

Allen and Wheelock Percussion and Lip Fire Revolvers

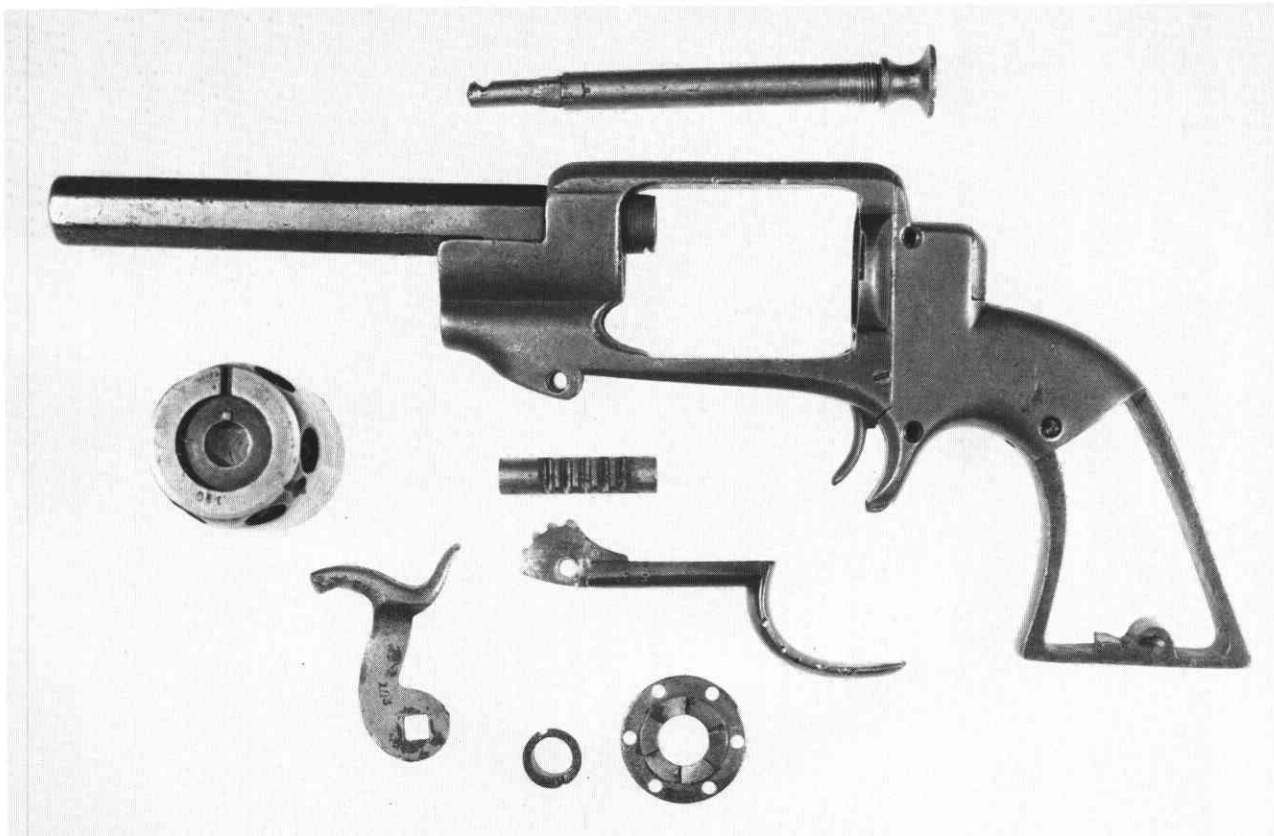
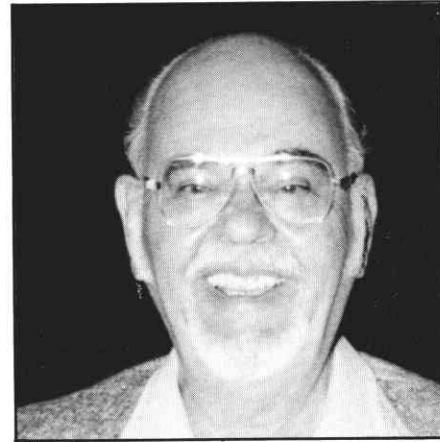
Les Bassinger

I would like to present the new information that has come to light in the last few years on the Allen and Wheelock percussion and lip fire revolvers. Quite a few new variations have been discovered since Harold Mouillette and others published their books some seven to ten years ago. For example, in the side hammer series alone, five variations have surfaced which were previously unknown.

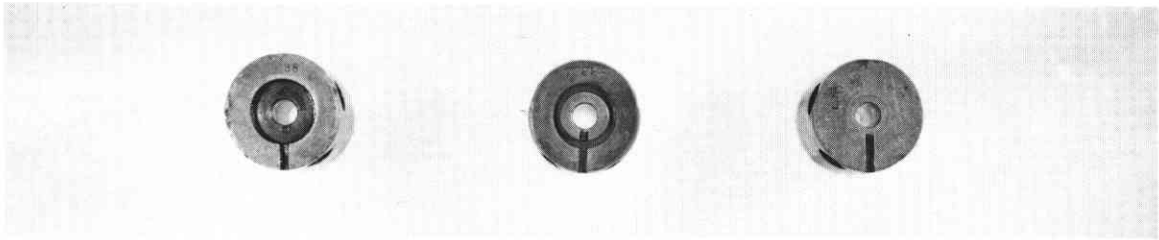
To avoid any repetition I will not discuss the .44 center hammer revolvers, the Providence police models and the .25 caliber lipfires, as the published data is still correct.

To realign these pieces in a more logical sequence of production, the following criteria will be used: types of sideplates, type of cylinder plates, types of trigger guard loading rammers, loading gates and finally barrel markings. Again let me remind you that serial numbers are of little use in classifying Allen Arms, as they are batch numbers indiscriminately used on various types of guns that were in production at the same time.

I am going to start with the belt model side hammer percussion revolvers, since they were the first pistols produced after the transitional pepperbox revolvers were discontinued.



This illustration shows the main parts of the side hammer we will be concerned with.



The three types of cylinder plates found in this series.



The first production model side hammer revolver shown here is in the Paul Henry collection. It was originally known only from the drawing for the December 15, 1857, patent, which covers the breech plate used to revolve the cylinder. Now two of these pieces are known, and we feel this is the earliest production model.

This piece is equipped with friction latch trigger guard-loading rammer. This friction latch system consists of a notch cut in the end of the rammer which dovetails with a similar notch cut into the frame when the rammer is secured. It was not a good system as you had to warp the latch to the side to close it and it soon became loose and would not hold. It also has the first type cylinder. Note the unusual alignment of the three screws in the side plate which are different than any other early models. The hammer tumbler extends through the side plate and has a screw in its exposed end which, when removed, reveals a pick attached to it, presumably for cleaning the nipples. Only one other gun is known to have this screw pick and it is a .36 caliber model. The barrel is marked Allen and Wheelock at the top; January 13, 1857, on the side flat (the January 13th patent covers the use of the trigger guard as a loading rammer), and the December 15th date is under the frame above the rammer.



This shows the screw in the hammer tumbler.



The second model has a different three screw side plate and a round cylinder pin. The hammer tumbler extends through the plate, but it does not have a screw in its exposed end. I do not have this early variation of the second model even though three are known to exist. It has the same markings and cylinder as the first model. The piece shown here is the second variation and differs only in that the front of the cylinder pin is square (covered under the September 7, 1858, patent and supposed to deflect the gasses away from the frame and prevent fouling). The two patent date stampings are reversed on this gun: December 15th is on the side of the barrel and January 13th is under the frame.



The third model has a two screw sideplate with the hammer tumbler extending through the plate. It has type two cylinder and the two date markings are now found on the side of the barrel. It also has a friction latch.



The fourth model of the series has the two screw side plate without the hammer tumbler extending through the plate. It also has the type two cylinder and for some reason is marked the same as the second model. Another odd characteristic is the cylinder pin is round on the front end. Despite these two earlier features we still believe it fits here in the series since it is the first case of the hidden hammer tumbler.



The fifth model has a two screw side plate, is equipped with the late type three cylinder and a square front cylinder pin. All markings are on the side of the barrel flat. This is the last appearance of the friction latch type rammer.



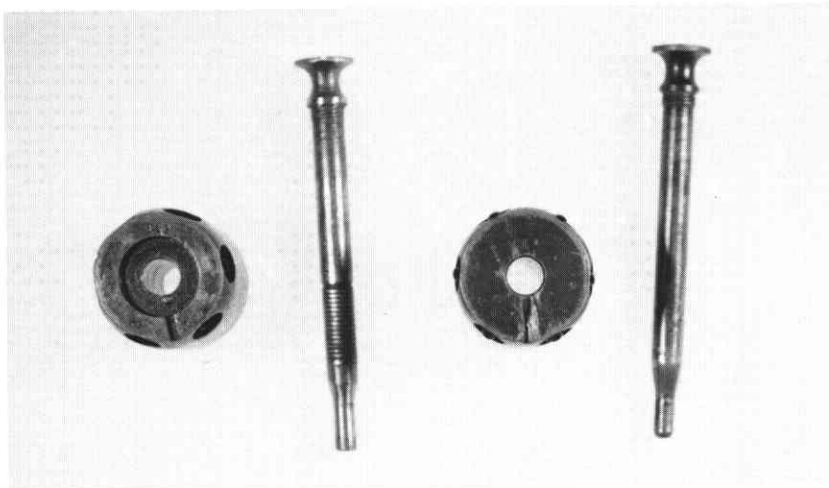
The sixth model shows the first appearance of the one screw side plate and the use of a snap latch to secure the trigger guard rammer. This piece has the two date markings on the side of the barrel and the hammer still retains the early saddle-type knurlings, as do all the previous pieces.



The second variation of this model is the same as the previous gun except it now has the third patent date, September 7th, on the side of the barrel and the hammer has the late oval type knurling. This hammer is the most common on the Belt Model series. This gun has an eight inch barrel which is much more difficult to find than four inch or six inch barreled guns.



This last belt model is one of three I know of that I feel certain is factory engraved. Even though Allen engraved many of his pepperboxes, very few of his revolvers have engraving.



The .36 caliber Navy is the next side hammer group I would like to discuss. This shows the early type cylinder and early pin with the round front end and parallel grooves which served as grease rings. The other pin is without the grease rings and is with the late type cylinder.



This first model .36 side hammer shown here is from the Paul Henry collection and has a friction latch rammer, three screw side plate, and round-front cylinder pin with grease grooves. It has a Type I cylinder and is marked the same as the second belt model with Allen and Wheelock on the top of the barrel, December 15th on the side of the barrel, and January 13th under the frame. This piece is very unusual as it has the screw and the pick in the end of the hammer tumbler, which is hidden under the side plate. This is the only other case of the screw pick device that is known.



This piece is also equipped with a small screw in the right side of the frame to prevent the collar keeper from coming loose as the cylinder is revolved. This fault was overcome in later pieces by threading the collar keeper with a left hand thread.



Another slightly later variation of the first model which is identical to the previous piece except it does not have the screw pick in the hammer tumbler and the screw to retain the collar keeper. Note the hammer rest on the cylinder. This feature is found on very few of the side hammer revolvers.



This next piece is the second model with three screw side plate, friction latch rammer and has the round front cylinder pin. It has the later type cylinder and the two date markings are on the side barrel flat. It is also equipped with the more rare eight inch barrel.



The next piece is very similar to the previous one, only it has the later type square front end cylinder pin. The bottom grip strap has had a piece cut out and rewelded which creates a quicker drop and more narrow grip profile. I doubt that this was done in the Allen shop.



The next photo shows the third model which is quite different. It has a three screw side plate, but a snap latch to secure the trigger guard. This feature appears quite a bit earlier here, as it is not found on any two or three screw belt or pocket models. The barrel markings also include the three patent dates stamped on the side of the barrel. This three date marking appears much later in the belt model series.



This is another third model. A slightly later variation with a shortened barrel, which is evident by the space between the front of the frame and the bottom barrel flange. As the rear of the barrel was burned or eroded out by hot gasses it was removed, cut off, rethreaded and reinstalled in the frame. Any original barrel will show the bottom of the barrel flange to be flush with the frame. This piece also has the hammer rest on the cylinder; it is the only other one I own with this type cylinder. The later feature is the cylinder pin head which is rounded on this gun while the previous ones had flat head pins.



Next, a similar gun with a barrel that has been shortened from seven and one-half inches to seven inches.



This fourth model side hammer, the latest in the series, has the 1 screw side plate and the scarce eight inch barrel. This late model should be the most common type and easiest to find in the .36 caliber; however, in the thirty-five years of collecting I have seen only eight of these models -- three of which I own.



The next series we shall examine are the .28 caliber pocket models. The first model shown here has a three screw side plate. Early markings the same as the first model .36 Navy and it has the friction latch rammer. The main difference in this model is that it has the square front cylinder pin and late type cylinder. I have never seen a pocket model with an early type cylinder. Now that I have said that one will surely turn up.



This second variation of the first model is identical to the last piece except that it has the two date markings on the side flat of the barrel.



This shows the second model pocket revolver. It has a different side plate with only two screws; otherwise, it is the same as the previous piece. It has the last of the friction latches in these guns.



The third and last model pocket revolver shown here has the snap latch trigger guard and the one screw side plate. It also has the three date stamping on the side of the barrel.



This piece is unfired and factory engraved. It is the only engraved pocket model that I have seen. I would like to review the lipfire revolvers next, starting with the .44 caliber model since we now feel it was the first lip fire produced.



This first model .44 caliber was not known as a production model until the last few years; we only knew of the patent model in the Smithsonian. There are now two production specimens known, this piece and one other in the Paul Henry collection. This first model is unique in that it has the early flared or wide bottom grips. The loading gate is hinged from the top and the hammer screw enters from the right side of the frame.



The second variation of the first model is the same as the one above, except it has the more narrow grip.



The second model .44 caliber lip fire has the early flared grips; however, now the loading gate is hinged from the bottom and the hammer screw enters from the left side of the frame. This second model is, of course, not as rare as the first model; but I know of only seven of these pieces and have owned two of them.



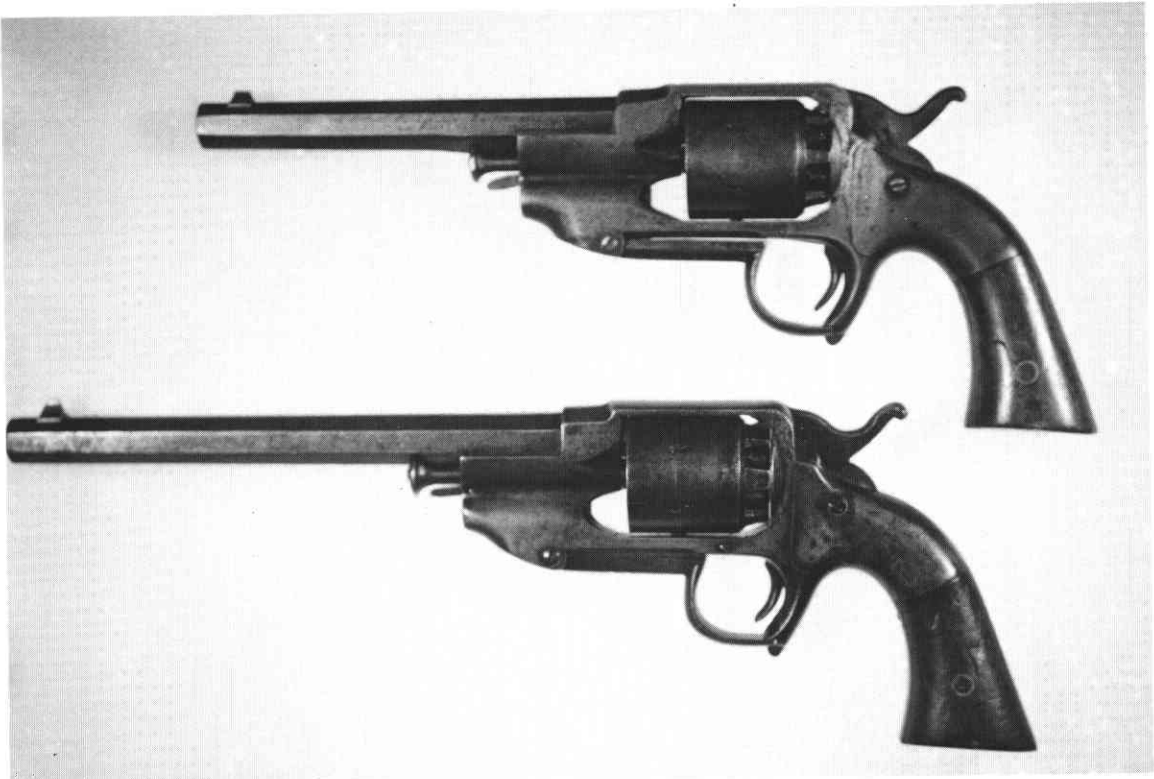
The second variation of the second model shown here is by far the most common. It has the narrow grips; otherwise, it is the same as the earlier variation. I have seen only one other unfired .44 caliber lip fire revolver in near mint condition. This gun was unfired and had ninety-five percent of the blue when I acquired it some years ago. This is a typical example of what happens when you hang a mint gun on the wall of your gun room in Houston, Texas.



These .36 caliber lip fire revolvers with rare eight inch barrels which are much more difficult to find than the four and six inch barreled guns. The .36 caliber lip fire was produced during the same period as the last model .44 caliber. The top gun is nickel plated, while the bottom one is blued. The .25 caliber lip fire was brought into production during this same period, while the .32 caliber lip fire was the last in the series to be produced. Some authors felt that the .32 caliber lip fire was the first model of the series; however, we now have data that leads us to believe it was, indeed, the last.



This photo shows the two models of the .32 caliber lip fire and a much later gun which appeared in the Ethan Allen & Co. era after the expiration of the Rollin White patent injunction. The top gun has the slanted rear end plate on the side over the rack and pinion ejection system. The ejector was operated by lowering the loading gate and raising the ejecting lever which removed the spent shell. The ejector was then withdrawn, a new shell loaded and the loading gate secured. The middle gun, the later variation, has the square rear plate over the ejector. Both the top and middle pieces are marked Allen & Wheelock; the bottom one is marked Ethan Allen & Co. which shows the square plate cover is the later variation. Notice the loading gate on the bottom gun at the rear of the cylinder does not fit flat, vertically, against the cylinder. This is the result of the cylinder having been altered to take rim fire cartridges. This alteration was done after the gun left the shops. I have owned one other Ethan Allen lip fire revolver which did have the original, unaltered cylinder. I own several boxes of lip fire cartridges with original labels in the same caliber which show the Allen & Wheelock firm name, while others show the Ethan Allen firm name. This would certainly show that Allen continued to produce lip fire ammunition after the .44, .36 and .25 caliber guns had been discontinued.



The last revolvers I will discuss are the .36 caliber center fire percussion Navys. These guns differ only in the size of the cylinder pins. The more rare seven and one-half inch barrel gun has a larger pin than does the six inch and four inch barrel guns. I know of no reason why Allen would use different size pins in these two guns unless he perhaps wanted to confuse future collectors. In closing I might add that the number of models that have been discovered lately in the .22 caliber and .32 caliber revolver series are by far more numerous than the pieces discussed here. I hope to be able to discuss them at a later time.

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