

The Percussion Target Rifle for Single and Double Rest Matches

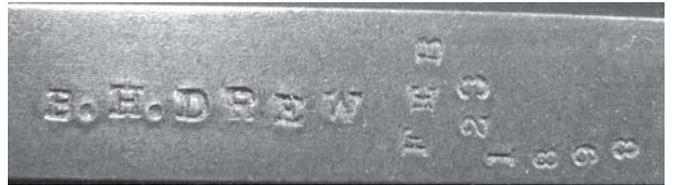
by Richard Hummel
(most photographs courtesy of Tom Rowe)

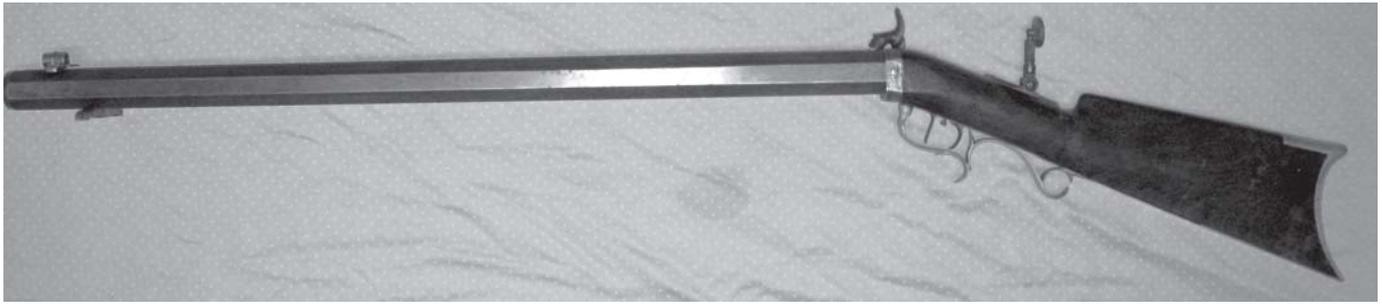
Part VII:



B. H. Drew - Cedar Rapids, Iowa

This 20 lbs. rifle is marked on the top barrel flat "B.H.Drew - Feb. 23, 1898." That name and initials are close but not exactly the "F. H. Drew-Cedar Rapids, IA 1887-1889" found in Sellers, *American Gunsmiths* (p. 87). One initial and the date are misaligned. Could this perhaps be a son of F. H. Drew? Or could it be a misreading by Sellers' Source? The date, 1898, offers the exciting possibility that muzzleloading slug guns were still being fabricated at that late a date! Whew, what have we here? The false muzzle (present) is machined to receive a cross patch for slug shooting. Although the barrel now wears iron sights fore and aft, a dovetail behind the muzzle and threaded holes on the tang indicate the probable presence, once upon a time, of a telescope. The tools accompanying this rifle include molds for casting its two part bullets, as well as a swage for the necessary melding of the soft and hard lead halves. The 31" barrel measures 1.38" across the flats at the muzzle and 1.5" at the breech. The bore is .45 cal. There is not a "Remington" mark visible, raising the question as to whether Remington was still supplying muzzleloading barrel blanks in the late 1890s.





Unmarked (no. 3) Bench Percussion Target Rifle

This rifle is a sweetheart in that it has only a 28 ½ inch barrel and weighs 15 pounds. The barrel is 1.285" across the flats at the muzzle and 1.4" at the breech. The bore is .445 cal. and the muzzle is drilled for a false muzzle, which is not present. A steel cross bar is screwed to the underside of the muzzle as an anti-tilt rest. The front sight used replaceable inserts, held in place by a sliding bar key, as found on single shot cartridge target rifles of the late 1800s. The tang wears a folding sight, such as often found on single shot cartridge rifles. It was built with double set triggers, fairly uncommon among our sample specimens. The barrel surfaces are completely unmarked as to the maker or barrel source. Over all, it is a neat and tidy, well proportioned piece that renders its anonymity unfortunate. The stock furniture is German silver. A threaded hole in the tang suggests it was fitted for a telescope at one time. It was discovered in south central Illinois, with no clue as to its initial origin.



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William Billingham-Rochester, N.Y.

This rifle was part of John Amber's estate. I saw it sell in 1986, at his estate sale, but only acquired it after a decade of other owners. It is .40 cal., with a false muzzle, a 31" barrel, and weighs 16 lbs. It was obviously an upscale product of Billingham's shop, with its modest amount of superb engraving. I had hoped to resurrect it for slug gun shooting and turned it over to Larry Thompson for his magic touches. Unfortunately, he found the bore beyond salvation. It retains its false muzzle and front telescope mounting ring. Its profile shows the elegant lines that characterize all Billingham rifles, in my experience. The engraved shield on the top of the patent breech intrigues me. Did it denote some U.S. service function, perhaps Civil War sharpshooter duty? Wishful thinking no doubt on my part.

Billingham is well described in the works of Ned Roberts, and Swinney and Rowe. His target rifles are among the crown jewels of American gun crafting. None are finer, few are as fine.





Merton S. Hendricks - Aurora, Illinois

Illinois is represented in this survey of percussion bench target rifles with the work of M. S. Hendricks. The barrel is stamped "M.S. Hendrick Maker Aurora Ill 1875." He is better known for his work with single shot cartridge target rifles. Curt Johnson's excellent reference on **Illinois Gunmakers** (vol. 2) lists Hendricks and pictures our example here when it lived with another collector. This rifle wears a false muzzle and is equipped with bullet starter and a mold for a picket bullet, and is accompanied with the bullet swage. It may have always had the Vernier tang sight and front globe sight. Its double set triggers are less common on heavy percussion target rifles, as noted earlier.



Nathaniel Whitmore - Boston, MA

This rifle is marked "N. Whitmore Cast Steel-Boston" on a barrel flat near the breech. The rifle weighs 17 lbs., sports a 33" barrel of .365 cal. The barrel measures 1.35" at the breech and 1.32" at the muzzle, showing almost no taper. It is machined for a false muzzle and wears a lollipop tang sight, as well as a rear barrel sight. Its walnut half stock and double set triggers are less often found on percussion bench rifles. The



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fore end terminates with a pewter cap and there are no provisions for a cleaning rod. A threaded hole on the bottom barrel flat just behind the muzzle indicates that a barrel rest could be attached. The stock hardware is made of German silver.



Nehemiah Angell - Erieville, N.Y.

Our second example of the Angell action is also devoid of any name stamp of Angell himself. The barrel stamp on the bottom flat near the breech is "Hitchcock and Muzzy-Cast Steel." The rifle weight 18 lbs., is .50 cal., with a 33.6" barrel. The barrel is 1.49"

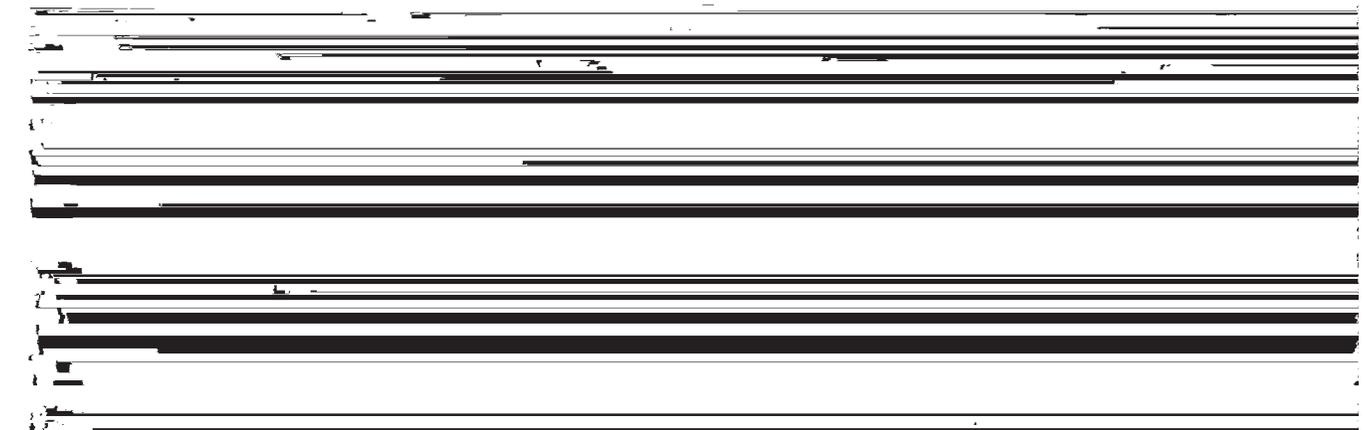


across the flats at the breech and 1.392" at the muzzle. There is no evidence it ever had other than the lollipop tang and globe front sights. The metal action body is wondrously rugged. The angular stock contours are still graceful to the eye. Compared to our first example, this specimen seems hardly used at all.



(Attributed) George Schalk - Pottsville, Pennsylvania

This rifle is a medium heavy bench target rifle with no visible marks, but the lines and quality that I want to believe originated in the shop of Schalk. If I had the courage to remove the half-length tube sight, I might find some barrel marks. That courage is not in my vicinity at present. The previous owner vaguely reported it had been in his family who lived in Pennsylvania, possibly near Pottsville. A very slender reed on which to build an attribution, I admit. The quality and condition of this rifle prop up my hopes. The rifle weighs about 22 lbs., when the false muzzle and bullet starter are





attached! This would put it at about the 20 lbs. limit for bench target rifles reported to be the standard of the day. Its stock and barrel architecture effectively mask its mass. What an achievement. A weight watchers dream!

The unmarked octagonal barrel is 32.25" long, and measures 1.62" at the breech and 1.53" at the muzzle. The barrel

is fitted with a false muzzle and bullet starter, and the .40 cal. bore is rifled with seven grooves and lands. The tube sight is fitted with a simple elevation screw on the eyepiece. The front sight is held fast with a slim removable wedge and guided in its windage adjustments with fine index marks. The barrel has an iron rest screwed to its bottom flat behind the muzzle.

Overall, this is the finest percussion bench target rifle I own at present. Its 90% condition is a rare find in my collecting travels. **MB**

-To be continued -



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