FIREARMS ENGRAVING IN NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICA

by R. L. Wilson

The 19th Century marked a significant 100 years in the decoration of firearms. The first fifty years continued the tradition that any gun not constructed for military purposes was likely to be engraved. At this time the assembly line production of arms was still in a relatively infant state. In the second fifty years, gun engraving was at its all time peak in popularity and practice. In the same time span, the mass production of firearms on an assembly line basis became widespread. Nevertheless, most of the manufacturers had hand engraved weapons available as stock items, or at least they expected a demand.

What quickly evolved in the 1850's from an influx of German immigrant engravers and the rapidly increasing demand for machine made arms was what can be called the golden era of arms engraving in America. Taking the period of c. 1850-1900, the total number of gun engravers active in America exceeded at least 200. Hundreds of Germanic speaking immigrants responded to the demand for expert gunmakers, most of them settling in New England. The immigrations began in force in the 1840's and '50's, and continued in diminishing quantities into the 20th Century. Several master arms engravers came to America in the 1840's, among them L. D. Nimschke, Gustave Young, and the first of the Ulrichs. These men were destined to become the most influential style setters and tastemakers in the evolution of American arms engraving. The Youngs and the Ulrichs developed family dynasties, with descendants active in the craft into the 20th Century. In short, American gun engraving is basically the evolution of styles from European, particularly Germanic, roots.*

Sources of information in unravelling the story of American arms engraving of the 19th Century have been interviews with descendants of engravers, original scrapbooks, pattern books, and ledgers, gunmakers' catalogues, factory records, and study of the guns themselves. Only a few pieces were signed, so that quite a bit of the attributions have to be made piecing together sundry clues along with stylistic details of engraved work. Style and quality are important factors, since every engraver has individual facets of each which are as tell-tale as fingerprints. This is a relatively new field, even though engraved firearms have always been popular with collectors. It is also a field which arouses the curiosity and interest of persons who normally would have no appreciation of firearms. And engraving is the major area wherein gunmaking is related to the fine arts.

Something should be said of the quality of iron and steel which 19th Century engravers had to cope with. They, and their predecessors, were lucky. The metal was nearly always soft enough to allow for a high grade of workmanship. Any tempering or color hardening required was done after the engraving was finished. Such workability of metals is in marked contrast to the woes of the gun engraver of today, whose major challenge is the toughness of modern steels.

American gunmakers never had a period of firearms embellishment comparable to the extremely elaborate periods of European craftsmanship which predated the Revolutionary War. THE ART OF THE GUNMAKER, by John F. Hayward, sums up the late 18th Century as follows:

> The attitude of both gunmaker and his customer changed during the last decades of the eighteenth century. Whereas previously a fine gun had to be richly decorated, this ceased to be an indispensable feature...

A masterpiece such as the Sadeler wheel lock represents the epitome of firearms craftsmanship. (figure 1) However, there was at least one engraver active in America in the 19th Century who was capable of equalling a piece like this one. He was the German master Gustave Young. Young was another Sadeler in every respect, only working in a different style.

The Kentucky represents America's first noteworthy contribution to the history of engraved firearms. In style and execution the work was nearly always primitive, reflecting the folk art of the makers. (figure 2) Early American gunsmiths sometimes called on silversmiths for help in engraving, but the ability of silver craftsmen in iron was limited. Engravers specializing in firearms work, in the United States, did not emerge until the second quarter of the 19th Century.

Engraving on Kentucky rifles and pistols helped to set a tradition of decoration on American firearms, which was continued by their successor arms such as the so-called Plains rifle, and such pieces as Henry Deringer pistols.

*Engravers of other nationalities also came to America in these immigrations, but the dominent group was the Germanic.

Reprinted from the American Society of Arms Collectors Bulletin 28:2-20

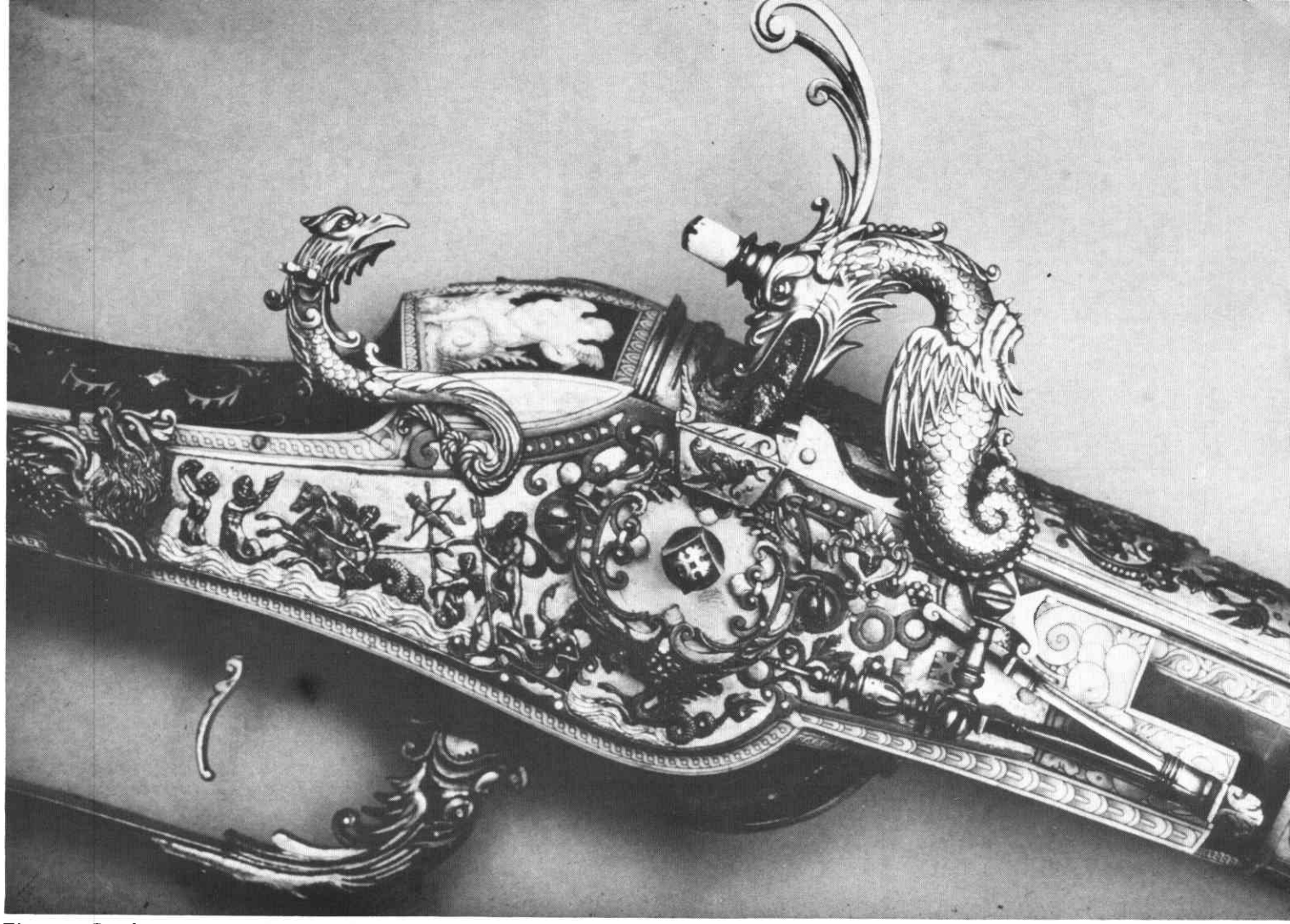


Figure 1. Combination wheel lock and matchlock; metal decoration by Amanuel Sadeler, circa 1600. Armeria Reale, Torino.

Towards the end of the Kentucky rifle period, the Connecticut gunmaker Simeon North produced two superb pairs of flintlock pistols which rival the finest guns made by contemporary British and French masters. The pistols (figure 3) are superbly decorated, including relief cast gold-washed silver mountings, and were commissioned by the State of Connecticut for presentation to Thomas McDonough and Isaac Hull. A stipulation of the commission was that both pairs of pistols would be entirely produced within the state of Connecticut. Americans were showing pride in their victories in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, and showed pride too in native craftsmanship. That North and his sub-contractors went all out is apparent from the rich mountings, and every other detail. The high quality also suggests that much of the lock, stock, and barrel work was done by craftsmen who just stepped off the boat from England.

These Boutets are much fancier than the North pistols, but they are not superior to the Norths in quality of craftsmanship. The Boutet double set (figure 4) is quite a contrast to most American work predating the mid 19th Century. However, both the Boutets and the Norths feature embellishments which are primarily in the realm of gold and silver smithing, rather than steel engraving. The lock engraving of the Norths is strictly English in style.

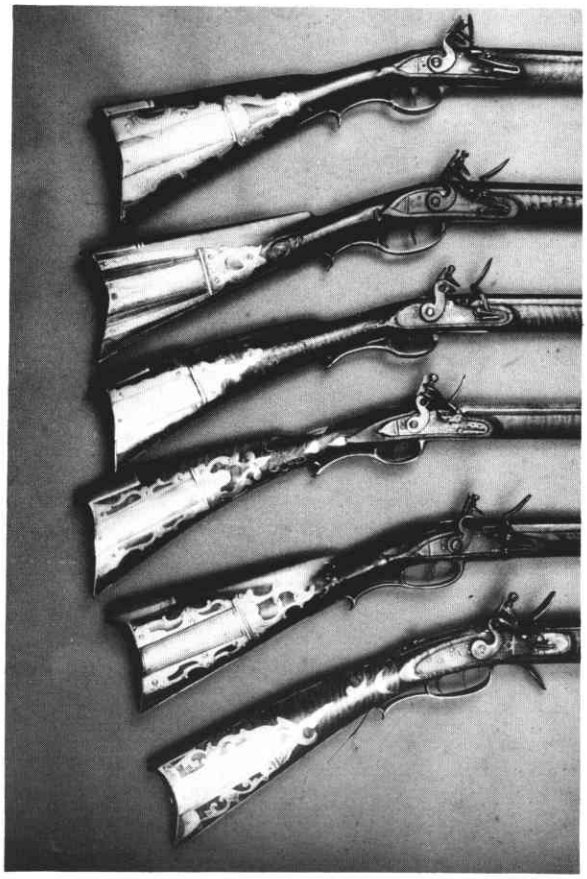


Figure 2. Kentucky Rifles. Joe Kindig, Jr. collection.

Figure 3. *Presentation pair of pistols by Simeon North. Smithsonian Collection.*

Figure 4. *Double cased set by Boutet. Muse's de l'Armee, Paris*

Figure 5. J. and J. Miller rifle, circa 1830. Collection of J. B. Smith

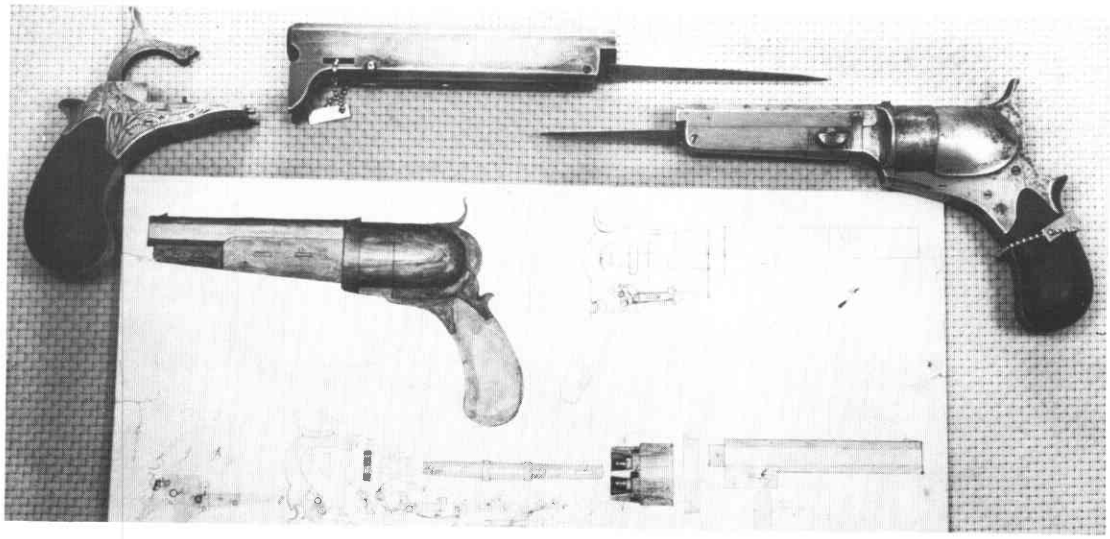


Figure 6. Primitive Colt revolvers of mid 1830's. Connecticut State Library Museum, Hartford

The much fancier locks of the Boutets feature gold overlays; and on a careful examination most of the quality of that work is not equal to what the Ulrichs or Gustave Young would be putting on their best grade Colts and Winchesters.

It should be said that for all periods of arms decoration, whether in America or Europe, there are masters at the top of their field, and there are the lesser craftsmen who never attain a great degree of skill. Using Boutet's shop as an example of this is an extreme case—but the point is that even he had some craftsmen in the engraving area who were not the very best.

The character of engraving on the J. and J. Miller rifle (figure 5) is English, especially on the lock. The overall effect of the rifle is quality and restraint. This is a superior example of a deluxe firearm of the period. Unfortunately the engraver's identity is unknown.

As a specialist trade in America, gun engraving was ironically a by-product of the machine age. Pepperbox handguns were machine-made in some quantity in the 1830's and '40's, and hand engraving was standard on many of these. The tradition of hand engraving dating from the Kentucky and its non-military contemporaries was carried over into these new mass-produced weapons almost as a necessary part of gunmaking. The demand for specialist gun engravers in steel was immediate. Samuel Colt's pre-Paterson revolvers, two of which are shown in figure 6, were sometimes hand engraved in an English style of feathers and scrolls. A bit of this appears on the frame at left. His idea was that the decoration would add to the appeal of the product. When he entered into Paterson manufacture in the mid-1830's, roll engraved scenes on the cylinders were standard, and a few of the production arms were hand engraved. The work on most of these arms was rather crude, and may indicate his reliance on craftsmen who were not accustomed to working in steel.

Figure 7. Texas Paterson Colt serial 984. Wadsworth Atheneum

On one of the most deluxe of all Colt Patersons known (figure 7), the coverage is there, but not the quality. Not until the 1850's would Colt start turning out decorated arms of the highest grade of mast produced weaponry. At this state, in the Paterson period of c. 1836-42, he was still finding himself in terms of gun decoration. Better items would come later.

Henry Deringer pistols (figure 8) generally have a relatively simple engraved decor, which is a holdover from the Kentucky period. The scrolls are Germanic, and the Deringer production is of interest because it spans from about 1830 into the 1860's, from one period of arms engraving into the next. The quality of work suggests an engraver in the shop who was experienced at working with iron. The pair of Whitneyville-Hartford Colt Dragoons in figure 9 were presented to Mexican War hero Colonel George Washington Morgan. The serial numbers are 1118 and 1123. These are the earliest known Hartford Colt production firearms with engraving. The sterling silver grips are inscribed in great detail, with the only scrollwork on the butts. The engraving should be attributed to one normally working in silver and gold. Colt's attention to arms embellishment had started anew with the Walker, whose cylinders were roll engraved with a Texas Ranger and Indian scene. The same roll was used on the cylinders of these transition Dragoons of Colonel Morgan. Various roll cylinder scenes would remain a standard feature of all production Colt firearms of the percussion period, at least on guns having round cylinders. Who could predict that from the rather simple scroll decor on the Morgan pistols would quickly evolve some of the most elaborate of firearms produced in 19th Century America.

The Massachusetts Arms revolvers (figure 10) are an intriguing part of the engraving story. Their cylinders are standard with acid etched designs, while locks and some other major parts are usually scroll engraved. The scrollwork is quite similar to what was used on early Hartford Colt revolvers, and is Germanic in style. The gold barrel bands are quite rare; these appear to be holdovers from bands not uncommon on European sporting, duelling, and pocket gun barrels.

The Massachusetts Arms revolver is an early example of the beginnings of America's "golden era of arms engraving," the second half of the 19th Century.

The new style of engraving which the immigrant Germanic craftsmen fostered was rich and fancy, crisply executed, and usually included a punched dot or matte background. Sizes of scrolls varied, but on handguns, such as Colts, were generally tight and small, and on longarms generally large and flamboyant. Animal head finials were sometimes present; of these the wolf head is famous with collectors, particularly because for years it was misinterpreted as the signature of an engraver named Joseph Wolf. No one has been able to prove that Wolf ever engraved a gun, but the attribution still persists.

These Sharps (figure 11) arms of the 1850's are very revealing of the arms engraving trade, because the engravers of some Hartford-made Sharps were definitely members of the shop of Gustave Young, Colt's chief engraving contractor from 1852-1869. Soon after joining Colt's, Young organized a shop which took in the major share of Colt factory work, plus some guns from Sharps and no doubt pieces from other factories in the area as well. Young is even known to have done a few Winchesters at a later date.

In the late 1860's Young would pull up stakes and move to Springfield, Massachusetts, where he took in work mainly from Smith & Wesson, while continuing to serve many of his previous clients. He remained active in the arms trade until his death in the 1890's. Young is generally considered to have been the best arms engraver active in 19th Century America.

Figure 8. Pair of Henry Deringer duelling size pistols. W. H. Locke collection

Figure 9. Pair of Whitneyville-Hartford Colt Dragoons. Smithsonian collection.

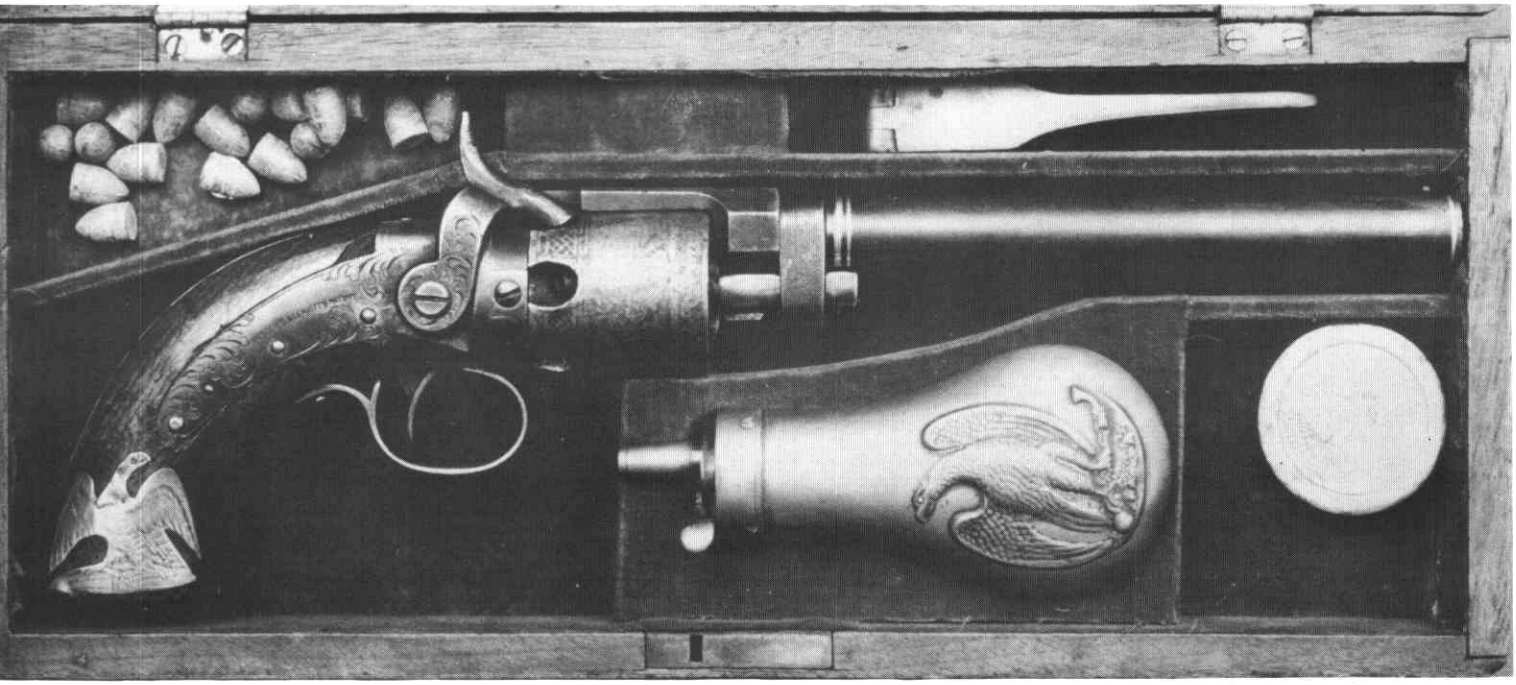
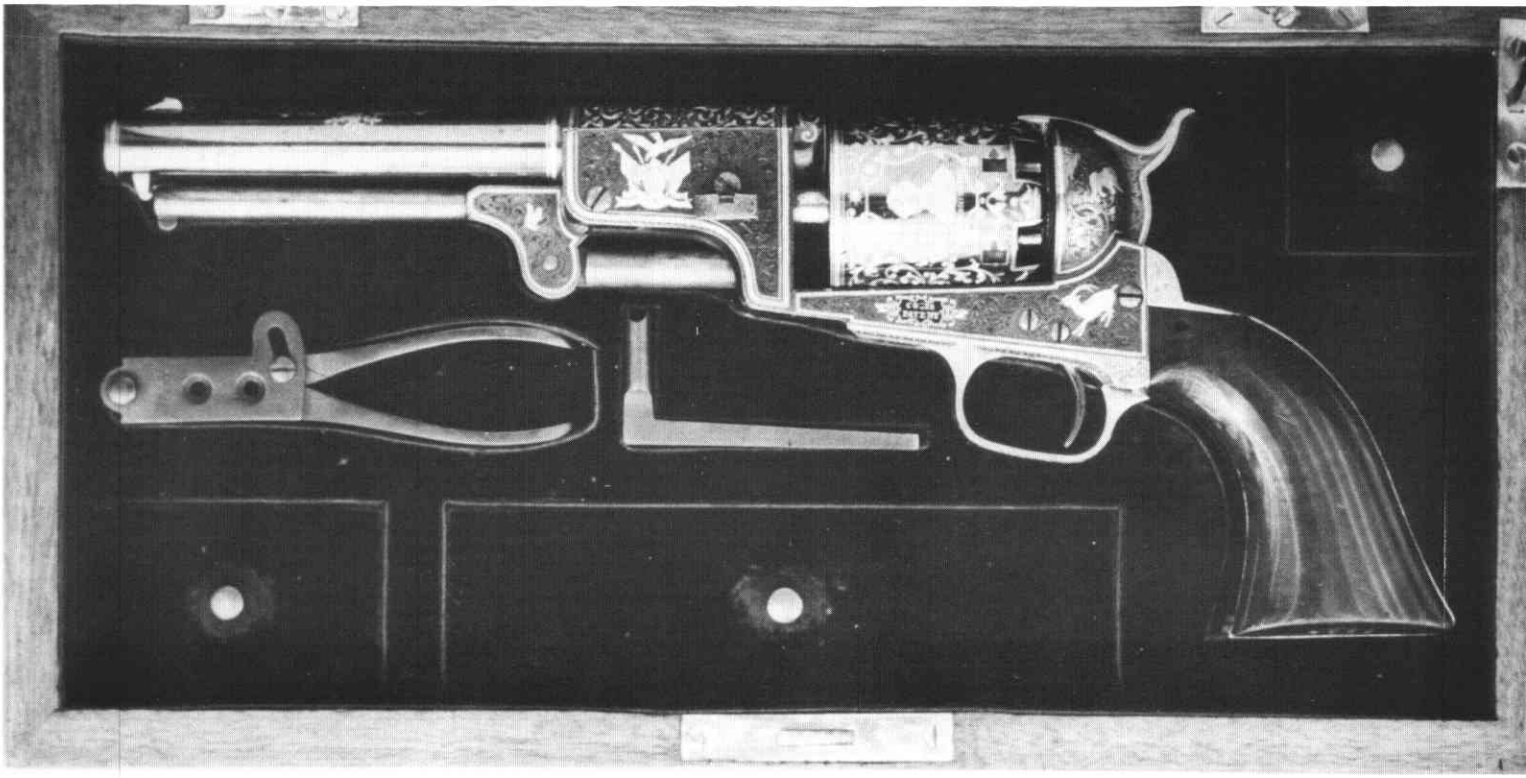


Figure 10. Massachusetts Arms Company revolver. H. W. Williams, Jr. collection.

Figure 11. Deluxe Sharps rifles. A. I. McCroskie collection.

Figure 12. Colt Dragoon presented by the inventor to E. K. Root, serial 16421. R. P. Mellon collection.

Figure 13. Colt Dragoon presented by the inventor to the Sultan of Turkey.



By the 1850's most manufacturers dropped scroll engraving as a feature standard on all their pieces. But the engraver was now in demand for the embellishment of deluxe grade guns which were maintained in inventory or produced on the special order of military and civilian clients. Every gun collector knows the mark left by Samuel Colt in this area. (figure 12) Deluxe firearms were being made in Colt's Hartford factory within the first year of operations. Sharps, Volcanic, and Smith & Wesson, as well as others, soon followed suit.

Samuel Colt took a personal interest in highly embellished firearms. He found them a means of influencing the public and the military in arms of his manufacture. It appears that Gustave Young was usually kept concentrating his special talents on the extra high grade pieces. The revolver shown here was part of one of a few highly elaborate sets of various models made for presentation. Young's style is characterized by a crisply cut Germanic scroll, and every detail is of perfection. Figure 13 is a gold inlaid Dragoon Colt (serial 12406) presented by the inventor to the Sultan of Turkey. This gun was formerly in the Locke Collection, and now is in that of Herb Glass. The mate to this piece is in The Hermitage Museum, and was presented by Colt personally to Czar Nicholas I, in 1854.

The rich, strongly Germanic style of the Youngs, Ulrichs, Nimschke and others continues to dominate American arms engraving to the present day. Among the best known examples of Young's artistry is the series of gold inlaid percussion Colt handguns, of which only about twenty are presently known. In 1967 the grandson of Gustave Young was accidentally located, living in Springfield, Massachusetts, and in his attic was stored a unique collection of documents, ledgers, and other memorabilia. One of the most important items was a print pulled from the frame of a gold inlaid Dragoon Colt revolver—one of many clues proving Gustave Young to have been the artisan responsible for these richly embellished arms. Johnie Bassett now has that complete collection of papers from the grandson's attic, along with the records of several other engravers.

Despite the exquisite detail and extra deluxe nature of guns like the Sultan's Dragoon Colt, only one firearm is known which Young actually signed —and this was one of his last creations, done for Smith & Wesson in the 1890's. Except for the Ulrichs and Nimschke, engravers' signatures are the exception rather than the rule in 19th Century America.

Samuel Colt not only prepared deluxe firearms for presentations, he had some made as showpieces. These three revolvers (figure 14) served as such for nearly 100 years, having even appeared at NRA shows within recent memory. The guns are good examples of a major facet of the gun engraver's repertoire—the use of pattern books. Some of the gold inlay motifs appear in two books of patterns pub-

Figure 14. Inlaid colt revolvers by Gustave Young. Connecticut State Library Museum

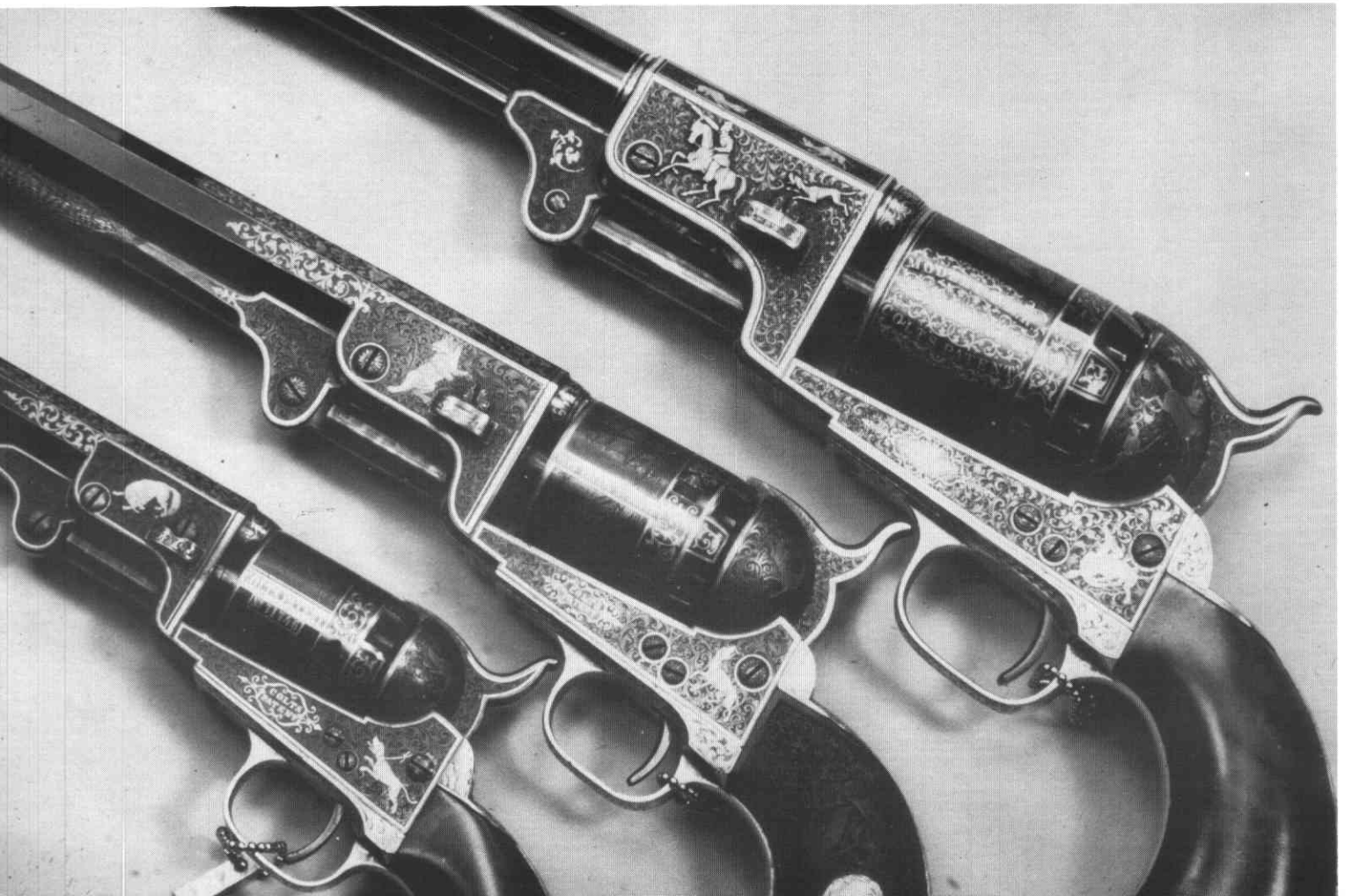
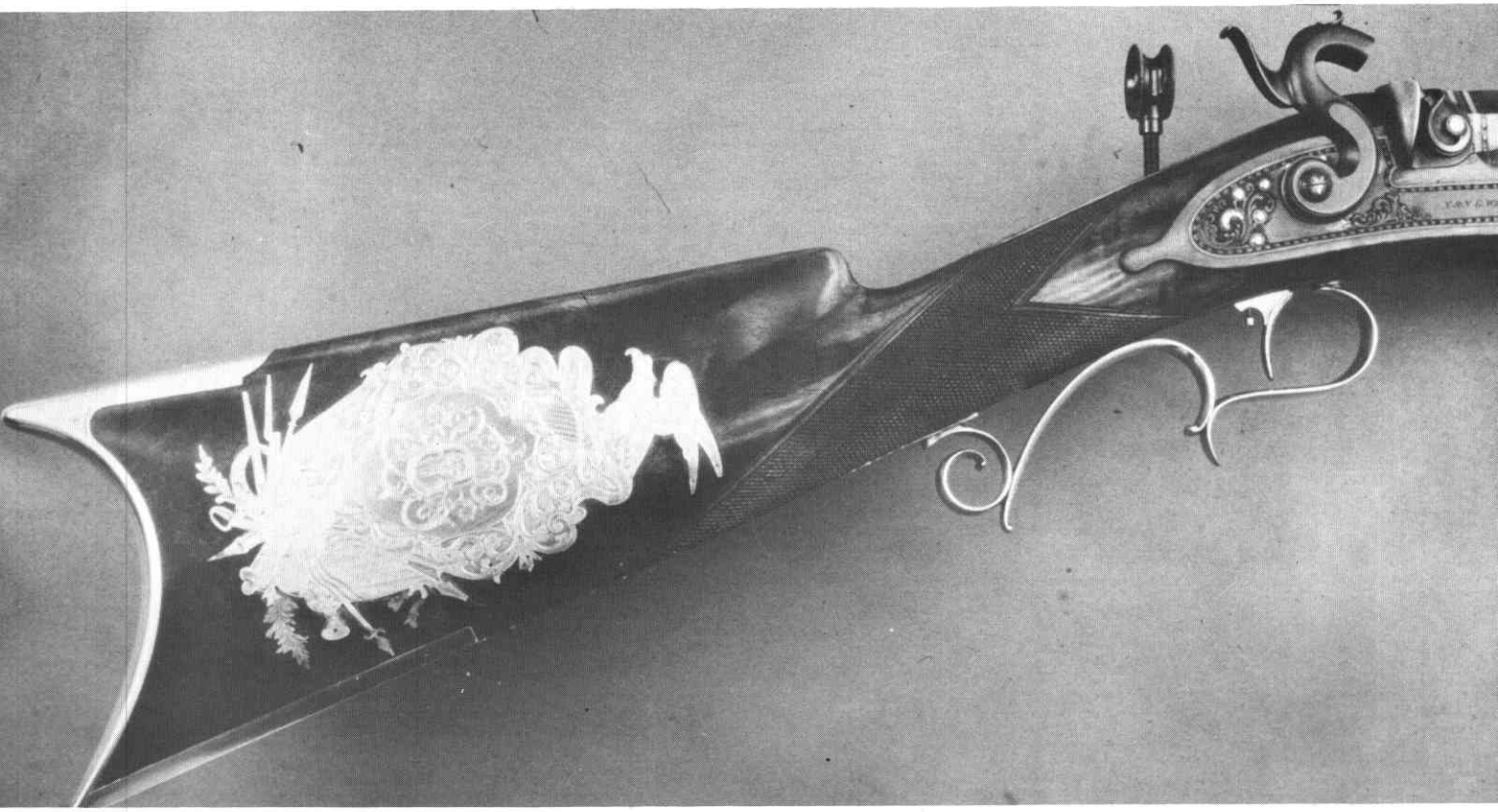


Figure 15. Cold inlaid Colt 1862 Police revolver, serial 38549. W. M. Locke collection.

Figure 16. Whitmore rifle, circa 1866. Smithsonian collection.



lished in Germany c. 1840. Copies of these booklets are known not only to have been in Young's shop, but also in Nimschke's. The Ulrichs and others undoubtedly also had them. As an example of their common use, the standing bear on the barrel lug of the center pistol appears also in the Nimschke record book. Other sources for pictorial material were illustrated newspapers, coins, currency and stamps, and any kind of picture book.

A gold inlaid Colt Model 1862 Police revolver is pictured in figure 15. This piece does not appear to be by Gustave Young, and the engraver has yet to be identified. The very simple design has made the attribution to a specific engraver quite difficult. The work might be by Young, but it might also be by his successor at Colt's, Cuno Helfricht, or by still another craftsman.

Equally intriguing are the metal grips. Just who manufactured the various cast metal stocks for Colt handguns of the Civil War period still remains a matter of speculation. Both Tiffany and the Ames Sword Company are the leading candidates for the honors. None from the period have been found marked with maker's names. Figure 16 is General Grant's Whitmore rifle. The General was presented the rifle as a gift from the citizens of Rhode Island. This is still another piece which has not yet been exactly identified as to the engraver. But again the style is Germanic. For the major motif of the silver stock inlay, the skills of a jewelry specialist could have been called on. Despite this, the rifle is a very

Figure 17. Colt Deringers, circa 1870. R. P. Mellon collection.

Figure 18. Colt Express rifle of the 1860's attributed to Cuno Helfricht. D. C. Wolock collection.

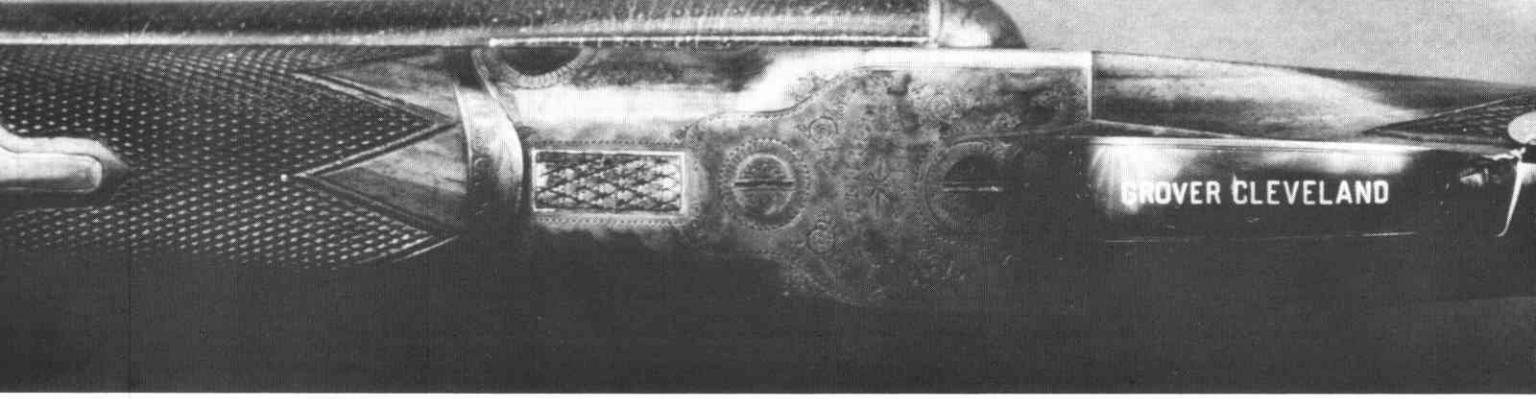


Figure 19. Grover Cleveland's double barrel Colt shotgun, circa 1895. R. P. Mellon collection.

important and historic one, and well worth studying here. Surely General Grant's Whitmore is one of the finest pieces of American gunmaking from the 19th Century.

The deringers in figure 17 are all done in varying degrees of coverage, all Germanic in style. Research in Colt ledgers reveals the work of the top three cost the factory about 50c per pistol. A savings was made on two of the three by omitting the punched dot backgrounds and keeping the shading lines and amount of scrolls to a minimum. Apprentice engravers would generally be assigned the less elaborate pieces, such as deringers, while the better and more experienced workmen would concentrate their skills on larger and fancier pieces.

From c. 1879 to c. 1921, Colt's chief engraver was another German, Cuno Helfricht. It was his style of German-American scroll which became the standard on Colt arms of the period (figure 18).

Helfricht and his assistants turned out thousands of decorated guns. During one ten year period, from the mid 1870's to the mid 1880's, a total of over twenty master engravers and apprentices is known to have worked for varying periods of time. With so many craftsmen at work engraving, how can one possibly hope to identify which artisan engraved a specific gun. For the years 1871 through 1900, with Colt firearms, this is extremely difficult. Some pieces can be identified by their degree of excellence and by strong stylistic features. However, working from predetermined patterns restricted the craftsman's individuality. Without these patterns, it would be relatively easy because, as noted earlier, the identity of a workman's engraving can be likened to the uniqueness of fingerprints.

Only rarely did the Helfricht shop employ silver or gold inlay, and the style of scrolls cut on handguns remained very much the same as illustrated on this deluxe rifle. For shotguns Helfricht used still another style, very much as seen on contemporary British sporting guns.

Except for the finely gold inlaid triggerguard inscription, the decoration of President Cleveland's 8 gauge Colt double (figure 19) is one of Helfricht's standard patterns. A few years ago a group of the original shotgun design drawings was discovered in possession of the engraver's descendants. Typical

Figure 20. Jennings Rifle, circa 1851-52. Winchester Gun Museum

Figure 21. Volcanic, Henry, and Winchester rifles. H. Sefried collection.

of the Youngs and most of his other contemporaries, Helfricht is not known to have bothered to sign many examples of his work. Even the original design sketches were unsigned. The widespread use of signatures on engraved pieces is an innovation of the 20th Century.

Engraving on Winchester predecessor arms (figure 20) began in a basic scroll similar to the work found on contemporary pepperboxes, deringers, and other commercial weapons of the 1840's and early 1850's. The Smith & Wesson and Volcanic lever action types continued this sparse scroll style. While Colt's was already turning out elaborate pieces early in the 1850's, the Winchester predecessors did not get into the same mode until the Henry rifles of the 1860's. One reason for the relatively sparse early engraving is undoubtedly that the manufacturers wished to add at least some frills to the product, but wanted to keep costs down.

Here the evolution of decoration from Volcanic to Henry to Model 1866 Winchester is clearly illustrated in figure 21. The Volcanic at top has only basic scrolls; the Henry has greater coverage plus a punched dot background; sometimes a basic animal or bird detail was included. The Model 1866 Winchester has profusely cut scroll coverage, with animal motifs more frequently employed, and a full range of deluse decorative possibilities. In the late 1860's and 1870's, the company apparently developed their engraving department vigorously.

Lincoln's rifle (figure 22) just about represents the epitome of factory decoration on a Henry. The frame was plated in gold, and the stock was of rosewood. Work in this style has been attributed to an engraver Samuel J. Hoggson, about whom very little is presently known. Using silver, gold, or nickel plating shows off engraving to best advantage. When steel or iron parts are blued or color hardened, the engraving is usually lost. The ideal state is actually bare metal, but then one has to contend with rust or tarnishing.

Figure 22. Abraham Lincoln's Henry Rifle, serial #6, Smithsonian collection

Hoggson was no competition to the Ulrichs, the best known of all engravers in 18th Century America. The several members of the family offered the combined talents of die cutting, engraving, and stock-making (figure 24). They are best known, of course, for their engraving on firearms. The Ulrichs dominated Winchester arms decoration from the late 1860's into the mid 19th Century. They worked in a Germanic style, with frequent use of game scenes and stylish borders. Gold inlays were a speciality, nearly always cut flush in bank note quality. As a show case for the work of the Ulrichs and their associates, Winchester issued the only known published catalogue of gun engraving from the 19th Century. The book appeared in 1897, and was entitled: HIGH FINISHED ARMS. Studying Ulrich engraved guns and this catalogue reveals how heavily most engravers of the period c. 1850-1900 relied on patterns and designs which they would repeat – often without much variation – time and time again. Sources of most of the game scenes can be traced to contemporary publications with wildlife illustrations. The bear motif was a grizzly named Samson, who appears in ADVENTURES OF JAMES C. ADAMS MOUNTAINEER AND GRIZZLY BEAR HUNTER OF CALIFORNIA, first published in 1860. When the catalogue of 1897 was published by Winchester, the work illustrated actually represented an accumulation of over 30 years of work by the Ulrichs and their associates.

On the Model 1895 the bear appears again (figure 24). Poses of the animals can usually be found in the HIGHLY FINISHED ARMS catalogue. These rifles clearly show the distinctive stylistic features of the Ulrichs in gold inlaid scrolls and borders, the flush inlaid or engraved animals, and the Germanic scrollwork. The fancy stock carvings were also part of the

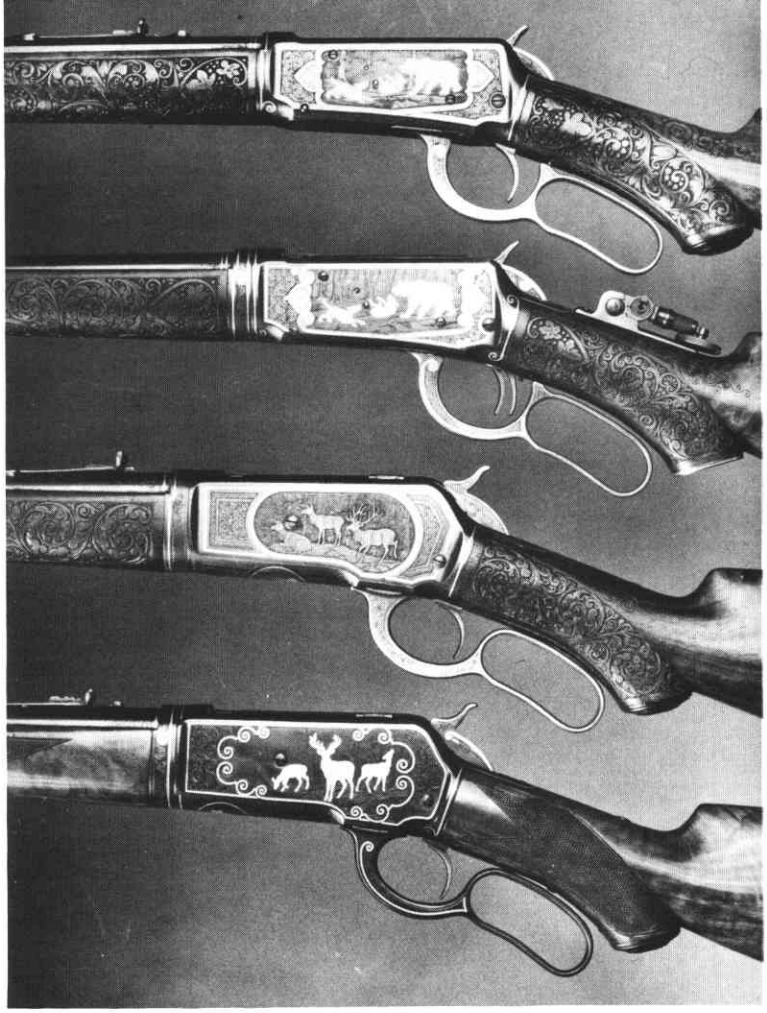


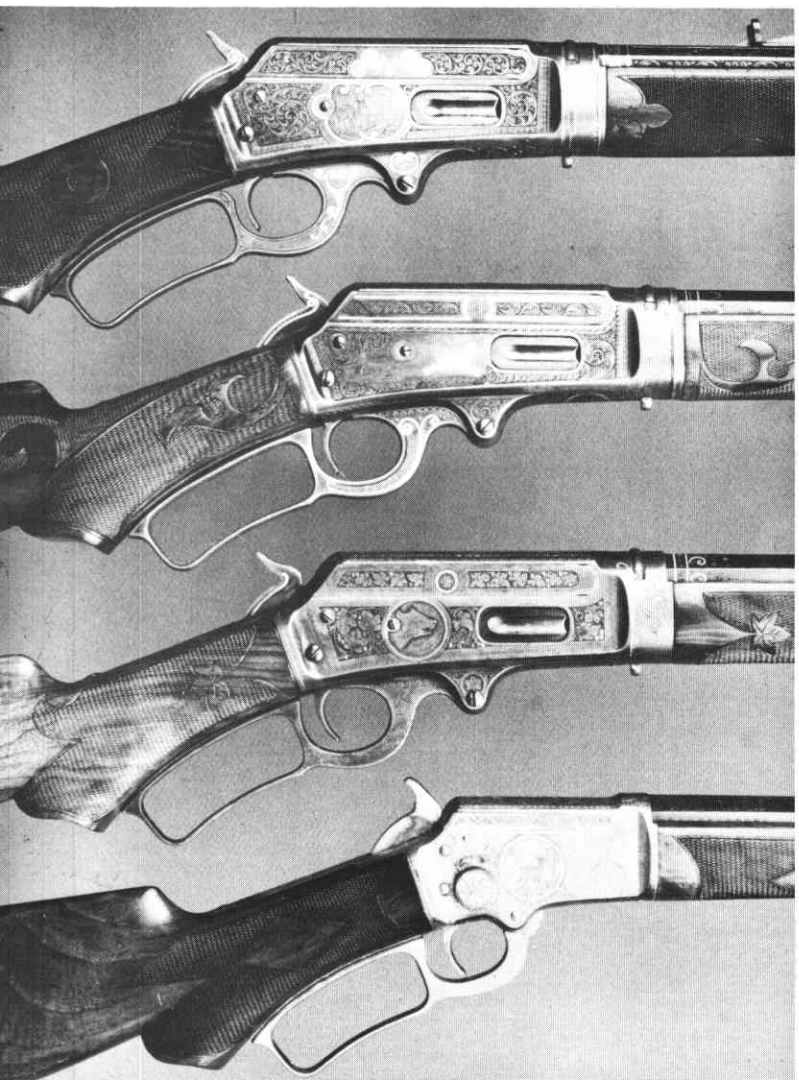
Figure 23. Winchester 1866 and 1894 rifles. J. S. Fowler collection.

Figure 24. Model 1895 and 1910 Winchesters. I. G. Hart collection.

Winchester engraving catalogue of 1897.

These deluxe Marlins (figure 25) are included primarily to show that the Ulrichs did not concentrate solely on Winchester products. In the early years at least two members of the family are known to have worked for Colts. Interestingly, Gustave Young is known to have done not only Colt's and S & W's, but at least a few Sharps, Bullards, Peabody and Martinis, and some Winchesters. Records of such masters as L. D. Nimschke also prove that many of the 19th Century arms engravers in America knew their more prominent contemporaries either personally, or by reputation. The fact that most gun engravers in America in the period of c. 1850-1900 were of Germanic origin and were located in the New York or New England area, contributed to a knowledge of one another's work. The Scheutzenfests served as a means of bringing some of these craftsmen together. The George L. Holmes pistol-rifle in figure 26 a unique and priceless record of the period 1850 to 1900 and was revealed by the discovery some years ago of the engraving scrapbook of the master L. D. Nimschke. In it were thousands of impressions pulled from designs he had cut on all types of U.S. firearms. Nothing to rival this unique record has since been uncovered. The volume's significance is borne out by publication in its entirety as the 156 page book, L. D. NIMSCHKE FIREARMS ENGRAVER. In identifying the decorative styles outstanding in the second half of the 19th Century, this book is quite useful. Furthermore, the weapons of over 100 makers and manufacturers are represented. The Nimschke record proved to be the vital source which unravelled many of the unknown details of 19th Century arms engraving in America. It helped to prove the Joseph Wolf attributions false, was a key to identifying the work of Gustave Young, and proved time and again the reliance of engravers on pattern books and other sources for their engraved motifs.

Figure 25. Deluxe Marlins.
J. F. Fowler collection.



In studying the Nimschke book, one wondered how many of the extra fine guns in the volume would turn up in collectors' hands. One of the very best pieces of all did not surface until Herb Ratner recently added the Napoleon III Manhattan (figure 27) to his collection. The extensive use of gold inlay on this revolver is a great rarity in Nimschke's output. In the engraver's own records, he indicated the use of gold by marking the original prints with colored pencil.

The high relief carved figure of liberty grip was also done by Nimschke. About the only weakness in his record book was a lack of clues providing information on his work in ivory and pearl. In the years since the book was published, enough pieces by Nimschke have surfaced so that it is possible to say that ivory and pearl carving and engraving formed an important aspect of Nimschke's repertoire. Since his pattern book was made up of ink impressions, pencil rubbings and sketches, there was no practical way to keep a pictorial record of ivory and pearl work. However, he probably had some plaster casts of grip carvings, and unfortunately these may have been part of the Nimschke material which is known to have been lost years ago.

Besides the distinctively styled scrolls, and the frequent use of ivory or pearl grips, a key to identifying Nimschke pieces is the frequent presence of silver, nickel, or gold plating. Another hint is the style of casing, usually attributable to Schuyler, Hartley and Graham, the New York City dealers. Still another clue is the shipping point of a piece—especially in Colt arms. A gun that Nimschke engraved was usually one whose shipment had been to a New York City arms dealer. A tell-tale series of clues is a group of design motifs which are scattered throughout the Nimschke record (see especially page xxxv).

The Theodore Roosevelt revolver (figures 29 and 30) was shipped 'in the white' in May of 1883, from Colt's factory to Hartley and Graham. Nimschke custom-engraved the piece with profuse scrolls, and the TR monogram was relief carved on the recoil shield. Nimschke also made the carved ivory grips. Finish was in gold and silver plating. The gun became young Roosevelt's personal sidearm and constant companion in his life in the American West; he regarded it as his 'best western revolver.' Among the other famed clients for whom Nimschke decorated

Figure 26. George L. Holmes pistol-rifle engraved by Nimschke in November 1868. H. W. Williams collection.

Figure 27. Manhattan revolver engraved by Nimschke. H. G. Ratner collection.

Figure 28. Remington revolvers, by Nimschke, serials 115896, 123329. W. M. Locke collection.

firearms were General Custer, Clarence H. Mackay, George A. Peabody, King George I of Greece, and the Empress Marie Cristina of Spain.

Smith & Wesson engraving is still another chapter in the story of gun decoration in America. The firm had a number of able craftsmen, both in the factory and in their outside contractors. Only two pieces will be discussed here, both of them rare and unusual. The Tiffany grip was the result of collaboration between S & W and Tiffany's. From 1890 to 1909 the Tiffany Blue Book catalogue advertised under the heading 'Pistols':

> Revolvers of the most improved types, mounted in silver, carved ivory, gold, etc. with rich and elaborate decorations, $50.00 to $300.00. Cases, boxes, belts and holsters made in appropriate styles for presentations.

From studying surviving specimens so decorated, it is clear that the firm of Smith & Wesson benefitted most from these Tiffany creations. Several revolvers from the 1890's are in the factory museum collection (figure 31), and additional pieces are known in private collections. Most of the designs are unduplicated, and it appears that most of the work performed was on an individual basis. Much rarer than the S & W pieces are Winchester rifles mounted in silver by Tiffany.

All of the Tiffany grips are marked TIFFANY & CO. MAKERS STERLING, or a variant thereof. Ironically, Gustave Young and his sons are known to have cut dies for Tiffany's, at about the same period as Tiffany was doing the S & W silver grips.

The Tiffany gripped arms are classic examples of the art nouveau style. It may be said that they are as important and interesting as examples of art nouveau as they are rarities in the arms collecting field.

Most of the Tiffany guns done for Smith & Wesson are examples of the use of etching on American 19th Century firearms. Barrels and cylinders are nearly always acid etched. That form of firearms decoration was a low grade approach in 19th Century America, and was not generally accepted even in the 1890's for quality firearms. It appears that Tiffany's use of this medium was due to a lack of steel engraving talent among their own craftsmen.

The final masterpiece of Young (figure 32), this is the only firearm known bearing his signature. Dating from 1893, Young would die just two years later, apparently continuing to engrave to the very end. S & W exhibited the piece as part of their ambitious display at the Chicago World's Fair, 1893. In an unusual technique, which is comparable to the Emmanuel Sadeler piece seen in figure 1, the engraving itself was cut in relief, and the background matted to take a thin gold overlay. The final effect of engraved and polished steel against bright gold was spectacular. To this day the piece is a pride of S & W, and is probably the finest gun ever made by the com-

Figures 29 and 30. Theodore Roosevelt's Colt Single Action Army; engraved by Nimschke, serial #92248. R. P. Mellon collection.

Figure 31. Smith and Wesson Model 1891, serial 10501. Smith and Wesson Factory Museum.

pany. Not a single animal motif appears on the revolver, so that Young apparently had decided to create the last word in intertwined scrollwork. Engravers who have examined this gun stand in awe of the perfection of every engraved detail.

The immigrant German craftsmen set a high standard of arms embellishment, but as the 20th Century unfolded, the standard began a downhill slide. The demand for engraved arms would level off, and most of the younger generation of craftsmen would not have the benefit of the thorough training of their predecessors. Just a few modern American arms engravers can be compared favorably with their 19th Century peers. The family dynasties are now a thing of the past. Even to learn the trade today presents a problem. No American schools or formal apprentice systems are teaching the engraver's art for gunmaking. Most U.S. arms engravers are self taught, are converted jewelry engravers, or die cutters, or had the luck to learn at the side of a top artisan. Fortunately the demand for high grade firearms is strong, and that has meant plenty of work—even for the less able craftsmen. However, the 19th Century's decades of great and fancy firearms will never be seen again, except in museums and in the gun rooms of avid collectors.

NOTE: Most of the illustrations are from the extensive photograph collection made by Merrill Lindsay and Bruce Pendleton. The author is grateful for their cooperation in supplying these items.

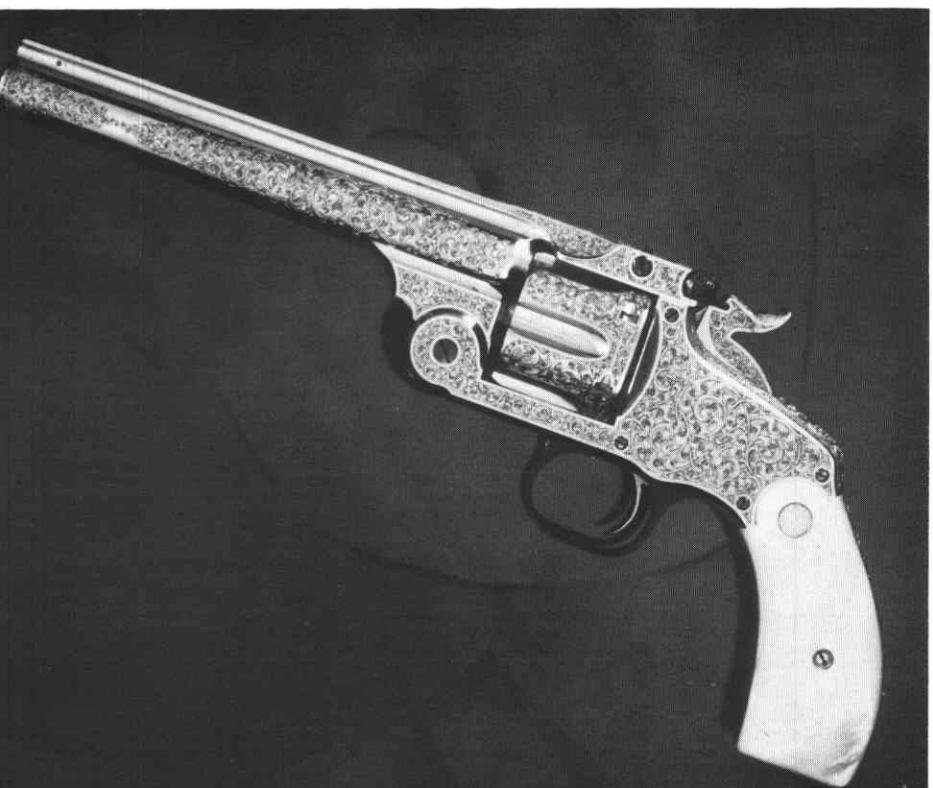


Figure 32. Third Model Russian by Gustave Young. Smith and Wesson Factory Museum collection.