

# The Percussion Target Rifle for Single and Double Rest Matches

by Richard Hummel  
(most photographs courtesy of Tom Rowe)

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## Part VIII:

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### Josiah Bradley Smith – Northfield, Vermont

This 12 pound rifle is stamped on the top barrel flat, ahead of the extended rear sight mounting, in three lines: “J. B. Smith Northfield, Vt. Maker/ Warrented Cast Steel/Gain Twist.” The rifle wears a rear sight that is dovetailed into the barrel and extends back over the tang, where the rear sighting disc is attached. Elevation is by means of a screw into the



tang, its upper end bearing on the underside of the sight tang. The front sight has a similar sturdy globe. The 31" barrel is .35 cal. and measures 1.08" at the breech and 1.08" at the muzzle. The half stock has double set triggers, pewter fore end, brass furniture, and a wooden loading rod in thimbles under the barrel. This is the only barrel I have ever witnessed



with the “gain twist” designation. Is it that I just don’t get around much, or is that a relatively rare stamp? The barrel is most likely rifled for use with a picket bullet.

Phillips and Tyler (*Vermont’s Gunsmiths and Gunmakers to 1900*, p. 224) describes J. B. Smith active in 1860 in Northfield, Vermont, until his death in 1872. The lock of this rifle is marked with the last letters of “Goulcher.”



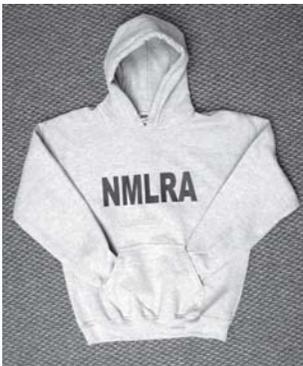


**W. H. Barnes – Boston, Massachusetts**

The rifle is only marked on the lock plate “W. H. Barnes – Boston.” Sellers lists this name in Boston (n.d.) and in Ohio (1880-90). This 10 pound rifle has a 36" barrel and double set triggers. All iron parts are deeply and evenly pitted, but the lock surface and hammer do not show the same affect of moisture. The walnut half stock and brass furniture shows the affects of whatever atmospheric events scarred the barrel and sights. The barrel measures 1.17" across the flats at the breech and 1.13" at the muzzle. The bore measures .37 cal. The rear sight, attached by a steel strap, is screwed to the top barrel flat, and extends back over the tang. It is an ingenious device, with opposing screw adjustment for gross windage and an additional horizontal screw adjustment for fine windage changes in the rear eye piece. Elevation requires the vertical eye piece bar to be drifted vertically. Not too sound, in my view. Perhaps the target distances were so standardized that only windage concerns need be addressed.

This “road-wearly” warrior presents a fascinating mystery. The relatively slim muzzle shows four screws that seem to plug the holes normally associated with a false muzzle. One possible explanation is that the screws attach a ½" segment of barrel that appears to be silver-soldered to the muzzle. When photographing that seam, the computer screen enlargement reveals a date “1844” that invites wild speculation. What could that date signify or identify, and why?

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**William Roberts – Dansville, New York**

This 10 pound rifle has a 32", 2/3 round, 1/3 octagon barrel, and a single, non-setting trigger. Roberts' name and address are stamped on the barrel top flat and his name alone appears on the bottom edge of the "A. W. Spies" lock. The bore is .36 cal. A hickory cleaning rod is located in a brass thimble under the barrel. A very simple lollipop tang sight augments the rear barrel sight and it has a small brass bead screwed into the barrel at the muzzle. Swinney and Rowe picture this rifle in their five volume treatise and detail what is known about William Roberts. Their descriptions of the observed examples of Roberts' work suggest that he produced many combination guns of various unusual configurations. Which leads me to my final quip: it may be my imagination, but the 1/3 octagon, 2/3 round barrel profile suggests the outline of a fowling piece. The non-set trigger also teases me into conjecturing that this rifle might well have come with a second shotgun barrel. I'm just saying – the look is right. No multi-barrel outfits have been observed from Roberts, I confess.

**W.H. Calvert – Beloit, Wisconsin**

Weighing roughly 8 pounds, this rifle epitomizes the hunting/target rifle dual purpose arm of the Civil War era. Calvert is reported in Sellers as being active from before the Civil



War (1852). This trim rifle, with back action lock, double set triggers, a lollipop tang sight, as well as barrel sights fore and aft, with its muzzle turned for a starter, shows substantial original finish. The barrel is stamped "W. H. CALVERT - BELOIT, WIS-No. 149." This specimen appeared in east central Illinois at an estate auction 35 years ago. Oh, that we could unseal its lips! What hunting forays and local target competitions must it have attended! The 28 3/4" barrel is 1.23" across the flats at the breech and 1.055" at the muzzle. The bore is .36 cal. Much of the original barrel and stock finishes remain intact. The stock hardware is yellow brass, with a pewter fore end. A brass-tipped cleaning rod rides in brass thimbles under the barrel.



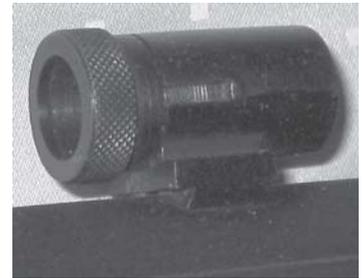
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**John Ohrt – Burlington, Iowa**

This 12 pound picket rifle is by a mystery maker who signed the barrel and the loading tools accompanying its journey to these pages. The barrel reads “1868 John Ohrt-Burlin[glton, Iowa – Cast Steel.” It comes with a bullet starter and powder funnel, a steel muzzle rest, powder measure, two probably original front sights, and a swage for the picket bullet, whose mold is missing. The rifle displays such classic lines that it won my heart immediately and had to come to live with me. The name, “John Ohrt” appears in no reference source I can locate. The rifle is of such high quality in every detail that I am led to speculate that Ohrt is not the maker, but the owner, as of 1868. The maker of that rifle certainly turned out comparable products. This is so unlikely to be a “one-off.” Perhaps the name on the barrel and powder measure belongs to the owner, a prosperous Burlington, Iowa merchant? The rifle shows relatively little or very careful use.



The 32" barrel measures 1.075" across the flats at the breech and 1.05" at the muzzle. The bore is .355 cal. The tang sight has a fine capstan screw adjustment horizontal bar. The rear barrel sight is very crisp and the front globe sight (modern) uses replaceable inserts. The stock furniture is browned iron. The iron cap box contains cleaning patches, a front sight insert, and a percussion cap.

A brass-tipped loading/cleaning rod rides in two iron thimbles below the barrel. *-To be continued -*

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