

The Percussion Target Rifle for Single and Double Rest Matches

by Richard Hummel
(most photographs courtesy of Tom Rowe)

Part V:



H. J. Ruthrauff, Warrensburg, MO

This rifle is .45 cal., 33 5/8" octagon barrel with a very fine bore. The barrel measures 1 5/32" across the flats and the total weight is 13 3/4 pounds. The top barrel flat is marked "H. J. Ruthrauff, Warrensburg, Mo." The letter L is punched behind the sight and on the muzzle. The barrel has a false muzzle with no rifling, a round blinder pin, and a steel bullet starter with brass tip and push cap. The walnut half-stock has a cheek rest and rounded pistol grip with no checkering. The lower rod pipe, wedge escutcheons, trigger guard, cap box, butt plate, and lock bolt washer are of silver. The fore end cap is pewter. The double set triggers function perfectly. The front sight is a pinhead in a tube with the rear a tang mounted disc peep adjustable for elevation only. One feature attracting me to this rifle at its "adoption" auction was the association of its point of origin - Missouri, with the Hawken legend. The stock architecture and even the pistol grip stock evoked the



Hawken image (aren't rationalizations wonderful, so ever present). Now, if it just sported a double-keyed fore end, the image would be complete. I have not located any information about bench target shooting matches in Missouri. The famous George Caleb Gingham painting, "Shooting for the Beef," represents a Missouri frontier hunting rifle match c. 1840s. The Schuetzen rifle matches among German Ameri-

cans are also prominently represented in our historical target shooting lore, but muzzleloading bench rifle matches? Not to my knowledge.

The false muzzle, absent rifling, is a curiosity to me. Was it an after-market addition to aid in loading? Perhaps the bullet patching of the late percussion era did not require contact with the rifling at the muzzle when starting the projectile down the barrel. Perhaps the rifling grooves had become so shallow by the time of this piece that nothing could be gained by the patched bullet contacting the rifling immediately. Perhaps bare lead bullets were being started and the smooth false muzzle assisted alignment of the elongated lead projectile before it was forced on the rifling lands. Perhaps. Perhaps!



Benjamin Moulton-Union Village, NY

This medium weight hunting and target rifle is marked "B. Moulton-Union Village, N.Y." on the top barrel flat. Swinney and Rowe place the maker in the 1855-60 time period. This rifle came to me by way of Miami, Florida and Federal Express. When I opened the package, I found the stock shattered in multiple pieces. The seller was a lawyer in the Miami financial district and he used my photographs of the victim to extract a fair settlement from FedEx. The amount almost covered the repairs executed by Dan Breitenstein of Northern Illinois. The stock is undoubtedly stronger after the epoxy treatment than any earlier period in its life (if I happen to sell this to any of you be sure I mention the repair). I absolutely adore the lines of this rifle, especially the flat ledge forming the bottom of the trigger guard. I can't explain its



appeal, but I always exercise a second look when I encounter this profile. The rifle wears a double cheek piece, perhaps suggesting it was used in a rifle club for multiple users. Other explanations may be more mundane: two shooters in the owner's family, one being left handed.

The rifle is stocked in walnut, with a lollipop tang sight and no provision for a rear barrel sight. This suggests that the rifle was a dedicated target rifle. It weighs 9 pounds, is of .40 cal., with a 33 1/4" barrel. The barrel is 1.17" across the flats at the breech and 1.07" across the flats at the muzzle.



Nehemiah Angell-Erieville, N.Y.

This rifle is truly in relic condition. One saving grace is that its lock work still sings when cocked, testifying to the

survival of the mainspring. Otherwise, it is approaching scrap metal status (not in my hands, however. I find "relics" generally the most provocative in stimulating my imagination into where they have been, what they have done, and how they escaped that final trip to the scrap yard?) The remaining bore is .46 cal. and the barrel is 29 1/4" long and once possessed a false muzzle. The name "Angell" is not visible on any surface; however, two names are stamped on the barrel flat just ahead of the patent breech: "N. Whitmore and T. Webster." I have no clue as to what that is about. Any ideas are welcome. Could its weathered condition result from Civil War battlefield experience? Probably not, but?



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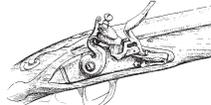
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This rifle arrived via a Wes Cowan (Cincinnati, OH) auction several years ago, in the company of two other heavy target rifles. Now, let's take a look at those.

Unmarked Heavy Target Rifle

This rifle wears a Vernier tang sight with a short staff, unlikely original equipment. However, the eye piece has a horizontal threaded screw adjustment, a feature I have not witnessed before. The rifle weighs 25 pounds and the barrel

is 33 inches long, 1.9 inches across the flats at the breech and 1.44 inches at the muzzle – a tapered barrel! The barrel once had a false muzzle and is of .46 cal. “Remington” and “cast steel” are stamped on the bottom barrel flat at the breech. Ahead of those stampings we see “711 R O.” The bottom barrel flat displays threaded holes at the breech and muzzle, perhaps for bench rest brackets of some design. The top barrel flat displays two filled dovetails 3 and 5 inches forward of the patent breech. The single set trigger still functions. Wood has



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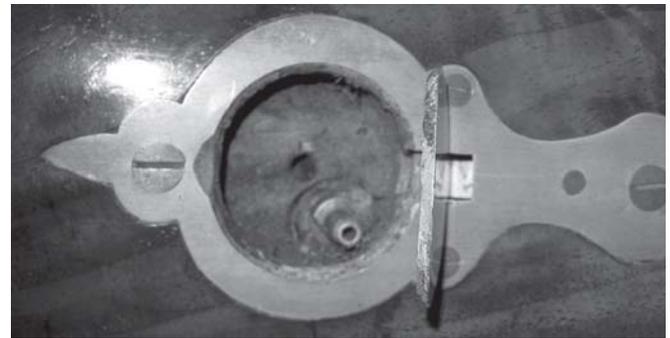


been replaced above the lock and a long crack repaired on the left side opposite the lock. What uses put that many miles on its speedometer? Was it Civil War service? It's possible, but not probable. Its condition possibly suggests that it delivered significant value on the target ranges it visited and was kept in service long after its physical appearance declined. Of course, it might have been the victim of childhood misadventures; although, its weight surely discouraged any imaginable child from toting it about.

Unmarked Heavy Target Rifle No. 2

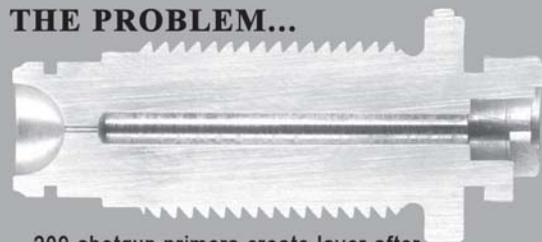
This is the third rifle that appeared in the Wes Cowan Auction. All three were purchased sight unseen, by phone bidding (not the best strategy, but often the only one available). This rifle was the best of the lot and the most expensive. The only marking is the "cast steel" stamp on the lower barrel flat. The 32 5/8" barrel is 1.875" across the flats at the breech and 1.44" across the flats at the muzzle. The bore is approximately .355 cal. and the muzzle is fitted for a false muzzle. It weighs 25 pounds. The German silver cap box contains a new percussion nipple threaded into the wood at the bottom of

the recess. The double set triggers, perfectly functional, are somewhat unusual on these heavy bench guns, most wearing single set triggers in my experience. The tang sight is robust, but precise in its adjustments. The rifle is in a



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high state of preservation, showing careful use and maintenance. The false muzzle and bullet starter were present. The iron sights suggest it was designed for picket bullets.

Nelson Lewis-Troy, New York

Nelson Lewis was active for a very long time, from the 1840s-1880s. A great many of his firearms survive, as documented by the 27 pages of pictures and text given to Lewis by Swinney and Rowe (NYSFT, 2003, pp. 970-997).

Our example is pictured as part of their parade of Lewis guns. This rifle was equipped for a telescope, only the front mount surviving. Note the charming ivory bar inlet

at the muzzle, serving as a telescope front mount index. The .45 cal. barrel is 33 1/4" long. The barrel measures 1.6" across the flats near the breech and 1.35" at the muzzle.



The Lewis section in Swinney and Rowe reveals the far flung variety of Lewis' products in the sporting gun line: hunting rifles, hunting/target rifles, light weight target rifles for iron sights, heavy weight target rifles for telescopes, combination guns, double rifles, cased, upgrades of any of his models.

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-To be continued -

