

Texas Pistol Makers of the Confederacy

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All of the Confederate pistol makers of the Civil War were located either in Georgia or Texas. Much more has been known and written about the Georgia makers than about those from Texas. Also, much that has been written about the Texas makers has not been accurate. The purpose of this paper is to straighten out the inaccurate history of these "Texas pistol makers of the Confederacy."

There were two revolver makers in Texas who played a part in arming the Confederacy. They were the firms of J.H. Dance and Brothers, and the Lancaster Pistol Factory. The latter of these two companies made those revolvers known to collectors as the Tucker and Sherrard and the Clark and Sherrard.

It has always been thought that the Dance Brothers never had a contract with either the Confederate government or the Texas Military Board. It has also been thought that while the Lancaster firm had a contract with the Texas Military Board, they never completed any revolvers during the war.

I would like to explore with you what is now known and believed to be the facts about these two revolver makers.

J.H. DANCE & BROS.

Nothing quickens the heartbeat of a Texas gun collector more than the anticipation of acquiring a Confederate Dance revolver. True, they were not really Confederate, only secondary Confederate. The Dance factory never had a contract with the Confederate government or even the Texas Military Board; however, the guns were manufactured during the Civil War, so they must have been purchased by Confederate soldiers for wartime use.

A true statement?

Not by a long shot.

Not only did the Dance factory furnish revolvers for the Confederate Army, but prior to the end of the war, the Confederate government probably acquired ownership under the Confederate Ordnance Department. We are getting ahead of the story, though. First we need to go back to the beginning and review the history of the Dance family's venture into revolver production.

The family dates back to Thomas Dance (1675-1765) of Virginia, whose grandson, Ethelred (1750-1828), served for North Carolina during the American Revolution. Family members migrated first from Virginia



to North Carolina, then to Alabama and, finally, to Texas. The four Dance brothers settled in Brazoria County, Texas, in 1853, where they became the preeminent gun makers of Texas' history and the preeminent family of gun makers for the Confederacy.

The brothers were James Henry, George Perry, David Ethelred, and Isaac Claudius Dance. A cousin, Harrison Perry Dance, also was involved in the business. The firm of J.H. Dance & Bros. was founded in the town of Columbia, Texas, which was situated on the banks of the Brazos River near Houston and Galveston. By today's terms the business would have been called a machine shop, but at that time it was known as a steam factory. When the Civil War broke out, the brothers decided they should join the war effort and so they halted other business efforts in favor of producing revolvers for the Confederacy. This must have been quite an undertaking for a group of country boys who had no experience in gun making or in the manufacture of guns.

This decision probably was made in late 1861 or early 1862. It is interesting to note that the Dance brothers never received any money from the Confederate government or the Texas Military Board for financial assistance to start production. It is also interesting to note that all four brothers entered the Confederate Army by enlisting in the 35th Texas Cavalry (Brown's Regiment).

Over the years, disagreements have surfaced as to whether the revolvers made in Columbia should be known by the name of Dance or as Dance and Parks. Jesse W., Anderson, and Samuel Park were brothers who lived in Columbia and worked at the pistol factory throughout the war.



.44 Caliber Dance revolver from the collection of Don Bryan.

Fuller and Steuart's *Firearms of the Confederacy* (1944) refer to the revolvers as Dance and Parks because they believed the Park brothers were partners in the firm. Carroll C. Holloway in *Texas Gun Lore* (1951) refuted this and said it was a misconception to believe that the Parks were any more than factory employees.

There are no records of a business relationship between Dance and Park in either Brazoria or Grimes county, although there are tax records before, during, and after the war in Brazoria County for both groups of men. There also are tax records for J.H. Dance & Bros. However, records from the National Archives reveal that all the correspondence refers to the firm as Dance and Park, never as J.H. Dance and Bros. This would indicate that there must have been some form of business relationship between the two groups.

Information now available on the wartime operation of the Dance Bros. pistol factory comes from the National Archives and the "Mattie and George Duff Letters and Papers" now in the Confederate Collection of the Hill County Junior College Library in Hillsboro, Texas.

Mattie Duff was a cousin of the Dances and lived in the home of James Henry Dance while her husband, George, served as Captain of Company A of the 35th Texas Cavalry. Fortunately for today's students of the Dance pistol factory, letters to her husband, in which she kept him well informed about the pistol factory, were preserved.

The Dance brothers did better than many other Confederate revolver makers in getting their factory into production. Military service records from the National

Archives indicate that on May 1, 1862, George P., David E., and Isaac Claudius Dance were detached from their unit for duty at the pistol factory in Columbia where they remained until the war ended. James Henry Dance, however, continued in the service as 1st Lieutenant in the 35th Texas Cavalry. Despite his absence from the factory, he still seems to have played some type of management role in the firm's operation.

By July 1862 the factory was close to finishing its first revolvers. Mattie wrote George on July 5, 1862, "the boys think they will soon get three or four of their pistols finished."

On February 25, 1863, she wrote "there was a benefit given in Columbia to raise money for disabled Confederate veterans. The boys gave them a very fine pistol which they sold. I took a chance on it for you but lost it. Mr. Beal Terry drew it."

All Confederate arms makers found it very difficult to locate skilled workers due to the Confederate Conscription Act, which drafted all white males ages 18 to 35 without exception. Their only recourse was to convince the army to assign smiths and mechanics to work in the factories, although few firms had much success with this approach. The Dance brothers, however, were quite successful. More than 35 soldiers were assigned to work at the factory and at least 23 of them came from the 35th Texas Cavalry (Brown's Regiment). This success was no doubt due in part to James Henry Dance, one of the unit's officers.

Another contributing factor was that most of the Texas units in the Confederate Army had trouble secur-



.36 Caliber Dance revolver from the collection of Cliff Young.

ing arms and Brown's Regiment was no exception. The prospect of getting more revolvers manufactured no doubt was a strong incentive for the Regiment to assign soldiers to the factory. In a letter dated August 29, 1863, by George Duff to Mattie, he states, "I have an opportunity to send a letter to you by George Westervelt who is going to Columbia today to work in the pistol factory. Jim Henry has got several more men detailed to work in the factory with the promise from Gen. Magruder that our Battalion shall have all the pistols they make till we are armed."

It has always been the belief that the Dance brothers never had a contract with the State of Texas or the Confederate government. It can now be shown that this was not the case.

In a letter from Edmund P. Turner to Dance and Park dated June 26, 1863, Turner states, "I am verbally informed by Major Maclin, Chief Ordnance Officer of this district, that the contract with Messrs. Dance and Park for the manufacture of pistols has been disapproved at Richmond." However, on November 16, 1863, the District of Texas, Confederate State Army issued Order No. 312: "A Board of Officers is hereby appointed to convene today at the office of Capt. Good, Ord. Off. E.S. Dist. to examine and report upon a lot of pistols received from Dance and Park by Capt. Good 'under contract.'"

The move of the pistol factory to Anderson, Texas, does not seem to be completely due to fear that Columbia would be shelled by Federal gun boats, as many people have speculated. Anderson was the site of a Confederate Ordnance Works and the move coincides

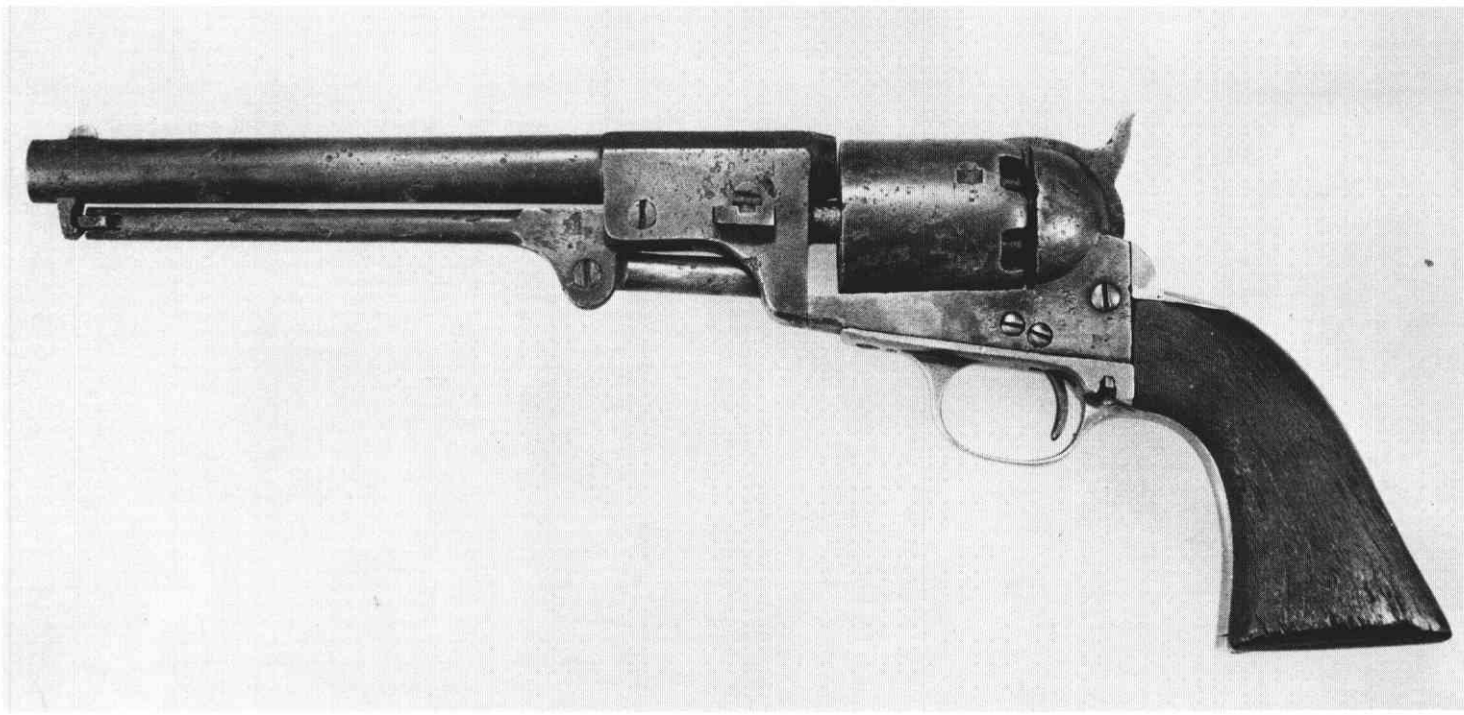
with the timing of the purchase of the Dance pistol factory by the Confederate government.

On November 30, 1863, Mattie wrote George Duff that "the boys think it quite possible they will quit the shop soon. George (Dance) went to Galveston last week to see if he could make a government affair of it and he thinks perhaps it will be done." On April 16, 1864, she wrote that "George (Dance) did not find out anything about what they will do about his machinery. The papers were sent back to Houston." On June 16, 1864, 1st Lieutenant J.H. Dance was given leave to go to Anderson "for the purpose of settling with Capt. Good for machinery sold the Government." The fact that the pistol factory now was part of the Confederate Ordnance Department is supported by the unit's muster rolls, which no longer identified the workers as detached to the pistol factory. Instead, they were now carried on the Post Return, Post of Anderson, Grimes County, Texas.

The move of the Dance family and the pistol factory to Anderson was completed about the first of the year in 1864. However, it took some time to get back into production. On February 7, 1864, Mattie wrote George, "they have not got quite ready for making pistols but will soon."

On June 6, 1864, Lewis J. Wilson writes in a letter to "Friend Howell" that, "We have lately got to making six shooters and have turned out 46."

The last revolvers received by the Ordnance Depot of Supplies at Houston was on April 18, 1865. Hugh T. Scott, Captain, Artillery & Acting Ordnance Officer, reports the receipt of 25 six-shooting pistols, although



.36 Caliber Dance revolver with recoil shields.

the box had been broken into and 5 were missing. Dance Bros. were the 4th largest producers of hand guns in the Confederacy and the only firm to produce both .44 caliber and .36 caliber revolvers. Using known serial numbers would indicate that about 350 .44 caliber revolvers were produced and perhaps 135 more .36 caliber revolvers. It is unknown if the .36 caliber serial numbers were separate or integrated with the .44 caliber numbers. However, many .36 caliber parts have been uncovered at the Anderson site, which is strong evidence that the numbers were in a separate series. Production of .44 caliber revolvers would have passed number 135 long before leaving Columbia. If the numbers were integrated, no .36 caliber revolvers would have been made after the move to Anderson.

Most of the revolvers produced at the Dance factory were delivered to Ordnance Officers in Texas for issue to Texas Cavalry units. No doubt some of the guns produced earlier were sold to various individuals. Texas units known to have received Dance revolvers were the 35th Texas Cavalry and Captain Sutton's Company, Graham Rangers.

Characteristics of the Dance Revolvers

The Dance revolvers are patterned after the Colt revolvers. The .44 caliber and .36 caliber revolvers are similar in appearance except for size. One of its most distinguishing features is the omission of recoil shields. A lot of written speculation focuses on this subject. One simple explanation is that the available metal stock was not thick enough to include the recoil shields. Since they serve no real purpose, why not eliminate them?

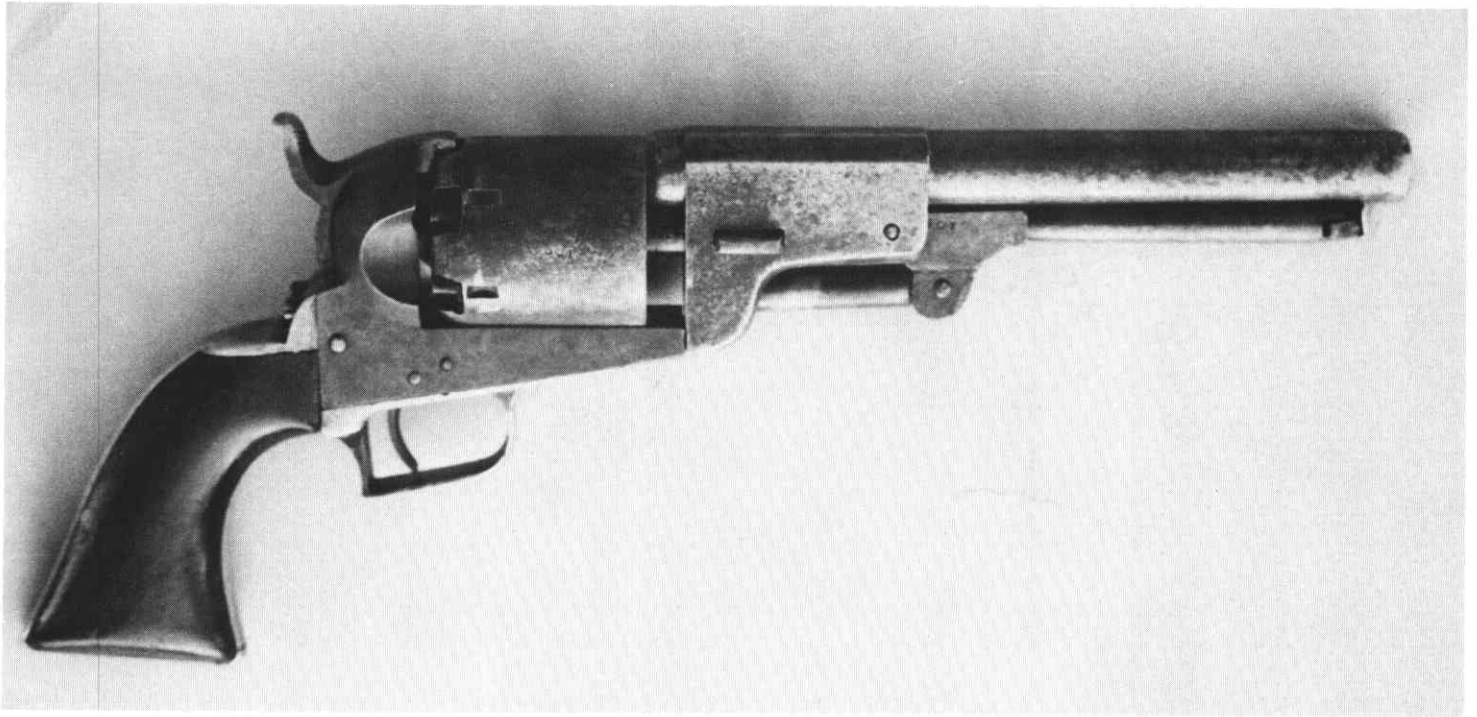
The Dance revolver was not marked with the Dance name. The serial number dies are fairly large and the serial numbers are marked on nearly all parts of the revolver. Some of the revolvers are marked with zeros, diamonds, or stars in various combinations instead of serial numbers. There are several specimens with no numbers or markings, and one with 4 dots. These oddly marked and unmarked revolvers were probably part of those sold to the civilian market.

The revolvers have a round barrel similar to the Colt Dragoon, although several specimens have a full-octagon barrel. There is a roller on the hammer of most examples and, contrary to what most authors on this subject have said, there is a cap release groove on the Dance revolver.

The .44 caliber Dance has the overall length of a Colt Dragoon, but weighs less. The length of the cylinder corresponds to a Colt 1860 Army, which makes the barrel actually longer than a Colt Dragoon. The bore has 7 lands and 7 grooves with a clockwise spin and no gain to the twist.

The trigger guard is rather square, thick, and heavy. However, low-numbered revolvers have a lighter weight trigger guard; the guard increased in thickness as production continued.

The .36 caliber revolver is much more scarce than the .44 caliber. If the serial numbers were integrated within the .44 caliber range, it would appear that not too many of the smaller calibers were made. However, if a separate range of numbers was used, at least 135 were made, since this is the highest number known. Authentic .36 caliber revolvers are extremely rare today.



Tucker & Sherrard revolver with square backed trigger guard made at Lancaster, Texas. These revolvers were most likely completed during the war and sold to individual soldiers.

The .36 caliber revolver is similar in size to the Colt 1850 Navy model, although it has a round barrel. The serial number dies are the same as the .44 caliber Dance and the location of the markings are the same. The bore has 7 lands and 7 grooves, a clockwise spin and no gain to the twist. Nearly all the characteristics for the .44 caliber Dance are found on the .36 caliber.

Dance Revolvers with Recoil Shields

Most people have believed that the lack of a recoil shield is necessary for a revolver to have been made by the Dance brothers. It is almost certain, however, that they did manufacture a few revolvers with shields.

In the .36 caliber model, 3 revolvers with recoil shields meet every comparison test with .36 caliber Dance revolvers without the shields. Their serial numbers are 48, 50, and 51. These serial numbers are stamped with the same dies and in the same locations as the other Dance revolvers. The rifling in the bore is the same. They have the same squareness to the front of the barrel housing and barrel lug, the same thickness to the small of the grip and the same misplaced screw.

In making the revolvers, the Confederates used a wooden jig to drill the screw holes. All .36 caliber Dances have one screw that is misplaced and these revolvers with recoil shields also have this feature.

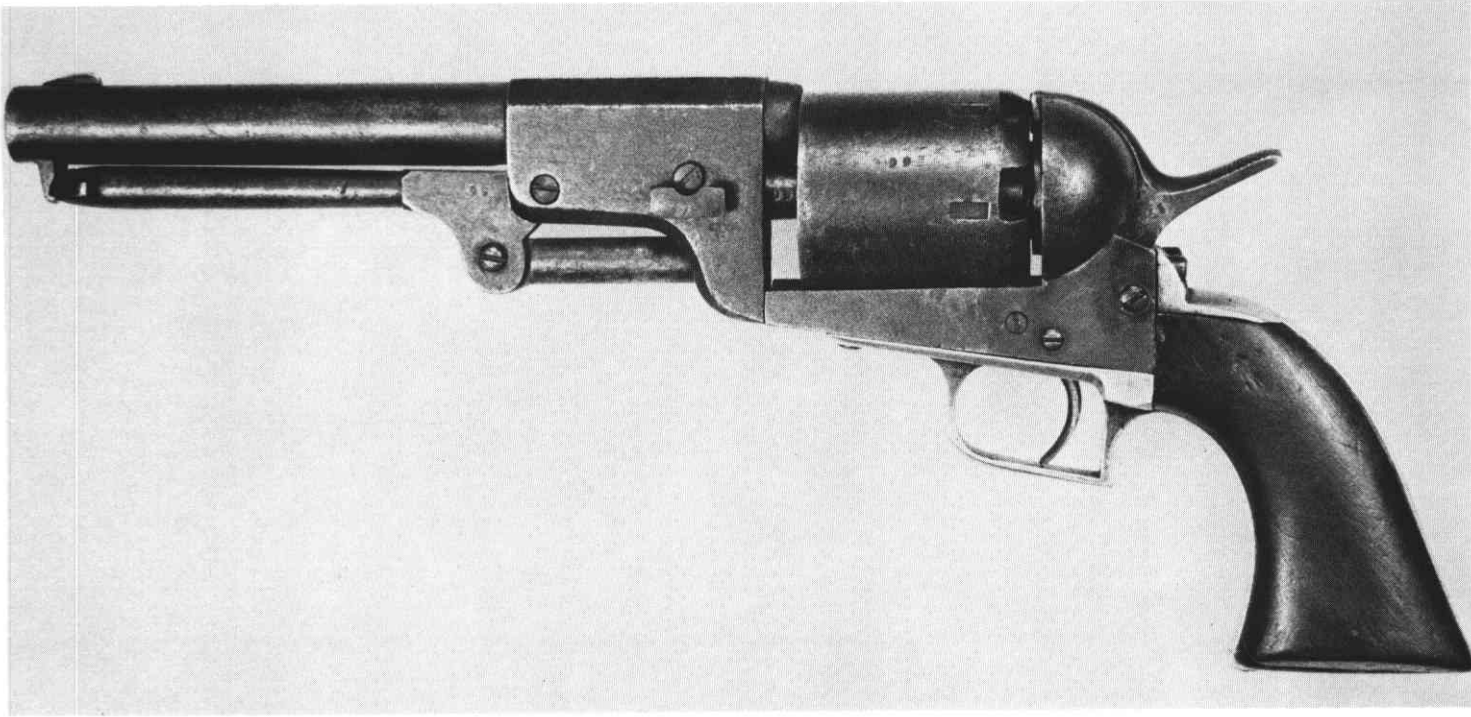
Conclusive evidence is found on revolver number 51, which is marked on the grips with the name *Charles Hill, Co. H., Brown's Regiment*. National Archives records indicate that Charles Hill was a member of the unit and we have already shown that Dance revolvers were issued to soldiers in Brown's Regiment.

As for the .44 caliber revolvers, there is one known specimen with recoil shields that meets all the criteria for guns made at the Dance factory. All measurements are correct and the rifling in the bore is correct. It has the squareness to the barrel housing and barrel lug and the square heavy trigger guard. It has an octagon-shaped barrel and a rear sight mounted on top of the barrel housing. There are Dance revolvers with both of these characteristics. It does not have a serial number, but is stamped *J B* where serial numbers would ordinarily be found. The top of the barrel is stamped *G. Erickson, Houston, Texas*. Gustav Erickson was a gun dealer in Houston during the Civil War and is known to have stamped his name on derringers and rifles. Since the Dance factory at Columbus was only 35 miles from Houston, it is probable that Erickson could have purchased this revolver from Dance and then stamped his own name on it. The Otto and Alec Erickson listed as workers assigned to the Dance factory were sons of Gustav Erickson. Two workers were assigned to the factory with the initials "J.B." They were Joseph Bray and J. Black, both members of Brown's Regiment. Either man could have stamped his initials on the revolver in place of a serial number.

All of these facts pertaining to the .36 and .44 caliber revolvers with recoil shields mentioned above and pictured in this paper leave little doubt that Dance did make a few revolvers with recoil shields.

THE LANCASTER DRAGOON

The Confederate pistol factory at Lancaster, Texas,



Tucker & Sherrard revolver with the experimental low hammer spur. There are three of these known, serial numbers 52, 54, and 56.

has almost passed from the realm of history into the realm of myth. Who ran it? What did it make? When did it function? Was the whole operation something we might today call a scam? Question has clouded fact from the day the owners received their first contract from the State of Texas in 1862. Some writers have called the Lancaster plant a munitions factory, which it wasn't; some have suggested other firearms besides pistols were made there, but none were, and during the brief period it was in operation (less than 2 years), suspicions were voiced that arms manufacture merely served as a front for military exemption and that equipment, labor, and metal stock were devoted to consumer goods.

The firm names are confusing. At one time or another the company was referred to as Tucker, Sherrard & Co., Tucker, Sherrod & Co., Sherrard, Taylor & Co., and Clark, Sherrard & Co. But the biggest questions is whether the wartime factory ever produced more than 2 finished revolvers.

There are pistols marked *Lancaster, Texas*, which are among the most eagerly sought pieces of American armament, but were they manufactured in Lancaster in wartime or were they assembled later from leftover parts? Facts have been hard to come by because the experts have disagreed. Referring to Sherrard, Taylor & Co., the name under which the wartime firm operated longest, Carroll C. Holloway, in *Texas Gun Lore*, says, "Texas' most publicized makers of arms during the Civil War were the least effective." At the time he wrote (1951), Holloway doubted any pistols were actually completed by the factory during the war. Satterlee and

Gluckman's *American Gun Makers* (1945) erroneously reported that "about 400" pistols were made in 1862, while Fuller and Steuart's *Firearms of the Confederacy* (1944) fails to differentiate between pistols which might have been made during the war and those made afterward. Victor Friedrichs, writing in *The Texas Gun Collector* in 1954, talks of "the highly controversial Texas Confederate Revolver generally known as the 'Tucker & Sherrod Confederate Colt,'" and says the controversy "hinges on whether or not this firm did or did not produce and manufacture a goodly number of revolvers."

Friedrichs was of the opinion that the firm finished some revolvers but sold them under the counter to private individuals "at an excessive profit" during the time the firm was under contract to deliver such revolvers to the State of Texas at a price of \$40. He adds, "There will be a storm of protests to the effect that there is no documentary evidence whatsoever to substantiate this statement."

However, there is evidence available today that will clear up much of the mystery surrounding these historic Texas revolvers.

The pistol factory story begins with a notice in the *Dallas Herald* of February 19, 1862: "Messrs. Sherrard, Killen and Brunie, of Lancaster, have formed a co-partnership for the purpose of manufacturing Colt's and other revolving pistols. They commence immediately to arrange the necessary machinery . . . and if justified by large subscriptions, will be able to manufacture this arm in any desired quantities . . . at \$40.00 each for Navy pistols and \$50.00 for the Army size. Those desiring to



Clark and Sherrard revolver from the collection of Stanley Diefenthal. This revolver was made after the war at Lancaster, Texas. Some have an etched cylinder scene and the name etched on the top flat of the barrel housing. This one, number 404, is plain, without name or cylinder scene.

add their names to the list can address either Dr. J.H. Swindell, Hon. Jeff Weatherford, or J.H. Sherrard, Esq., Lancaster, Texas.”

With the Civil War moving into its second year and Southern arms in desperately short supply, this notice seems to have drawn quick response from the State Military Board, consisting of the Governor, the Comptroller, and the State Treasurer, an agency created to provide arms and ammunition for the defense of the state and to establish “a foundry for the manufacturing of ordnance.” It was not part of the Confederate government and, as you will see, often found Confederate agents, whether Texans or not, to be in sharp competition for scarce materials.

On March 6, 1862, the Military Board wrote John M. Crockett of Dallas, Texas, who was Lieutenant Governor of Texas, requesting he “interview immediately with gentlemen in your County who are constructing revolving pistols, and learn . . . whether the Board can in any way aid them to increase their results, and whether they can build guns for use in the army. (We) further request that you will learn whether the company or contractor will enter into a contract with the Board to build arms for the defense of the State, and if so at what price they can make (them).”

It is difficult to determine if the board was writing in response to the *Dallas Herald* “notice or was simply making a broad inquiry. Whatever the case, Crockett’s reply is a masterpiece of opportunism.” I have taken all the pains that I could to ascertain the facts you desire

(and find) there is no establishment of this kind in this county, but there are about twenty gun-smiths, some of whom are first-rate. I have induced a few of the first men among the smiths to open a shop . . . they say that with the corps that they can organize and the tools and materials at hand they can make about thirty Colt Revolvers per week. The men who are undertaking are . . . in every way worthy of the confidence of Board, but they have no means, and could not have started but for my assurances.”

Crockett, with the Military Board’s offer in his pocket, apparently went to the Lancaster pistol people and offered them a chance at a government contract if they would make him a co-partner, which they did, and from then on Crockett was spokesman for the pistol firm in all its relations with the State. By April 11 the Military Board offered “Messrs. Tucker, Sherrod (sic) & Co.” \$5,000 in advance on signing of a contract with a performance bond, the contract promising the Board would, at \$40 per weapon, “take . . . all the pistols they shall make within one year, not to exceed three thousand” with 100 pistols per month to be delivered after May, 1862. It also stipulated, “Said pistols are to be of the kind and quality of the Colt Revolver, but the exact form and style being immaterial so that said pistols are good and substantial arms of the size and after the manner of said Colt Revolver.” The Lancaster men signing this contract were Laban E. Tucker, Joseph H. Sherrard, W.L. Killen, A. W. Tucker, Pleasant Taylor, and John Crockett. (The State’s constant spelling error of “Sherrod” as firm name has

added historical confusion. No "Sherrrod" was connected with the project.)

Laban Tucker had manufactured revolvers prior to the war, a fact most historians have overlooked. Argyle W. Tucker was his son. One account calls the elder Tucker, "near genius in both the metallurgical and mechanical principles of gunmaking." Joseph H. Sherrard was a Lancaster blacksmith, W.L. Killen was a wagon maker, while Pleasant Taylor, the capitalist of the venture, was a Lancaster merchant who had come to Texas in 1844 from Illinois as a Peters Colonist. We would today call Crockett a lobbyist, and in his position as Lieutenant Governor, might feel there was a conflict of interest dealing with the Military Board over state contracts and the like.

The pistol factory was located on West Main Street in Lancaster, the site today of the Veterans Memorial Library. For decades the lot was owned by the Rawlins family of Lancaster, which Pleasant Taylor had married into. Another confusing factor is that in 1862, the same year as the opening of the pistol factory, the Confederate Quartermaster established a wagon manufacturing plant adjacent to the pistol factory with Maxine Guillot of Dallas as superintendent. Guillot is sometimes listed as directing the pistol factory, which was never the case.

By June 30, 1862, the final deadline for delivery of the initial shipment, Crockett was forced to write the Military Board, "We are not ready to deliver 100 pistols." He spread the blame by stating that Confederate government agents were buying up every article needed by the pistol factory "at the most exorbitant prices." He feared that when pistols were made ("We have several hundred on the way") they would be "pressed" (confiscated) by Confederate officers. He also states that while one local agent "has advised us that his men will not be allowed to press our pistols," he is also aware, he says accusingly, that there is a secret proviso wherein the Military Board has consented for one Confederate officer to have them. "And he is not all," Crockett moans, "the walls — law — have broken down. We therefore think of putting none (pistols) together until *ordered* to do so." All of which adds up to a set of excuses for not delivering the contract guns.

On July 3 another Crockett letter states the factory has "several waggons on the way from San Antonio with materials which are long due" but the newly enacted (April 16, 1862) Confederate Conscription Act, which forced able bodied white men ages 18 through 35 into the army, may have stopped them. "We understand that the conscript Officers are taking the drivers & turning the trains out & we greatly fear they have done ours so. We now employ twenty-five hands & have machinery & materials to keep them going for some time. We have now

machinery for about as many more hands & will have it all running in about ten days with fifty hands."

The letter voices more expectations than concrete information, and on July 21 yet another letter defends the factory's failure "to have the first hundred pistols ready" and says Col. Burford, the Confederate agent, "has been urging us to let him have what we can complete . . . and has conceived the idea that we are refusing to finish off (the order) for fear of getting them pressed."

By August 5, still no pistols. Crockett wrote, "We are pressing on with the work and have a good many (pistols) on the way but the difficulty of getting machinery has prevented us from finishing some of them. We have expended at least half or more of our labor making tools & machinery . . ." Two weeks later Crockett reports, "We are at no child's play . . . but are traversing every portion of the Country assessable, and when we have the least hope of securing material or machinery are paying the most exorbitant prices, having to come in competition with (Confederate) Government Agents who, you well know, are not generally any ways particular about the prices they pay. We are now at work on the third hundred pistols and our expectation is to complete the four hundred (due you) during the month of September. We had to send to Boggy Depot, Choctaw Nation (now Oklahoma) for coal (and) we have paid as high as 75 cents per pound for steel and \$700 for a lathe. We have expended more than as much more money was advanced to us, and we are now out."

Crockett adds, "The effort & expenditures we are making would intimidate most men & they would most likely shrink from the engagement — indeed two of our men have already shrank from it & gone out of the concern: the two Mr. Tuckers, the pistol makers — but they are working for us at wages. I think they became dissatisfied at our contract to make pistols for \$40 when we could sell them for \$60 to \$100." An 1886 profile of Crockett, in *Farm & Ranch* magazine, says that looking for material for the pistol factory, "He set out for Jefferson, Marshall and Shreveport, returning by Galveston, Houston and intermediate places . . . Waco, Austin, San Antonio, Brownsville and Matamoros, securing every piece of steel to be found and all suitable implements and machinery and shipping them to Lancaster."

Still no pistols. But on October 2, despite the failure of Sherrard, Taylor & Co. (the new name as of mid-August) to supply any arms, the Military Board advanced the firm another \$5,000. A \$10,000 performance bond was signed by Sherrard, Killen, Taylor, Crockett, G. W. Record and R.M. Hawpe, the latter two of Dallas. Crockett complains this time that the factory's workers are being drafted "regardless of the law exempting men from military duty who are engaged in the manufacture of



The name as it appears on the top flat of the barrel housing on those Clark & Sherrard revolvers which have a cylinder scene.

fire arms, etc. They utterly refuse to let us have one (man) out of any company or regiment. Even Texas Colonels have been most rigid with us. We have tried Cols. Ross, Spaight and Elmore for men whom we know to be good mechanics and who wish to come to us but they refuse to yield to any request. It only takes 54 men to fill our shops . . . yet we have not been able to reach thirty yet."

On November 20, Crockett is writing the board "nearly all of the pieces of the four hundred pistols are finished." Now, he notes, "We are failing to find material and are preparing to melt our own ore and do all we can to secure material by our own resources. There is ore in Denton Co." Also, "There is great prejudice against our establishment on account of the exemption of conscripts in it, and much is being said to injure it." He also pleads, "Under all the circumstances could not the Board afford to give us a little encouragement by advancing \$10 a piece on the price of our pistols and letting us have a little more money? We are actually told here that we can have \$100 a piece for them . . ." At one point in November the plant had only three hands available for work.

By the new year things hadn't changed. No pistols. On January 28, 1863, Crockett complained, "All assurances were given that artizans and mechanics would be relieved of their engagements in the army to engage in the manufacture of arms. But strange to say, we have been able to employ on an average about twelve." On top of that, New Orleans, "whence we hoped to obtain material," fell to the Federals. "For hands we have been compelled to pay \$4.00 per day and over," he says. But the elusive 400 pistols are being finished "with all possible dispatch."

In January, Crockett went to Austin, Texas, as the Legislature opened its session, and took with him two completed revolvers, alleged to have been manufactured

at the Lancaster plant. He later reported the pistols were tried "by Governor Lubbock, Ed Fannin and others, in the presence of the members of the Legislature, and pronounced true and trusty." On February 28, *The Texas Almanac*, a newspaper, remarked, "We were shown the other day a beautiful specimen of a six-shooter, manufactured in Dallas (sic) by Col. Crockett, who has a large armory in successful operation. The pistol appears, in every respect, quite equal to the famous Colt's six-shooter. We learn that Col. Crockett has now 400 of these pistols on hand, which he has manufactured within the last six months, and which he has offered to the Governor at remarkably low figures — not one-third of what they could be sold at by retail."

We must hope that Crockett was misquoted by the *Texas Almanac*, because on March 14 he addresses his friend, Governor F.R. Lubbock, somewhat belligerently, reporting that Major Johns (one of the Board members) said Crockett's only alternative was to sell the pistols to individuals, and winds up by saying, "We can sell the pistols for \$100.00 each without any trouble but we shall be pleased to hear from you."

The 400 pistols belonged to the State of Texas, under terms of the contract, but it is doubtful that anywhere near that number had been finished. In fact, except for the "pilot pistols," none of the famous, or infamous, 400 were delivered to the State. Thus the months dragged on with Crockett offering the same reasons for delay: lack of materials, conscription of workers, the military going back on its word to release experienced armaments men, needing only certain unspecified parts, etc.

Finally, despite satisfaction with the sample pistol it and the Legislature had seen demonstrated, the Military board in September 1863 reported, "The Legislature . . . thought proper to relieve the parties of the contract on

their repaying the sums advanced with legal interest, and in July last the parties repaid the loan in Confederate Treasury notes with \$814.00 interest." There were complaints that the repayment was unfair because inflation caused Confederate money in 1863 to be worth only half what it had been when given to the Lancaster firm, but under terms of the contract there was no basis for adjustment.

The loss of the contract ended Sherrard, Taylor & Co., but not the activity of the factory. The Dallas and North Texas region was, at the time, a great wheat growing country that furnished the Confederate army with a vast amount of flour. But the mills and harvesting machinery were giving out, and there was no means of repairing them. Crockett, according to an 1886 *Farm & Ranch* article, "lost no time sending notice over the State that the foundry and machine shop would be at the service of the country and that all the machinery which was breaking down could be repaired. And to this shop was the army and the women and children of the State indebted for all the flour that was made in 1863 and 1864."

Several persons who would later be important in Dallas County history worked at the pistol factory during the war. Foremost was Joseph Paul Henry, a La Reunion colonist, who was a lithographer and was famed as an engraver on metal and ivory. On reaching the United States in 1855 he had worked for the famous Endicott Engraving Co. of New York for a few months before proceeding to Frenchtown, as the Reunion colony was called. Writing in Johnson and Barker's biographical set, *A History of Texas and Texans*, his son, Rene Paul Henry, said, "During the Civil War the Confederacy called his services as an engraver into use, assigning him to the Lancaster pistol manufactory. This would explain why several of the Clark & Sherrard pistols have etched cylinders and would suggest that Henry was the person responsible for the work. What is also little known about Joseph Paul Henry (who after the war became a successful banker in Lancaster) is, according to one reliable historian, that he learned pistol making in Liege, Belgium, before migrating to the United States.

John M. Oram, who had settled near Lancaster with his parents in 1857 at age 12, enlisted in the Confederate army but was transferred from active duty to the Lancaster pistol factory "because of his special skills," presumably as a watchmaker.

Elihu McDonald Tucker, a son of Laban, who had helped his father run the gun factory and powder mill in Marshall, worked in Lancaster but when drafted by the Confederate army was assigned to work in the Confederate powder mill in Marshall. And despite Crockett's assertion that the pistol factory had gotten "not one man" from the army, Thomas J. Kemble, of Co. A, 31st

Texas Cavalry (a Dallas County unit), is shown on company reports as detached to duty as a smith in the Lancaster factory.

However they got them, or whatever they got, early in 1867 Clark and Sherrard (who had served in the Confederate army after Sherrard, Taylor & Co. folded) were advertising pistols for sale in the *Dallas Herald*. In a letter to a Jefferson, Texas, merchant, Clark says "We have about 400 cal .44 old style army revolvers that we plan to finish and embellish into high class merchandise." The embellishment consisted of fancily decorated cylinders and *Clark & Sherrard, Lancaster, Texas* etched across the top of the frame.

Cartridge pistols, already making the cap and ball guns obsolete, had been introduced and used in the Civil War, and in 1873 the U.S. Army officially adopted them, so it was undoubtedly recognized that these Lancaster revolvers were more useful as souvenirs than as serious weapons. Besides, the wholesale price of \$20 gold was rather steep, since Colt revolvers of newer design were retailing for \$30 at that time.

Whatever reasons customers might have had for buying the post-war Lancaster Dragoons, not many did, if you base that conclusion on the very small number in existence today.

While most writers and students of Confederate handguns maintain that the Lancaster gun factory never completed any revolvers during the war and that all specimens known today were assembled from leftover parts after the war, a good case can be made to prove otherwise.

We first need to separate the different types of revolvers attributed to the Lancaster gun factory. The characteristics that make them alike are the dragoon size and the lack of a loading aperture on the barrel lug, while the most distinguishing difference is the square-backed trigger guard and the round trigger guard. Those revolvers with the square-backed trigger guards were the earlier models made during the war by Tucker, Sherrard & Co. After reading all the material from the Texas Archives, one would have to come to the conclusion that Colonel Crockett accepted the suggestion of Major Johns and sold the guns on the retail market at a higher price than the Texas Military Board would allow for them. Also, some of the few square-backed revolvers in existence today show considerable holster wear. If they had not been finished until after the war, it is doubtful they would have received much use at all, since they already were obsolete.

The conclusion is that these Tucker & Sherrard revolvers were completed and put into use during the war, even though they were sold on the open market to soldiers for their personal use.

The round trigger guard models were those revolvers

sold after the war by Clark, Sherrard & Co. Close examination and comparison of the square-backed trigger guard models (Tucker and Sherrard) and the round trigger guard models (Clark and Sherrard) reveal conclusively that the round trigger guard models were not made from leftover parts of the square-backed models. All the parts are of different size, dimension, and configuration, with two exceptions. The barrels of the Clark and Sherrard could have been made of unfinished barrel blanks from Tucker, Sherrard and Co. and the loading levers could have been left over from the same company. Everything else, including the serial number dies, are completely different.

Much speculation has been made and numerous conclusions drawn as to why the Lancaster pistols did not have a loading aperture. Examination of the revolvers and a study of those involved in their manufacture offers some answers to this mystery.

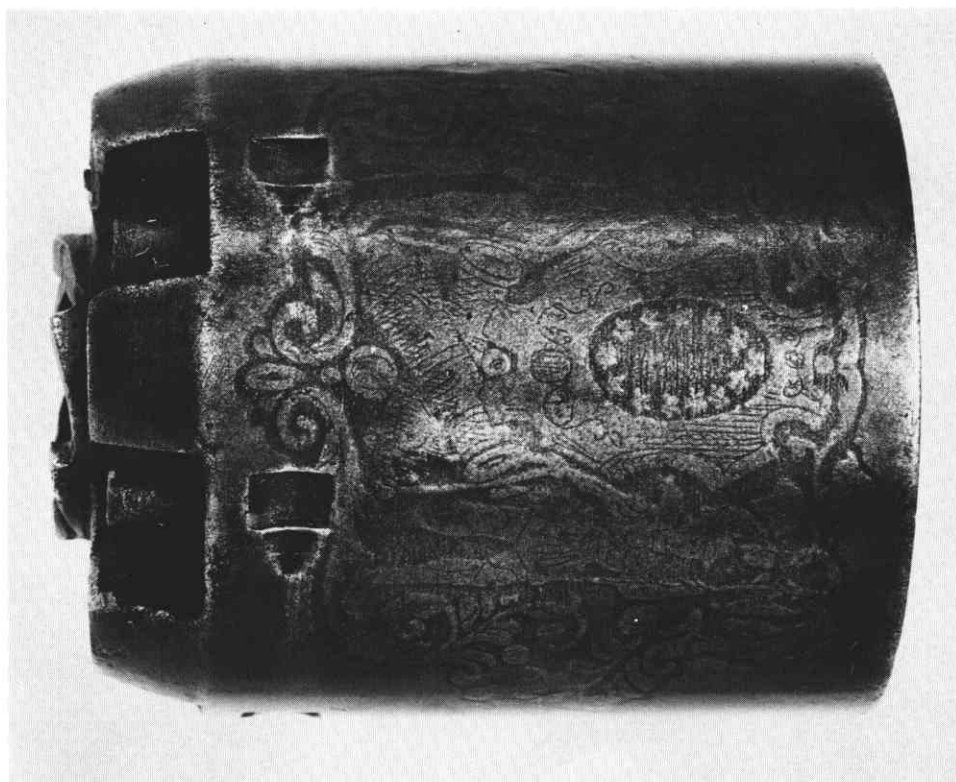
The proper way to carry a percussion revolver in the holster was to rotate the cylinder to the point where the

hammer, when let down, rests on the shoulder between the nipples. When this is done, one of the cylinders is straight out from the frame and can be loaded without a loading aperture.

A revolver in the Metzger collection at Texas A & M marked *L.E. Tucker & Sons*, serial number 79, does not have a loading aperture. This is one of the revolvers made by Leban E. Tucker before the war at Marshall, Texas. Perhaps Tucker felt that a loading aperture was not necessary and since he was the experienced revolver maker in the firm of Tucker, Sherrard & Co., that may be the reason this feature was left off their revolvers.

Looking at the details of the Lancaster dragoons, they, too should be divided into two main categories: the Tucker and Sherrards, with the square-backed trigger guards made by the firm of Tucker, Sherrard & Co., and the Clark and Sherrards made after the war by the firm of Clark, Sherrard & Co.

This article is an excerpt from the forthcoming book, *Confederate Revolvers* by William A. Gary.



An etched cylinder from a Clark & Sherrard revolver.