

# EARLY GUNS AND GUNMAKERS WEST OF THE MISSISSIPPI

by James E. Serven



I am truly proud to be with you tonight; the American Society of Arms Collectors; in spite of some rough spots, has greatly increased its stature over the years and has built a sound foundation for healthy future growth.

The Society's increasing virtues have had a good effect on some of our members, too. One pillar of the Society recently told me he had given up smoking - drinking - and, oh, well, two out of three is a good average.

For a subject I can promise you nothing as amusing or as close in the experience of many of us as, for Herman Dean's fascinating talk on chamber crockery.

My subject tonight is not intended to be especially profound, but if we are to judge from the attention given it by television, the moving picture industry, and in books of fiction, history and biography, it reasonable to assume that guns and their use in that period so broadly referred to as "the Winning of the West" is a subject of general interest.

A discussion of specific weapons is usually more meaningful if these weapons may be related to important movements in history. This is often not as easy as it may seem. In many cases we have reason to believe certain weapons should have been on the scene at a given time, but were they?

As men like Sam Smith, Herschel Logan, Henry Stewart and many others of you know, a serious conscientious researcher cannot be satisfied with vague references and must accept nothing but positive proof. In some cases this may call for days, or months, or even years of search down many long trails.

The brief comments I shall make this evening were not thrown together in a few days for this talk. They represent specific information one accumulates here and there, sometimes in the reliable obvious places and sometimes from patient search in obscure corners -- and over a long period of time.

When Harry Knode asked if I would speak to you on this occasion he emphasized that my talk must be accompanied by a manuscript. What Harry didn't realize was that without a manuscript there would be no talk.

One of the hard lessons soon learned by anyone who presumes to frequently dip his pen in the inkwell and write on technical subjects for a highly informed and critical audience is never to try to commit anything to memory; always put it in black and white -- then check it and recheck it!

The matchlock and the wheel lock arquebus of the Spanish soldier-explorer were the first guns to appear on the western scene. Their fire and smoke were seen in the Southwest as early as 1540 when Francisco Vasquez de Coronado led a great expedition northward from Mexico. This was years before the Pilgrims landed in Massachusetts or Captain John Smith and his fellow adventurers sailed up the James River of Virginia.

Guns of this early type had some impact on the history of the west but their use was very limited, and soon the more practical flintlock came into use not only in the Southwest but also in the Northwest and in the far west coastal regions.

As Spanish exploration and colonization spread through the Southwest and into California, the boom of gunfire came to lands accustomed to nothing louder than the whistle of an arrow. It was much the same when the French, British and American traders and trappers pushed into the Indian lands of the upper prairies and northwest territories. Light flintlock muskets, often called fusils, became a highly prized article in the Indian trade and remained in great demand for well over 100 years.

In the 1800s a more efficient weapon, the caplock, entered the West from two directions -- from the frontier supply towns like St. Louis in the east, and on sailing ships through western harbors. The Mountain Men, early pathfinders for the Oregon land-seekers of the 1840s and the California gold-seekers from 1849, showed a pronounced preference for the strongly-made caplock rifles of Jake and Sam Hawken of St. Louis.

Reprinted from the American Society of Arms Collectors Bulletin 14:6-14

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It can be properly claimed that St. Louis became the first settlement west of the Mississippi to establish any semblance of a gunmaking industry.

Texans were quick to realize the advantages of caplock arms, and it was in Texas that the Paterson-made Colt repeating pistols, rifles and carbines had their first important baptism of fire, largely in the hands of Texas Rangers. Texas also provided the spark which set off the Mexican War.

Aside from winning the Mexican War, a vital result of that conflict was the acquisition of California. In 1846 General Stephen Watts Kearny led a mounted force of the First Dragoons from Leavenworth down the Santa Fe trail to New Mexico. His conquest of New Mexico encountered no resistance. Leaving a major portion of his command in New Mexico, Kearney headed for California with about 100 Dragoons, picking up Kit Carson as a guide along the way. After a costly encounter with a well-mounted and determined Mexican force at San Pasqual in California, Kearney and his diminished Dragoon detachment reached San Diego, where they joined naval forces from the Pacific Squadron.

Kearny's Dragoons were armed with Hall breech-loading carbines and single shot pistols. The sailors of the Pacific Squadron still were armed in 1846 with standard U.S. flintlock muskets, although a select group of skirmishers did have some of Samuel Colts six-shot Paterson-made carbines. A few sailors carried pikes. The mounted Mexican forces, usually superb horsemen, were armed with lances and some "escopetas," short flintlock carbines made frequently of cut-down obsolete English Tower muskets.

The brief resistance to the American take-over in California centered in the southern part of the state, with decisive engagements in the general vicinity of Los Angeles. This southern part of California, however, was destined to continue its traditional tranquil, slow-moving pace for many years after it came under the stars and stripes, while four or five hundred miles to the north the floodgates to a great migration burst wide open in 1849 after the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill.

Guns and gold had a way of being closely associated. For one thing guns were necessary in the procurement of meat in an unpopulated country where wild game was the only available supply; guns were useful in the protection of mining claims and for various other purposes. In any case, everyone needed a gun. In response to this demand, gunmakers headed west in considerable number.

One of the first members of the craft to pack his tools and reach the Golden Gate to San Francisco Bay was Frank Bekeart, who sailed in aboard the Oregon on April 1st, 1849. Frank Bekeart was the first of three generations of Bekearts to engage in the gun business on the Pacific slope.

Following close on Frank Bekeart's heels, Benjamin Bigelow headed for California, reaching San Francisco to look things over in 1850. Bigelow had been born in Nova Scotia, but drifted down to Rochester, New York, where he learned the gunmaking trade with William Billinghamurst. Finally setting up shop in California at Marysville, Bigelow produced fine guns there until his death in 1888.

One of the specialties of the Bigelow shop was cylinder rifles. Several years ago it was my good fortune to obtain Benjamin Bigelow's own rifle, the most beautiful specimen of this revolving cylinder type I have ever seen.

San Francisco quickly became the hub of the gun trade on the far shore of the American West, just as St. Louis had become the gunmaking center on the Mississippi. While many of the prominent gunmakers were located within San Francisco itself, others like Bigelow sought locations closer to the California gold fields.

In 1950 I wrote a review of the California gun trade which appeared in the American Rifleman; a roster containing the names of approximately 250 gunmakers and gun shops (operating prior to 1900, mostly in northern California) accompanied that study. This illustrates a very active gun trade in and about the hub of the Far West's trading area.

Many men who first came to dig gold from the California creeks and rivers stayed on, turning to farming, lumbering, and the many other activities which have contributed to give California the largest present population of any state. These were hardy people, these pioneers. It was said of them that "the weak died along the way, and the cowards never started."

The role of the gun dealer in the West began to take on a greater importance as the population grew and demand increased. Local gunmakers could not keep up with the demand, and imported weapons from such firms as Colt, Slotter & Co. of Philadelphia, H. Deringer, Allen, Sharps and others soon enjoyed brisk sales.

Two firms especially prominent in selling arms made by American manufacturers in the East were A. J. Plate and the Curry brothers. A letter to the Sharps Rifle Company indicates that at one period A. J. Plate carried as many as 200 Sharps carbines in stock. The Plate and Curry firms also carried large stocks of percussion derringer pistols, these little pocket weapons often found to bear on their barrel the Plate or Curry name as agents.

Following the War Between the States, life in the Far West settled down to a more orderly tempo than in those hectic years when "The Committee of Vigilance" dealt out their form of justice with a coil of rope. But this civic maturity brought with it no lessening in the use of firearms; the change was primarily in the selection of targets. Eventually a six-shooter no longer was a customary part of male attire and human targets went definitely out of style.

There sprang up in California a great interest in rifle matches -- a western version of the old beef and turkey shoots long popular in the East.

It may seem strange to some that muzzle-loading target rifles were favored by many in the Far West long after breech-loading rifles like the Remington and Sharps were available. I have a beautiful 17-1/2 pound caplock bench rifle made by Horace Rowell of Sonora, California, dated 1876. Rowell was one of the leading marksmen of his day, and his heavy bench rifles are fully equal to those of Brockway, Ferris, James or other well-known eastern gunmakers.

Gunmaker Louis Moller was one of the leading marksmen in the San Francisco Bay area, and his guns show a definite German influence. This past year, after about fifteen years of fruitless prior negotiation, I was able to purchase a fine Moller caplock Schuetzen target rifle. This gun weighs 14-1/2 pounds and has a 34" moderately heavy actagon .36 caliber barrel. Moller perhaps holds a record for continuous years of service in the gunmaking trade of the West, having been listed in San Francisco directories as a gunmaker for 50 years subsequent to 1875. He was one of the West's best craftsmen.

In the early years of settlement in the Southwest areas, now within the borders of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, there were many traders, some gunsmiths who could repair guns, but few shops that could be called gunmaking establishments. The same was true of the Rocky Mountain states except Colorado and Utah.

In Colorado, the gold discoveries at Central City, Leadville, and other locations close to Denver led to the rapid development of Denver into an outfitting center which, after 1860, began to take much of the trade from St. Louis. Recognizing the great future of this area, Samuel Hawken had walked all the way from St. Louis to Denver to set up a shop there in 1859. Military activity was increasing in the West; a transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869 and more railroads were building; the great slaughter of the buffalo herds was about to begin.

Carlos Gove, an ex-Dragoon soldier and Indian fighter had been one of the first gunmakers to settle in Denver, reaching there in June, 1860. Gove's business thrived, and in 1873 he took in with him John P. Lower and George C. Schoyen. These men were later to break away into gun businesses of their own, Lower specializing in the sale of Sharps rifles and Colt pistols, while Schoyen became famous for his fine match rifles. Schoyen later formed a partnership with equally skillful Axel Peterson.

The 1870s saw the era of the caplock fast coming to a close in the West. The Springfield muzzle-loading rifled musket of Civil War days was being replaced by the breech-loading Springfield guns reguilt to employ .50 caliber metallic cartridges, these guns being sent to military forces down the Santa Fe trail to Arizona and up the Bozeman trail to posts in Montana where on August 2, 1867 they rendered excellent service in the famous "Wagon Box Fight."

A short time before the "Wagon Box Fight," in December of 1866, Brevet Lt. Col. Wm. J. Fetterman's detachment of 81 men from Fort Phil Kearney, armed with Springfield muzzle-loaders and Sharps caplock carbines, had been surrounded and killed to the last man by a large force of Sioux, one of the worst massacres in our western military history. Two civilians who had accompanied Fetterman's command had been armed with the new Henry repeating rifles. A great number of empty Henry .44 rimfire shells were found where these men fell, indicating that they had put up a strong fight.

In the summer of 1866, Nelson Story and a group of cowboys enroute with cattle to the Gallatin Valley in Montana had fought off a very large war party of Sioux who had disputed their passage along the Bozeman trail. Story and his men were armed with the first rolling block Remington breech-loaders to be seen west of Denver.

After the Fetterman massacre, the commanding officer at Fort Phil Kearney, Colonel Carrington, had sent an urgent message which stated: "I need prompt reinforcements and repeating arms. . . . only the Spencer arms should be sent."

Thus we see that the Henry and Spencer repeaters now had come into the West, and along with them came the Remington, Springfield, Sharps and a few other breechloaders. Denver became an increasingly busy supply center.

By 1874 the slaughter of the buffalo had stirred up the Indians to vicious open warfare. In June of that year a war party of a thousand warriors surrounded a small trading post called Adobe Walls in the vicinity of the Texas panhandle. A woman and 28 buffalo hunters were forced up there, among them W. B. (Bob) Masterson and Billy Dixon. All the hunters are said to have been armed with Sharps rifles, these guns so deadly that the great attacking party of howling savages was finally driven off, one of their number killed by a bullet fired from a "big .50" Sharps at a distance of half a mile.

Improvements on certain features of the Sharps rifles were developed by the Freund brothers, George and Frank, who opened a shop about 100 miles north of Denver at Cheyenne, Wyoming Territory, in 1868. The Freund brothers' partnership was dissolved about 1881 when George moved down to Durango, Colorado, and established the "Colorado Armory."

Indian outbreaks and depredations plagued our western military posts through the 1870s and into the 1880s until the last marauding Apache band under Geronimo was forced to surrender.

After the Mexican War the building of western military posts had gained impetus. The Civil War caused some disruption of these posts in the Southwest but some were soon re-established and new posts had been built. Through these periods and into the various Indian campaigns a variety of weapons had been issued. Most of the shoulder arms have been discussed and among the principal military pistols were the 1836 and 1842 single shot pistols, the big Colt Dragoon six-shooter, the Colt 1851 Navy, the Colt 1860 Army, and the Remington 1858 Army model.

In Arizona the big top-break Smith & Wesson .44 revolvers were given a field trial by the 1st and 5th Cavalry in 1871 and 1872, prior to Army purchases of Colt's single action .45 "Peacemaker" revolvers. The Colt six-shooters and the Springfield "trap-door" .45-70 carbines, both introduced in 1873, saw action in June of 1876 at the Battle of the Little Big Horn. It will be recalled that General Custer decided he did not wish to be encumbered with the Gatling guns which had been issued to his command, and left them behind when he took to the field. By contrast the Canadian militia effectively employed two Gatling guns to help in the defeat of a large force of half-breeds and Indians in the 1885 Riel Rebellion.

Winchester's Model of 1866, successor to the Henry rifle and first to bear the Winchester name filtered into the West, and the showy brass frame appealed greatly to the Sioux and other Indians, who were willing to pay dearly in buffalo hides or beaver pelts for one of these prized weapons.

A man who was to have a great influence on Winchester arms, and many other arms, lived about 550 miles west of Denver in the little Mormon town of Ogden, Utah Territory. His name was John M. Browning. Although Browning was a skilled mechanic, his fame was built primarily on his inventive genius. Winchester's single-shot "high-wall" rifle was a Browning invention as was the Model 1886 Winchester and many other models.

Colt, Remington, and other manufacturers also used a number of Browning inventions. Over ninety Browning-designed guns are now on display at the John M. Browning Armory in Ogden, from the first single-shot patented in 1879 down to machine guns. Although most of the famous gun designers were native to New England and the mid-Atlantic states, Browning's exceptional contributions in weapons design did much toward distributing credits for firearms progress over a wider geographical area.

The Winchester Company purchased the assets of the Spencer Rifle Co. and, because their own rifles became so popular, discontinued manufacture of the Spencer. The Winchester Model 1873, first of the lever action repeaters with reloadable center-fire cartridges, was one of the most popular and widely used rifles in history. Deluxe specimens were sometimes marked "One of One Thousand" and have received widespread publicity.

Perhaps less glamorous than the six-gun or rifle, the shotgun was nevertheless used widely in the West. As early as 1846 Jesse Boone laid low the last Indian to be sent to the happy hunting grounds by a gun of the Boone clan; he killed a marauding redskin in what is now Nevada -- with a shotgun. A double barrel shotgun and a Colt cylinder rifle rode in one of the covered wagons of that ill-fated '49er wagon train that blundered into Death Valley. Several decades later Charles E. Boles formed a partnership with a double barrel shotgun and as "Black Bart" made himself infamous in California's Mother Lode country by helping himself to Wells Fargo's money boxes. Shotguns in the hands of lawmen on the streets of Tombstone, Dodge City, Deadwood, and other rough western towns were not an unfamiliar sight. For close-up debate they presented a couple of strong arguments.

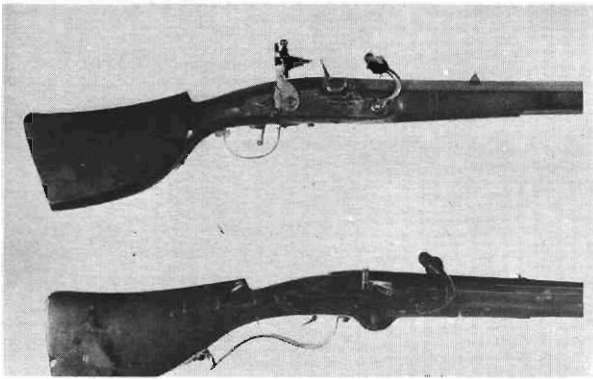
One of the principal lines of merchandise was guns when towns began to build along the maintrails and railroads and close to western mining activity.

Samuel Colt became interested in a mining company in southern Arizona in the late 1850s. A company store was operated at Tubac. Advertisements for this store which appeared in Arizona's pioneer newspaper The Arizonian featured Colt's Navy pistols, pocket six-shooters, and revolving-cylinder repeating rifles.

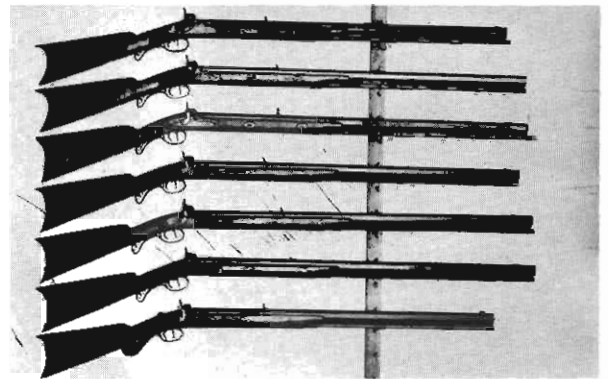
James Dean Alden was Colt's representative in Arizona, and Colt wrote this complaining letter to Alden in his own hand, easily recognizable by its atrocious spelling:

"I am noticing in the newspapers occasionally complementary notices of the Sharp & Burnside Rifles & Carbines anecdotes of their use upon Grisley Bares, Indians, Mexicans &c. Now this is all wrong, it should be published Colts Rifles Carbines &c. When there is or can be maid a good storry of the use of a Colts Revolving, Rifle Carbine Shotgun or Pistol for publication in the Arizonan the opportunity should not be lost & in the event of such notices being published you must always send me one hundred copies (always divide them between several males or express conveyances that some are sure to reach me).. If there is a chance





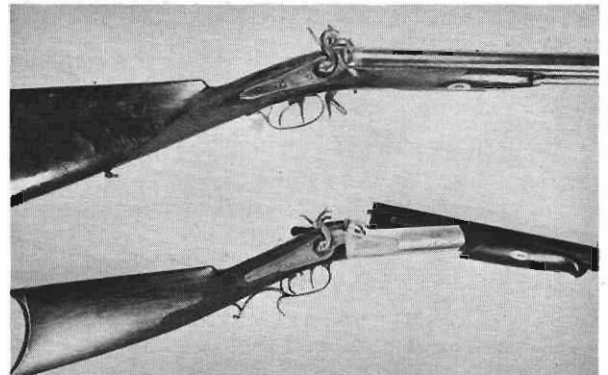
THE MATCHLOCK ARQUEBUS WAS USED BY SPANISH SOLDIER-EXPLORERS IN THE SOUTHWEST AS EARLY AS 1540. SOME EARLY FLINTLOCKS RETAINED A MATCHLOCK SERPENTINE IN CASE THE LOCK MECHANISM FAILED, AS ABOVE.



CAPLOCK RIFLES SUCH AS THESE MADE BY SAMUEL AND JACOB HAWKEN OF ST. LOUIS WERE USED BY KIT CARSON, JIM BRIDGER AND MANY OTHERS WHO VENTURED WEST OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER.



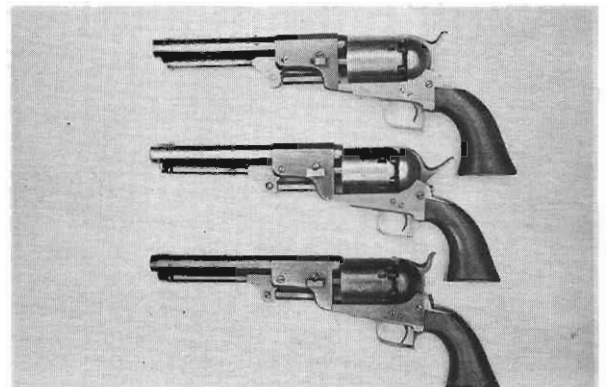
CALIFORNIA-MADE 17-12 POUND MATCH RIFLE MADE BY HORACE ROWELL AND DATED 1867.



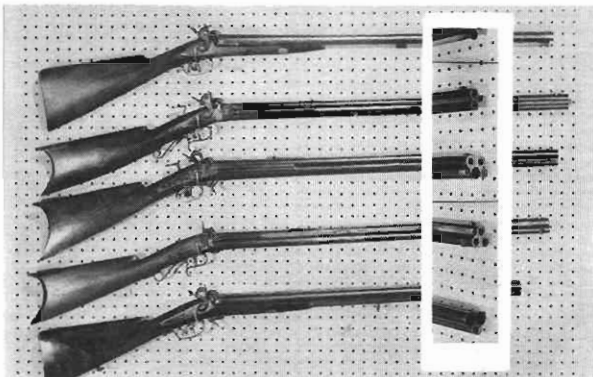
CHARLES SLOTTERBEK OF CALIFORNIA WAS NOT ONLY A FINE GUNMAKER BUT A TALENTED INVENTOR AS WELL; THE 3-BARREL GUN AT TOP WAS HIS PATENT OF 1868, THE TIP-UP BREECHLOADER HIS PATENT OF 1880.



ONE OF A FINE PAIR OF CHARLES SLOTTERBEK PERCUSSION PISTOLS (BEDFORD COLLECTION).



SHOWN BETWEEN TWO PISTOLS OF COLT SECOND MODEL DRAGON TYPE IS A BIG .44 CALIBER PISTOL SAID TO HAVE BEEN MADE BY JONATHAN BROWNING OF UTAH, FATHER OF JOHN BROWNING.



MULTI BARREL CAPLOCK GUNS IN MANY STYLES WERE MADE BY FAR WEST GUNMAKERS. SOME GUNS HAD SWIVEL BARRELS; OTHERS WERE DESIGNED WITH MULTIPLE HAMMERS. A MUZZLE VIEW OF THE FIVE MULTI BARREL GUNS HERE ILLUSTRATED SHOWS THE VARIED BARREL ARRANGEMENTS.



WHEN HUMAN TARGETS WENT OUT OF STYLE WESTERN SHOOTERS TURNED TO MATCH SHOOTING. THESE FOUR RIFLES, ALL BY DIFFERENT MAKERS ARE TYPICAL OF FAR WEST MANUFACTURE.



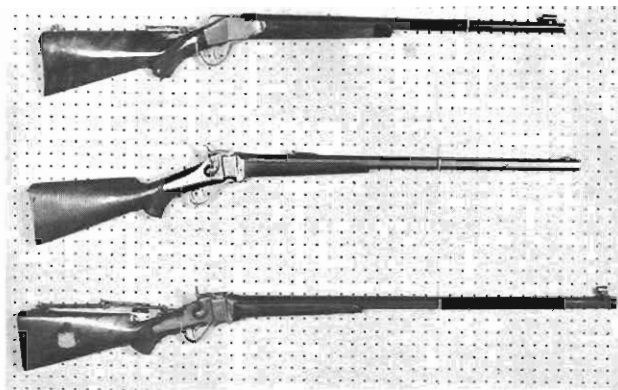
JOHN P. LOWER'S STORE



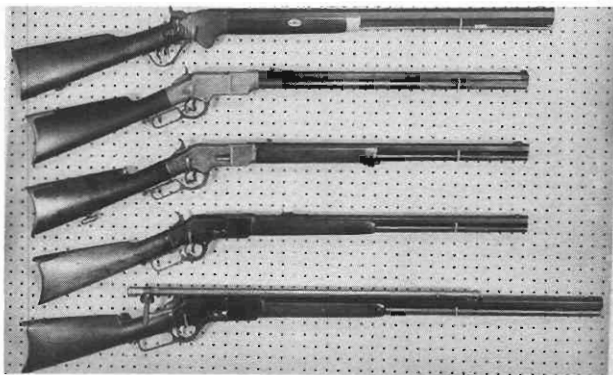
CATLIN THE ARTIST SHOOTING BUFFALOS WITH COLTS REVOLVING PISTOL



JOHN BROWNING'S RARE MODEL 1878 SINGLE SHOT RIFLE (TOP). NOTE THE LEVER PULLS BACK TOWARD THE SHOOTER RATHER THAN FORWARD AS ON THE STANDARD 1879 MODEL BELOW IT.



SHARPS RIFLES WERE ESPECIALLY POPULAR IN THE WEST. FROM TOP: 1. A DELUXE SHARPS-BORCHARDT 45 EXPRESS RIFLE, 2. FREUND BROS. ALTERATION OF THE SHARPS MADE AT THEIR "WYOMING ARMOY," CHEYENE, WYO. 3. AN ENGRAVED SHARPS LONG RANGE RIFLE PRESENTED TO JOHN P. LOWER, FAMOUS ARMS DEALER OF DENVER.



THE FIRST LEVER ACTION REPEATING RIFLES TO WIN POPULARITY IN THE WEST WERE, FROM TOP: 1 SPENCER, 2. HENRY, 3. MODEL 1866 WENCHESTER. 4. MODEL 1873 WINCHESTER, 5. MODEL 1876 WINCHESTER. HERE SHOWN WITH THE RARE SLOTTERBEK PATENT SCOPE MOUNT AND OFFSET SCOPE.



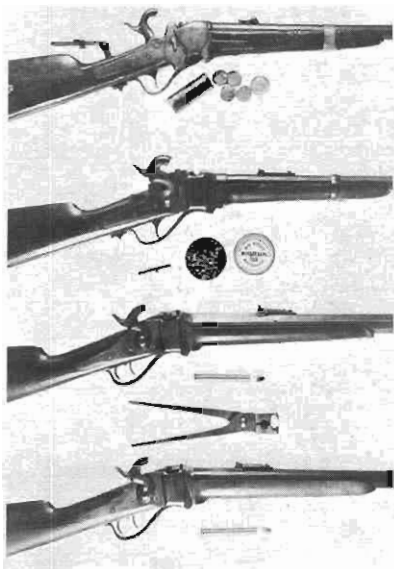
TWO OF THE FIRST REPEATING RIFLES TO BECOME POPULAR IN THE WEST; THE HENRY RIFLE, TOP, FEEDS ITS CARTRIDGES BACK TO THE RECEIVER THROUGH A MAGAZINE UNDER THE BARREL, WHILE THE SPENCER RIFLE, BOTTOM, FEEDS ITS CARTRIDGES FORWARD THROUGH A MAGAZINE INSERTED INTO THE BUTT-STOCK.



THE FIRST SPRINGFIELD BREECH-LOADING RIFLES TO GAIN PROMINENCE IN THE WEST WERE CONVERTED FROM CIVIL WAR RIFLED MUSKETS (TOP) BY A HINGED OR "TRAP-DOOR" BREECH.



THE U.S. FLINTLOCK MUSKET (TOP) IS TYPE USED BY SAILORS OF THE PACIFIC SQUADRON IN THE MEXICAN WAR. BELOW IT, THE POPULAR MODEL 1841 CALIBER .54 "MISSISSIPPI" RIFLE.



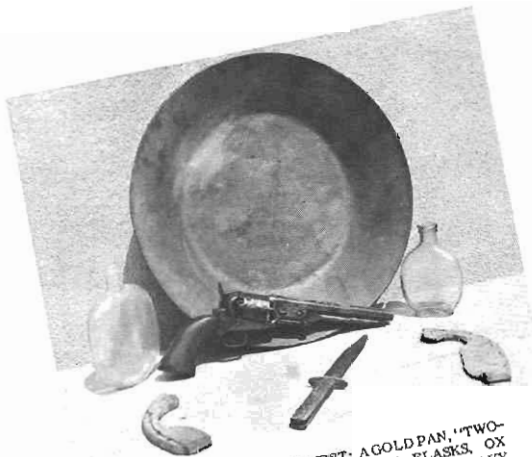
IN THE LATER HALF OF THE 1800'S SHARP'S CARBINES AND RIFLES WERE TO BE FOUND ON THE FRONTIERS AND WHERE THERE WERE BUFFALOES.



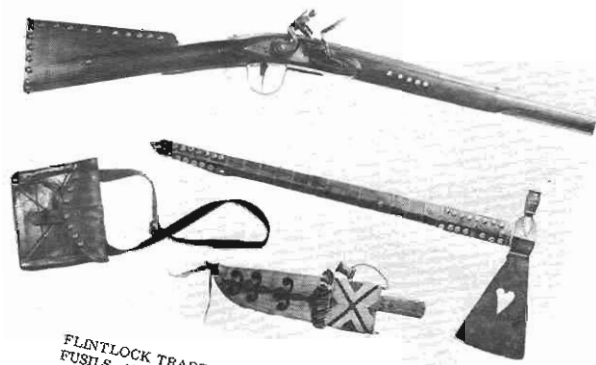
PISTOLS PROMINENT IN THE WEST WERE, FROM TOP: 1. MODEL 1836 ARMY PISTOL 2. MODEL 1842 ARMY PISTOL 3. MODEL 1843 ARMY/NAVY PISTOL 4. COLT 44 DRAGOON SIX-SHOOTER 5. COLT MODEL 1851 NAVY MODEL 6. REMINGTON .44 ARMY MODEL 7. THE '49ER PEPPERBOX PISTOL 8./9. POCKET DERRINGER PISTOLS.



GUNS PROMINENT IN WESTERN HISTORY WERE, FROM TOP: THE COLT PATERSON-MADE CARBINE; THE DOUBLE BARREL CAPLOCK SHOTGUN (OFTEN REPAIRED AT ITS WEAKEST SPOT AS SHOWN); THE HAWKEN CAPLOCK BIG-BORE MUZZLE-LOADER; AND THE WINCHESTER MODEL '73 REPEATER.

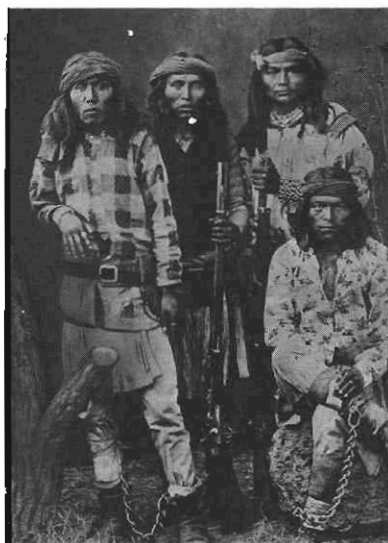


SYMBOLS OF THE FAR WEST: A GOLD PAN, "TWO-BIT" AND "FOUR-BIT" WHISKEY FLASKS, OX SHOES, A BOWIE KNIFE, AND A COLT NAVY PISTOL.



FLINTLOCK TRADE GUNS WERE USUALLY CALLED FUSILS, AND IN RECENT YEARS CALLED "NORTH-WEST GUNS." THEY WERE SOLD AND TRADED AT TRADING POSTS AND SOMETIMES BY ARMY SUTLERS FROM ARIZONA NORTH INTO THE CANADIAN WEST.

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in every style—Sawyer, French, American, Mahogany, Walnut, etc.  
OLD SHOW CASES Taken in Exchange for New.



TWO APACHE MURDERERS (IN LEG-IRONS) ARE GUARDED BY EQUALLY VILLAINOUS-LOOKING APACHE POLICEMEN ARMED WITH 60-70 SINGLE SHOT SPRING FIELDS.

COLORADO ARMORY  
SUPPLY DEPOT  
FRIENDS  
FAMOUS PATENT  
RIFLES & SIGHTS  
BEST in the WORLD! MORE LIGHT  
RIFLES IN COMPLETE READY STOCK.  
Price for both Sights: \$10.  
How both Sights will appear with the  
object viewed at its distant view.  
GEO. FREUND,  
Denver, Colorado, U.S.A.  
DURANGO, COLORADO

to do a few good things in this was give the editor a Pistol or Rifle compliment in the way it will tell. You know how to do this & Do not forget to have his Columns report all the accidents that occur to the Sharps & other humbug arms. I hope soon to see the evidence of your usefulness in this line of business."

While the Sharps had proved itself to be far from a "humbug" gun, it may be that Colt wasn't too far wrong in his appraisal of the Burnside carbines. On June 8, 1859, Col. Edward E. Cross and Lieut. Sylvester Mowry fought a so-called duel at Tubac, Arizona, with Burnside carbines. They fired at each other four times at forty paces, the only damage being to the desert shrubbery. The wild-shooting duelists decided to settle the matter by shaking hands and setting up the drinks for the spectators. Blame for the poor marksmanship was placed on a strong wind.

In this talk with you I have attempted to touch lightly on guns that played important roles in the development of our American West and to doff my hat to some of the skillful and hardy men who made and sold guns -- vital tools employed in moving eastern civilization westward.

The West certainly is but one region that knew the brave, pioneering spirit of America. Other parts of our country have earlier and very just claims to an equally great history. The West was different perhaps mainly in that the vastness and remoteness of the land changed the habits of men. There was an undercurrent of excitement and adventure in the movement beyond the Mississippi. There was a certain recklessness and lack of restraint here that had not been so apparent in the slower-moving migration westward from the eastern seaboard to the Mississippi. The opening of the western trails and establishment of crude settlements came at a time when there were busy if careless pens like those of Ned Buntline whose dime novels spread melodramatic words of adventure, shining heroes, and villainous "bad guys." All in all, the West provided a colorful background for the kind of two-fisted history for which we never seem to tire. A further stimulation to a romantic interest in the West came through the skill with pen and brush of artists like George Catlin, Frederic Remington, Charles Russell, Charles Schreyvogel, and others.

Western gun collections as a general rule will have a preponderance of the weapons which I have outlined to you here. However, there are probably as many easterners now living in the West as native westerners, and this has had an important influence on western collections. Not only do we have the Colts, Sharps, Winchesters, Remingtons and other highly publicized arms of North American manufacture but you will find in a sparsely populated western state like Arizona several of the finest private collections of rare "high art" early European weapons to be found anywhere; collectors in other western states also will be found to have surprising and most impressive collections of these beautifully wrought "Old World" arms. Thus influences are changing, and the guns used primarily west of the Mississippi are not the only kind you will now find in western collections. More and more there is truth in the old saying, "Rare and beautiful guns are where you find them!"

Collections of old-world weapons which represent elegance, ingenuity and craftsmanship are admired by all for their appeal to the eye and their venerable antiquity. On the other hand, guns with a background of use in our American West have great appeal to the imagination and are often a vital part of our national history. There are challenging goals, and generally many rewarding experiences for the collector of guns regardless of what field he may prefer.

For the ladies who perchance may read this story of western lore I shall paraphrase the words of the great detective story writer Agatha Christie, who expressed the view that, "Collectors make the very best husbands -- the older anything becomes, the greater their interest!"