John Parker Lindsay
A Study in Firepower

by Albert J. Weatherhead, III

It is inevitable that a serious and fundamental revaluation of such a remarkable person and his firearms be undertaken. The purpose of this study is an important one. I have been, over the years, somewhat skeptical and disappointed by the lack of available information concerning Lindsay. I have found it difficult to accept that his entire story could be summarized with such succintness.

It may well be asked why such a study should be attempted at all, while there is available information concerning Lindsay's firearms. I might just add that I do not consider this treatise to be in any way definitive. There are a number of mysteries that remain to be solved in connection with Lindsay and his firearms, and my own judgements, I know, are far from exhausting the number of interpretive appreciations which this subject invites. It is my hope that the following discussion, incomplete as it is, will stimulate further exploration of the subject by those whose youth, more exuberant energies, and lesser burden of distracting interests and responsibilities will take them further along this path of discovery than I have been able to go.

When studying Lindsay firearms it is necessary and important to consider both of his patents coincidentally to discern the sequence of thoughts that occurred to Lindsay in actually inventing and manufacturing his two shot firearms. It is my belief that, in reality, the firearm is a direct result of the cartridge patent. The cartridge is an unusual improvement in the field of propellants. Lindsay recognizes this by stating:

"I am aware that repeating cartridges have been used which require separate locks, one for each charge, fitted along the barrel of the piece, and separate touch-holes or vents drilled through the side of the barrel, as described in Newton's Journal, first series volume 13, pages 72 to 73; but they were soon abandoned as being too clumsy and inconvenient. I therefore do not claim any such contrivance as my invention; but—What I claim as my invention, and desire to secure by Letters Patent, as a new article of manufacture, is—The cartridge-case made with its chamber for receiving several charges, in combination with the discharging tubes or passages, when the whole is combined, arranged, and fitted for use, substantially as herein described."

It is informative and interesting to review the repeating cartridge patent. It gives an insight into the Patent Office of the 1860's as well as Lindsay's tenacity of purpose.

On March 23, 1860 the Commissioner of Patents received Lindsay's patent petition for a Repeating Cartridge for Firearms. The petition states, "That your petitioner has invented a new and improved Repeating Cartridge, to be used in Fire Arms, which he truly believes has not been known or used prior to the invention thereof by your petitioner." (See figure 1)

The specification of the patent petition gives a clue to Lindsay's purpose: increased firepower. He states that he wishes "to impart to others a knowledge of its (the cartridge) construction, I will describe the same carefully. I first construct a hollow tube of copper or other suitable material, varying the size, length and strength, according to the amount of powder, shot or balls and number of charges to be inserted and fired from the same; to this I attach small tubes, varying in number according to the number of charges to be fired." The novelty described by the patent petition is several fold. First, the multiple charges are exploded singly from muzzle to breech with each charge being fired separately. Second, "the cartridge can be constructed of light-material or solid material." Seemingly it appears that Lindsay had in mind the fabrication of cartridge cases either from solid brass rod or from light gauge copper strip. His thinking of over a hundred years ago is the forerunner of today's method of making cartridge cases on eyelet machines. Third, "the cartridge can also be constructed of sufficient strength so the same can be reloaded repeatedly by the possessor thereby saving the necessity of purchasing new cartridges to replace those fired." Today Remington and Winchester-Western are at the very forefront advertising and promoting shell reloadability as the ultimate answer to every shooters' prayer and pocketbook. Winchester-Western places heavy advertising emphasis on the fact that reloaders willingly pay 3c each just to be able to obtain Winchester-Western empties. Thus, John Lindsay certainly could be considered the granddaddy of the modern day reloading fad.

Unbelievable as it is Lindsay's cartridge application was rejected by a patent examiner on April 25, 1860 "for want of substantial novelty in the device."

Undaunted Lindsay refiled his application on June 23, 1860 "by cancelling the whole of the original . . . and substituting another." And this time with assistance of a patent attorney, Richard Fitzgerald of New Haven, Connecticut.

The essential claim of the second application is the construction of a multiple charge cartridge requiring only a single vent or nipple in the breech of any percussion firearm. Such design and

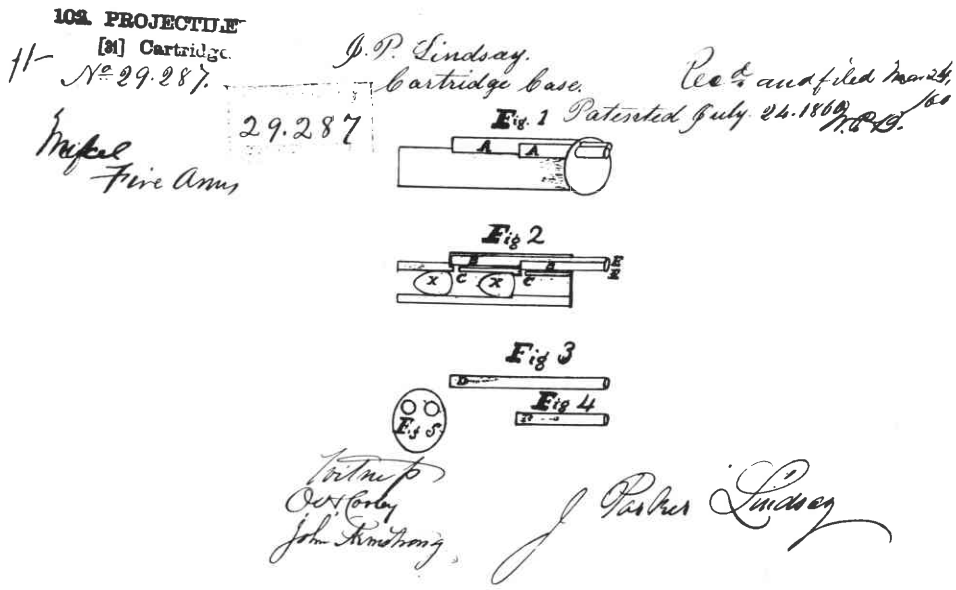


Figure 1
Lindsay Patent for improved cartridge cases

construction avoids the necessity for multiple vent holes in the side of the barrel.

The second application was accompanied by an explanatory letter from Fitzgerald to the Commissioner of Patents. Referring to Newton's Journal Fitzgerald explains that the patent examiner clearly does not comprehend his clients claim: the cartridge is discharged from the breech or rear end of the barrel and not by several locks arranged alongside the barrel as described in Newton's Journal. Moreover, Fitzgerald goes on to say that the pistol for using Lindsay's cartridge will be symmetrical and convenient. In short it would not be awkward as those having several locks on the side of the barrel.

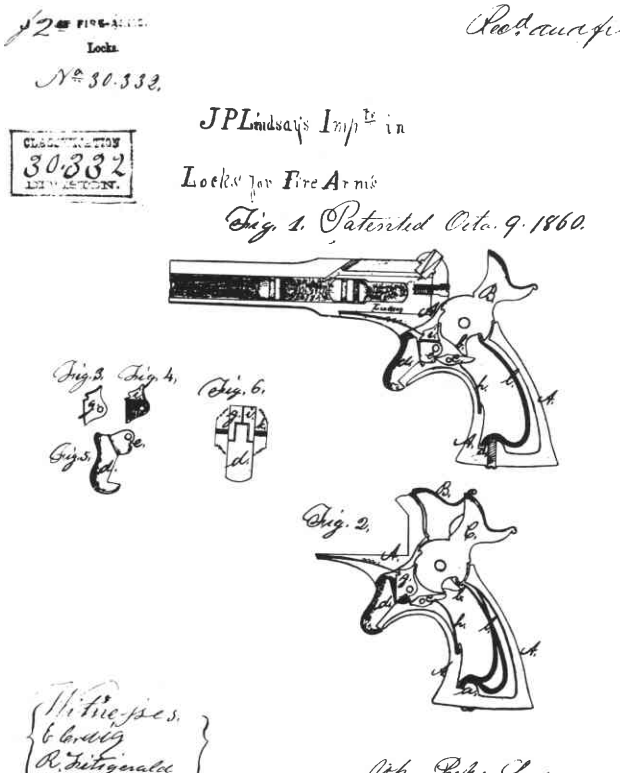
On June 25, 1860 in spite of his attorney Lindsay received a second rejection and again for want of a substantial novelty.

Through the mists of time I can sense Richard Fitzgerald's righteous indignation. His written appeal of June 26, 1860 seethes with pent up ire as he requests permission for personal attendance for a matter twice rejected.

On July 9, 1860 an examining board of three men: DeWitt Lawrence, Rufus Rhodes and A. B. Little did justice with their favorable opinion recommending that a patent be allowed. Prior to clarification by this examining board A. L. Hanout's English Patent Communication No. 5155 of April 23, 1825 had been the stumbling block. Hanout's patent requires that "each charging barrel must have as many touch holes as it is intended it shall contain charges, and similar touch holes must be formed in the exterior or shooting barrel corresponding exactly with those in the charging barrel." The board simply stated Lindsay's device obviated the necessity of more than one lock and made unnecessary touch holes through the shooting barrel. On July 9, 1860 Phillip F. Thomas, Commissioner of Patents personally confirmed and allowed the patent which was issued July 26, 1860.

Consequently, what Lindsay saw as a result of this patent was a multi-shot cartridge that could be placed in any single-barrelled firearm, thus upgrading existing firearms by making them multi-shot weapons. Therefore, it was a short step from the cartridge to the firearm. First of all, the short span of time between the two patents— 77 days— leads to such a conclusion.

Figure 2
Lindsay Patent for improvement in firearm locks



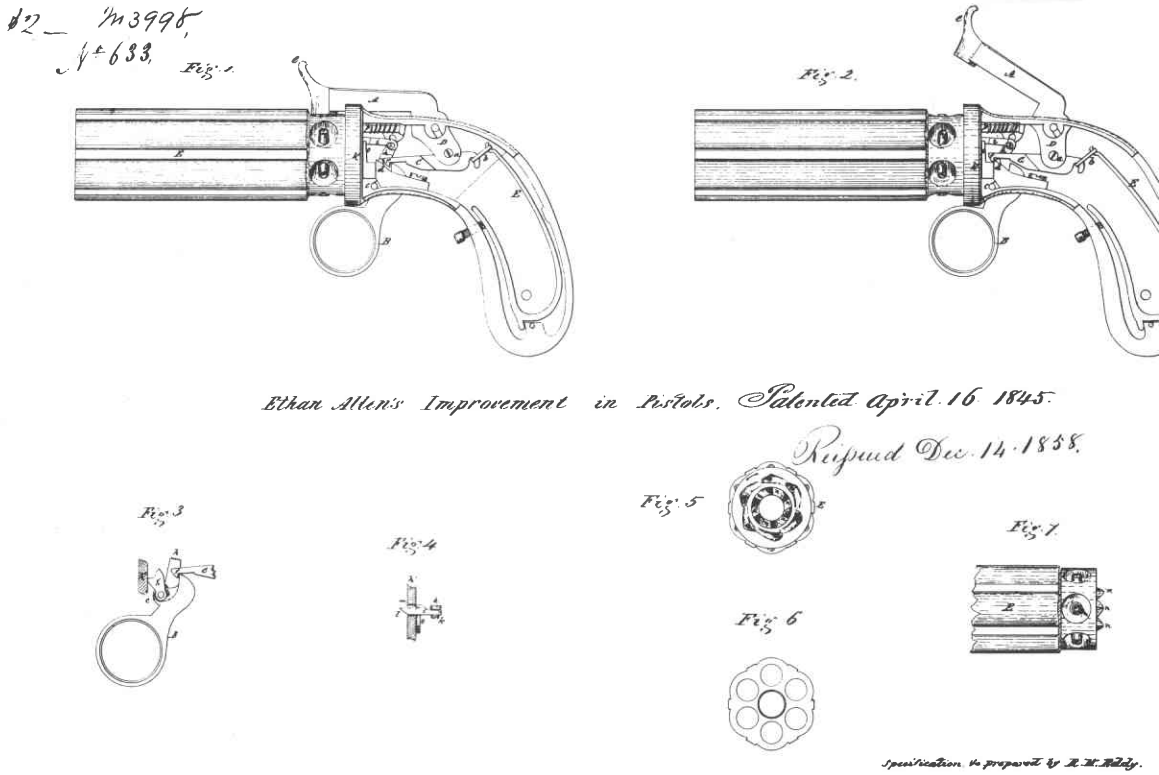


Figure 3
Ethan Allen Patent

Furthermore, I do not feel the patents can be treated as separate ideas apart from one another. The germ of the idea for each patent, perhaps conceived at different times and under different circumstances, obviously was in Lindsay's mind as he worked, undoubtedly feverishly, to beat competition to the punch and gain advantages of his patents in the market place.

Moreover, having improved the state of the art in cartridge manufacture, thus doubling the firepower of single shot firearms fabricated to the date—1860—Lindsay could turn his attention to the improvement of firearms, which is what he proceeded to do.

On October 9, 1860 Lindsay received Patent No. 30, 332—Improvement in Locks for Fire-Arms (See figure 2). In part his patent states:

"My improvement consists in the use of a detent, which is operated by one of the hammers so as to arrest the trigger and prevent action on the second sear until the trigger has been released by the finger and thrown forward by the action of the detent, when the detent is vibrated by its proper spring, and then by again pulling on the trigger it will act on the second sear to release the second hammer to ignite the next charge."

"I *make* the *frame* of *cast brass*, or any other suitable material, substantially in the form represented, (the patent drawing approximates the Third Model Lindsay pistol having a brass frame and *improved single stub trigger*), affording proper supports for the fulcrum pins on which the hammers, sears, etc., vibrate, and especially the curved support

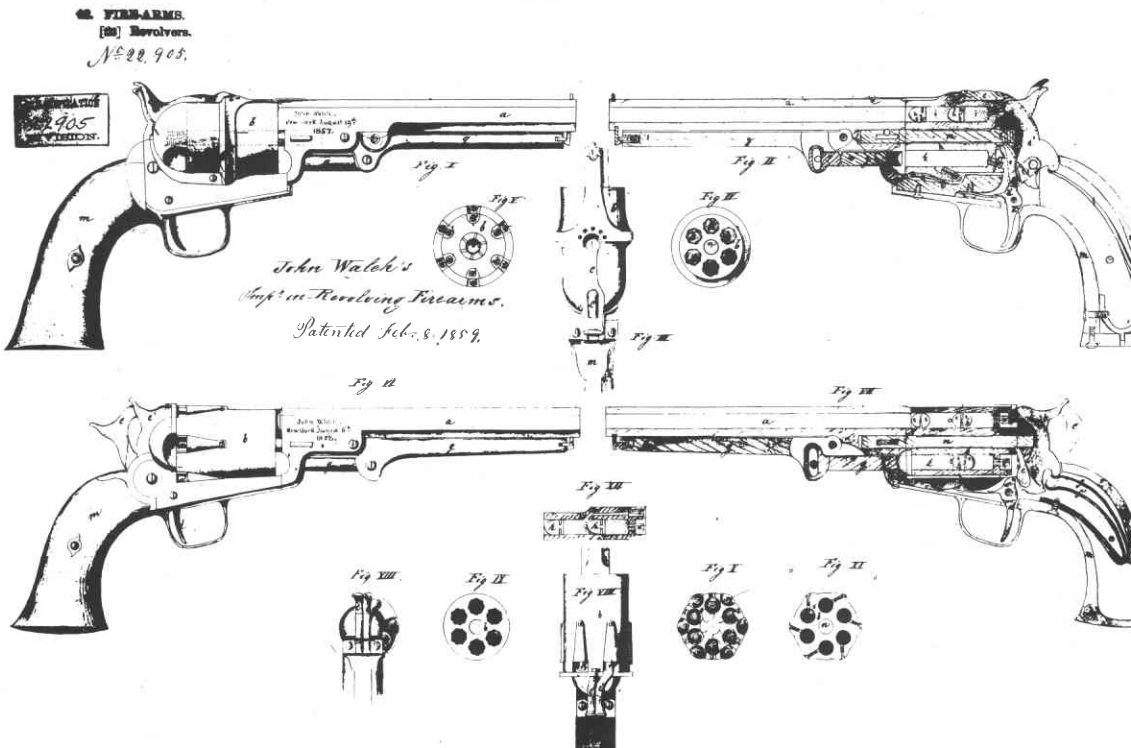


Figure 4
Walch Patent

of the fulcrum on which the mainsprings rest and rock, as shown, and, in which there may be placed screws to set up the mainsprings."

"I make the hammers of steel, or any other suitable material, substantially in the usual form, making the lower one of the one to fire the first or front charge, with a projection or foot, so that while drawing back the hammer to cock the piece the projection will act upon the detent so as to cause the front end to correspond with and enter the notch or space in the trigger, which detent will absolutely prevent drawing back the trigger so as to act upon the sear and of hammer, so that the hammer cannot be let down to ignite the rear charge while the hammer is cocked, nor until after the trigger has been thrown forward so as to release the detent, by a spring, when the trigger may be brought to act on the sear."

When the application for the Lindsay patent was originally filed, it contained three separate claims. The first claim was for the broad combination of two or more sears with but one trigger, where two hammers are used.

The second claim of the application was somewhat narrower than the rejected first claim and related specifically to the use of the detent in combination with the hammer and trigger. This claim was never rejected by the Patent Office, and it is this second claim which is the claim of the issued patent.

The third claim did not relate to the single trigger for operating two hammers, but instead related to the combination of a main spring with a curved support or fulcrum formed so that the main spring will rock upon the fulcrum to give uniformity to the action of the spring. It was this aspect of the invention, and not the aspect relating to the single trigger operating the two hammers, which was

Figure 5, 6, 7
Walch 12-shot prototype revolver. Silver triggerguard and backstrap, underside of barrel marked: "Jan Walch Patent".

rejected based upon the Ethan Allen patent (See figure 3). It appears that the Examiner was correct in rejecting the third claim on this basis, and this claim was cancelled from the application.

Just what is the Walch patent (See figures 4, 5, 6, 7) and why is it pertinent to John Lindsay's patent covering two sears and two hammers which are operated by a single trigger? The trigger of the John Walch patent is of a Y-shaped configuration. As the trigger is pulled back, one branch of the Y releases the hammer for the forward charge, and subsequently the other branch of the Y releases the hammer for the rearward charge all in a single continuous motion. As can be readily envisioned only quickness of mind and the sensitivity of a finger prevent an unintentional simultaneous double explosion from a Walch revolver.

The distinguishing feature between the John Walch patent and the Lindsay patent, and the invaluable safety feature of John Lindsay's patent is the use of separate sears and the detent which prevents the firing of the rearward charge on the first pull of the trigger so that the trigger must return to its forward position and be pulled back a second time to fire the rearward charge. In other words after firing one charge the Lindsay trigger must be released before a second charge may be fired. Certainly, a far reaching and masterful improvement on the Walch patent.

On September 15, 1860 an examiner in the United States Patent Office returned Lindsay's specification and one drawing to Richard Fitzgerald requesting one amendment and a restriction of claim so as to avoid conflict with the Allen and Walch patents so that a patent could issue for the Lindsay pistol. On September 17, 1860 Fitzgerald readily complied with the requested amendment.

One last request was made, September 21, 1860 by the patent examiner, would Mr. Fitzgerald be kind enough to "adjust" the preamble? Certainly Fitzgerald would comply, but he refused to recognize a major difference between the words "relates to" and "consists in" and so you see lawyers argued even in those days. Fitzgerald concludes his letter of compliance, dated September 22, 1860 with some well chosen thoughts reflecting obvious disdain for the patent examiners lack of comprehension and understanding involved in the art of firearms. "But in this case we have not the slightest evidence that any such 'class of Fire Arms,' (where *two* or more *separate* sears are worked by the same trigger) has been known, your reference to Walch's Patent, is *evidently* a *mistake.*"

"All of the Walch Pistols have been manufactured under the *immediate care and inspection* of Mr. Lindsay, and he says that the two *separate sears were never applied to it* until since he filed his present application, and he is (like myself) a practical Gun Smith, and capable of understanding the difference, and which you will find that the trigger is made with a *sear all* of one piece (in the *usual* way) while Lindsay makes the trigger *without* a sear, and then makes a *separate* sear for *each* hammer."

"But as Mr. Lindsay has consented to erase that part of his invention from his present claim he, of course, is willing to strike it from his preamble... however, he believes that his recent invention is the *only specimen in existence.*"

Digressing momentarily it is interesting to note, that initially, Lindsay was denied his patent application because it too closely paralleled the Walch patent of February 8, 1859 and Ethan Allen's patent of April 16, 1845. Was Lindsay following the modern day practice of designing around another's concept or was he creating a Chinese copy? I think not. Lindsay served as an employee of the Springfield Armory and as such was well aware of firearm mechanisms. More importantly there seems to have been close cooperation between John Lindsay and John Walch. Lindsay was responsible for the production of both his own weapons and also the Walch revolvers. All Lindsay pistols, and presumably the Walch revolvers, are known to have been manufactured at the factory of the Union Knife Company on Fulling Mill Brook, Naugatuck, Connecticut, under the direct supervision of Lindsay himself.

Digressing further the drawings presented in this story are exact copies of those actually submitted to the Patent Office by John Parker Lindsay. It is particularly interesting that they do differ from the drawings provided to the public by the Patent Office. It is the consensus among the knowledgeable patent attorneys that the Patent Office redrew Lindsay's original drawings for publication purposes because the original drawings were not reproducible. In so doing Lindsay's name, as originally drawn, was not retained on the frame of the pistol.

Harpers Ferry, the first target in John Brown's war for slave liberation, was situated on a narrow neck of land at the confluence of the Shenandoah and Potomac Rivers in the Blue Ridge Mountains of northern Virginia. For John Brown the war commenced in May 1856 with the massacre of eight proslavery men at Pottawatomie Creek in Kansas. An intractable Calvinist, Brown was determined and obsessed to the point of fanaticism, that human bondage in the Union must cease! On Sunday, October 16, 1859 Brown assembled his twenty-one recruits—sixteen whites and five negroes—and outlined his battle plans: they would barricade the two bridges leading to Harpers Ferry, seize the federal armory complex and the rifle works, and use hostages to negotiate with any militia that attacked them. Since no federal troops were stationed with any militia that attacked them. Since no federal troops were stationed at Harpers Ferry, he thought he would have plenty of time to gather the arms, terrorize the town, wait for slave reinforcements from Virginia to join him there, and then take to the hills. By eleven o'clock on Monday morning a general battle was raging at Harpers Ferry; the speed with which the countryside mobilized had taken Brown completely by surprise. He had had abundant opportunities to gather his hostages and the government weapons and make a run for it; instead he mysteriously delayed. Under command of Brevet

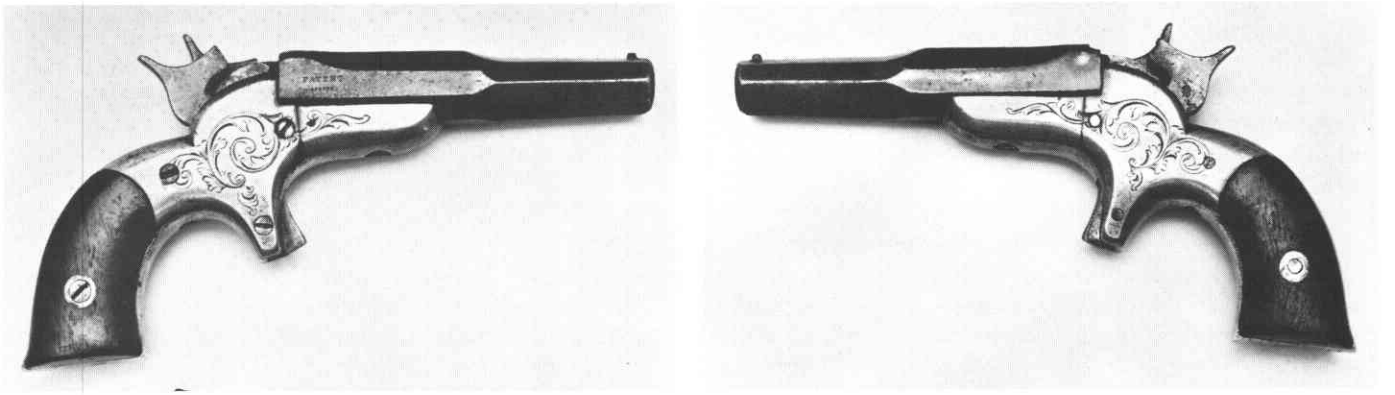
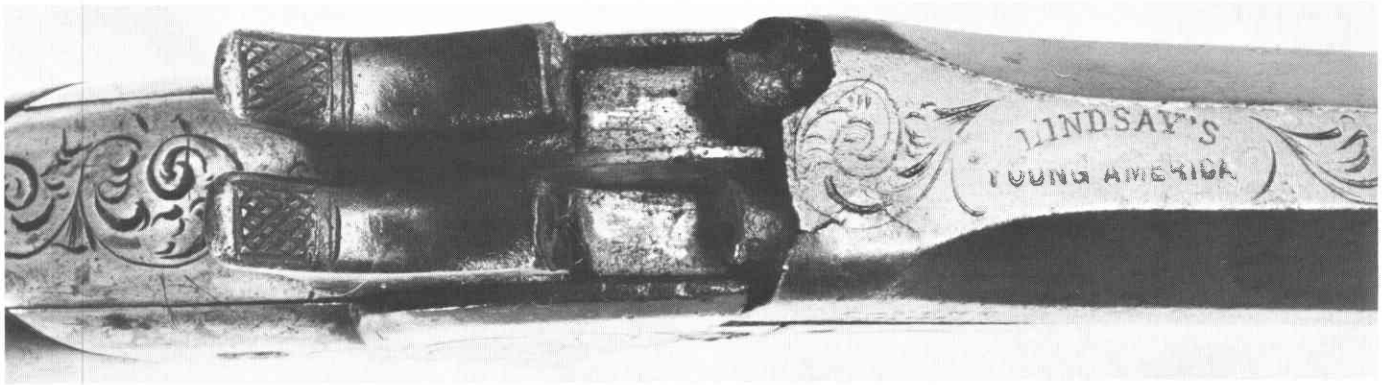


Figure 8, 9, 10
Lindsay 2-shot Percussion Pistol, Model I Frame marked "Patent APd For"



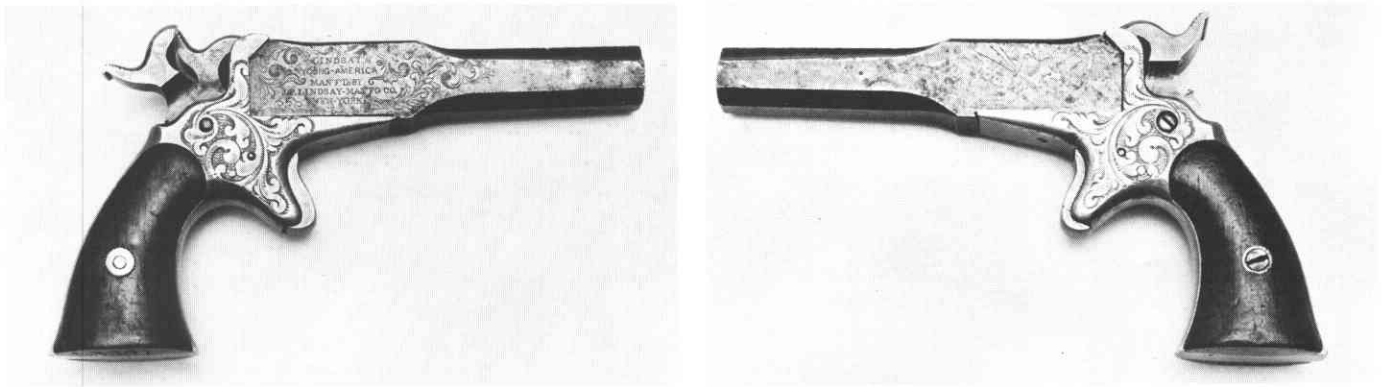
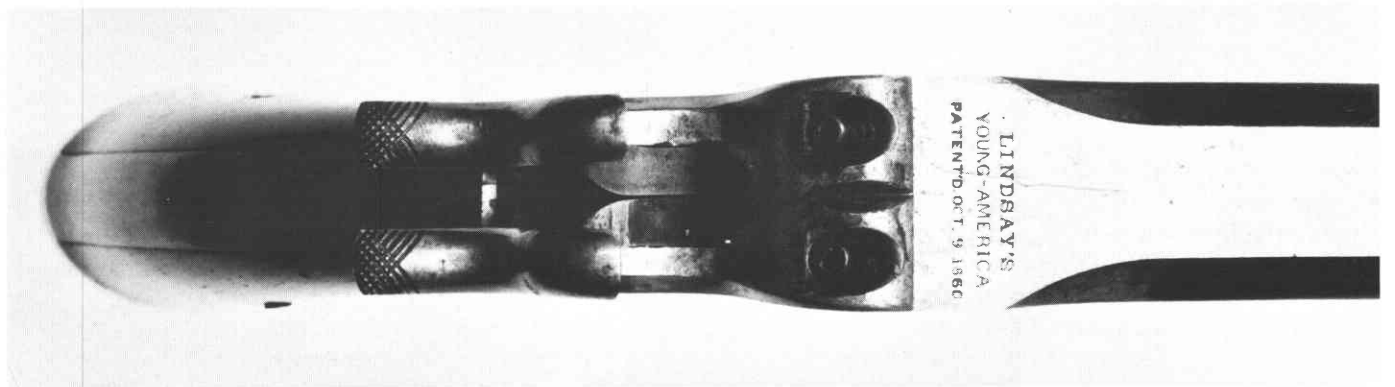


Figure 11, 12, 13
Lindsay 2-shot Percussion Pistol, Model II Barrel marked: "Lindsay's Young-America"



Colonel Robert E. Lee, Lieutenant J. E. B. Stuart of the 1st Calvary, handed Brown Lee's note to surrender unconditionally. Brown declared, he would surrender, only on terms that would allow him and his men to escape. Suddenly storming parties rushed the engine house, Brown and his small party were captured and the war for slave liberation, thirty-six hours after it had begun, had ended in dismal failure. On December 2, 1859 John Brown died on the gallows that had been set up in an open field on the outskirts of Charlestown, Virginia.

For the moment let us assume that we are John Parker Lindsay, former Springfield employee and practical Gun Smith. What thoughts would be running through our minds? Our repeating cartridge patent application is at the examiner's office in Washington, D.C., reasonably certain of approval. The nation was approaching the election of 1860. The Republican platform was clear enough: no more slavery in the territories; but no interference with slavery in the states.

The Democratic nominating convention at Charleston split on the issue of popular sovereignty in the territories. Nothing less than active protection to slavery in every territory, present or future, would satisfy the Southerners. Jefferson Davis demanded a plank in the platform requiring Congress to apply a "black code" to all territories. William L. Yancey of Alabama insisted that the Democratic party declare flatly "that slavery was right." "Gentlemen of the South," replied Senator Pugh of Ohio, "you mistake us—you mistake us—we will not do it." Nor did they; and on April 30, 1860 after the convention had rejected an extreme proslavery platform with the Davis plank, the delegations of eight cotton states withdrew.

In short, the nation was seething! Certainly and unconsciously the thought uppermost in Lindsay's mind: completion of a working model firearm having two hammers, two triggers and a single barrel for the repeating cartridge. As with most inventors, after an idea has been committed to paper in the form of a working drawing, it is important almost to point of necessity to see, to touch and to test a sample; so working in a tool room a model is made. In this case the model was Lindsay's "Patent APd For" pistol. In handling his tool room sample he was proud of his workmanship. The balance was there. The appearance was striking. The size was appealing. Yet something bothered him! All too soon it became apparent: two triggers were awkward! Why not substitute a single trigger? It's an easier way of making the pistol and undoubtedly an easier way of discharging the hammers, the right first and the left last. And certainly it has more sales appeal—probably more patentable too. The necessary changes were made, the dent-sear arrangement incorporated, final drawings completed and the patent application filed.

"What I claim as my invention, and desire to secure by Letters Patent, is—The use of the detent in combination with hammer and trigger, when the whole is constructed, combined, and made to produce the required result, substantially as herein set forth." Thus, the prime claim of the patent is the use of a single trigger to safely release a first, then a second hammer in discharging two shots from a single barrel muzzle loading firearm.

It seems appropriate to evaluate the facts. During the period of time that elapsed between the granting of Lindsay's cartridge patent and the granting of the firearms improvement patent it can safely be assumed that Lindsay was working toward what he felt was a definite improvement in firearms and firepower. The brass frame "Patent APd For" model, therefore, can logically be thought of as a working model from which additional improvements and later models were developed. Of noteworthy interest is the fact that the "Patent APd For" pistol (See figures 8, 9, 10) made use of two stub triggers mounted side by side, a feature not incorporated in Lindsay pistols (See Figures 11 thru 15) made after the granting of his firearms improvement patent of October 9, 1860.

Reputedly Lindsay designed his two shot muzzle-loading firearm to surprise and repel attacking Indians. Purportedly, Indians had wiped out a command in which Lindsay's brother was serving as a soldier. As the story is told, the Indians drew the fire of the troops equipped with the usual single shot muskets, and then charged in overwhelming numbers before the muzzle-loaders could be reloaded killing the entire troop in a bloody massacre.

Summarizing, what was Lindsay seeking and what was he thinking about during this period of troubled times in our nation? It seems more likely with Lindsay's background and the nation's approach to war his primary goal was increased firepower. That this is true is a logical conclusion. Why else would a man, in such a short span of time, be issued two patents relating to the same principle? Thus, immediacy of increasing firepower and the desire of arming the troops with that additional firepower brought about and was primarily responsible for the Lindsay patents.

Figure 14
Lindsay 2-shot Percussion Pistol, Model III or "Army Model"

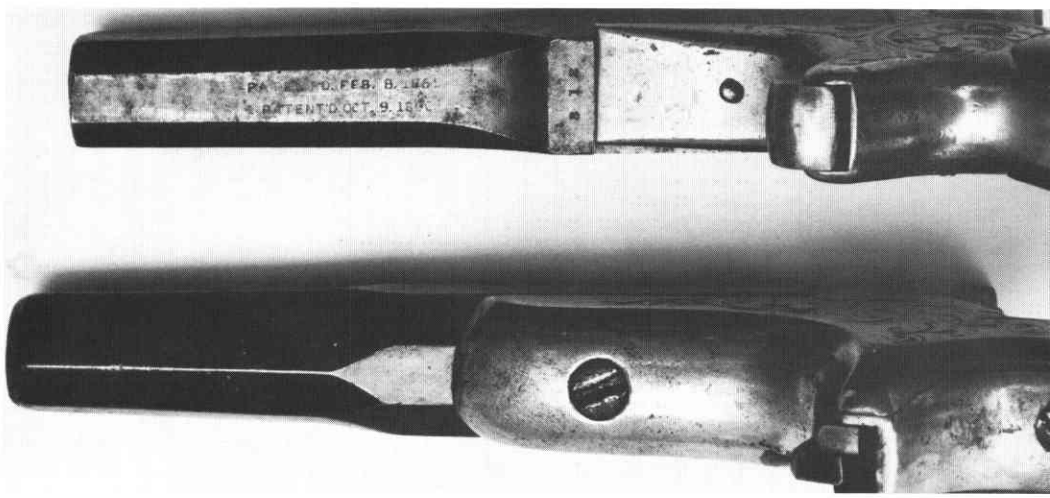


Figure 15
A comparison of Models II and I. Note in upper Model II the patent dates on underside of barrel

J. P. LINDSAY
Muzzle Loading Firearm
2-Shot Superimposed Load Percussion Pistols
PRODUCTION DATA AND MODEL CHART

Model	Type	Dates of Manufacture	Number Manufactured	Highest Observed[1] Serial Number
I	2-stub triggers side by side with brass frame marked: "Patent APd For"	Early 1860	50 Estimated	157
II	Single stub trigger with brass frame marked: "Lindsay's Young America, etc."	After October 9, 1860	100–150 Estimated	1,250
III	Army Model	After October 9, 1860	125 Estimated	114
IV	Double Musket	August 1863 To 1864	1,000	—