

SOME OF THE OLD MODEL POCKET PISTOLS CALLED "'49ers.'

By P. L. Shumaker



There are probably as many reasons, - different reasons for writing books as there are people who write them. As you scan some books which have been written recently (and I am not referring to Arms publications), you consider the meagerness of the plot or of the material offered, and wonder whether some authors write books just to keep from going to work.

If you will look around you, you can see lots of folks in this very room whom you feel certain would be natural, sure-fire authors.

For example, there's Harry Knode. Everyone in this room knows the quality of his writing ability, inspite of the fact that you know he can tell more tall stories in five minutes than the average man could believe in a week, or duplicate in a lifetime.

Then, there's that Fox(y) Yankee from Long Meadow, Mass. whose droll, tongue-in-cheek linguistic virtuosity, coupled with his unquestioned knowledge in many fields has made him a prime choice as a speaker and writer.

You could undoubtedly name scores of other actual or potential literati before you got down to my class at the bottom of the publishing Totem-pole, and then you might well ask yourselves, "Whatever got into a schnook like this to make him write a book?"

Well, gentlemen, I promise I'll never do it again, and I wouldn't have done it the first time, but I was "Horn-swoggled" into it. For the benefit of those who might be unfamiliar with the term "Horn-swoggle," it has been defined as a combination of all of the characteristics of cajolery, flattery, coercion, high-pressure selling, low-pressure selling, honest and dishonest persuasion, encouragement, discouragement and plain and fancy flim-flamming.

The whole thing started out some years ago as a quiet little inconspicuous project in keeping with a low gun-budget. I liked percussion Colts, and since good Dragoons cost from \$50.00 to \$75.00 then, I had to settle for something less in dollar value if I ever wanted to cover the field. The Something I picked was then classified as the "49ers," and if you paid over \$25.00 for a mint copy, you were liable to be suspected of possessing more holes in your noggin than Devine Providence had originally intended or supplied.

In my ignorance, I guesstimated that 12 or 15 specimens would cover the entire field. Since there were plenty of specimens in existence then at every gun-show (it seemed as though every collector had at least one or two), I made up my mind to be as "picky" as possible. So, armed with a magnifying glass (which made you appear to know more than you did), and a tablet of ruled paper, I started my search.

Naturally, the owners of Pocket Pistols I examined were curious or suspicious, and asked questions. My stock answer was, "I'm making a Study." For some reason or other, there is something magical in the use of the word Study. Suspicion of my inquisitiveness vanished, and those who weren't downright embarrassingly helpful were satisfied to consider me slightly balmy but harmless, and offered no opposition.

If I hadn't found so many different kinds, and if they hadn't been so darn interesting, and if so many collectors hadn't been so anxious and willing to help in any way they could, I probably would never have

considered writing anything. But you just don't kick nice, obliging, helpful people in the shins, especially when their assistance has been given without any expectation of recognition, and they only express hopes that what they have offered will be helpful.

So, you try to think how you can repay friends in a suitable manner. You marshal the facts, - try to express them as interestingly as possible, and from there on, the fun begins. I might add that it is extremely helpful if your wife is sympathetic with the milder forms of insanity such as Arms Collecting, is patient with late hours, long trips (many of which are water-hauls), and scads of correspondence.

I have brought along some specimens which I hope will prove interesting to you, and some problems which I would be obliged if you would answer.

For some of you who might be interested in figures other (but not excluding) those incorporated in blonds, brunettes and redheads, the production of Old Model Pocket Pistols was around 400,000, and this figure does not include the Model of arms known as the 1862's which were .36 caliber but used the frame and "innards" of the Old Model Pocket Pistols.

More of these Pocket Pistols were produced than any other of the percussion lines, and more than any other Colt line, percussion or cartridge, with the possible exception of the Single-Action Peacemaker which has sufficiently upped its total figures by reactivating production in recent years. Remember that the Old Model Pocket Pistols' 400,000 was produced when our population was much smaller, in the period from 1848 to 1872, and you can appreciate why it was the Colt "Bread-and-Butter" gun, which kept the factory going when military arms were not in demand.

"The LONDON marked Pocket Pistols"

{ ADDRESS COL. COLT }
LONDON

This group of pistols includes some interesting innovations, some of which appeared in the Pocket Pistol group for the first time, although others may have appeared simultaneously on some American-made specimens.

Although eventually it was possible to examine around 140 specimens of Pocket Pistols bearing the LONDON markings (56 of these being among the first 1000 of the approximately 11,000 produced), I succeeded in publishing some inaccurate information about the earliest group.

Whether Sam Colt became impatient with the slowness with which the London plant was being readied for production, or whether orders for guns from English buyers piled up more rapidly than the facilities at the London plant could be made operative, no one knows. Whatever the reason, a batch of several hundred unmarked Pocket Pistols were produced at the Hartford factory and shipped to England. There they received the LONDON factory serial numbers, English Proof Marks and Barrel markings. We know this because these specimens, in spite of the markings, had all of the characteristics of the Hartford-made Pocket Pistols, and these characteristics did not appear in the later specimens fabricated at the London plant.

The first few of these typically Hartford-made specimens which I examined were ENGRAVED (not stamped) with the inscription, "Col. Colt, London." in block-type lettering in one line, and positioned on the barrel from the breech toward the muzzle. Lacking other evidence to the contrary, I baldly pronounced this as THE barrel-marking for all of the Hartford-made but London-marked specimens.

Believe me, there are times when "eating Crow" or your own words does not offer much choice in the way of pleasurable diet.

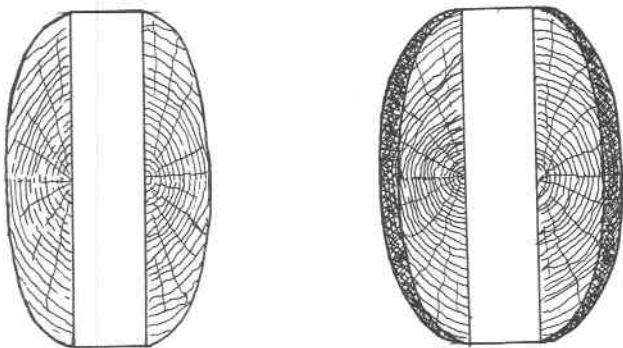
Hardly had the book been published when I stumbled across a couple of these early specimens (under serial number 300) which were embarrassingly enough not marked "Col. Colt, London," breech toward the muzzle, but were engraved simply enough with the words, "Sam'l. Colt, London," in a muzzle toward breech direction.

After that, the whole roof caved in, and early specimens showed up with either of the 1-line Engraved markings appearing placed in either direction, Breech-toward-muzzle, and Muzzle-toward breech. Apparently there was as much confusion regarding early barrel-marking at the London plant as there has since developed in my mind on the subject. At least, the markings were in 1 line, and they were Engraved, not stamped as were the later 2-line Londons.

There is a specimen of the "Sam'l. Colt, London" marking among those exhibited on my table as proof that it is often unwise to open your mouth too widely or you might get a size 13 like mine in it. There are also some pictures of the various 1-line London markings.

Modification of the Loading-slot to permit easier charging with the powder flask and admission of the ball or conical bullet under the rammer was also a part of the London venture. Even the Hartford-made specimen mentioned just previously shows the slight rounding of the "notch-type" Loading-slot which was characteristic of the then currently made American Colt Pocket Pistols. Later groups showed further rounding and deepening of the Loading-slot until the latest group (Serial #s 9,100 to the end of production) were made with what is identified as the Late Type Loading-slot.

These Loading-slot changes on the London-made Pocket Pistols were made more rapidly than were corresponding changes on the American-made counterpart pistols. It was after 1858 before the so-called Late Loading-slot appeared on Hartford-made Pocket Pistols.



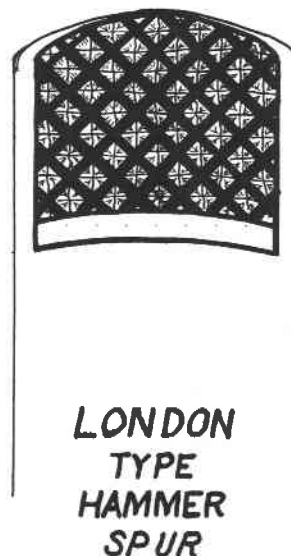
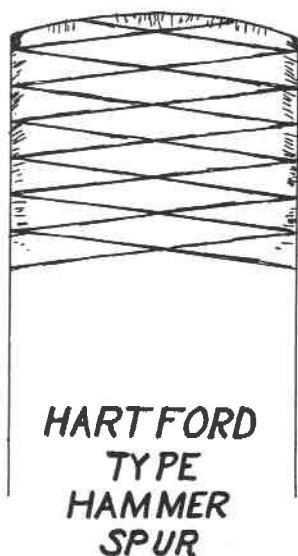
AT THE LEFT IS BUTT STOCK (FULL SIZE) OF THE EARLY 2-LINE "LONDON" POCKET PISTOLS. AT THE RIGHT IS THE BUT STOCK (FULL SIZE) OF THE LATE 2-LINE "LONDON" POCKET PISTOLS. THE SHADED AREA INDICATES THE DIFFERENCE IN THE SIZE.

Large Rounded Steel guards (quite possibly made at the London plant) around 1853, although these used the standard American short trigger. Apparently this was just a trial run, because it was not until 1858 that the Large Rounded trigger-guard became standard on American-made Pocket Pistols, and Brass was used instead of steel. This was more than a year after the London factory was closed.

Another peculiarity of the London-made specimens was observed in the finishing of the hammer spurs. Up to this time, with the exception of fancy Engraved pieces, all of the American-made, and around 1000 of the London-made Pocket Pistols had hammer spurs which had the appearance of having been criss-crossed rather haphazardly with the edge of a file in order to roughen the spur so that the thumb of the user would not accidentally slip in the act of cocking the hammer. After the first 1000, the Londons appeared with a spur face quite similar to those found on modern arms, a framed area of small steel pyramids. This improvement in design and appearance was not applied to the standard Hartford-made Pocket pistols until around 1863, or 6 years after the close of the London plant.

For some unknown reason, approximately the first 6,000 of the London-made pistols (exclusive of the 300 early ones made in Hartford) were produced with narrower grips than were the last 5,000. The narrower grips measured about 1-1/16" across the width of the butt, whereas the later specimens measured a full 1-1/4," an appreciable difference of 3/16." There was no difference in the back-strap itself.

The Large Rounded Trigger-guard and longer trigger were also identified with the London-made Pocket Pistols. This permitted easier placement of the finger in the guard, and better trigger control. A few hundred Hartford-made pistols appeared with the



There were obvious differences in the English market for Pocket Pistols as compared with the American market. Undoubtedly, the average family in England did not face the same problems requiring home protection or personal protection as did families in this country. Possibly much of the English purchasing was for family members in the colonial areas, since this would account for the fact that 35% of the London-made specimens examined were in Cased outfits which often contained some spare parts, and cleaning equipment not found in standard American cases. 20% represents the highest estimate of American specimens cased, and that occurred only in the 2-Line New York group. Undoubtedly, the American market was a more general one, and the arms saw much more active use. This might account for the fewer cased outfits since the pistols were bought to be carried, not stored. The English cases of Oak appear to be better made than their American counter-parts, and this might also account for the survival of a higher percentage of them.

The "2-Line Hartfords"

{ ADDRESS SAME COLT } NEW YORK CITY	ADDRESS SAME COLT HARTFORD, CT.
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Even the most casual observers of Old Model Pocket Pistols are familiar with the two major American-made groups, - those bearing what is known as the "2-Line New York" marking on the barrel, and the other bearing the 1-Line New York marking.

The "2-Line New York" group started at Serial #1 and continued through Serial #187,100 (approx.), and the "1-Line New York" group began where the other left off, continuing to the end of the Production period in 1874 or 1875. They did not overlap in Serial numbering.

The London-made group was identified by its own Serial Numbering system.

However, there was one odd group which confused collectors, and that was a group of Pocket Pistols bearing the "2-Line Hartford, Ct." barrel stamping.

None of the early collectors appeared to know why this barrel marking existed, or how many of them there were. In one of his late 1930's lists, Theodore Dexter mentioned the Hartford marking, and ventured a guess that not over one out of every nine Colt percussion pocket pistols could be found bearing the Hartford marking.

His prophecy had much more truth than fiction in it, but apparently he didn't consider it interesting enough to follow up because he didn't mention it again. He could hardly be blamed, because when he wrote his article, '49s as they were called sold for from \$2.50 up to a maximum of \$15.00 for standard model specimens.

In the course of the Pocket Model research, a total of 155 specimens bearing the Hartford markings were examined and catalogued. It was observed that they appeared with 5-shot or 6-shot cylinders, with the 5-shot varieties outnumbering the 6-shot specimens two to one. Although most of them had the standard silver-plated Brass fittings, some few appeared with the Large Steel triggerguards of the London type. Also, this group was not identified with any individual Serial Numbering system or section, but appeared in 100s and 1000s groups interspersed with specimens bearing the "2-Line New York" or the "1-Line New York" barrel marking identified with those particular Serial Number groups.

These observations didn't give much to go on, so it was necessary to start from scratch.

The earliest numbered specimens could be identified as having been produced early in 1858, and the highest numbered specimens appeared around 1861. By checking all of the recorded "2-Line Hartfords," and observing the proportion of "2-Line" and/or "1-Line New Yorks" appearing in the same 1000s and 100s groups of the Serial numbering system, it was possible to estimate that probably not in excess of 6,000 "2-Line Hartfords" of all types were produced. . It is quite likely that there were even fewer than 6,000. The fact that the production of this group was relatively close to the Civil War period indicates that, proportionately, more of the "2-Line Hartfords" may have seen un-official service in the armed forces than some of the other Pocket Pistol groups, and that for this reason, comparatively few specimens survive for collectors today. Although not as flashy or eye-catching as the so-called Baby Dragoons, there were considerably less than half as many "2-Line Hartfords" made as there were Baby Dragoons. For this reason, the Hartford marked group of Pocket Pistols deserve the attention of percussion Colt collectors.

The exhibit on the table contains specimens of most of the variations in the "2-Line Hartfords" group, - the 4, 5, & 6 inch barrel lengths appearing first in the 5-shot and later in the 6-shot categories; a specimen which was once the property of "D" Company of the 74th New York State Regiment; a specimen with the Large Steel triggerguard, and one of the few Engraved Hartfords known to exist.

It is interesting that none of the Hartford-marked group appear in the 3 inch barrel length, or without an attached rammer assembly.

Some early accounts mention the existence of Hartfords having a "1-Line" marking, but I have never been able to find one or find anyone who has seen one. If anyone here has one, I would appreciate being allowed to examine it.

SOME QUESTIONS WHICH HAVE NOT BEEN ANSWERED.

There are always some questions that seem to have very elusive answers, or none at all.

One of these is related to the rifling of Colt's Old Model Pocket Pistols.

The study of these pistols was designed to identify real variations. The term Variation was defined as a "factory-initiated change or modification of a functional nature," and under such a definition, the rifling or changes in rifling would appear to qualify in the variation category.

Information had appeared from several sources that the Early Rammerless types of Colt's Pocket Pistols (those often call "Baby Dragoons") had a straight rifling with a slight Right or Clockwise twist, and that the Pocket Pistols with attached rammer assemblies (known as '49ers) had a gain-twist rifling with a Left or counter-clockwise twist.

In the initial phases of the study, I saw no reason to question this statement.

Rifling, itself, would be an important consideration, but the direction of twist seemed to be unimportant. Presumably, a ball should fly just as true with a Right or clockwise twist as with a Left or Counter-clockwise twist. However, I was cleaning some of my pistols one day, and you naturally squint down the barrel to see if it has been properly cleaned. On this occasion, the squint showed a clockwise twist where a counter-clockwise one was supposed to be. I took another look, and the direction was still clockwise.

I then examined 10 or 12 specimens I had and discovered five changes in rifling direction, - from clockwise to counter-clockwise, back and forth. Since then, I have found 14 changes in rifling direction in the specimens I have.

Obviously, there must have been many more. How many more, probably no one will ever know, and it may not be important at all. I discarded rifling as a possible form of variation, but the reason why these changes in direction occurred remains an un answered question. I have asked the Colt Factory people, but they not only had no explanation, but they seemed to be as surprised as I was that the situation existed although they agreed that there must have been some good reason for the changes in direction. I have talked with old machinests and old barrel-makers, but have not received any answer or explanation.

If any of you know the answer, please elucidate.

Another peculiarity which is not readily answerable relates to Brass and Steel fittings.

American-made Colt pocket pistols were almost universally equipped with silver-plated Brass fittings, whereas the London-made pistols were almost always equipped with silver-plated or blued Steel fittings. There must have been some reasons for this but what those reasons were remains obscure.

It is possible that Colt believed that this cheap but serviceable arm deserved a little "dressing-up" in the way of silvered fittings, and Brass was obviously easier and cheaper to plate) to make it more attractive to his native American market. Having started along this line with the "Baby Dragoons," Dragoons and 1851 Navys, it may have become a recognized mark differentiating these arms from other makers products.

The only times when all-Steel fittings appeared on these Hartford-made pistols, two things were evident:

- (1) That Steel fittings were in use on London-made pocket pistols, or (later) on pistols primarily made for the British market after the close of the London factory.
- (2) That they were "trial runs" not produced in large quantities which were apparently not successful in this country or they would have been produced in larger numbers. Or, in later production,

their appearance indicated an "over-run" of Steel fittings made for an English order. Their infrequent appearance seems to strengthen the opinion of non-acceptance here in this country, and thereby adds to their scarcity as variations sought after by collectors.

On the other side of the question, the English market apparently preferred arms with Steel fittings rather than those of silver-plated Brass. With the exception of that first few hundred Hartford-made, but London-marked pistols which had plated Brass fittings, almost all of the London-made pistols were equipped with Steel fittings, almost all of the London-made pistols were equipped with Steel fittings which were usually blued, but occasionally plated. The rare exceptions appear with the silver-plated Brass fittings.

Even after the close of the London factory, most of the arms (pocket pistols) made for the British market were equipped with Steel fittings even though manufactured in this country. Strangely enough, some of these later productions (usually in the Pocket-sized .36 caliber) bore the "2-Line London" marking although they were undoubtedly produced at the Hartford plant, while others bore the current "1-Line New York" barrel marking. Some, but not all, of these specimens bearing British proof-marks had Serial Numbers followed by an E or an L. Whether these letters had any real significance relative to a British order is debatable since other specimens in the same Serial Number groups and also bearing British proof-marks were not designated with the E or L following the Serial Numbers.

Among the American-made specimens with Steel fittings shown in the exhibit are:

1. One showing the rare Small Rounded Steel triggerguard, appearing on the market about the time when the London factory was opened. To the best of my knowledge, none of the London-made pistols ever appeared with the Small Rounded guard.
2. One with a 4 inch barrel showing the typical Large Rounded Steel triggerguard, but with the then standard short American-type trigger since the Small Rounded Brass guards were still standard in this country.
3. One of 2 known specimens with 5 inch barrels. Almost all other specimens examined had 4 inch barrels. This specimen was produced either just at the end of the London factory period, or just after it. It shows the Large Rounded Steel triggerguard and the long trigger usually associated with the larger guard, but just then about to be standard in this country.
4. The Highest-numbered specimen recorded in the study which was found to be equipped with the Steel fittings. Undoubtedly, this was the result on an "over-run" on a British order.

At this point, I would like to digress from the consideration of Colt's Old Iron, and take a look with you at the past and the future.

Over the many years since Arms Collecting became a hobby, there have been collectors who were more inquisitive than others. Some of these not only wanted larger and finer selections of arms than they could acquire by the limited individual efforts, but they also particularly wanted information.

These collectors realized that information about the arms they collected represented the keystone to the determination of values, - that information about the age, manufacture and uses of these arms represented a significant contribution to history.

This realization led to the formation of Arms Collector organizations; groups of individuals with kindred interests who sought information and increased knowledge through associations in addition to other organizational purposes.

At first, these associations were localized, but the stimulation they provided has influenced widespread growth in both the number and size of these organizations. It is probably conservative to say that membership in organized Arms Collecting associations has increased several thousand percent in the past 15 to 20 years.

As has occurred when any such organizations have experienced mushroom growth, some of the initial fine principles and purposes become diluted and even lost. All organizations are subject to some degree of change by virtue of rapid growth, and even through progress in the study of the various facets of the hobby. Unless Club management has been consistently strong enough to secure majority support, year after year, any organization is subject to the decay of "growing-inward", of cherishing past performance instead of searching for new accomplishments, or, conversely, the organization grows out-of-bounds, and beyond the control of the basic principles which benefit the entire Arms Collecting fraternity.

It was in recognition of these situations (if my information is correct) that the American Society of Arms Collectors was formed 10 years ago. Certainly, no other association was ever formed for better purposes, nor has any other included on its roster, as many persons dedicated to Arms Collecting, and capable of contributing to the betterment of conditions for the entire fraternity.

It has been progressive, - it has grown beyond the numerical bounds originally envisioned by its Charter Members. Probably, that is how I managed to squeeze in.

The meetings which I have attended have been enjoyable and informative experiences. I shall long remember them. The individual members do not hesitate to share experience and knowledge with other members.

This is good, but this good contains within it, however, the seed of a malady which has afflicted similar organizations in the past. I know that I would be greatly disappointed if this organization became similarly afflicted.

I speak of the illness of "growing-inward," - of hugging to ourselves the knowledge we have acquired, the satisfaction of past accomplishments, and forgetting the responsibilities and obligations we owe to the future of Arms Collecting.

How these responsibilities and obligations are to be discharged is a matter for the consideration of each and all of us. Certainly, leadership in the various fields of Arms Collecting is something we can provide if we will.

As the items which we collect become interesting to more and more collectors, the value of these items goes high enough to entice Fakers to practice their trade, since the supply of Antique Arms, especially, is limited.

The fact, that our items attract the attention of Fakers, should be an encouraging point, - not a discouraging one. Fakers are not interested in faking junk.

It will not be enough for us to come out and state that we are against Fakers.

There is an old proverb which runs something like this, - "The Sheep are Foolish to Petition for a Universal Vegetarian Diet as long as there are Wolves in existence."

Our attitude toward Arms Collecting must follow positive lines.

Fakers cannot be defeated by exposure and prosecution alone since this is often slow process.

Other new Fakers will figure that they are smart enough to get away with it if the opportunities for profit are high enough. Moreover, faking will never be entirely eliminated because there will always be folks who are ignorant, or whose "bargain-hunting instinct" blinds them to a proper investigation of the items offered at such attractive prices.

There is only one positive way to discourage Fakers, and that is by reducing the Fakers' potential market to as near an absolute minimum as possible. This can be done through a determined, planned process of education.

How this can be best implemented is a problem requiring active thought and creative planning. Education, of any real sort, is not a cheap or easy acquisition.

As members of organized Arm Collector clubs in our home areas, there are many things we can do.

1. Not all new members can afford to maintain a complete library of Arms information. It should be possible to set up a lending library with club funds initially, but which can be amortized by operational charges. This would permit members to become familiar with the best information available, and to form their personal libraries on subjects pertinent to their collections.
2. As members of these clubs, we could encourage members to make studies in new fields of Arms Collecting, or in fields which have been covered to some extent, but not fully explored.
3. As individuals with some backgrounds of experience, we can assist and help organize assistance for those members who are willing to undertake detailed studies.
4. We can assist in editing proposed material where the students or explorers have amassed material, but who are hesitant or lacking in the means of interestingly expressing their findings.
5. We should constructively criticize those works which need criticism. I am sure that in your own experience, you have encountered the works of writers who were more prolific in their use of words than they were diligent and conscientious in performing the more arduous exploratory work which is necessary preliminary to the writing of authentic material. Writing of this sort can be not only confusing to the uninitiated, but it can cause a great deal of harm by its misinformation. By being critical in a constructive manner, we can assure the presentation of more factual material, and minimize the publication of confusing or distorted material.
6. We could be of assistance in the formation of a Board of experienced collectors (You will note that I avoided the use of the term "experts.") who could assist in the evaluation of certain pieces submitted to them. I do not know exactly how this group could function to the best advantage, but surely there will be some here who can devise ways it can be done.

These are but a few of the ways in which this organization can fulfill its real obligations, and maintain its rightful place as the leader in the field of Arms Collecting.

EDITOR'S NOTE...DUE TO THE NECESSITY OF CLEARING SOME OF THE MATERIAL USED BY DR. THOMAS T. HOOPES IN HIS FINE TALK "REPORT ON ARMS MUSEUMS OF GREAT BRITAIN" WE FELT IT ADVISABLE TO WITHHOLD IT'S PUBLICATION UNTIL OUR NEXT ISSUE.