

BRIEF NOTES ON THREE SUBJECTS

by Herbert G. Houze

Some forty plus years ago a professor admonished me with the quip: Keep it brief. In keeping with that bit of advice, this presentation will briefly examine three topics that are related in one way or another to the history of the Winchester Repeating Arms Company or its predecessor the New Haven Arms Company. While I do not expect you to be enthralled, hopefully you will find them to be somewhat interesting and perhaps even useful.

In the interests of full disclosure, I should advise you that my personal interest in American arms has waned and I will not be pursuing any further research in that area. So the following notes are intended to guide those who wish to delve deeper into the subjects covered.

Oliver Winchester's Swiss Contract of 1866-1867

As some of you may remember a number of years ago I wrote an article suggesting that the serial numbering of the Model 1866 began at 1.¹ This suggestion raised a fire storm of controversy and more than one Winchester enthusiast said that my career as a Winchester historian was finished. Well I am still here and over the intervening years evidence has been found that supports the conclusion first put forth in 1991.

It is generally accepted that Oliver Winchester did not begin production of what became known as the Model 1866 until 1867.² To put it bluntly, this is pure bunk. Internal Revenue Service tax assessments, as well as other documents, clearly indicate that he was manufacturing rifles and ammunition in Bridgeport, Connecticut, as of September 1866.³ The question therefore arises, where did the arms then being manufactured go? Before answering this, however, it is necessary to examine an unpublished aspect of the Winchester company's history.

During most of its operation the New Haven Arms Company was located at 9 Artizan Street in New Haven (Fig. 1). The factory there was sufficient in size to meet the company's sales needs until it began receiving large orders for the Henry Rifle. To meet demand for the latter, Oliver Winchester leased the Dwight, Chapin and Company factory in Bridgeport in 1863 (Fig. 2).⁴ Following its be-



(Fig. 1) The New Haven Arms Company factory at 9 Artizan Street in New Haven, Connecticut. Though used for the earliest production of the Henry Rifle, it was not large enough to process the increased orders for this arm that were received in 1863 and following. Consequently, it was converted to the firm's cartridge works in late 1863 and remained as such until July of 1866. Olin Corporation Photograph.

ing fitted out, the Artizan Street works were used primarily for the production of ammunition and therein lay the reason for its later abandonment. A series of explosions and fires caused the residents of the street to petition the New Haven city council to close the factory since it posed a hazard to their well-being.⁵ Winchester eventually gave in to these requests and operations there formally ceased in July of 1866.⁶ That same month O. F. Winchester sold the machinery then being used in Bridgeport to manufacture the Henry Rifle.⁷

Actual manufacture of the King's Improvement or Henry-Winchester began at Bridgeport in August of 1866 and the first rifles were sold in September.⁸

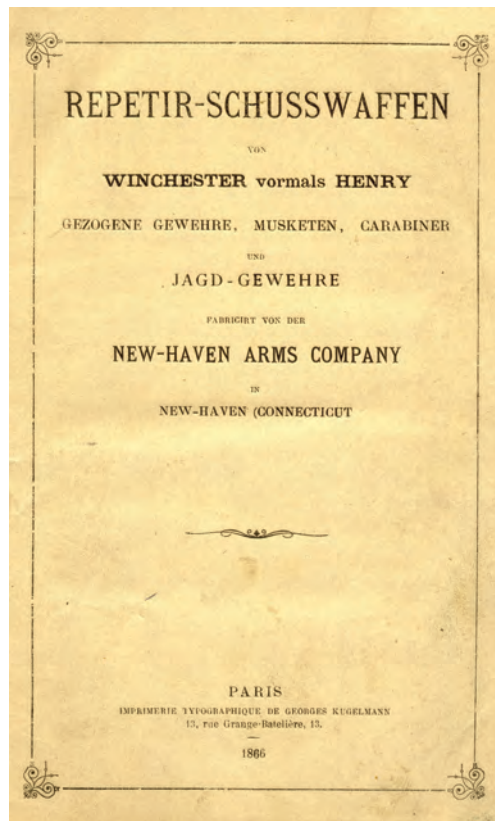
Income for the period of September through December 1866 amounted to \$33,089 indicating sales of at least 600 rifles plus their attendant ammunition.⁹ Although



(Fig. 2) Photograph taken during World War II of the Dwight, Chapin & Company factory in Bridgeport, Connecticut, that was leased in 1863 by O. F. Winchester for the manufacture of Henry Rifles and subsequently what became known as the Winchester Model 1866. Olin Corporation Photograph.

absolute evidence has yet to be located, it is likely these arms formed part of the 1,000 rifle contract known to have been let by the French Government earlier that year (Fig. 3).¹⁰

O. F. Winchester's major hope for the new rifle lay in its adoption by the Swiss Confederation. It had won the Aarau Rifle Trials¹¹ and it appeared in January of 1867 that substantial quantities would be ordered.¹² However, complications arose when the Swiss authorities insisted that the rifles be made in their country.¹³ Winchester ad-



(Fig. 5) Cover of the New Haven Arms Company's European catalogue of 1866 containing the illustration shown in Figure 4.

amantly opposed this suggestion as Switzerland did not offer patent protection for his designs.¹⁴ Though some historians have stated that was the end of Winchester's Swiss adventure, it was not.

The fact that the 8,000 rifles ordered following the Aarau Trials were actually delivered and put into service, is confirmed by a later report stating that they were being held in stores as of the close of June 1871.¹⁵ Additionally, circumstantial evidence suggests that another 7,000 rifles were ordered in early 1867, bringing the total number to 15,000.¹⁶



(Fig. 3) French contract Winchester Patent repeating carbine made in early to mid-1866 for issuance to troops stationed in Mexico. Olin Corporation Photograph.



(Fig. 4) Line drawing of the Aarau pattern Winchester carbine originally intended for Swiss service.

The significance of these numbers to the Model 1866's production is two fold. Firstly, it proves beyond a doubt that the rifle was being manufactured in considerable quantities during early 1867. Secondly, it answers the question as to what happened to the supposedly "missing" first 15,000 Model 1866 rifles that were made.

That the arms shipped to Switzerland were in fact Model 1866s and not iron-frame models having detachable side plates of the same pattern as those tested at Aarau (Fig. 4) is clearly demonstrated by comments contained in a report published in the March 4, 1867 issue of the *Revue Militaire Suisse*.¹⁷ Not only does this document state the rifles were the same as those then being made in New Haven, but it also notes they were of a different caliber than the test rifles (i.e., they were of .44rf).

It should be noted that Oliver Winchester also furnished an unknown number of Model 1866 rifles for field trials in France in early 1867.¹⁸

Daniel S. Wesson:

The New Haven Arms Company's Engraver 1864-65

When the name Daniel Wesson is mentioned to any collector of antique American arms the individual who immediately comes to mind is Daniel B. Wesson, co-founder of Smith & Wesson. There is, however, another Daniel Wesson who should be remembered: Daniel Smith Wesson.

The second son of Phineas Wesson and Lucy Smith, Daniel was born in Rhode Island on November 5, 1831.¹ Trained as a soft metal engraver, Daniel first worked in Providence, most likely in the jewelry trade.² In 1860 he moved to New Haven, Connecticut,³ and sometime shortly thereafter entered the employ of the New Haven Arms Company.⁴ For reasons that are now unknown, he left the company in 1862, since his name does not appear in the firm's payroll ledger for 1863 or most of 1864.⁵ As he was not listed in *Benham's New Haven Directories* for those years, he may have left the city to work elsewhere.



Prototype Briggs' Patent Rifle made by the New Haven Arms Company in late 1865, engraved with flower heads, foliage, animal scenes and scrollwork attributed to Daniel S. Wesson. Private Collection.

Wesson reappeared in New Haven in November of 1864 and his name regularly appears in the New Haven Arms Company's Payroll book for the next fourteen months.

| 1864 | | |
|-------------|--|---------|
| November 26 | | \$27.00 |
| December 24 | | 41.00 |
| 1865 | | |
| January 21 | | \$99.00 |
| February 18 | | 87.00 |
| March 18 | | 57.00 |
| April 17 | | 75.00 |
| May 13 | | - |
| June 10 | | - |
| July 8 | | 48.00 |
| August 5 | | 30.00 |
| September 2 | | 96.00 |
| October 28 | | 78.00 |
| November 25 | | 21.00 |
| December 23 | | 66.00 |

What is important about this date sequence is that it immediately follows the period when Gustave Young of Hartford is known to have worked as the Arms Company's engraver (October 1863 to September 1864) and immediately predates Conrad F. Ulrich's employment (1866/67).⁶

It is therefore likely, if not extremely probable, that Daniel S. Wesson was the engraver responsible for those late production Henry Rifles that are decorated with large leafy flowers and vignettes displaying running deer, dogs, horses and so forth.

After leaving the New Haven Arms Company Wesson continued to work as an engraver and pattern maker in New Haven until his death on December 25, 1908.⁷



Trade card printed from an engraved steel plate produced by Thomas F. O'Connell of New York City in 1874. Collection of the late Jonathan Buckley (Photograph courtesy of Richard Sheaff).

Brief Notes Concerning the Engraver, Thomas F. O'Connell

As with the preceding, the following comments tie up another loose end concerning Winchester rifles. In this instance it concerns the engraving found on a number of Model 1866 Sporting Rifles that are signed with the initials "T.F.O'C." While the identity of this artisan was discussed in an article published in *The Winchester Repeater* three years ago,¹ recently a trade card advertising his work has come to light. Since it clearly illustrates various aspects of his work, its reproduction might prove useful to members of the Society.

The card printed from a steel plate engraving has six vignettes set within decorative panels and displays a variety of border designs, as well as scrollwork, that will allow T. F. O'Connell's work to be identified.



Details of O'Connell's 1874 trade card. Notice the kidney shaped engravings which are a trait of Thomas O'Connell.



Details of O'Connell's 1874 trade card.
Notice the scroll engravings which are a trait of
Thomas O'Connell.



Winchester Model 1866 Sporting Rifle serial number 44156 engraved by Thomas F. O'Connell.
Most of O'Connell's work is marked with his initials somewhere in the engraving.
Photograph courtesy of Bonhams, San Francisco, CA

Bibliography

Oliver Winchester's Swiss Contract of 1866-1867

¹ H. G. Houze, "A Reevaluation – Henry and Model 1866 Serial Numbering," *Man at Arms*, Volume 13, Number 4 (July/August 1991), pp. 10-17.

² This assumption came about due to a misinterpretation of a manuscript note on the reverse of the original minutes for the December 3, 1866 board meeting of the Winchester Fire Arms Company (Winchester Arms Collection Archives, H. R. McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Cody, WY). Under the headline "Sales," the same writer as the minutes noted the following:

| | |
|--|-------------------------|
| Mar 5th | |
| Philip Wilson & Co To Mdse [Merchandise] | |
| 1 improved Carbine | 40.00 |
| 1 " Rifle | 50.00 |
| | Disc 20 % <u>-18.00</u> |
| | \$72.00 |

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Wm Golcher To Mdse | |
| 1 improved Carbine | 40.00 |
| 1 " Rifle | 50.00 |
| | Disc 20 % <u>-18.00</u> |
| | \$72.00 |

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Mch 6th | |
| J. C Grubb & Co To Mdse | |
| 1 improved Rifle | 50.00 |
| | 20% <u>-10.00</u> |
| | \$40.00 |

These entries are believed to represent the first sales of sample arms in the United States by the company which in April of 1867, officially became known as the Winchester Repeating Arms Company and began marking its products as such.

³ Internal Revenue Service tax assessments indicate that the Bridgeport factory sold \$8,279 worth of ammunition and arms during the month of September 1866 (U.S. Internal Revenue Service Tax Assessment Lists, 1862-1918, National Archives Microfilm Series M758, Roll 23, image 11635). This is also confirmed by other sources, most notably George K. Walker's manuscript annotations to Veader & Earle's typescript history of the Winchester company written in 1918; Walker's "Production Notes for the Model 1866" and the personal diary of John M. Davies, Winchester's partner (H. G. Houze, *History of the Winchester Repeating Arms Company 1865-1982* [Krause Publications, Inc.; Iola, WI: 1994], p. 46). In his Production Notes, Walker recorded that "1 Improved Carbine" was shipped to a Mr. Hartley in New York City on September 15, 1866; "10 Improved Rifles" were shipped to O. F. Winchester by "Fast Boat" on September 17 and "1 Ditto" was delivered to Mr. Hobbs in Bridgeport (Winchester Model 1866 Production Notes; Winchester Arms Collection Archives, op. cit.).

⁴ Houze, *Winchester Repeating Arms Company*, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

⁵ From March 1863 through January of 1866, seven explosions and fires were reported at the Artisan Street factory (New Haven Palladium, March 3, 1863, p. 2, col. 3; *ibid.*, February 16, 1864, p. 1, col. 2; Hartford Daily Courant, March 26, 1863, p. 3; New Haven Palladium, April 2, 1863, p. 1, col. 2 [referring to the March fire]; August 27, 1864, p. 2, col. 3; February 7, 1865, p. 1, col. 2; *ibid.*, February 16, 1865, p. 1, col. 1, and; Hartford Daily Courant, January 6, 1866, p. 2). In the February 7, 1865 report it was stated

that the manufacture of ammunition and powder was "a source of annoyance to the families in that locality by reason of the danger and the offensive gases attending its manufacture." The local citizenry presented a petition to the New Haven Common Council on March 6, 1865 demanding "the removal of the works of the New Haven Arms Co. in Artizan street to a location apart from dwellings" (*ibid.*, March 7, p. 1, col. 2).

⁶ The last payroll entry for the New Haven facility is dated July 7, 1866 (New Haven Arms Company Payroll Book January 24, 1863 to July 7, 1866, Private Collection).

⁷ This is indicated by the assessment of \$271.50 in tax by the IRS resulting from the sale of "Machinery" valued at \$4,525 (IRS Tax Assessment Lists, op.cit., Series M758, Roll 23, image 11588).

⁸ *Ibid.*, image 11635.

⁹ *Ibid.*, images 11635, 11655, 11674 and 11691. The estimate of rifles made is based upon ratios documented in the Internal Revenue Service's tax assessments for the New Haven Arms Company from 1862 to 1866 (H. G. Houze, "Monthly Sales of Henry Rifles & Cartridges by the New Haven Arms Company from October 1862 to October 1866," *The Winchester Repeater*, Volume 30 (Spring 2008), pp.8-13).

¹⁰ This contract was partly fulfilled with Winchester Patent Rifles of the type commonly, but erroneously, known as the Briggs' Patent (*History of the Winchester Company*, op. cit., pp. 34-38).

¹¹ For a complete discussion of these trials and the performance of the sample rifles submitted by Winchester, see H. G. Houze, *The Winchester Model 1876 "Centennial" Rifle Its True Origins and Subsequent Production* (Andrew Mowbray, Inc., Publishers; Lincoln, RI: 2001), pp. 20-40. Switzerland's intense interest in rearming was brought about by a series of small regional wars that took place in Europe in 1866 (e.g., those in Germany and Italy). Realizing that her army was ill-equipped to face foreign forces, such as those fielded by Prussia, the Swiss Confederation authorized measures to modernize its troops.

¹² *The New York Times* reported in late December of 1866 that the Swiss Government had passed a resolution to purchase 100,000 Winchester rifles (*The New York Times*, "Triumph of American Skill in Europe," December 20, 1866, p. 4; a number repeated in a formal report published in the same paper on December 24, 1866 [p. 1]). A month later, a European military journal stated that 120,000 Winchester rifles had been ordered (*Militar=Zeitung* [Vienna], "Schweiz," No. 8, January 30, 1867, p. 67, col. 2). In reality, however, official records indicate that only 19,000 to 20,000 were to be purchased for units known as "carabiniers" (*Revue des Armes Spéciales, Supplément Mensuel de la Revue Militaire* [Lausanne], "Message du Conseil Federal... (Du 28 novembre 1866)," No. 4, February 16, 1867, p. 82).

¹³ *Revue Militaire Suisse* [Lausanne], "Message du Conseil Fédéral... (Du 28 novembre 1866)...6. Fabrication des nouveaux fusils," Supplément to No. 4, February 16, 1867, pp. 109-110. The quantity was also cited as 8,000 in the *Schweizerisches Bundesblatt* [Berne], "Botschaft," Vol. XVIII, No. 53, December 8, 1866, p. 289.

¹⁴ *The Edinburgh Evening Courant* [Edinburgh], "Latest News. By Electronic Telegraph... Switzerland," January 10, 1867, p. 3, col. 7 stated that "The introduction of the Winchester rifle into the Swiss army is delayed in consequence of the refusal of the American manufactory at Newhaven [sic] to make the rifle in Switzerland." The question of patent protection was subsequently discussed in the *Revue Militaire Suisse*, op. cit., No. 7, April 6, 1868, pp. 145-147.

¹⁵ Moriz Brunner (ed.), *Streffleur's Osterreichische Militarische Zeitschrift*, "Dermalige Bewaffung der Schweizer Truppen mit Feurgewehren," XII Jahrgang, Band I (Verlag der Streffleur'schen Erben; Vienna: 1871), p. 303.

¹⁶ The delivery of a total of 15,000 Winchester rifles is indicated by Col. Louis Tronchin's annual report dated August 4, 1867 to the Swiss General Assembly (*Revue Militaire Suisse* [Lausanne], "Rapport annuel du président, lu à l'assemblée générale du 4 aout 1867, à Vevey," No. 16, August 21, 1867, p. 359). This number was also mentioned in the German journal *Militar-Wochenblatt* [Berlin], No. 43, July 13, 1867, p. 401.

¹⁷ *Revue Militaire Suisse*, op.cit., "Message," No. 5, March 4, 1867, pp. 109-110. See also, *Militar=Zeitung*, op. cit., "Schweiz," No. 40, p. 325, col. 2.

¹⁸ Trials of the Winchester rifle by France is substantiated by a brief announcement of O. F. Winchester's return from Europe published in *The Boston Daily Advertiser* of January 24, 1867 ("From New Haven," p. 1, col. 5). Results of the trials with a description of the Winchester rifle's performance were widely reported in October of 1867 (e.g., *Militar=Zeitung* [Vienna], "Frankreich [Zur Gewehrfrage]," No. 85, October 30, 1867, p. 687, col.'s 1 and 2). The cartridges used in the French rifles are described in A. Mattenheimer, *Die Patronen der Ruckladungs-Gewehre* (Eduard Zernin; Darmstadt: 1868), p. 35. It should be noted that these cartridges had dimensions the same as the .44rf round and differed from those for the Swiss contract rifles described on the same page. The French trial rifle was subsequently described in J. Corréard, *Journal des Armes Spéciales et de l'Etat-Major* [Paris], "Groupe 1.-Systeme Winchester," Tome VII, 6e Série, No. 8 (August 1869), p. 192. Cf., *History of the Winchester Company*, op. cit., p. 47 for a transcription of a letter sent by General F. de Suzanne to O. F. Winchester on October 2, 1866 relating to a test rifle.

Daniel S. Wesson:

The New Haven Arms Company's Engraver 1864-65

¹ The date of Daniel S. Wesson's birth is inscribed on his grave's headstone in the Fair Haven Union Cemetery, Fair Haven, Connecticut.

² His occupation is listed as "Engraver" in the 7th Census of the United States, City of Providence, Ward 2, Providence Co., Rhode Island, National Archives and Records Administration Microfilm Publication M432, Roll M432_844, p. 129A, image 263, line 3. The assumption that D. S. Wesson worked in the jewelry trade is based upon the fact that his older brother,

George, was engaged in that business (ibid., line 2).

³ Wesson is listed as an "engraver" boarding at the City Hotel in Benham's *New Haven Directory and Annual Register Number 21 1860-61* (J. H. Benham; New Haven, CT: 1860), p. 309. His wife, Alma, and their three children remained in Rhode Island and were enumerated in the 1860 Census as living with her mother Julia Manchester in Bristol (8th Census of the United States, Bristol, Bristol Co., Rhode Island, National Archives and Records Administration Microfilm Publication M653, Roll M653_1202, pp. 45-45, images 93-94).

⁴ Wesson's employment with the New Haven Arms Company during 1861 and 1862 is confirmed by Benham's *New Haven Directory and Annual Register Number 23 1862-63* (J. H. Benham; New Haven, CT: 1862), p. 331.

⁵ New Haven Arms Company Payroll Ledger for the period beginning January 24, 1863 and July 7, 1866 (Private Collection).

⁶ H. G. Houze, *Colt's Factory Engravers of the Nineteenth Century* (Andrew Mowbray, Inc., Publishers; Woonsocket, RI: 2012), pp. 119 (Ulrich) and 136 (Young).

⁷ His name appears in New Haven directories until the 1909 edition that was prepared in 1908 and his date of death is inscribed on his headstone (op.cit.).

Brief Notes Concerning the Engraver, Thomas F. O'Connell

¹ H. G. Houze, "A Tale of Two Engravers Named Thomas O'Connell and Their Misidentification with Thomas E. Addis," *The Winchester Repeater*, Vol. 32 (Spring 2010), pp. 6-10.