



"Scout on the Plains of Kansas" by Joe Grandee.

# The HENRY — My Favorite Rifle

Thurston Van Horn

I'm here to expound on my favorite subject when it comes to the arms collecting field. More than likely I would have made a dissertation to this group years ago, but I was stunned after procuring the issues of the *Bulletin* prior to my membership in 1967: I couldn't find *one* article on Winchesters, Henrys or Volcanics! In fact, I couldn't find anyone interested in them except my two friends from Colorado, Carl Hayes and Tom Lewis, and Jack Malloy and Paul Faulks, who were instrumental in my being nominated to the organization. I've lost Tom, but gained Mac McCroskie and Larry Jones.

Now, many years later, they are the only ones known to me that collect Henrys or Winchesters in this gathering. Maybe these comments of mine will bring out some of the members of this group who love the early Winchesters. I've always been amused at Chuck Suydam's estimation of Henrys: "They're not good antiques, they're scrap iron."\* Of course, he never looked close enough to see that the majority have brass frames just like the beautiful guns he collects with brass barrels.

Then along came Jim Lucie: he had the best mint, plain, and engraved Henrys I had ever seen. They didn't last long—the boys sold him on Kentuckies, and the Henrys went. It is amazing, though, how many collections I've seen in the past thirty-five years that contain a Henry rifle and do you think any of them would trade or sell it? NO! Most anything else in the collection could go, but not the Henry. So there must be an interest somewhere in these fine old guns.

To get to the meat of this subject of Henry rifles, it all started with the inventions of Hunt and Jennings, in 1849, of the toggle-link action, which were the two basic patents on the toggle link lever action system which was also patented in 1854 by Smith & Wesson of later revolver fame. A year later the Volcanic Repeating Arms Company was incorporated, with Oliver Winchester a stockholder.

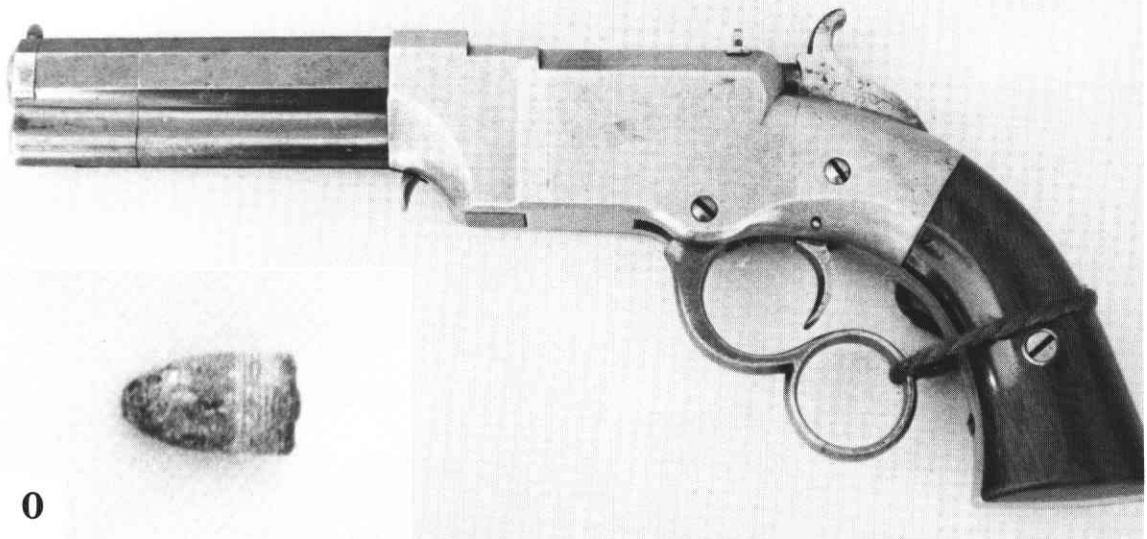


## The Volcanic Pistol and Cartridge

Both the Volcanic pistol and the cartridge it used (photo 0) were unsatisfactory; the company went under in 1857. At this time Winchester purchased the company assets and became the sole owner of the patents. He continued to manufacture the arms under the name of The New Haven Arms Company until 1860. Sales were poor and they had a large unsold inventory. During this time B. Tyler Henry became plant superintendent and developed and patented an improved rifle design, utilizing a metallic rimfire cartridge instead of the loaded projectile used in the Volcanic. The rimfire far surpassed the linen and paper cartridges that were used in most weapons at this time. The rimfire was designed and patented by Smith & Wesson in 1854, and Winchester got the patents when he bought the defunct Volcanic Arms Company stock. Anyway, with this improved cartridge and a newer and heavier gun, now known as the Henry rifle, Winchester was on his way to making big bucks in arms sales the world over.

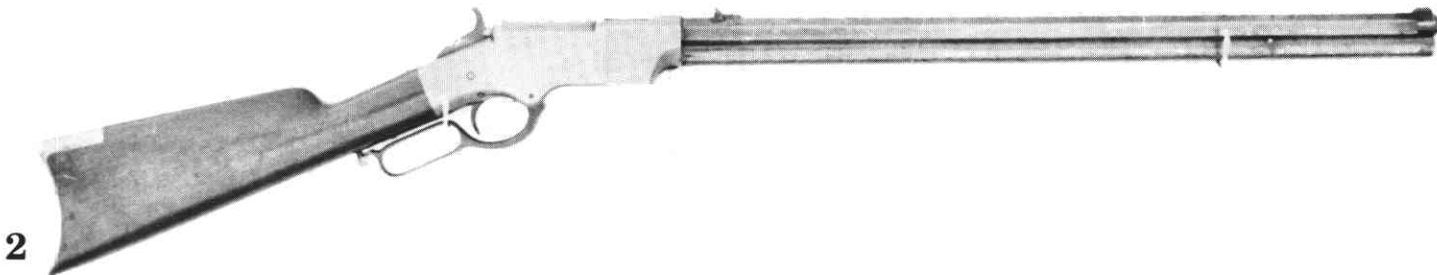
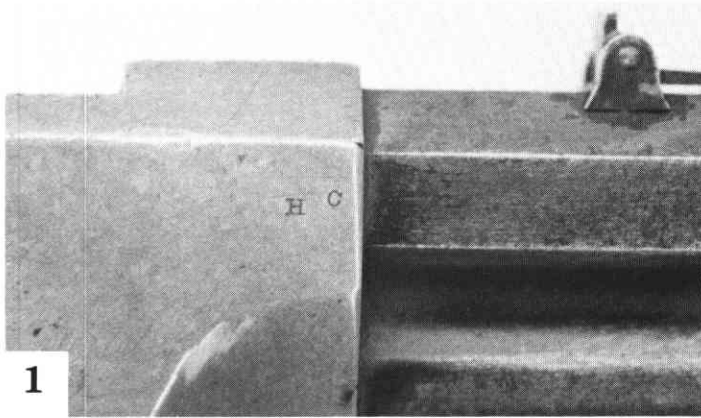
At this time (in 1862) Winchester was looking to the sale of his repeating rifle to the military, but a dim view of this new rifle was taken by the Secretary of War, who said the soldiers would waste shots with it. Consequently, the government purchased only 1731 guns, mostly for the defense of Washington, D.C. and the Louisville, Kentucky, area.

\*All I said was, "They're machine made and all alike." CRS



Photos 1 and 2 show a government-purchased Henry, serial number 3526, showing both Henry's inspection mark (H) and Chamber's (C). Chambers was a government inspector assigned to inspect these government purchases. The majority of these guns just have Chamber's mark, CGC, on the side of barrel or frame.

The Rebels referred to this as "a weapon you could load on Sunday and shoot all week," as it carried 16 cartridges in the magazine tube. This is a quotation from Col. Mosby's correspondence.



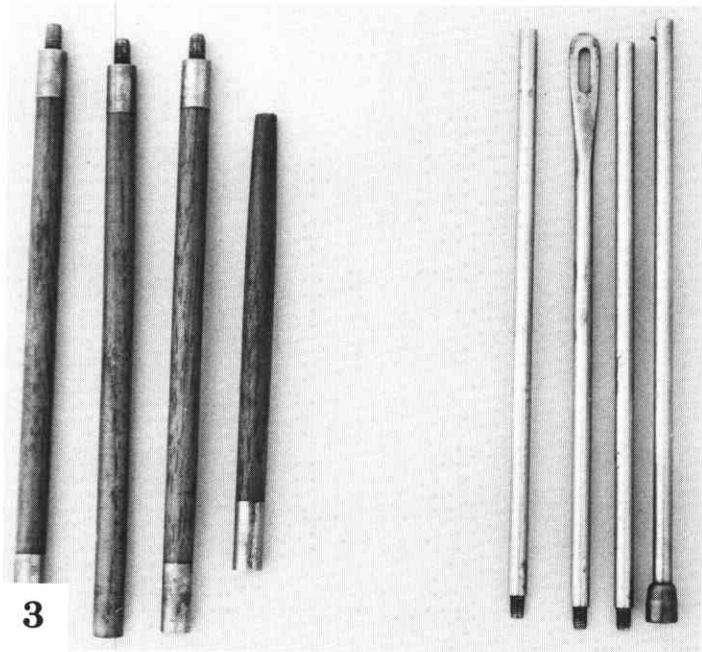
These early guns were equipped with a three-piece wooden cleaning rod stored in the butt stock (photo 3) and had no provision for a bayonet, which was a necessary weapon of the foot soldier of this era. Later ones were equipped with a four-piece steel rod, also held in a receptacle in the butt.

Photo 4 shows a typical private purchase Henry, no. 2774, with the man's name inscribed with his company and the state from which he came. I've heard all kinds of figures and speculation on how

many were privately purchased by Army and Navy personnel. It's a good guess.

Winchester was never able to secure a big government contract by the time the war was over, but he made enough money from the sale of 10,000 or so of his guns that he was able to buy the assets of the Spencer Arms Company, his biggest competition, and close them down!\*

\*Actually, the Fogerty Repeating Rifle Company of Boston bought the assets of the bankrupt Spencer Company, and Winchester bought Fogerty in 1869.

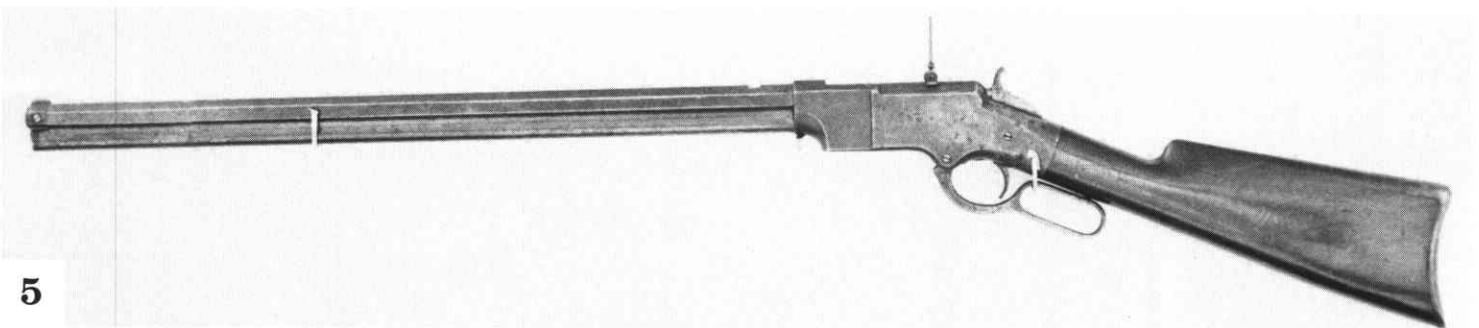


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### Variations of the Henry Rifle

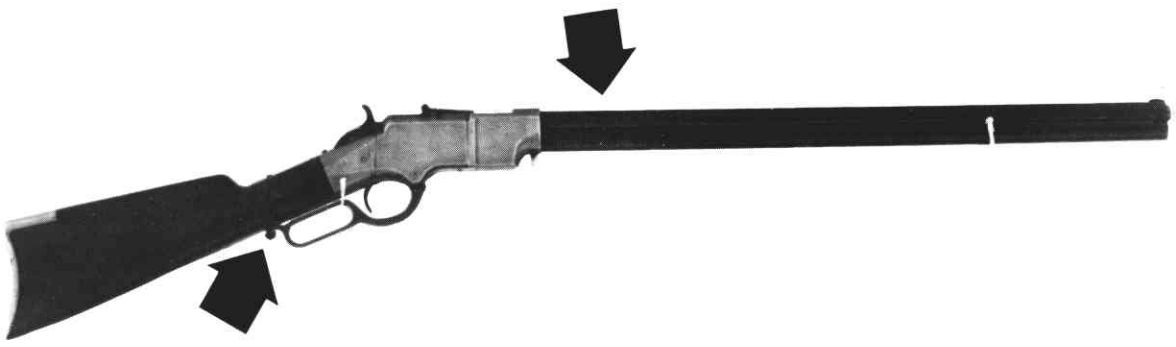


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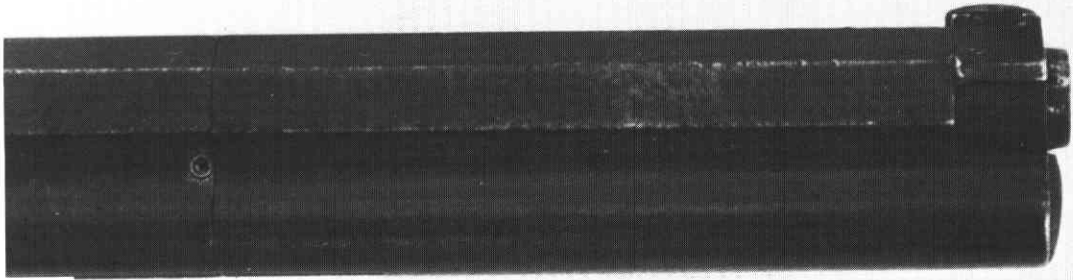
Now I would like to point out a few of the many variations that are to be found in the Henry rifle. First and most interesting is the iron frame variation, photos 5 and 6, produced in the first 350+ guns, serial numbered right along with the brass frame guns. These early guns had no lever latch on either brass or iron frames. Note there are no sling swivels on gun no. 131 in photo 5, even though Winchester was trying to sell these to the Army. He must not have known the Army doesn't carry their guns in their hands, but slung from the shoulder by a strap. The swivels did appear around serial number 800 and, could you guess, they were made by Colt! At this time please note the butt caps on the early production guns have rounded tips on the heel; later ones have sharp pointed caps. Some of the frames were dovetailed for sights, some guns were dovetailed just on the barrel, and some on both frame and barrel. The closeup in photo 6 shows the lack of lever latch, and a sight on the frame.



6



7



8

Photos 7 and 8 show rifle no. 469. Notice there is no rear sight slot on the barrel, the early rounded buttplate, and the strange front sight. The gun had been equipped at one time with a tang peep sight. Finally, the lever latch has arrived.

Most all of these early guns had every piece and part with the serial number stamped on them, even the screws, wood and metal parts. They seemed to have gone to a lot of effort to produce a fine weapon. The Indians loved them—they gave the government troopers hell when they were trying to get the job done with single shot Springfields. They were also favorites of the Frontier Scouts, as Joe Grandee

depicts in the picture he did for me of a Scout on the plains of Kansas in 1868, on the Butterfield Trail just south of where we live.

All Henrys were produced in 44 caliber rimfire with 24-inch barrels except one carbine with a 19¼-inch barrel for government trials.

As the years have gone by I've noticed many, many engraved guns that are supposed to be factory original, and the last time I saw the same gun it was plain. I have my doubts that over 10% of the engraved Henrys we see today were done at the time of conception.



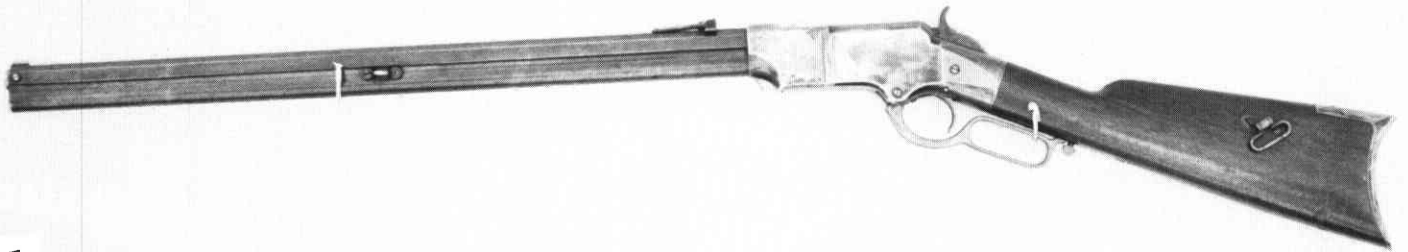
9

Photo 9 shows Henry no. 9554—I hope it's a genuine early engraved piece—with flowers, leaves and two deer.



10

Similar frame engraving is found on no. 7156, photo 10, but this is the only known Henry with the portrait of a lion.



11

Photo 11 is silver plated, with a very high serial number, 10,669. There is a letter on record, where Winchester wrote, saying he did not have time to embellish his guns, as he could sell them as fast as he could produce them. Of course, that was during the war and manpower was very scarce—which also makes me think not many were engraved at the factory. Thirty years ago you would see a row of Henrys: none were engraved. Today you see a row

and they're all engraved! *Beware!*

By 1866 there had been 13,500 Henrys purchased. Of the final year's production of 2,500, 1,000 were taken to Mexico and traded for silver coins by Winchester's super salesman, Thomas Aldis. A number of them were also sold to Chile and Peru. These constituted the first sales of Winchesters outside the United States. There were also several copies of the Henry rifle made in Europe at this time.



12

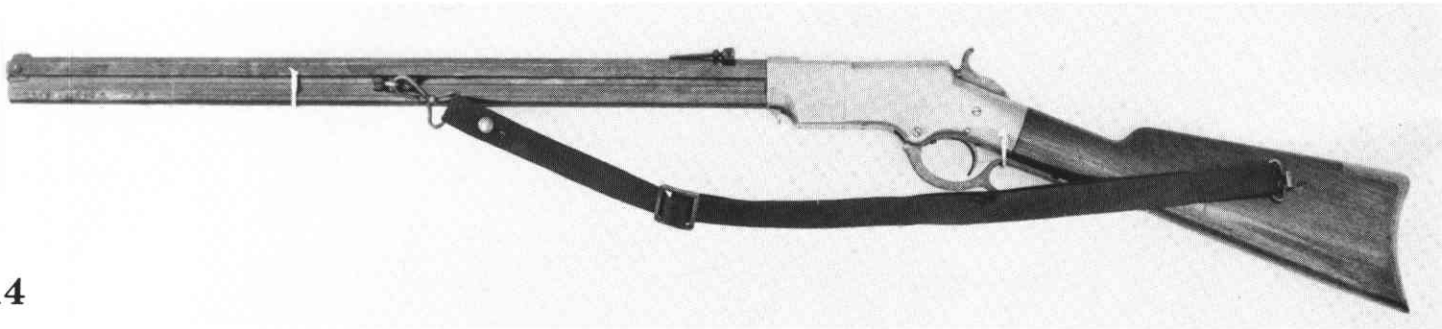
In 1866, the new model Henry was introduced with a loading port on the side of the frame (photo 12), instead of having to run a follower to the forward end of the barrel and twist the sleeve to load. This

King's Improvement sent the gun that is now known as the lever action Winchester well on its way to success.



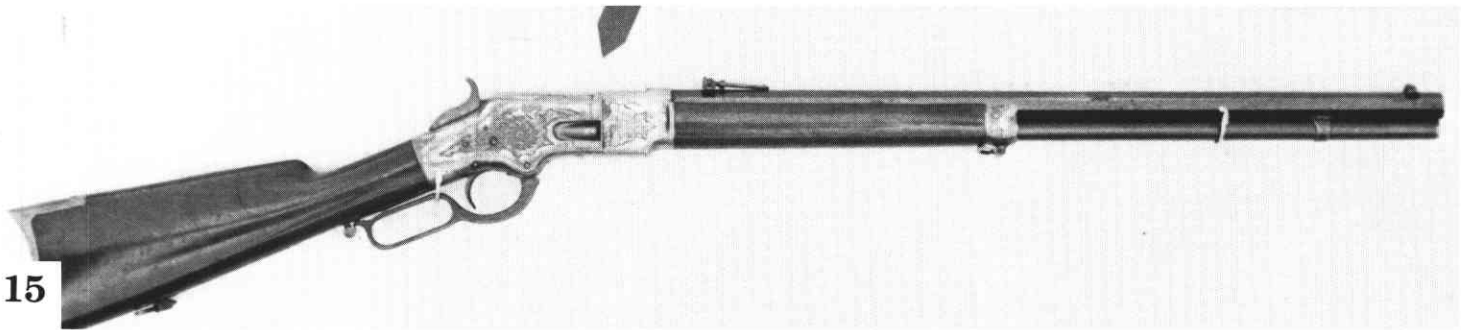
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Photo 13 shows a gun with the Bayes' patent dust cover; it has no serial number. This is the first dust cover; not otherwise used until the Model 1873 was introduced. The patent, no. 86,723, by Stephen Bayes of Waseen, Ohio, is dated Feb. 9, 1869.



14

Photo 14 shows a Henry with a sling attached: number 4,955.



15

Finally, the Model '66 or improved Henry engraved and plated in photo 15.

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The greatest times of my life have been spent talking, reading, and arguing over whether a certain gun is right or not, and then my standard answer is, "for a dollar or two extra, Winchester would make it anyway you wanted it."

You can examine these variations I have de-

scribed in my display. There are others, too, that I didn't go into, such as different types of wood used in stocks: walnut, cherry, birdseye maple, etc.

These words are only mine—don't take them as gospel, as some other collector may challenge you.

I have enjoyed this time with you!