

Henry Deringer and J. Joseph Henry Martial Pistols

As Revealed in the Complete Records of the Maryland Arms Purchases from 1784 to December 1823

By: Jim Wertenberger

The Deringer martial flintlock pistol has remained a mystery since the start of serious U.S. martial pistol collecting. In the first part of this century the Deringer was classified as an 1808 contract pistol, although no contracts or mention of them were found.

Through the research of Col. R.C. Kuhn in the 1960s, records were found in the National Archives for the delivery of one pair of Deringers in 1811 to Tench Cox, Purveyor P.S. Records were also found showing the delivery of approximately 163 Deringer pistols to the U.S. Navy in 1814. From these findings it was concluded the Deringer flintlock pistols in collections today were 1814 U.S. Navy pistols. Still, the known Deringers, while bearing inspection marks, did not, with the exception of one pistol, bear any known U.S. inspection marks. The U.S. Government had by 1808 adopted a rather standard system of inspection. Further doubt of the 1814 designation is provided in a letter written by Henry Deringer himself to John Rogers, February 10, 1816, in which Deringer is attempting to secure arms contracts in response to an "advertisement in the papers for receiving proposals for purchasing or manufacturing arms etc." In this letter Deringer writes: "I thought proper to speak a few words Respecting such pistols which we manufactured during the late War for the Navy. I could supply you in Short time with Several Hundred pair, I have all the Materials on hand ready to finish, — the kind of pistols which we made vis — the Barrels was 9 and 10 inches in length the bore or caliber half oz — Brass Mounting with side spring and good double Bridle locks." The two key words in this letter are "side springs", or as we call them today, "belt hooks". The Deringer pistols now in collections do not have belt hooks.

Only two pistols from the 1813 and 1814 Navy contracts have been found and recognized. Both pistols are the same model J. Henry pistol and they are equipped with a side spring or belt hook. The Henry pistol maintains the overall lines of the 1808 contract type but has a wide flat-type belt hook, recessed at the rear into the stock, and held only by the rear lock plate screw. The top of the barrel is marked, on the left side of the breech, with a raised eagle and CT in a sunken cartouche, a pistol inspection mark which was discontinued after 1813; the CT stands for contract. Col. Kuhn's research in the National Archives, as presented in *ASAC Bulletin* Number 3, estimated J. Henry delivered 206 pistols to the Navy in 1813 and 254 more in 1814. The lock plate is marked J.Henry/Phil^d in two lines. The pistol measures 15 13/16" overall and is equipped with a 10 1/4" barrel of 58 cal.

About one and one half years ago, I started researching martial pistol inspection marks in an attempt to classify some of the "known but unknown", martial pistols. These pistols are recognized as martial, but with no records to place them in

(Note: This is an abridgement of the detailed report on the Maryland pistols presented by Mr. Wertenberger. It is hoped the total work will appear in a future publication.)



history. The search led me, last spring, to the Hall of Records of Maryland in Annapolis, Maryland, where I found the original "Adjutant General's Accounts of Arms," which are the records of Maryland's purchases of muskets, rifles, swords, cannons, cartouche boxes, pistols, pistol holsters, powder and powder horns, tents, lead, knapsacks, canteens, etc. from 1784 to December 1823. In the records, in many cases, was information as to where the arms were delivered and to whom they were issued, along with other internal affairs. It was in these records the Deringer pistol mystery was solved, and as luck would have it, two "known, but unknown" Henry pistols found their place in history. Likewise, some other names appeared in the records which created new questions about yet-to-be-found martial pistols.

From a general review of the records, Maryland appears to have had no pistols in their possession when the United States delivered 500 pistols of an unknown make to John Shaw, Armourer, at Annapolis, July 7, 1810. The pistols were issued to Maryland under the Law of Congress drafted the 3rd of April, 1808, for arming and equipping the Militias of the States.

It is interesting to note in the records many of the martial arms were delivered to a Major General Samuel Smith. The Samuel Smith provoked a lot of curiosity on my part as to what this man looked like. After a fruitless search looking for a likeness of Sam, I consulted a swami specializing in reincarnation. When the swami looked in her crystal ball an image came forth: I quickly photographed this and now we know what Sam Smith looked like in 1813 collecting martial arms. If you didn't believe in reincarnation or longevity, you should now!

As shown in the record of "Pistol Deliveries to the State of Maryland, July 7, 1810, to March 1813," the 500 pistols delivered by the United States to John Shaw, Armourer, at Annapolis, were turned over to Washington P. Fluck in March 1811. Mr. Fluck took over Shaw's position as Armourer at Annapolis when Shaw retired. Fluck appears to have barely got started issuing the pistols when the supply ran out.

At this point, the 1811 martial Deringer enters the picture.



Reverse of the 1812 U.S. Navy J. Henry pistol showing the attachment of the belt hook by the rear lock plate screw.

During the research of Col. R.C. Kuhn in the National Archives the earliest Deringer pistol entry found was:

Tench Coxe, Purveyor P.S.
 Bot of Henry Deringer
 1 Pair of Pistols _____ \$8.00
 Received June 27, 1811 from Trench Coxe P.S.
 The above eight dollars in full \$8.00
 Henry Deringer

It is known the United States frequently helped individual states in the acquisition of arms. While no official Deringer correspondence between Maryland and the United States has been found, the assistance to Maryland may have been like this (reduced to present-day informality)

Dear Trench Coxe:
 Need More Pistols. Can you help us?
 Signed: Washington P. Fluck

Dear Washington:
 Sorry, but you have received your quota of pistols. It would take another Act of Congress to get you any more pistols. I have a pair of Henry Deringer's pistols we purchased as a sample and inspected. If it's OK, I'll sent you one and if you like it, you get in contact with Deringer.
 Tench Coxe

The 1811 Deringer pistol bears the inspection marks of both the United States and the state of Maryland. Located on the top of the breech is the "raised eagle over a raised P in a sunken oval cartoush"* inspection mark used by the United States through 1813, and a sunken block M inspection mark used by the state of Maryland. The pistol is stamped "1" on the lower section of the barrel under the touch hole, on the frizzen, lock plate and many other parts. The stock and lock contours of the 1811 Deringer more closely follow the contours of the standard 1808 contract pistols, compared to the 1808 Calderwood and 1808 Henry, than do the later Maryland Deringers. The pistol measures 16 1/8" overall and has a 9 15/16" 56 cal. thin walled barrel. The barrel wall thickness again follows that of the 1808 contract designs. The later Deringers, as a general rule, have much heavier barrels.

Since Henry Deringer does show in the records the ability to produce pistols quickly in quantity, I will use the designation the 1813 Maryland Deringer. The first delivery by Henry Deringer to the state of Maryland is recorded on March 20, 1813.

In the entry for December 31, 1813, 198 pistols were delivered by Irving and Smith. To date, Irving and Smith have not been identified. We do not know if they were agents or gun-makers. The only thing known is possibly an insight into their characters; they were paid \$1227.00 for 200 pistols and only delivered 198. (Plus 2 samples? Ed.)

The Deringer pistols delivered were of two styles: a two-ramrod-pipe model and a single ramrod pipe model. Of the nineteen Deringer pistols our member, Sam Smith, has recorded over the years, fifteen pistols are of the two ram-rod pipe model, and four are of the single ramrod pipe model. After studying the inspection marks and watching the general deterioration and breaking up of the inspection die stamps from use, it appears there is no set pattern of single and double ramrod pipe deliveries. In all probability, Deringer either ran out of rear ramrod pipes or tried to skimp on his contracts. The



Re-enactment of General Sam Smith collecting martial arms. The "victim" is Luke Wood.



In 1811 the United States purchased two pistols from H. Deringer, probably as samples. This pistol is U.S. martially marked and bears serial No. 1.

*"Cartoush" is the spelling given in the original documents. Current spelling is of course "cartouche," which will be used hereafter.

single ramrod pipe model does provide us with a rare variation.

The lowest serial numbered Deringer delivered under a regular Maryland-Deringer contract is the double ramrod pipe model in Dr. Walter Peterson's collection. This pistol is serialized No. 1 throughout the various parts. The number has been hand cut rather than stamped by dies as were all but two of the other Deringers in this study. The pistol is 15 25/32" overall and has a 9 7/8" thin-walled barrel like the 1811 U.S. Henry Deringer. On the top of the barrel, at the breech, there is a raised P in a sunken oval cartouche, and the sunken block-style M. The barrel does not have a punched dot mark at the breech as do many other Deringers examined. The pistol is brass mounted and has a brass post front sight. The lock plate is marked Deringer Phil^a in two lines. This pistol was formerly in the William Locke collection.

The single ramrod-pipe model in my collection basically had the same contours and lines as most double ramrod pipe models. The pistol is brass mounted, has a brass post front sight, and has no serial numbers. It measures 16" overall and has a 9 11/16" heavy walled barrel which is marked with a raised P in a sunken oval cartouche and the sunken M stamp. Below the M is the punch dot mark. The purpose of this dot is not known other than that it is some form of inspection mark. Possible this is the mark used by Joshua Watts, for on September 20, 1813, in "An Account for Cleaning Repairing and Storage of Arms," Joshua Watts is paid \$8.00 for proving barrels.

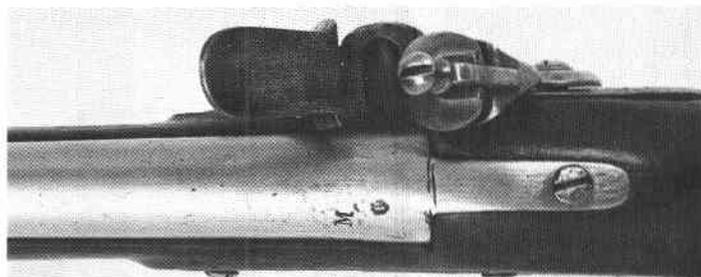
On the left side of the pistol the same M as on the breech is stamped into the stock to the rear of the sideplate. At the very rear of the flat area on the left side of the stock there is stamped, in small letters, H.M. Through a quirk of fate the H M stamping has been identified. During this period of Maryland's history, payment of armory personnel was made through the armourer in charge. The armourer drew lump sums from the state in his own name and paid his workman. It is through the untimely death of the armourer at Annapolis, William Rossi, that his assistant Henry M. Murry (H M) got "left out in the cold" and his name was recorded in "An Account for Cleaning Repairing and Storage of Arms." On February 12, 1814 this entry appears:

"To cash paid Henry M. Murry the amount of an order drawn in his favor by Wm. Ross late Armourer at Annapolis \$168.24"

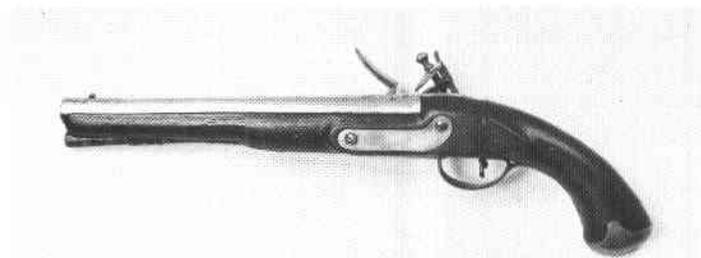
Markings on the Deringer pistols vary from pistol to pistol. Four different styles of P proof marks were observed, five different dies for the M, and two different dies for the H M. Some pistols had all three marks. Two pistols had no inspection marks, and others had only one or two of these marks. Several pistols did not have the punched dot mark.

The pistol at the bottom of illustration No. 20 is in Sam Smith's collection. The pistol is a double ramrod pipe model, serial No. 13. The pistol at the top of illustration No. 20 is in the Herb Uphoff collection. This pistol, serial No. 19, a single ramrod pipe model, was formerly in Col. Kuhn's collection.

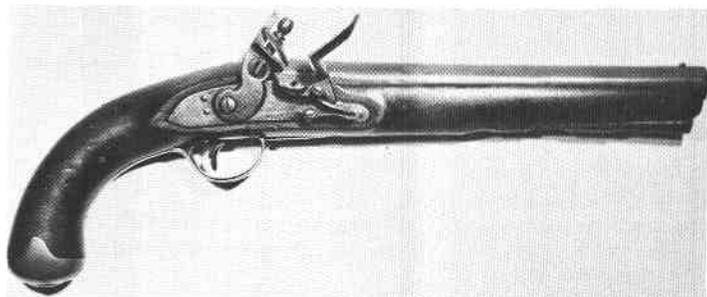
Pistol No. 13 is marked with one and one half inspection stamps of the raised P in a sunken cartouche. The only other marks are the two line Deringer stamp on the lock plate, the serial numbers, and a raised J A in a sunken cartouche stamped



Close up of the 1811 Deringer barrel marks. Partially visible is the raised eagle C T in a sunken cartouche discontinued by the U.S. on pistols after 1813 and the Maryland block M.



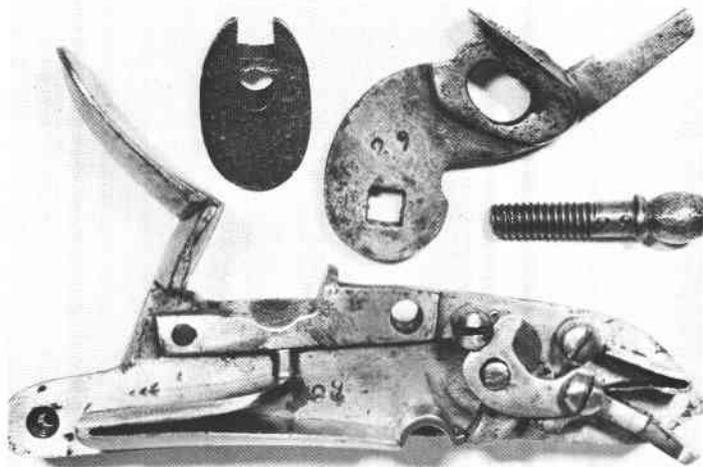
Reverse view of the 1811 Deringer. No marks are found on the stock.



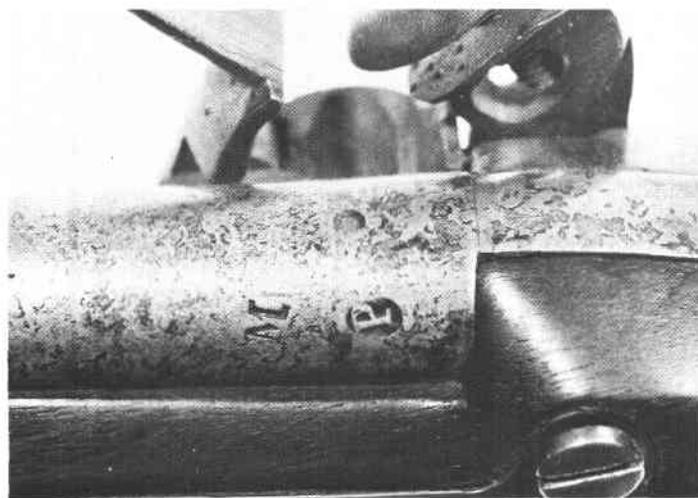
1813 Maryland Deringer serial No. 1. The number is hand cut rather than stamped.



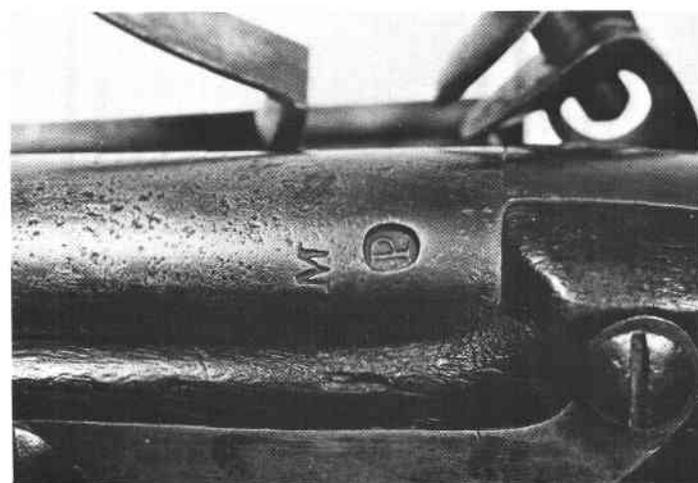
The single ramrod pipe 1813 Maryland Deringer provides a rare variation of the Maryland Deringer. Only 4 of the 18 recorded Deringers are of the single ramrod pipe model.



The inside of the lock plate found on Deringer No. 29. Almost all Deringer locks were well numbered on all parts including the underside of the top jaw and the shaft of the top jaw screw.



A complete set of Maryland's acceptance marks on Deringer No. 28. The punch dot mark, the block M, and the raised P in a sunken cartouche.



1816 Maryland J. Henry barrel acceptance marks.

sidered both equitable and just to make a distinction in favor of those who uniformly furnish the best articles. The quality of all contract arms is ascertained in the first instance at the work shops of the maker by an inspector appointed for that purpose, and whose approval is given before they are paid for. But as a further means of insuring the good quality of the arms, samples of all of them are occasionally collected and sent to the national armories to be examined by the officers of those establishments. The reports of the last special examination of this kind represented the arms made by Mr. Deringer as being inferior in all respects to those made by any other contractor."

While the Deringer pistol in any condition is a rarity today, one can understand from the preceding report why the number of surviving 100% original Deringers can almost be counted on one hand.

The question still remains: where are the Deringer U.S. Navy belt hook models? The Maryland Deringer was used a very short time in war and then a small percent were returned to the armories. Those pistols not returned were either lost in service or taken home as souvenirs. The U.S. Navy, on the other hand, would have continued to carry the pistols on a regular basis aboard ships, exposing these to the ravages of the sea air. It is also natural to assume the navy might have had better inventory control of the pistols until they were used up. As we have seen, J. Henry delivered 460 pistols to the navy, and only two are known to have survived. Based on the survival rate of the better-made Henrys, one out of every 230, the odds of finding one of the estimated 163 navy Deringers approaches the odds of the proverbial "needle in the haystack". We may never see one.

A Col. Waters received 121 pistols from J. Joseph Henry late in 1813. Col. Waters kept 28 of these pistols, presumably for his own troops, and delivered the remaining 93 pistols to John Shaw, Armourer at Annapolis, on December 20, 1813. In the record covering deliveries to Annapolis from June 1, 1814, to May 5, 1816, we find an additional 40 pistols delivered by Henry on May 5, 1815, shortly after the war.

The Maryland militia was called into federal service at the Battle of Bladensburg under General Winder. Based on established martial criteria, since there is definite proof these pistols were used by state forces called into the service of the United States, the 1813 Deringer and the 1813 Henry are no longer considered a secondary martial pistol, but are now classified as U.S. Martial Pistols.

In the record of "Miscellaneous Pistol Deliveries to the State of Maryland" it is shown that Henry delivered 60 more pistols on March 13, 1816, but this time direct to a Capt. Lightner Cecil. The above deliveries total 221 pistols delivered by Henry to Maryland.

In this study two different Henry pistol models were found bearing the Maryland inspection marks. One of these models has been around and known for years, but its place in history was unknown. This pistol is the goose neck hammer Henry flintlock pistol. As far as I know, no record has been kept of the number of surviving specimens, although through the years I can recall seeing eight such pistols in collections. Since a greater number of the goose neck variety survive today compared to the next Henry pistol to be covered, I will assign the goose neck Henry to the first and largest delivery of 121 and possibly to the second delivery of 40 pistols, making the total 161 pistols.

The goose neck Henry pistol measures 16" overall and is

equipped with a 10 1/8" barrel of 56 cal. without sights. The 6 1/16" long beveled lock plate is slashed and stepped down at the rear. "J. Henry" in one line is stamped between the cock and the frizzen spring. The left side of the pistol has a hole in the stock which indicates it once held a belt hook. The pistol has a brass trigger guard and a single ramrod pipe.

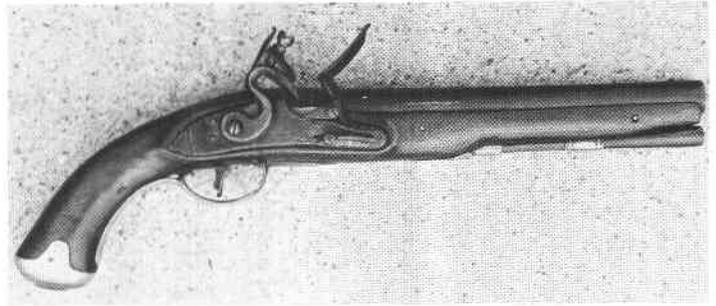
The first clue which lead me to know this pistol was one of the Maryland Henry pistols was comparison of the raised P in the sunken cartouche with the same mark on the Deringer pistols. With further research, three more specimens were turned up, not only marked with the P. but also with the Maryland block M. One of these pistols was in the former William Locke collection and another is in the Sam Smith collection. The Smith pistol shown in illustration follows the same lines and general measurements of the Henry. The full set of Maryland's inspection marks is on the top of the barrel at the breech. Apparently Maryland sometime during this period stopped marking their pistols on the stock, as no Henrys noted in this study bore the M or H M inspection marks in the wood as found on the Deringers. This pistol can now be called "The 1813 Maryland J. Henry."

Identification of this model Henry pistol as a Maryland arm should be done with care, as J. Henry produced several pistols of this style with slight variations which were not delivered to Maryland. One of these variations is in the Herb Uphoff collection. While at first glance the pistol appears the same as the Maryland model, it is mounted with a brass lazy S side plate, where the Maryland model has a L-shaped side plate. The Uphoff pistol is also stamped behind the side plate in the stock, S.N.Y. for the state of New York. Other Henry variations not of Maryland delivery have longer, straighter grips; some have much shorter lock plates, and longer barrels. Two pistols had a series of two or three of what appeared to be Os, Cs, & Ds located at the breech — the meaning of which is unknown. None of these variations bore the Maryland acceptance marks.

The second Maryland model J. Henry pistol found is a heretofore unknown martial pistol. This pistol violates the old, time-worn rule "Its gotta have a butt cap to be martial". As only one specimen has come to light, I have assigned this pistol to the last 60 pistols Henry delivered in peacetime on March 13, 1816, direct to Capt. Lightner Cecil.

This pistol, which we shall now designate as the 1816 Maryland Henry pistol, reverts back to the basic lines of the 1808 U.S. contract pistols, but lacks a butt cap. The pistol measures 15 7/8" overall and has a 10 1/4" round barrel of 58 cal. without a sight. The lock is 4 11/16" long and is marked between the hammer and frizzen spring J.HENRY/PHIL^a in two lines. The 5 1/4" brass trigger guard sets over an iron trigger and iron trigger plate. The lock plate is held by two iron screws which pass through an L shaped brass side plate. The single ramrod pipe is of brass. Maryland's acceptance marks, the raised P in the sunken cartouche and the stamped block M, are stamped on top of the barrel at the breech.

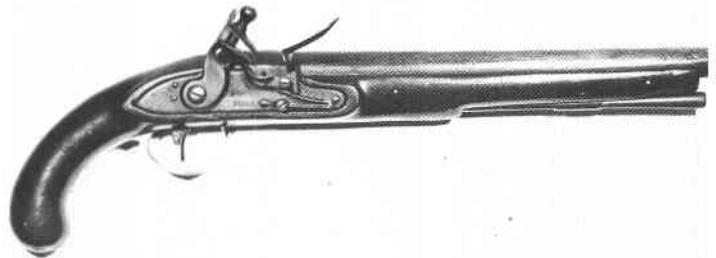
It is my belief this pistol was a rather standard Henry production item, as other similar Henry pistols, with slight variations, exist. These variations are marked with an eagle on the lock plate. They may have two ramrod pipes and longer grips or may be equipped with a blade front sight. None of these variations bear the Maryland acceptance stamps and are not considered Maryland arms.



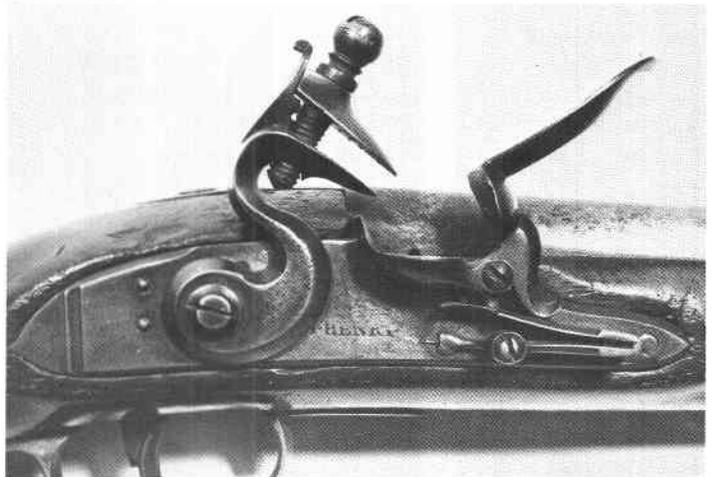
Reconverted Deringer with an unusual banana shaped lock plate.



Maryland 1813 J. Henry pistol equipped with a goose neck cock. Compare lockplate with gun above.



1816 Maryland J. Henry pistol. The lock is marked with a two line J•HENRY PHIL^a stamping. The butt does not have a cap.



Close-up of the lock showing the single line J•HENRY stamping used on the 1813 pistol.