



The Antique Arms Gazette

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The “Trumpster” Effect

Regardless of your political leaning, it must be said that Donald Trump’s victory will have global and historic significance. It is yet too early to say if his election “rhetoric” will amount to anything at all, but if you believe the “experts”, he will change the very fabric of American society – for the good or bad. This newsletter is not a platform for political debate, and really the only interest I have here is trying to determine what effect Trump’s government will have on my business and our collective hobby. I doubt very much that his policies will spill over into Canada, especially as long as we have a Liberal government led by a mere boy – oops, sorry, I made a political statement – but his government will definitely impact gun collecting in the US. The NRA is one of Trumps most loyal supporters, and has raised millions through its membership to support his election efforts. That alone should tell you that his getting elected will benefit the firearms industry. For the past few years, since some of the high-profile shooting incidents in the US there has been a move toward banning the sale of firearms over the internet. If this were to be legislated, it would pretty well end the businesses of many auction houses, and businesses like mine, although antiques would probably be exempt, because in a legal sense they are not guns. Trump’s presidency will, I suspect, ease the gun laws and everything around them.

Samuel Colt’s M1849 Pocket

Sam Colt had a very successful gun on the market in 1849, namely the Colt Baby Dragoon – to date then the most popular handgun in Colt’s line-up. So, when he introduced the M1849 Pocket Revolver to succeed the Baby Dragoon, it would seem he was fighting a battle for popularity with his own product. The M1849 resembled the Baby Dragoon in many ways and critics at the time did not believe it would last very long as its successor. The Dragoon’s

reputation was legendary, and any gun claiming to take its place at the top would have to prove itself among the skeptics – military men, frontiersmen, lawmen and shooters all over the world. It would turn out, however, that more M1849’s were produced than any other of Colt’s percussion pistols. From 1850 to 1873 some 340,000 of this model were made in the US and another 11,000 at Colt’s London factory. Compare this to the mere 15,000 Baby Dragoons, about 215,000 M1851 Navy’s and 200,000 1860 Army’s. The M1849 came only in one caliber - .31, with either a 5- or 6- chamber cylinder. Barrel lengths were available in 3, 4, 5 and 6 inches, and a variety of finishes, including silver-plated brass frames, steel frames, blued, case-hardened, factory engraved, ivory grips, etc. Fine, cased models may sell today in the US \$9,000 to \$15,000 range while a similarly cased Baby Dragoon will sell for more than twice that much. M1849’s can be had, depending on their condition, for as little as US \$600 to \$1,000 for a fair or poor condition specimen, and up to US \$3,000 for a fine to excellent example. The M1849 is a very well made revolver, in every respect a rugged and reliable gun designed for rough service in the field. Colt only ever sold about 50 of them to the US Navy, but many a soldier during the civil war purchased a M1849 to carry as a secondary weapon on the battle field.



Cased Colt M1849

Iver Johnson and the Arms And Cycle Works at Fitchburg

It would seem an odd combination for a factory to turn out both bicycles as well as firearms, but this combination worked well for the famous New England maker for many decades, from 1891 until the 1920’s, when they ceased the production of bicycles. The combination was certainly not unique to Iver Johnson of Fitchburg, Massachusetts. The Austrian firm of Steyr-Puch was also known to produce guns and bicycles simultaneously, and later even included motorcycles in their line-up of products. Other companies which were in the gun and “other products” business include Otis Smith, Lucius Pond, Ludwig Loewe (DWM Berlin), Sauer-Suhl and the Swiss SIG. I suppose the similarities between making guns and other metal products must speak for themselves...

Iver Johnson came to the US as a trained gunsmith from Bergen, Norway in 1863 and went to work in Worcester, Mass. He designed pepperboxes for Allen & Wheelock, among others, and finally went into business with fellow gunsmith Martin Bye to form Johnson & Bye Company in 1871, producing firearms of various types. Johnson and Bye secured several patents around that time, some original, some improvements on existing designs. The partnership dissolved in 1883, and Johnson took over the firm as Iver Johnson & Co. In 1891 the firm took its most famous name – Iver Johnson Arms and Cycle Works, and relocated to Fitchburg, Mass. Here Johnson produced his most lasting legacy – the “Safety Automatic” revolver (automatic only for the “automatic” ejection of spent shells upon breaking open the revolver). Johnson advertised both guns and bicycles aggressively, often in the same ad. These advertisements of the 1880’s provide a surprising insight into American public perception and attitude toward crime, safety and the need for self-protection. Johnson revolvers were marketed as being “safe for babies to handle”, on account of their

unique design which made accidental discharge virtually impossible.



Johnson produced several models of revolvers, semi-automatics and shotguns, and secured numerous military contracts at the outset of WW1, and again in WW2. Today, Iver Johnson guns are somewhat collectible, but they are not in the same league as Colt or S&W. His bicycles however, are a different story. Iver Johnson bicycles have always been regarded as extremely well made, years ahead of the competition in design and manufacture, and are to this day highly sought-after collectors' pieces. Iver Johnson motorcycles were also highly refined and of superb quality. Produced until the end of WW1 these motorcycles are to this day regarded as a standard of their own...

The New England Dynasty of Gun Makers

The student of American history will know that in the early years of the United States, most of the economic and manufacturing activities were limited to a handful of states in the north-east of the newly formed country. Industrial manufacturing was mostly concentrated in the New England states of Vermont, New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Philadelphia, whereas the mid-west and south were mostly agrarian. Not surprisingly, many of the well known gun makers of the New England states worked together, lived together, intermarried and lived as one big, happy family... well, maybe not exactly...

Ethan Allen (1806 – 1871): One of the best known of the early American gun makers, Ethan Allen had his shop in Milford Mass. first, and later relocated to Norwich and Worcester. Allen was famous for his pepperboxes and "pocket rifles". He was, until the 1850's a serious competitor to Sam Colt. Allen's firm went through various changes, as his business partners changed: **Allen & Thurber**, **Allen & Wheelock**, and finally **E. Allen & Co.**, which included two of his sons-in-law, **Sullivan Forehand** and **Henry Wadsworth**, who, you guessed it, formed **Forehand & Wadsworth** after Ethan's death in 1871.

Samuel Colt: There is not enough paper in the country to do justice to the life and work

of Samuel Colt, and this paragraph is a mere drop in an ocean of information about the most famous gun maker in the world. Some of the notable associations with Colt are those of **Rollin White**, who, while in the employ of Colt, and with his help, developed his design for the bored-through cylinder for which he was granted the famous patent no. 12618 in 1855. White tried to sell it to Colt for \$1 million, and when the Colonel declined the offer, White went to **Smith and Wesson** instead. (This is deserving of a story in itself...). Another famous associate of Colt's was **Eli Whitney Jr.**, son of Eli Whitney, the inventor of the cotton gin. Whitney produced Colt's first Colt-Walker revolvers, about 1,100 of them at his New Haven CT. factory which he referred to as "Whitneyville Armory". Colt had lost his Paterson, NJ facility and had not yet built his factory at Hartford at that time. Whitney military long arms and handguns were very well respected, and the company remained in business until 1888 when declining sales and financial difficulties forced the company to negotiate a take-over by the **Winchester Repeating Arms Co.**

Manhattan Firearms: This company only maintained offices in Manhattan for the sake of the name (as did Sam Colt) whereas the actual manufacturing facilities were located in New Jersey and Norwich CT. Manhattan Firearms had worked closely with Sam Colt prior to 1858, producing various parts for Colt revolvers. It is not surprising that, as soon as Colt's patent protection expired in 1858, Manhattan entered the market with two revolvers so similar to the M1849 and the M1851 that one cannot help but believe they were copied. An important name in the list of employees at Manhattan Firearms was one **Thomas Bacon**, who would go on to found Bacon Arms of Norwich CT. Bacon also had close ties to **Ethan Allen**.



A Colt M1849 (top) and a Manhattan (London Pistol Co.) Series 1 (bottom)

Hopkins & Allen: The Allen in H&A is of no relation to the Ethan Allen mentioned previously however the manufacturing duo of Hopkins and Allen were well connected in the New England dynasty: They started in 1868 buying up the Bacon Arms Co. and together with Bacon's superintendent **Charles Converse** they went into the

Business of making mostly "Suicide Specials". Their lines of "XL" "Blue Jacket" and "Dictator" revolvers are famous among collectors. Charles Converse became disenchanted with the business in 1874 and sold his 50% share in H&A to one **Joseph Mervin** of New York. In short order, Hopkins and Allen became **Mervin, Hulbert & Co.** Eventually, in 1902, Mervin and Hulbert also bought up **Forehand and Wadsworth**...An outsider in this merry group of gun makers is one **Peter Finnigan**, an Irish immigrant with an outrageous idea: while on a trip to Europe, Finnigan came across a new invention popular on the continent: the "palm squeezer" pistol. Several versions of this highly concealable gun existed, from the famous "Gauloise" to the rotary palm pistol Finnigan would later patent in the US. Palm pistols were popular with ladies and gentlemen, as well as the less "savory" crowd of gamblers, pimps and hoodlums. These small-caliber guns had very short barrels and were designed to shoot at point-blank range. Although unlikely to do much damage, they were nevertheless a very effective deterrent. Finnigan contracted the **Ames Sword Company** (owned by **Remington and Sons of Ilion, NY**) to produce 15,000 of his palm squeezers in time for the 1891 "Columbia Exhibition" in Chicago. He formed the "Chicago Firearms Co." to market his guns but unfortunately Ames was unable to fulfill the order in time and defaulted on the contract. With his "window of opportunity" at the fair closing, Finnigan sued Ames for breach of contract and won. Ames was obliged to purchase all the remaining stock and try to sell it on their own. It would take a full 20 years to finally sell them all. The guns were of mediocre quality, using a unique .32 extra short rim fire cartridge especially made for this gun. Both the guns and the ammo are extremely rare today.



Chicago Firearms "The Protector" New Shipment arrived!

Old Guns Canada has a new line-up of excellent antique revolvers and pistols on its website www.oldgunscanada.com. An extremely fine Colt M1849, an early M1851 in fine condition, several Remington revolvers, a rare "London Pistol Co." Manhattan Series 1, a Hammond "Bulldog" and a rare Chicago Firearms "Protector" Palm Pistol, among others, are included.