

“A.B. Fairbanks...The Yankee Gun-Smith:”¹

Insights Into an Early 19th Century Boston Gun Shop

By Nick Chandler

Collectors of early American percussion pistols have at least a passing familiarity with the distinctive brass pocket and belt pistols made by Aaron Bliss Fairbanks of Boston (Figure 1) in the early 19th century. Even those who are familiar with these pistols probably are not aware of the scope of goods and services offered by Fairbanks in his shop during the 15 years he worked his trade. In this article, we will attempt to fill in details about Aaron Fairbanks' life, his shop, some of the people with whom he did business, and take a closer look inside the familiar brass pistols (Figure 2).

BACKGROUND

Aaron Bliss Fairbanks (1804-1841) was part of a cohort of young gun makers who were born around 1805, meaning they would have completed their apprenticeships and reached maturity around 1825-26, just as percussion caps were being introduced into the market. He did not come from a gun-making family, nor was he deeply invested in “the old ways” of gun making. He was born in Brimfield, Massachusetts, one of six children of Henry and Margaret Bliss Fairbanks.² He apprenticed as a gunsmith, probably between the ages of 16 to 21 years, and although there were



some nearby possibilities, we are not certain to whom he apprenticed.³ Aaron's younger brother Henry (1813-1858), also apprenticed as a gunsmith, but again, we do not know who the master gun maker was in his case either.

THE MOVE TO BOSTON

After completion of his apprenticeship, Aaron moved some 65 miles northeast to Boston (Figure 3) and established himself as a gunsmith in 1825 at age 21. Founded in 1630, Boston was incorporated in 1822, and had a population of about 58,000 in 1825. Aaron's name first appeared in an 1826 Boston Street Directory with a Williams Lane address.⁴ As one biographer noted, “He was a gunsmith by trade, and came to Boston about the time flintlocks were changing for percussion, and got a good start in business in that line of work.”⁵ In 1833, Aaron married Abigail (Abby) Bliss Janes from Brimfield, and she joined him in Boston where they lived at 47 Court Street, a short walk from the shop. A year after



Figure 1. Dock Square in downtown Boston, c. 1840. This image, facing east, shows Dock Square with Faneuil Hall in the center, the Old Feather Store on the left. Aaron Fairbanks had his gun shop upstairs at 2 Exchange Street at the corner of Dock Square from 1827 to 1836, within steps of this scene. (Image downloaded from Wikipedia September 4, 2012.)

their marriage, they had their only child, a son named John Hassam Fairbanks.⁶

INSIDE THE FAIRBANKS GUN SHOP, 1826-1834

Aaron's first business address was upstairs at the corner of 2 Exchange Street and Dock Square (Figure 1). This places his business at the heart of the thriving (and expensive) Boston dock and commercial districts. Exchange Street is a relatively short street, and the buildings at that time were two-and three-story structures of frame, stone, or brick construction. Aaron was surrounded by exchange brokers, auction houses (for ready access to parts and imported guns), printers, leather dealers, brush manufacturers and dealers,

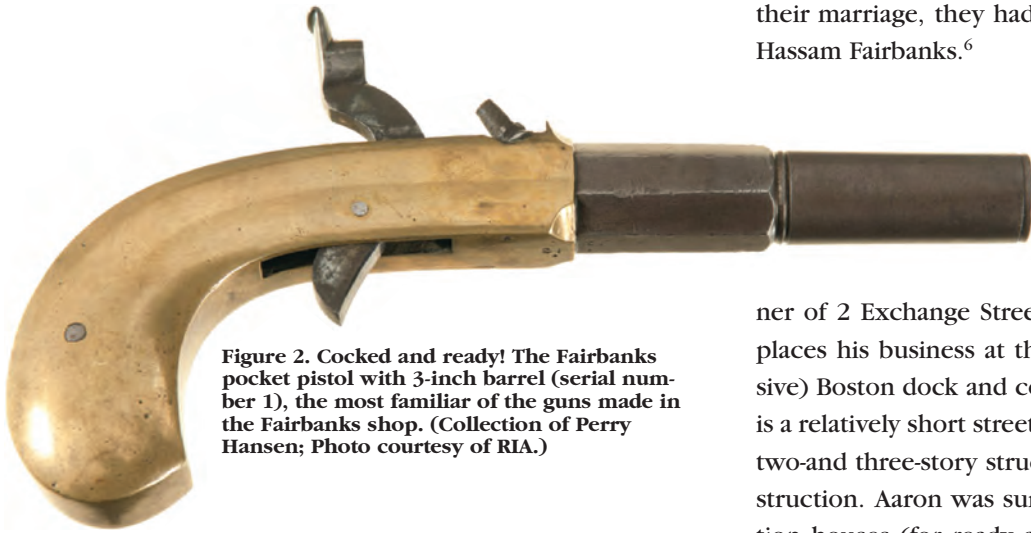


Figure 2. Cocked and ready! The Fairbanks pocket pistol with 3-inch barrel (serial number 1), the most familiar of the guns made in the Fairbanks shop. (Collection of Perry Hansen; Photo courtesy of RIA.)

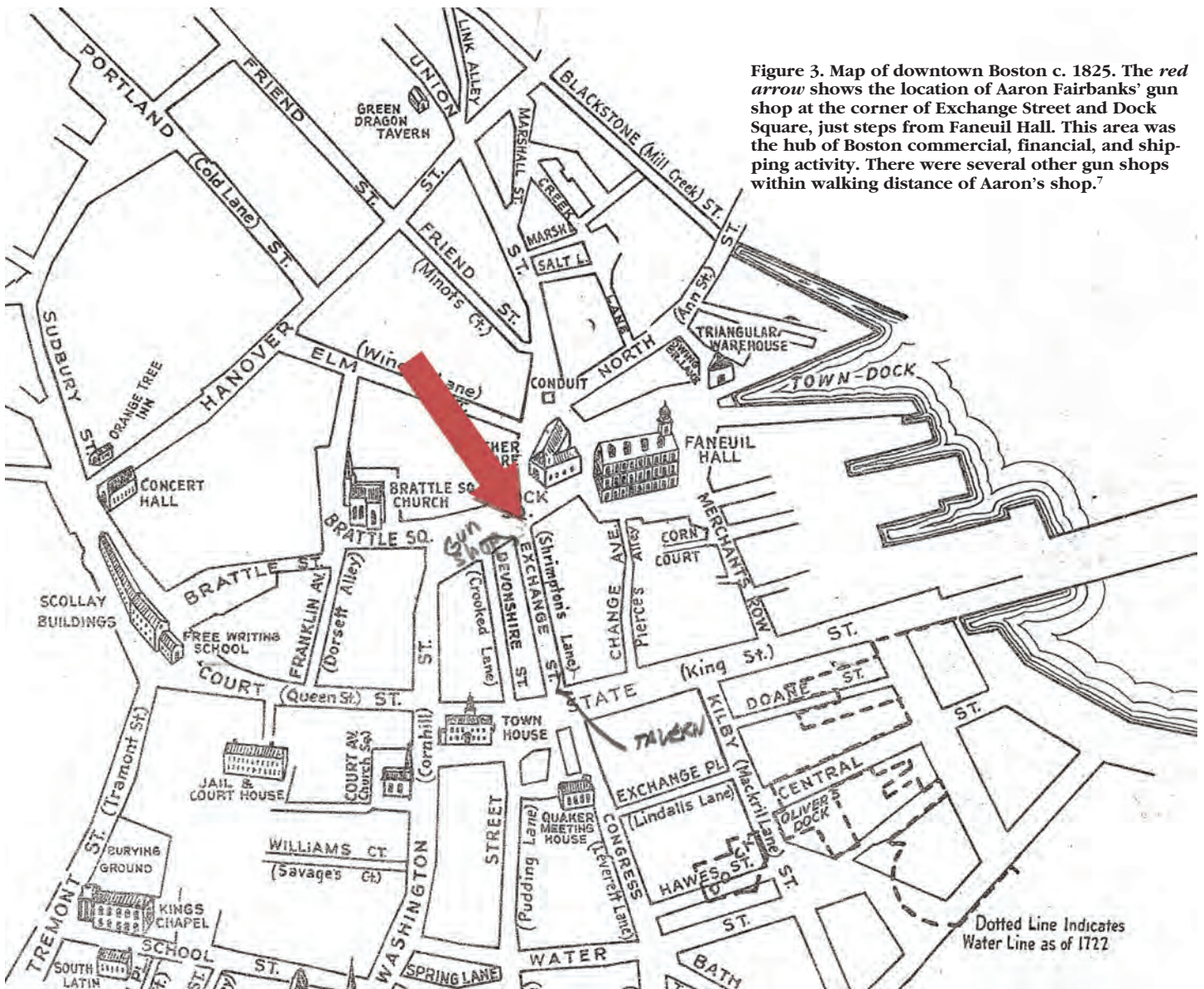


Figure 3. Map of downtown Boston c. 1825. The red arrow shows the location of Aaron Fairbanks' gun shop at the corner of Exchange Street and Dock Square, just steps from Faneuil Hall. This area was the hub of Boston commercial, financial, and shipping activity. There were several other gun shops within walking distance of Aaron's shop.⁷

TO SPORTSMEN.

AARON B. FAIRBANKS, would inform his friends and the public, that he now continues his business at No. 2, Exchange-street, corner of Dock-square, where having completed his arrangements for the manufacture, to order, of FOWLING GUNS and RIFLES of every size and quality, he flatters himself he shall be able to accommodate them in a more satisfactory manner than heretofore.

He repairs and relorks as usual, and likewise reborez, for which he has particular conveniences. Grateful for past favors, he solicits further patronage. ep3t april 18.

Sportsmen Attend.
A. B. FAIRBANKS,
THE YANKEE GUN-SMITH,
No. 2, Exchange Street, OPPOSITE the Sign of the Golden Gun,
DEVOTES his undivided attention to the Gun Smithing Business, in all its branches, and they who favour him with their patronage, he hopes will have no cause to be dissatisfied.

SPORTSMEN ATTEND!

AGOOD assortment of superior Flint & Percussion Fowling Guns, together with Training Guns, and Gun Materials, such as Stocks, Barrels, Flint and Percussion Locks, superior and common Steel Mountings, Steel Ribs, Percussion Caps, &c. constantly on hand and for sale by A. B. FAIRBANKS, at No. 2, Exchange St. corner of Dock Square, (Up Stairs,) opposite the Golden Gun; where he likewise manufactures to order and repairs Rifles, Muskets, and Fowling Guns, of as good quality and on as reasonable terms as can be had at any other place in Boston or vicinity.

July 2

1w3m

Figure 4 A. April 1827. The first print ad by Fairbanks. The statement that he will accommodate customers, ". . . in a more satisfactory manner than heretofore" implies an earlier shop, possibly at the Williams Lane address.⁸

Figure 4 B. 1828. Short on details, this one-third page ad from the *Boston Street Directory* was paid for by Fairbanks in 1828. The ad also coins the name of the shop . . . "The Yankee Gun-Smith."⁹

Figure 4 C. July 1829. The last Fairbanks ad from the 1820s, it continues to fill in details about the shop. Attempts to find more about the "Golden Gun" sign have been unsuccessful.¹⁰

and many other tradesmen and professionals. He had competition from William Bishop and other members of his gun-making family who were (at various times) located at 20 and 32 Exchange Street. At the opposite end of Exchange Street was the then-popular Exchange Tavern. As one can imagine, the Exchange Street address provided Aaron an excellent location for retail sales, with customers coming from workers on ships and docks, city residents, visitors, and immigrants arriving in Boston.

The prime location suggests that as a young gunsmith, he may have had financial backing, possibly from his family, to cover start-up costs, wages, rent, and the purchase of the necessary tools and stock. We do not know if there were other employees in the early days, although it seems likely he had at least one or two men in addition to himself. As we will show, the shop soon started to show signs of growth.

These three ads (Figure 4) suggest a small but fairly robust trade with a wide selection of products and services. It shows a gun shop, "in all its branches . . ." that consisted of guns made in the shop and guns imported or made by others. The second floor location narrows the type of power that would have been available to run the shop's machines. We do know that he had a forge, as it was the job of his apprentice to "blow the forge bellows." The ad establishes that Fairbanks was a general gunsmith who would make, fix, or sell anything needed by the sportsman. In addition to guns, they would have carried and sold powder flasks and

horns, shot bags, bullet molds, game bags, powder, flints, percussion caps, and patches. The gun shop at this time probably consisted of three or four men (including Aaron), with both sales and gunsmithing activities ongoing. We believe that this is a representative model of other urban gun shops of this period.

Equipping and stocking a new shop may have presented challenges. While we do not know for certain how he accomplished these tasks, one approach was through the many auctions in the city. One auction, held at 2 Exchange Street (Aaron's address) just before he took occupancy, included a large supply of tools similar to those a gunsmith would need. In 1827, not long after Aaron opened his Exchange Street shop, gunsmith Jacob Hurd, from nearby Kilby Street, drowned in a sailing accident. The contents of his shop were auctioned to settle the estate (Figure 5). The abbreviated list of contents suggests a shop the size of Aaron's and may have offered a way to jump-start the business.

The last paid print ad (other than the journeymen ad) that we have found was placed in the *American Traveler* in November 1834 (Figure 6).

STAFFING THE SHOP

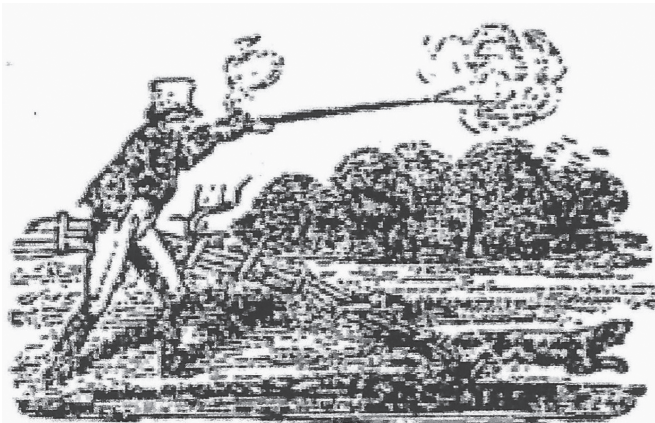
By the mid-1830s, we are able to identify a few of the men working in the shop. The most notable of these employees was a young apprentice named John P. Lovell

TOOLS, &c. OF A GUNSMITH.
 On **MONDAY** next, at **10 o'clock,**
 At the shop lately occupied by **Jacob Hurd,** Gun-
 smith, deceased, near the Post Office,
 A collection of very useful Tools—among which
 are a large Turning Latho—1 small do—Bench Vices
 —Anvil—Bellows—and a great variety of other Tools.
 A so, Gun Barrels—single and double Gun Stocks
 and Mounting—Percussion and Flint Locks—Ship
 Muskets, &c.—and one very elegant Gun, with ap-
 paratus, in case.
 By order of the Administratrix.

Figure 5. The contents of an 1827 gun shop were auctioned at the time Aaron was starting his business. This unique opportunity could have presented him with a way of stocking and equipping his shop.¹¹

Cast Steel Rifles,
OF very small calibre, for sale by **A. B. FAIR-**
BANKS, No. **2 Exchange Street.**
 box 7
 Jus&Lawa

Figure 6. This advertisement appeared in late 1834 and ran at least until May 1835. Unlike earlier ads this one focuses on a single product, cast steel rifles, and makes no mention of other products and services. Cast iron and steel rifles are mentioned in an 1841 inventory of the shop.¹²



TWO good Journeymen **GUNSMITHS** can find
 constant employ and fair wages at **A. B. FAIR-**
BANKS'S, No. **2 Exchange Street.**
 dec 3
 Javill

Figure 7. Business had reached the point in December 1834 where Aaron needed to advertise for two journeymen to join his shop. This ad would suggest that the shop had at least two benches.¹³

(1820-1897). Lovell was born in East Braintree, Massachusetts, and entered the Fairbanks shop in 1833 at the age of 13 to serve his apprenticeship. He was paid \$2.00 a week for the first year, in addition to a \$25.00 allowance for clothes. He received annual raises of 50 cents a week, plus \$10.00 for clothes each year.¹⁴

In 1833 or 1834,¹⁵ Leonard Grover (1809-1849), a journeyman gunsmith from the Boston waterfront neighborhood of Charlestown, joined the Fairbanks shop, perhaps in response to the ad in Figure 7.

In 1836, Aaron's younger brother Henry, his apprenticeship completed, came to Boston and was listed as a gunsmith working at the corner of Exchange and Dock Square, Aaron's shop address. (Given their age difference, it is possible that Henry apprenticed to Aaron.) Henry's name appeared only once in a city directory, after which time he married and moved to Terre Haute, Indiana. He was variously listed as gunsmith and farmer, and he ultimately became the mayor of that town.¹⁶

Besides increasing the number of employees, records exist¹⁷ that indicate Aaron was doing business with gunsmiths and agents outside of Boston. Some of these individuals included David T. Hapgood of Baltimore (formerly of Massachusetts), George Warren of Albany, New York,¹⁸ and Samuel A. Bingham from Springfield, Massachusetts. At one point Bingham had 18 shotguns and 15 rifles of Fairbanks manufacture in his possession, presumably for resale. The reach of this small business was expanding, further illustrating the importance of working in a town that was a transportation hub.

The shop had five employees in 1841, and we believe that number was about the high-water mark for the shop during this period.

PRODUCTS OF THE SHOP

We know from the previous ads that Aaron made or sold traditional rifles, fowlers, and "training guns" (presumably used by members of the militia for drill and training). In hindsight, we know he made at least three other types of weapons: cane guns, single shot pistols with cast brass frames, and cast iron and steel rifles and shotguns.

FAIRBANKS CANE GUNS

The first indication that Fairbanks made or sold anything other than the "standard" long arms came in March 1831, when a small newspaper article appeared in several New England newspapers. The article noted a percussion cane gun presumably made in his shop (Figures 8 and 9).¹⁹

Mr. A. B. Fairbanks, a very ingenious goldsmith, has invented and patented a neat and handsome walking cane, which he advertises to-day. It consists of a gun barrel, percussion lock, and rammer. It appears to possess all the requisites of a good gun, but probably would not pass a militia muster.

Figure 8. An 1831 newspaper article mentioning the Fairbanks cane gun. The article states that he is the inventor and patent holder, but the evidence does not support this claim.



Figure 9. Two views of a cane gun marked "FAIRBANKS PATENT BOSTON." The collar and tip of the gun are made of brass. The simple undercock percussion lock is to similar cane guns made in this country and in England starting in the mid-1820s. The hammer (red arrow) has a hole for a line or ring to facilitate cocking the gun. The trigger (blue arrow) is in its closed and concealed position. The stag grip and faux bamboo painted barrel were popular designs with many makers of cane guns. (Photos courtesy of Matt Parise, Rock Island Auctions.)

CANE GUNS.
PATENT Percussion Gun Walking Cane (a new and superior article, of simple construction, possessing all the properties of a good Sporting Gun, compressed within the size and shape of a common Walking Cane) manufactured and for sale by A. B. FAIRBANKS, Gun Maker, at No. 2. Exchange St. corner of Dock Square; where at all times may be found a good assortment of good Sporting Guns.
 may 10 eop3m

Figure 10 A. The first cane guns advertisement,²⁰ May 1831, appearing shortly after the newspaper article on the same weapon, stresses its "simple construction."

Despite the language of the article and in the ads in Figures 10A and B, it is doubtful that Fairbanks held a patent on the cane gun. A search of the "X"- and restored patents (those patents lost and/or restored after the patent office fire of 1836) does not show any patents issued to Fairbanks. The newspaper piece served its purpose; Aaron's name and products were in print, and for the moment he made at least a minor splash. This "news" article was quickly followed by paid ads placed by Aaron in the *American Traveler* newspaper.

If Aaron did not patent his cane gun, he clearly recognized that the advent of percussion caps represented a sea change moment for gun making which made possible guns of "simple construction." The new locks had only two or three moving parts (hammer, trigger, and mainspring), rather than the 10 or 15 parts required in a traditional lock. Other early adopters of "simple construction" guns (Ruggles, 1826; Hart, 1827; and Pratt, 1827; et al) all used variations of the new design. An 1827 article about the Hart pistol states, "The common percussion lock is composed of almost 30 different pieces, while this consists only of eight . . ." ²² We believe the success of the cane gun led Aaron to his design of the simple brass pistols. (An interesting sidebar is that Moses Babcock, who is noted for his cane guns of similar design, is most often cited as living in Charlestown. We now know he lived and worked on Friend Street in Boston from 1830 to 1832. Babcock and Fairbanks may have worked together making cane guns at this time. Alvan Pratt from the Roxbury

PATENT PERCUSSION GUN CANES,
A New and superior article, of simple construction, possessing all the properties of a good Sporting Gun, within the size and shape of a common Walking Cane.—Manufactured and for sale by A. B. FAIRBANKS, Gun Maker, No. 2 Exchange Street, corner of Dock Square, Boston. 6w aug 17

Figure 10 B. Aug 1832. A second ad for cane guns, although here they are called gun canes! This ad is the same as the first except that it does not mention the other products in the shop. The reference . . . "of simple construction . . ." refers to the few number of moving parts, the same concept that was used in his all-metal pistols.²¹

neighborhood of Boston demonstrated a similar cane gun in April 1827. It should also be noted that all of these cane guns closely follow the 1825 British patent for a cane gun made by John Day. In a veiled acknowledgement of Day's patent, an article about the Pratt weapon noted that his guns could be made "cheaper than similar English guns."²³)

FAIRBANKS ALL METAL PISTOLS

Aaron Fairbanks made all metal pistols with brass frames and grips. He made these pistols with two different grip designs and barrel lengths. Pistols with bag grips have 3-inch barrels, and pistols with pointed grips, similar in shape to undercock pistols made under the Ruggles patent of 1826, have 7-inch barrels. Both barrels are part round and part octagonal, finished in blue with a brass blade front sight. One example (Figure 11) has a belt hook, but it is believed that this was added by an early owner, and that Fairbanks did

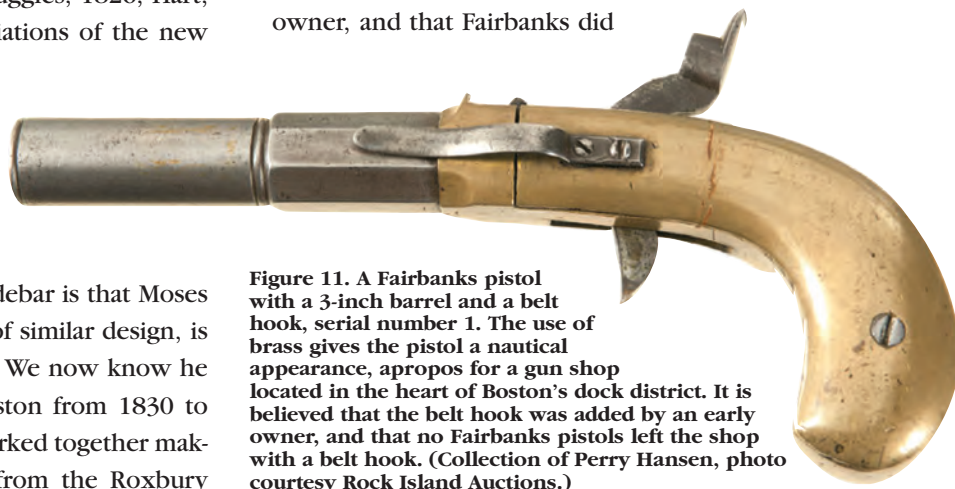
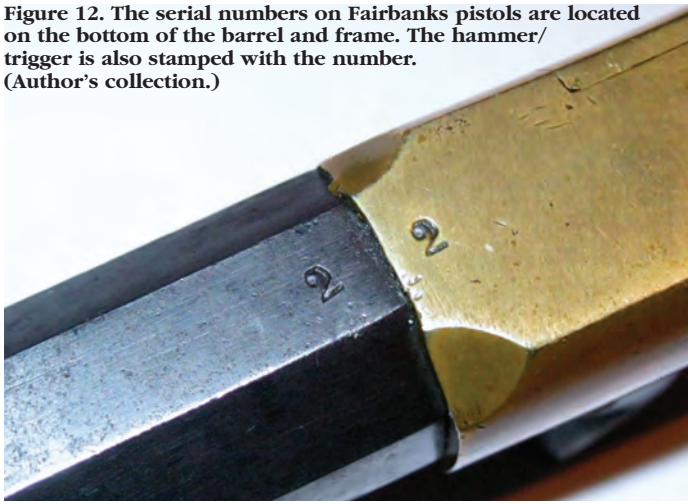


Figure 11. A Fairbanks pistol with a 3-inch barrel and a belt hook, serial number 1. The use of brass gives the pistol a nautical appearance, apropos for a gun shop located in the heart of Boston's dock district. It is believed that the belt hook was added by an early owner, and that no Fairbanks pistols left the shop with a belt hook. (Collection of Perry Hansen, photo courtesy Rock Island Auctions.)

Figure 12. The serial numbers on Fairbanks pistols are located on the bottom of the barrel and frame. The hammer/trigger is also stamped with the number. (Author's collection.)



not offer belt hooks as a standard feature. If Fairbanks followed other makers of the period, these pistols were made and sold in pairs, and may have been made in other barrel lengths.



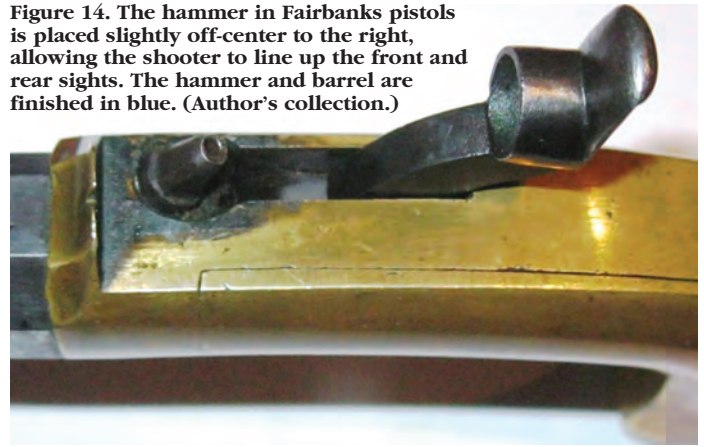
Figure 13. A Fairbanks belt or holster pistol with a 7-inch barrel. The barrel is part round, part octagonal, with a one piece hammer/trigger identical to the pocket model. This example is stamped with serial number 19 under the barrel and the frame. Note the two screws that hold the grip in place. The barrel is die stamped "FAIRBANKS, BOSTON," and "CAST STEEL" on the octagonal portion of the barrel. Other than the shape of the grip, the design and finish of the belt pistols is identical to the pocket models. (Collection of Perry Hansen, photo courtesy Rock Island Auctions.)

The external die stamp markings are the same in both models: "FAIRBANKS BOSTON" is stamped in two lines on one barrel flat, and "CAST STEEL" is stamped in one line on another flat. The guns have a small number stamped on the frame and barrel on the underside of the pistols. These numbers appear to be sequential, and may either be serial numbers or batch numbers (Figure 12). To date, the highest number observed is 33 on a pistol with a 3-inch barrel, and 19 on a pistol with a 7-inch barrel (Figure 13).

The frame and grips of the Fairbanks pistols are brass and cast in two pieces, a "frame" side and a "grip" side. The frame side is cast with a notched rear sight, housing for the main-spring, and another housing that encases the one-piece iron hammer and trigger. Brass pins align the grip to the frame. A single machine screw in the middle of the grip (two screws in the case of the belt pistol) neatly secures the two sections together.

The firing mechanism is as simple as the rest of the pistol. As the one piece hammer-trigger is cocked, the trigger snaps

Figure 14. The hammer in Fairbanks pistols is placed slightly off-center to the right, allowing the shooter to line up the front and rear sights. The hammer and barrel are finished in blue. (Author's collection.)



into place from its recessed location in the frame, ready to fire (Figure 14). The trigger has a small set screw which allows the very stiff trigger pull to be adjusted before assembly at the factory. The hammer is

also numbered consistent with the serial number. The V-spring serves as both the main and trigger springs.

Fairbanks all metal pistols are quite scarce. Based on anecdotal observations, we believe that there are more pocket models than belt models. The total output of these guns may be in the range of 100 to 150. A Fairbanks shop inventory from 1841 listed 530 pistol barrels

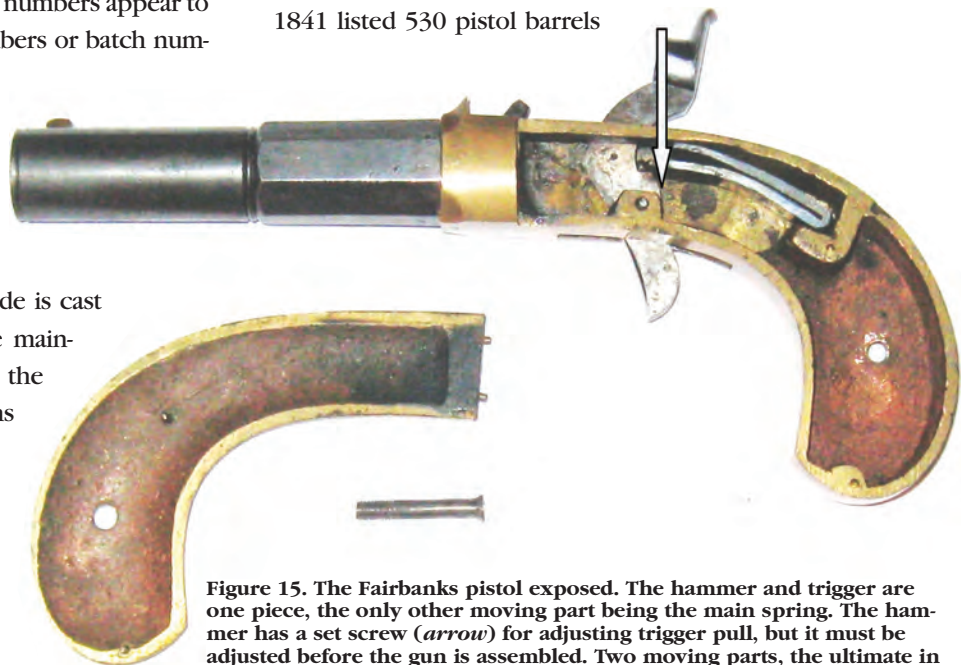


Figure 15. The Fairbanks pistol exposed. The hammer and trigger are one piece, the only other moving part being the main spring. The hammer has a set screw (arrow) for adjusting trigger pull, but it must be adjusted before the gun is assembled. Two moving parts, the ultimate in simple design! (Author's collection.)

of various lengths and finishes on hand. This suggests the barrels were bought in bulk from a third-party vendor and made based on demand, and demand was low. With all of the advertising Fairbanks paid for, no mention is ever made of pistols.

THE FAIRBANKS COPYISTS

Most reference books cite two types of brass-gripped pistols by Fairbanks: pocket pistols with 3-inch barrels, and target pistols with 10-inch barrels and adjustable sights.²⁴ Flayderman notes that no examples of target pistols have been found marked with a maker's name, and estimates that less than 100 of these unmarked target pistols were produced. In fact, we believe that these unmarked target pistols have been incorrectly attributed as Fairbanks products, based solely on the fact

marked with the Fairbanks name or serial numbers. Based on these factors, we believe these target pistols were not made in the Fairbanks shop. These pistols remain rare and desirable and are quite valuable because of their unique decorative features.

OTHER FAIRBANKS GUNS

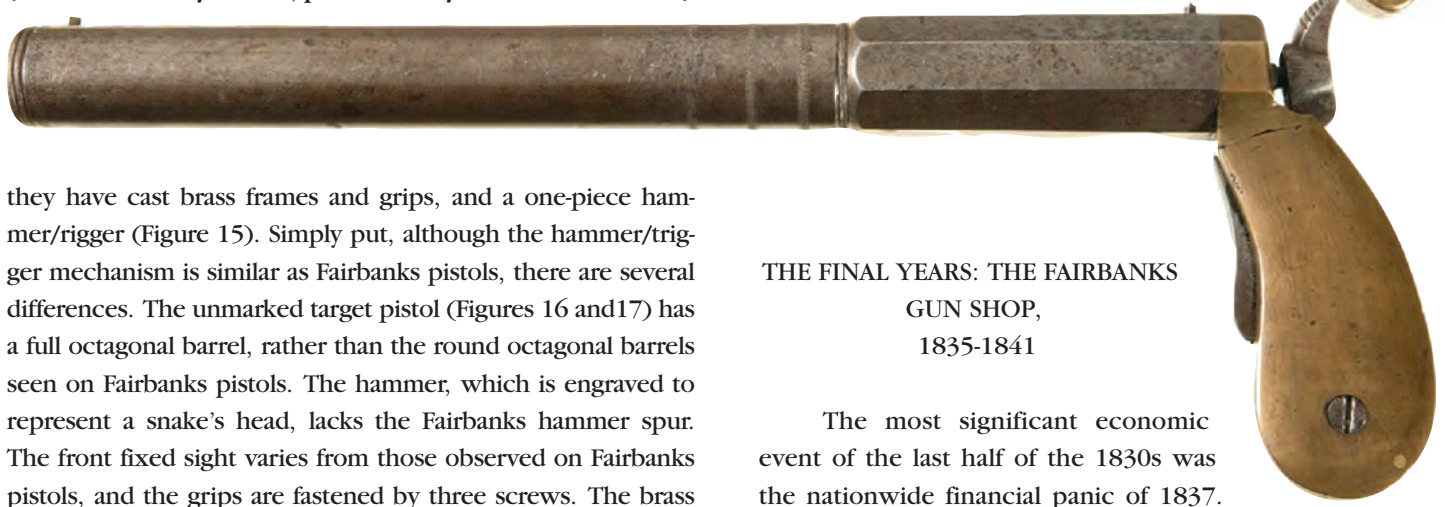
Examples of other Fairbanks-marked arms are difficult to come by. Searches of standard reference books show only the above-mentioned brass-framed pistols.

A search of the internet resulted in only one example of a sporting rifle bearing the Fairbanks name and Boston stamp (Figure 18).



Figure 16. Unmarked target pistol. Pistols of this type have been incorrectly attributed to Fairbanks. Although the pistol has characteristics similar to Fairbanks guns, there are also several differences. The most significant difference is that none of the guns with these characteristics have any maker's name. All indications point to the fact that these rare and nicely engraved pistols were made by someone other than Aaron Fairbanks. (Collection of Perry Hansen, photo courtesy Rock Island Auctions.)

Figure 17. An interesting, but unmarked, all-metal pistol with brass grips and a one-piece hammer trigger. This pistol has a 9 1/2-inch barrel and is .44 caliber. This is another example of the many copyists who used the "simple construction" approach to pistol making. The location of the hammer is the distinctive feature of this pistol. (Collection of Perry Hansen, photo courtesy Rock Island Auctions.)



they have cast brass frames and grips, and a one-piece hammer/rigger (Figure 15). Simply put, although the hammer/trigger mechanism is similar as Fairbanks pistols, there are several differences. The unmarked target pistol (Figures 16 and 17) has a full octagonal barrel, rather than the round octagonal barrels seen on Fairbanks pistols. The hammer, which is engraved to represent a snake's head, lacks the Fairbanks hammer spur. The front fixed sight varies from those observed on Fairbanks pistols, and the grips are fastened by three screws. The brass

THE FINAL YEARS: THE FAIRBANKS GUN SHOP, 1835-1841

The most significant economic event of the last half of the 1830s was the nationwide financial panic of 1837.

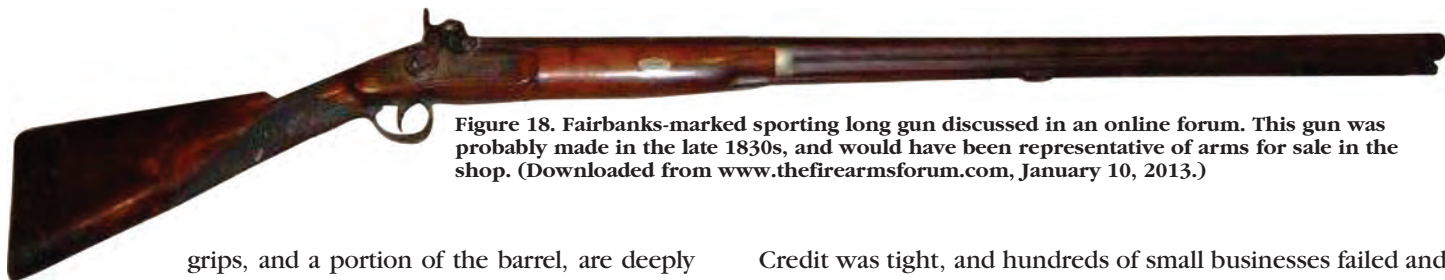


Figure 18. Fairbanks-marked sporting long gun discussed in an online forum. This gun was probably made in the late 1830s, and would have been representative of arms for sale in the shop. (Downloaded from www.thefirearmsforum.com, January 10, 2013.)

grips, and a portion of the barrel, are deeply engraved in a professional manner. No engraved Fairbanks-marked pistols have been noted. Most important, however, is that none of the target pistols have been found

Credit was tight, and hundreds of small businesses failed and never recovered. The Fairbanks shop survived this downturn, but the conditions created by other forces must have been felt by Fairbanks' business.

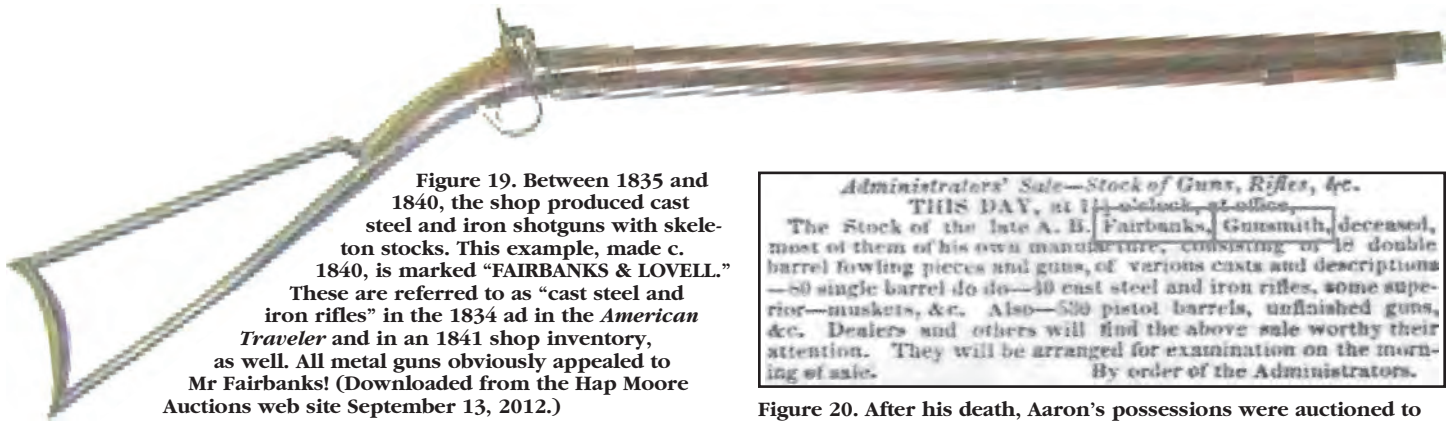


Figure 19. Between 1835 and 1840, the shop produced cast steel and iron shotguns with skeleton stocks. This example, made c. 1840, is marked "FAIRBANKS & LOVELL." These are referred to as "cast steel and iron rifles" in the 1834 ad in the *American Traveler* and in an 1841 shop inventory, as well. All metal guns obviously appealed to Mr Fairbanks! (Downloaded from the Hap Moore Auctions web site September 13, 2012.)

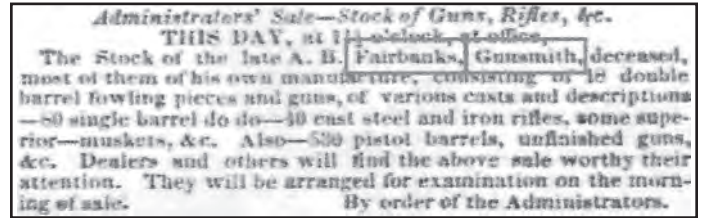


Figure 20. After his death, Aaron's possessions were auctioned to help settle his estate. The 530 unfinished pistol barrels suggest that these were purchased from a third-party barrel maker. We do not know if this inventory represents the entire business at that time, or just Aaron's half. The total of nearly 150 finished guns seems to be a large inventory, even for a shop in downtown Boston.²⁷

We know that Aaron had difficulties with one of his journeymen gunsmiths, Leonard Grover. Grover was swindled by a lottery broker into buying \$90 (about 2 to 3-month's salary at that time) worth of fake lottery tickets. A minor incident in the scheme of things, but Aaron took it upon himself to bring charges against the swindler and follow the case through the courts to recover the lost funds. In the same general timeframe, Grover was arrested on more than one occasion for buying rum and gin on Sunday. Again, this was not a particularly big deal, but these issues were a distraction to Aaron.

On the positive side of the ledger, Aaron clearly enjoyed respect with contemporaries in his trade. Evidence of this came in 1837, when Aaron and fellow gun makers William Bishop (his competitor on Exchange Street) and George Lane, were appointed judges in the first exhibit of the Massachusetts Mechanics Charitable Association in 1837. The Massachusetts Mechanical Charitable Association was a highly respected organization that traced its origins to Paul Revere in 1795.²⁵ These men were judges in the category of "Cannons, Fire-arms, Rifles, Rifle Pistols, and Sportsmen's Apparatus" exhibited at this Fair.

By 1839 Aaron was in ill health (and probably had been for some time), suffering from consumption (tuberculosis) which was ravaging towns throughout the state. Aaron's wife Abbey died in 1838 at the age of 25, leaving him as the single parent of a 4-year-old son. Despite this tragic event and his failing health, in 1840, about a year after Abbey's death, Aaron married Nancy Sargent of Dorchester, Massachusetts.

John P. Lovell was put in charge of daily operations at the firm in 1839, even though he was only 19 years old, and not the most experienced gunsmith in the shop.²⁶ In 1840, Aaron gave him a half interest in the shop (Lovell family history notes that John P. lacked the funds to buy his share of the shop) and for a short time, the shop was named Fairbanks & Lovell. The only product known to emerge from

this partnership was an all-metal single-barrel shotgun marked "FAIRBANKS & LOVELL," an example of which was sold at auction several years ago (Figure 19).

The partnership of Fairbanks and Lovell lasted only a few months. Aaron died at his home in Dorchester in August 1841 at the age of 36. Obituaries at the time of his death list Aaron living in Dorchester, working for the firm of Fairbanks and Lovell in Boston.

When Aaron died, his estate went into probate. As a part of this process, an auction of Aaron's personal possessions was held. The newspaper announcement of the event showed a portion of the real property he owned at that time (Figure 20).

While Aaron's death in 1841 marked the end of "The Yankee Gun Smith," it was the beginning of a prosperous business for his partner, John P. Lovell. Lovell joined forces with long-time (and sometimes troublesome) Fairbanks employee Leonard Grover and, for a short time, the firm changed its name to Lovell and Grover. In its first year, there were five men employed and they managed to turn a profit of \$700. Not long thereafter, Lovell took full control of the company and went on to build one of the largest gun and sporting goods importing and manufacturing companies in the country for the rest of the 19th century. At the end of the century, the firm of J.P. Lovell was purchased by Iver Johnson's Arms and Cycle Works in 1891 (Figure 21).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to the following for their assistance in preparing this article: The staff of the New England Historical and Genealogical Society for their assistance in obtaining copies of the Probate Records of Aaron B. Fairbanks, Perry Hansen for sharing rare examples from his collection included in this article, and Rock Island Auctions for the photographs of the pistols in Figures 2, 9, 11, 13, 16, and 17.

ALLEN'S, COLT'S, AND OTHER
REVOLVERS,
At the Lowest Prices.
—
Muzzey's Rifle Barrels
CONSTANTLY ON HAND.

JOHN P. LOVELL,
27 DOCK SQUARE, BOSTON,
IMPORTER AND MANUFACTURER OF
DOUBLE AND SINGLE GUNS,
RIFLES, PISTOLS,
GUN LOCKS,
AND
GUN MATERIALS
OF ALL KINDS.




Figure 21. After Aaron's death, his successor, John P. Lovell, carried on the business in Dock Square. Late in the century, Lovell sold the business to Iver Johnson's Arms and Cycle Works. (Downloaded from Wikipedia, January 18, 2013.)

IVER JOHNSON



SEMI-HAMMERLESS AUTOMATIC EJECTOR
SHOT GUNS
are the most rapid shooters made
can be opened closed and fired
without changing position of
the hands. THE BEST MEDIUM
PRICED GUN KNOWN CATALOGUES FREE
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END NOTES

1. Aaron Fairbanks coined the slogan "The Yankee Gunsmith" in an 1828 *Boston Street Directory* advertisement.

2. *Vital Records of Brimfield Massachusetts To The Year 1850*, The New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston, Massachusetts, 1931.

3. In researching the life of Aaron Fairbanks, it was learned that Luther R. Lamb and William Tucker were active as gunsmiths in Brimfield at the time Aaron served his

apprenticeship. Other gunsmiths in the area include Ambrose Packard, Enfield, Massachusetts (to whom Colt prototype maker Anson Chase apprenticed); Adin and Fordyce Ruggles, Hardwick (who patented a pistol in 1826); and Joel Hapgood, Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, to name a few.

4. *Boston City Directory*, 1826, www.Fold3.com (downloaded December 2012).

5. *Genealogy of the Fairbanks Family, 1633-1897*, Lorenzo Sayles Fairbanks, Google Books (downloaded December 2012).

6. 47 Court Street was a mixed-use building, serving both as a rooming house and a business location. During the time the Fairbanks lived there, other boarders included members of the Hassam family. One of the boarders was named John Hassam, and it is assumed that Aaron named his son, John Hassam Fairbanks, after this man. Collectors may recognize the name Hassam as one from a well known cutlery-making family. There exists a rare all-metal prototype musket marked "HASSAM, BOSTON" that bears a many strong similarities to known Fairbanks work. While we know from Aaron's probate records there was a business connection between John Hassam and Aaron Fairbanks, the link and exact nature of that relationship has yet to be established.

7. Map from *The Crooked & Narrow Streets of the Town of Boston, 1630-1822*, Anne Haven Thwing, Boston, Marshall Jones Company, 1920.

8. *American Traveler* newspaper (downloaded from GenealogyBank.com).

9. *Boston Street Directory for 1828*, Fold3.com (downloaded December 24, 2012).

10. *American Traveler* newspaper (downloaded from GenealogyBank.com).

11. *American Traveler* newspaper (downloaded from GenealogyBank.com).

12. *American Traveler* newspaper (downloaded from GenealogyBank.com).

13. *American Traveler* newspaper (downloaded from GenealogyBank.com).

14. *Boston and Bostonians*, American Publishing Company, New York, 1894. (Google Books.)

15. Grover was born in 1809, which would have him starting an apprenticeship around 1824, and completing it around 1830. Based on this and information from street directories, we believe his employment with Fairbanks was his second job.

16. *American Gunsmiths*, Frank M. Sellers, Blue Book Publications, Minneapolis, MN, 2008. Sellers' lists Henry as an active gunsmith in Harrison, Indiana.

17. Norfolk County, Massachusetts, Probate Records, Vols 74 (1841), 75 (1842), 94 (1855), and 95 (1856).

18. For additional information on George Warren, see *The New York State Firearms Trade*, Vol 4, Swinney, H.J. and Rowe, Tom.

19. *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven, Connecticut) May 1831.

20. *American Traveler*, (Boston, Massachusetts) May 1831.

21. *American Traveler*, (Boston, Massachusetts) Aug 1832. In fairness to Aaron, while the news article credits him with the invention of his cane guns, neither of his paid ads do, stating only that they are patented and making no indication who held the patent, leaving open the possibility that he was making (or infringing on) the patent of another person.

22. *American Traveler* newspaper (downloaded from GenealogyBank.com).

23. *Boston Street Directory 1830* (downloaded from Fold3.com).

24. *Flayderman's Guide to American Firearms . . . and their values, 9th edition*, Norm Flayderman, Gun Digest Books, Iola, Wisconsin, 2007.

25. This "exhibit and fair" was the first of its type in the history of the association, and it attracted some 50,000 visitors over a 3-day period. This exhibit was a watershed of gunmaking skill and technology of that day, with exhibitors including C.B. Allen (Cochran's Rifle), E.A. Bennett's revolving chain many-chambered rifle, D. H. Chamberlain sliding breech rifle, and many, many others.

26. *Genealogy of the Fairbanks Family, 1633-1897*, Lorenzo Sayles Fairbanks, Google Books (downloaded December 2012). In October 1840, about 15 months after Abby's death in 1839, Aaron married Nancy Sargent from Dorchester. This union resulted in the birth of a daughter, Aronette, after Aaron's death.

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