons", and the following year, Beals' first invention in the employ of Remington became available for sale. The .31 pocket revolver was produced for only two years, with a total run of 2,500 first models, 1,200 second models and 1,500 third models. With the 1858 patent in their pocket, Remington and Beals concentrated on developing the new large-frame martial revolvers, which would prove to be extremely popular by both the military as well as civilian users. The Remington Army (.44cal) and Remington Navy (.36cal) revolvers were the second most used sidearm in the civil war, after the various Colt models.

Fordyce Beals would remain in the employ of Eliphalet for the remainder of his working life. He died in 1870, at the age of 64.

Gun Show News

Spring is always the busiest time for gun shows. This year, I went to Chilliwack, Eugene, Oregon, Kamloops and in May I will be in Atlanta. It has been a busy year, both for buying and selling. The overwhelming trend is toward high-end antiques, such as rare Colts, S&W's and Remingtons. The American made guns still rule on this continent while European guns only fetch high prices if they come with impressive "provenance". For instance, a new world record was set last month for the sale at auction of the only known, cased, civilian Colt Walker. It sold for a staggering \$1.84 million! The only high-end European gun to fetch a record amount was a Walther PPK once owned by Hitler's disciple

Heinrich Himmler. It fetched a measly \$215,000. The antique craze is evident on the show circuit as well. Guns which should not fetch more than a couple of hundred dollars are priced well over \$1,000 and sellers seem to be unwilling to make deals. In this environment I avoid the "established" vendors and concentrate on small-scale individual collectors who either don't know what it is they are selling, or they are not aware of the current market conditions. It's a bit more challenging, but also more entertaining... In Oregon I managed to pick up a couple of early Austrian 2mm pin fire pistols – the world's smallest fully functional firearms. These early specimens have a fully bored-through barrel and are capable of shooting a tiny, 2mm projectile. Later models have a solid barrel with only a small vent to let the gas from the blank cartridge escape. I also found an extremely rare, all-brass four-barrel pepperbox by Swedish gun maker Johan Engholm. A truly rare specimen! The show in Eugene was disappointing, other than that.

The show in Chilliwack was good, although most buyers were reluctant to spend their money, and although a few vendors had interesting ware, it was the individuals who approached me at my table to offer their antiques for sale who had the most interesting guns to offer. Most beneficial were the connections I made in the antique gun community – fellow collectors, vendors and parts dealers. Kamloops proved to be a good show (it always does), and much buying and selling went on, albeit more on the lower end of the value scale. I picked up several interesting pieces, some sold even before I had a chance to post them. Of note at the Kamloops show was a nice S&W Schofield in .45 S&W which the vendor wanted \$12,000. It was in good condition, but not worth the asking price. The Schofield is very similar to the 3rd Model Russian, with the barrel catch attached to the frame instead of the top strap, and a slightly different grip profile. The Schofield owes much of its

popularity to its reputation as the guns of choice of the James brothers, the Younger brothers, and the US cavalry's "Buffalo Soldiers"...

Who Let The Dogs Out?

The continuing popularity of the infamous "Bulldog" has me searching far and wide for suitable examples to sell on my website. I have not had any luck for the longest time, and all of a sudden I ran into a collector in Oregon who is in the process of "liquidating" his collection of fine Bull Dogs. I have been fortunate in securing three of them for now, all Belgian proofed and in various European calibers - .44 Webley and .380 British. The few I had previously sold within minutes of me posting them on line, some even before I had a chance to advertise. I am hoping this collector will part with a few more...

Henry and Samuel Nock of London

Henry Nock was one of the most famous London gunmakers of the 18th century. He was born in 1741 in London where he apprenticed as a lock smith first, but soon found an interest in building locks for guns. Henry went out on his own in 1772 and became master of the gunsmiths' guild in 1782. His nephew Samuel apprenticed with Henry starting in 1786, and after Henry's death in 1804 he took over the business until 1852. Both Henry and Samuel were "Gunmakers to His Majesty", Kings George III, IV, and William III of the house of Hanover. Henry had a good business supplying military weaponry to the various famous conflicts of the time: the American revolution, the French revolution and the Napoleonic wars. The Nock family was, and continues to be, known for their fine quality workmanship and exquisitely executed firearms. Henry was famous for his multi-barreled flintlock rifles and muskets (up to 9 and even 11 barrels!), and for his exquisite double-barreled shotguns. A famous volley gun called the "Nock Gun" was used by the Royal Navy until 1804, and although it bears Nock's name, it was not his own invention; he merely produced it. Samuel Nock was known more for dueling, travel, and horse pistols. In all there were four gunmakers in the Nock family: Henry, his brother Richard, and nephews Samuel and Joseph (not sure if Richard was their father, or if there was another Nock). Joseph emigrated to America around the time of the civil war and was working and producing firearms in Baltimore, MD. After Samuel's death in 1852, the firm continued under the same name until 1863, and was eventually sold, and turned into the Wilkinson Sword Company, another famous English weapons manufacturer. Wilkinson did not produce firearms, and by the time it closed in 2005 it was best known for its razor blades...



Finely engraved .62 cal. Nock of London percussion pistol



New Shipment Arriving

A good selection of guns from all over the world is waiting to be cleared at Customs – Belgian pin fires, a Mariette four-barrel pepperbox, percussion and cartridge revolvers, and derringers, an amazing Tranter Model 1868 in excellent condition and a cased set of 2 S&W Model 1 1/2's! They should be available within a few days or weeks...

The Humble Spur Trigger Revolver

It has become increasingly apparent by the numbers of them appearing in displays of well-known collectors and dealers at antique arms shows that these guns, once considered on the "fringes" of collecting, have emerged as a serious and bonafide specialty among collectors. Uninformed "historians" of the past threw them all into one "bucket", called "Suicide Specials" – cheap, uninteresting pieces of metal not much more use than as a paperweight. However, on closer examination we find all the major producers of the late 19th century- Colt, S&W, Remington, H&A, Whitney – marketing a variety of spur-trigger revolvers and derringers of amazing quality and design, many exquisitely engraved, nickel, silver and gold plated, and housed in fine presentation wood cases. The one thing they all have in common – the design of the spur trigger with its short travel make them by necessity single-action only weapons. The design originated some time around 1868, and is

almost exclusively an American "thing" – Europeans were more inclined to make pocket pistols with folding or drop-down triggers, which in turn was something entirely "foreign" to American makers. While it is true that there were many cheaply made, poor quality spur-trigger revolvers produced and sold in the late 19th century they cannot all be dismissed as inferior. It should be noted that all of these inferior guns were made under a variety of interesting names by one of the major makers – Bacon Arms, Otis Smith, Whitney, Hopkins and Allen, etc. Some of the names under which these were sold were noteworthy: American Boy, Brutus, Captain Jack, Buffalo Bill, Earthquake, Electric, Bulldozer, Marquis of Lorne, Swamp Angel, Tramp's Terror... I have had a few of these over the years myself – Ranger, Blue Jacket, Red Jacket, Defender of '68...

Spur trigger revolvers are an interesting and important part of firearms development in North America and deserve their place as a specialty collecting subject among antique guns. There certainly is no end to the types, variations and brand names, and the price is usually right.

James Warner of Springfield, Mass.

James Warner, brother of Thomas Warner, the intendant of the Springfield Arms Co. from 1814 to 1837 was born in 1818. As an apprenticed gunsmith he went to work with his brother at Springfield Arms and in 1837 took over the management of the company when Thomas left to work at Whitney's Whitneyville Armory. In 1851 James started his own company, Warner & Co., where he designed and produced a variety of high quality percussion rifles, carbines, revolving rifles and unique pistols. Among them, the Warner Pocket Revolver of which only about 1,000 were made. It was his first cartridge revolver and is stamped with an 1857 patent date for the ratchet mechanism and cylinder stop. However, the breech-loading design was one of those violations of the Rollin White patent for which he was sued, and lost... Warner procured several other important patents between 1851 and 1866, all for improvements to existing pistol and revolver designs. Not much is known about James who spent a prolific career designing and producing some of the most unique firearms in American history. James Warner died in 1870 at the early age of 52.

