

LUCIUS WILLSON POND: MACHINE TOOL MAKER, GUN MAKER AND FRAUDSTER

by Michael Helms

Back in 2013 I was busy starting the research for my history thesis on Rollin White. A business trip had taken me to Philadelphia that fall. As all good gun collectors do when they're traveling, I looked up "gun shops" to see where I might spend my spare time. To my delight I found Lock's Gun Shop in the northern part of the city (Figure 1). With all the eagerness and zeal of a new collector that was looking to scoop up everything in sight, I took the subway into northern Philadelphia and made my way into Lock's.



Figure 1. The J. H. Lock Gun Shop in Philadelphia, PA.

For those that haven't been there, Lock's is one of those delightful old gun stores that has a bit of everything—including an impressive collection of antique firearms. The shop itself dates back to the 1950s, when many of these antique guns likely wandered in from the dresser drawers and attics of the surrounding homes. A particular revolver in the case caught my eye, and as I handled the little Lucius Pond Front Loading Revolver I knew that it would have to come home with me (Figure 2).



Figure 2. The Lucius Pond Front Loading Revolver that the author purchased on that fateful day in 2013.

Up to this point, my only exposure to Lucius Pond had been a brief mention in the lengthy transcript of the famous *White v Allen* lawsuit of 1862, which preserved Rollin White's patent (Figure 3) at the expense of his financial well-being. This lawsuit allowed Smith & Wesson to maintain their monopoly over the cartridge-load revolver until 1868, and it set legal precedent that would influence other important intellectual property trials such as the Bell Telephone cases.

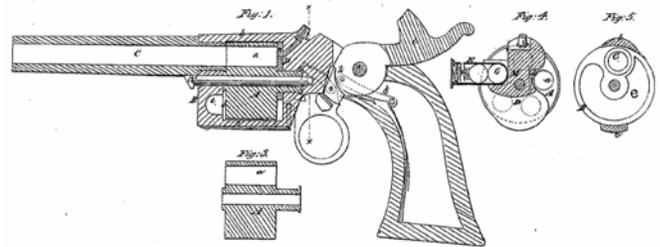


Figure 3. US Patent 12648, dated April 3, 1855, and granted to Rollin White.

I ended up focusing on Smith & Wesson Model 1 for my history thesis, but I remained very interested in Lucius Pond. His contributions to gun making remain something of a historic footnote, but he was an enigmatic character and his company lived on for almost a century after his death. The Pond Machine Tool Company was absorbed into the Niles-Bement-Pond company after his death (Figure 4). This was eventually merged into the Lima-Hamilton Corporation, which ultimately merged into the Baldwin Locomotive Works, which survived until 1972.



Figure 4. A 1919 Niles-Bement-Pond advertisement from the *Indian & Eastern Engineer*, December 1919, page xlv.

Pond's Gun Making

Lucius Pond's gun making spanned three different models: an "Army" pattern percussion revolver, a cartridge-loaded belt revolver and the front-loading revolver. The most elusive of these revolvers is the "Army" pattern revolver that Pond is reported to have made. Flayderman noted in his tome of antique American firearms that there are only a handful of specimens known to exist (Figure 5).¹ I've never seen one and couldn't find an auction listing for one, so its existence is considered speculative.

Lucius W. Pond S.A. "Army" Revolver

Lucius W. Pond, Worcester, Massachusetts, Single Action Large Frame Army (so-called) Revolver. (Not illus.) Made c. 1861 to 1863. Total quantity unknown. Extremely rare with but two or three known specimens.

.44 caliber rimfire. Six-shot. 7-1/4" octagon barrel tips upward for loading; hinged at rear of topstrap on recoil shield. Brass frame with plated finish; barrel blued; spur trigger. Walnut grips; square butt. Brass handled screwdriver fitted in underside of butt.

The few known specimens are all unmarked.

Traditionally considered by collectors as a "Secondary Martial" handgun. There is no evidence that they were purchased or issued by the government. The gun has been listed in other works as if it were a widely produced, rather commonly encountered type. It is, in fact, extremely rare with a very limited production as noted:

8A-115 Values—Good \$8,500 Fine \$25,000

Figure 5. An excerpt from *Flayderman's Guide to Antique American Firearms and Their Values, 9th Edition*¹, showing the only mention of the Pond 'Army' Revolver that the author has ever found.



Figure 6. A brass-framed Lucius Pond Belt Revolver, serial number 4508. the robust and well-designed barrel hinge. (Author's collection)

The first commonly available Pond gun was a fairly conventional cartridge load revolver. Flayderman called this the "belt revolver" (Figure 6).² It was chambered in the .32 caliber rimfire round, was built on iron and brass frames, and came in a variety of barrel lengths. The barrel hinge and latch on this gun were very robustly designed. Compared to the tip-up Smith & Wessons of

the era, Pond's belt revolver was far less prone to hinge breakage. The cylinder is also attached to the barrel, instead of being loose (like the Smith & Wesson Model 1). This is somewhat unique to revolvers of this era, but it raises a question about how cartridge extraction would have worked. The dart-style extractor rod under the barrel wouldn't have worked with the fixed cylinder, so it's likely that a separate tool would have been needed to push spent cartridges out of the cylinder.

The hinge at the front of the top strap and the cylinder being attached to the barrel was covered by an 1860 patent (US29126) that was granted to Abraham J. Gibson of Worcester (Figure 7). Gibson was an inventor that held at least 22 patents for various things including life preservers. This particular revolver patent is an important one, though. In 1874 it was extended and assigned to Daniel Wesson. Daniel Wesson likely wanted this patent because it covered the fitment of the cylinder to the barrel, which was a central design feature of the company's "top break" revolvers.

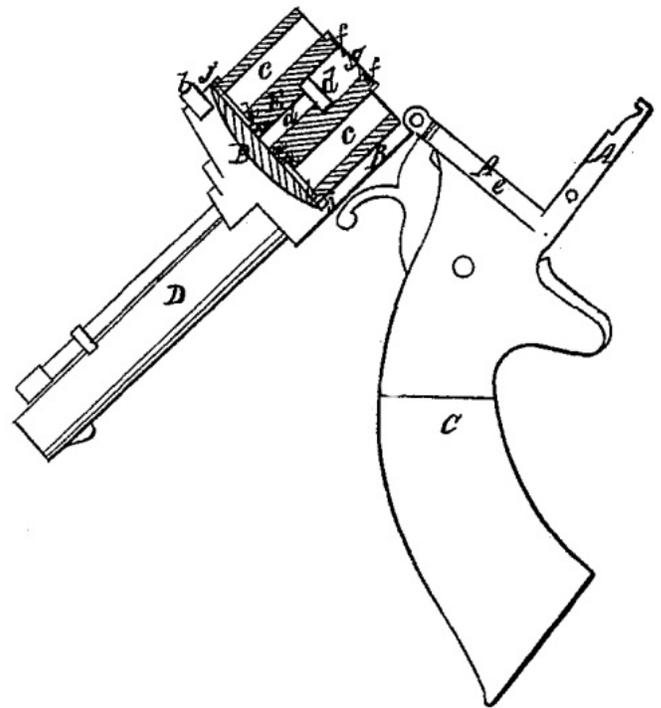


Figure 7. Abraham J. Gibson's US patent 29126, which was granted on July 10, 1860. This patent was reissued on March 31, 1874 and reassigned to Daniel B. Wesson."

According to Flayderman, there were a few thousand of these belt revolvers made starting around 1861.² I have recorded serial numbers into the low five-thousands, but it's possible that many more of these revolvers were made. I know of no extant factory records for these guns, so the historical record on these guns will likely be filled in by documenting the existing guns – their serial numbers, configuration and barrel roll marks.

Lucius Pond and Rollin White's Patent

Like several other gunmakers from this era, Lucius Pond was sued for violating Rollin White's patents on the bored through cylinder. As a result, many of these belt revolvers were turned over to Smith & Wesson to be sold by them (with their barrels being roll-marked accordingly).



Figure 8. A Civil War-era tintype depicting a man posing with a Lucius Pond Front Loading Revolver. This particular gun appears to be chambered in .32 caliber. From the collection of ASAC member Frank Graves.”

early cartridge load revolver collectors, and it’s probably one of the most complex. In order to circumvent Rollin White’s patent on the bored through cylinder, the gun did not have the cylinders bored through. The rimmed .22 caliber cartridges were loaded into the front of the cylinder, and a small sleeve was then placed around the cartridge to keep it centered in the cylinder bore. It was a cumbersome feat of engineering, but it succeeded in allowing the .22 rimfire cartridge to be chambered without a bored-through cylinder.

To load the revolver (Figure 9), a button in front of the cylinder is depressed, which allows the extractor rod to be swiveled about 45 degrees. This puts the extractor in line with one of the cylinder bores. Next, the sleeve in that bore is moved forward onto the extractor rod. This opens up the cylinder and allows a cartridge to be inserted. Once the cartridge is seated against the back of the cylinder, the sleeve is moved back into the cylinder. This centers the cartridge in the bore, and it gives the rim something to rest on. Now, the cylinder is rotated and the same operation is done to the five other cylinder chambers.

After the gun is shot, the exact same operation is done to extract the spent cartridges and load fresh cartridges. It’s a cumbersome and complex process that makes no provisions for “speed loading,” but it did successfully circumvent Rollin White’s patent. Not surprisingly, the front loading revolver wasn’t a big seller for Lucius Pond. The two examples of this gun that I have both have serial numbers below 2,000. Flayderman estimates that there were “several thousand” of these guns made.² The front loading revolver was also made in a larger .32 caliber rimfire version, and Flayderman claims that the .32 is the more common front loading variant. Both appear on the market from time to time, and both have appeal to collectors of early American firearms.

The second commonly available Lucius Pond revolver is the “front loading revolver” (Figures 2 and 8). This is a favorite for

Figure 9. The loading sequence for the Lucius Pond Front Loading Revolver (clockwise from top left) involves moving the cartridge sleeve onto the extractor rod. This simultaneously extracts a spent cartridge from the sleeve, and it allows a fresh cartridge to be inserted into the front of the cylinder.



Pond Machine Tools

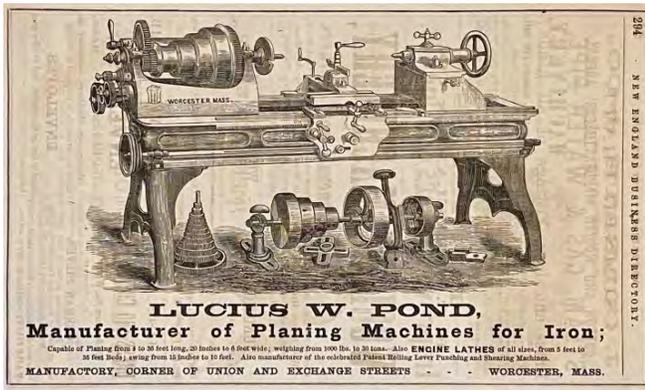


Figure 10. An advertisement for Lucius W. Pond, taken from the *New England Business Directory*, 1866, page 294.

Guns were just a small sideline for Lucius Pond's business. His most well-known enterprise was his machine tool company, which made all manner of metalworking tools (Figure 10). His lathes, mills, planers, drills and cutters were widely known in the industry (Figure 11). Surviving examples of Lucius Pond's machine tools do occasionally appear on the market, as do examples of his company's smaller tools and accoutrements (Figure 12).



Figure 11. A brass identification plate from an unknown Lucius Pond machine tool. It identifies his showroom as being located at 98 Liberty Street, New York City.

Lucius Willson Pond's Biography

Lucius Willson Pond (Figure 13) was born on April 20, 1826, in Hubbardston, Massachusetts – about 20 miles northwest of Worcester. The Pond's ancestors settled in that area in the early 1600s, with a Robert Pond immigrating to Massachusetts from Suffolk, England around 1620. What inspired Lucius to uproot and head south from the family farm is anyone's guess, but Lucius went to Worcester around 1846 and began working for machinist Samuel Flagg. Flagg was 66 years old when young Lucius – just 20 years old — came into his employ.



Figure 12. One of Lucius Pond's hand calipers (top). Well-made and with obvious attention to detail, it's typical of the products that Pond's company produced in the 1860s and 1870s. Another of Lucius Pond's interesting manufacturing sidelines were railroad ticket punches (bottom). Three of these well-executed punches are shown here, and they are still fully operational.



Figure 13. An undated photograph of Lucius Willson Pond. Similar photographs of Pond appeared in newspapers in the late 1870s.

Notice.

WANTED, immediately, by
the Subscriber in West-Boylston, two
or three good **TURNERS** and **FILERS**, and
one **FORGER**, who is well acquainted with
the business. **SAMUEL FLAGG.**
West-Boylston, March 29, 1826. 4w

Figure 14. Samuel Flagg clearly had a going concern by 1826, when he posted this ad looking for laborers. Taken from the *Massachusetts Spy*, April 5, 1826, page 4.”

Samuel Flagg begins to appear in period newspapers in the 1820s, when he was in his early 40’s (Figure 14). It appears that Flagg started by making textiles manufacturing equipment, and then branched out into machine tools. By the 1840s, Flagg was manufacturing an impressive line of machine tools—manufacturing that Lucius Pond was introduced to when he came to work for Flagg in 1846. In 1854, Lucius Pond bought out Samuel Flagg (Figure 15). By that point Flagg was seventy years old, and he was undoubtedly delighted that the 28 year old Lucius Pond would be taking over the concern.

Copartnership Notice.

WE the Subscribers hereby give notice that we have this day, retired from the firm of Samuel Flagg & Co., and that all debts due the said firm can hereafter be settled with Lucius W. Pond, who will hereafter conduct the business as heretofore under the name and style, of **SAMUEL FLAGG, & Co.**

HENRY HOLLAND.
ARTHUR T. BACK.

Worcester, Aug. 16, 1854.

2w

Figure 15. Lucius Pond becomes a principal of Samuel Flagg’s business. Taken from the *Worcester Daily Transcript*, August 22, 1854, page 3.”

Flagg’s restless caught up with him, though, and in the late 1850s he started another machine tool company. The enterprise failed, and in 1860 Flagg was arrested in Boston for having forged a \$500 check (Figure 16). There’s no record of whether he was convicted, but in 1864 Flagg and his wife celebrated Flagg’s 80th birthday. This included \$175 given to him by employees from Lucius Pond’s shop. Was he in dire straits, or was this just a token of appreciation for the old man? We may never know. But just over a year later, in 1865, Samuel Flagg died.

In the meantime, Lucius Pond had been doing well with Flagg’s company, which by 1857 was operating under Pond’s name. The company’s advertisements appeared all over the country, and there’s little doubt that the booming industrialism of the Connecticut Valley had been good to Lucius Pond. In 1856 he bought a large house at the corner of Laurel and Edward Streets in Worcester. Pond became interested in politics in the late 1850s and served on the Worcester town council in 1858 and 1859, as an alderman in 1862, and at a state senator for three years late in the 1860s. Lucius was also a member of the Montacute Masonic Lodge – initiated, passed and raised in 1858. And in 1862, the only known ad for

Lucius Pond’s guns appeared in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Figure 17). This ad was for a merchant named Elias R. Bowen, who operated a shop on Clark Street in the windy city’s downtown.

Arrest for Cheating. Mr Samuel Flagg, of this city, was arraigned in the police court in Boston on Friday, charged with having obtained a note for \$600 from Samuel Verry, Jr. of Malden, giving him as security therefore two engine lathes. Mr Flagg has long been a machinist, and is near 78 years old. It is believed that there has been some mistake in the matter, which will be cleared up if the case should come to trial.

Figure 16. An ignoble end to Samuel Flagg’s storied career. Taken from the *Worcester Palladium*, May 2, 1860, page 3.

ARTILLERY AND CAVALRY
OFFICERS.—An extra nice lot of Sabres, Belts and Sables, Sabre Knots and Spurs, Real Buckskin Dress Gaiters. Also, Infantry Field and Line Officers’ Swords, the best articles made; Smith and Wesson and Pond’s **Revolvers** and Percussion Cartridges; Shoulder Straps, Breeches, &c., &c., all sold very cheap for cash. **E. R. BOWEN,** 28 Clark street, [up stairs], over the United States Express Office. oct:15

Figure 17. The only known advertisement of Lucius Pond’s guns, taken from the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 15, 1862, page 4.

As mentioned before, Lucius Pond had been promptly sued by Rollin White for violating White’s patent with the belt revolver. Pond turned over his stock of remaining belt revolvers to Smith & Wesson, and then began manufacturing the front-load revolver. Like his predecessor Samuel Flagg, Lucius Pond’s fortune started to change in the 1870s. It’s likely that the economic effects of Reconstruction, and the subsequent Long Depression that started in 1873 contributed to Pond’s difficulties. Despite serving as a director of the Central National Bank, Pond found himself in dire straits. By 1874, Pond was washing bank checks and re-issuing them to himself for much larger amounts. In one instance, a \$500 check was subsequently altered into an \$1,100 check. Needless to say, Pond was deeply in debt.

Late in 1875, Pond’s fraud came to light and that October, Pond disappeared completely (Figure 18). He had set out from Worcester for New York City, but he quickly escaped to Hamilton, Ontario, where he found work as a machinist. But he knew that the law would catch up to him in Ontario, so he again set off for San Francisco, where he boarded a boat for faraway Australia. But for the work of Detective Ezra Churchill, Pond would very likely have disappeared down under. Pond was arrested on the boat and returned to Worcester (Figure 19), where he stood trial for his fraud – estimated to have exceeded \$100,000. He was convicted and sentenced to 15 years in prison (Figure 20).

Pond – always eloquent and loquacious – remained a favorite among his friends and family. His pastor visited him in prison and commented that “*I never saw a better man in the world, and I never expect to, till I am in heaven.*” Pond’s friends and families petitioned the Governor of Massachusetts twice for his pardon. They

DAVID W. POND A SUICIDE.

THE FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE POND TOOL AND MACHINE COMPANY SHOTS HIMSELF IN PLAINFIELD.

Plainfield, N. J., Aug. 4.—David W. Pond committed suicide this morning by shooting himself in the head as he lay in bed at his home, in Leland-ave. His wife was asleep in an adjoining room at the time.

Mr. Pond's death must have been almost instantaneous, as he was dead when the first person to examine him did so. Mrs. Pond, however, insisted that Dr. Fritz should be called, and he was soon at the side of the suicide. He pronounced life extinct.

Mr. Pond's reason for ending his life is believed to have been financial trouble. He was at one time wealthy. He was the founder and head of the Pond Tool and Machine Company of this city, but retired about three years ago. The firm employs about five hundred men and does much work for the Government in the building of guns and other machinery used by the War and Navy departments.

Mr. Pond was at his office, No. E 27, in the Produce Exchange, on Tuesday, and was apparently in good health and spirits. He had a desk in the office of H. S. Wade and James S. Fries, and the former said yesterday that he knew of no reason for Mr. Pond's act. Since he sold his interest in the Pond Tool and Machine Company, of which he was president, he had not been actively engaged in business, but had, as far as was known, been well situated financially. He is said to have sold his interest in the tool company for a substantial sum, and all that is known about his stock speculations is that he sold blocks of Jersey Central and Diamond Match stock at good prices. He was a great reader, and spent much of his time in the reading-room of the Exchange. His mother is still living at Worcester, Mass., where the tool company was located before it moved to Plainfield.

Figure 22. Like his father, David Pond managed to make national news, and not always for the right reasons. Taken from the *New York Tribune*, August 5, 1897, page 7."

Bibliography

The author first undertook a search of the secondary literature, and the following books were found to have information about Pond's gun making. Because of the scarcity of information in these works about Pond's life and times, the author undertook an extensive review of primary source documents – including, but not limited to period newspaper articles, federal and state censuses, tax rolls, vital records and other documents. It was through this research that much of this article was assembled.

That said, the following authors deserve mention – both as important contributors to our *corpus of knowledge*, and for helping to place Lucius Pond in the annals of early American gunmakers.

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Endnotes

- 1 Flayderman, Norman. *Flayderman's Guide to Antique American Firearms and Their Values*, 9th Edition. Iola, Wisconsin: Gun Digest Books, 2007. p. 502.
- 2 Flayderman, Norman. *Ibid*, p. 503.
- 3 Broehl, Wayne G. Jr. *Precision Valley, the Machine Tool Companies of Springfield, Vermont*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1959.

