

The Percussion Target Rifle for Single and Double Rest Matches

by Richard Hummel

(most photographs courtesy of Tom Rowe)

Part VI:

Michigan Percussion Target Rifles

James Kelly's *Michigan Gunsmiths of the 19th and Early 20th Centuries* (2002), illuminates a dimly studied or understood neighborhood of the percussion era. Swinney and Rowe more recently pointed out that a large portion of Michigan gunsmiths originated from New York. Kelly aggregates Michigan gunmakers by location and provokes some, perhaps, obvious speculations. Where many gunsmiths are gathered together in a location, the market for arms must be robust. Where a maker of target rifles plies his trade, there must be an active target shooting group. So, find an address of a target rifle maker and one would expect to find a local shooting club or range.

According to Kelly (p. 2), in 1860, 118 names were identified in the firearms trade. Of the total, 46 (39%) reported coming from New York. At that time, perhaps 30% of Michigan's general population originated from New York. Therefore, there must be the audience for target shooting activities, and New York originated gunmakers were present to produce the necessary target shooting products.

Kelly usefully instructs us about the features of picket and slug rifles. Picket rifles were built with rifling twists of about 1 twist in 30". Round ball barrels would be rifled with a 1 twist in 48" or greater. The heavy plains rifles of Hawken-like profile might have twists of 1 in 70+", allowing accuracy with heavier charges of black powder. The slug gun barrels were rifled with a 1 in 18" twist or thereabouts.

J. C. Crabbs – Morenci, Michigan

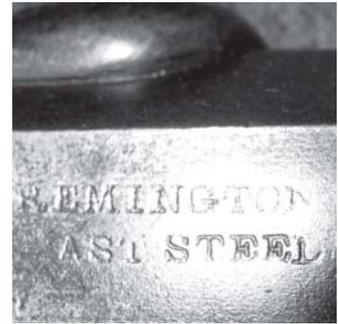
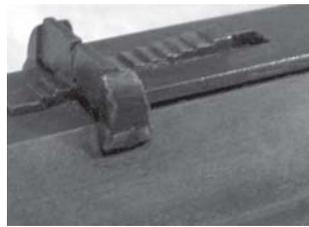
Over 20 gun related craftsmen are listed in Lenawee County, along with J.C. Crabbs. Adrian, Michigan is in the county and provided the population base for the apparent firearms commerce. J. C. Crabbs is listed with the date "1879." This date may be late in the target shooting period, using muzzleloading arms.

This rifle weighs 17 lbs., uses a single set trigger, and is designed to utilize a false muzzle. The barrel is 1.32" across the flats at the breech and 1.295" at the muzzle, showing very little taper. The Remington barrel is 33" long, in .365 cal. The name "J. C. Crabbs" is stamped on both the top barrel flat



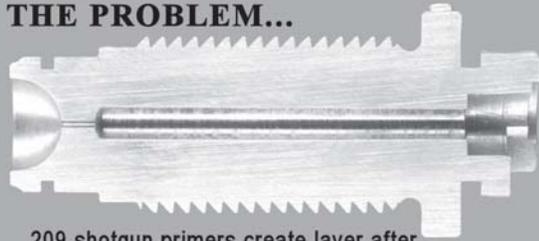


and the back action lock. The tang shows holes for perhaps a telescope base, although the current sights consist of front and rear barrel-mounted sights. The furniture is all iron. The butt stock has a finely checkered wrist.



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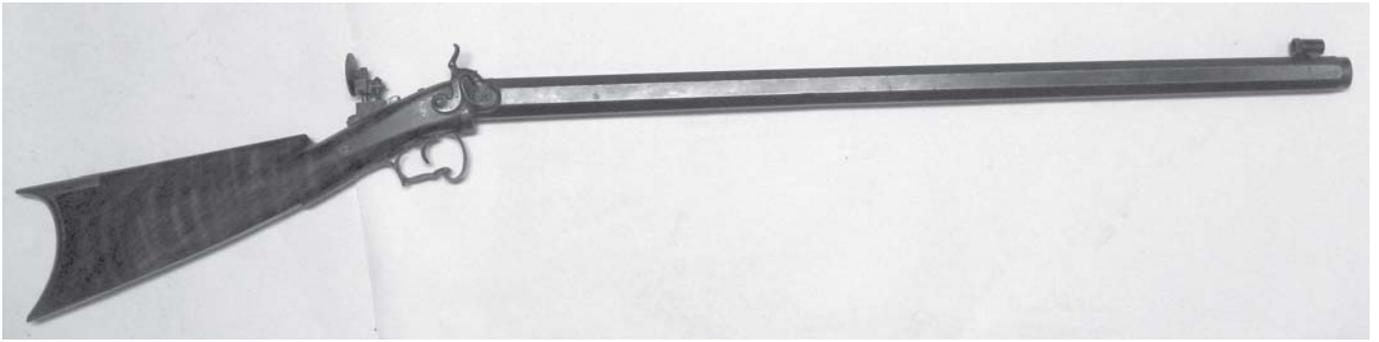


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E. S. Sweet – Kalamazoo, Michigan

Kalamazoo County listed roughly 20 names in the gun crafting trade, according to Kelly. E. S. Sweet is identified as active sometime just after the Civil War (1867).

The target rifle marked with his name wears a Remington cast steel barrel, 1.34" across the flats at the breech and 1.16" at the muzzle. The barrel is 29 7/8" long and .41 cal., turned for a bullet starter only. The rifle weighs 15 lbs. It uses a single set trigger. The hammer spur looks to have been repaired some time. The tang sight is certainly a modern day replacement.



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Samuel Adams – Battle Creek Michigan

This heavy slug gun has a .37 cal., 32" heavy octagon barrel with a muzzle rest and excellent bore. The rifle weighs 17 lbs. It is designed as a slug rifle and is marked on the top flat "S. Adams Battle Creek Mich." Samuel Adams is listed in Battle Creek from 1860 through 1899. Swinney and Rowe (*The New York State Firearms' Trade*, 2003, p. 56) trace Samuel Adams' migration from Springfield, Massachusetts, through Troy, New York, to Battle Creek, Michigan.



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The scope is marked "L. N. Mogg, Marcellus, N. Y." The rifle is fitted with a false muzzle with pivoting lock and bullet starter. The front action lock and hammer are lightly engraved. The butt plate, toe plate, and trigger guard are of German silver, as is the single trigger. The walnut stock has a pewter forend and is checkered at the wrist. With the rifle is a box of molds and tools for bullet making. Two molds for the parts of the slug, swages to compress the parts together, cross-patch cutter dies, and other assorted implements make up the accessories.

-To be continued -

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