

Percussion Double Rifles of North America

– *Different Designs and Origins* Part II

by Dick Hummel



David Hudson-Napoleon, Ohio

The next example pictured is an Ohio gun, made by David Hudson of Napoleon, Ohio. Napoleon is in the northeast corner of the state, and Hudson is listed as being an active maker between 1875 and 1896. Hutslar describes Hudson as being a deaf-mute, known for specializing in double rifles (203). A fascinating question is how much of this gun was fabricated by Hudson and how much was purchased to be assembled and finished by him. We suspect that the locks, set triggers, and all brass hardware were purchased, as well as the barrel blanks and the rough forging for the patent breech. The likely increased cost of this arm probably put it into the hands of a more prosperous sportsman who used it relatively little, thus accounting for its rather pristine condition. However, the condition of this gun highlights a common problem for the collector: what was its “factory-new” condition? Such products of small makers undoubtedly sported various original finishes. Only the more serious collector can amass the experience necessary to confidently assess the degree of original finish remaining on surviving specimens.

Hudson’s shop was supposedly on Goose Creek; however; our contemporary atlas suggests this name has been lost. An 1888 sportsmen’s guidebook offers the following description of shooting opportunities around Napoleon:

For turkey and partridge 8 mi. south, and for deer 11 mi. southwest; quail are also found and are with partridge the most abundant; Oct. to Jan. 1 best; double team \$4 p.d.; hotels \$2 p.d.; no trained dogs or professional guides; country-wooded and open; owners usually do not object: shooting excellent. (Harris, 1888: 151)

The specimen pictured is brass-mounted with a neatly engraved cap box and engraved oval medallion where a





cheek piece would normally appear on its walnut stock.

The back-action locks are unmarked; the maker's name is stamped on the top barrel rib. The rifle barrels are just shy of 32 inches, of about .38 caliber, and undoubtedly rifled for conical bullets. Each barrel has its own sight. The rifle weighs 9 pounds. Its browned barrels show very little wear beyond nicks in the soft iron tubes.



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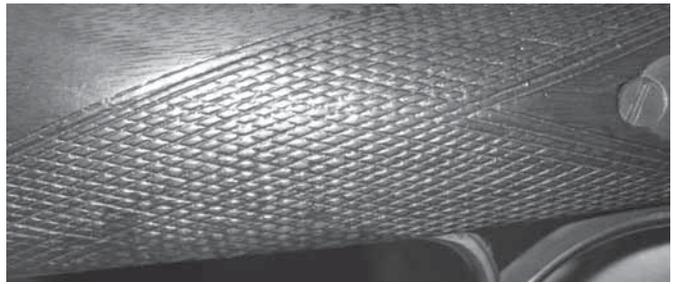
Welles & Hale, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Another darkly finished double rifle comes from the firm of Welles & Hale, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This 8-pound rifle has 27 1/2" barrels and is .40 caliber in both barrels. Its walnut



stock wears iron furniture, including the cap box. Under the cap box lid are several die-cut round linen patches.

The wrist of the butt stock is neatly checkered. The barrel sights are single, in contrast to the David Hudson double rifle.



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The double set triggers work for each barrel one at a time. The right hand lock will not cock unless the double set triggers are set. The left hand lock works without setting the trigger. Intentional?

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Unmarked double rifle

The last side-by-side percussion double rifle we examine is a relatively unsophisticated example. Its lines are unrefined. The walnut stock has double cheek pieces, perhaps suggesting multiple users. The rifle weighs roughly nine pounds.



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Its single set trigger is "basic" and crude and unlike any I have encountered before. The trigger must be pushed forward and set before either hammer will cock. A safety design perhaps? The 31 1/2" barrels are .38 caliber. The single front and rear sights are basic. There is no provision for a tang sight.



There are several curious features of this piece. While the lines are unrefined, the stock furniture is German silver (trigger guard, butt plate, and toe plate) and the toe plate has intricate inletting way above the overall quality of the rifle. Also, the lock plates are engraved, perhaps with a roll or stamped process, and there may be vestiges of flakes of silver plating on the lock plates. What is that about? **MB**



-To be continued -

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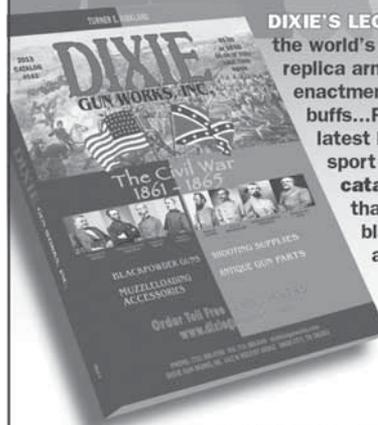
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