

The M 1861 Rifle Musket Contract of William Mason, Taunton, Massachusetts

By Paul R. Johnson, M.D.

During the American Civil War, William Mason, of Taunton, Massachusetts, entered into a contract with the US Ordnance Department to manufacture 30,000 model 1861 rifle muskets for \$20 per stand. His production arms were of good quality, serviceable, and functional, and he received payment. The Union prevailed, and everyone lived happily ever after.

As a novice collector in the 1980s, (having grown up in Taunton, Massachusetts) this is what the reference books indicated while I was researching my first gun show Mason musket. Basic black and white facts and a standard image of the lock plate marked Wm. Mason, Taunton and 1864. It was sterile, compartmentalized, and boring—or so I thought (Figure 1).

For the next 30 years, I have been fortunate to have stumbled on very interesting research materials and documents which paint a broader picture concerning the travails of this businessman and manufacturer in tooling up production, dealing with the US Army Ordnance Department, and ultimately being financially devastated by the U.S. government. He sought legal redress for his losses at the hands of the government, and his case was ultimately heard at the Supreme Court level. He lost (of course), but a dissenting voice in Mason's favor was solidly heard from Supreme Court Justice himself, Salmon P. Chase.

William Mason (Figure 2) was born in Mystic, Connecticut on September 2, 1808. With barely one year of formal education, he learned blacksmith and manufacturing trades and relocated to Taunton, Massachusetts, where he set up a production factory. He possessed the gift of visualizing an object, designing and then manufacturing it. For instance, he desired to learn to play the violin, obtained blueprints and instructions, manufactured his own violin, and mastered this instrument!



Figure 1. A standard William Mason lockplate. (Author's Collection)



Mason's manufacturing business (Figures 3 and 4) grew to include the production of textile machinery (for which he received a patent for improvements in loom machinery), other major machinery, and ultimately locomotives. During the Civil War, he produced over 30 locomotives under



Figure 2. 1853 lithographic portrait, William Mason. (Author's Collection)

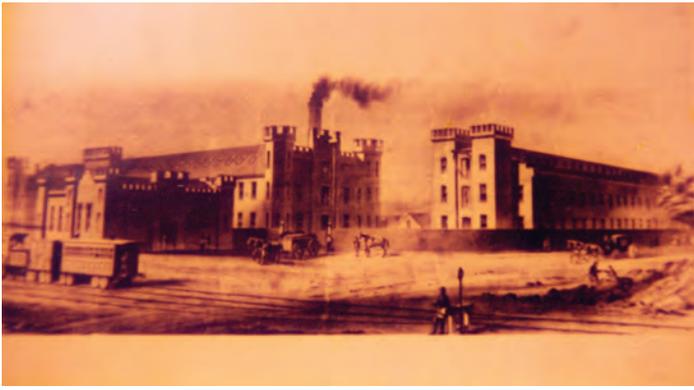


Figure 3. Lithograph of the main entrance (Oak Street), Mason Machine Works. (Courtesy Old Colony Historical Society, Taunton, MA)

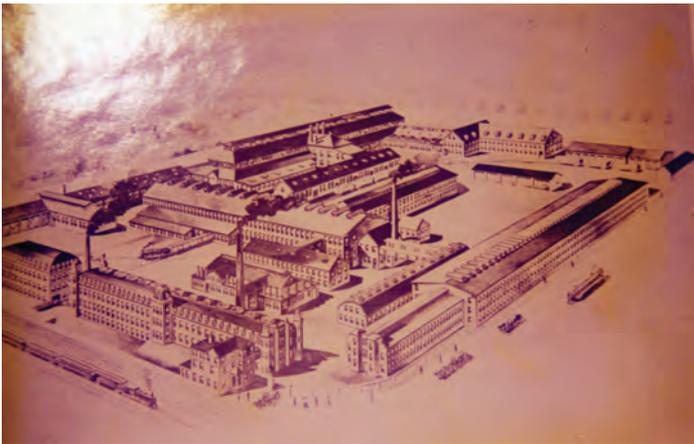


Figure 4. Mason Machine works plant overview which hung in William Mason's office. (Courtesy Old Colony Historical Society, Taunton, MA)

contract for the U.S. Military Rail Road Service. Four of these were named after U.S. Generals: Burnside, Haupt, Robinson, and Sickles. The "General Robinson" weighed 55,000 pounds, cost \$9,300, and ran 16,071 miles during the war (Figures 5 and 6).

In January 1862, Brig. General Ripley, Chief of Ordnance, offered Mason a contract to produce "50,000 muskets with 50,000 more if they were to be manufactured in your own establishment".¹ To meet this new obligation with the U.S. government, Mason modified and retooled his manufacturing works and obtained additional manufacturing and finishing equipment—spending nearly \$72,000 (Figure 7), purchased raw materials (nearly \$500,000), and contracted with several other manufacturers for smaller parts of the musket such as locks, bayonets, and rolled, unfinished barrels (Figure 8). This practice was to be considered the norm at that time by Springfield Arsenal/Armory.

Mason set up his works to perform the major wood and metal milling and finishing steps (Figure 8). These included:

- wood-stock lathing/turning/channeling/drilling
- barrel rifling, final finishing, sighting, test firing and proving in his specially made proving house

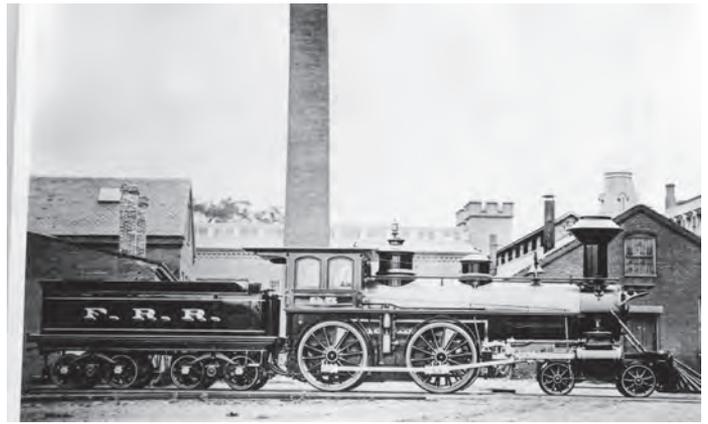


Figure 5. Locomotive manufactured by William Masson Machine Works, main entrance (Oak Street) in background. (Courtesy Old Colony Historical Society, Taunton, MA)



Figure 6. The "General Haupt" locomotive manufactured by William Mason for the U.S. military railroad. (Courtesy National Archives)

- ramrod production
 - overall final assembly and finishing including crating stands of arms with appendages for shipment
- For his barrel finishing, he is credited with inventing (but not patenting) an optical barrel straightening device.

Other expenses incurred were for the purchase of major gauges for musket components. In fact, he manufactured many of the smaller gauges (band springs and stock tips, etc.) from Springfield's drawings. In an attempt to lessen expenses and improve profitability, Mason entered into sub-contracts with E.L. Bodine (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) to produce 25,000 finished rifled barrels and committed another 36,000 future finished barrels to John Rice, also of Philadelphia.

On March 18, 1862, Judge Joseph Holt (who would later try the Lincoln conspirators) and arms agent Robert Owen were commissioned by Secretary of War Edwin Stanton to examine, audit, and adjust all arms and accoutrement contracts, and to limit the size of contracts to reduce waste and expenditures by the U.S. government. In dissecting Mason's contract, "manufactured at your own establishment in Taunton" appeared to them to exclude any and all sub-contracting, and that the entire musket should have been produced at Mason Machine

| TABLE 1 MANUFACTURING MACHINERY AND COST | | |
|--|---------|--------------------|
| BARREL MACHINERY | COST | |
| 20 BORING MACHINES | \$6,000 | |
| 1 MILLING LATHE FOR BARREL ENDS | 250 | |
| 25 MILLING MACHINES | 6,350 | |
| 8 BARREL TURNING LATHE | 2,800 | |
| 2 POLISHING MACHINES | 1,000 | |
| 2 BREECHING MACHINES | 3,000 | |
| 1 MUZZLE MILLING MACHINE | 350 | |
| 1 THREE SPINDLE SLIDE MACHINE | 300 | |
| 1 EDGING MACHINE | 500 | |
| 20 STRAIGHTENING ANVILS/APPARATUS | 600 | |
| 7 SCREWING AND TAPPING MACHINES | 450 | |
| 2 GRINDSTONE AND APPARATUS | 1,000 | |
| 1 APPARATUS FOR FORGING BREECH PINS | 200 | |
| 1 PUNCHING PINS FOR SAME | 400 | |
| 1 COUNTER BORING LATHE FOR BARRELS | 300 | |
| 1 PROVING HOUSE AND APPARATUS | 1,500 | |
| 1 ANNEALING FURNACE | 500 | |
| SHAFTING/BELTING FOR ABOVE | 1,500 | |
| FIXTURES AND SMALL TOOLS | 5,000 | |
| 8 RIFLING MACHINES | 9,600 | |
| 2 INDEX MILLERS | 1,100 | TOTAL: \$42,750.00 |
| RAMROD MACHINERY | | |
| 2 TILT HAMMERS WITH DIES | 1,500 | |
| 2 MILLERS AND CLAMPS | 200 | |
| 1 GRINDING MACHINE | 300 | TOTAL: \$1,900.00 |
| STOCKING MACHINERY | | |
| 1 FIRST SAWING MACHINE | 1,000 | |
| 1 CUTTING MACHINE | 200 | |
| 2 FIRST TURNERS | 2,400 | |
| 2 SECOND TURNERS | 2,400 | |
| 1 BARREL BEDDING MACHINE | 2,800 | |
| 1 LOCK BEDDING MACHINE | 3,500 | |
| 1 PROFILING MACHINE | 1,200 | |
| 1 SPOTTING MACHINE | 300 | |
| 1 SECOND SAWING MACHINE | 1,400 | |
| 1 BUTT PLATE BEDDING MACHINE | 2,400 | |
| 1 GUARD BEDDING MACHINE | 2,400 | |
| 1 BAND TURNING MACHINE | 1,500 | |
| 1 BETWEEN BANDS TURNING MACHINE | 1,500 | |
| 1 RAMROD BEDDING/CHANELLING MACHINE | 1,200 | |
| SHAFTING BELTING FOR ABOVE | 1,000 | |
| FIXTURES AND SMALL TOOLS | 2,000 | TOTAL: \$27,200.00 |
| TOTAL EXPENDITURE = \$71,850.00 | | |

(NOTE: THIS IS MASON'S COMPLETE LISTING OF MUSKET BARREL, STOCK, RAMROD MACHINERY COSTS AND STEPS REQUIRED FOR MANUFACTURING THE M 1861 RIFLE MUSKET)

Figure 7. Table 1.

| TABLE 2 WM. MASON MUSKET COMPONENT MANUFACTURE | |
|--|---|
| BARRELS | ROLLED IRON BARRELS BY WASHBURN, WORCESTER, MA. AND PROVIDENCE TOOL CO., R.I.; MASON BORED, MILLED, TAPPED, RIFLED, POLISHED, STRAIGHTENED, BOLSTERS APPLIED, CONES AND BREECH PLUGS INSERTED, AND SIGHTS APPLIED. |
| STOCKS | RAW STOCK BLANKS LATHED, MILLED, FINISHED BY MASON, SOME BOUGHT COMPLETE TO SPEED INITIAL PRODUCTION |
| LOCKS | CLEMENTS, COLEMAN & CO., PROVIDENCE, R.I.; COMPLETE, INSPECTED BY MR. FLAGG AT R.I. FACTORY; LOCK SCREWS AND WASHERS BY MASON, LOCKS THOUGHT TO BE STAMPED BY MASON WORKERS AT TAUNTON |
| BANDS | KILBURN LINCOLN & LUSCOMB, FALL RIVER, MA.; INSPECTED BY MR. FLAGG IN FALL RIVER; MR. LUSCOMB WAS PREVIOUSLY THE FOREMAN FOR MASON MACHINE WORKS; THE U S FREQUENTLY NOTED TO BE UP AND OFF OF HORIZONTAL LINE OF BAND SPRING |
| BAND SPRINGS | BY MASON (SOMETIMES NOT BLUED) |
| BUTT PLATES | BY MASON INCLUDING SCREWS, TANG MARKED STANDARD U.S. |
| TRIGGERS-GUARDS | BY MASON |
| SLING SWIVELS | BY MASON |
| STOCK TIPS | BY MASON |
| RAMRODS | BY MASON |
| SIGHTS | PROBABLY BY N. R. DAVIS, FREETOWN, MA., (ALSO MADE SIGHTS FOR PROVIDENCE TOOL CO. MUSKET CONTRACT) USUALLY BLUED, BUT SOMETIMES IN THE WHITE |
| BAYONETS | A. H. ALMY, EAGLE ARMS CO., NORWICH, CONN.; INSPECTED BY MR. FLAGG, PERHAPS IN CONN. |
| APPENDAGES | BY MASON |
| SHIPPING CRATES | BY MASON (LATER REIMBURSED BY THE ORDNANCE DEPT.) |
| GAUGES | SOME PURCHASED BY MASON, SOME MANUFACTURED BY MASON |

Figure 8. Table 2.

works. Mason had always openly intended for some sub-contracting of parts to speed up initial production and get arms into Union private's hands as soon as possible.

Mason travelled to Washington, D.C. in June, 1862 to argue his case with the Holt-Owen commission. Despite having expended approximately \$589,000^{2,3} in anticipation of producing the full 100,000 rifle muskets, the commission struck down the number to 25,000 stands of arms only. This astonishing reduction would serve to nearly bankrupt Mason. Despite Mason's passionate arguments, he could not improve his contract, with the exception of a token upgrade to 30,000 (Figure 9).

Mason knew that he could not afford the total annulment of his contract with subsequent severe financial loss. He also knew that muskets were urgently needed by the army, and the outlook for the country at this time, early in the war, was very uncertain. Thus, he grudgingly submitted to the commission's requirements and signed the amended contract for 30,000 stands of arms on June 25, 1862.^{1,3} For perspective, Mason's contract was reduced (perhaps arbitrarily) by 70,000 guns, but at this time period and later, the U.S. government contracted with multiple other manufacturers (many of them relatively unknown) for approximately 612,730 muskets costing approximately \$12,254,600.

By the fall of 1862, musket component manufacturing was well underway with a fair stockpile of parts. Major Peter V. Hagner of the Ordnance Department who was in charge of the contractors wrote a series of letters to Mason confirming the inspection processes and requirements. In addition, he personally came to Taunton to prove some of the first 500 completed barrels in Mason's proving house. Multiple Ordnance Department inspectors were sent to Taunton in stages, including Joseph Hannis, Mr. Boyd, Mr. Flagg, and Mr. Sevard² and others whose identities are unknown at this time. Major Hagner informed Mason at this



Figure 9. Mason's original contract for 30,000 stands signed by William Mason and James Ripley, Chief of Ordnance. (Author's Collection)

time to provide extra appendages (at Mason's expense) including spring vices, screws, tumblers, worms, cones, etc. Mason was reimbursed for construction of packing crates.

Lock plate markings became an issue as assembly of finished rifle muskets was nearing completion. Mason had experimented with stampings, either himself, at his factory, or at Clements and Co., Providence, Rhode Island (his primary lock sub-contractor). An early and extremely rare lock plate marked with only "US TAUNTON", eagle, and 1862 (Figures 10 and 11) is shown.³ The style of letters used is unique to any Mason stamping. It is suspected to be an extremely early, initial production piece made prior to Mason receiving these instructions from Hagner (August, 1862):

"the name and place of the contractor is the best and most appropriate mark and the lock plate the proper place."²

On May 15, 1863, Hagner wrote to Mason:

"When ready, you will ship your arms in lot of 500 addressed to Capt. T. J. Rodman, Commander of Watertown Arsenal, care of U.S. Quartermaster, Boston."²

Mason complied, and his first delivery of 500 rifle muskets was sent on June 11, 1863³ with a full list of shipment dates per Mason's own documentation in Table 3 (Figure 12).

One fascinating musket (Figures 13 and 14) is shown which may represent Mason's first production or proof/



Figure 10. Rare 1862 lockplate marked "Taunton" with a different font. (Author's Collection)



Figure 11. Rare 1862 lockplate close-up. (Author's Collection)

| | | | |
|---------|------------------|--------|---|
| 1863 | MAY (?JUNE 11TH) | 500 | - SHIPPED TO WATERTOWN, MASS. |
| | JUNE | 1,000 | - SHIPPED TO WATERTOWN, MASS. |
| | JULY | 1,500 | - SHIPPED TO WATERTOWN, MASS. |
| | AUGUST | 1,000 | - SHIPPED TO WATERTOWN, MASS. |
| | SEPT. (19TH) | 2,000 | - SHIPPED TO WATERVLLET ARSENAL, N.Y. |
| | OCTOBER | 1,500 | - SHIPPED TO WATERVLLET ARSENAL, N.Y. |
| 1864 | NOVEMBER | 1,500 | - SHIPPED TO WATERVLLET ARSENAL, N.Y. |
| | DECEMBER | 2,000 | - SHIPPED TO WATERVLLET ARSENAL, N.Y. |
| | JANUARY | 1,500 | - ALL FURTHER MUSKETS SHIPPED TO WATERVLLET ARSENAL, N.Y. |
| | FEBRUARY | 1,500 | |
| | MARCH | 2,000 | |
| | APRIL | 2,000 | |
| | MAY | 3,000 | |
| | JUNE | 3,000 | |
| JULY | 3,000 | | |
| AUGUST | 3,000 | | |
| TOTAL = | | 30,000 | STANDS OF MUSKETS DELIVERED |

(NOTE: CAPTURED AND REPAIRED WILLIAM MASON, TAUNTON MUSKETS OFFICIALLY ACKNOWLEDGES BY S. ADAMS, MASTER ARMORER, C.S. ARMORY, RICHMOND IN A 9/22/1864 LETTER BY HIM TO COL. J. GORGAS, CHIEF OF ORDNANCE.)

Figure 12. Table 3.

sample musket.³ It bears the lock plate date of 1862 with standard Wm. Mason Taunton markings but with an unproved barrel bearing 1863 date (flat topped 3) at the tang. The wood flat opposite the lock is unstamped, and the musket is in un-issued, un-fired condition. Engraved in flowing script on the trigger guard tang appears to be "T.J.R. #1".



Figure 13. 1862 dated unfired, unproved Mason musket with "T.J.R. #" on trigger guard believed to be 'proof piece' sent to Thomas J. Rodman, commanding Watertown Arsenal. (Author's Collection)



Figure 14. "T.J.R. #1" engraved on trigger guard of 1862 unfired Mason musket. (Author's Collection)

Provenance indicates this musket was returned to Springfield Armory during or at the end of Mason's contract and ultimately passed into private hands by a worker at Springfield to whom this musket was given upon his retirement.

It is possible that Mason directed Capt. Rodman's initials and gun number 1 to be engraved on the trigger guard prior to shipment to Watertown Arsenal, or this was done at the receiving facility to distinguish Mason's first specimen of production. No other similarly marked manufacturer's muskets are presently known. This musket was never issued and apparently remained in storage at Springfield Arsenal.

On June 23, 1863, Hagner ordered "Mr. C. Sevard in charge of your factory—one of my most able and most experienced inspectors who has given great satisfaction at the Spencer Arms Co."² It is significant that the majority of true Mason muskets (from mid-1863 throughout all of 1864) are inspected "F.C.S." with larger "P." under the barrel, with "F.C.S." (Figures 15 and 16) in script cartouche on the stock flat. It is strongly suspected that these initials represent the full name of C. Sevard.

At times, other initials appear under the barrel and on the stock flat which are still thought to be correct. From an examination of many Mason muskets, some of these inspector's initials are listed in Table 4 (Figure 17).

Mason began musket manufacture in mid-1862, with first delivery in May or June of 1863 and delivered muskets in batches of 500 to 3,000 until August 1864 (Figure 12). To



Figure 15. Underside of barrel proof inspector's markings (F.C.S.) seen on 1864 muskets. (Author's Collection)



Figure 16. Stock flat markings (W.H.R. and F.C.S.) observed on all 1864 muskets. (Author's Collection)

| TABLE 4 ORDNANCE INSPECTORS MARKINGS ON MASON MUSKETS | | | |
|---|----------|---|--|
| STOCK FLAT | F. C. S. | (THOUGHT TO BE F. C. SEVARD; JUNE, 1863-1864) | |
| | J. H. | JOSEPH HANNIS | |
| | W. H. R. | WILLIAM H. RUSSELL OR WILLIAM H. ROBERTS | |
| | T. K. L. | (UNKNOWN DIFFICULT TO READ SCRIPT INITIALS) | |
| | L. E. H. | UNIDENTIFIED | |
| OTHERS OBSERVED, DIFFICULT TO DECIPHER SCRIPT CARTOUCHES | | | |
| BARREL | P. | F. C. S. | (THOUGHT TO BE F. C. SEVARD, JUNE 1863-1864) |
| | P. | L. E. H. | UNIDENTIFIED |
| | P. | F. E. W. | UNIDENTIFIED |
| | P. | J. L. P. | UNIDENTIFIED |
| | P. | N. W. | UNIDENTIFIED |
| | P. | P. | UNIDENTIFIED |
| | | B. B. | UNIDENTIFIED - ?BOYD |
| INSPECTORS KNOWN TO SERVE ON MASON'S CONTRACT INCLUDE: | | | |
| MR. FLAGG, MR. HANNIS, MR. SEVARD, MR. BOYD, AND P. V. HAGNER | | | |
| ONE LOCK HAMMER NOTED TO HAVE 'P. H.' - ? HAGNER | | | |

Figure 17. Table 4.

date, no musket dated 1865 has been observed. It is also thought that lock plates dated 1862 represent the very first, initial production specimens which were actually delivered in mid-1863. No barrel with an 1862 barrel dating has been seen by me or contributing collectors/dealers, and the rare, complete muskets with 1862 locks all appear to have 1863 dated barrels (flat topped 3) without federal proofs.

In addition, I suspect earlier 1863 Mason specimens utilize the flat topped 3 of 1863 on the lock plate. Both flat topped 3 and round 3 in the 1863 stamps have been noted on barrel tangs. A few Mason locks are seen with the 1863 or 1864 date stampings high and slightly up to the left. When this occurs, the eagle and "U.S. Wm Mason Taunton" usually appear a bit high on the plate as well (Figures 18-21).

Regarding 1862 dated specimens, I am personally aware of only three 1862 lock plates (without muskets) and four complete muskets with 1862 locks on 1863 dated barreled muskets (flat topped 3).³ One appears to be an assembled piece (Mason 1862 lock on another contractor's musket), and the "T.J.R.1" musket, which has been discussed in this article. None have stock flat inspectors. A fourth specimen deserves mention.

A Mason 1862 lock with a flat 3 - 1863 barreled musket has been recently located.³ This specimen has no barrel proofs, nor stock flat inspector's stampings, but retains the U.S. on the butt plate. It also has blued band springs, trigger, nipple cone, bolster clean out and hammer screws and sight. It also has the U at horizontal with the lower band spring, but with U's above the horizontal on the middle and upper



Figure 18. Standard 1863 Mason lockplate markings (sometimes with flat topped 3). (Author's Collection)



Figure 21. Standard 1864 lockplate markings. (Author's Collection)



Figure 19. Example of the occasional 1863 lockplate stamped off the center line. (Author's Collection)



Figure 22. Barrel band "U" with stamping above the line of the band spring, seen on most Mason muskets. (Author's Collection)



Figure 20. Standard 1863 breech markings (note flat topped 3). (Author's Collection)



Figure 23. 1862 dated Mason musket showing probable factory repair of wrist crack. (Author's Collection)

bands which may be characteristic of Mason production (Figures 22 and 23).

A very expert repair at a wrist stress crack has been effected which appears to be original to factory production and not a post-production field repair. It may represent a very early Mason specimen which cracked during assembly

of the lock (perhaps a too-tight fit which expanded a grain stress crack). This problem may have been specifically repaired by Mason at his works. It could then have been rejected by the ordnance inspectors, or never have been submitted, but sold on the private market as a good and serviceable arm. Although it is in superb condition, there is evidence that it was issued, fired, and has bayonet socket wear.

Contrary to this possible problem piece, the majority of Mason's muskets were of high quality. Inspected muskets were reimbursed according to classifications: Class 1 = \$20, Class 2 = \$19.90, Class 2 1/2 = \$19.00, Class 3 = \$18.00, Class 4 = \$16.00. Ordnance reports indicated that Mason received an average of \$19.89 per musket. There were

approximately 22 other contractors (for nearly 631,278 total muskets), but only Colt (\$20), Jenks (\$19.99), Norwich (\$19.96) and Schubarth (\$19.92) were higher. Mason's total reported receipts from the Ordnance Department were \$596,316.90.⁵

Proof of Civil War service is found in a September 22, 1864 letter written by S. Adams, Master Armorer, C.S. Armory, Richmond, to Col. Gorgas, Chief of Ordnance, CSA, in which he states;

"Among the old arms received in this armory for repair during the current month, I have noticed the above arms from a variety of manufacturing establishments... William Mason, manufactured at Taunton, Mass ...".³

An enigmatic Mason musket with 1863 on lock and barrel is included in this article with hope of full identification by the readers. It has a completely unique (for Mason production) lock plate eagle,³ with unique font letters for U.S. Wm (line under m) Mason Taunton, and is the only known plate specifically marked "Mass". The barrel and stock flat have N.J. proof stampings, no U.S. on the butt, and C.S.F P under the barrel (thought to be F.C.S. with letters reversed). It appears to be in unfired condition, no bayonet wear (Figures 24 and 25).

This musket may be a sample piece by Mason sent to the state of New Jersey in an attempt to arrange a contract for muskets. Perhaps "Mass." was added to the lock plate to differentiate this product from "Trenton"? There has been no New Jersey state contract found in the archives.

In addition, a second 1863 Mason musket exists (in the Connecticut Archives) which bears a Connecticut Arms Inspector's circular stamping surrounding initials on the left stock flat. This specimen has not been examined by the author, but it may represent another sample musket sent by Mason to Connecticut in an attempt to secure a state contract (not proven yet by archival research).

Special mention is made of the apparent lack of 1865 dated specimens. Although it is possible that some guns or components may have been produced in late 1864 or 1865, perhaps for private sales or unknown state contracts, their identification and disposition remains enigmatic. Mason does report that he derived approximately \$71,000 from sales of gun parts to other parties after his contract was fulfilled.³ This may explain the occasional 1864 otherwise blank lock plates which are attributed to Mason by other authors.^{5,6}

Post war, Mason sued the federal government in the Court of Claims for \$500,000 for losses incurred by the U.S. Department of Ordnance's abrogation of the initial contract for 100,000 stands of muskets. Secretary of War Simon Cameron testified for Mason:



Figure 24. 1863 Mason musket with unique lockplate markings similar to Savage markings. N.J. inspection markings are on barrel and stock flat. (Author's Collection)

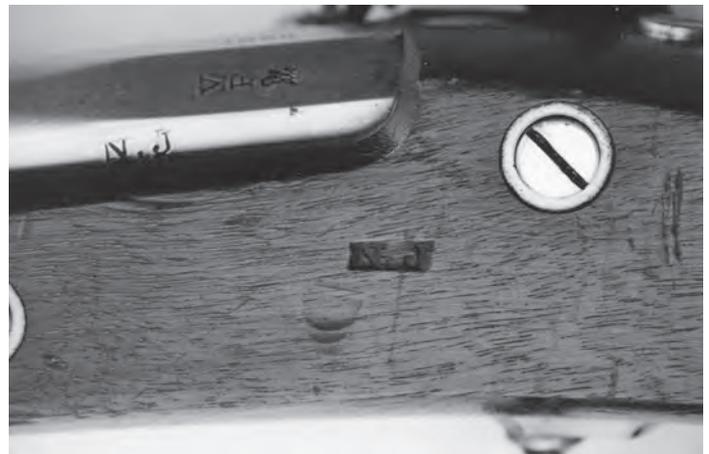


Figure 25. "N.J." double-stamped Mason 1863 unfired musket thought possibly to be a sample musket sent to the State of New Jersey to obtain a contract. (Author's Collection)

"Up to the time I left the War Office, we never had arms enough, and there was scarcely a day that President Lincoln did not send urgent appeals to me for arms. I was convinced that we needed a million muskets, for the million men I was preparing for the field, and another million to be ready to put into their hands fast as they were lost or destroyed ...".³

Mason lost his case at the Court of Claims based upon the fact that he ultimately signed the reduced contract for 30,000 under "free will". If he had refused this amended contract, failed to produce the sorely needed muskets for the Union during the early days of the war at such a critical time of national defense, and then sued the U.S. government, he undoubtedly would have won!

Not happy with this initial legal outcome, Mason appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1872. Unfortunately, this court upheld the ruling of the previous one. However, Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase held a powerfully dissenting opinion:

"I am unable to concur in the opinion just read. The original contract was honestly and fairly made without taint of fraud.

This is not disputed. Large preparation at great expense was made by the claimant (Mason) for the fulfillment of it on his part. It was violated by the United States without reasonable cause, as I think, as expressly found by the Court of Claims, without the consent, and against the remonstrances of the claimant. A modified contract, so called, but really a second contract, was then made between the parties, which was fulfilled on both sides: but there is nothing to show that this contract was freely made, or made at all by the claimant in place of the first, or that payment of the sums due under it from the U.S. was accepted by him in satisfaction of damages for the breach of the first. I think that the United States are not absolved in their dealings with citizens from the obligations of honesty by which individuals are usually controlled, and that the claimant is entitled to damages.”⁷



Figure 26. Grossman's lumber yard (original site of Mason Machine Works) burning down in 1970. (Courtesy Taunton Daily Gazette)

Adding insult to injury, Mason was himself successfully sued by F. L. Bodine for his failure to deliver finished rifled barrels. This failure, in a large part, precipitated Bodine's annulment of his own musket contract and subsequent financial losses. Bodine was awarded \$34,000.



Figure 27. Present site of Mason Machine Works, Taunton, Massachusetts. The main entrance was just beyond the railroad tracks crossing Oak Street. (Author's photograph)

Despite these setbacks, William Mason and his Mason Machine Works continued successfully into the 1880s, producing machinery and locomotives. The physical plant passed on to several subsequent owners, burning down as Grossman's Lumber Co. in 1970. (Figures 26 and 27).

During the 1950s, some musket components (barrels, locks, and other hardware) were reported to have been found in an upper level of the main building. It is not known if these were items which failed inspection or were surplus parts. These items as well as his die stamps and gun-making tools cannot be presently located.⁸



Figure 28. William Mason's tombstone in Mount Pleasant Cemetery, Taunton, Massachusetts. (Author's Photograph)

Sadly, Mason's elaborate and magnificent stone and marble mansion was demolished in the 1930s and the lot subdivided. A medical office building was built on his home location, from which the initial major portion of this article was written.

William Mason died from typhoid pneumonia on May 21, 1883. His large and fairly lavish funeral was held at St. Thomas Episcopal Church, centrally located between his home and factory. He was interred at Mount Pleasant Cemetery in his family's plot (Figure 28). Major General Darius Couch is also buried in this cemetery. Couch, a native of Taunton, is best remembered for assuming command of the Army of the Potomac after Gen. Hooker's wounding at Chancellorsville, and also for turning down Lincoln's offer to assume of the same army just prior to the Battle of Gettysburg.

Similar to Garand and Browning, recognition by the Ordnance Department and the U.S. government has been fleeting. In Mason's case, it was also very costly.

I do not know whether Mason ever realized the contribution he made to his country's Civil War arms requirements. His muskets are superb in quality and function, and undoubtedly served the Union cause with distinction.

As a student of history, this presentation represents my continuing research in all aspects of Mason's musket

production. Any errors or omissions are my own, for which I take responsibility. I would welcome comments and information concerning William Mason's muskets. Thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to Peter Albee, Hudson Martin (deceased), Warren Connor (deceased), Mark Skolnik, Paul D. Johnson, many other musket collectors and dealers accidentally not mentioned, the membership of the American Society of Arms Collectors, the staffs of the Old Colony Historical society, Taunton, Massachusetts and the National Archives (Washington, D.C. and Waltham, Massachusetts) and all others for their generous assistance. I am also grateful for the assistance and advice of John Thillmann.

REFERENCES

1. National Archives and Records Administration, Record Groups #156, 92, 123 and Ordnance Dept. Records at Waltham, MA and Washington D.C. (including Springfield Armory records).

2. The Mason Archives, Old Colony Historical society, Taunton, MA.

3. Author's collection.

4. *Civil War Guns*, William B. Edwards, Stackpole, Pa. 1962.

5. *The Rifled Musket*, Claud E. Fuller, Stackpole, Pa. 1958.

6. *United States Military Small Arms 1816-1865*, Robert Reilly, Gun Room Press, 1970 (1st Edition).

7. U. S. Supreme Court Cases, Justin and Oyet (Internet citation).

8. Personal communications: Hudson Martin (Taunton, Ma.)—"I have never seen an 1865 Mason musket; do not have any 1862 muskets. F.C.S., and W.H.R. cartouches are the only ones I have seen. Grossman Lumber co. was located in the Mason Machine Works building for many years. I remember hearing about many muskets, parts, barrels, locks, bayonets, etc. turning up in the upper floors of one of the main buildings, but don't know what became of them. They were among tons of world war surplus hardware stored there, probably got melted. My father was office manager of Mason's, he was paid \$21 weekly, sometimes in silver dollars." (H.M., deceased)