

# A UNIQUE BREECH-LOADING U. S. MARTIAL PISTOL

by

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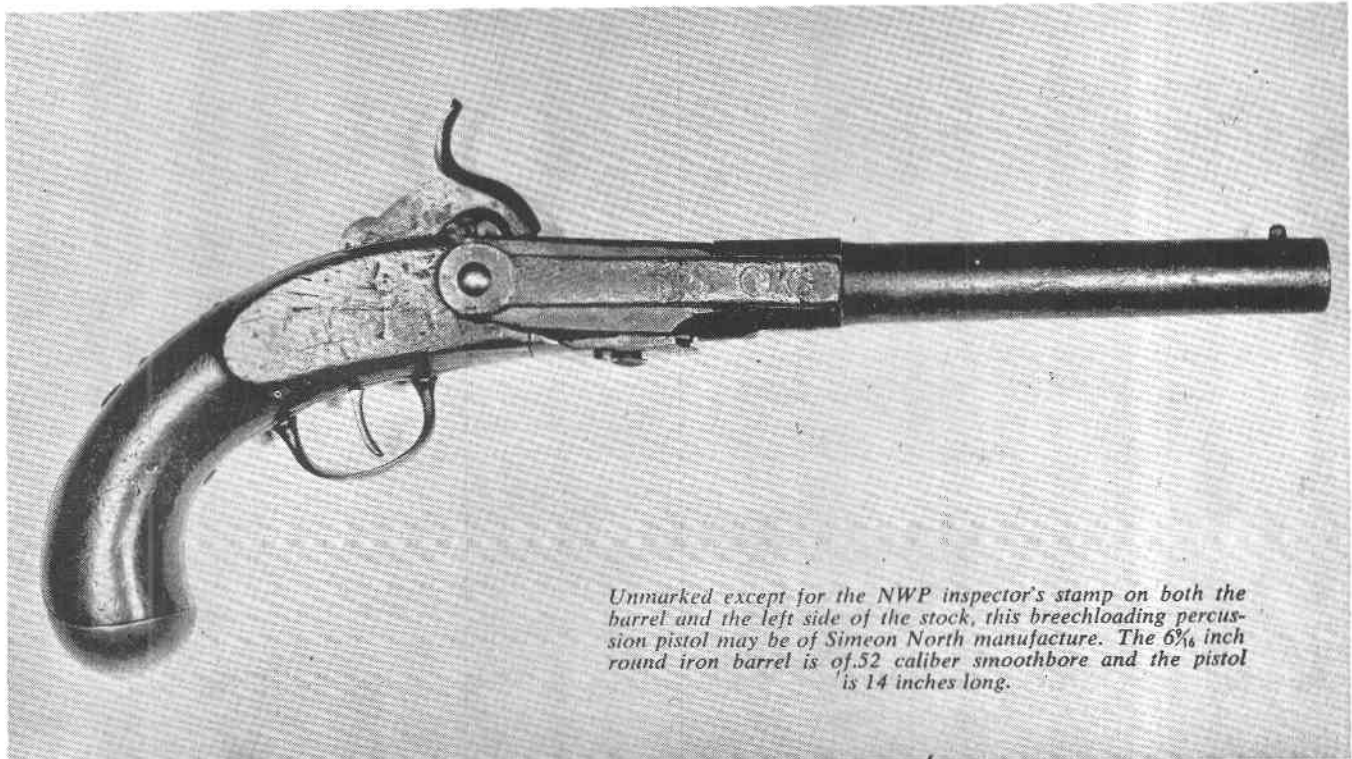
Whether completion of Simeon North's 1826 contract ended all of his pistol making activity may never be known. However, there is a strong possibility that the breech-loading single-shot percussion pistol illustrated here was made under North's supervision in his armory in Middletown, Conn. as a trial piece for another U. S. Government contract which never materialized.

The only markings on this pistol are the inspector's initials "NWP" on the breechblock in front of the hammer, and also the same "NWP" stamped in an oval on the left side of the stock where the government inspector's initials appear on other U. S. martial pistols. Having the same inspector's stamp of approval on both the stock and the barrel is important on a trial piece, such as this pistol appears to be. Standard production pistols have barrels proved by one or more inspectors and stocks and

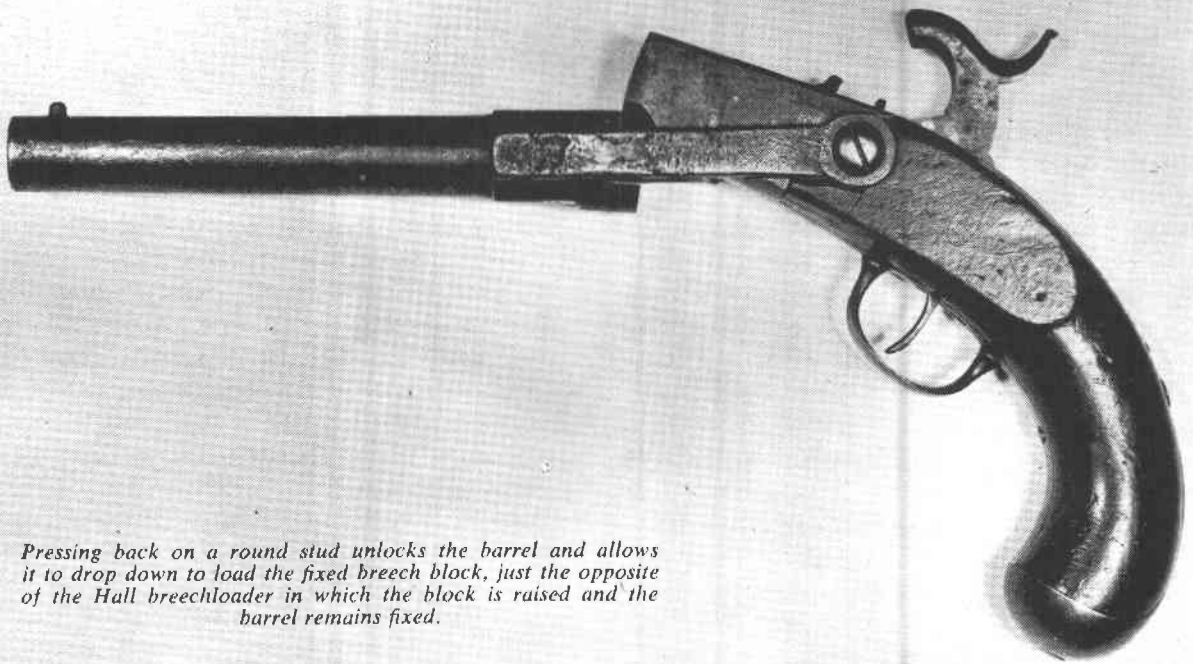
final assembly by still others. With this entire pistol being o.k.'ed by just the one inspector, the trial pistol theory is given credence.

NWP was the mark of N. W. Patch who had been a government arms inspector since 1831 when the inspection was taken from the Superintendents of the National Armories and placed under Lt. Daniel Tyler as Chief Inspector. This information is given in Vol. I of *U. S. ORDNANCE* by James E. Hicks. In Vol. II by the same author, much of the correspondence is given, showing that N. W. Patch served as an inspector at the Simeon North armory between 1833 and 1850 while North was engaged in manufacturing more than 20,000 percussion carbines under government contracts. While it is true that Mr. Patch was also employed inspecting arms at the Waters, Starr and other armories during the 1830's, yet it must be remembered that those contractors were making muzzle-loading flintlocks, swords, etc. None of them were making percussion breech-loaders and none of them had the previous long history as a pistol maker that North did. Simeon North was actively engaged in making percussion

<sup>1</sup> Because of the possibility that this rare breech-loading military pistol might have been made by Simeon North, it was decided to ask Mr. Smith to write the story and include it with Mr. Patterson's feature article.



*Unmarked except for the NWP inspector's stamp on both the barrel and the left side of the stock, this breechloading percussion pistol may be of Simeon North manufacture. The 6 $\frac{1}{8}$  inch round iron barrel is of .52 caliber smoothbore and the pistol is 14 inches long.*



*Pressing back on a round stud unlocks the barrel and allows it to drop down to load the fixed breech block, just the opposite of the Hall breechloader in which the block is raised and the barrel remains fixed.*

breech-loaders (carbines) and it seems only natural that he would be interested in producing a percussion breech-loading pistol.

On page 111 of Vol. II *U. S. ORDNANCE*, Major Hicks reproduces Col. North's letter of June 4, 1833 to Col. George Bumford at the Ordnance Dept. in Washington. In the second paragraph, North writes: "I would also propose to furnish one thousand pistols the same as the one now furnished, at the price of eight dollars per pistol, or ten thousand of them, at seven dollars per pistol". Attempting to read between the lines of century old correspondence is admittedly dangerous, but it is very possible that when North wrote "the one now furnished" he meant just that — and was referring to one pistol he had just then furnished. However, even if he meant the Model 1826 pistol which was the most recently manufactured model, it shows a continued interest of North in pistol making at the time he was making breech-loading carbines and rifles.

Comparing this breech-loading pistol with the carbines, we find some similarities which could well be a maker's carryover. The trigger guard on the breech-loading percussion pistol is about identical to those on the Model 1826 North flintlock pistols. So is the butt cap, except that it extends more than an inch farther up on the grip to meet the tang than do those on the flint pistols. Being shorter, an old Model 1826 butt cap could not have been used here. The hammer, though smaller, is very similar to the hammers North supplied on his contract carbines; likewise the trigger. Being .52 caliber smoothbore, it may indicate that this pistol was not made until around 1840, as the Model 1838 Hall-North breech-loading carbine and subsequent carbine models were the first to be made in that caliber.

The mystery of who made this martial pistol may never be solved, but regardless it is to me one of the most interesting pieces in the martial pistol section of my collection. Simeon North could have been proud of it then as I now am.