

A Plain Old Maynard Rifle

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In the game of collecting arms, it is uncommon to be able to determine the original owner of a particular item. Certainly there are many pieces displayed at American Society meetings associated with the rich and famous. Offhand I can recall one of General Grant's presentation swords, George Washington's pistols, Robert E. Lee's pistol, and the Lewis air gun. All had the character alluded to; that is, they were tied to someone of historical interest whose very importance guaranteed articles associated with that person were preserved either publicly or privately. While I posit the importance of the person to be the reason for preservation of these important pieces, I am not unmindful of their intrinsic value. Perhaps the tail of intrinsic value wags the dog of the weapons first owner's history. I'm not sure.

My collection is no different than most of yours. We all commonly ascribe a theme to our collecting. It is always interesting to hear ASAC members describe their fields of interest during the introductory part of our meetings. In case you have not noticed the thrust of many members' description of their collecting interest changes from time to time.

My personal collection has been put together over some 60 years, and while its main thrust is schuetzen rifles and single shot rifles made or used in the west, it has many divergences ranging from a mid 1600's English Fowler to 1903 Springfields. No automatics. I have carefully maintained a catalog of my collection with special emphasis on provenance, not only to prove the chain of ownership but also to place the particular piece in its proper historical niche. Tragically, nearly all my provenance entries commence with acquisition of the particular item from a dealer or from another collector. Occasionally an entry will trace the item through two or three collections or dealers. A very few relate to an owner who actually used the weapon, and even fewer identify that first owner. As my collection and friendships with arms collectors grew it was readily apparent that not only I but also my fellow collectors lacked any knowledge of the people who first owned and used our old weapons.

To illustrate, in the recent publication *Ballard The Great American Single Shot Rifle*¹ by John Dutcher, the



author noted the provenance of a number of the rifles pictured therein. Of the some 113 Ballards identified as having any provenance, only two revealed the identity of the first owner. All of the remaining 111 appear to have as provenance only a chain of possession by known firearms collectors and dealers. If we were to calculate the percentage of first owner provenance to all the provenances revealed by Dutcher, we would determine that 1.77 percent of the illustrated firearms had first owner provenance. Not many firearms authors have been concerned with provenance; Dutcher should be commended for making it a serious part of his study. While my illustration relates to the Dutcher book, it should only be interpreted as an illustration and should not be accepted as scientific proof of expectations of first owner provenance. To the statistician, the sample is too small.

What has this provenance thing got to do with my plain old Maynard rifle? Let us take a look.

The tale of my Maynard commences with a phone call from an old college acquaintance and friend, George Hoyem. When George was preparing his fourth volume of *The History And Development Of Small Arms Ammunition*² he requested permission to photograph certain of my rifles to illustrate his book. He visited my home and was apparently impressed with the Maynard portion of my collection. A number of them were photographed and included in the publication. Later, came another phone call

from George inquiring whether I would be interested in purchasing a Maynard belonging to someone whose wife was uncomfortable with guns in the house. What was described seemed to be a rather plain rifle. But then he mentioned the rifle had three barrels and was accompanied by a wooden box containing original tools similar to some of those we had looked at in my collection. Interest rose. Telling me there were some papers that appeared to be related to the old gun set the hook.

A phone call to the owner of the rifle confirmed it was for sale and that he had an appraisal to determine an asking price. From information he was able to supply, I simply could not determine whether this outfit was something that was of interest to me. Before we concluded the conversation, the owner agreed to ship the entire lot including the extra material on approval, to be returned if I so desired. I asked him to make a detailed inventory and to keep a copy so there would be no question about the contents of the shipment.

The outfit came in three packages, two arriving one day and the third two days later. Panic is the best description of my state of mind for those two days. Had UPS lost a valuable shipment containing the three irreplaceable barrels? Computer tracking revealed the barrels were somewhere between Spokane, Washington and Billings, Montana. Finally, the UPS truck pulled up to our door. Quick inspection revealed the package to have been roughly treated so I insisted on opening it in the presence of the deliveryman who protested he knew nothing of how the package got in that condition. He further protested he had nothing to do with damage claims. I'm sure it was as much relief to him as to me that the barrels were unharmed.

I spent several hours inspecting the shipment. While the 75 to 80 percent condition of the rifle and the three barrels left something to be desired, the tools, shells, molds and accompanying paper made up for that deficit. My apologetic explanation to my wife was that at least I saved the shipping costs had I returned all of the shipment to the Seattle area. Let us now look at the major items contained in the shipment.

We start with the breech piece and the barrels, Figures 1 and 1A. The buttstock with its pistol grip, high quality walnut and checkering fit the usually accepted definitions of a Maynard #16 rifle. The rear sight is an obvious substitution that greatly decreases the value of the weapon. On the left side of the receiver, in addition to the Massachusetts Arms Co. stamp, appears the date 1873, designating this as a model 1873 rifle. No 1882 date appears on the right side of the receiver as is usual on rifles with factory fitted barrels chambered for 1882 cartridges yet the features such as ham-

mer and firing pin system mark this as a rifle usually denominated as a model 1882. All of the barrels have walnut forend tips, again indicative of a model 16 as described in the 1885 catalog. The barrels are chambered for 1882 cartridges, they being 22-10 center fire, 32-35 center fire, and 44-100 center fire. The buttstock is typical of model 16 Maynard rifles and has an inletted silver monogram inscribed with the initials J.E.W. and the date 1894. The reason this rifle set is unique is the accompanying original sets of equipment to reload ammunition for all the barrels, the original cartridge cases, other small accessories, and the papers that relate it back to its beginning.

Figure 2 depicts the center fire .22 caliber loading tools and two original boxes of .22-center fire ammunition. It is difficult to photograph small objects but be assured your eyes are not kidding: the miniature powder funnel was indeed fabricated out of an Ex-Lax box! The loading tool with its integral bullet mold was made by Ideal, as was the bullet sizer.

Figure 3 shows the .32-35 center fire Maynard loading equipment. Actually, there are two sets of implements in this caliber. The Maynard set consists of a unique Maynard paper patch mold, a Maynard bullet seater, a Hadley capping device and a hammer to use with the bullet seater. The second set consists of an early 32-35 Ideal tool with integral mold. Undoubtedly, this second loading tool was added to the set after its initial purchase. Proper everlasting cartridge cases and paper-patched bullets complete the outfits for this caliber.

Figure 4 shows the simple Maynard tools utilized to load the 44-100 cartridges. The top item is the bullet seater and the bottom is the biggest Hadley capping device I have ever personally handled. It takes the spent primers out of the fired cases and replaces them with new ones. The cartridge cases are of the heavy everlasting variety and the bullets are 550-grain products of the Sharps factory. Because only Sharps factory bullets came with this set, it is doubtful it ever was equipped with an original bullet mold in this caliber. Both these original bullets and cartridge cases are irreplaceable; they must be treated tenderly.

A very rare Troemner balance for weighing powder appears here as Figure 5. This balance was manufactured in Philadelphia by the Henry Troemner firm. The lid carries the notation "not to be used in weighing loads of less than 10 grains". The weights accompanying the scale are gradated in drachms, scruples and grains but easily converted to grains by reference to a small printed table glued to the inside of the drawer.³

A comparison of the cartridges for the three barrels appears as Figure 6. All of the described loading tools plus

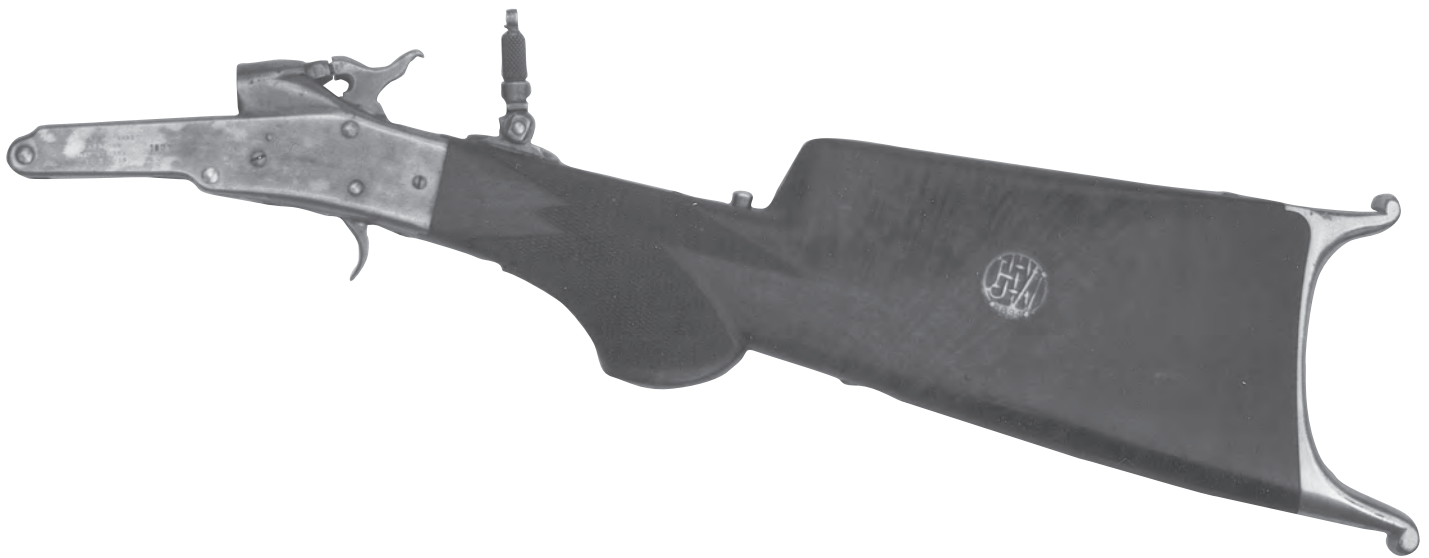


Figure 1. Maynard breech piece.



Figure 1A. Maynard barrels.

numerous other small articles was safeguarded in an old wooden dynamite box noted as Figure 7. The box bears the date 1936. Note how the ordinary wooden box was adapted to the function of preserving these valuable Maynard tools. Practical, utilitarian, frugal and reminiscent of the economics of the 1930s.

Turning to the documents accompanying the rifle outfit we first consider an undated and unsigned letter type document describing the rifle and its shooting qualities. The writer's choice of words and punctuation indicate a rather limited education not uncommon in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

"Maynard Rifle No. 4

Made special order

Bought by me at Salida, Colo. in 1894 from the factory.

I wanted a rifle suitable for all purposes.

The 22-10-45 (or 22 cal. 10 grains of black powder, and a 45 grain bullet.) This barrel is for general cheap shooting for squirrels, rabbits. Target. And will kill deer at 100 yards where you can get a vital shot at it.

The 32-.35-165. is for target, deer, wolves or elk, small bear etc.

The 44-100-550 or 405 lead is for elk and large bear, and target shooting and is good up to 1000 yards.

But I took the rear sight off as it was large and long to reach back and loop over the pin the stock,—as protection,

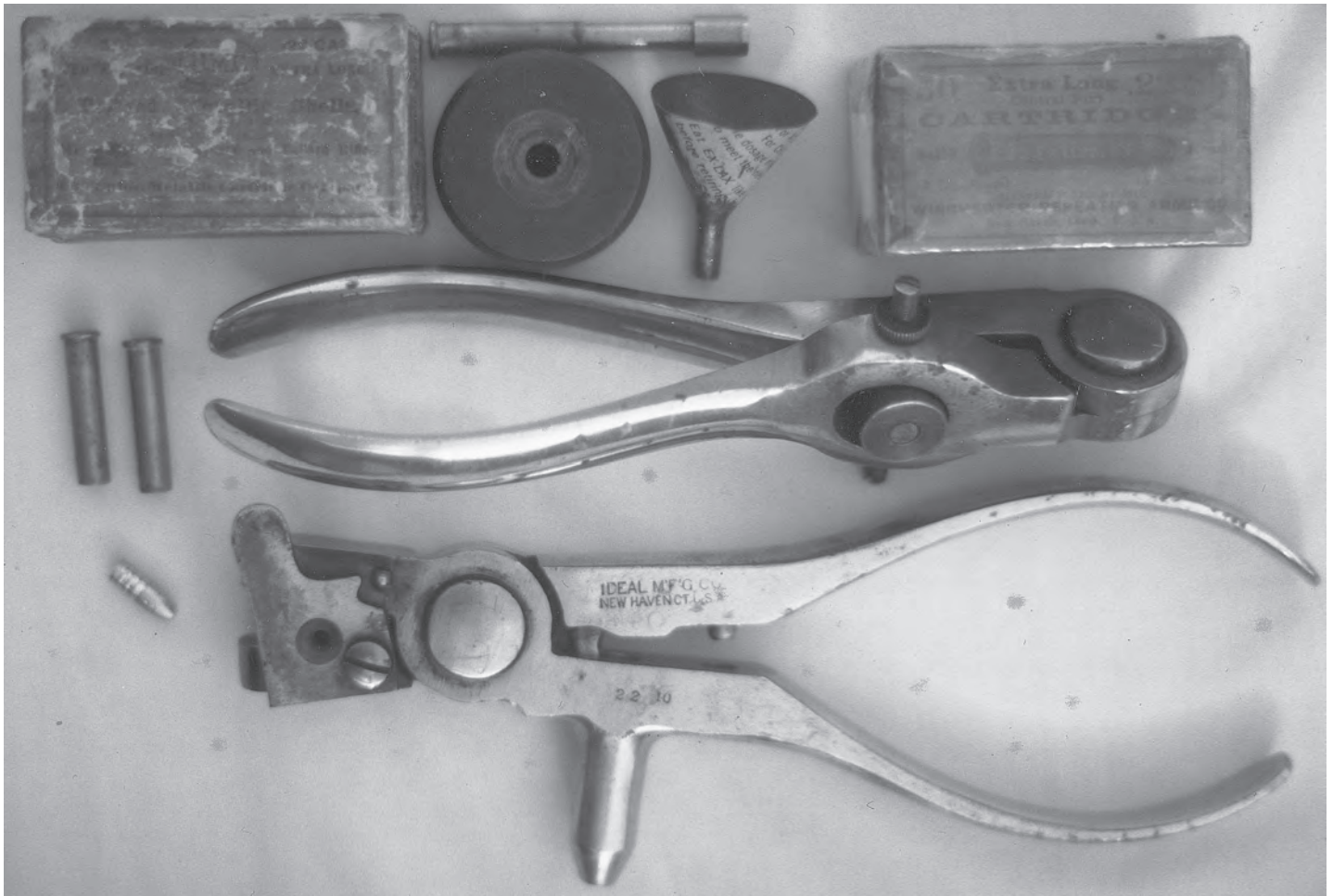


Figure 2. .22 caliber loading tools & cartridges .32-35.

clear back of the present sight when laid down. It was long enough to sight at 1500 yards. The present sight for this 44 barrel is only good for 5 or 6 hundred yards or as far as I ever expected to use it, for as one never takes time to raise the rear sight when shooting at game, but sights *over the top* and guesses at the different ranges. I always set the rear sight at 1 hundred yards and never change that. These three barrels are all different sizes. So the rear sight has got to be set for each individual barrel. For the 32 barrel the rear sight to be turned down as far as it will go. This will be right for 100 yards or less. If you want to shoot longer range at target you will have to try it out before hand where to set the sight for different distances. But I never raised the sight above the 100 yard range.

For the 22 barrel raise the rear sight $\frac{3}{4}$ turn which brings it to a little notch I filed on the top of the knurled sleeve. This notch to be directly *back* toward the butt of the stock. This will be right for 100 yards.

If you ever use the 44 barrel you will have to find out where to set the sight. You will never use this barrel unless you get to where there are grizzly bear.

The rifle was bought some two or three years before the smokeless rifles were made and only black powder was

used. The bullets in black powder shells travel much slower than the smokeless high speed bullets. Consequently the bullets with black powder makes more of an arch in long shots. So requires more accurate calculations to make good shots at long distances.

The 32 barrel is as accurate as any rifle I ever shot.

The 22 is very accurate also. And so is the 44 a very accurate barrel. It costs very much less to shoot when you load your own shells. But do not load too many shells ahead as the powder is apt to cake especially if you fill the shells a little too full so as to compress the powder, then they will not shoot accurate. I tap the shells lightly to settle the powder then have the shells just full enough so the bullet just touches the powder when it is seated and not pack the powder.

I usually load enough shells in the winter when not working to last me until the next winter."

The combination of the monogram on the butt-stock and the unsigned letter are important clues but do not conclusively prove the true name of the first owner of this Maynard rifle. Looking farther we come to a letter written to me by Milton Thompson, the man from whom I purchased the outfit. That letter reveals Milton inherited the Maynard from his uncle Amos Cecil Thompson, who was



Figure 3. Maynard loading tools & cartridges.

born in Marshall, Wisconsin in 1901 and died in 1968. Amos was a gun nut, more of a shooter than a collector but he apparently collected some ammunition and in addition to the Maynard owned a Frank Wesson removable stock rifle. By the 1930's Amos was living in Spokane, Washington, and an active shooter with the Spokane Rifle Club. Later he moved to western Washington where he continued shooting. Milton noted his Uncle Amos was a frugal man who cast his own bullets and loaded ammunition for his own use and for others. Because of these characteristics, it is highly likely he remodeled the 1936 dynamite box for storage of this outfit.

With this information we look again at the unsigned letter. The language of the letter is instructional, written by a shooter very familiar with the Maynard telling someone equally versed not only a bit of its history but also its utilization and shooting qualities. Certainly Uncle Amos Thompson was qualified to be the recipient of such information, but again, no written proof of that fact. However, his possession of the rifle outfit coupled with his expert-

ise is strong circumstantial evidence he was the recipient. Among the papers are notes identified by Allen Thompson as having been written by Amos Thompson evidencing Amos' familiarity with usage of this rifle in all of the calibers. From these it is apparent Amos possessed it for a rather long period of time again lending credence to his being the recipient of the letter. While there is little reason to include those notes here, Amos' usage and grammar is so different from that of the unsigned letter that it becomes apparent they were not written by the same person.

The fact that the historical monogram bearing the date 1894 comports with the statement in the unsigned letter "Bought by me at Salida Colo. in 1894 from the factory" is very strong evidence the unsigned letter was written by the person whose monogram appears on the buttstock. Again, that person's initials were J.E.H. Finally, the person who wrote the letter is the one who filed the notch in the rear sight sleeve to adjust it for shooting the .22 barrel at 100 yards. That notch is still in place.

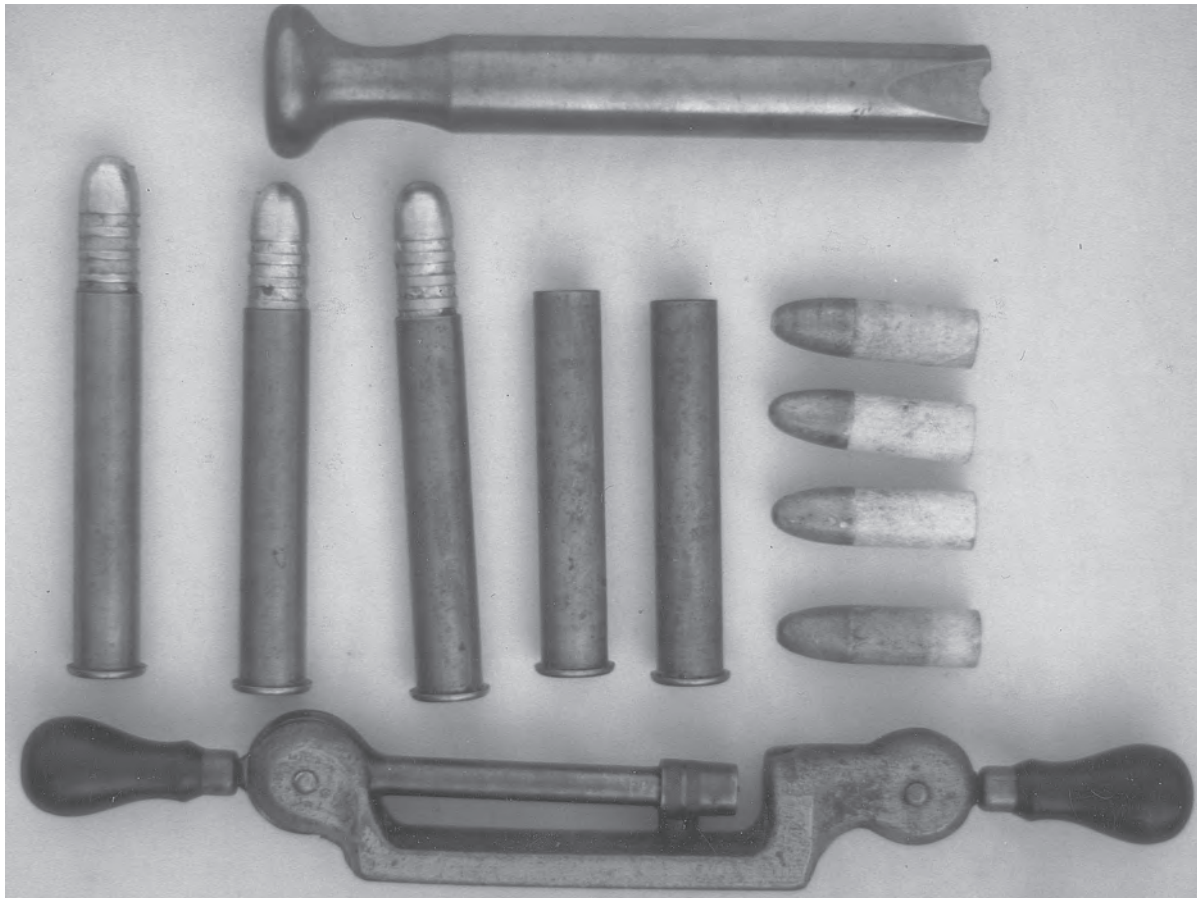


Figure 4. .44-100 loading tools & cartridges.

With the documents accompanying this rifle is an envelope postmarked at Spokane, Washington on September 16, 1911 and addressed to J. E. Weger at Keisling, Washington.⁵ When Milton Thompson received this Maynard outfit from his Uncle Amos' estate, the unsigned letter was enclosed in that envelope.⁶

To restate the evidence, the man who wrote the unsigned letter was living in Salida, Colorado in 1894. The rifle outfit that is the subject of this inquiry is exactly as described in that letter right down to the notch in the tang sight. Installed on the buttstock of the rifle is a silver monogram with the initials J.E.W. and the date 1894. The unsigned letter was enclosed in an old envelope from an insurance company in Spokane, Washington, dated September 16, 1911 addressed to J. E. Weger at RFD #1, Kiesling, Washington. The unsigned letter had been in that envelope for many years. Uncle Amos, who passed the rifle to his nephew, could not have been the purchaser of the rifle in 1894 because he had not been born.

What could be more natural than the verdict that J. E. Weger, in 1911 living at Kiesling, Washington, was the first and original owner of the Maynard outfit, the subject of this paper. From the limited information about him, we do not know whether Mr. Weger was an important person or not,

but we do know he was a skilled rifleman who greatly appreciated his Maynard rifle. Perhaps he was just a plain man with a plain rifle.⁷

While it may seem to all of you like preaching to the choir, what this article really is about the need for all of us to preserve all the documents possible to prove the provenance of all of the items in our collections. If Uncle Amos had not kept J. E. Weger's papers and then produced others of his own, the provenance of my Maynard would have been lost. And if Milton Thompson had not preserved them, likewise history would have suffered. Take away the provenance and shooting experience of the actual first user and of Uncle Amos Thompson and what we are left with is just another nice old 75 to 80 percent Maynard rifle. Yes, this rifle can talk and its talking adds to the lore of the past. And it can talk only because the previous owners took the time to preserve its provenance.

NOTES

1. Dutcher, John T., *Ballard, The Great American Sing Shot Rifle*, Denver, Colorado, 2002, published by the author.
2. Hoyem, George A., *The History And Development Of Small Arms Ammunition*, Volume four, Armory Publications, Seattle, WA, 1999.
3. Sharpe, Philip B., *The Complete Guide To Handloading*, 3rd Edition, 1953, page 193 discusses the Troemner balance scale.



Figure 5. Troemner balance.

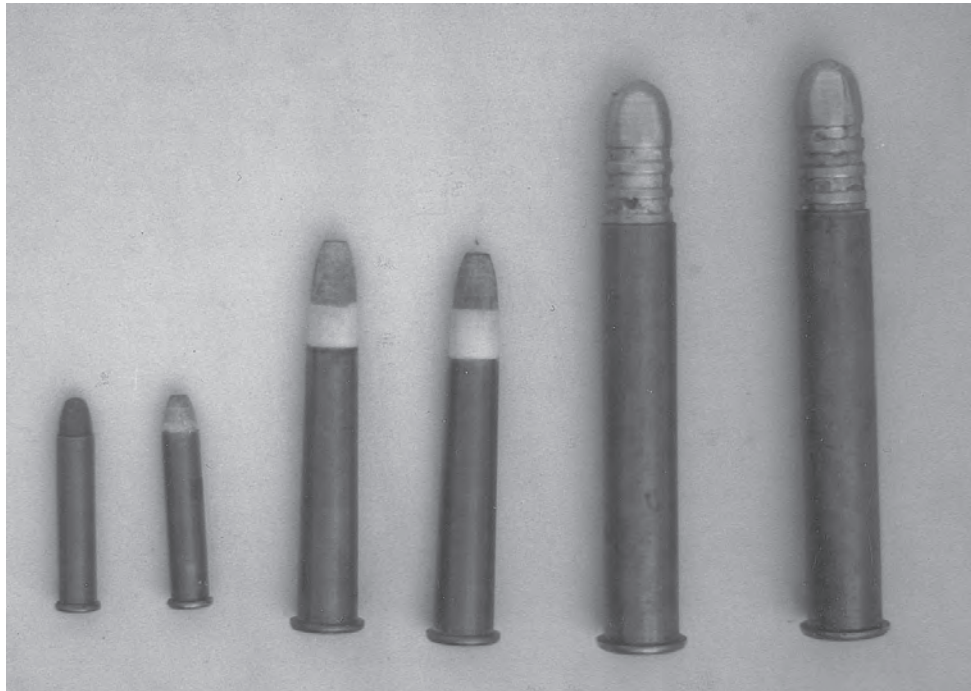


Figure 6. Cartridge comparison.



Figure 7. Tool & cartridge storage.

4. The serial number of this weapon is on the upper tang and inconvenient to get at which probably explains its omission from the letter.

5. For a considerable time I labored under the impression the town was Kersling, Washington. The Librarian at the Washington Department of Transportation researched that name. She was unable to find a town named Kersling but determined at one time a station on the Spokane and Inland Empire Railroad, an early interurban line running southeast out of Spokane, was named Kiesling. A closer examination of the envelope revealed the writer spelled the name of the town Keisling, reversing the i and e to misspell the towns name and then wrote the i in a manner that made it look like an r. Kiesling was only 12 miles from Spokane.

6. Conversation with Milton Thompson, September 5, 2003.

7. The search goes on for further information about J. E. Weger. So far, numerous searches of death records and other public records have revealed nothing. However, a January, 1941 plat of the area southeast of Spokane reveals J. E. Weger owned a 20 acre lot in Section 24, Township 24N, Range 43EWM, and that a road nearby was at that time called Weger Road. The search continues.