

"HENRY DERINGER, JR AND HIS IMITATORS"

Talk given by Harry C. Knode, Memphis meeting, May 1957

Officers, Members of the American Society of Arms Collectors and their guests, when your esteemed president, Mr. Samuel E. Smith asked me to give a talk at this meeting on Philadelphia Type Derringers my first thoughts were that he was either being facetious, trying to humor me, or had scraped the bottom of the barrel for this meeting. I tried to prevail upon him that we still had a wealth of untried speakers and material in our group but he insisted that he needed a speaker for Sunday morning that would not give such important information that should the members have not recovered from the fish fry and be wide awake that they would not miss too much and he said he did not know of anyone more capable of giving such a talk as myself.

First of all, I realize most of you have the book written by our very good member, John E. Parsons, entitled "Henry Deringer's Pocket Pistol" and if John has not covered it in that book it just isn't to be covered. So anything I may say here will to a great extent be repetitious. However, I do sincerely wish to thank Mr. Parsons for his efforts in writing this book for without it, I probably would have been lost.

Oddly enough, I had prepared the Deringer display you see here before President Smith asked me to give this talk, which just goes to show that confused gun collectors' minds can get in the same rut.

I believe you will all agree that the Philadelphia Type Deringer or Pocket Pistol is one of the most colorful arms in American history. It was not a martial pistol, never carried as a side arm in the making of our country's history. It was hardly a hunting piece of any kind. On rare occasions it may have been used as a duelling pistol but certainly not built primarily for that purpose. Nor was it carried, to any extent, during the days of the California Gold Rush. It was mainly adopted by people of all types as a personal weapon and it's period of popularity was apparently short - about 1850 to 1858. But the popularity of this little arm became so great that it's maker's name "Deringer" became a common noun in our language used to describe a type of pistol. This all happened in spite of the fact that Henry Deringer, Jr. did no extensive advertising. He apparently believed in the two slogans - "The best advertising is a satisfied customer" and "Imitation is the most sincere form of flattery".

I think it well at this time to give some of the background of Henry Deringer, Jr. He was born in Easton, Pennsylvania. Being born of parents of German extraction in a section of Pennsylvania that was predominately German and he came equipped with the methodical and mechanical mind of the Germans. Henry's father, by trade, was a gunsmith having practised in Richmond, Virginia. Henry, Jr. served his apprenticeship in the same city. However, when Henry, Jr. opened his own shop he did so in 1806 on Tamerind Street in Philadelphia. By the time Henry reached that stage in his life where the pocket pistols became his main interest he had back of him many years of firearms manufacture.

When he opened his shop in Philadelphia in 1806, his first venture was to produce flint pistols and muskets for the United States Army. I know you are all familiar with these pieces, particularly for the 1808 Contract Flintlock Martial Pistol. Also between the War of 1812 and the Mexican Conflict, he produced on government contracts approximately 20,000 rifles of the Models of 1814 and 1817.

His next venture in martial arms seems to have been the U.S. Model 1845 Boxlock Navy Pistol. He produced approximately 1200 of these Naval pistols.

Concurrently with the production of military pistols, Deringer also produced some very fine hunting rifles and sets of duelling pistols. These duelling pistols were described as pistols having 9" barrels and from .41 caliber up. Even in his later Deringers he seemed to prefer big bore pistols.

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Deringer stated that his first pair of percussion pistols were made for Major Armstrong, then agent to the Choctaw Indians in Arkansas. As Major Armstrong was appointed agent in 1831, his first pair of pistols must have been made about that time. So possibly Deringer was the first United States pistol maker to use the percussion system on pistols although it had been used before in the United States on long arms. This pair was probably large duellers or holster pistols. Deringer later stated that it was Armstrong who coined the phrase and termed his pistols "The Deringer Pistols". A phrase that was later adopted to describe a type of pistol rather than a maker.

After the Mexican Conflict there was a lull in the manufacture of military arms and it was at this time that Deringer conceived the idea of the small pocket pistol and placed it in production about 1850. This date is fairly well documented because Deringer's California sales began about 1852 and he was first listed in the Philadelphia directory as a pistol maker in 1853.

Unfortunately, for Henry Deringer when he started producing these famous small pocket pistols, unlike Colt, he had nothing to patent. The back-action lock was not patentable because it had been in use for some time. A single shot pistol was of course not patentable and about all he had created was a style or type of pistol and his main and only protection was a registration of his trade mark "Deringer Philadelphia". This lack of patent protection later caused him much trouble. These small pistols were mostly made and sold in pairs, but not many of them were cased in pairs. The prevailing wholesale price was \$22.50 per pair and the retail price was \$25.00 per pair. Deringer described his pistols into two size groups - Pocket Pistols, which had barrels of 1-1/2" to 6" and the Duellers from 6" to 9". Even though Deringer may have classified a 6" barrel pistol as a dueller, certainly the common conception of a dueller would not put a 6" barrel pistol in the duelling class. Duellers are normally considered to be from 9" to 10" barrels and about .50 caliber, either smooth bore or rifled. The barrels on Deringer's pistols were all made of wrought iron, whereas his competitors used steel.

Mr. Parsons classifies Deringer Pocket Pistols as having a barrel from 27/32, excluding breech plug, to 4". Calibers from .33 to .51. locks from 2-1/4" to 2-7/8" in length and of the back-action type. A few pistols were produced with set triggers. Deringer made a change in the design of his patented breech plug about 1857. Before that date, the breech plug carried a conical shaped cavity where the nipple connected with it and the later model was drilled straight back uniformly to the nipple opening. Sometimes a hole was drilled and plugged on the left side of the breech plug to permit cleaning of the breech. The early pistols that were produced for agents carried on the barrel, ahead of the agent's name "Manufactured For". The later pistols dropped this and merely carried the agent's name. The greatest market for Deringer pistols was in the South and West. It was stated that pistols in the South sold about three to one over those in the North. From 1856 to 1861, 4,000 pairs of the Deringer pistols were produced and sold. From 1861 to 1866, another five year period, only 1,280 pairs were sold. In 1855 the demand for these small pistols had declined to such an extent that only six men were then employed in making these pistols and the Arms Shop was in the rear of the Deringer's residence. By that time the cartridge Deringers were coming into their own and were rapidly replacing the demand for the Deringer percussion pistol.

During the hey day of the Deringer pocket pistol, most of the sales and distribution was handled through agents and to the collectors of Deringers, the assembling of as many of these pistols with different agents names on them is an important phase in collecting. The well known California agents were Charles Curry, who was probably the largest of the Deringer agents. A.J. Plate and A.J. Taylor were also California gunsmiths and agents of Deringer. Taylor is believed to be Deringer's first representative. W.C. Allen was another of the major agents in California and he was an importer of jewelry. Other agents whose names have been found on pistols and the approximate dates they operated are:

Tomes, Melvain & Company, New York City - 1864

M.W. Galt & Brothers, Washington, D.C. - 1865

Wolf & Durringer, Louisville, Kentucky - 1859

W.H. Calhoun, Nashville, Tennessee - 1855. Later W.H. Calhoun & Co. - 1860.

F.H. Clark & Co. - 1855 and Lullman & Vienna - 1855 - Memphis, Tennessee.

A.J. Millspaugh and G.B. Gilmore, Shreveport, La.

Hyde & Goodrich -1855- Later succeeded by A.B. Griswold & Co. - New Orleans, La.

H.G. Newcomb, Natchez, Mississippi

Most of the pistols produced by Deringer carried no agent's name.

To conclude with Henry Deringer, Jr and his activities, he died on February 26, 1868 at the age of 81 years. He was a well respected and influential citizen of Philadelphia and was considered a very wealthy man. Little did he suspect what great pleasure we collectors of his masterpieces would have in later years.

Unfortunately, the picture of Henry Deringer's imitators is not as quite as clear as that of the originator. Although there were many, many imitators of the Deringer Pocket Pistols, they did not leave many footprints on the sands of time with the exception of their handiwork. To pick up an imitation Deringer pistol and to say specifically and definitely who produced it is rather hard and ticklish to do. Apparently there were quite a few imitators. Some who openly advertised themselves as makers of imitation Deringers and they either neglected to sign their work or would sign it with some fictitious name, either with an agent's name or a corruption of the word "Deringer". We know of such corruptions as "J. Deringer", "Derringer", "Deeringer", "Deringe", "Beringer" and "F. Ringe". In Philadelphia alone there were probably a half dozen manufacturers imitating the Philadelphia Deringer. We know that Slotter & Company started in 1860 producing the best copies of the Philadelphia Deringer. The Slotter organization was comprised of men who had been with Deringer. Consequently, their work was good copies of the original pistol. They even went so far as to copy exactly the Deringer signing. These were produced for A. J. Plate in California and the records show there were 428 pairs of them produced. We believe that the pistols signed "J. Deringer" were probably made by the Slotter organization as it is recorded that in 1866 Slotter and Company took into their organization a Mr. J. Deringer as a partner and his occupation at that time was a tailor. There is little question but that he was taken into the organization merely for the use of his name. Slotter & Company also produced pistols that carried their own signing and some with their signing and A. J. Plate, R. Liddle & Company and J. P. Lower of Denver as agents. Other Philadelphia markings that have been found are: James E. Evans, Andrew Wurfflein, A. Frederick Lins, R. Constable, W. Afferbach, Wallis & Birch, Robertson, Krider, Tryon & Golcher and Kaye. Kaye's pistols were possibly made by Tryon as Doc Huckaba had a pair of these that the inside of the silver castings were marked "Tryon".

Other signed imitations that are known are:

Frank J. Bitterlich & Company, Nashville, Tennessee

H. E. Dimick, St. Louis, Missouri

J. F. Trumpler, Little Rock, Arkansas

G. Erickson, Houston, Texas

Schmidt & Company, Houston, Texas

F. Glassick & Company, Memphis, Tennessee

Schneider & Company, Memphis, Tennessee

Schneider & Glassick, Memphis, Tennessee

F. H. Clark & Company, Memphis, Tennessee

Some of the less frequently seen imitations are:

A. W. Spies, New York City

A. Linde, Memphis, Tennessee

A. Weisgerber, Memphis, Tennessee

S. O'Dell, Natchez, Mississippi

Louis Hoffman, Vicksburg, Mississippi

C. Sutter, Selma, Alabama

Canfield Brothers & Co., Baltimore, Maryland

Folsom, believed to be New York

Jos. Labadie, Galveston, Texas

Samuel Sutherland, Richmond, Virginia

T. F. Guion, New Orleans, La.

Klepzig & Company, San Francisco, California

Tufts & Colley

C. M. Dickson

Recently a pair signed H. C. Palmer - no address showed up in California. We should not also forget the F. Beerstecher's Patent of 1855 and Jesse S. Butterfield's Deringer.

In the New York area there was a gunsmith by the name of Daniel O'Connell, who operated in New York City and widely advertised as a manufacturer of imitation Deringer pistols. He did business under the name of Murphy & O'Connell. It is quite possible he may have produced many of these pistols carrying dealer's signatures or he may have operated merely producing guns for those in New York, namely - R. P. Bruff, Gillespie, Seaver, A. W. Spies or J. M. Syms. However, we do know that Spies was an importer. I have one of his pistols which unquestionably was produced in England as the barrel carries the British proof. His name is engraved on the lock but on top of the barrel is "Sutherland-Richmond".

It is my humble opinion that much can still be learned about these imitation Deringers if sufficient research and study is done. There is little doubt in my mind but that many of the marked pieces which we attribute to pistol makers were actually not manufacturers, but dealers. We feel this is quite true in the Texas marked pieces. We have the Schmidt, The Erichson and the Labadie and, as far as we know, they were not gunmakers but were gun dealers.

Recently I had the opportunity and pleasure of purchasing a pair of Deringers that were of ve good workmanship and carried the name "H. C. Palmer" with no address. Upon examining the pistols, I noticed a small five pointed star on the tang. This star rang a bell in my memory. I knew somewhere else I had seen that star and I started checking through my pistols and Lo & Behold, on the pistol marked "H. E. Dimick" was the same star and on both of these pistols, at the breech plug opposite the nipple, was a section milled out the length of the breech plug and about 1/8" deep. Unquestionably, both the Palmer and the Dimick pistols were produced by the same maker. I also remembered having seen this star some place else. In going back to the Texas Gun Collectors magazine to an article I had written on Texas marked Deringers, I found that on the tang of the Labadie pistol was the identical star - I believe made by the same die, although the cut-out at the breech was not there.

Most every craftsman leaves his own mark. Those who work in metal or other materials have an individuality that can be recognized if sufficient study is made. This will hold true with engraving or most any mechanical art. I, therefore, believe if the collectors of Deringers would devote more study to comparing specimens - that is to the type of engraving, the type of trigger guards, the finials, the shaping of the barrels, the rifling, the inlays, etc., much knowledge could be gained by this comparison of the different guns. I will be glad to cooperate with anyone who wishes to do any of this research work and information on my pistols is available upon asking.

As I intimated at the start, I do not believe my talk has brought forth any astounding or new information to speak of, but I do hope it has been of some interest to you.

I thank you.

THIS COMPILATION OF MARKINGS MADE BY AND USED THROUGH THE
COURTESY OF A. FRANK GREENHALL, DALLAS, TEXAS

DERINGER PHILADELPHIA AGENTS' MARKINGS

W. C. Allen, San Francisco	Hyde & Goodrich, New Orleans
W. H. Calhoun, Nashville	Lullman & Vienna, Memphis
F. H. Clark & Co., Memphis	A. J. Millspaugh, Shreveport
C. Curry, San Francisco	H. G. Newcomb, Natchez
N. Curry & Bro., San Francisco	A. J. Plate, San Francisco
M. W. Galt & Bro. Washington	L. Swett & Co., Vicksburg
J. B. Gilmore, Shreveport	A. J. Taylor & Co., San Francisco
A. B. Griswold & Co., New Orleans	Tomes, Melvain & Co., New York
	Wolf & Durringer, Louisville

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AMERICAN PERCUSSION "COPIES" - MAKERS AND/OR DISTRIBUTORS

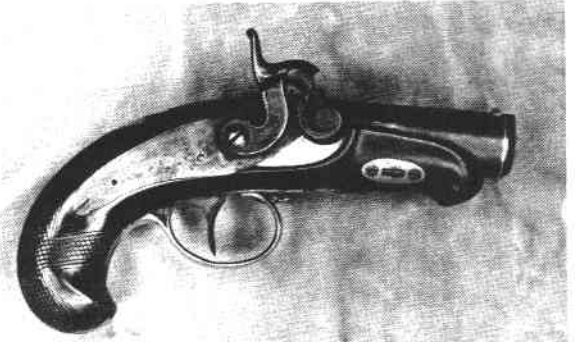
William Afferbach, Philadelphia	Robert Liddle, San Francisco
Frederick Beerstecher, Lewisburg, Pa.	A. Linde, Memphis
Frank J. Bitterlich, Nashville	Adam Frederick Lins, Philadelphia
Blunt & Syms, New York	John P. Lower, Denver
R. P. Bruff, New York	Cyrus P. Mendenhall, Old Jamestown, N. C.
Jesse S. Butterfield, Philadelphia	Murphy & O'Connell, New York
Canfield Bro. & Co., Baltimore	Daniel O'Connell, New York
W. Carroll, Philadelphia (?)	S. O'Dell, Natchez
Clark, Philadelphia	E. G. Owens, Denver
F. H. Clark, Memphis	H. C. Palmer
Richard Constable, Philadelphia	Parker
Nathaniel Curry, San Francisco	F. Ringe, Philadelphia
J. Deringer, (Slotter & Co.), Phil.	Robertson, Philadelphia
Horace E. Dimick, St. Louis	Robinson, Philadelphia
M. Dickson, Louisville	E. Seaver, Vergennes, Vt.
Efflebach, Philadelphia	E. Schmidt, Houston
G. Erichson, Houston	William S. Schneider, Memphis
A. B. Fairbanks, Boston	R. J. Simpson, New York
Daniel Fish, New York	Slotter & Co. (Schlotterbeck), Phila.
Charles Foehl, Philadelphia	Spang & Wallace, Philadelphia
H. Folsom, St. Louis (?)	A. W. Spies, New York
Gillespie, New York	Samual Sutherland, Richmond
Frederick G. Glassick, Memphis	C. Sutter, Selma, Ala.
Joseph Griffith, Louisville	J. G. Syms, New York
Grubb, Philadelphia	J. F. Trumpler, Little Rock
T. F. Guion, New Orleans	Edward K. Tryon, Philadelphia
J. M. Happold, Charleston	Tufts & Colley
Hawes & Waggoner, Charleston	Wallis & Birch, Philadelphia
Louis Hoffman, Vicksburg	A. Weisgerber, Memphis
Klepsig & Co., San Francisco	Wilson & Evans, San Francisco
John H. Krider, Philadelphia	Andrew Wurfflein, Philadelphia
Jos. Labadie, Galveston	John Wurfflein

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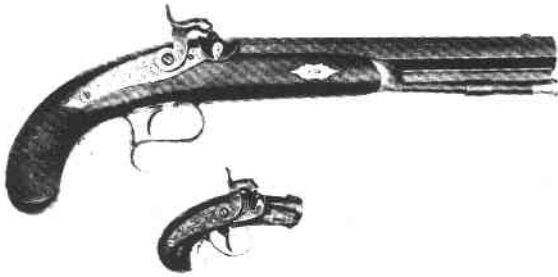
The above compilation has been made with the thought that it may be of interest to the students and collectors of Deringers. Additions and corrections will be welcomed.



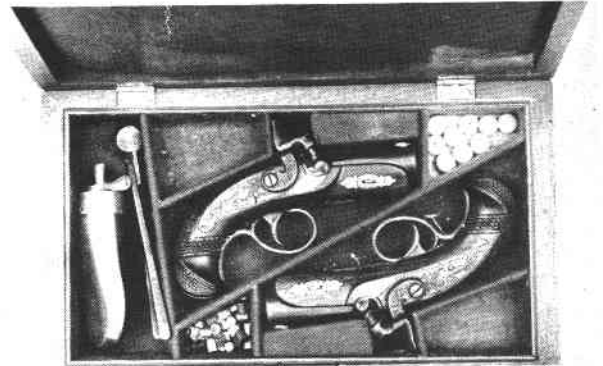
JOS. LABADIE DERINGER,
ONLY KNOWN SPECIMEN.



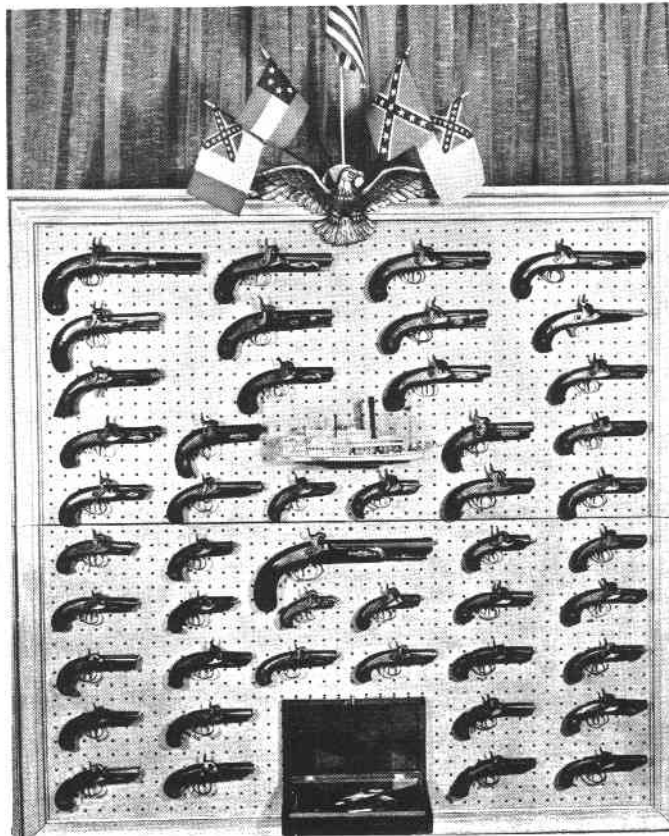
E. SCHMIDT & CO., HOUSTON
POSSIBLY A HALF A DOZEN KNOWN



LARGEST AND SMALLEST OF THE DERINGERS
DUELLER... 15 1/4" O.A., 9 1/2" Bbl., .58 Cal.
POCKET ... 4 1/8" O.A., 15/16" Bbl., .375 Cal.



CASED PAIR OF DERINGERS
5 1/4" O.A., 1 5/8" Bbl., .41 Cal.



DISPLAY USED WITH DERINGER TALK