

THE MODEL 1861 RIFLE MUSKET CONTRACT OF WILLIAM MASON, TAUNTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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It has been almost 10 years since we presented our initial research on William Mason and his model 1861 rifle musket contract at the Fall American Society of Arms Collectors meeting (#116). That was way back in September 2011 at Portsmouth, Virginia. These data were later published in the *ASAC Bulletin* #104¹, to which this current small essay refers.

Since then, I am happy to say that many people have contacted me with information, and examples of Mason production items which have improved the overall story, but also have raised some more questions. This is good, for historical research which appears to be an ongoing, continuing process. Here are some updates with (comments in parentheses):

1. Inspector's initials found on the majority of 1864 weapons (and appearing about ½ way through 1863) appear to be those of "F.C.S." = F. C. Spalding, as initially discussed by Anthony C. Daum and Charles W Pate in their 2016 book "*U. S. Military Arms Inspector Marks*"². These are located vertically on the side stock flat opposite the lock; and under the barrel, associated with a larger P.
2. The rarest lock- 1862 with eagle and only US TAUNTON- with same font in capitals – a second one was seen on the Collector's Firearms website. It has apparently been nickel plated, with some of this finish coming off. It has an 1862 dated barrel with V P Eagle head proofs, but without inspector's markings or proofs on the stock flat. (This specimen was not able to be examined by me – not sure if this rare lock was applied to this musket, or an all original early Mason production run specimen. However, there is a small C on the inside of the hammer -? condemned marking; and the 2 of 1862 on the barrel does not match any 1862 dated Mason locks on comparison. It would be advantageous to examine under the barrel for large P and any other initials – several barrel inspectors known to have worked at Taunton. Mason had his own proving house in his Machine Works. Also, if this represents a very early 1862 barrel, we know that Major Peter V. Hagner himself proved an initial 500 barrels at Taunton in 1862. Would love to see under the barrel for markings!)
3. Another standard 1862 Mason lock with an 1862 barrel is noted on the internet on the Regimental Quarter-Master site. (Images are not crisp to full evaluation, but discussion from #2 is appropriate here. Of note, these would be the only two 1862 dated barrels known to this author, if correct and not assembled specimens.)
4. 1863 lock with WM(line under M)ASON TAUNTON, MASS. – 3 more have been found (one on ebay which I missed out on purchasing!). The last one showing excellent case hardening – which appears to be very unusual for Mason production.
5. 1862 lock, 1863 barrel – 3 more found. All appear to have absent stock inspectors and barrel proofs, sometimes with and without US on butt-plate tang. (I question whether these are actually early Mason production which failed inspection, or later assembled guns).
6. No 1865 dated specimens have been identified. (discussion-with financial losses incurred by Mason from the US Government's contract debacle, it is not unreasonable to consider that Mason tried to sell muskets to other purchasers at other times, even using outdated parts and/or rejected items. Since no 1862 lock-plates have been found on Federal or State inspected rifle muskets, it is possible that the earliest 1862 lock-plates may have been applied at unknown times to generate 'substandard' specimens which were peddled elsewhere?)
7. Several Mason lock-plates (various dates) applied to Model 1863 and 1864 muskets have been identified, but they appear not to be of original Mason manufacture – just the locks. (discussion – since Mason was in a financial loss situation, undoubtedly, he would not have entertained the expense of retooling for the Model 1863/4 upgrades and changes in assembly of breeches and fittings)
8. It is known that many Mason musket parts were found long after the war and manufacture in Mason Machine Works. These may be the source of not a few genuine Mason locks (and parts) being assembled or placed onto other manufacturer's muskets in the late 19th or formal 20th centuries?
9. Major Peter V. Hagner, U. S. Ordnance is known to have travelled to Taunton in early 1863 to prove an initial 500 of Mason's barrels. So far, no barrel with P.V.H. has been located, but at least one 1863 barrel with only a larger P has been noted. (Of significance, all under barrel proof/inspection markings on Mason barrels have the similar larger P. followed by three smaller inspector's initials or simply blank.) Note: P.H. can be found on hammers of 1863 specimens.
10. It is believed, but not yet proven, that Mason completed the lock stampings in Taunton at Mason Machine Works. But the locks were manufactured by Clements & Coleman Company in R.I. and inspected there prior to shipping to Taunton for assembly. However, the barrels were proved in Taunton, in a proving room set aside in the Mason Machine Works. Mason is also known to have straightened bores using an optical bore sighting/measuring system that he developed.
11. Providence Tool Co., R.I. shipped many rolled, unfinished barrels, and rough stocks to Mason. (Railroad shipping receipts (Providence, RI to Taunton, MA) for these have been located. Also, a receipt from Providence Tool Co. shipping ordnance stores to Major T. J. Rodman, Watertown Arsenal has been found and illustrated-to show that Mason's proof sample musket marked T.J.R. #1 is consistent with this procedure of shipping ordnance in his name to Watertown, MA)

I would be most grateful to the readers for any further information, suggestions, questions, and/or discussion concerning any aspect of William Mason, his rifle musket production, and even his manufacture of other products from the Mason Machine Works in Taunton, Massachusetts.

Endnotes

Johnson, P. R. 2011. "The M 1861 Rifle Musket Contract of William Mason, Taunton, Massachusetts." *Bulletin of the American Society of Arms Collectors*. 104: 65-73.

Daum, A. C. and Pate, C. W. 2016. *U. S. Military Arms Inspector Marks*. Andrew Mowbray Publishing, Woonsocket, RI. 240 pp.



Mason, Taunton 1862 rifle.
No stock flat inspectors
cartouche. (Courtesy-
Collectors Firearms website)

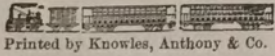


Mason US Taunton 1862
lock nickel plated plated.
(Courtesy- Collectors
Firearms website)



Mason 1862 butt plate US
C nickel finish coming
off. (Courtesy- Collectors
Firearms website)

Boston and Providence Railroad Corporation.



Providence Merchandise Station, Inven. 18. 1863

Received from

Providence Tool & Army

ARTICLES.

MARKS.

WEIGHT OR MEASURE.

Four (4) Boxes
Musket Stocks

Wm Mason
Duplicate
Taunton
Mass

Numbered and marked as above, which the Company promise to forward by its Railroad, and deliver at its station in ~~BOSTON~~, to

Taunton as above

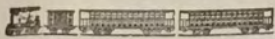
or order.

Parker

For the Company.

Mason Rodman receipt.

Boston and Providence Railroad Corporation.



Providence Merchandise Station, October 5 1863

Received from

Providence Tool & Army

ARTICLES.

MARKS.

WEIGHT OR MEASURE.

292 Gun Barrels
weighing 2497

Wm Mason
Duplicate
Taunton
Mass

Numbered and marked as above, which the Company promise to forward by its Railroad, and deliver at its station in ~~BOSTON~~, to

Taunton as above

or order.

Parker

For the Company.

Mason gun barrel receipt 1863

Boston and Providence Railroad Corporation.



Providence Merchandise Station, August 27th 1863

Received from

Providence Fire & Armory

ARTICLES.	MARKS.	WEIGHT OR MEASURE.
Fifty Boxes Ordnance & Ordnance Stores	Major J. Rodman Watertown Arsenal Watertown Mass Care U.S. Quar. Master Boston	

Numbered and marked as above, which the Company promise to forward by its Railroad, and deliver at its station in BOSTON, *as above* or order.

Burt For the Company.

Mason gun stock receipts 1863.

