

THE ENIGMATIC MILITARY PISTOLS OF JOHN JOSEPH HENRY

by Lewis F. Southard

Prologue

The Enigmatic Military Pistols of John Joseph Henry include four different types of flintlock military pistols fabricated at the Boulton Gun Works in Pennsylvania or at Henry's Gun Factory in Philadelphia. The selection of these four pistol examples is due to two main factors. Each example presents its own unique riddle. Each example has consistently been misunderstood and misidentified in various publications. For example, the flintlock pistol known to collectors as the "J. J. HENRY BOULTON" has defied explanation since first publicized in 1939.¹ This pistol was further investigated in 1957 and seriously studied in the early 1970s, only to be misidentified in The William M. Locke Collection catalog in 1973. The remaining three pistols fall into the general category of sea service pistols fabricated for the War of 1812 by John Joseph Henry and his brother William Henry. These three pistols have been confused with each other in publications and auction catalogs. This work will explain the origin of the J. J. Henry Boulton pistols and clear up these misunderstandings by identifying the "Common" Navy pistol, the Chambers "Repeater" Navy pistol, and introducing the rare Henry "Privateer" pistols. In addition an odd pistol that Henry called the "Better Kind" which seems to include elements of most of Henry's War of 1812 era pistols will be briefly discussed.

To quote the master sleuth, "It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence. It biases the judgment," Sherlock Holmes in *A Study in Scarlet*.² A thorough study of military arms requires both archival documentation and physical evidence. In one case the physical evidence is currently limited to only three pistols and only slightly more examples exist in the remaining cases. The archival evidence, however, is very robust, thanks to the Henry Family Papers in the Hagley Museum, Wilmington DE, and the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington DC. The conclusions reached are a credit to another Holmes quote "When you have eliminated the impossible whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth," *The Sign of the Four*.³ Interestingly the "Clue" to these pistols is the rather mundane belt hook.

The Henry Family

The Henry family has a long association with arms making. William Henry I the gun making family patriarch from Lancaster, PA, began his career before the French and Indian War. William Henry II 1757-1821 established his gun making operation near Jacobsburg, PA. His sons John Joseph Henry (Figure 1) and William Henry III (Figure 2) established a gun making factory in Philadelphia. John Joseph Henry emerged as a major arms contractor in Philadelphia in the early 1800s. He established a factory and



Figure 1. John Joseph Henry



Figure 2. William Henry III

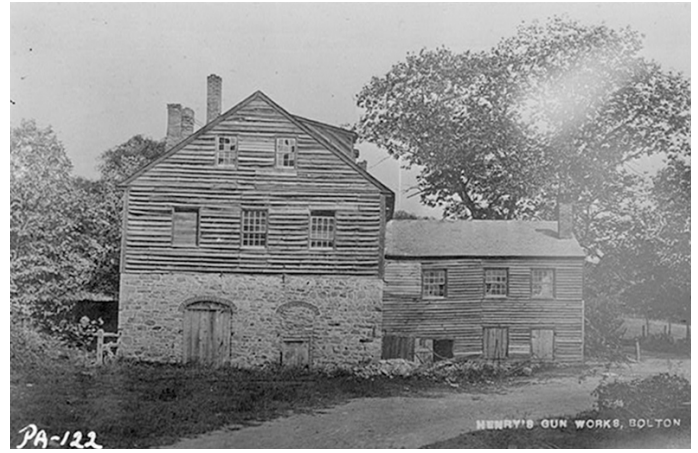


Figure 3. Painting of the Boulton Gun Works (left) and picture from around 1885 (right).

show room on North Third Street in Philadelphia in 1807. According to advertising broadsides of the time, the business was called the American Rifle Manufactory.⁴ His location, near Third and Vine Streets, placed him close to the newly established U.S. Schuylkill Arsenal. Shortly after the establishment of the factory, he received government contracts for rifles and pistols. In late November of 1808 the Henry Family began to expand the facilities and built a new shop. In 1812 John Joseph Henry and his brother William Henry established a gun factory on the Bushkill River at Boulton, PA (Figure 3). William Henry, John Joseph's younger brother, was born in Nazareth in 1794. William trained as a lock maker and supplied many of the locks for the Henry pistols. In 1822 William Henry III sold his Boulton interests to John Joseph and the Philadelphia operation was closed. John Joseph notes in his Ledger 2 "Continued at Boulton December 22, 1822."⁵ After John Joseph's death in 1836 his son James Henry continued the business in Boulton until his death in 1895. James Henry's son Granville entered the business in 1858 and closed out the gun making business in 1907. The Henry Gun Making dynasty ended with Granville's death in 1912.⁶

The J. J. Henry Boulton Pistols 1835-40

The J. J. Henry Boulton pistol saga begins on February 10, 1835. On this date John Joseph Henry records in the Boulton Gun Works Order Book a request from the firm of Hubbard and Casey for "75 pair of pistols after the United States Pattern." Beginning in March 1833 Hubbard and Casey began ordering massive numbers of rifles from the Henrys at Boulton. In 1837 the firm placed the largest single order for Indian trade rifles in the Henry records. The Order Book also contains orders for the American Fur Company and George W. Tryon. The pages in the Order Book are often marked "Sent" or have a diagonal line through the order and the word "Delivered." On February 1, 1834 [1835] Hubbard and Casey made an unusual order of 100 sabers. On the next page of the Order Book, dated February 10, 1835, they also ordered "75 pair of pistols after the United States Pattern."⁷ Neither of these orders have notations that they were delivered.

On August 4, 1835 Hubbard and Casey began to receive Cast Steel pistols made by Henry with various barrel lengths and continued to receive rifles and pistols until 1840. Henry denotes the Cast Steel as C.S. For example, on February 4, 1836 they received C. S. pistols with 6, 7, and 8 inch barrels. These Cast Steel under-

hammer pistol deliveries can be confused with the "United States Pistol Pattern" order.⁸

The last orders for Hubbard and Casey occur in 1839 with a delivery of 80 rifles for South Carolina. None of the early listings specifically identify the address of Hubbard and Casey. However, one piece of evidence indicates they were located in New York. On December 29, 1835 a shipment was unusually routed through Perth Amboy, NJ for passage through to New York. A notation was made in the margin of the Order Book because the re-route cost an additional \$15.⁹ Before the work on the 75 pair of pistols was completed John Joseph Henry died on December 2, 1836.¹⁰ The Boulton Gun Works continued under the leadership of his only son James Henry (1809-1895; Figure 4).¹¹



Figure 4. James Henry

In the Henry Papers a document of Boulton Gun Works Sales includes a listing headed "Manufactured at Boulton Gun Works" which includes firearms made between 1823 and 1874. In the last column for the year 1838 is a notation for "84 Holster Pistols." The words "Holster Pistols" are written out vertically along the edge of the page and almost hidden in the fold of the book. This notation for holster pistols provides the first clue to the Hubbard and Casey order. Although the order was received while John Joseph Henry was still alive, the pistols were not made until 1838. Although the J.J.HENRY stamp was used on the locks, the pistols were actually completed by James Henry. Beginning in 1836 the record headings list 712 and 1,581 C.S. pistols manufactured. The C.S. indicates Cast Steel. Henry had completed 3,827 C.S. underhammer pistols by 1839. In 1840 the records list 3 holster pistols manufactured followed by 10 in 1841 and 12 in 1842. A total of 25 holster pistols. James Henry resumes the Cast Steel pistols in 1844 but only completes 549 before discontinuing production in 1850. The total is 4,376 Cast Steel underhammer pistols.¹² The underhammer pistols and rifles began to be made in the United States in 1826. The barrels were often stamped CAST STEEL because this material was readily available for making barrels and the arms makers noted this in their marketing strategy.¹³ There are no known underhammer pistols with Henry markings. In the Henry records "holster pistols" are clearly listed as a separate product from the Cast Steel underhammer pistols. The Boulton Gun Works continued to make rifles until 1874.¹⁴ More information on underhammer pistols may be found in *Early American Underhammer Firearms* by Nicholas Chandler and *Underhammer Guns* by Herschel Logan.

In 1840 the records indicate that Hubbard and Casey are beginning to close out their business dealings with James Henry. An entry dated April 4, 1840 in the Account Ledger dated 1836-1872 records 30 pair of pistols delivered to Hubbard and Casey, New York.¹⁵ This is the only account located that suggests that the firm is in New York. The total cost was \$285 or \$4.75 each. The 84 holster pistols manufactured in 1838 were those intended for the Hubbard and Casey order. Only 60 pistols were delivered to Hubbard and Casey in April 1840. The original order of 75 pair was not completed. The remaining 24 holster pistols made in 1838 coupled with the 25 made in 1840-1842, likely made from excess parts, leaves 49 pistols to be sold elsewhere. The total number of J. J. Henry Boulton pistols does not exceed the 109 holster pistols recorded in the Henry Family Papers.

Hubbard and Casey were probably New York Merchants contracting with Henry for arms. The holster pistols were likely for a particular militia unit. Despite a rigorous search the firm of Hubbard and Casey has not been identified with the merchant or fur trade industry. No letters were located in the Henry records concerning Hubbard and Casey although letters to John Jacob Astor and others in the fur trade are in the records. The records indicate that Henry provided 80 rifles to Hubbard and Casey for South Carolina.¹⁶ This order suggests their clients requiring swords and pistols were not necessarily from New York State.

The particular need for swords and pistols resulted from a lack of pistols for state militias. The reasons were twofold: no federal contracts for army pistols had been made since the Model 1819 North production ended and the outbreak of the Second Seminole War 1835- 1842. The Model 1836 flintlock pistols were just being

developed and the first of these pistols were not delivered until November 1836.¹⁷ Many state militia mounted units were federalized for service in Florida. The complex reasons behind the lack of pistols to furnish state militias under the Militia Act of 1808 were examined in the article "The Georgia Pistol Contract...but for the Exigencies of the Service" *American Society of Arms Collectors* (ASAC) Bulletin Number 98, 2008.¹⁸

The proximity of the sword and pistol orders in the Order Books would suggest that the orders were linked. John Joseph Henry had provided swords to the State of Maryland during the War of 1812. Those swords were actually made by Philadelphia manufacturers. An in-depth study of these swords was presented in the article "Philadelphia Gun Makers and the Evolution of the "Maryland Sword" *ASAC Bulletin number 89, 2004*".¹⁹ However, by the mid-1830s Nathan P. Ames would have been the likely sword provider to Henry. Ames did deliver Pattern 1833 Dragoon swords to the State of Texas in 1840. However, Ames would have been busy preparing for the U.S. contract for the Model 1840 Heavy Dragoon.²⁰ There is no evidence that Henry actually delivered the entire 100 swords to Hubbard and Casey. However, an entry in J. J. Henry's Cash Book notes "DEC 1837 sent Hubbard and Casey 1 Case of 20 Swords @ \$3.66."²¹

J.J. Henry Boulton Pistol Description:

The description of the pistol known to collectors as the J. J. Henry, Boulton (Figure 5) begins with the order dated February 10, 1835, for "75 pair of pistols after the United States Pattern." Technically the current "United States Pattern" would have been the Model 1826 Navy Flintlock pistol. Simeon North manufactured 3000 of these pistols in 1827-28. Subsequently 2000 pistols of the same model were manufactured in 1830-31 by William L. Evans located at Evansburg, PA (Figure 6). Evansburg is about 52 miles from Boulton and along the main route to Philadelphia. It would not have been difficult for Henry to have obtained a sample pistol from Evans. Although a Navy pistol it would have satisfied the qualification for "A United States Pattern."

Early publications on single-shot pistols refer to the J. J. Henry Boulton pistol as Models 1826, 1827, and 1826 type. Collectors and authors early on recognized that this was not an official U.S. Military Pistol often referring to it as a "Militia Pistol."²² Today collectors and authors tend to refer Henry's version of the pattern pistol as a "J. J. Henry Boulton" because of the address on the lock.

The J. J. Henry Boulton pistol at the first glance closely resembles the Model 1826 Navy pistol (Figure 7). The overall size and appearance are generally the same. A more careful examination will quickly detect the major differences. The most obvious difference is that the Boulton pistol was never equipped with a belt hook. However, the most noticeable features of the Boulton pistols are the drop of the grip and the odd shape of the trigger guard. These last two features compromise the overall look and symmetry of the pattern of Model 1826 Navy pistols. Closer inspection reveals there are no proof marks on the barrel, either civilian or military, and no ordnance inspection marks on the barrel or stamped in the wood. The lack of these features immediately assures these pistols were never intended for U. S. military service.



Figure 5. J. J. Henry Boulton Flintlock Pistol



Figure 6. Evans Model 1826 Flintlock Pistol

The Physical Evidence

William Evans of Evansburg, PA was the last contractor to fabricate the Model 1826 Navy pistols. The proximity of the Evans Mill to Boulton would suggest he may have been the source of the pattern. The Henry Papers suggest a long association with the Evans Family. For example on November 12, 1812 the Henry Day Book records an entry for Edward Evans returning to him 22 condemned bayonets and paying him for 47 muskets @ \$10.75 each totaling \$505.25. This entry suggests that Henry was sub-contracting his muskets to Edward Evans.²³ Because of the similarity of the J. J. Henry Boulton pistols and the Model 1826 made by Evans, some collectors have wondered if there was any collaboration between the two arms makers?

Although the Model 1826 was certainly the “United States Pattern” used to satisfy the Hubbard and Casey order, collectors and students of arms consider the Henry Boulton pistols to be of lesser

quality than the Navy contract pistols. The purpose of the Boulton pistol more likely was to arm a state militia unit or for private sale.

To answer some of the questions about the Henry Boulton pistols a thorough examination was conducted by four seasoned U.S. Military pistol collectors who had access to J. J. Henry Boulton pistols and North and Evans Model 1826 Navy contract pistols in their collections. A thorough examination was conducted on four J. J. Henry Boulton flintlock pistols. The pistols were from different collections and were examined by the owners. All four pistols are original flintlocks and in collectable condition. The task was to answer the question: why are the Boulton pistols of lesser quality than the Model 1826 Navy pistols? In the process of examination information began to emerge which illustrates the contradictions in the manufacture of these pistols. The collectors decided to look more closely at quality differences of the individual components of the pistols. The following positive and negative comments are



Figure 7. J. J. Henry Boulton (top) and 1826 S. North pistols (bottom).

extracted by the author from numerous communications and not necessarily the final conclusion of everyone.

Positive Attributes of the Four Boulton Pistols Examined.

Locks: The locks are well made and include a feature on the bridle that looks like the head of an eagle. One collector suggested this “beak” may have been to facilitate the removal of the main-spring without a vise. The locks have brass pans. Some of the lock plates exhibit an unusual maker’s mark inside shaped like a “Man in the Moon” (Figure 8). None of the locks have assembly marks except occasionally on the pan. However, what seem to be cryptic marks are found on the screws, mountings and other components. On close examination these are assembly marks. Henry used a script set of numbers, which appear distorted on uneven surfaces. The number 7 can clearly be seen in the following photographs. Where the numbers are clear on flat surfaces they appear to have been a fancy stylized set.



Figure 8. Interior of the lock for J. J. Henry Boulton pistol.

Stocks: The black walnut wood for stocks is of good quality. The mountings are all well fitted to the stock. The lock mortise is well inlet including the precise shape of the unusual bird head

on the bridle. The barrel is well mounted. The assembly number observed on the inside lock components is also stamped inside the tang mortise (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Tang mortise, note the assembly number “7” stamp on the right side of the mortise.

Barrel: The barrels are well finished and fit very well into the stocks. Traces of browning could be seen under one barrel. The barrel bands are well made and closely resemble those used in the Model 1826 pistols in shape and quality. However, the bands are not quite uniform as to thickness of the metal. The bottom of the barrel and breech plug are stamped with the assembly number of the pistol (Figure 10).

Negative Attributes of the Four Boulton Pistols Examined.

Locks: The lock screws that mount the lock to the stock are crudely forged as well as the tang screw (Figure 11). In contrast, the lock and tang screws on the North pistols are turned on a lathe. The lock screws on the Evans pistols exhibit milling and a combination of partial milling also showing forging marks. The hammered forging marks indicate that Evans’s machinery was not quite as good as North’s.

Stocks: One of the most noticeable features of the Boulton pistols is the drop of the grip. The turn of the grip varies on the pistols



Figure 10. Breech and barrel stamping with the assembly number.



Figure 11. Forged J. J. Henry Boulton tang screw and assembly number.

from those that resemble the Model 1826 to a grip that is almost a straight drop meaning that the grip is almost at a 90 degree angle. The stock is cut off flat at the butt and does not fit into the butt cap. The North and Evans butt caps are fitted to the wood such that the wood fills the cap. Henry grips are thinner and do not have the swell at the butt cap present on Model 1826 pistols. Measurements of North stocks and Henry stocks from the tip of the butt cap to the end of the stock at the muzzle show the Henry stocks are at least 1/2 inch shorter due to the sharp turn of the grip.

Mountings: The next most noticeable feature is the shape of the trigger guard. A master gunsmith examining a Boulton pistol suggested that the guard was made for a different firearm and was repurposed to fit the pistol by constricting the guard, thus creating the elongated bowed shape. This may be a Henry “short cut” or a

necessity in modifying the trigger plate to fit the severe curve of the grip. These two features combine to create the most undesirable feature of the pistols, which is an unpleasing asymmetry of the arm. The side plates, though well inlet, are thinner on the J. J. Henry Boulton pistols. The swivel ramrod is thinner and the heads not as well made.

Barrels: The barrels do not exhibit any proof marks (Figure 12). The walls of the barrels are thinner than the Model 1826 Navy pistols. Henry barrels vary in caliber from .54 to .56. This fact alone certainly suggests that this pistol is not one of the Boulton Gun Works best products! Providing a military purpose barrel without evidence of proofing is not an acceptable practice. The ramrod swivels are serviceable and are about the same quality as military pistols. However, the Henry ramrods are smaller in diameter and more poorly finished than the military pistols.

Conclusion of the Collector Study

The study of the four Boulton pistols, along with North and Evans Model 1826 Navy pistols, provided an answer to the question of quality. Overall, the J. J. Henry Boulton pistols are decidedly inferior to their military counterparts. Perhaps the most disagreeable aspect of the pistol is the lack of symmetry and pleasing appearance. The shape of the grip and the modified trigger guard are the reasons for the negative appearance. When gripping the pistol butt the middle finger pinches between the trigger plate and the trigger guard due to the excess curve of the stock. This does not happen when gripping the Navy pistol. One collector noted on his pistol that the trigger was so short and bow so large that the trigger finger was more likely to fit behind than in front.

Henry was making underhammer pistols which require shorter stocks. It is not unreasonable to assume that Henry wanted to use stocks on hand for these pistols instead of buying new material. The short pistol stock material could be the reason for the tighter butt grip. However, this element of the pistols fabrication remains unexplained.

Previous Studies

In researching the published material it was discovered that others had seriously considered the “Boulton” pistols. In the early 1970’s Robert A. Howard, Registrar of The Hagley Museum, and Sam Smith, a noted veteran pistol collector, became acquainted. Both were interested in Henry’s operations including the J. J. Henry Boulton pistols. Mr. Howard was in the process of writing an article for possible publication titled “Manufacturing Techniques of the Henry Gun Works.” Howard discovered an article published by Sam in *The American Arms Collector* in July 1957 titled “Henry Flintlock Pistols in the Locke Collection.”²⁴ The two began corresponding. In those prehistoric days before computers, Sam corresponded by typed letter and had the foresight to carbon copy



Figure 12. Top of barrel of J. J. Henry Boulton pistol.

his reply on the back of a received letter. Brilliant, a researchers dream to have both sides of a communication!

In 1972 the Henry Family Papers had recently been microfilmed and were publicly accessible. Howard complained that the microfilm was not well organized and was hard to follow. Howard visited Mrs. Mary Henry Stitis in 1972 and examined two of the J. J. Henry Boulton pistols remaining with the Henry family. Howard states that at that time the original Henry Papers were still in possession of the family.²⁵ Fortunately, the original Henry Papers are now in the Hagley Museum and are well organized and available for public study.

The focus point of Howard's article was to determine if the Henry Boulton Gun Works had achieved interchangeability. During his visit with Mrs. Stitis, who lived in the Joseph Henry home, Howard was allowed to disassemble the two J. J. Henry Boulton pistols. He made numerous notes and comparisons of the two pistols, which he shared with Sam in letters and provided copies of "Appendix C, Comparison of Model 1826 Style Henry Flintlock Pistols" (see appendix 1). Howard also provided Sam a manuscript copy of his article. His study of the pistols components is detailed and follows the same discussion points used by the above mentioned collectors to evaluate their pistols. Howard's study, therefore, provides an "independent" evaluation of the Boulton pistols.

The two pistols were both J. J. Henry Boulton flintlock pistols. Howard reported that the pistols were in good condition but slightly damaged from poor storage. He disassembled the pistols and made detailed notes. Both pistols were stamped J. J. HENRY BOULTON on the locks. Unfortunately he did not note any assembly or lock markings. However, he did reply to Sam Smith, who had inquired about these marks, in a letter dated April 30, 1973. Howard writes that both pistols were stamped J. J. Henry Boulton and that he had not noted any assembly numbers. He did remark that when "fooling around" with the pistols he had a problem getting the parts right so had tagged all the components on one pistol.²⁶ His notes illustrate the same differences noted by our collectors study. He determined that the barrel wall thickness varied around the muzzle. He noted the screws were hand forged and the locks did not have assembly markings. Although the lock parts were similar and he thought they "may be interchanged" but added they were different enough that they would not interchange in the lock mortice. Included in the material is a photograph of the two pistols together, unfortunately the quality of the photo is dark and the detail is limited. Generally they appear to be standard Boulton flintlock pistols in very good condition. These pistols exhibit all the features of the pistols recently studied including the drop of the stock and the elongated trigger bow. Howard concludes these pistols are quite similar but not identical.²⁷

Robert Howard in his manuscript conclusions states... "It is therefore reasonably certain that the factory did not employ any significant new techniques in the production of their arms..." He concludes: "These 'J. J. Henry Boulton' pistols were the last military style flintlock pistol fabricated by John Joseph Henry."²⁸ In fact, John Joseph Henry did not live to see them completed by his son James Henry in 1838.

In the article "Henry Flintlock Pistols in the Locke Collection", which attracted the attention of Mr. Howard, Sam described two "Boulton" pistols in his article. One pistol exhibited the more

common lock marking. The second pistol is similar but the lock marking is J. HENRY.²⁹ These same two pistols are illustrated in The William M. Locke Collection on page 228, although misidentified as Henry Model 1819.³⁰ Both these pistols passed from the Locke collection to the Edwin Bitter collection and were both included in *Historic Pistols* by Samuel E. Smith and Edwin W. Bitter on pages 206-209.³¹ The J. J. Henry is described as a Militia pistol 1826, while the J. Henry stamped lock is incorrectly described as a Militia Pistol "1836." Perhaps the odd J. Henry marking is one of the 25 pistols made 1840-42 when James Henry was the sole owner of Boulton Gun Works. Or more simply just a missing "J". Both pistols are from the same era 1838-1842.

Oddly today, despite the small production, the Boulton pistols are not uncommon; however, finding one in original flintlock and in good condition is a challenge. About a dozen are known in collections today in original flintlock and in collectable condition. Many of the Boulton pistols were altered to percussion and many of the altered pistols have been returned to flintlock configuration.

An example of a percussion altered J. J. Henry Boulton pistol was purchased in a Pennsylvania farm sale in 1981 (Figure 13). On examining the pistol collector Jim Wertenberger quipped that "The pistol was probably unique in that it had not been reconverted to flintlock!" The pistol was altered to percussion using a side lug and standard percussion hammer. One interesting note is that the pistol has no address on the lock plate. Another pistol without an address was examined on a sale table during the Baltimore Gun Show. This example was in original flintlock, but was in only fair condition. The lock clearly never had the normal Boulton markings. A thorough examination was made of the altered percussion pistol for this study and there are no appreciable differences in the components of its original fabrication. These unmarked locks could be examples of the last 25 made in the 1840s.

The Boulton Gun Factory

The Henry Family papers support Mr. Howard's manuscript conclusions concerning Henry's ability to employ new techniques in the production of his firearms. Immediately following John Joseph Henry's death James Henry prepared an Inventory of Stock, Machinery and Buildings at the Boulton Works, January 1837.²⁹ The inventory includes the following buildings and machinery:

- Tilt House (likely the tilt hammer facility) contains mostly blacksmith tools and grinders.
- Blacksmith shop and tools
- Lower Shop: Boring tools bits and tools, water wheel
- Upper Shop: Turning lathe, cutting machine, upright bore, 5 boring benches, a breeching bench and tools, boring bits and other tools
- Finishing Shop: Three stories 52 vises, bench clamps, 3 rifling benches

At the height of the Henry's operation they employed about 84 workers at Boulton. The two page inventory contained numerous parts and partly finished arms. Listed on the inventory were 4000 pistol stocks.³² Surely, James Henry had a supply of enough pistol stocks available to properly stock the Boulton pistols? Unless these are all cut short for underhammer pistols?



Figure 13. J. J. Henry Boulton pistol altered to Percussion

This inventory, taken in January 1837, was only a few years before the goal of interchangeable parts was achieved with the production of the Model 1842 pistols and the Model 1841 rifles. Although the Henrys had a rather large facility (Figure 14), the inventory does not include many machinery improvements beyond perhaps the “upright boring machine” and the “cutting machine.” The inventory suggests that in the very period when other gun makers were working toward manufacturing improvements, the Henrys were not investing in machinery. The Boulton Gun Works, though robust, was operating in the cottage and handicraft era. The best Henry could achieve was a uniformity of parts. It has been argued that the more robust arms makers had the advantage of large military contracts and could invest in machinery, yet William L. Evans a few miles south at Evansburg was able to produce 2000 Model 1826 Navy pistols that were reported to be of better

quality than the pattern pistol received, which was likely made by veteran pistol maker Simeon North. Evans’s pistols illustrate that quality pistols could be made in small numbers.

Conclusion: J. J. Henry Boulton pistols.

The documentation provides a plausible solution for the existence of the J. J. Henry Boulton pistols. They would have been fabricated by 1838 on special order by Hubbard and Casey, likely for a state militia unit. The Henry papers reveal that 84 holster pistols were completed in 1838 and 60 were delivered to Hubbard and Casey, New York by April 1840. Henry completed 25 more holster pistols in 1840-1843. The total production was likely 109. After the delivery to Hubbard and Casey the remaining 49 pistols would have been sold to the private market.



Figure 14. Undated picture of Boulton Gun Works, front (left) and Henry Factory Equipment in ruin about 1885 (right)

A careful examination of the Boulton pistols and comparisons with North and Evans Model 1826 Navy contract pistols clearly illustrate that the Boulton pistols, although similar in pattern, are of much less quality. One of the collectors suggested that the Henry Boulton is to the Model 1826 Navy in quality as the Henry 1807-08 contract pistols are in quality to the Harpers Ferry pistol. Meaning that Henry was not able to make pistols of the same quality of the patterns provided.

Collectors and authors have always thought that the J. J. Henry Boulton pistols were not made for the U.S. Military. Hubbard and Casey requested the pistols follow a U. S. Pattern. Perhaps they were indicating they did not want underhammer pistols. Clearly they wanted a military style pistol. But then why did they follow a U.S. Navy pattern? Perhaps because a pattern pistol was available close by at Evans Mills. Although not an army model, the Model 1826 Navy was certainly a "U.S. Pattern." This article has provided a few answers and left a few mysteries untouched. The J. J. Henry Boulton pistols do have a historic place with the U.S. Military pistols. They are the last of the military style flintlock pistols made by the Henry Family. The Henrys long history of pistol fabrication will be partially discussed in the next three segments on sea service pistols.

The Privateer Pistols of John Joseph Henry, Philadelphia

The modern history of the privateer pistols of John Joseph Henry begins with the publication in 1985 of *Historic Pistols, The American Martial Flintlock 1760-1845*.³³ Contributing author James M. Wertenberger initially identified the pistol pictured on page 204-205 as a "J. Henry 1812 Navy Contract Pistol." Additional research in the National Archives and in the Henry Family Papers have permitted a clearer identification of the pistols Henry furnished to the U.S. Navy during the War of 1812. However, Jim should be credited with bringing this rare pistol to the notice of collectors. Jim first identified the rarity by noting that only two examples of this pistol were known to collectors.³⁴ In recent years two examples of this rare pistol were listed in auction catalogs, both mislabeling the pistol as a Henry Navy Contract pistol. The Henry Family Papers and examples of the Henry Navy pistols delivered to the Philadelphia Navy Yard suggest a different identity for these pistols. Archival research indicates that these rare surviving examples are J. Henry privateer pistols that were fabricated for ships fitting out in Philadelphia. Currently only three of the Henry privateer pistols have been located for study (Figure 15).

A brief history of Henry's 1807-08 Army contract pistols is necessary to properly sort out the origin of the privateer pistol.



Figure 15. J. J. Henry Privateer pistol.



Figure 16. Henry 1807-08 Contract Pistol.

On November 3, 1807 Secretary of War Henry Dearborn by letter ordered Tench Coxe, the Purveyor of Public Supplies, to proceed with the purchase of 2,000 rifles, 2,000 pair of pistols and 2,000 horseman's swords.³⁵ John Joseph Henry, Philadelphia, PA received two contracts for pistols (Figures 16 and 17). The first for 300 pair of pistols was dated November 17, 1807 and the second dated March 23, 1808 was for 600 pair of pistols. Henry delivered a total of 734 pair (1468) of pistols. Coxe initially believed the Pennsylvania rifle makers would be ideal contractors for the military pistols and rifles. At this period in our history the arms making facilities in the United States were still a handicraft industry. Strong personalities and incompetence caused the procurement system to fail at a critical moment in our history. James Wertenberger provided a great study of the 1807-08 Contract pistols in his article "The Primary 1807-08 U.S. Martial Pistols."³⁶

On March 15, 1811 William Eustis, Secretary of War, appointed Marine T. Wickham, then serving as the Master Armorer at Harpers Ferry Armory, as the official inspector of contract arms. The appointment letter was specific as to Wickham's duties. Responding to criticisms of the arms contracted by Tench Coxe, Wickham's first duty, specifically instructed by Secretary Eustis, was to examine the contract arms in storage at the U.S. Schuylkill Arsenal and report the results directly to him.³⁷ Wickham's full report dated October 10, 1811 reflects the number of pistols in stores by contractor, inspector, and his opinion of the contract arms. Wickham's report condemned almost the entire lot of contract pistols including those of Henry's manufacture.³⁸ This was a massive failure of contract military arms on the eve of the War of 1812. The purpose of this long background is to set the stage for the supply of condemned pistols resting in storage in the Schuylkill Arsenal.

When the Declaration of War on Great Britain was made on June 18, 1812, John Joseph Henry inquired of Calendar Irvine, Superintendent of Military Supplies, about the possibility of purchasing

some of his own condemned pistols back from the government. On June 25, 1812 Calendar Irvine informed Secretary Eustis about the possible sale of the pistols:

... An application has been made to me to purchase the rejected pistols and muskets at the arsenal, which are wanted by privateers fitting out in this port (Philadelphia). I possess the authority to sell them but am of opinion it would be better to let them take that course at any price.³⁹

The Secretary responded affirmatively, setting the price at ten dollars per pair, the same price paid to Henry for the contract 1807-08 pistols. On July 20, 1812 George Ingles, Military Storekeeper, was ordered by Irvine to deliver the pistols that Henry had requested:

Be pleased to deliver to the order of Mr. Joseph Henry 120 pair of pistols manufactured by himself.⁴⁰

On July 29, 1812 Henry received 200 pair of his own condemned contract pistols. The receipt was copied into a small ledger book located in the National Archives, while the original receipt was sent to the Secretary of War.

Receipt of pistols

Joseph Henry to the U. States July 29 for 200 pair of pistols sold him by permission of the Secretary of War at ten dollars per pair ...\$2000 delivered him by George Ingles, MSK (Military Store Keeper). Received check dated July 29, 1812 on the F& M bank.⁴¹

On August 4, 1812 Callender Irvine Informed Secretary Eustis that the sale of pistols to Joseph Henry had been completed.

I have sold agreeable to your permission two hundred pair of pistols to Mr. Joseph Henry at ten dollars per pair for which I have received two thousand dollars, which sum is deposited at the credit of the treasurer of the United States in the Farmers & Merchants bank of this city. {Joseph Henry receipt for the pistols enclosed}⁴²



Figure 17. Early barrel marking and eagle P proof.

Although the documentation is complete for only the transaction for the 200 pair of pistols, examination of the Henry Day Books indicates that Henry received two groups of pistols totaling 320 pair (640) of pistols.

Oddly on July 10, 1812, before the receipt of the 640 pistols, the Henry Day Book records receiving two payments from Bassmore and Sperry for 100 pair pistols at \$9.00 per pair, 200 muskets at 12.00 and 250 cutlass at \$3.50 each plus \$25 for boxing and shipping.⁴³ This mixture of arms would suggest the firm was involved in outfitting a privateer. The firm of Bassmore and Sperry has not been identified.

There could be several explanations for the lack of clarity on the number of pistols Henry received including loss of official records due to the burning of Washington during the War of 1812. A thorough review of Henry's own records, although tedious, suggests one logical solution that will be presented here.

On the last pages of John Joseph Henry's Day Book 1807-12 there are a number of scribbled notes and figures. In one set headed Pistols Delivered in the Whole, Henry tallies the total number of pistols delivered on the two contracts noting 734 pair delivered (Figure 18). Then he subtracts the 734 from the 900 pair due on both contracts and notes "166 to be made." Although undated, the account clearly shows the last pistol delivery on July 1810. In this accounting Henry has identified that he needs to make 166 pair of pistols to complete the last contract. However, Henry's intentions aside to complete the contract, no more Henry contract pistols were ever delivered to Tench Coxe.⁴⁴

Pistols delivered in the whole		
April 1809	403 pair	900
June 22 "	96 1/2 "	734
August 31 "	40 1/2 "	166 to be made
July 1810	164 "	734
	<u>734 pair</u>	900
	10	
	<u>734</u>	

Figure 18. Pistol account tally J. J. Henry Day Book.

On June 30, 1808 the Henrys signed a contract to deliver 10,000 muskets in five years. The deliveries began on May 20, 1809. In the year following the last delivery of pistols Henry began to put his effort fully into muskets. Only a few pistol parts were accumulated through 1811. The reason was simple economics, again referring to Henry's scribbled notations, the profit margin on the muskets was significantly larger than the pistols. Also Henry could sub-contract for muskets.

Prior to the Henry repurchase of pistols on August 10, 1810, the United States Schuylkill Arsenal sold 500 pistols to Maryland, 424 of those pistols were made by Henry. This reduced the Henry pistols in the arsenal to 1044.⁴⁵ Also, previous to Henry's buy back he sold on March 11, 1811 34 pair of pistols at \$12 per pair to Juan Bolivar for his brother Simón Bolivar.⁴⁶ Henry sold Bolivar muskets as well at a higher price than his contract arms. The sale to Bolivar was likely the last of the pistols, which may have been

in some form of fabrication after Henry delivered the last group in July 1810. His Day Book suggests he may have been planning to complete the contract. However, the Henry Day Books following the last delivery of pistols indicate that Henry and his suppliers are working full time on the muskets.

When Marine T. Wickham condemned the remainder of Henry's pistols in the Schuylkill Arsenal it provided Henry with a ready supply of pistols. The War of 1812 provided Henry with an opportunity to sell pistols to other buyers. Between July 10, 1812 and October 9, 1812 Henry sold a total of 630 pistols. He had acquired at least 640 of his own 1807-08 contract pistols from Schuylkill.

On July 31, 1812 Henry sold George Harrison, Navy Agent Philadelphia, 100 pair of pistols at \$12.00 a pair. In only a couple days after receiving his own contract pistols from Schuylkill, Henry made a nice \$2.00 profit per pair. Later on October 9, 1812 Henry sold George Harrison another 25 pair of pistols at \$12.00. Henry notes the payment was received on October 23, 1812.⁴⁷ The U.S. Navy became the largest buyer at 250 pistols and provided Henry an 8% profit.

The Privateer Pistols

In Calendar Irvine's letter of June 25, 1812 he specifically noted that Henry's rejected pistols and muskets at the arsenal were "wanted by privateers fitting out in this port." By early August 1812 Henry had acquired 640 of his own condemned pistols to outfit privateers. Three pistols have been located that fit the circumstances covered in the correspondence. These three pistols are similar to the Henry Army pistols delivered on the 1807-08 contracts. The defining privateer feature is a belt hook inlet into the stock and secured only by the rear lock screw. Two of the pistols examined retain their original belt hooks. A third pistol, though missing the belt hook, exhibits the stock mortice for the tail of the hook. The belt hooks on these pistols are not the same configurations found on Henry's War of 1812 Navy pistols or those made by Simeon North for his U.S. Navy contract pistols. The belt hook used on the privateer pistols is a French belt hook originally used on Model 1733 Dragoon pistols (Figure 19). The belt hook pictured in *Historic Pistols* on pages 204-205⁴⁸ is clearly similar to those pictured in Robert Booker's excellent book *Armes De Poing, Militaries Francaises* on pages 54-56.⁴⁹ The physical and archival evidence will clearly show that pistols erroneously identified in publications and sale catalogs as "J. Henry Navy Contract" are in fact those repurchased or repurposed by Henry for privateer service.



Figure 19. French belt hook held in place by rear lock plate screw with the rear terminal inlet into the wood.



Figure 20. J. J. Henry Privateer pistols (pistol 1 top, pistol 2 bottom).

To quote the master sleuth again, “It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence. It biases the judgment,” Sherlock Holmes in *A Study in Scarlet*.⁵⁰ A thorough study of military arms requires both documentation and physical evidence. In this case the physical evidence is currently limited to three pistols. One of the pistols was examined in detail about 1995 before subsequently being sold at auction. The two remaining pistols are currently in private collections and were examined in detail at the ASAC Springfield, MO Meeting in 2019.

The Provenance for the Three Known Privateer Pistols

Pistol Number 1

This pistol, formerly in the collection of James Wertenberger, was featured in *Historic Pistols*. It was described as a “J. Henry 1812 Navy Contract Pistol.” The pistol was acquired by Leland Bull in 2005. Wertenberger notes in the description that, “At present there are only two known examples.” The pistol retains the French belt hook.⁵¹

Pistol Number 2

This pistol was formerly in the Robert Howard collection. The pistol was purchased at auction by Joseph Murphy in 2007. The pistol listed as item 17 on page 11 of the Robert Howard Sale catalog incorrectly identifies the pistol as a “U.S. Navy Contract pistol c.1812.” The pistol, identified with the Murphy collection number 0511, was purchased from the Joseph Murphy estate on March 15, 2019 at Baltimore, MD and is now in the collection of Lewis Southard. This is likely the second pistol noted by Mr. Wertenberger in *Historic Pistols*. The pistol retains the French belt hook.

Pistol Number 3

This pistol was formerly in the collection of Robert Jeska. The pistol was sold at auction on November 23, 2009. The Bonhams and Butterfields Catalog, item number 5007, page 11 incorrectly describes the pistol as “A rare 1807/1808 Navy contract flintlock pistol. Probably Henry.” The area around the rear lock screw has a mortice filled with a wood chip the same configuration as the known examples with the French belt hook. This pistol was examined in detail by Lewis Southard at Bob Jeska’s home about 1995. The barrel is marked NY for barrel maker Nicholas Yocom. Discussions at that time about the pistol were inconclusive. The consensus among collectors at that time was that the pistols were War of 1812 U.S. Navy pistols. Differing from example numbers

1 and 2 the pistol lock is unmarked. The inside of the lock plate is stamped PS according to the catalog.

Examination and description of the pistols

At the ASAC Springfield Meeting the two most complete privateer pistols Number 1 and 2 above were brought together, studied and photographed (Figure 20). Both pistols are complete and remain in original flintlock condition. Both pistols retain the modified French belt hook. Overall the pistols follow the pattern of the John Joseph Henry contract pistols of 1807-08. The two pistols are similarly marked. Comparative examples of the Henry Army contract pistols and the U.S. Navy Henry pistol were available for study. The comparisons show an obvious difference between the privateer pistols and those fabricated by Henry for the U.S. Navy during the War of 1812. Further examination of the two types of U.S. Navy pistols provided by Henry in limited numbers during the War of 1812 will follow and clearly show the difference in these three sea service pistols. The following details follow the traditional Lock, Stock, and Barrel pattern.

Lock: The lock follows the 1807-08 contract pattern with a change in the lock plate stamping to read J. HENRY PHILA (Figure 21). The stamp appears to be the same one used on the barrels of the contract pistols. Using the absence of marking on pistol 3 as a “clue”, measurements of the thickness of the lock plate on the two privateer pistols were taken and compared to similar locations on 1807-08 Henry contract pistols. The comparisons suggest that the lock surface on the pistols may have been ground to remove the US and the address on the tail on the lock, which is present on contract pistols. The locks on pistols 1 and 2 are stamped SS on the inside of the plate. These initials are commonly found on Henry locks and are lock makers John Steinman and Frederick Schrader. The PS stamping reported on pistol 3 is also noted on the inside of Henry locks.

Stock: The black walnut stocks on all three pistols are unmarked. The stock has been morticed at the rear lock screw to accommodate the tail of the French belt hook. No inspection marks are present.

Mountings: The mountings are brass and consistent with those on the 1807-08 contract Army pistols, including the rear ramrod pipe, which is not present on Henry Naval pistols of the War of 1812 era (Figure 22). The brass butt cap is simpler and a little



Figure 21. Lock Showing address and Lock showing SS inside.

smaller than those on the earlier Henry contract pistols and has no raised surface where the butt screw attaches. The rear section of the brass trigger guard plate is noticeably shorter on the privateer pistols and secured with only one wood screw. The trigger guard on the contract pistols are longer held with two wood screws. The trigger guards are more similar to the Navy trigger guards and the pistols Henry delivered to the State of Maryland. However, research has shown that Henry began to “cut corners” on some of his later deliveries of U.S. contract pistols.

Barrel: The barrels on all three examples are proofed with an Eagle CT. There is no address stamped on the barrels. There are no brass sights on the barrels. Pistol barrels on examples Number 1 and 2 are .56 caliber and about 10 inches long. Number 2 and 3 have the NY marking for barrel supplier Nicholas Yocom filed on the bottom (Figure 23).

Analysis: With only three examples to study, these pistols at first seem perplexing. They resemble the configuration of the 1807-08 pistols, however they differ in some details. The markings on the

privateer pistols are different. The 1807-08 contracts locks have a US in the center and are stamped J. Henry PHILA in two lines on the tail. The same stamping appears on the barrel. Pistols 1 and 2 have the J. Henry PHILA in two lines on the lock plate centered under the pan. Pistol 3 has no lock or barrel marking. This suggested that the marking had been removed and led to a more detailed examination of the lock plates. Comparative measurements of the thickness of the lock plates of two contract army pistols inspected by Jacob Shough and Daniel Pettibone were compared with the locks on two privateer pistols. Both locks on pistols 1 and 2 suggest that the lock plate has been reduced in thickness along the sections where the stamping of the US and address at the tail were located on the Army contract pistols. The lock plate on Pistol 3 is unmarked.

Cautionary notes are required here to explain why the precise measurements are not presented. This is because these locks are handcrafted and provided by several contractors. Also, the sample of privateer pistols is quite small. However, measurements of the thickness of the lock plates and the pistol example with no lock



Figure 22. Comparison of two Privateer pistols (top) and 1807 contract Henry pistol (bottom).

markings suggest that the locks were ground. The thickness of the plate is generally consistent on the contract pistols. In contrast, measurements of the lock plate's thickness on the privateer pistols exhibit a thinning lock plate from the pan area to the rear lock screw hole.



Figure 23. NY for Nicholas Yocom filed onto the bottom of the barrel.

During the comparisons it was noted that the tip of the sear spring protrudes from the lock plate on both privateer pistols examined. In comparison the sear spring screws on contract pistols are nicely finished flush to the lock plate. The protruding screws at the rear of the lock plate provide another “clue” suggesting the lock plates had been ground. The thinner plate would allow the lock screws to protrude through the plate when tightened. In Example 3 the lock plate is unstamped. This suggested that the marking had been removed and led to a more detailed examination of the lock plates.

Henry may have reasoned that the presence of the US on the lock plate would identify the pistol as federal property. If the pur-

pose of the reduction of the plate was to remove the US then the process also removed the address marking on the tail. Grinding only the rear part of the lock plate avoided the pan and the area of the frizzen spring. The replaced J. HENRY PHILA stamp covered the site of the US stamp found on the 1807-08 contract pistols.

None of the privateer barrels have a stamped barrel address or a tail address and none have a front sight. There is no visual evidence that any barrel markings have been removed. All three examples have the eagle head CT proof mark.

The mountings are the same as those found on the later contract pistols. Noticeably, there is no raised area on the cap where the butt screw passes through. Beginning in December 1807 Henry used Joseph Edwards to provide sets of mountings. On April 28, 1809 Edwards delivered 600 sets of pistol mountings to Henry. The sets were the brass side plate, butt cap and the two thimbles for the ramrod.⁵² Between May 23 and November 2, 1809 Joseph Edwards was paid for 345 more sets of mountings. However, by September 11, 1810 Henry seems to have changed brass casters. On that date Henry paid Casper Laurerlane for 50 sets of rifle mountings.⁵³ Subsequently Henry paid the firm of Bourton and Ashton for brass casting, however, these were paid for by the pound and not specific to type.⁵⁴ The raised medallion on the butt caps was discontinued at some point during the contract pistol production. None of the privateer pistols have the raised butt cap medallion and neither do some of the later contract pistols. The shortened trigger guards may also be another Henry short cut.

The physical evidence and a letter from Tench Coxe suggests that Henry had begun to cut corners in the last groups of pistols delivered. On January 11, 1811 Coxe informed the Secretary of War... “I find this day that Shough has passed 380 pistols of Henry and Frye though they lack the brass tops to the ramrod and the brass upper sleeve of the stock, which are both on the pattern.”⁵⁵ This observation concerning the “upper sleeve” is interesting in that Henry’s last delivery was on July 31, 1810. Some of the Hen-



Figure 24. Privateer pistols (top) and Henry Navy Contract Pistol (bottom).

ry pistols with Maryland marks lack the front brass thimble which Coxe refers to as the upper sleeve. Pistols were also noted that lacked the brass front sight. Coxe's comments imply that Henry was beginning to take short cuts on his later deliveries. In comparison the 1812 Navy contract pistols do not have a rear ramrod pipe (upper sleeve; Figure 24).

The barrel proof mark on the privateer barrels is an eagle head CT stamping rather than the eagle P found on the Henry Contract pistols. Pistol barrels were supplied by sub-contractors especially noted in Joseph Henry's Daybook. Inspector Jacob Shough employed Lewis Ghriskey, a local Philadelphia gunsmith, to prove pistol and musket barrels.

A bill for proofing musket and pistol barrels submitted to Tench Coxe by Lewis Ghriskey covering the period August 3, 1810 to January 15, 1811 included two of Henry's barrel makers Nicholas Yocom and Daniel Pannabecker. Ghriskey passed 104 barrels by Yocom and 81 made by Pannabecker. It is important to note that Ghriskey passed 27 barrels made by Martin Fry and 37 for John Guest who were making their own barrels for the pistol contracts:

August 24 1810 To proving 33 Pistol Barrels made by Nicholas Yocom for Joseph Henry 29 passed proof

September 29 1810 To proving 77 Pistol Barrels made by Nicholas Yocom for Joseph Henry 75 passed proof

September 1 1810 To proving 31 Pistol Barrels for Martin Fry 27 passed proof

September 5, 1810 To proving 60 Pistol Barrels for John Guest 37 passed proof

*January 15, 1811 To proving 117 Pistol Barrels made by Daniel Pannabecker for Joseph Henry 81 passed proof*⁵⁶

It is important to note that Henry had on hand a large supply of proofed pistol barrels suggesting it was his intention to complete his contract, although the barrels were not used in making further contract pistols. The fact that the invoice for proofing was submitted to Tench Coxe means that Ghriskey was proving these barrels for the United States, not for the contractors. Lewis Ghriskey was a well-known gunsmith in Philadelphia. Peter Schmidt in *U.S. Military Flintlock Muskets* lists numerous payments to Ghriskey for proving musket barrels in 1810.⁵⁷ Many of those musket proofs were for Henry. Schmidt pictures a barrel proof on a Henry musket with a left facing Eagle CT credited to Lewis Ghriskey (Figure 25). Ghriskey continued to proof musket barrels through 1811, however the payment records do not show him proofing additional pistol barrels for the government. During the War of 1812 Ghriskey did proof Navy pistol barrels for Henry.



Figure 25. Eagle CT barrel proof.

While most of the barrels on the 1807- 08 contract pistols are proofed with an eagle P, the privateer pistol barrels are proved with an Eagle CT. The pistol barrel proof on the privateers have a right face eagle head CT proof stamp suggesting two different stamps in use. The presence of the "Ghriskey" like Eagle CT proof mark, coupled with no barrel marking and ground locks suggest that Henry used the accumulating pistol components that were initially acquired to complete the 1807-08 contract to make up these privateer pistols.

The Revenge



Figure 26. The Revenge?

On November 16, 1812 John Joseph Henry purchased a one fiftieth share in the Schooner Revenge for \$770. The Privateer Schooner Revenge was "fitted out" at Southwark, Philadelphia by owner and shipwright Benjamin Phillips. The Revenge had already sailed on a cruise against the enemies of the United States under Captain William Butler. The purchase document was signed by officials of the U.S. Treasury and Customs House, Phillips, and Joseph Henry.⁵⁸ Henry records in his Day Book on November 24, 1812 he paid Howell and Shaw for two shares in the Privateer Revenge. One share for himself and the second for Daniel Henkels, a longtime associate, which cost him \$770 a share. Previously on October 9, 1812 Henry's Day Book noted a sale of arms to Howell and Shaw including: 37 muskets, 45 pair of pistols at \$13 a pair, 25 boarding pikes, 16 boarding axes, 2 screwdrivers and 1 set of magazine tools.⁵⁹ This sale alone would account for 90 privateer pistols. Interestingly William Henry, who was an excellent illustrator, has a pen and ink drawing on the leather cover of his "Temporary Memorandum Book" depicting a ship in full sail (Figure 26). The drawing shown in the above photo above may be the Revenge?⁶⁰

Edgar S. Maclay in *A History of American Privateers* identifies a Schooner Revenge, which originated in Boston, carried 14 guns,

and was one of the first privateers to sail. The *Revenge* enjoyed a very successful career capturing several valuable prizes. The last two, laden with dry goods worth seven thousand dollars, were taken in July 1814.⁶¹ Perhaps Henry made a good investment. Earlier on July 10, 1812 Henry noted in his Day Book a sale to Bassmore and Sperry of 100 pair of pistols at \$9 a pair, 200 muskets and 250 cutlass for a total of \$4,400.⁶² The inclusion of the 250 cutlass suggest this is another privateer investment group. The name of the ship is not listed in Henry's records. These records suggest a total of at least 290 pistols were supplied to privateers by Henry.

The Belt Hooks

Perhaps the most defining feature of these privateer pistols is the unusual belt hook, which should be more accurately called a Crochet de Ceinture, because it is a French belt hook used on Model 1733 dragoon pistols.⁶³ This type of belt hook pictured in *Historic Pistols, The American Martial Flintlock 1760-1845* on pages 204-20564 is clearly similar to those pictured in *Armes De Poing* on pages 54-56.⁶⁵ The attachment end of the original belt hook has been modified into a flat pointed end and inlet into the stock and in the process removing a section of the side plate (Figure 19). The original side plate was cut to accommodate the tail of the belt hook. This inletting modification was effected to utilize the original rear lock screw. The source of these belt hooks was likely the Schuylkill Arsenal where they were stored after removal from French pistols acquired during the Revolutionary War. Continental Dragoons carried their pistols in saddle holsters while French mounted units carried them on the belt using the Crochet de Ceinture. French pistols arriving in Philadelphia were placed in stores, cleaned, and often modified by shortening the barrels. The French "belt hooks" would have been removed as an unnecessary encumbrance. Henry very likely acquired them as a quick fix.

The presence of the belt hooks along with the J. Henry lock stamp is the reason that publications and auction catalogs describe them as U.S. Navy Contract Pistols. They are not. The U.S. Navy North contract of 1808 and the previous 1797 Navy pistols have a much more robust belt hook with a more secure anchoring system. The pistols acquired by the Navy Agent purchased from Henry during the War of 1812 have a similar belt hook to earlier Navy pistols, but the tail is fastened with a screw into the stock instead of the stud. The shorter French belt hook is not well attached to the stock. The tail is only secured by the inlet and the lock screw. A blow to the belt hook as it is attached to the Henry privateer pistol would easily rip it from the shallow insert in the wood and allow it to rotate on the stock. The damage to the stock on Pistol Number 3 and the missing hook suggest that this is exactly what happened to this example. This was simply a quick fix by Henry to repurpose the basic army pistols and components that Henry had on hand to outfit a limited number of privateer ships.

Conclusion

One question that needs to be answered is why are these privateer pistols not some of the 125 pair of pistols Henry sold the Navy? The most telling answer is that Henry did not have the time to modify the pistols between receiving them and delivering the first 100 pair to the Navy. Since he did not modify the first ones why bother on the second one?

Although not official U.S. Navy pistols, they are a unique example of the privateer contribution during the War of 1812. The possible total of 290 pistols sold to privateers, with only three pistols

identified suggests a very low survival rate of these unique pistols. These repurposed pistols also partly explain why Henry did not complete his contract. He simply could make more money selling pistols privately. It is entirely possible that these privateer pistols complete with French belt hook were intended for the *Revenge* in which Henry was a part owner. The archival documents are clear that it was Henry's intention to use the condemned contract pistols for privateer ships. More likely this was a business decision by Henry to acquire his own condemned contract pistols and resell (even at the expense of the U.S. Navy) and use excess parts to make profitable pistols.

Common Navy and the Chambers Repeating System Pistols

During the War of 1812 John Joseph Henry secured an agreement with George Harrison, Navy Agent Philadelphia, to furnish arms including muskets and pistols. Henry supplied the Navy two types of flintlock pistols. Both types of pistols were made concurrently in Henry's gun shops. In the Henry Day Books they are referred to in his records as "Common" and "Repeating" pistols.⁶⁶

These pistols differ from the privateers and 1807-8 Army contract pistols in that these were purpose made for the U.S. Navy. These pistols were used on the Great Lakes, where a pair was carried by Captain Oliver Hazzard Perry. One of Perry's "Common" Henry Navy pistols is currently in the U.S. Naval Academy Museum in Annapolis, MD. The museum curator kindly arranged for the pistol to be temporarily removed from exhibit so it could be studied in detail. One of the reasons for the examination was to study the details of the original attached belt hook (Figure 27). Without any U.S. Navy markings or inspection marks, it is the provenance of this pistol, complete with its original belt hook that allows the positive identification of these Henry Navy "Common Pistols." Once again, the simple belt hook provides the necessary clue.



Figure 27. Belt hook on Perry Navy pistol.

John Joseph Henry Repeaters

The "Repeaters" were made in the same facilities with parts furnished by the same contractors as the "Common" pistols. The "Repeaters," as Henry called them, are unique pistols that utilized a special device invented by Joseph G. Chambers. An entire article could be devoted to the devices invented by Joseph Chambers and the intrigues that occurred during the War of 1812. The focus of this work is to properly identify the Enigmatic Military Pistols of J. J. Henry; however, some supportive information is included to illustrate the uniqueness of this pistol.

Joseph G. Chambers wrote to the Secretary of War from his home in Washington, PA on December 17, 1812. In the letter he offered "...some account and description of an invention of fire-

arms, which I term The Repeating Gunnery..." Chambers stated that muskets could hold 7 shots and horse pistols 3 or 4. Chambers states in his letter that he has... "possessed this secret for a number of years." The letter from Chambers included two endorsements. The letters were sent to Decius Wadsworth, Commissary General of Ordnance, for comment. Wadsworth added his comments to the bottom of the endorsements letter. Colonel Wadsworth, a veteran military officer, did not even bother to use a new sheet of paper in condemning the idea... "I am decidedly opposed to any species of arms of a complicated construction..."⁶⁷ Chambers had tried to interest the government in his ideas in May of 1792. His system was tested and found to be unreliable. The main objection was the Chambers repeating system was easily damaged and unreliable.⁶⁸

Although the Army was unwilling to support the Repeaters, the U.S. Navy decided to try them out. Although the device was unique and the pistols were purpose built as Repeaters, they used the same pattern as the Common pistols. A side by side comparison of the two Navy pistols will quickly show the similarities. Therefore, a pistol built by Henry identified as a purpose built Chambers Repeating Pistol can clearly inform the identity of the Common Navy pistols.

The Chambers Repeaters differ in having a slightly heavier barrel and stock and, of course, originally featured the unique Chambers device. It is also important to note that Henry Derringer and Jacob Bretz also delivered common pistols to the Philadelphia Navy Yard during the War of 1812. Pistols made by Thomas French have been noted with belt hooks and some were provided with the Chambers Repeating system. The Chambers systems have also been noted on 1808 North Navy pistols, Harpers Ferry pistols, and an 1816 North Army pistol.

The Repeating Gunnery System

The Joseph Chambers Repeating Gunnery system allows multiple shots to be fired from a single flintlock barrel (Figure 28). It is designed for use on standard flintlock military pistols. A second touch hole is drilled about 3 1/2 inches forward of the normal location near the breech. A hole is drilled into the pan and a brass tube was attached from the pan and run along the morticed cut in the top of the stock to the forward touch hole. A tiller mechanism was added to the lock to allow a piece of metal to be moved to cover the original touch hole. The idea was to load the barrel first with a standard load followed by multiple loads using a cylindrical lead ball that was cast with a hole in the center. A tube like projection communicated the fire into the next round. With the tiller closed over the original touch hole, the lock was fired and the ignited charge in the pan traveled up the tube and ignited the powder and ball charge at the forward hole. The charges below the forward touch hole would then in turn be ignited through a hole in the lead round. The solid ball loaded first would halt the ignitions. Then the pan was recharged and the tiller moved away from the original touch hole allowing a final shot. Reportedly the pistol capacity was 3-4 shots. Some years ago Chambers lead cylinder shaped pistol balls were reported to have been found in a military storage refuse pit in the Great Lakes area. A few years ago a Harpers Ferry pistol in severely damaged condition was noticed at the Baltimore Gun Show. The remains included the barrel and contained a section of the original Chambers brass tube (Figure 29). There is a cleanout door at the junction where the pipe turns 90 degrees into the forward chamber. Several different kinds of pistols are known

to have been fitted with the Chambers Device perhaps on an experimental discovery.

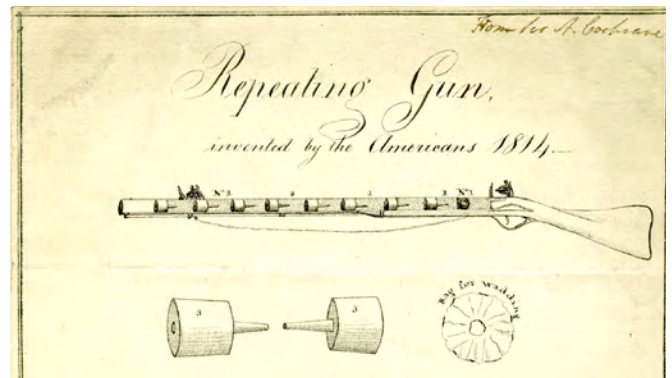


Figure 28. Drawing of the Chambers multi-shot system. Accession VAC1213-01855. Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.



Figure 29. Harpers Ferry Pistol barrel with Chambers tube and close up of clean out door (bottom)

The Henry U.S. Navy Deliveries

The archival evidence for the Henry Navy deliveries begins with an entry in the Henry Day Book for May 31, 1813. On that day Henry recorded a delivery to George Harrison Navy Agent Philadelphia:

3 pair pistols double bridle Ketland locks

5 pair single bridle Ketland locks

22 pair of our own make

This sampling of pistols may have been to illustrate that Henry's pistol locks were as good as imported Ketland pistol locks. Pistols imported by Ketland and Walker just before the War of 1812 broke out have the S shaped pistol cock. This pattern must have met with Navy approval because both the Common and Repeaters have a similar S shaped cock. Henry's pistols of his own make are likely



Figure 30. Henry Common Navy Pistol.

the first delivery of the Common Pistols.

The Henry records confirm the following additional deliveries to Harrison:

June 2, 1813 Pistols 30 pair of pistols @ \$12.50

March 3, 1814 Pistols 66 Pair @ \$13.50

March 12, 1814 Pistols 40 Pair @ \$13.50

On July 14, 1814 Henry delivered 80 pair of common pistols at a cost of \$13.50 per pair and 50 pair of repeating pistols (Chambers patent pistols) at a cost of \$800 or \$16.00 a pair.⁶⁹

The Henry Day Books account for 476 Common Navy pistols, 16 pistols with Ketland locks, and 100 Chambers Repeaters delivered to the Navy in 14 months. A curious entry appears in the Henry Day Book for December 8, 1822: "George W Tryon has the following to sell for me on hand: 84 ½ pair of Ships Pistols worth \$6.75-- 570.37 1/2."⁷⁰ This would be half price for the Common Navy pistols during the War of 1812. If the Navy cancelled delivery due to the end of the war this implies that Henry may have fabricated at least 645 Common Navy Pistols. Henry's other "ship pistols" sales ranged from 9 to 12 to 13 dollars per pair.

The Henry Day Books and Ledgers

The Henry Day Books record payments for materials such as barrels, locks, and brass casting. The Day Books imply that Henry had the repeater barrels especially made. On June 17, 1813 Lewis Ghriskey is paid for proving 268 pistol barrels and 48 ship pistol barrels. Ghriskey is proving these barrels for Henry and is paid by him. These barrels are stamped with a P. On October 23, 1813 Abraham Winderhoffel is paid two separate rates for breeching pistol barrels: 4 pair (8) for \$1.12 or 14 cents each and 14 pair (28) for \$1.60 or about 6 cents each. On November 16, 1813 William Henry was noted for filing 18 repeating locks. On several occasions Daniel Pannabecker is paid for pistol barrels. His distinctive () DP is stamped on the bottom of Chambers Repeater pistol barrels as well as on the Common pistol barrels.⁷¹

Perhaps the most interesting entries noted are those for Joseph Chambers. On February 16, 1814 Henry sold to Joseph G. Chambers 3 pair of pistols at \$10.00 a pair. On June 18, 1814 David Maston was finishing 50 repeating pistols and 1 for Joseph Chambers. On October 4, 1814 Henry sold Joseph Chambers 1 hammer

(frizzen) for a repeating pistol. Henry charged him 50 cents.⁷²

U.S. Navy "Common" Pistol Description

These .56 caliber pistols are rather sturdily made (Figure. 30). They are 16 ¾ inch long and weigh 2 lb. 8 oz. Only 476 Common pistols have been documented delivered between June 1813 and July 14, 1814 for the U.S. Navy. It is unclear if the 16 Ketland pistols delivered are English Ketland pistols or Common pistols with Ketland locks? The Common Pistol lock is simply stamped J. HENRY. The interior lock plate on one example is unmarked except for an F on the sear and near the pan. A second example has a 1 B on the plate and K on the sear and tumbler and on the pan area. Imprinted on the stock of the second example is the outline of the original belt hook.

The serpentine shaped cock is a distinctive difference from the usual double necked cock used on previous U.S. Military pistols and on Henry's 1807-08 contract pistols. The unmarked stock is black walnut. The morticing in the wood is well done. The barrel is 10 ⅜ inch and stamped with a P proof mark. The pistol is fitted with a 7 ⅛ inch iron belt hook similar in shape to the 1808 Navy early contract pistols. The hook is secured with the rear lock screw, but instead of a stud to stabilize the hook as used on the 1808 North pistols, Henry fastened the tail of the belt hook to the stock with a wood screw (Figure 27). The iron belt hooks are well made but they show rough file marks. The mountings are brass and include only one ramrod pipe.

John Joseph Henry, U. S. Navy Chambers "Repeater" Description

These .56 caliber pistols are robustly made (Figure 31, 33). They are 16 inches long and also weigh 2 lb. 8 oz. Only 100 pistols have been documented delivered on July 14, 1814 for the U.S. Navy. The lock on the Repeating pistol used for this article has been altered to function as a standard flintlock. The known surviving pistols are found in this condition. There is a legend that the Navy removed the repeater tubing, spliced the wood and returned the pistols to a regular flintlock system (Figure 32).

The lock plate is simply stamped J. HENRY. The inside of the lock is stamped PS. The inside of the Henry locks are usually stamped with initials denoting the supplier. William Henry is credited with filing most of these unique locks. In a statement of



Figure 31. Henry Repeater that once had a Chambers Device (since removed on this example).

work dated October 11, 1810 Henry notes 12 pistols locks soft by PS.⁷³ The statement also includes rifle and musket locks by PS and two soft pistol locks by LR.⁷⁴ The lock parts are stamped with an H and a double H on the lock plate. The cock is S shaped and the same pattern as found on the Common Navy Pistol.

are thicker on the Repeater suggesting these were purpose made. The barrel is shorter, measuring 9 3/4 inches. The combination of the barrel and stock gives the repeater the appearance and feel that it is more robust than the Common Navy. Both pistols weigh the same at 2 lb 8 oz. The Chambers would weigh more with the added tubing.

Conclusion and Belt Hooks Again

Since both the Common and Repeater pistols were being fabricated at the same time in Henry's facilities and used the same barrel and lock makers and the sources of the brass mountings they should look alike. The Repeaters are a unique purpose built pistol and cannot be confused with other types. Therefore, they reinforce the identity of the Common Navy pistol furnished by Henry. The Captain Perry pistol, which is an example of the Common Navy pistol, retains the original belt hook thus providing the correct configuration of a Henry Belt hook (Figure 34). The Captain Perry pistol clearly shows the tail of the belt hook was fastened by a small wood screw. Even if the belt hook is missing the small screw hole can be found in the stock. Unless of course some well-meaning individual has tried to fit a belt hook made with a larger stud and obliterated the evidence of the wood screw threads. The belt hook on the Captain Perry pistol is fitted with a 7 1/8 inch iron belt hook similar in shape to the 1808 Navy early contract pistols. The iron belt hooks are well made but they show rough file marks. The hook is secured with the rear lock screw, but instead of a stud to stabilize the hook as used on the 1808 North pistols, Henry fastened the tail of the belt hook to the stock with a wood screw. The presence of this small detail identifies the Common Navy Pistol.

Assembly of the repeating pistols would require a great deal of custom work and were priced accordingly at \$16 dollars a pair. The Henry Ledger Books list some of the "specialists" assigned to work on the repeater pistols. The Ledger Books note payments made for labor by employees. All the Repeaters were stocked by James Eddy and finished by Daniel Maston. Jerry Vandergraft was paid for filing up the 100 belt hooks.⁷⁵ At the height of his production Henry employed up to 84 people at Boulton.

There are no Chambers Repeater pistols known in their original configuration for study. The pistols are very rare and according to collectors there are only about 6 reported in existence. However, a quick request to pistol collectors familiar with this pistol can



Figure 32. Interior of lock plate from Henry Repeater pistol that was modified for the Chambers system (top). Note the portion of the lock where the frizzen screw is located that was milled out to accommodate the priming tube. The image below shows the spline of wood that was added to replace the space where the priming tube was.

The black walnut stock is larger at the grip but tapers into the standard butt cap. There are no marks on the stock. The mountings are brass and similar to those on the Common Navy pistol. There is only one ramrod pipe.

The .56 caliber barrel on the study pistol was made by Daniel Pannabecker. His DP initials are visible on the bottom of the barrel. The barrel is proof marked with a stamped P. The barrel walls



Figure 33. Bottom and top view of Henry Repeater pistol (top) and Common pistol (bottom), respectively.

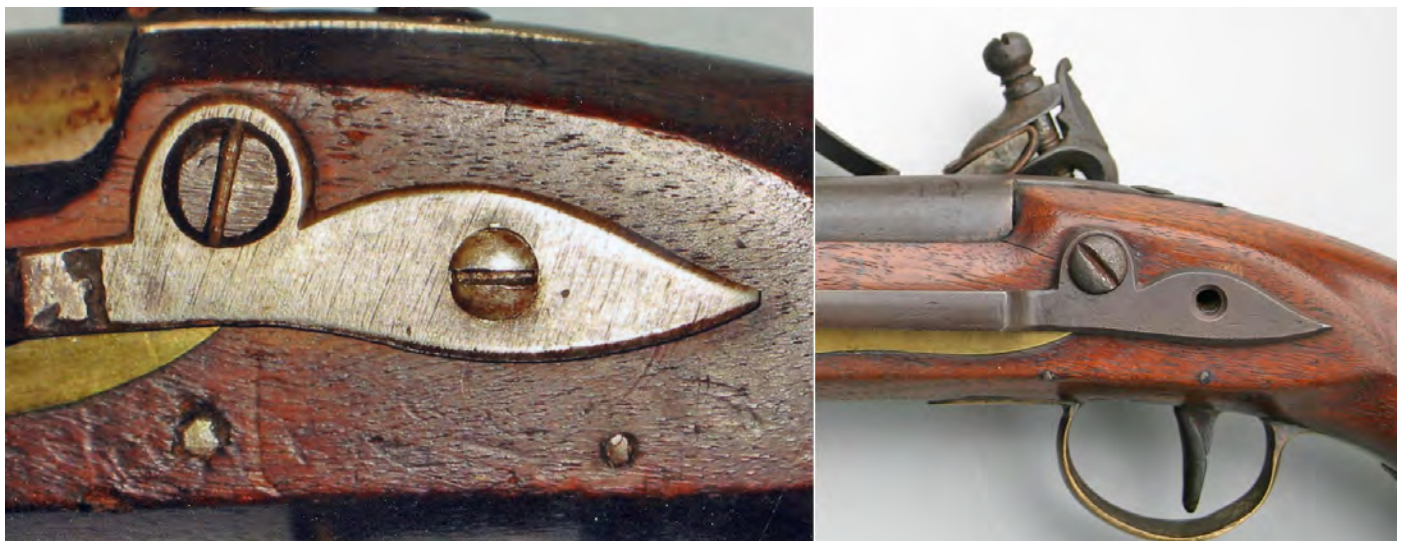


Figure 34. Belt hook on the Captain Perry pistol (left) and Henry Common Navy pistol (right).

account for only three. Repeaters known today have a sliver of wood added along the stock that had been originally cut out for the tubing. The forward touch hole is plugged but visible, the hole in the pan is plugged as is the hole in the lock plate for the tilter. Additional U. S. martial pistols have been identified that were converted to the Chambers system, specifically War of 1812 naval

pistols made by Thomas French and model 1808 North pistols. There are no records of Thomas French pistols delivered to the Philadelphia Navy Yard. However, since these pistols are Navy Agent purchases they may have been delivered to another Navy Yard such as Boston or Washington by French or an entrepreneur. The North 1808 Navy pistols were all delivered to the New York



Figure 35. Henry pistol, the “Better Kind”



Figure 36. Henry locks with eagle found on the “Better Kind” of Henry pistol.

Navy Yard.

Only 100 of these rare purpose made pistols were created for the U.S. Navy using the repeating ignition invented by Joseph Chambers. They were all delivered in one batch on July 14, 1814. Although other pistols are known to have been modified to the Chambers Repeating System only the Henry pistols were purpose built from the beginning.

Henry’s Pistols of the “Better Kind”

There is another Henry pistol similar to those fabricated during this same period for the U.S. Navy pistols. Henry was selling pistols to Maryland and independent buyers for resale. He also made pairs of “Officers Pistols” and pistols of the “Better Kind” (Figure 35). The prices of these Better Kind pistols range from \$14 to \$16 a pair. For example on December 13, 1813, Henry sold William Hollins, Baltimore, MD, 75 cutlass at \$3.00 each and 14 pair of pistols at \$15.00 a pair, 4 bullet molds, and provided 159 more cutlass for Hollins to sell. Hollins settled his account of \$450 for the pistols and cutlass on December 17, 1813.⁷⁶ On June 18, 1814 James Coates, Henry Frayley, and Joseph Weathersby are

each paid for stocking one pair pistols of the “Better Kind”⁷⁷

Some of these “Better Kind” pistols have a similar configuration to the War of 1812 Navy Common Pistols. They have been published in a variety of books primarily noted as “Militia Pistols.” There are about four examples of these pistols known in private collections. The pistols exhibit a combination of features found on the Navy common pistols and the 1807-08 contract pistols. The defining feature is an eagle stamped in center of the lock plate over J. Henry PHILA stamped on the tail (Figure 36). The lock has an S shaped cock similar to the Navy pistols. The interior of one example is marked PS for the maker.

The black walnut stock is nicely finished. There is no evidence of a belt hook. The grip of the stock has a sharp drop and curve. The mountings are brass. The rear ramrod pipe is similar to the 1807-08 pistols. The butt cap, side plate and trigger guard are similar to those found on the Henry Navy pistols.

The barrel has the P proof mark similar to the Navy pistols (Figure 37). The .58 caliber barrel on one example was bored considerably off center leaving a very thin wall on one side. Although

the barrel has been proofed the larger bore and thin barrel would have been unsuitable for a Navy pistol. This example suggests that some of these pistols are made from parts that were not suitable for use on the Navy pistols. These pistols are included because of their similarity to other War of 1812 Henry pistols and keeping in mind the goal to identify these enigmatic pistols. The pistols likely began to be fabricated in the War of 1812 and likely continued to be sold for the remainder of the flintlock period. The Henry records and surviving examples suggest a number of different types of the “Better Kind” pistols were made and sold.



Figure 37. Henry barrel proof on the “Better Kind” of pistol.

Conclusion

This article leaves a lot of the War of 1812 pistol story untold. However, the purpose of this work is to correctly identify the types of pistols furnished by the Henry family to the sea service and to properly identify the J. J. Henry Boulton pistols, which also have a naval association. Henry continued to make pistols well into 1815. However, there are no more payments made to workers for fabricating belt hooks. And although he continued to make repeating muskets, there are no further deliveries of pistols to George Harrison during the period. It seems that the Henry Common pistols were destined for the Great Lakes. Perhaps the Repeaters were tried out there as well. The Henry pistol Repeaters are the only ones ever purposely made for the United States Military. The total made was 100, with 7 more made for inventor Joseph Chambers. The total Common Navy pistols made was 476, with 16 more with Ketland locks. The odd Henry pistol with the French belt hook has a plausible explanation as a privateer. The total made may have been only 90 complete with the French belt hook and those very well may have been made for the Revenge. Henry’s record keeping suggests that he furnished as least two privateer ships with

a total of 290 pistols. Henry bought back at least 640 of his own condemned 1807-08 contract pistols and resold at least 630 at a nice profit.

John Joseph Henry died in December of 1836 leaving the mysterious legacy of the J. J. HENRY BOULTON pistols. It was left to his son James Henry to complete this mystery by fabricating at least 109 of these pistols. At least 60 were furnished to the original buyer 4 years after the initial order. The similarity of these pistols to the Model 1826 Navy pistols and the Henrys’ association with the Evans family uncovered additional information about the Evans’s U.S. Navy contract pistols. Finally with the assistance of a number of collectors past and present we were able to examine in detail a number of the “Boulton” pistols and clearly disassociate them with any relationship to the Navy Model 1826 contractors.

This work has satisfied, as far as possible, the goal to examine selections of the Henry Family firearms from both archival and physical evidence. Perhaps we have even satisfied Mr. Holmes’s admonishment “When you have eliminated the impossible whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.”



FINIS - An example of William Henry’s skills

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Appendix 1. Robert A. Howard's conclusions on comparisons of two J.J. Henry Boulton pistols in the home of Mrs. Mary Henry Stitis. See Endnote 25 in manuscript; this is his appendix C.

APPENDIX C

COMPARISON OF MODEL 1826 STYLE HENRY FLINTLOCK PISTOLS



In general these weapons are quite similar but not identical.

APPENDIX C

COMPARISON OF MODEL 1826 STYLE HENRY FLINTLOCK PISTOLS

	UNTAGGED SPECIMEN	TAGGED SPECIMEN
BARREL:		
Weight	35 oz.	34 oz.
Length	12.95 inches	12.7 inches
Bore	54 caliber	54 caliber
Muzzle diameter	.751 inch	.749 inch
Barrel length	8.58 in. General Barrel Note: Neither muzzle was crowned and barrel wall thickness varied around muzzle circumference.	8.58 in.
RAMROD:		
Length	8.92 inches	9.1 inches
Head	Minimum dia.. 440 in. Note: Neither turned round.	.463"
BAND SPRING:		
Length	1.7"	1.75"
Width	.18"	.16"
STOCK:		
Length	11.3" Lock, barrel, etc. are hand let into stock.	11.2"
SCREWS:	All screws are handmade and heads hand slotted.	
LOCKS:		
Bridle	Case hardened surfaces, pieces of different shape but critical holes close enough that part could be interchanged.	
Sear	Case hardened, significant difference in shape. Critical dimensions close enough to interchange.	
Tumbler	Cock notches vary in position. Square lug on hammer end different, enough to preclude interchanging.	
Mainspring	Hand filed and then hardened. Did not remove.	
Frizzen Spring	Although they differ in dimensions about 1/10th inch, they will interchange, which is more a commentary on the function of the part rather than the interchangeability concept.	
Hammer	Since hammer fitted to tumbler, they will not interchange. Top jaws also hand fitted and not interchangeable. Locks will not interchange because of positioning of mechanism on one lock. One is interchangeable the other is not.	
BARREL BANDS:	Although quite similar they are enough different in interior dimensions not to interchange.	

