

John Pearson: Gunsmith for Sam Colt

By Robert Pershing



Figure 1. John Pearson, approximately at the age of 28. (Anonymous collection)

Samuel Colt stepped off the train in Baltimore, Maryland on a cold February day in 1834. He had just finished a swing through Trenton and Philadelphia on his one-man “Dr. Coult of New York, London and Calcutta” scientific exhibition that was based on applying nitrous oxide (laughing gas) to audience participants. The gas produced a harmless form of intoxication, generating performances quite out of the “patient’s” character, with little if any later recollection. This popular exhibition provided Colt with living expenses and some extra dollars for his research and development project.

Besides being a “traveling lecturer” on natural philosophy, chemistry and human reaction, Sam Colt was developing his invention of a revolving cylinder firearm. He had hired gunsmith Anson Chase in Hartford, Connecticut in late 1832 or early 1833 (Colt was 18 years old at the time) to transform his inventive ideas into working prototypes. The start up capital came from a \$15 Christmas present to Colt. The first model blew up in the initial test. The next rifle and pistol made by Chase were taken to the U.S. Patent Office but were not in the finished state required for patent establishment so Colt took a “caveat” provisional specification, which was somewhat like the “Affidavit of Claim of Invention” issued today—establishing priority of invention. Chase was paid less



than \$125 for all his work for Colt. Colt had also contracted Samuel Gibson, a gunsmith in Albany, paying him \$11 to use the forgings of True and Davis to make an experimental pistol. By May 24th, Colt had paid \$415 dollars, 12 and 1/2 cents for work on two rifles and several pistols including one of brass, which has never surfaced in the collecting world. These were made by Anson Chase and several other gunsmiths (13 in all). Of this lot, apparently only two of the rifles survive today.

Baltimore seemed to be a good place to restart his project and further his ambitions. Colt secured bookings as a lecturer at the Museum that proved to be quite profitable, so he extended his plan to stay in Baltimore. The Museum was under the direction of Joseph E. Walker, probably a close relation to Capt. Samuel Hamilton Walker of Baltimore and Texas, who played an important part in Colt’s future.

The Museum was an oddity—an unorganized collection of oddments of junk. There was a renaissance of learning at this time, and benefactors came forward with items and even collections to share with the general populace. While the spark of knowledge and investigation existed, Colt was a contributor to the house quackery. This enticed interest (and money) to Mr. Walker and Colt more as a sideshow than an informational or scientific exhibit.

While wandering around Baltimore, Colt met A.T. Baxter, one of the finer and more talented gunsmiths in town. Baxter was established and had done well enough to employ a few apprentices. He was always looking for outside jobs to keep them employed, and assigned one of his best

men, John Pearson, to take care of Colt's needs. The initial note in Colt's journal reads:

"Baltimore March 1, (1834)

To 14 days work on Rifle by hand ingaged of A. T. Baxter
\$28.00"

Figure 2 is the rifle completed by A.T. Baxter and John Pearson. It has the cocking lever going through the bottom of the trigger guard and is in front of the trigger. The front sight is missing but the four-horse trademark is affixed to the left cheek piece of the stock. The rifle is marked "WORLY" (the source of the barrel) on the right side of the barrel at

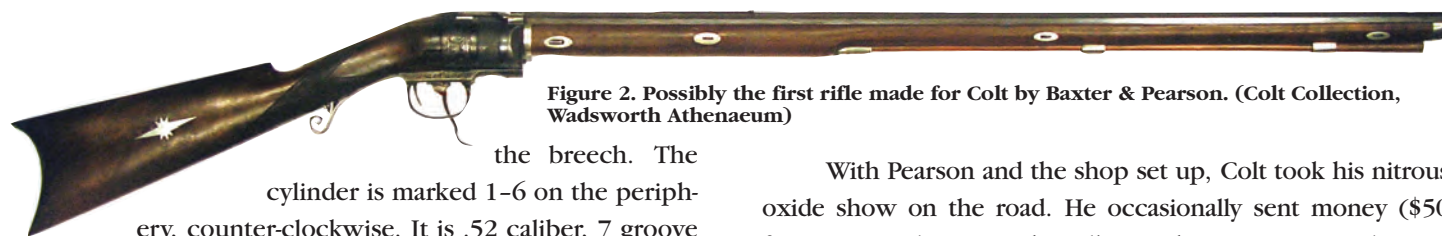


Figure 2. Possibly the first rifle made for Colt by Baxter & Pearson. (Colt Collection, Wadsworth Athenaeum)

the breech. The cylinder is marked 1-6 on the periphery, counter-clockwise. It is .52 caliber, 7 groove rifling with right hand twist, 53 inches overall length and weighed 9 pounds, 5 ounces. The forestock is a full Kentucky style. The frame, cap cover and rear ramrod ferule are scroll engraved. An 8-point German silver star is on the right stock. The barrel and stock wedges are framed in German silver. The stock is checkered at the grip and the walnut is oil finished.

John Pearson was schooled as a watchmaker in England, which probably meant he apprenticed as a watchmaker before coming to America. He was born around 1806 and was 28 years old when Colt (age 19) found him. It was a natural move for Pearson to evolve from watchmaker to gunsmith, considering the complexity of making firearm locks. John Pearson may have been related to James Pearson, a gunsmith who contracted with the Pennsylvania Committee of Safety in 1780 for muskets.

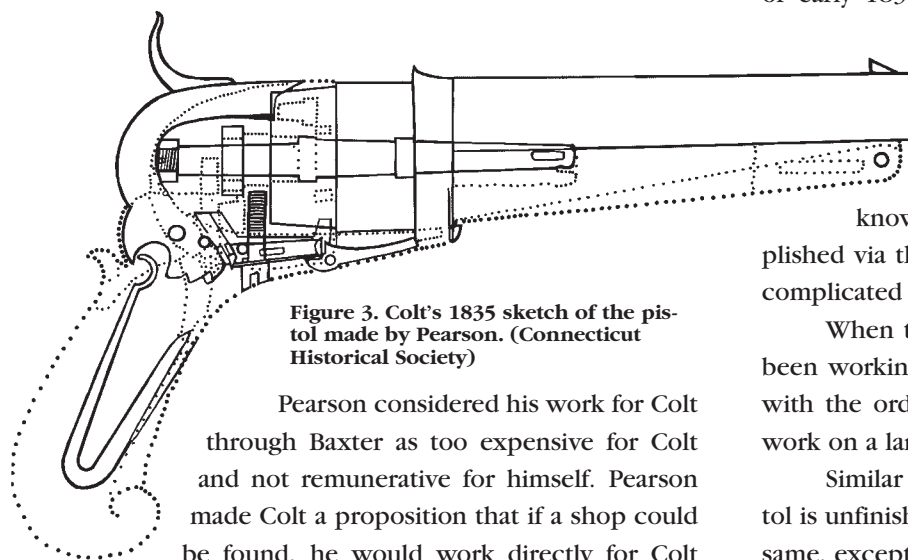


Figure 3. Colt's 1835 sketch of the pistol made by Pearson. (Connecticut Historical Society)

Pearson considered his work for Colt through Baxter as too expensive for Colt and not remunerative for himself. Pearson made Colt a proposition that if a shop could be found, he would work directly for Colt

with no middleman. An agreement was contracted between the two:

"Baltimore June 27, 1834

I John Pearson agree to work for Mr. Samuel Colt Twelve Months at Ten Dollars per week. Ten Hours in each day (Sundays excepted) out of which Wages To pay Shop & Forge Rent to John Colt Four Dollars per Month—I to draw my wages weekley. In case of disagreement eather party have the privilage of closing The Contract by giving one Months Notice.

John Pearson"

With Pearson and the shop set up, Colt took his nitrous oxide show on the road. He occasionally sent money (\$50 from Montreal) to Joseph Walker at the Museum in Baltimore for Pearson's account. This was a poor choice because Walker had made some bad investments and was forced to leave Baltimore in the middle of the night for Richmond, Virginia.

Figure 3 displays the barrel with a spring-held folding bayonet (for use after all shots had been fired). The raised part of the breech of the barrel is the rear sight. The breech also included a cover over the cones of the cylinder to suppress flash firing of more than one cylinder. The trigger came down when the hammer was cocked back (as in the later Patersons).

Colt told Pearson (in the latter part of 1834) to "—cut 7 or 8 inches from the small end of the rifle barrel to make a pistol of it to carry 6 charges—a Rifle from the rest—that will carry 8 charges."

The prototype pistol was probably made in late 1834 or early 1835. It is very much like the sketch (Figure 3).

Although unfinished, this specimen has a strong and workable construction (Figure 4). A six shot with a folding bayonet, Pearson possibly made more of this model, but in its unfinished state it is the only one

known today. Loading the cylinder was accomplished via the barrel, as removal of the cylinder was more complicated than later experimental models.

When the parts and instructions arrived, Pearson had been working on a shotgun, but he put it aside to comply with the order and material sent by Colt. He commenced work on a large holster pistol (Figure 5) and a rifle.

Similar to the pistol shown in Figure 4, the holster pistol is unfinished and unmarked. Many of the features are the same, except for the heavy barrel lug. The hammer and spur

Figure 4. An early prototype pistol made by Pearson for Colt. (Colt Collection, Wadsworth Athenaeum)

are oversized, and the barrel is definitely made from a rifle barrel. This was Samuel Colt and John Pearson's first attempt at a pistol with a fixed trigger and trigger guard. Note how the trigger guards bulged forward with the early rifles and this pistol. The trigger guards and the bag shaped grips with a spur are a mark of Pearson's work. Some early Colt books identify this as an Anson Chase pistol but it was definitely made by Pearson in late 1834 or early 1835.

"Dr. Coult" continued on the road through Canada—from Montreal to Quebec—while both towns were experiencing a cholera outbreak. Attendance was down so he turned toward St. Johns, New Brunswick. Finally, on September 29, 1834 he was able to reach his friend (and Pearson's paymaster) Walker in Richmond, Virginia: "I will send you (the money) before I pay any of my bills so that you may not be under the necessity of paying any more money in advance for me which you have been doing so kindly & to a stranger as it were whom you know little of but of whom you shall one day now more. For what you have done and are I trust yet doing returns your money thanks & hopes at some future period to have it in my power repay you for your grate kindness—"

In his next letter to Walker, October 12, 1834, after a successful run in St. Johns, Colt sent instructions for Pearson, along with a few dollars, and asked: "Have the goodness to quit a small ruffle barril with a bore that will just chamber a large size buck shot with out pach & let Mr. Pearson make a pair of small pocket pistols out of the little end of the barril that will carry 6 charges each I want them to

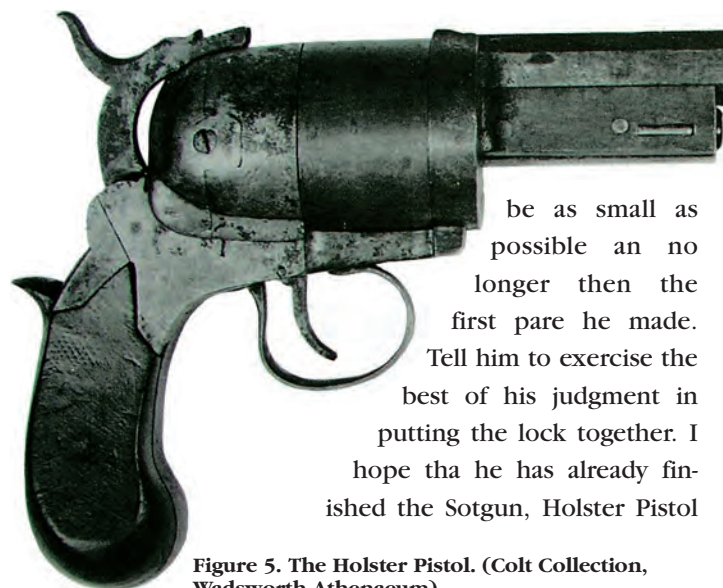


Figure 5. The Holster Pistol. (Colt Collection, Wadsworth Athenaeum)

be as small as possible and no longer than the first pair he made. Tell him to exercise the best of his judgment in putting the lock together. I hope that he has already finished the Sotgun, Holster Pistol

and Rifle—if the are—take charge of them and don't let them be seen by anybody."

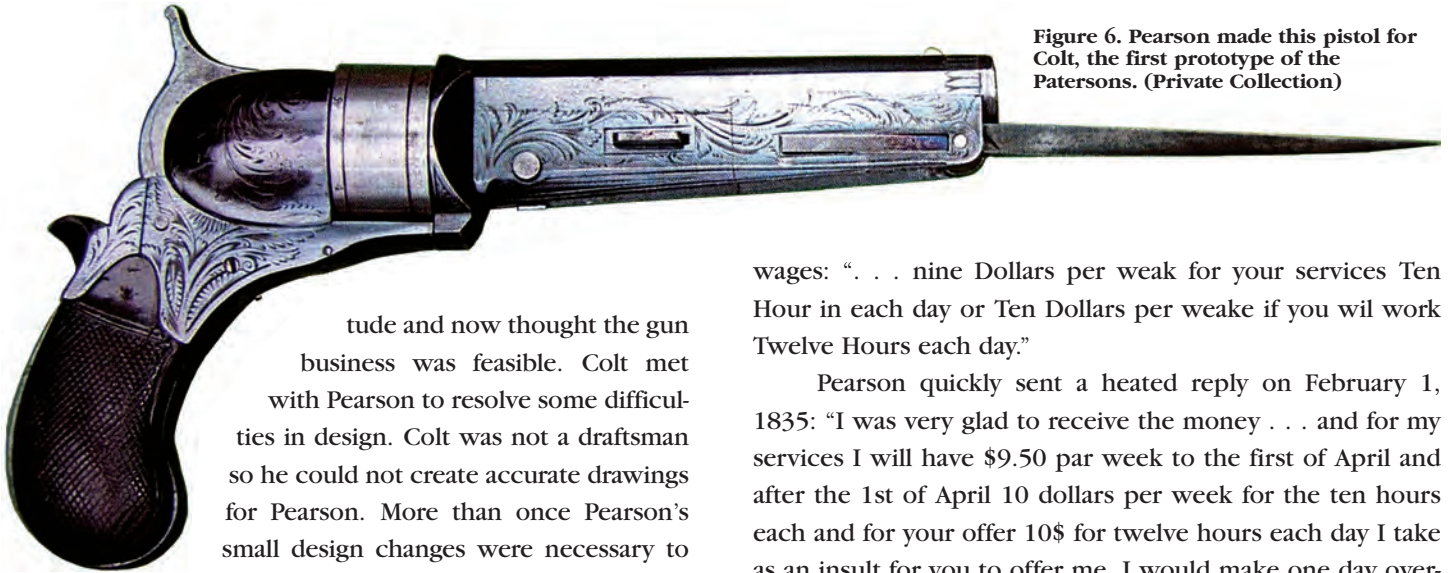
Colt finally received word of Walker's financial trouble (investing in a propeller driven box kite with cigar shaped balloon attached) and his subsequent flight (by land, not air) to Richmond. Colt decided to attempt a small smuggling operation to raise funds. He invested a few hundred dollars in bolts of fine fabrics in St. Johns. Colt's father, Christopher, was prominent in the fabric trade and had taught his son the finer points in choice of quality textiles. Colt thought he could sneak the material past the duty officers upon re-entry to the U.S. and realize a good profit. The officers at the Providence, Rhode Island dock were attentive and confiscated one bale of Colt's contraband. He did smuggle another bale past the officers that included a bolt of material and a music box. This ended his smuggling career until the Model 1851 Navies.

Figure 6 is serial No. 1, .36 caliber, a 5-inch barrel, six shot, and rifling of seven grooves with a right hand twist, including the bayonet the overall length is 13-3/4 inches. The bayonet swings back and is housed under the barrel, contained by the rectangular spring latch just to the rear of the

blade. Colt used it as a sample gun to start organizing his firearm business. The serial number is on the top of the barrel in the rear sight groove. The barrel is pieced together from four chunks of carefully formed steel including the breech flash-plate (5/16 inches thick). The front sight is a small blade, German silver, and the rear sight is a notch in the hammer—a trait used by Colt throughout the percussion era. This is the only known prototype Colt Paterson revolver to be in a private collection. The other two are in the Colt Collection at the Wadsworth Athenaeum Museum in Hartford, Connecticut.

Colt returned to his home in Baltimore, deciding to stay until after Christmas. His father had changed his previous atti-

Figure 6. Pearson made this pistol for Colt, the first prototype of the Patersons. (Private Collection)



tude and now thought the gun business was feasible. Colt met with Pearson to resolve some difficulties in design. Colt was not a draftsman so he could not create accurate drawings for Pearson. More than once Pearson's small design changes were necessary to make Colt's ideas workable.

Early in 1835, Colt left for Richmond and joined up with his old friend Walker. He neglected Pearson to the extent that Pearson had to feed and clothe himself. The situation escalated when Pearson threatened to stop work and get a steady position elsewhere. Knowing he did not want to lose a good man, Colt wrote on January 17, 1835:

"Mr. Pearson:

Sir: I improve this lishour moment in informing you that my affairs here are like to terminate as wel as I had expected & on Monday or Tuesday next I wil make you a remittance that wil inable you to commence my work. You can therefore make your arrangements accordingly At all events don't ingage yourself to anyone until you hear fromme again which wil be on Monday or Tuesday next."

Colt didn't make it north as intended, but wrote and sent Pearson money. He asked Pearson to buy accessories such as shot, powder flasks, wad cutter, etc. and all the tools necessary for completely disassembling the piece put in a carrying case. He followed with another letter on January 23, 1835: "I forgot to mention I wished you to have the ornament on the stock engraved. Take it to the engraver underneath the Museum or to some other good engraver & have him engrave the Colts heads in the center of which I want my name 'S Colt P R' engraved . . . it is my intention to put three or four other men to work with you as soon as I retrnn to Baltimore . . ."

The "Colts heads" was the earliest trademark of Colt. The four-horse head emblem was found on the cheek piece of several prototype rifles and shotguns (including the rifle made for Colt by Anson Chase). It carried over into the production of First Model Ring Lever Rifles at the Paterson factory. Colt used it as his letter seal and signet. He concluded the above letter by generously offering to raise Pearson's

wages: ". . . nine Dollars per weak for your services Ten Hour in each day or Ten Dollars per weake if you wil work Twelve Hours each day."

Pearson quickly sent a heated reply on February 1, 1835: "I was very glad to receive the money . . . and for my services I will have \$9.50 par week to the first of April and after the 1st of April 10 dollars per week for the ten hours each and for your offer 10\$ for twelve hours each day I take as an insult for you to offer me. I would make one day over-time in a week for which you would give me one dollar. I may work all day and study all night for which you offer me \$1.50 each day and \$1.00 dollar for the extra day. I suppos I must find my own candle for the one dollar. As you must know I would have from 2 to three haur of candlelight each day and then wait 6 months or you pleasure for my pay as I have done. But no Baby Bargain . . . the money you sent me wont pay all your bills and you order me to by a Barrel and flask & and pay for a forging and all these things which will take a great part of it. I think it nothing but just and right that you pay me my money tat is due and advance money to buy all these thing and a months wages as I to credit you for it. For I am neither willing or able to hazard my Time or Money on your work anymore. So you can use your own pleasure whether you employ me or not . . . At present I send you the amount of Expenses."

Walker was still in Richmond and was in no position to advance Colt more money, nor soothe Pearson's hurt feelings because his wages were a month in arrears. Colt gathered all the money he could and sent Pearson a bank check for \$75 while reaffirming the previous letters of instruction. He asserted his intent to put more men in the shop and said in the following letter of February 5, 1835: "make your expensies as lite as possible . . . Don't be alarmed about your wages, nothing shal be rong on my part, but do wel for me & you shal fare wel."

Pearson wrote back on February 10, 1835: "I received your letter on the 9th with the draft for Seventy Five Dollars on a Bank in Philadelphia for which I had to pay 25c discount to get cash here . . . I shall proceed with your work as quickly as possible according to my proposals mentioned in my last letter."

Colt, always the demander, directed Pearson to send him the shotgun he had mentioned in his letter of January 23, 1835. He also ordered ammonium nitrate to fuel his

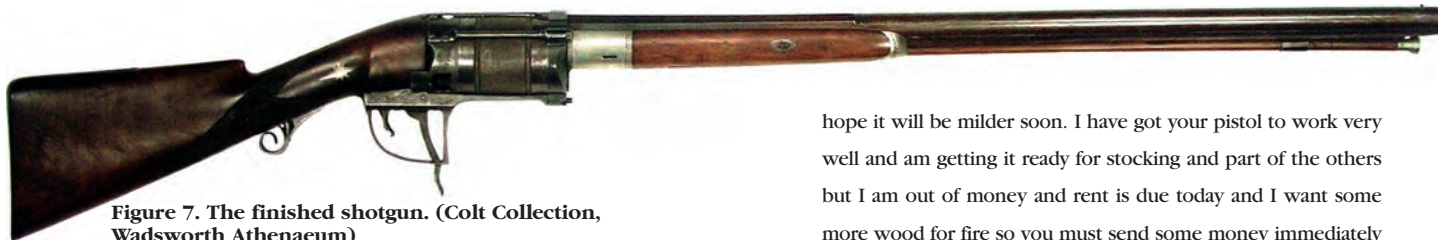


Figure 7. The finished shotgun. (Colt Collection, Wadsworth Athenaeum)

gas-generator (laughing gas for “Dr. Coult’s” lectures) and asked they be sent to Richmond.

John Pearson returned to work on the shotgun in late 1834 and finished it in mid- to late-February 1835. John Medeity did the engraving and charged Colt a mere \$1.50 and 1/2 cent. Pearson shipped the gun (now cased with tools) and the requested chemicals in late February 1835.

The finished shotgun’s barrel is marked J. Pearson No. 5 on the lug (Figure 7). The cylinder has a grooved periphery, chambers are numbered 1-6 and a Birmingham proof mark is stamped on the barrel. The four-horse head overlay on the cheek piece has S. Colt/PR engraved in the center. Overall length of the shotgun is 49-5/8 inches, .66 caliber (about 16 gauge) and weighed 13 pounds, 6 ounces. There is a trap door on the front of the frame to facilitate loading.

The four-horse overlay (Figure 8) on the left cheek piece of the stock of the prototype shotgun was an early design that carried forward to the First Model Ring Lever that Colt produced at the Paterson gun works. The overlay on the left was turned 90° when mounted on the stock, so that it appeared as the one on the right. Colt used the four-horse head emblem as a trademark and also letterhead.

Pearson completed the order and wrote to Colt on February 10, 1835:

“I sent your Gun and Ammonia . . . I am getting on with the work as well as I can but it has been such colt weather and the shop so cold that I had like to be frose. But I

hope it will be milder soon. I have got your pistol to work very well and am getting it ready for stocking and part of the others but I am out of money and rent is due today and I want some more wood for fire so you must send some money immediately or I shall be lost. Please to write a soon as you get the goods and let me know that you get them but Don’t Forget the Money.”

I remain yours to command . . .

Upon receiving the shotgun and ammonia, Colt promptly went to Lynchburg for lectures to replenish his capital. Lynchburg proved a good financial move for Colt, so he was soon able to send \$50 to Pearson, which he thought should last him until he returned to Baltimore in mid-April. He was pleased with the gun which met his expectations.

Colt now needed patents to protect his invention. To accomplish this, he needed more working prototypes. Despite his intention to “to put three or four other men to work,” he fired off another letter to Pearson on February 15, 1835 with more work directions: “. . . commence on the Rife of the half-ounce ball, use the barril that came from Philadelphia some months since, coting from the small end sufficient to make a Holster Pistol. I shal probably be in Baltimore by the time you finish the rifle . . .”

Colt decided to keep Pearson as a single employee for a while longer. The original shop was too small, so a new space was located. The move was executed on May 10, 1835. Some new items were introduced to the improved shop: a strong padlock and hasp, a heavy vice and a number of files.

As soon as the new shop was ready, Colt hired Fred Brash as an assistant to help John Pearson. Sam Colt realized he needed patent protection for his invention. He borrowed \$2,000 and made plans to go to Europe. Colt left a generous \$150 in the Coing Bank in Baltimore for Pearson to draw on

as the “need arose.” Colt then signed a contract with his two workers: Brash \$7.50 per week, Pearson \$12 per week.

Colt left for Liverpool August 24, 1835. From there he went to London, arriving on the September 19 and hired Lemuel W. Serrell “Solicitor of American and Foreign Patents.” Serrell completed the papers in only three days and the patent process started. The patent was granted but required drawings and examples of firearms. Colt had the pistol polished, blued, hardened and engraved. The work was

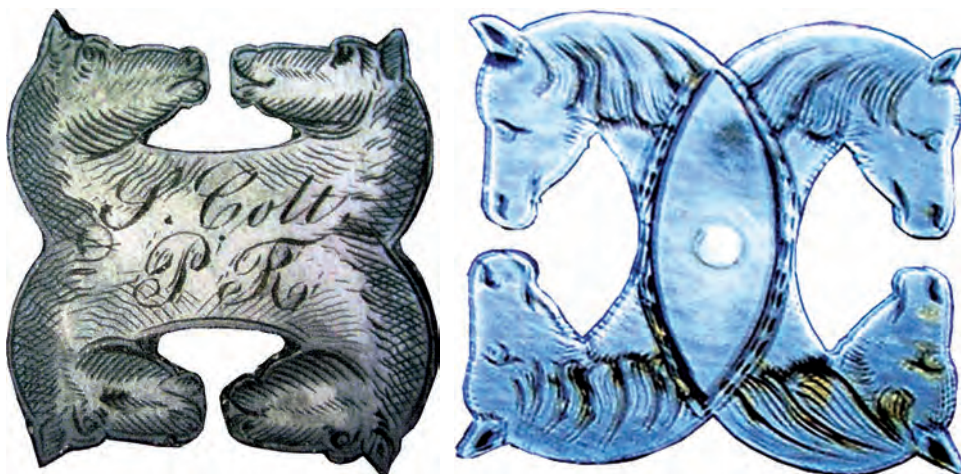


Figure 8. Colt’s first trademark (left), as compared to one from the Paterson era (right). (Left: Colt Collection, Wadsworth Athenaeum; Right: Author’s Collection)

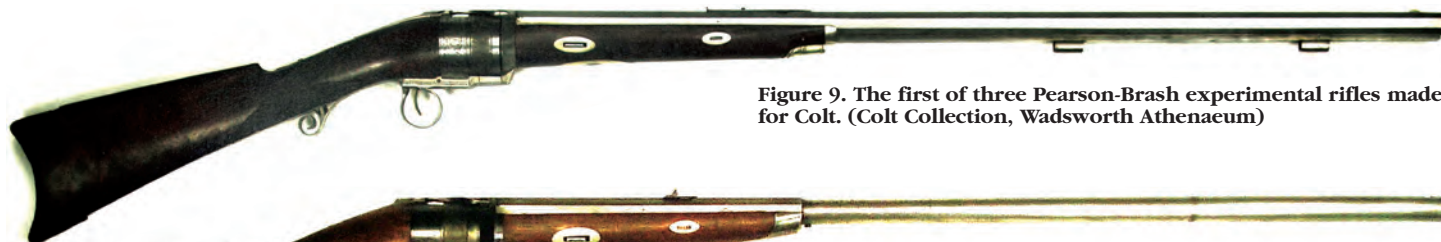


Figure 9. The first of three Pearson-Brash experimental rifles made for Colt. (Colt Collection, Wadsworth Athenaeum)

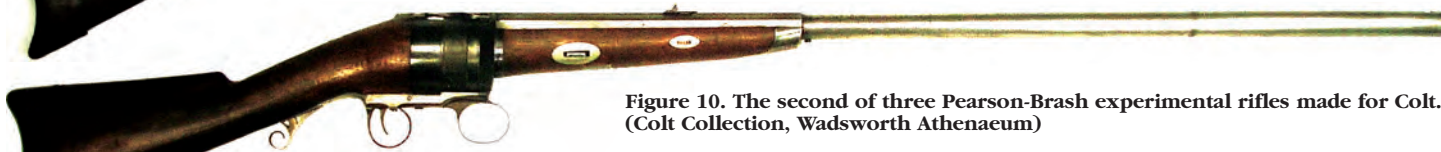


Figure 10. The second of three Pearson-Brash experimental rifles made for Colt. (Colt Collection, Wadsworth Athenaeum)

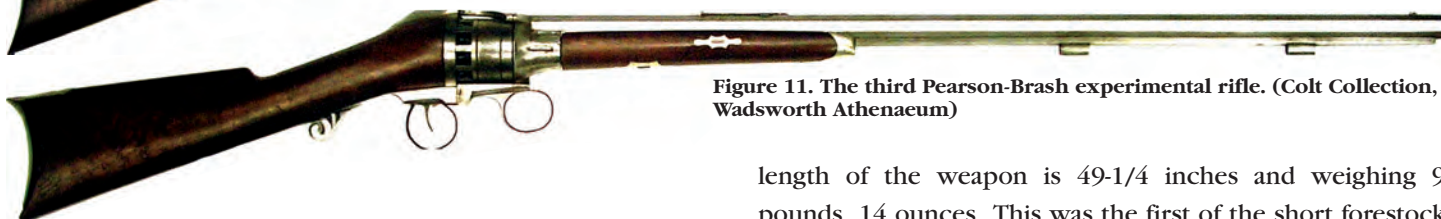


Figure 11. The third Pearson-Brash experimental rifle. (Colt Collection, Wadsworth Athenaeum)

done at the shop of William Palmer, “Gun Maker to His Majesty,” costing about \$3.00. All requirements were completed by October 29, 1835. The total cost for the patent was more than \$600 in gold.

Colt turned to France for his next patent, going to Paris and securing the services of an English speaking, reputable patent attorney, M. Perpigna. Soon an 11-page document, similar to the American and English patent claims (worded differently, according to law) were filed and accepted. Colt had only half of the fee (927 francs), so his attorney advanced him the balance and the patent was awarded.

Dr. Coult was dead and gone and Samuel Colt closed the gap on a formal U. S. Patent. There is some disagreement on the issuance of the patent. Colt held a “caveat” from the Patent Office and on February 25, 1836 he was issued Patent No. 138 as granted by President Andrew Jackson. Unfortunately, shortly after the issue, the Patent Office caught fire and burned to the ground. The ashes were sifted through and enough evidence was recovered so that the patent held. Subsequently, Patent No. 9430X was assigned to replace the original. Patents in order, Colt proceeded to promote his arms company. To do this he needed more examples of his wares. He returned to Baltimore, paid off old debts to Pearson and Brash, and strung them along for a while longer.

Production accelerated, and more pistols and rifles were in various stages of completion. New designs appeared and old features disappeared—for example the bayonet and stock overlays. A ring lever for cocking and advancing the cylinder replaced the cocking lever of the rifle and shotgun.

Figure 9 is a .36 caliber with a 10 shot cylinder, engraved with Roman numerals I-X reading counterclockwise. The rifle is missing some parts: the ring lever (forward of trigger guard, for cocking), the butt plate and the ramrod. The barrel has a 7-groove rifling, right-hand twist, overall

length of the weapon is 49-1/4 inches and weighing 9 pounds, 14 ounces. This was the first of the short forestock rifles, and was engraved in the same manner as the rifle shown in Figure 2.

We are not sure how much of a difference Fred Brash made on the design changes, but with his employment the quantity and quality of the rifles and pistols improved.

Figure 10 is a .53 caliber, 7 groove rifling (twist to the right), nine shot with numbered cylinder (similar to Figure 9), 49-1/4 inches total length and a weight of 12 pounds, 7 ounces. This is quite an increase in weight, in spite of one shot less than Figure 9. For the first time we see a lot of blue finish, no engraving and the only German silver is on the key plates. The butt plate is shaped more in the style of the forthcoming Paterson ‘39 Carbine and Shotgun. This is the first rifle that does not have a checkered stock.

Figure 11 is a .35 caliber rifle, overall length shortened to 47-7/8 inches, weight 10 pounds, 8 ounces. The front and rear sights are dovetailed into the barrel. The key plate is fancier for the forestock, while the barrel key is incorporated in the barrel lug behind the forestock. The frame bridge above the cylinder is the same in all three experimental rifles. The ramrod is missing.

Figure 12 is unmarked except for the numbering of the cylinders, 1-6 on the breech end of the cylinder, forward of the nipple cover plate, .53 caliber, weighing 4 pounds, 4 ounces (5 ounces less than a Walker) and an overall length of 13-5/16 inches. The pistol was altered on Colt’s orders in March of 1836 because the Navy Board had agreed to test the model. Changes included a new barrel assembly (longer barrel and lug) and altered grips.

In a response to an impatient Colt, Pearson wrote on March 27, 1836: “I have not done any but the large one—I have altered the Handle and finished it.” Pearson gave the “Navy model” heftier grips and besides flattening the bottom of the grips, he flared the bottom to give the heavier gun a better balance. The back strap has a slot cut in it indicating

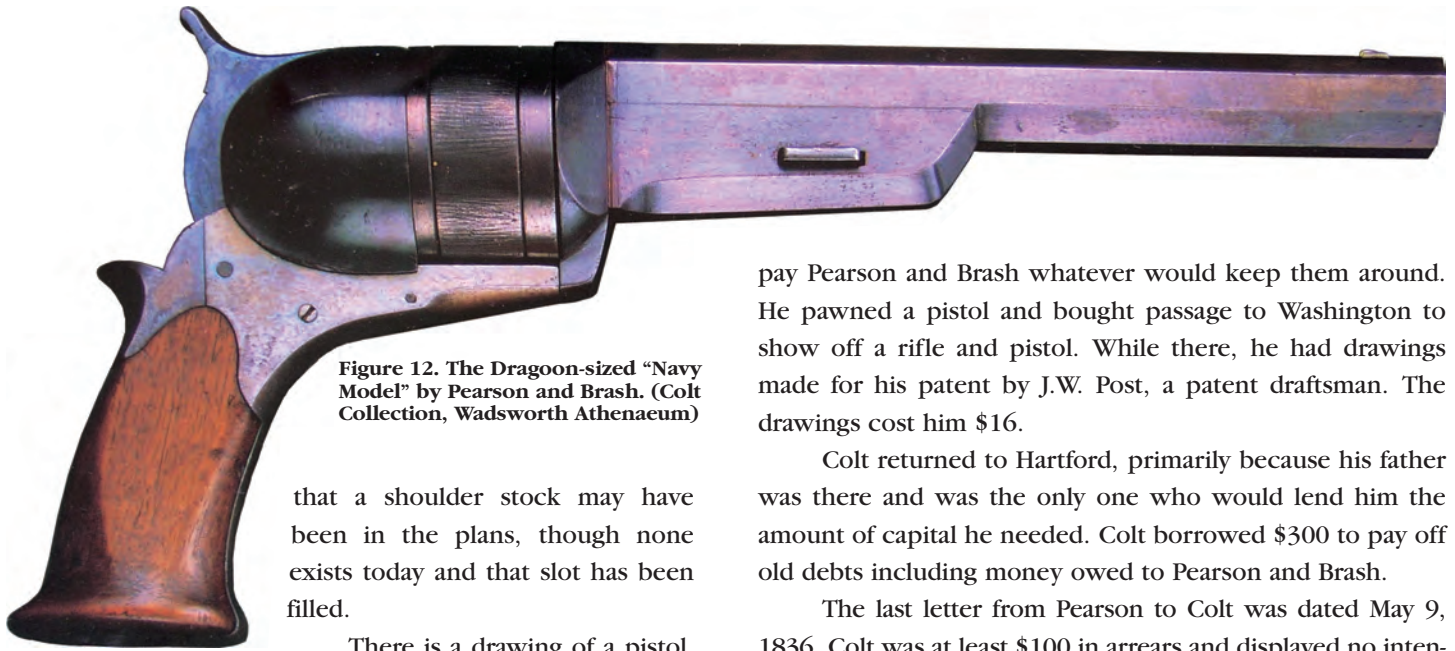


Figure 12. The Dragoon-sized "Navy Model" by Pearson and Brash. (Colt Collection, Wadsworth Athenaeum)

that a shoulder stock may have been in the plans, though none exists today and that slot has been filled.

There is a drawing of a pistol, though it is not known who did it (Figure 13). Colt was not a draftsman and we do not know if Fred Brash made this drawing. Note in the detail of the cylinder, the chamber is double-drilled with the ball cavity larger than the powder cavity. This was done to insure the powder load would be safe to prevent bursting the cylinder or firing more than one chamber at a time. The pistol has a cap box in the grip, which perhaps explains the added hand-drawn circles in the toe of the grip and the half-circle in the heel.

Figure 14 became Sam Colt's pride and joy. It filled two demands: a prototype and a promotional example to show investors. Made by Pearson and Brash, it is unmarked and has a barrel length of 3-11/16 inches, .33 caliber, five shot. The front sight is a German silver blade; the rear sight has a groove at the top of the breech plate at the breech of the barrel and a hole through the nose of the hammer. The cylinder is covered at the breech; the frame, recoil shields and breech plate are vine engraved. The bag-shaped varnished mahogany grips are checkered with a German silver star and have no spur. The forestock has German silver overlays at the wedge slots. Unlike later Paterson models, the trigger is lowered by hand.

It is interesting that all the screws were punch marked as are their screw holes (Figure 15). Since they were engraved, the screws must return to the same hole or disturb the engraving pattern.

Colt discontinued his lecture tour and had no income. He sold the music box and bolt of cloth from his "old" smuggling days, but that did not provide enough funds. He borrowed \$300 from his uncle, Roswell L. Colt, of Paterson, to

pay Pearson and Brash whatever would keep them around. He pawned a pistol and bought passage to Washington to show off a rifle and pistol. While there, he had drawings made for his patent by J.W. Post, a patent draftsman. The drawings cost him \$16.

Colt returned to Hartford, primarily because his father was there and was the only one who would lend him the amount of capital he needed. Colt borrowed \$300 to pay off old debts including money owed to Pearson and Brash.

The last letter from Pearson to Colt was dated May 9, 1836. Colt was at least \$100 in arrears and displayed no intention of paying the debt. Pearson finishes he letter with: "I shall expect some money next week or I wil stop work for I can get Half a Dozen places of work and get my Pay every week. You are in a Devil of a hurry but not to pay your men"

Sam Colt's habit of using people as stepping stones to success did not exclude Pearson. Colt was destined to become one of the wealthiest men of his time. Pearson would have not worked at the Paterson Factory, because he was not able to handle being number two. After making many of the 26 experimental guns for Colt, Pearson the "gonsmith" (Sam Colt's own spelling) leaves the scene. Pliney Lawton of Springfield, Massachusetts was hired to manage the manufacturing complex.

John Pearson stayed in Baltimore until around 1840 when he moved to St. Louis, Missouri. He remained in

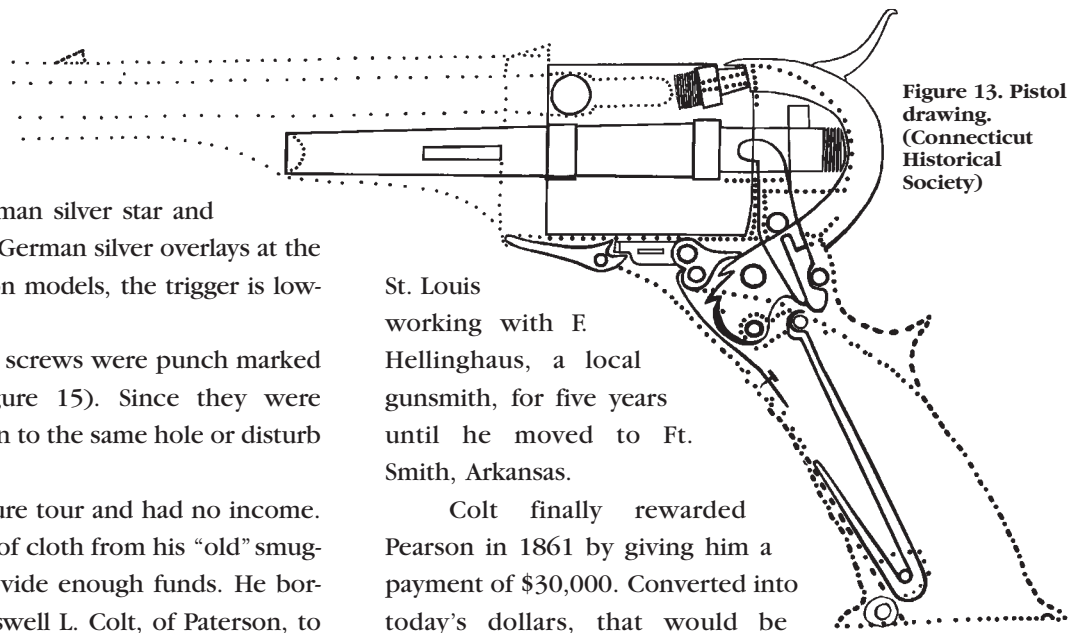
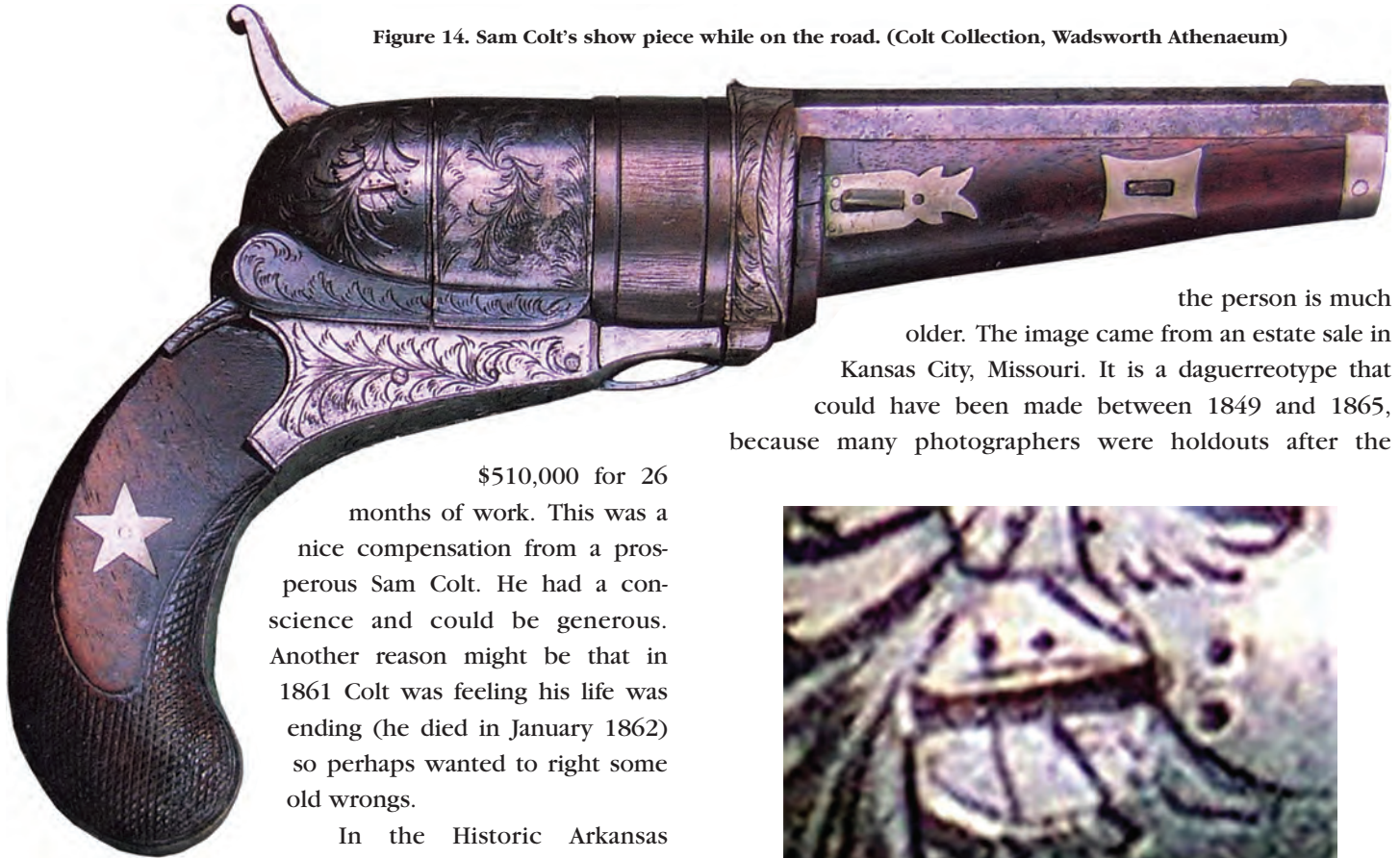


Figure 13. Pistol drawing. (Connecticut Historical Society)

St. Louis working with F. Hellinghaus, a local gunsmith, for five years until he moved to Ft. Smith, Arkansas.

Colt finally rewarded Pearson in 1861 by giving him a payment of \$30,000. Converted into today's dollars, that would be

Figure 14. Sam Colt's show piece while on the road. (Colt Collection, Wadsworth Athenaeum)



\$510,000 for 26 months of work. This was a nice compensation from a prosperous Sam Colt. He had a conscience and could be generous. Another reason might be that in 1861 Colt was feeling his life was ending (he died in January 1862) so perhaps wanted to right some old wrongs.

In the Historic Arkansas Museum there is a percussion pistol considered to have been made by John Pearson (Figure 16). This pistol is a .36 caliber, 9 inches overall, single shot with silver containing rings for the ramrod. It is not a very complicated gun, and certainly not one of great beauty and balance. The hammer and trigger were made of the same piece of steel. When the hammer is cocked, the trigger pivots down, and when the trigger is pulled, it pivots back into the frame and the hammer strikes the cap. "J. Pearson" is stamped on the right side of the frame.

John Pearson returned to St. Louis in 1870, dabbled in Missouri real estate and limited gunsmithing.

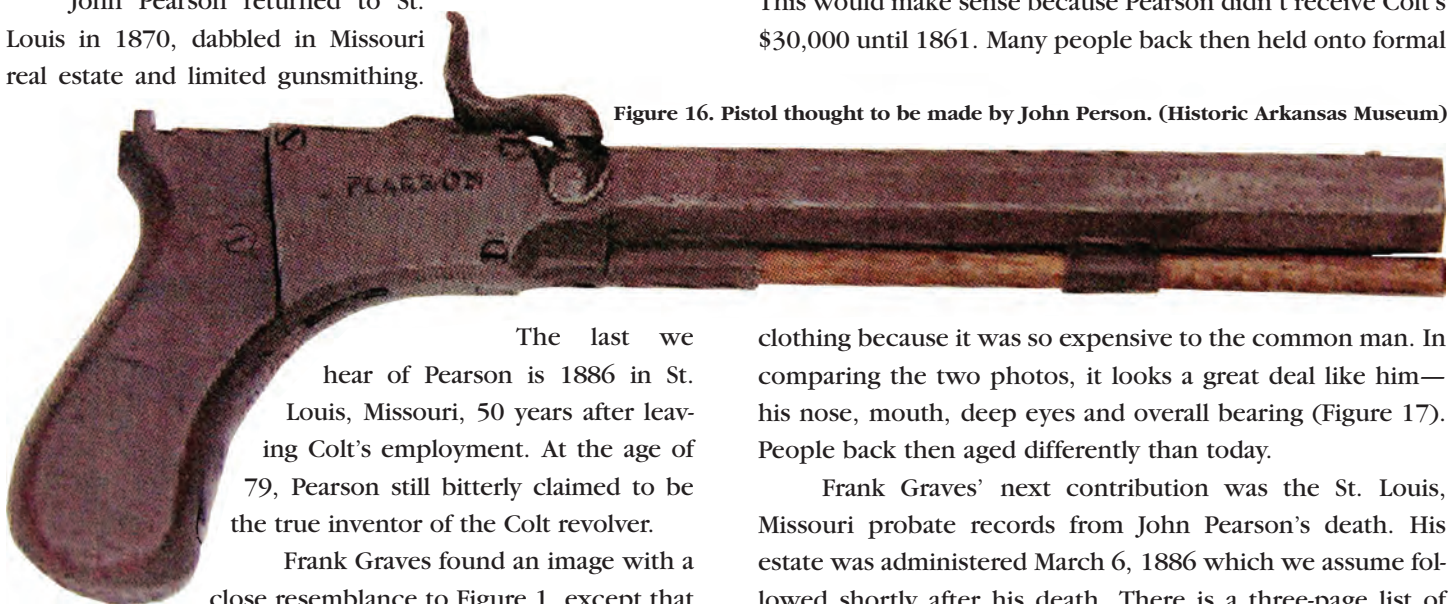


Figure 16. Pistol thought to be made by John Person. (Historic Arkansas Museum)

The last we hear of Pearson is 1886 in St. Louis, Missouri, 50 years after leaving Colt's employment. At the age of 79, Pearson still bitterly claimed to be the true inventor of the Colt revolver.

Frank Graves found an image with a close resemblance to Figure 1, except that

the person is much older. The image came from an estate sale in Kansas City, Missouri. It is a daguerreotype that could have been made between 1849 and 1865, because many photographers were holdouts after the



Figure 15. The punch mark identification for the correct screw. (Colt Collection, Wadsworth Athenaeum)

change to ambrotypes in the mid- to late-1850s. An expert in vintage photography was shown the picture and based on some of the minutiae observed, dated it 1859-60. He pointed out the coat worn would be early 1850 in style and ill fitting. This would make sense because Pearson didn't receive Colt's \$30,000 until 1861. Many people back then held onto formal

clothing because it was so expensive to the common man. In comparing the two photos, it looks a great deal like him—his nose, mouth, deep eyes and overall bearing (Figure 17). People back then aged differently than today.

Frank Graves' next contribution was the St. Louis, Missouri probate records from John Pearson's death. His estate was administered March 6, 1886 which we assume followed shortly after his death. There is a three-page list of



Figure 17. John Pearson, probably in his 70's. (Frank Graves Collection)

“Goods & Chattels” in which one revolver (a Hopkins, no less) and one box of cartridges is included with such items as 50 cakes of assorted soap, 34 tooth brushes, etc. Perhaps the one item of great interest that could clearly identify the deceased as the John Pearson of this article is “one work box complete.” Oh, if we only knew its contents. His entire estate was worth \$59.65, not enough to cover his debts. The records show he had a wife and three minor children living in England at the time. The plot thickens, becomes muddled and finally, the trail ends.

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