

# Smith & Wesson Rarities, 1854 – 1900

David R. Burghoff

The intent of this presentation is to outline the early product development of Smith & Wesson arms for the purpose of identifying rare models and variations. Rarity ranges from the unobtainable on down to guns that are simply hard to find in fine original condition. An attempt will be made to deal with actual production models, although at times it is difficult to draw a line between the experimental and limited production. The period 1854–1900 was chosen because it spans development from the very beginning up to the introduction of the hand ejectors which represent current revolver technology.

The chart, (opposite), is arranged chronologically by frame size and caliber; exceptions are noted. This format was chosen to give an overview of the years to be discussed.

In the relatively small manufacturing environment of New England, it was probable that Horace Smith and D.B. Wesson would become acquainted through arms industry activities. By the time they became partners both were experienced in their field. Smith had previously worked on the Hunt-Jennings rifle, which was an attempt to create a repeating firearm using externally primed, loaded ball ammunition. Wesson is known to have experimented with the Flobert cartridge at about the same time: 1851–1852<sup>1</sup>. Smith & Wesson joined forces in 1852 and began their manufacturing operation in Norwich, Connecticut, in 1854.

With a beginning curiously similar to that of Samuel Colt, Smith & Wesson got off to a false start in a location that was not to house their ultimately successful venture. Their first product was the iron frame Volcanic pistol.

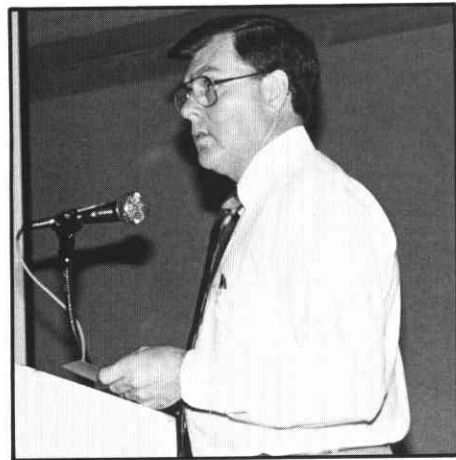
## IRON FRAME VOLCANICS

Manufactured: 1854–1855

Quantity: 1,700<sup>2</sup>

The iron frame Volcanics (Figure 2) were offered in two sizes: the small frame was .31 caliber and the large frame was .41 caliber.

Even though the partners were familiar with copper cased, self-contained cartridge technology, they went into production incorporating only an improvement of the Hunt-Jennings ammunition system, again a loaded ball, but this time with a built-in primer. This self-contained system brought the design one step closer to success, but lack of power and reliability dampened consumer acceptance. The business faltered and had to be refinanced, resulting in the loss of control by Smith & Wesson.



Because of limited production, iron frame Volcanics are quite rare today.

Regardless of their disappointment, the venture must have left a favorable impression on the partners, for correspondence shows that D.B. Wesson named his first son, Walter H. Wesson, after Walter Hunt<sup>3</sup>.

Over a year passed before the Smith & Wesson partnership was reformed. During this time Horace Smith moved to his hometown of Springfield, Massachusetts, while D.B. Wesson stayed on in Norwich and New Haven as Superintendent of the Volcanic Arms Company<sup>4</sup>.

## MODEL NO. 1, FIRST MODEL, FIRST ISSUE

Manufactured: 1857–1860

Quantity: 11,671

The Springfield operation began on November 18, 1856<sup>5</sup>. The first Springfield gun was known as the Number 1 Pistol; collectors today call it the First Model, First Issue (Figure 3). The gun was a seven shot revolver chambered for Smith & Wesson's revolutionary No. 1 cartridge. This model went through many engineering changes, resulting in six distinct types. The rarest First Model, First Issue, is the first type with production quantities at about 225. This gun can be identified not only by its flat spring barrel latch, but by the small key that acted as the retainer for the revolving recoil plate (Figure 4). The second type, which had the flat latch but not the key, is also scarce, with production quantities at about 900.

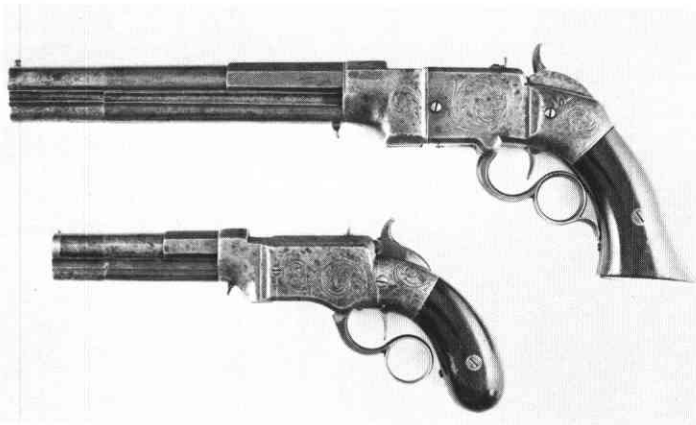


Figure 2: Iron Frame Volcanics



Figure 3: First Model, First Issue, First Type, Serial #11

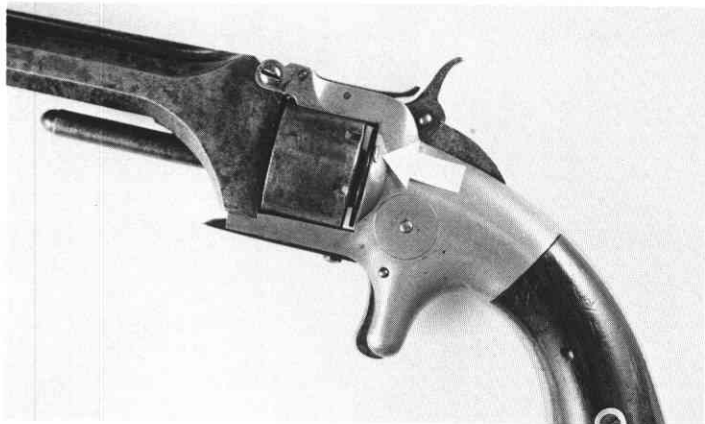


Figure 4: Detail: retainer key for revolving recoil plate



Figure 5: First Model, Second Issue

### MODEL NO. 1, SECOND ISSUE

Manufactured: 1860-1868

Quantity: 114,689

The Model No. 1, Second Issue (Figure 5) serial numbers were a continuation of the First Model, First Issue series. Serial numbers run from 11,672 to 126,361. Two rarities occur in this series: the side plate on the very early guns had a square shape along the back edge (Figure 6). There were probably only a few thousand guns made with this feature before the change was introduced; they are seldom found today. As we will see later when discussing the double actions, Smith & Wesson seemed to have a habit of changing side plates shortly after the introduction of a new model.

The other interesting oddity to appear in this series is the "second quality" guns. Because the factory was so heavily back ordered, they were hesitant to scrap frames that had minor blemishes but were still perfectly functional. In order to get these guns to market without compromising established quality standards, Smith & Wesson stamped the guns "2D.QUAL'TY" (Figure 7). Although 4,402 guns were so stamped over an eight year period, they are rarely seen on today's market. The second quality stamps are also on four other guns to be discussed later: the Model No. 1, Third Issue (7 guns); the Model No. 2, Army (35 guns); the Model No. 1-1/2, Old Model (6 guns); and the Model No. 1 1/2, New Model (41 guns)<sup>6</sup>.

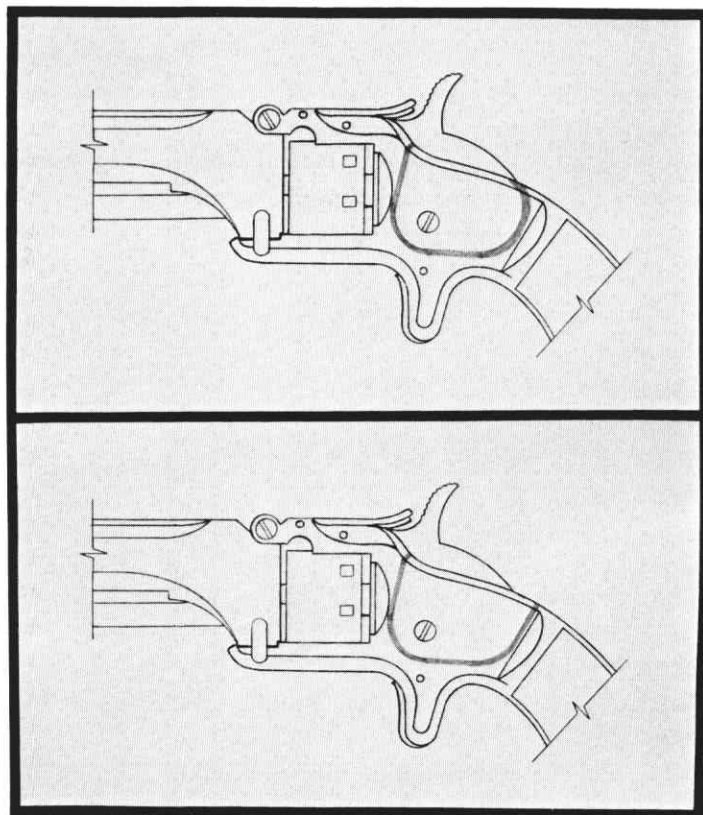


Figure 6: Standard sideplate (top) and square-cut sideplate on very early models (bottom)

### MODEL NO. 1, THIRD ISSUE

Manufactured: 1868–1881

Quantity: 131,163

The Model No. 1, Third Issue (Figure 8) was a modernization of the Model No. 1, Second Issue, and was given its own serial number range. The standard barrel length for this model is 3 3/16". A scarce variation is the short 2 11/16" barrel with the barrel stamping on the side rather than on the barrel rib.

### MODEL NO. 2, ARMY

Manufactured: 1861–1868

Quantity: 77,155

The No. 2 Army (Figure 9) was Smith & Wesson's first effort to produce an arm of a larger caliber. It was chambered for the S&W #2 or .32 caliber long rimfire cartridge and had a six round capacity.

Early guns were fitted with two pins in the top strap. One pin was a pivot for the cylinder stop, the other retained the cylinder stop return spring (Figure 10). Because of damage due to over-travel problems with the cylinder stop, a third pin was added to limit the length of stroke; this change took place at about serial number 3000. Two pin models are not often found on today's market.

The No. 2 Army (Figure 11) was first offered in barrel lengths of 5" and 6". However, a small quantity of 4" barrels were also produced; most are of late manufacture. A few guns with 8" barrels and oversized grips have turned up, but these are considered special order guns and not representative of standard production.

Another interesting variation in the No. 2 Army family (Figure 12) is the "half plate" finished guns. Standard finishes were blue or nickel; half plate guns had silver plated frames with blued cylinders and barrels.

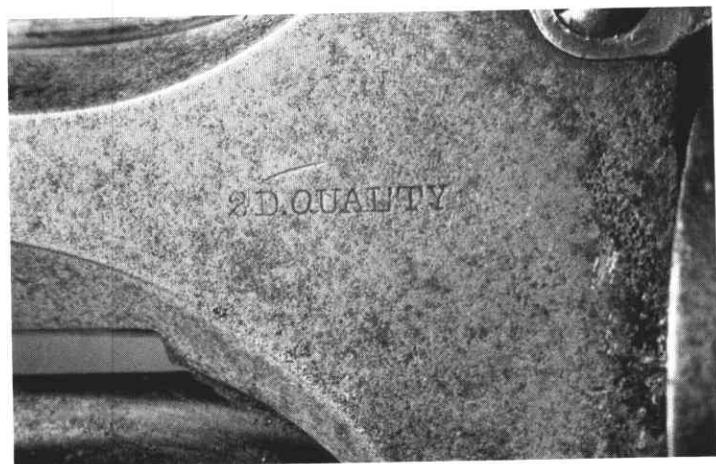


Figure 7: Second quality stamp



Figure 8: First Model, Third Issue, scarce 2 11/16" and standard 3 3/16" barrel



Figure 9: Model No. 2, Army



Figure 10: Detail: 2 & 3 pin straps



Figure 11: 5" and 6" barrels are common but 4" barrels are rare

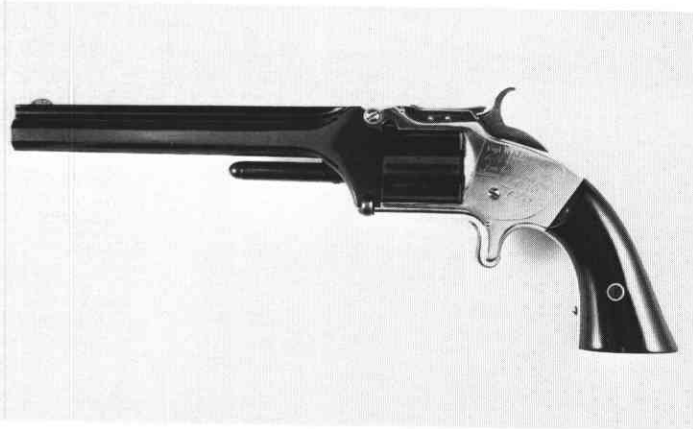


Figure 12: Half plate finish



Figure 13: Model No. 1 1/2, Old Model



Figure 14: Old Model 1 1/2, standard 3 1/2" barrel and scarce 4" barrel



Figure 15: Model 1 1/2 New Model

### MODEL NO. 1 1/2, OLD MODEL

Manufactured: 1865-1868

Quantity: approximately 26,000

As we have seen, the First Model was followed chronologically by the Model No. 2. It was after the Civil War that Smith & Wesson felt the need for a third frame size, a pocket-sized 5 shot pistol in .32 RF caliber. The naming of the new model was something of a challenge because the frame size fell between that of the First and Second Models; Smith & Wesson solved the problem by giving the new model the unwieldy name, Model 1 1/2 (Figure 13). This model underwent few engineering changes. One scarce variation has a 4" barrel length: the standard barrel was 3 1/2" (Figure 14).

### MODEL 1 1/2, NEW MODEL

Manufactured: 1868-1875

Quantity: 100,799

The Model 1 1/2, New Model (Figure 15), is a modernization of the Old Model. It is interesting to refer to the chart and note that the year of introduction was 1868, the same date that the Model No. 1, Third Issue, was introduced. Both guns underwent very similar design changes.

This model continued in the same serial range as the Old Model; numbers ran from approximately 26,320 to 127,000<sup>7</sup>.

Like the Old Model, the New Model (Figure 16) underwent few engineering changes. Again, barrel lengths offer the collector an interesting variation. As with the Model No. 1, Third Model, a scarce short barrel version was offered: the standard barrel length was 3 1/2", and the short barrel length was 2 1/2".

A few Old and New Model 1 1/2s have turned up in half-plate finish with silver frames and blued cylinders and barrels, similar to the half plate No. 2 Army.



Figure 16: New Model 1 1/2, scarce 2 1/2" and standard 3 1/2" barrel



## MODEL 1 1/2, TRANSITION

Manufactured: 1868

Quantity: approximately 650

Smith & Wesson purchased most of the parts for the Old Model 1 1/2 from King & Smith of Middletown, Connecticut<sup>8</sup>. Perhaps logistical problems contributed to the production of the rare Transition Model (Figure 17). When converting from the Old to the New Model 1 1/2, there was an excess of Old Model barrels. Rather than manufacture more Old Model parts, it was decided to use the barrels by fitting them to New Model frames: thus the "Transition" Model. Additional Old Model cylinders were produced to balance out production.

Serial numbers fall into the 27,000–28,000 range.

## MODEL 1 1/2, CENTERFIRE

Manufactured: 1878–1892

Quantity: 97,574

This model (Figure 18) represents a design departure from the original guns: other than the change from rim to centerfire, the gun also changed from a tip-up to a top-break design featuring automatic ejection.

An interesting variation unique to this model (Figure 19) is found on guns under the serial range of about 6,500: these early guns had a cam to tighten the main-spring rather than the standard screw through the front strap. Evidently the effort proved to be unpopular, because it never appeared on production guns thereafter. The standard tension screw, which goes all the way back to the Volcanics, is in use on revolvers currently manufactured.

Guns below serial number 100 are reported to have been equipped with hammers that had a half-cock; factory literature mentions this feature<sup>9</sup>. Later guns were equipped with a rebounding hammer system. Two specimens with serial numbers under 100 were examined, but both guns had the rebounding hammer. Either the number of guns with half-cock hammers is much fewer than estimated, or the two specimens had been modified.

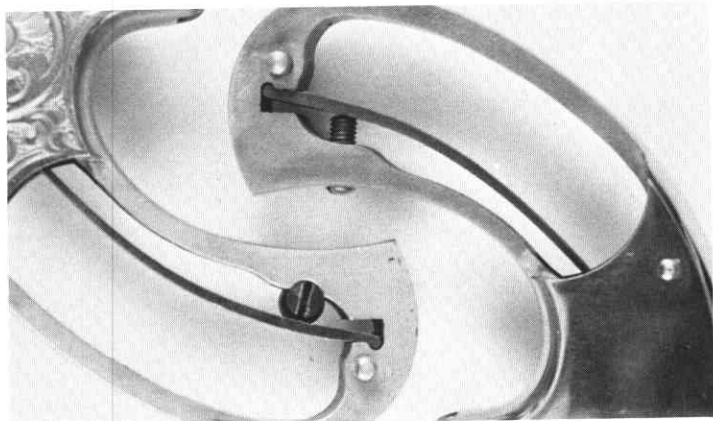


Figure 19: Early Model 1 1/2 centerfires incorporated a cam rather than a tension screw



Figure 18: The Model 1 1/2 Centerfire represented a departure from tip up to top break design.



Figure 17: The Transition Model 1 1/2 (center) has features of both the Old and New Model 1 1/2



Figure 20: .32 Double Action



Figure 21: Rare First Model .32 Double Action with square-cut sideplate



Figure 22: 8" and 10" barrel lengths are rare



Figure 23: .32 Safety Hammerless with 2" barrels are somewhat scarce

### .32 DOUBLE ACTION

Manufactured: 1880-1919

Quantity: 327,641

The Double Action (Figure 20) represents another giant step in arms development. The Double Action design quickly became popular and soon made obsolete the single action handguns.

Once again, like the First Model, Second Issue, we see a departure in side plate design which proved to be faulty; side plates were of key interest to the factory because the larger the opening, the easier the job of assembling the internal parts.

The First Model .32 D.A. (Figure 21), consisting of only 30 guns, was equipped with a square-cut side plate designed for ease of machining and maximum opening size. The design, however, led to a frame weakness, and the factory quickly reverted to the half-round configuration. There were a total of five model groupings in the .32 D.A. series.

A scarce variation to look for in later production is guns with 10" barrel lengths (Figure 22).

### .32 SAFETY HAMMERLESS (NEW DEPARTURE)

Manufactured: 1888-1937

Quantity: 242,981

The Safety Hammerless (Figure 23) was a .32 caliber, 5 shot gun featuring a break-open design with automatic extraction. There were three model groupings, identified by design changes in the barrel latch. No extreme rarities turned up in this series, although guns with 2" barrel lengths are somewhat scarce.

### .32 HAND EJECTOR, FIRST MODEL (MODEL I)

Manufactured: 1896-1903

Quantity: 19,712

The Hand Ejector (Figure 24) marked the beginning of revolver technology as we know it today. The important feature of the gun was a solid frame, designed to eliminate the weaknesses synonymous with hinges and barrel latches. Another innovation was the 6-shot side-swing cylinder with hand ejection system.

This gun was available with both service and target sights, is rare in the latter.



Figure 24: .32 Hand Ejectors with target sights are very rare

**.38 SINGLE ACTION, FIRST MODEL,  
(MODEL NO. 2, BABY RUSSIAN)**

Manufactured: 1876–1877

Quantity 25,584

The .38 Single Action (Figure 25) was still considered a No. 2 frame size by the factory. However, with the introduction of this model, the caliber changed from .32 RF to .38 CF.

Once again (Figure 26) we see radical engineering changes very early in production: about the first 100 guns were equipped with a safety feature referred to as the “Aldrich 38 Hammer”<sup>10</sup>. This was a mechanism that prevented the barrel from being unlatched when the gun was cocked. Even though the Aldrich feature was quickly dropped, frames machined for that design were used until about serial number 2,000. This provides the collector with another scarce variation: frames with an extra screw on the side opposite the side plate.

This model is also hard to find in blue rather than nickel finish; guns with wooden rather than hard rubber grips are also scarce.

**.38 SINGLE ACTION, SECOND MODEL**

Manufactured: 1877–1891

Quantity: 108,255

The Second Model (Figure 27) closely followed the design of the First Model with the exception of a change in the ejection system. The rack and gear extractor arrangement was replaced with a hook mechanism, resulting in a shorter ejector housing under the barrel.

8” and 10” barrel lengths are very scarce in this model.

**.38 SINGLE ACTION, THIRD MODEL  
(MODEL OF 1891)**

Manufactured: 1891–1911

Quantity: 28,107

The Third Model (Figure 28) resembles the second model with the addition of a trigger guard.

In spite of the quantity manufactured, this model is hard to find. The Mexican Models, First Model Single Shots, and combination sets are included in this serial range, so the number of basic models is fewer than implied.

With the introduction of this model (Figure 29), guns with spur triggers were no longer offered by Smith & Wesson. To accommodate customers who still requested spur triggers, the factory offered a conversion kit. Since Mexico represented the biggest market for spur trigger guns, the kit was referred to as the Mexican Kit<sup>11</sup>.

Two Mexican variations may be encountered (Figure 30). The first is the true Mexican Model, which was manufactured by the factory for export. In addition to the spur trigger, the gun was equipped with a hammer having



Figure 25: Baby Russian



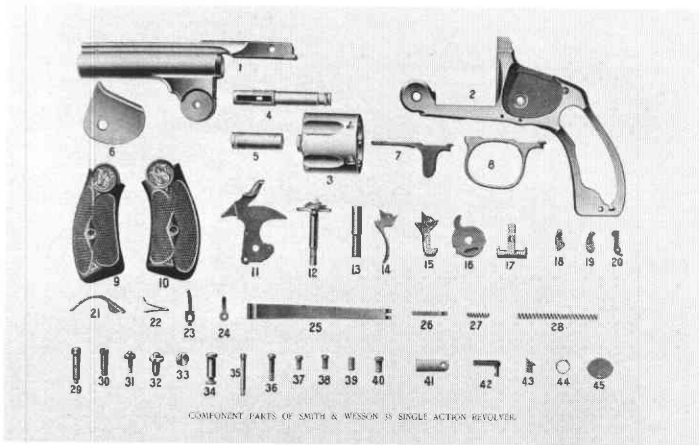
Figure 26: Detail: Showing extra screw for Aldrich 38 hammer



Figure 27: .38 Single Action, Second Model



Figure 28: Model of 1891



**Figure 29: Page from 1895 factory catalog showing Mexican trigger accessory**



**Figure 30: Model of 1891 with Mexican trigger conversion**



**Figure 31: Singleshot built on Model 1891 frame**



**Figure 32: Combination Set**

flat sides rather than the flanged thumb piece on the standard model. This hammer had a half-cock rather than the standard rebounding action.

The second variation is a gun with a Mexican trigger kit but with a flanged, rebounding hammer.

Both variations are quite rare, only a few thousand were produced.

1,251 First Model Single Shots (Figure 31), mostly in .22 caliber, were built on this frame. In addition, combination sets were made, consisting of a Third Model revolver with a single shot barrel, screwdriver, target grips, and cleaning rod in a factory case. Combination sets are very rare with total production estimated at 90 (Figure 32).

Other hard-to-find variations in this series are First Model Single Shots in .32 or .38 caliber, with fewer than 400 produced.

### .38 DOUBLE ACTION

Manufactured: 1880–1911

Quantity: 554,077

The development of the .38 Double Action (Figure 33) closely parallels the .32 Double Action discussed earlier. Both guns were introduced in 1880, both had 5 model changes, and both First Models had square cut side plates.

The First Model .38 Double Action is not as rare as the .32 Double Action, however, with about 4,000 produced.

Again barrel lengths of 8" and 10" are scarce.

### .38 SAFETY HAMMERLESS (NEW DEPARTURE)

Manufactured: 1887–1940

Quantity: 261,493

The .38 Safety Hammerless (Figure 34A) was similar to the smaller .32 Safety Hammerless, but it went through five rather than three model changes.

A scarce variation is the 2" barrel length (Figure 34B) which appears only in later production.



**Figure 33: .38 Double Action**



A rare variation (Figure 35) occurred in the Second Model group when 100 guns were purchased by the U.S. government for testing. These guns were supplied in blue finish with 6" barrels and were marked "U.S." on the barrel.

**.38 HAND EJECTOR (M & P) (MODEL 1899)**

Manufactured: 1899-1902

Quantity: 20,975

Approximately the first 50 guns made (Figure 36) lacked barrel markings, creating a rare early variation.

Also of interest are 1,000 guns (each) made for the Army and Navy. These guns are readily identifiable by military and inspectors' marks.

Another scarce variation is the commercial model chambered for the .38 Long Colt (.38 U.S. Service cartridge).

**FIRST AND SECOND AMERICAN & OLD, OLD MODEL RUSSIAN MODELS (MODEL NO. 3)**

Manufactured: 1871-1874

Quantity: see text

There were 32,800 First and Second Model Americans (Figure 37) produced, including about 5,000 commercial Old, Old Model Russians. In addition there were 20,000 contract 00Ms produced. The 00M is essentially an American, with the exception of the chambering. "As explained to a correspondent by D.B. Wesson, 'the difference between the American and Russian Model (cartridge) is, the shell in the American Model is the same outside diameter as the bullet, and is crimped to hold the bullet in, while the shell of the Russian is made of the same diameter inside as the bullet' " <sup>12</sup>.

This was Smith & Wesson's first big frame or Number 3 arm. Like other introductions, there were immediate engineering changes which led to scarce variations. The many changes that took place in a relatively short period of time created a complex and confusing history for collectors to unravel. Due to time and space limita-



Figure 34A: .38 Safety Hammerless



Figure 34B: A Fifth Model with 2" barrel



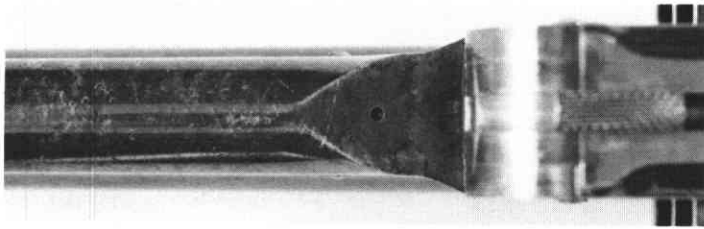
Figure 35: Detail: U.S. markings on Second Model .38 Safety Hammerless



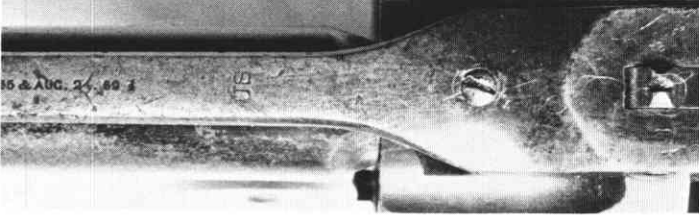
Figure 37: First Model American



Figure 36: .38 Hand Ejector, Army Contract



**Figure 38: Detail: oil hole on early First Model American**



**Figure 39: Detail: U.S. markings on American Models**



**Figure 40: Detail: First Model American**



**Figure 41: Detail: Transition Model American**



**Figure 42: Detail: Second Model American**

tions the identification of scarce variations is somewhat simplified here.

The American in its original form (Figure 38) had an oil hole in the bottom of the extractor housing. This was dropped at about serial number 1500. "Oil Hole" Americans are scarce on today's market.

One thousand First Model Americans were produced for the U.S. Government (Figure 39). These guns can be identified by a small "US" stamped on the top rear of the barrel. 800 guns were furnished in blue finish and 200 in nickel<sup>13</sup>.

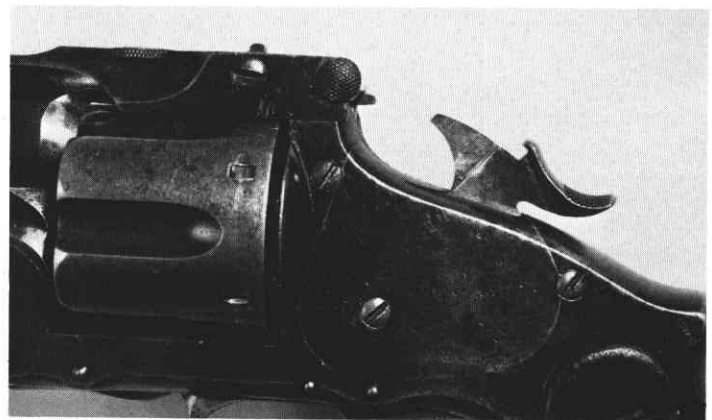
The Second Model American (Figures 40, 41, & 42) is distinguished by two engineering changes: a notched hammer which engages a protrusion in the barrel latch to keep it from being dislodged from recoil and a larger trigger pin which necessitated an enlargement in the surrounding frame. An overlap in manufacturing created Transition guns. Transition guns have the First Model frame with the small trigger pin but with the notched hammer from the Second Model. Transitions occur in two serial ranges: from 3,500 to 3,900 and from 6,500 to 8,500.

Thirty-two First Model Americans were supplied to the Nashville Police Force in 1871. These are identifiable by their 6" barrel length and the legend "Nashville Police" engraved on the backstrap.

Any rimfire guns (.44 Henry caliber) in a No. 3 frame size (Figure 43) can be considered rare. Only a few hundred were produced among all three models.

Any guns in this group with a detachable shoulder stock are extremely rare. The revolvers will have special cuts on the back strap and butt. Collectors may find specimens that are cut through the serial numbers or specimens with numbers that are positioned to allow space for the cuts. Both varieties might be factory original, but those cut through the numbers could also be reworked guns, which can affect value.

Russian contract guns with Cyrillic barrel markings



**Figure 43: Detail: Rimfire hammer**

(Figure 44) were made in large quantities, but few specimens are available in this country.

Finally, barrel lengths shorter than the common 8" length are hard to find, with scarcity inversely proportioned to length.

**OLD & NEW MODEL RUSSIAN MODELS  
(MODEL NO. 3)**

Manufactured: 1873-1878  
Quantity: see text

The Old and New Model Russians (Figure 45) are a continuation of technology begun with American Models. However, their appearance was altered dramatically, due to changes requested by the Russian Government.

Since most of the changes are designed to control recoil, it can be assumed that the Russians found the Americans and the 00Ms difficult to grip, especially on horseback. Changes included a pronounced hump on the back strap, a finger spur on the trigger guard, and a wider and more upturned hammer thumbpiece.

Serial ranges require a lengthy explanation because of overlaps and factory errors. For a detailed account of serial numbers, read *Smith & Wesson 1857-1945*, revised edition, by Roy G. Jinks and Robert J. Neal, Cranbury, New Jersey: A.S. Barnes & Co., Inc., 1975.

Again stocked guns, Cyrillic marked guns, and rimfire guns are extremely rare.

In this series a separate serial range in .44 rimfire caliber was produced under a Turkish contract (Figure 46). Identifying characteristics are the rimfire hammer and Arabic markings in several places on the gun. Also, a close inspection of the firing pin hole will show that the frame was altered from centerfire by plugging the firing pin hole and milling a rimfire slot. 5,000 guns were produced, but specimens are scarce in the U.S.

Also in this series, a contract for 1,000 guns was filled with Japan. These guns were marked with an anchor design on the bottom strap (Figure 47).

**NEW MODEL NO. 3**

Manufactured: 1878-1912  
Quantity: 35,796

The New Model No. 3 (Figure 48) was the final stage of development in the big frame, single action series. This model has an outstanding reputation as a target gun, was also ordered by many foreign governments for military use.



Figure 45: Old Model Russian



Figure 46: Old Model Russian, first Turkish contract

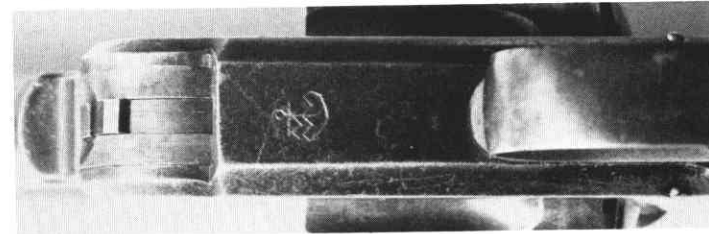


Figure 47: Detail: Japanese contract marking



Figure 48: New Model No. 3

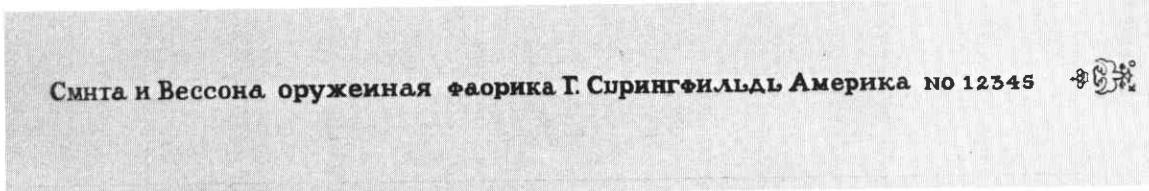


Figure 44: Detail: Cyrillic barrel markings on Russian contract gun



**Figure 49: New Model No. 3 with hooked trigger guard**



**Figure 50: New Model No. 3 with detachable shoulder stock**



**Figure 51: New Model No. 3 with 3" barrel**



**Figure 52: New Model No. 3, Australian contract**

The New Model No. 3 was available in over 14 calibers as well as smooth bore. Calibers .44 Russian, 32-44, and 38-44 are common; all others should be considered rare.

A variation that is fairly uncommon is a New Model No. 3 with a hook on the trigger guard (Figure 49) similar to the earlier Russian Models. Plain trigger guards were standard.

Also like the American and Russian Models, stocked guns and shorter barrel lengths (Figures 50 & 51) should be considered rare.

There were a number of New Model No. 3s made under special contract; most have identifying marks and features:

#### State of Maryland Contract

280 guns were supplied. The most obvious identifying mark was a "US" on the butt.

#### Japanese Navy Contract

An estimated 2,500 guns were supplied. The most obvious identifying mark is an anchor stamped in front of the trigger guard. Some anchors have wavy lines through them and some are plain.

#### Australian Contract

250 stocked guns were supplied to the Australian Colonial Police (Figure 52). The most obvious identifying marks are the Broad Arrow proof marks on the butt of the revolver and the tang of the stock. Another unique feature is that the stocks were numbered to match the guns.

#### Japanese Artillery Contract

A small but unknown quantity of guns were supplied. The most obvious identifying mark is a Japanese character on the extractor housing.

#### Argentina Contract

2,000 guns were supplied. The most obvious identifying mark is the legend "Ejercito Argentino" stamped over the trigger guard.

#### Unmarked U.S. Government Contract

The U.S. Government ordered 207 New Model No. 3s under 2 separate contracts. These guns have no special marks and can be identified only by serial numbers, a list of which is given on page 189 of *Smith & Wesson 1857-1945*, revised edition, by Roy G. Jinks and Robert J. Neal, Cranbury, New Jersey: A.S. Barnes and Co., Inc., 1975.

Many variations of the new Model No. 3 were built on the same basic frame but in separate serial number series. Most of these offshoots, discussed below, are quite scarce.



### NEW MODEL NO. 3, TARGET

Manufactured: 1887–1910

Quantity: 4,333

This model (Figure 53) was available in both 32-44 and 38-44 calibers. The 38-44 is the scarcest of the two with only 1,413 produced. Near the end of production, the cylinder length was changed from 1 7/16" to 1 9/16" making the "long strap" guns a scarce variation numbering only in the hundreds.

Detachable shoulder stocks were available but are seldom found as matched sets today.

### NEW MODEL NO. 3, TURKISH MODEL

Manufactured: 1879–1883

Quantity: 5,461

This Turkish Model (Figure 54) is essentially a New Model No. 3 in .44 rimfire caliber. In spite of the number made, this model is scarce in this country. 5,281 were shipped to Turkey, and most of the few remaining commercial overruns were exported.

The Turkish Model can be identified by its distinctive rimfire hammer as well as the inspector's initials "AFC" on the left grip.

### NEW MODEL NO. 3, FRONTIER

Manufactured: 1885–1908

Quantity: 2,072

This model (Figure 55) was chambered in 44-40. This caliber required the longer 1 9/16" cylinder which, after introduction, was also used in other New Model No. 3 series: this explains the long strap variations. The Frontier is hard to find today because many of the original guns were converted back to .44 Russian caliber by the factory.

This model with target sights or detachable extension stocks is quite scarce.

### NEW MODEL NO. 3, 38-40 WINCHESTER

Manufactured: 1900–1907

Quantity: 74

This gun (Figure 56) has the outward appearance of the standard New Model No. 3 but can be identified by its low serial number range, long cylinder, and caliber. Specimens I have examined had the caliber designation "38 Winchester Ctg" on the barrel.

### NEW MODEL 320 REVOLVING RIFLE

Manufactured: 1879–1887

Quantity: 977

The Revolving Rifle (Figure 57) was uncomfortable to shoot because of escaping gas between the cylinder and the barrel. This led to poor consumer acceptance, resulting in limited production.

This long arm was built on the New Model No. 3 frame; the extended barrel was of two piece construction. The gun was offered in 16", 18", and 20" barrel lengths.



Figure 53: New Model No. 3 target model



Figure 54: New Model No. 3, Second Turkish contract



Figure 55: New Model No. 3, Frontier Model



Figure 56: New Model No. 3, 38-40 Winchester



**Figure 57: Revolving Rifle**



**Figure 58: .44 Double Action**



**Figure 59: .44 Double Action Favorite**



**Figure 60: 38-40 Double Action**

A Revolving Rifle in good condition is hard to find today, not only because of the limited production, but because some specimens were cut down and otherwise abused by the owners.

Revolving Rifles in nickel are very scarce.

#### .44 DOUBLE ACTION

Manufactured: 1881–1913

Quantity: 54,668

.44 Double Actions with target sights or long 1 9/16" cylinders (Figure 58) (similar to the New Model No. 3 Targets) are scarce.

The variation known as the "Favorite" (Figure 59) is extremely rare. These guns fall in the same serial range as the standard .44 Double Actions. They differ, however, because of the many weight-reducing slots milled on the gun's surface and the patent dates on the cylinder flutes rather than the barrel rib.

#### 38-40 DOUBLE ACTION

Manufactured: 1900–1910

Quantity: 276

This gun (Figure 60) has the outward appearance of the .44 double action but can be identified by its low serial number range, long cylinder, and caliber. Also, the caliber, ".38 Winchester Ctg.," was stamped on the left side of the barrel.

#### .44 DOUBLE ACTION FRONTIER

Manufactured: 1886–1913

Quantity: 15,340

Guns with target sights (Figure 61) are scarce.

#### FIRST AND SECOND MODEL SCHOFIELD

Manufactured: 1875–1877

Quantity: 8,969

The Schofield models (Figure 62), like the Russian models, were offshoots of the Model No. 3 American. This model was developed in cooperation with Bvt. Col. George W. Schofield, whose brother John was president of the U.S. Army's small arms board<sup>14</sup>. Most Schofields were blue finish, but a few were in nickel. Most were government contract guns, but a few civilian guns were produced. Therefore, these models in original nickel finish, or without the standard U.S. Government markings, are quite rare.

The Wells Fargo Schofields have not been included here because they are aftermarket variations rather than factory models.

## CONCLUSION

Smith & Wesson has been one of the most successful and enduring gun manufacturers in America; unfortunately, the large number of Smith & Wesson arms manufactured has created a false impression that all models are quite common. Hopefully this paper will encourage collectors to take a second look at that next Smith & Wesson in hope of discovering one of the many Smith & Wesson rarities.

## Thanks

My sincere thanks to Peter DeRose who made many rare Smith & Wessons from his collection available to me for photographing. Guns from the DeRose collection are pictured in Figures 11, 12, 20, 21, 23, 24, 26, 33, 34, 35, 36, 39, 43, 46, 47, 50, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 58, 59, 60, and 61. The other guns are from the author's collection.

## Notes

1. Roy G. Jinks, *History of Smith & Wesson*, Beinfeld Publishing, Inc., North Hollywood, California, 1977, p. 20.
2. Roy G. Jinks and Robert J. Neal, *Smith & Wesson 1857-1945*, A. S. Barnes and Co., Inc., Cranbury, New Jersey. NOTE: Serial number ranges unless otherwise noted are from this source.
3. Letter H. Hunt to D.B. Wesson II, 4/25/34, author's collection.
4. Col. B.R. Lewis, "The Volcanic Arms," *American Rifleman*, November, 1957, p. 49.
5. John E. Parsons, *Smith & Wesson Revolvers*, William Morrow & Company, New York, 1957, p. 7.
6. Jinks and Neal, *Smith & Wesson 1857-1945*, p. 25, 29, 65, 56, and 59.
7. Vern G. Eklund, "Smith & Wesson Model 1 1/2 Tip up Revolver — A Survey," *Man at Arms*, Volume Four, Number Six, November/December 1982.
8. Vern G. Eklund, "King & Smith," *Arms Gazette*, November, 1979.
9. Factory operating instructions, author's collection.
10. Jinks and Neal, *Smith & Wesson 1857-1945*, p. 110.
11. 1895 Factory catalog, author's collection.
12. Parsons, op. cit., p. 104.
13. Roy Double, *Variations of the Smith & Wesson American 1870-1874*, Inverness, Florida, 1971, p. 1.
14. Parsons, op. cit., p. 85.



Figure 61: .44 Double Action Frontier Model



Figure 62: First and Second Model Schofields