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WARNERS REVOLVING RIFLES

The subject that I chose to talk about is Warner's. But there are several makes of revolving rifles that had quite a few manufactured. The Porter and Colt for instance. There are probably around 1,200 Porters, the first half of them are pillock and about half of them are percussion, the first half of them are 8 shot and the balance are 9 shot. This change took place at about serial 660. They are rather a complicated gun of several models. I feel that a lot of time could be spent on them, as they have had very little research. Nobody has really made a complete survey on Warners, Porters, or Colts. Warner, of course is well known. Our good member, Tom McHugh, has talked on Warner handguns off and on. Warner made many guns even into the cartridge period. But no book has been written on them. He operated from about 1839 to about 1869. His pieces have never had much publicity until recently. The family were gunsmiths. He had a brother that was a master armorer at Springfield and worked for many of the other armories. I don't know whether another Warner was a brother or not, but a Warner was one of the incorporaters of the Massachusetts Arms Company.

It appears that there are four distinct models of percussion revolving rifles that were by James Warner. The earliest is the Jacquith patent model. I have not found any marked with Warner's name. But as hand guns are marked with both "Jacquith Patent" and "Springfield Arms Co.", one would assume the revolving rifles were also made by Warner. Warner used the name Springfield Arms Company as a sales company name for his products. So only on that assumption are they included here.

The Jacquith gun has about one-half its cylinder above the frame, with a hole thru the cylinder for sighting. The trigger guard is in two pieces. The front half stationary, the rear is used to cock the gun, in the rear of this half is a notch which is engaged by a trigger to it's rear. This rear trigger is used to shoot the gun. The Jacquith specimen owned by Tom McHugh is 7 shot, 52 caliber, 31 inch barrel, has a loading lever but no serial number. These pieces are very scarce. The patent was taken out by E. Jacquith of Brattleboro, Vt. in 1838.

Warner took out patents 7894 dated January 7, 1851 and 8229 dated July 13, 1851. These principles were used on his hand guns and revolving rifles. He made two models of revolving carbines that appear to have a production of a few hundred of each. I have found serial 30 in each model.

One type of carbine has the entire lock built onto the right side plate. The front of the lock plate has a projecting lug which slides under the frame. At the rear of the lock plate is a half hole with the other half in the frame. A bolt goes thru these openings, covering part of each. There are no bolts going thru the left side of the frame, on this model. When the hammer is cocked, a crank turns inside the lock, which rotates the cylinder mechanically. The hammer on this model is outside the lock. The topstrap form the barrel lug towards the rear, takes an offset towards the left. So there is an arc cut out of this top strap, thru which the hammer hits the nipples. There are no grooves between the nipples. The cylinder pin has a groove in it, towards the front end. The inside of the barrel lug, has a piece of iron the width of the above groove. On one side, at the end of the cylinder, is a flat section that slides over this part of the barrel lug, when they are put together. Then the barrel is turned on the cylinder

pin into its fixed position, the groove then slides over the extended iron in the barrel lug, locking the gun together ahead of the cylinder. A bolt from the top of the barrel strap, into the frame, holds it in this fixed position for use. The rear of the cylinder on this type has a groove around the back end. The notches for turning are to the center of the groove. So a circular ring is fastened onto the front of the frame, which the cylinder rides against. This allows the crank lever to work into the cylinder notches freely, to turn the cylinder. The brass trigger guard on this resembles that of the Remington revolving rifle. It has a spur just behind the trigger and curls up and forward, at its rear end. The description above is serial 126, but several others with lower series are basically the same. A serial 30 exists of this model and a serial 30 also exists of the following model.

Serial 15 is the lowest that I own of a different model which has the following descriptions. Neither serial 15 nor serial 32 have the feature of the locking arrangement of the front end of the cylinder pin with the barrel lug, as previously described. Yet serial 69 and thereafter do have this locking feature. All the cylinders of this type, have a groove between the nipples around the outside of the cylinder.

Evidently Warner made improvements or changes as he produced this model. Serial #15 has a mechanically rotated cylinder. When cocked an arm raises upward thru the left side of the recoil shield, turning the cylinder anti clockwise. The cylinder has been grooved out at its rear, leaving a ring around the outside edge. This eliminates the plate on the recoil shield of the model previously described.

On serial 32 the cylinder turns by hand. Its cylinder has no notches on the rear. It does have a groove around its rear just inside the ring lift around its edge. Then the surface is smooth and flat towards the center, level with the outer ring. A button ahead of the trigger pushes upward. It moves a small block upward to the grooved section of the cylinder. This allows the cylinder to be pulled back and manually rotated. The front end of the cylinder has each chamber grooved so that they fit over the end of the barrel. This holds the cylinder in firing position as the cylinder is held forward by a spring plate at its rear. In general this mechanism resembles a Collier.

Serial 69 is the most common of this model. The rear of the cylinder is perfectly smooth. It has notches around the edge at the rear. Ahead of the trigger guard is a U shaped arm. The front of this arm slides into the cylinder notches as a stop. The rear of this arm is kept pushed down by a coil spring. Pushing the arm upwards released the cylinder for hand turning.

All of this model has the same iron trigger guard. They are cut out in front for the cylinder releasing parts, on hand turning models. Several inches behind the ordinary part of a trigger guard, it forms a backwards letter "C". When held in firing position the little finger naturally falls into this "C". The next two fingers fall into the space ahead of the "C" and behind the regular trigger guard. The forefinger of course is on the trigger. It gives one a secure hold on the gun, compared to the common guard which only goes around the trigger.

This model also has a strap over the cylinder, held in position by a bolt at its rear. But it comes back perfectly straight and is not offset as in the previously described model. The strap is about 15/16" wide on most models, with a hole drilled to the right side, for the hammer to go thru, to the nipples underneath.

There is a groove in these straps, underneath and just ahead of the bolt hole for fastening it to the frame. On the top of the recoil shield is a ridge built up. When the barrel is turned into its permanent position, they lock together for rigidity. This locking arrangement is on both models previously described. Some have loading levers while others do not. They also vary in design.

Generally speaking, Warner used very little brass on all these pieces. On many of them he did inset in the side of the stock, a small hinged cover cap box. The barrels usually have the rear part octagon and forward part round. A few are all octagon but I have never found one all round. On the early ones the octagon section is about 7 1/4" long. But later ones are 8" long for the octagon section. On the pieces of this model, the hammer is just inside the right side plate. It is held by a bolt from the left side of the frame, thru the frame and threads into the right side plate. This bolt does not exist on the serial 126 gun and others of that model. Serial 126 had a lug on the front end of this side plate, but this model has a straight front end except for a small hole that slides on to a pin in the frame. It is held on by the trigger bolt just described, and a screw to its rear as on the other model described. All these preceding guns have their rear sight on the top strap. It wedges into a slot. They vary some in design. Front sights also vary considerably. They include wedge type, blade and bead.

On the top strap type, one finds many numbers stamped in various places. They are usually one or two digits like 5, 6, 10, or 12. They are underneath the iron butt plates, underneath the trigger guards, or on the frame underneath the trigger guards. The same part does not carry the same number on different guns. Nor does the same number run thru the same gun. They vary in size, usually of much larger size than the guns serial. I have not been able to figure out what they represent. Barrels are usually stamped with the serial below. But practically always the correct serial is stamped on the bottom of the top strap.

Barrels lengths vary but are usually 22 to 23 inches. Calibers also vary from 40 to 44 caliber on those checked. They seem to be all 6 shots. Barrels do not seem to have any name stamped. But on the frames in various places and of various styles, you usually find either "Warner's Patent" or "James Warner, Springfield Mass." Sometimes both are present and on some models the patent date "1851". Some are unmarked except for serial.

One would probably classify the previously described models as carbines. But Warner also made an entirely different model that was a rifle. It had an entirely different action and a solid frame. The top strap was part of the frame. Its barrel length varied but was usually 26" to 30" and full octagon. The frames were made of brass or iron. Otherwise they were entirely iron. Calibers seem to vary from about 38 to 41. I have not found any serials as high as 300.

The cylinders are 6 shot, smooth on the rear, but stop notches are around the rear at the outside edge. A trigger just inside the guard is held forward by a spring into these notches. When pulled back the cylinder is turned by hand. This trigger was pinned on the early models but a bolt thru the recoil shield from the right side, was used on later models. There is no grooves around the cylinder between the nipples.

The cylinder pin is held by a thumb screw or bolt, from the left side of the frame.

On most models the wood ramrod under the barrel, fits into the end of the cylinder pin. Some early models only have the one pin, but most of them have another rod hinged to the pin which is the handle for the loading lever. The ramrod then goes into the front end of this loading lever handle. Loading levers differ in style. Serial 137 resembles the loading lever of an 1851 Colt Navy. Serial 226 is more the style of those on North Savage revolving rifles, with an extension of the ramrod extending past the lever. This extension against the barrel, holds the ramrod upwards, when loading lever is in its firing position. The cylinder must be removed to load it. It is about 2 9/16" long and 1 13/16" in diameter.

The hammer is center hand on this model. When cocked, you can see an adjusting screw to push the cylinder against the barrel for a tight fit. The trigger guard has two spurs for giving the shooter a solid grasp on the gun. Evidently Warner was very conscious of giving one a firm hold on his guns.

In front of the cylinder on the early models, was a "battery" plate for protection against multiple discharge. This "battery" plate and the adjusting screw for pushing the cylinder against the barrel, are part of Warner's Patent 15202 of June 24, 1856. Evidently this model was the last percussion revolving rifle made by Warner. I am told there are Pill Locks of this general type. Yet a pill lock seems too late for a gun with 1856 patents.

The serials are well marked and most frames are marked on top "James Warner, Springfield Mass."

If James Warner made revolving rifles that are marked "Jacquith Patent", that would be his first model. The pieces of this type does not have any makers name on them. Warner's solid frame model having 1856 patent features, is most probably his last model. But it is questionable which of the carbines with the top strap on the barrel, were before one another. Warner's patent # 7894 of Jan. 7, 1851 covered revolving the cylinder by a "crank-lever in a curved slot" in the recoil shield. This feature was in the first carbines described in this article.

His patent 8229 of July 15, 1851 covered the improvement between serials 32 and 69. It was the locking arrangement at the front end of the cylinder pin, into the barrel lug. These patent dates being only 6 months apart seem too close to designate models. Warner was about 33 years old at the time. Colt won his suit against Massachusetts Arms Co., which was tried June 30, 1851. Of course this suit effected James Warner as well as every manufacturer of cylinder guns.

One would assume that the first carbines described (Serial 126), which had a mechanically rotating cylinder and also no ring around the cylinder between the nipples, was produced before Colt won his suit., yet this gun has the feature of the July patent, whereby the cylinder pin locks onto the barrel lug.

It does not seem as though Warner would produce the above model, then start with his other carbine model, and not put this locking feature on a later model. Serial 32 of the model with the groove between the cylinders and lock built into the inside of the gun, does not have this feature. This model also started out with a 7 1/4" octagon barrel section, which was increased to 8" octagon section.

The trigger guard on 126 resembles that on Warner's solid frame last percussion model, much more than it does any other.

So most probably Warner's first carbine is the model with the ring around the cylinder, the trigger held by a bolt thru the frame into the tight side lock plate, and hammer inside the lock plate. Of course there are variations of that model.

Possibly Warner paid Colt a royalty to put out the mechanically turning cylinder model, which has the lock fastened to the right side plate. Or else maybe he did not come out with this model until Colt's patent expired in 1856 or 1857.

I would greatly appreciate Warner owners contacting me, so that additional data can be compiled on Warners. At least this paper gives us a basis to correct or add to the subject of Warner percussion revolving rifles.