

18387

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"My Friend" Knuckleduster

BY

ANDREW F. LUSTYIK

Of the many curious firearms designed as defensive weapons in the early days of the United States, perhaps the little twenty-two caliber pepperbox known as "My Friend" is one of the most famous. This small, compact and handy dual-purpose weapon was designed and constructed so that it could be used not only as a cartridge revolver, but as a pair of "brass knuckles" should such a need arise.

On September 18, 1865, James Reid, of Catskill, Greene County, N.Y., filed

with the United States Patent Office, an application covering a unique revolving firearm made entirely of metal. The Patent Office assigned #51,752 to Reid's revolver on December 26, 1865. This invention was applied to a series of short barrels with integral chambers, mounted on a center-pin in the frame.

The frame, which was of brass and usually engraved and nickel-plated, held a seven-shot "pepper-box style" cylin-

der which revolved clockwise when the hammer was cocked by the thumb. Pressure on the tiny spur trigger released the hammer, detonating the cartridge. The projectile passed up the short barrel and out through the front shield, or cap. This shield covered up the muzzles of all of the barrels, except the one on line with the hammer. In the shield in front of this barrel there is a small circular opening, slightly larger than the bore diameter, provided for passage of the bullet.

The cylinder had to be removed from the frame for loading and unloading as there was no loading gate or aperture provided in the recoil shield for this purpose. Removal is accomplished by unscrewing the cylinder pin from the frame. This pin has a flattened tip to facilitate removal by the fore-finger and thumb. The cylinder pins of the early production models had a right hand thread, whereas later specimens had a left hand thread which prevented the pin from loosening in the frame as the cylinder revolved. Care must be exercised in the removal of these pins so that undue pressure is not applied in the wrong direction resulting in damage. Once removed, the cylinder could be loaded, or reloaded, from the rear. Each smoothbore barrel was enlarged near the back end for a sufficient distance to allow for the introduction of a .22 caliber short black-powder cartridge. Fired casings were removed from the cylinder by the fingers or, in event of a stubborn shell, by using the cylinder pin as an extractor rod. No other extractor-ejector system was provided.

The quaint hammer, which somewhat resembles the head of the extinct dodo bird when cocked, is fitted in the usual manner with a pawl to take ratchet-teeth at the rear end of the cylinder and rotate it, and with a cam to act upon a locking lever that operates in the lower part of the frame under the rear of the cylinder.

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of this unique combination weapon is the construction of its handle. The spur trigger is contained within a shield which extends down and back in the form of an integral bow connecting with the butt of the birds-head handle. The smallest finger of the hand may be placed in the ring thus formed, and the piece grasped as shown in Plate 2, so as to be used in hitting a blow for self-protection before using the bullet, or after the revolver had been fired.

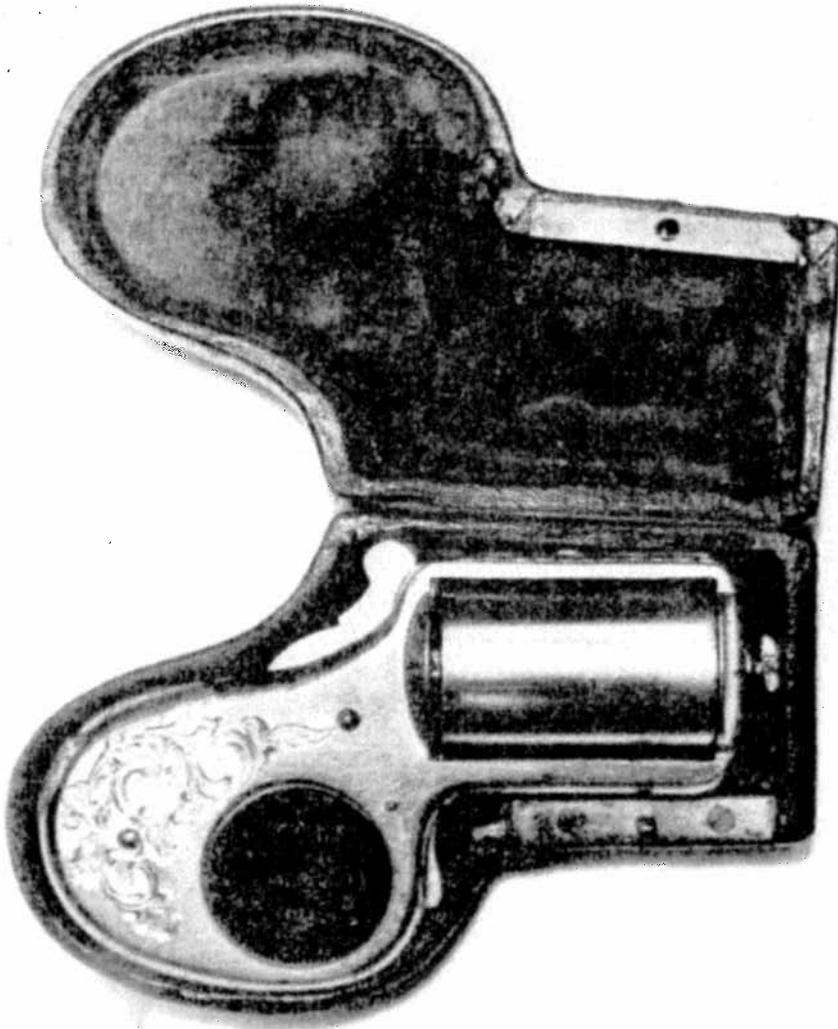


PLATE 1

A .32 cal., silver-plated "Knuckleduster" in original black leather casing. The interior is lined in light brown velvet. (Collection of Herbert G. Ratner, Jr.)

Reid's patent application also specified a sliding safety stop which was employed when the user desired to lock the piece so that it could not be accidentally discharged. The sliding stop was placed in a groove in the underside of the frame and front of the shield. It was retained by a pin passing through the frame and then through a slot or notch in the stop. A spring was employed to prevent the stop from sliding accidentally. The stop had a circular projection, the end of which entered and engaged the forward end of the lowermost barrel from the front of the frame, preventing the cylinder from turning. When the cylinder was locked in this manner, none of the upper chambers would be on line with the

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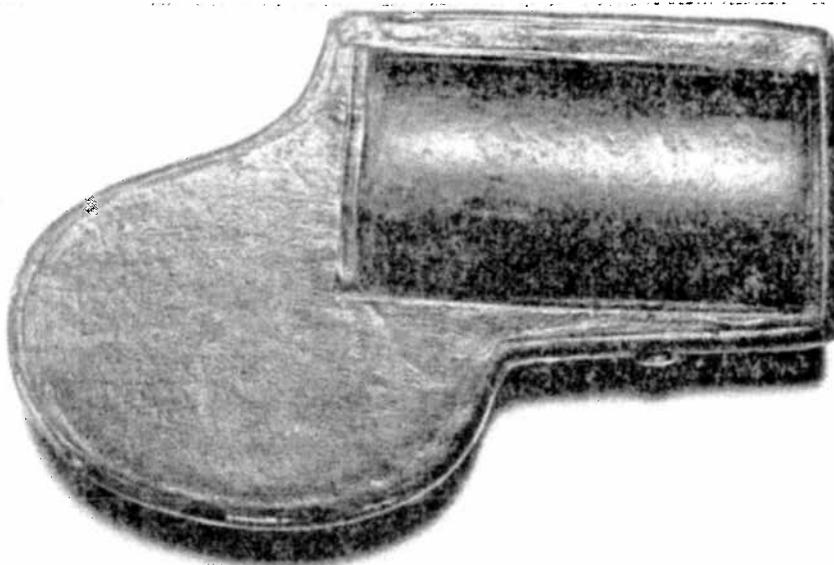


PLATE 2

The closed casing leaves little to the collector's imagination as to its contents.

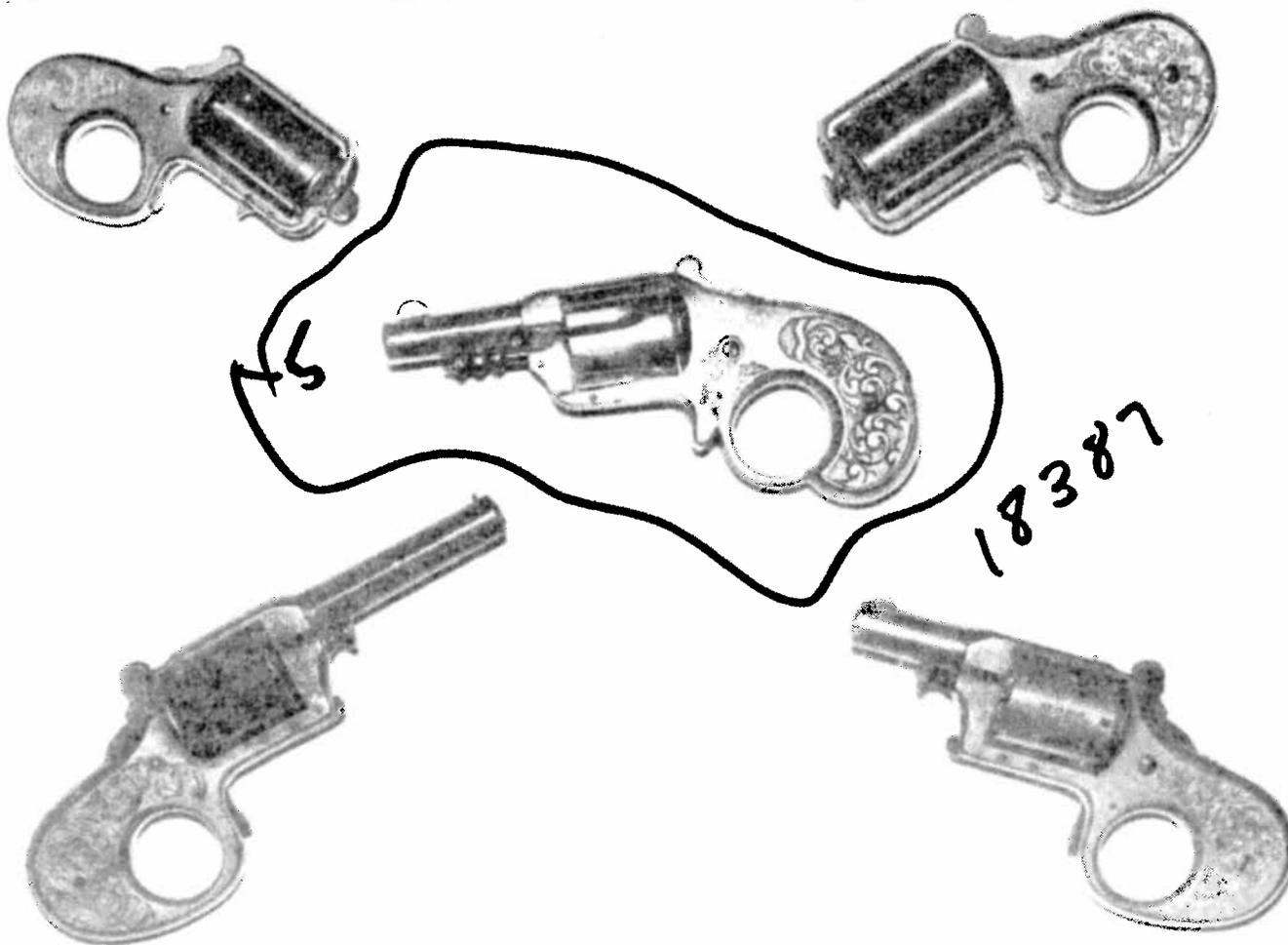


PLATE 3

This extremely fine group of "Knuckledusters" are (top-left and running clockwise): (1) .22 cal., 7-shot. Serial #5324. This specimen is made with the "Sliding Safety Device." (2) .32 cal., 5-shot, Serial #15866. Made without the Safety Device. (3) .32 cal., 5-shot, with 1¼ inch barrel. Casehardened hammer, ramrod & trigger. Serial #13404. Marked on the cylinder and top of barrel "MY FRIEND". (4) .32 cal., 5-shot, with 2½ inch barrel. Blued barrel, cylinder, ramrod & trigger. Serial #11845. This specimen, like the first three specimens described above, has a silver-plated brass frame which is marked on the left edge above the cylinder: "MY FRIEND PATD DEC. 26, 1865." (5) (Center) .32 cal., 5-shot, w/silver plated IRON frame. Barrel length 1 9/16 inches. Serial #18387. Marked on the left side of the barrel: "REID'S NEW MODEL .32 — MY FRIEND". This was the next to the last of the "all metal" models.

(Collection of Herbert G. Ratner, Jr.)



"My Friend" Knuckleduster

(Continued From Page 17)

hammer. However, one of the divisions between the barrels would be on line, with the hammer resting on the metal midway between the chambered cartridges, so that an explosion could not take place and the barrels could not be revolved. Hence the arm would be rendered safe, but useless as a firearm, until the barrels were liberated by sliding the stop forward. Reid stated that this type of safety would be practical when employed only with cylinders having an odd number of barrels.

As production neared the 10,000 mark, Reid discontinued the sliding safety device. A few "transitional knuckleduster revolvers" were made without the special safety, but using frames having the groove milled out along the bottom for the safety device. This groove is carefully filled in with a fitted brass blank, held in place by the pins that were originally intended to secure the safety stop. Notice this feature on the .22 caliber specimen pictured in Plate 6. This gun bears serial number 9987, has 1½ inch barrels, and is 4 1/8 inches overall. The brown leather holster

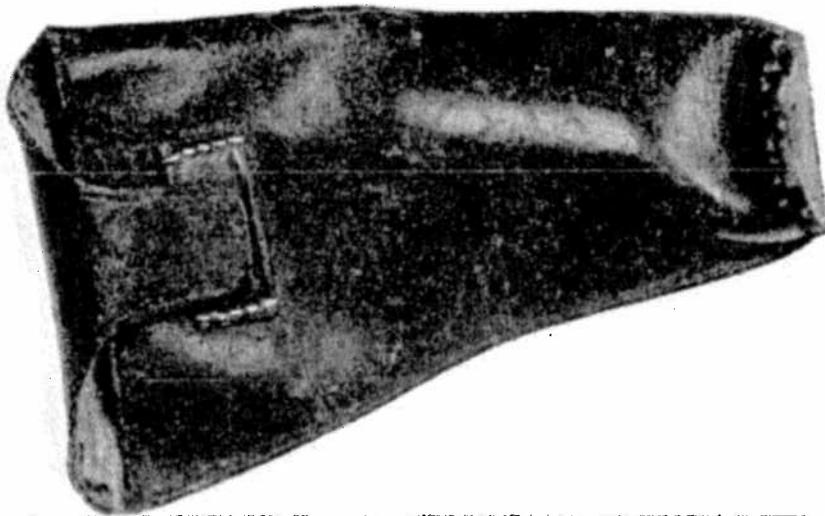


PLATE 4

A .22 cal., transitional "Knuckleduster" with an original leather "pocket" holster, to facilitate carrying in the pants pocket.

(Author's Collection)



No. 51,752

J. REID

Revolver.

Patented Dec. 26, 1865.

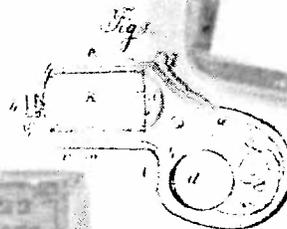


Fig. 2.



James Reid



PLATE 5

The cylinder pin, which serves as an extractor rod if necessary, is unscrewed to permit removal of the pepperbox cylinder for loading with seven (7) .22 caliber short cartridges. Note the impression of the "Knuckleduster" in the leather, indicating use of the holster. (Author's Collection)

shown with this gun is 6 by 3 3/4 inches, with a specially designed base, 1 1/4 inches in diameter. The holster is lined with buff colored felt now tan with age.



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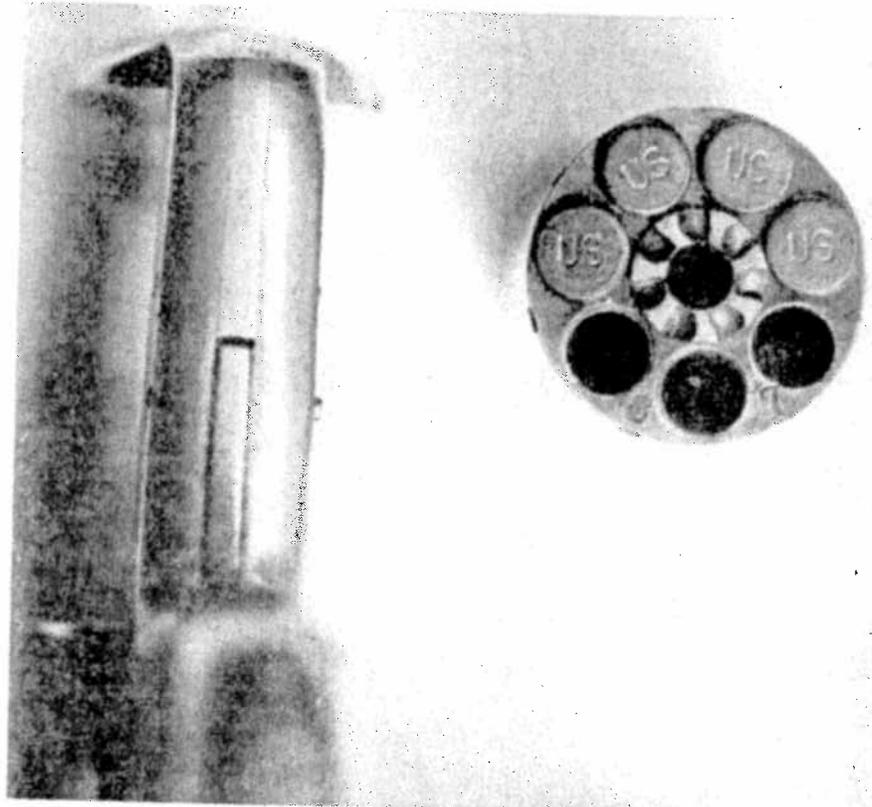


PLATE 6
A closeup of the frame of the "transitional Knuckleduster" reveals the tightly fitted brass blank used to fill the groove originally milled out for the sliding safety. The cylinder is pictured showing the ratchet and several chambered cartridges.

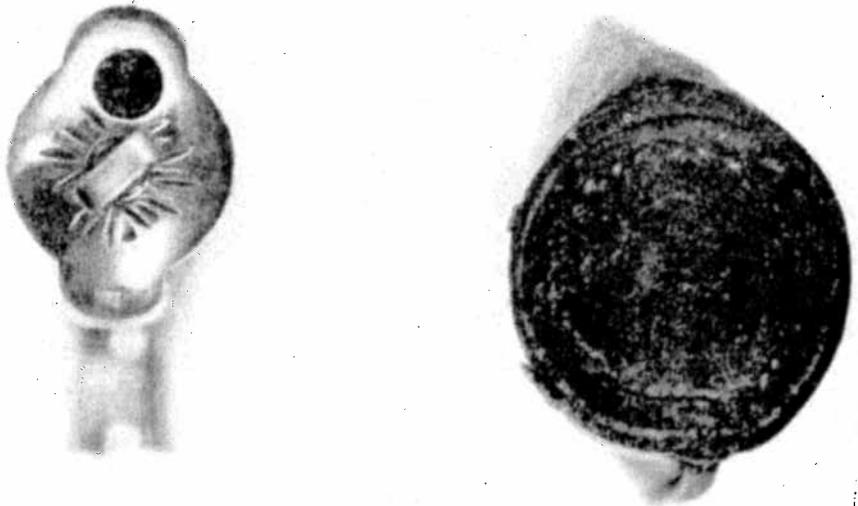


PLATE 7
A front end view of the muzzle shield reveals the hole through which the bullet passes. The muzzle end of the special holster is also shown.



Jackson Arms

1967 ANTIQUE GUN
CATALOG NO. 24

Price \$1.00

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ENGRAVED WINCHESTERS
1866-1873-1876-1896
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Also Henrys, Serial No. 13,400 or over.
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WANTED FOR COLLECTION:
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Need Exc. 73 and 86 carbine. I Pay
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Aurora, Illinois 60504

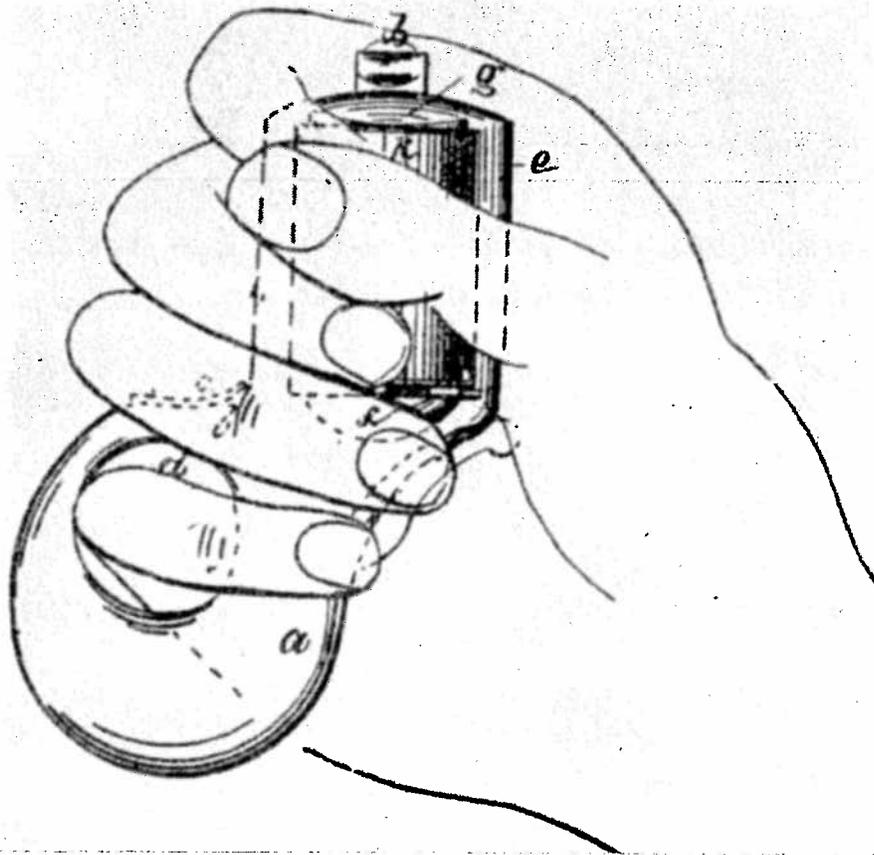


PLATE 8

Reid's Patent Drawing shows the manner in which the "knuckler" is grasped to strike defensive blows.

"My Friend" Knuckleduster

(Continued From Page 19)

Reid called his unique weapon "MY FRIEND" and this trade name will be found marked on the left side of the frame under the cylinder of the first few thousand guns produced. On most later arms, the marking changed to "MY FRIEND — PATD. DEC. 26, 1865" and was stamped on the left edge of the frame above the cylinder. Some revolvers of this type would be found marked "THE FISTICUFF", but these are imitations made in Belgium a few years later.

Most of the knuckledusters made were .22 caliber, seven-shot models, but other rimfire calibers are known. About 20 percent of the total number produced were in .32 caliber. Advertisements of the 1870's mention "six-shot" specimens in .32 caliber, but only five-shot specimens are known to this writer. Possibly guns with an even number of chambers (6-shot) could have been made after use of the special safety was abandoned, but it would seem that a slightly larger cylinder and frame would have been needed. In any event, guns with the sliding safety definitely required odd-numbered barrels. A few knuckledusters, perhaps 300, were made in .41 caliber. Approximately one dozen .41 caliber, 5-shot specimens are presently known to exist. The .41 caliber model was marked "J. REID'S DERRINGER" and the patent date.

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Although the first knuckledusters were made without conventional barrels, about 600 were made with shortened cylinders and barrels up to 3 inches in length, towards the end of production. These were in .32 or .41 caliber. Whether the barrel was added to provide a small degree of accuracy to these arms, or to provide a firmer grip for using the piece as a knuckler is a matter for speculation. Legend has it that someone, possibly a Warden, guard, or even an inmate, at Sing Sing Prison in Ossining, N.Y., suggested to Reid that a better grip for striking a blow would result by the addition of a barrel. There were several other variations of this final production type in addition to caliber and barrel lengths, including brass or iron frame, round or octagonal barrel, and full metal or wooden grips. Iron frame specimens are known marked "REID'S NEW MODEL MY FRIEND".

In 1862, James Reid is listed at 167 East 26th Street, New York City, and at 171 East 26th St., N.Y.C., in 1864-65. He was involved in the production of Reid patent 6 and 7 shot rim-fire cartridge revolvers, which were dis-

continued due to infringement upon the Smith & Wesson patents. W. Irving, 20 Cliff St., N.Y.C., is believed to have been the sole manufacturer of these revolvers. Subsequently, Reid moved to Catskill, N.Y., where in 1865 he is believed to have commenced manu-

facture of "My Friend" knuckledusters.

Today, any of the Reid knuckledusters, whether common models or rare, are welcome collectors items and mementoes of an era that is gone forever.



PLATE 10

Made before Reid began manufacture of the "Knuckledusters", this .22 cal., single-shot pistol is marked "W. IRVING" on the top rear of the blued side-swiveling barrel. The brass frame is silver-plated, hammer is case-hardened, and grips are of black ebony. Serial #8.

(Collection of Herbert G. Ratner, Jr.)

MY FRIEND, OR KNUCKLER.

7 SHOOTER.

Exact Size.



1½ inch steel barrel using No. 1, or 22-100 cartridges; full nickel plated and finely engraved; can be carried in the vest or pants pocket; can be used as a revolver and a knuckler.

No. 1, with 100 cartridges,	\$8 00
No. 2, large size, 6 shooter, using No. 32 short cart'ge, and 50 cartridges,	10 00

Will send them by mail, postage paid, on receipt of price.

PLATE 9

This advertisement appeared in the 1876 Catalogue of the "Enterprise Gun Works" (James Brown & Son), 136 & 138 Wood St., Pittsburgh, Pa. It depicts the later model "Knuckler" made without the special safety.

FEBRUARY 1967

The
**GUN
REPORT**

**General George Crook's
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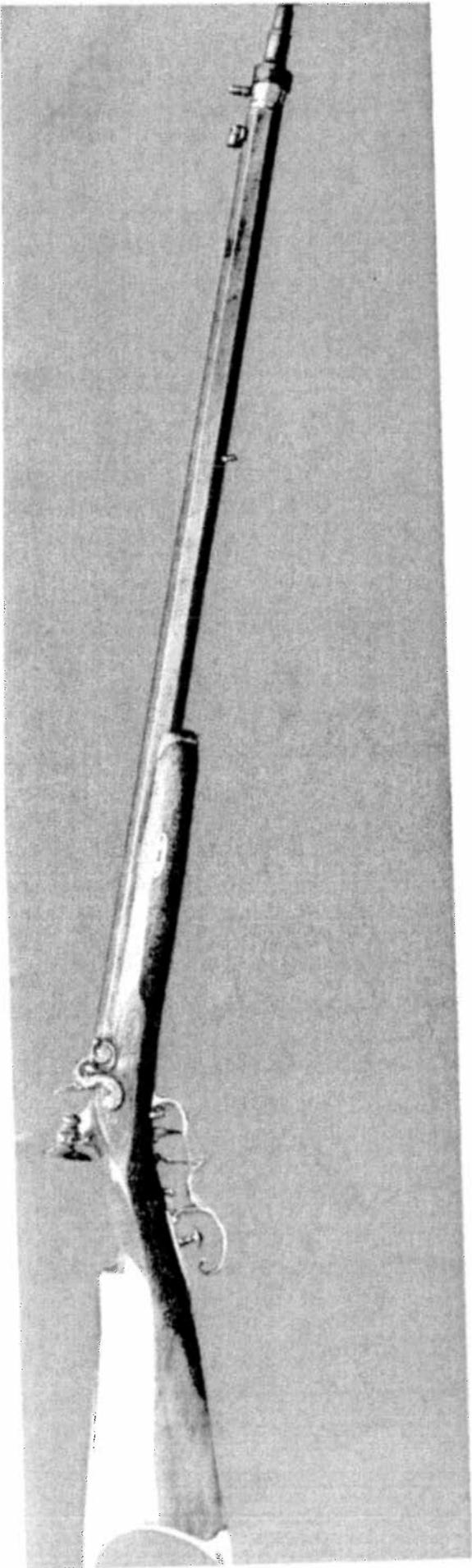
By

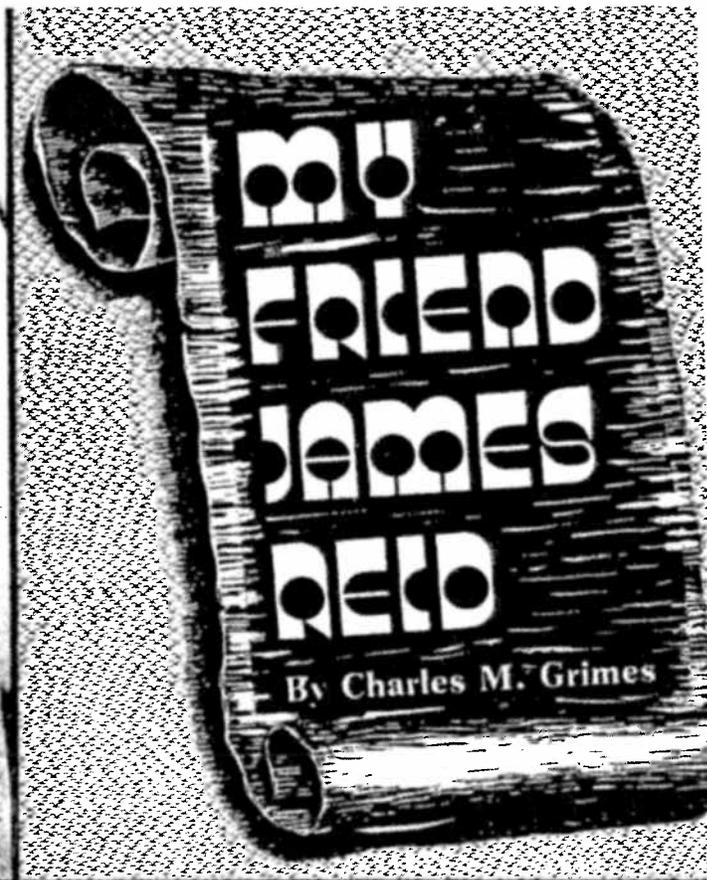
Col. Philip M. Shockley

50 CENTS

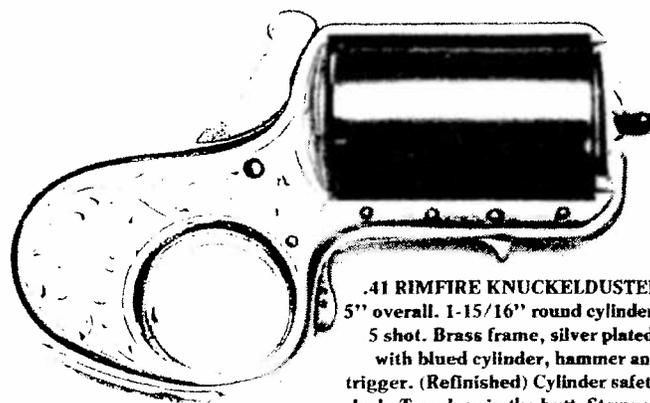
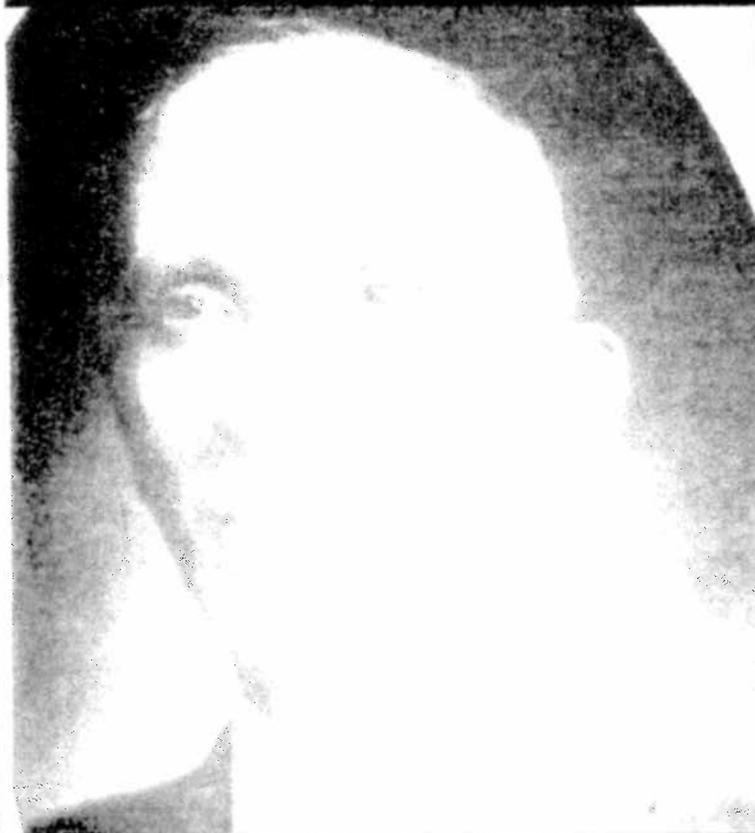
Cover Picture

A. Louis Moller "Schuetzen"
Rifle One of San Francisco's





James Reid Sr., Born: April 9, 1827, Died: May 28, 1898.



.41 RIMFIRE KNUCKELDUSTER
5" overall. 1-15/16" round cylinder,
5 shot. Brass frame, silver plated,
with blued cylinder, hammer and
trigger. (Refinished) Cylinder safety
lock. Trapdoor in the butt. Stamped
on top strap in two lines—"J. Reid's
Derringer/Patd. Dec. 26, 1865".
Serial #57. (This was undoubtedly a
four digit number, but was
obliterated during refinishing.)

All of this model had the cylinder lock safety and the trapdoor in the butt. There are also several variations in the cylinder pin shapes. Apparently this model was not advertised and only 13 pieces are known out of an estimated production of 300. The lowest serial number known is #6,040 and the highest is #8,982. (Author's collection.)

James Reid Jr., Born: March 30, 1857, Died: January 22, 1927.

is a serious collector of cartridge derringers and unusual handguns, no gunmaker has held for me such fascination and interest as has James Reid, creator of the ever-famous "My Friend" knuckledusters. I'm not sure why this particular maker has held my attention for so long unless it is because so little is really known about him and that many of his products are so scarce.

Unquestionably, most credit for technical information and family history is due Mr. Samuel Smith, a prominent gun collector and retired banker from Markesan, Wisconsin. His article in the old *Gun Collector Magazine*, Issue 42, in November of 1952 was certainly the most comprehensive information on James Reid at that time, and the few subsequent articles published since that date usually relate to his research. Practically all facts and figures on estimated production and information on particular specimens that are known today are attributed to his forty years of study and serial number compilation.

In 1949, Mr. Smith had the good fortune, after many fruitless tries, of locating and meeting with James Reid's grandson, Charles T. Reid, who was sixty-five and living in Rochester, New York, at that time. He was very helpful in reconstructing some early family history and background on the gun business of his grandfather.

The purpose of this article is threefold:

1. To present some early family history on the Reids.
2. To trace the writer's search for living family members and historical documents pertaining to the Reids.
3. To update information on the guns themselves, specifically production estimates, serial numbers and variations.

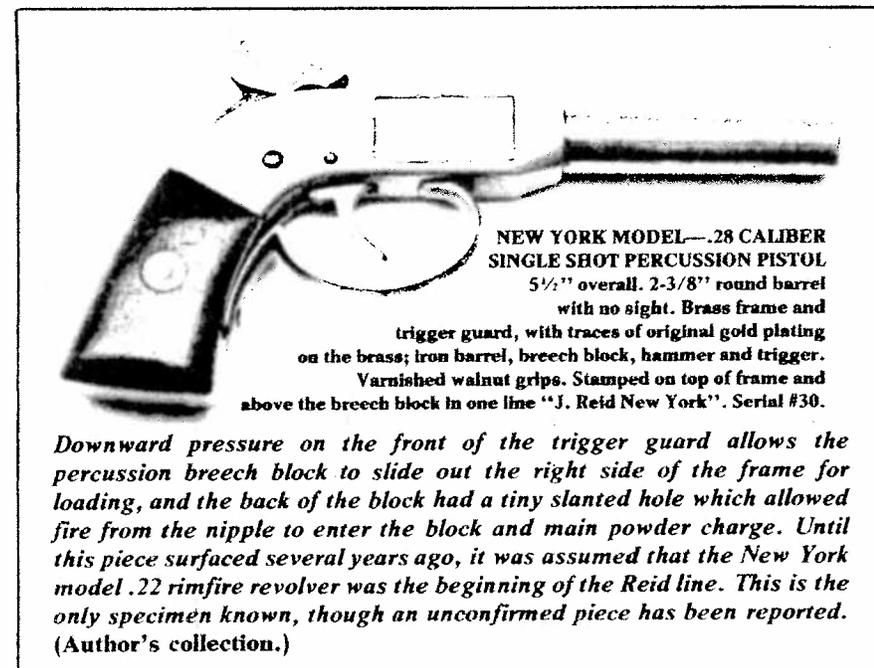
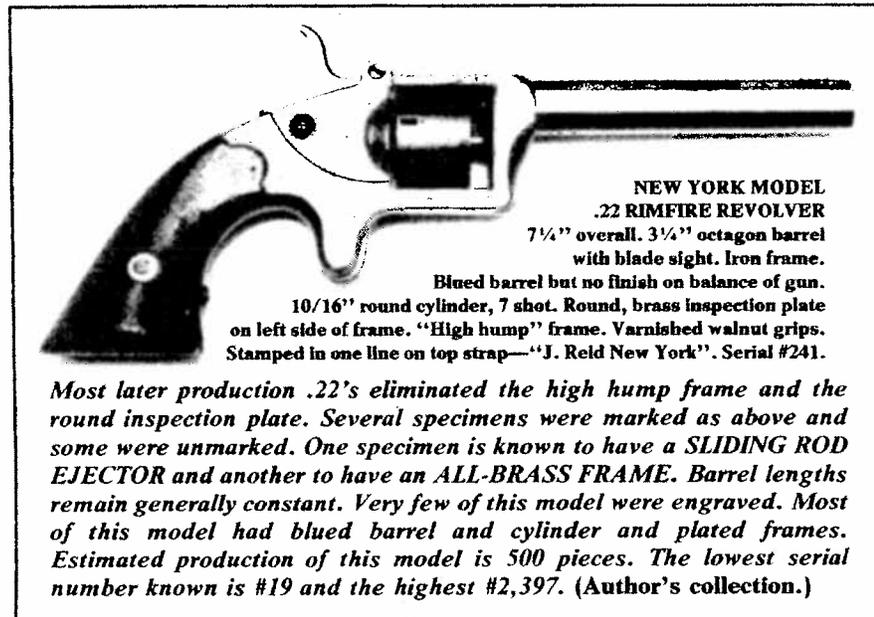
THE EARLY FAMILY HISTORY

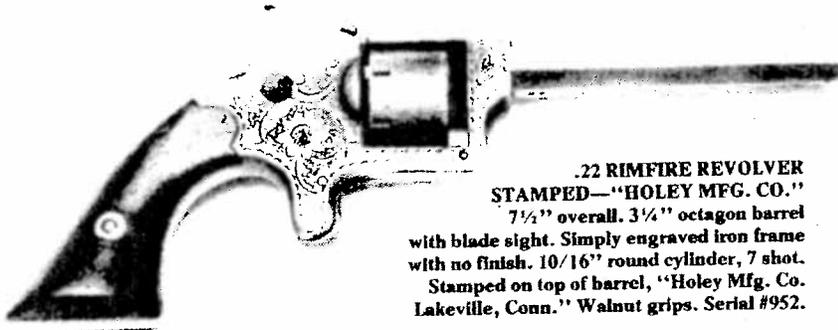
James Reid, the gunmaker, was born April 9, 1827, in Belfast, Ireland. His father and grandfather

were both in the woolen mill business. The gunmaker's father was killed in his woolen mill when James was but ten years of age. His grandfather was named James as well as his great grandfather, who was born in the early part of the eighteenth century. This is as far back as family history permits. For the purpose of clarity, I will henceforth refer to the gunmaker Reid as James Reid, Sr.

James Reid, Sr.'s uncle was Lieutenant John Reid, an officer in

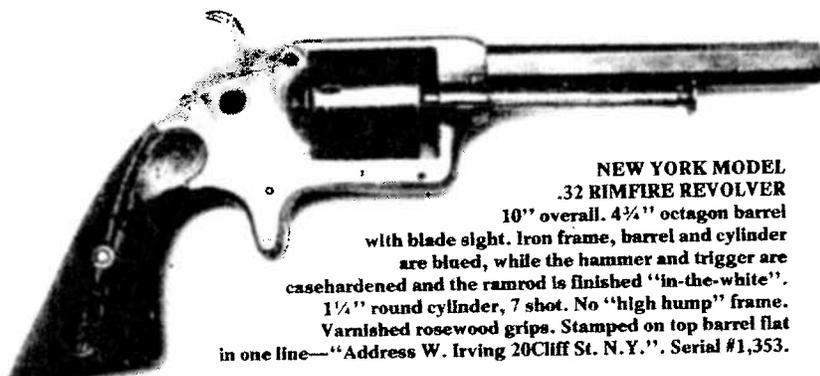
the British Navy. At the age of twenty-five, John was serving aboard the "Serapis" on September 24, 1779, during the historic and bloody battle with the famous Bonhomme Richard, commanded by Captain John Paul Jones. After hours of bitter fighting, with the two warships grappled together, the Captain of the "Serapis" surrendered his vessel to Captain Jones. Lieutenant Reid was taken prisoner but later embraced the American cause, married an American girl and lived out his life





.22 RIMFIRE REVOLVER
STAMPED—"HOLEY MFG. CO."
 7½" overall. 3¼" octagon barrel
 with blade sight. Simply engraved iron frame
 with no finish. 10/16" round cylinder, 7 shot.
 Stamped on top of barrel, "Holey Mfg. Co.
 Lakeville, Conn." Walnut grips. Serial #952.

While there are some slight variations in the .22 New York model revolvers, there are more on this gun than usually exist. While it is possible that this gun is a copy, the writer is more inclined to believe that it was manufactured by Reid. This is the only piece known marked in this manner. (Frank M. Sellers collection.)



NEW YORK MODEL
.32 RIMFIRE REVOLVER
 10" overall. 4¼" octagon barrel
 with blade sight. Iron frame, barrel and cylinder
 are blued, while the hammer and trigger are
 casehardened and the ramrod is finished "in-the-white".
 1¼" round cylinder, 7 shot. No "high hump" frame.
 Varnished rosewood grips. Stamped on top barrel flat
 in one line—"Address W. Irving 20Cliff St. N.Y.". Serial #1,353.

Most later production .32's eliminated the hump and the round inspection plate on the left side of the frame, the same as on the .22's. Some pieces had a "loop" housing on the frame to facilitate an ejector rod. This model is usually found either unmarked, marked as this gun, or "James P. Fitch N.Y. Pheonix Revolver" or simply "The Phenix". (Note different spelling.) One specimen is known to be marked "J. Reid New York". All of this model are believed to have iron frames, and one piece is known to have an unusual percussion-cartridge cylinder, different from the later model. A few of these guns will be found with floral and scroll engraving. Barrel lengths range from 4¼" to 7". Estimated production of this model is 1,350 pieces. The lowest serial number known is #615 and the highest, #1,602. (Author's collection.)

peacefully in Norwich, Connecticut.

Lieutenant Reid had a son, Samuel Chester, who attained the rank of Captain in the United States Navy, achieved such distinction in the service of his country that a destroyer was commissioned "Reid" in 1936 in his honor.

James Reid, Sr. was in the woolen mill business in Belfast, probably with his father. As a young man, he was a staunch Protestant who felt that his freedoms were being repressed, so young James went away to live in Glasgow, Scotland. An interesting family story handed down

is that enroute to Glasgow he was forced to sleep under a bridge in a rather cramped position, to which he attributed his lifelong problem with arthritis.

It was in Glasgow that he married and had his first born, Annie Jane, in 1856. For unknown and probably numerous reasons, the family of three migrated to America, arriving in Jersey City, New Jersey, on February 13, or 15, of 1857. Their second child, James Reid, Jr., arrived on the scene March 30 of that same year. James Reid Sr.'s wife, Agnes, died and he remarried to

Margaret Patterson in 1861.

It is not known what James Reid Sr. did for the first five years in Jersey City, but city directories for New York City indicate that he had a gun factory at 167 East 26th Street in 1862, and at 171 East 26th Street in 1863 and 1864.

In late 1864 or early 1865, the four Reids moved to Cauterskill, about four miles up Cauterskill Creek from the small town of Catskill, New York. The family doctor had recommended the move for Annie's health. It was there that the family moved into a fine existing home and began to build the gun factory with attached gristmill. It was a sturdy brick structure, and directly across the creek from his fine home. At the time of the move Reid was obviously financially successful, for he also built nineteen houses for his employees. It was reported that James Reid Sr. was worth about \$150,000 at this time.

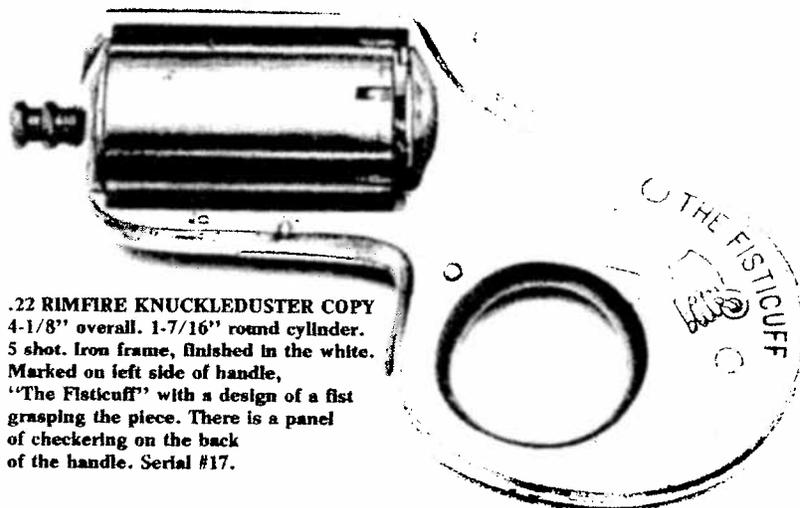
It is not known, but it is a safe assumption that he was well-off financially when he arrived in this country. When one considers the limited total estimated production of his New York guns and at the going prices of that day, he certainly could not have earned anything near \$150,000 just in the firearms business. Reid received the patent rights on his knuckleduster pistol on December 26, 1865, and may have waited until the Rollin White patent on the bored-through cylinder ran out in 1869 before marketing his newly designed piece. While Reid had been in New York City he was granted Patent #38,336, on April 28, 1863. This model revolver was not an infringement on the White patent; two other revolver models of his obviously were.

The gristmill was completed and advertised for business in 1868, and gun production was certainly under way within a year if not earlier. As a teenager, James Reid Jr. worked for his father as an engraver and did some machine work on the pistols. At the time of the gun factory and up until about 1919, a long covered bridge ran across Cauterskill Creek just a few hundred feet above the factory and leading over to the large family home. James Reid Jr. related to his son Charles, that after he had

been out courting his future wife Emma Egnor late at night, he whistled all the way through that scary and dark bridge so that his family would always know he was nearing home. James Jr. continued engraving for his father until he married and moved away to Athens, New York in 1882. Since James Jr. had always been rated high as a mechanic and inventor, it is no surprise that he went on to open a business with a partner. It was Hagen and Reid Company and they manufactured the Trojan Nail and Tack Puller, an invention of Reids, and he also invented the three-point electric switch which revolutionized the heating system for railway cars. James Jr. is buried in the Village Cemetery in Catskill, New York.

In Cauterskill James Reid Sr. and his new wife became the proud parents of six other children, three boys and three girls: Alexander (Sandy), Robert (Bob), Edward (Ned), Margaret (Daisy), Marion (Molly), and Rebecca (Ray). Four other children died in infancy.

James Sr. was a very charitable and trusting man, to the point of



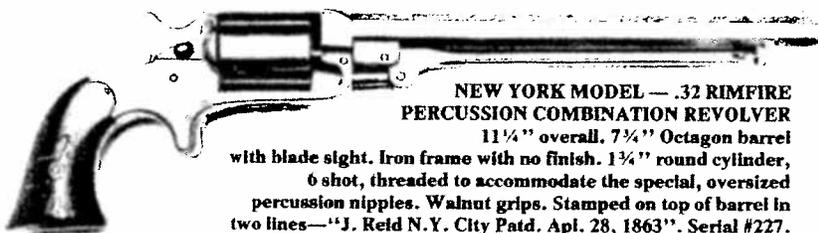
.22 RIMFIRE KNUCKLEDUSTER COPY
4-1/8" overall. 1-7/16" round cylinder.
5 shot. Iron frame, finished in the white.
Marked on left side of handle,
"The Fisticuff" with a design of a fist
grasping the piece. There is a panel
of checkering on the back
of the handle. Serial #17.

There are two other pieces known that are identical to this piece. Serial #21 is also in the white and another piece, with no serial number, is plated. A fourth piece is identical except there is no name or design, but the piece has an engraved frame and is serial #13. (Author's collection.)

fault, and was known to have loaned sums of money to his friends, some approaching \$5,000-\$10,000, and with absolutely no security or note of any kind. He trusted his friends! One Catskill man was purported to have reneged on a large loan. This blow, along with the depression of 1883 and

1884, coupled with the slackening of gun sales as attested to by the reduction of gun prices in catalogues of that day, led to the financial failure of James Reid Sr.

He left Cauterskill in 1884 with little more than "a grip and no money", reported his grandson years later. He moved to Watervliet, New York, where he worked in the U.S. Arsenal until his death from dilation of the heart on May 28, 1898. James Reid Jr. took his son, Charles, to visit the old man the night before he died, and it is reported that he retained his thick Irish brogue to the end.



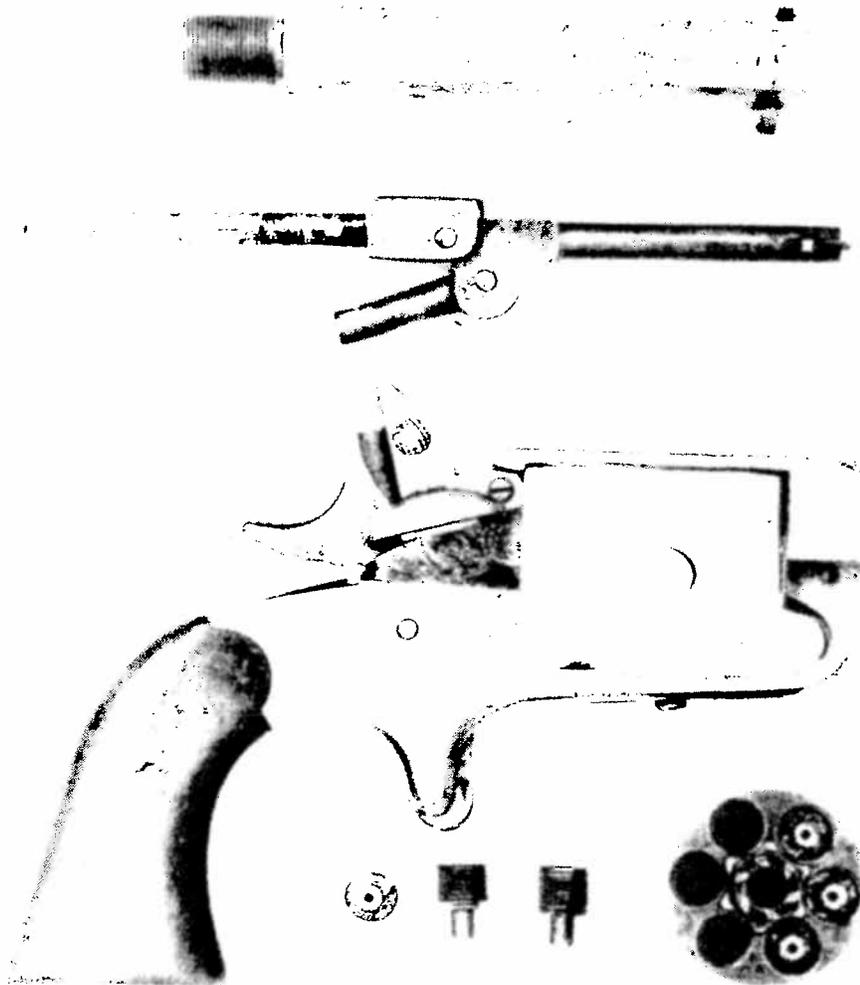
**NEW YORK MODEL — .32 RIMFIRE
PERCUSSION COMBINATION REVOLVER**
11 1/4" overall. 7 1/4" Octagon barrel
with blade sight. Iron frame with no finish. 1 1/4" round cylinder,
6 shot, threaded to accommodate the special, oversized
percussion nipples. Walnut grips. Stamped on top of barrel in
two lines—"J. Reid N.Y. City Patd. Apl. 28, 1863". Serial #227.

Patent #38,336 on April 28, 1863, provided for the use of the shallow threaded and oversize nipples to use the gun as a percussion cap revolver, and for the loading gate to keep the cartridges in the cylinder. Barrel lengths on this model range from 3 1/4" to 8", with the 4" and 5" lengths most often encountered. Two guns of this model are known with an ALL BRASS FRAME and they both incorporate the loop housing for the ejector rod, the same as some of the earlier model .32's. (Sam Smith classified these two pieces as 3rd models.) Several pieces were known to have been altered, possibly by the factory, to just cartridge by removing the loading lever and substituting a cylinder pin and non-threaded cylinder, and at the end of production of this model, the factory simply did away with the loading levers and threaded cylinders and the model became a normal cartridge revolver. No engraved guns are known in this model. Several guns are known to have the rare Tileston's patent feature of a safety screw underneath the frame, which by a twist of the fingers would lock the cylinder. (Patent #44,126 of September 6, 1864.) Most pieces had blued barrels and cylinders and plated frames. It is estimated that 1,600 pieces were made. The lowest serial number known is #1,284 and the highest, #3,462. (Frank M. Sellers collection.)



As mentioned earlier, James Reid Sr.'s grandson was a great help to Mr. Smith with the Reid background and it was believed at that time that he was the only living relative. It was in the summer of 1973 that this writer and his family routed their vacation into New York State for the purpose of pursuing the Reid story.

The first stop was the Old Rural Cemetery in Albany. The director pulled out the old dusty records which pinpointed the Reid family plot with sixteen graves. There was supposed to be a marker at the site, but after trudging over every grave in the Masonic area, not a Reid was to be found. This was a major dis-



A New York Model .32 Rimfire-Percussion combination revolver disassembled. Note that the barrel must be unscrewed to allow for cylinder removal. The oversized percussion nipples could be screwed into the back of the cylinder if the owner wished to use the gun in the traditional percussion manner. (Photograph courtesy of Paul C. Janke.)

appointment to us but we had to move on.

It is interesting to note that the Reid plot was only a few feet from the magnificent vault of President Chester A. Arthur. A last minute stop at the office revealed that there were no markers after all, but as a conciliatory gesture, they made us copies of the information sheet on each person buried in the plot. Each information sheet gave the name, place of birth, place of death, date of death, cause of death, last known residence and other helpful information. This puzzle would have to be pieced together later. We carefully tucked away the prized data, shot a picture of the cemetery entrance and were off for Catskill!

We arrived there late in the afternoon and made the police station our first stop. The names "Reid" and

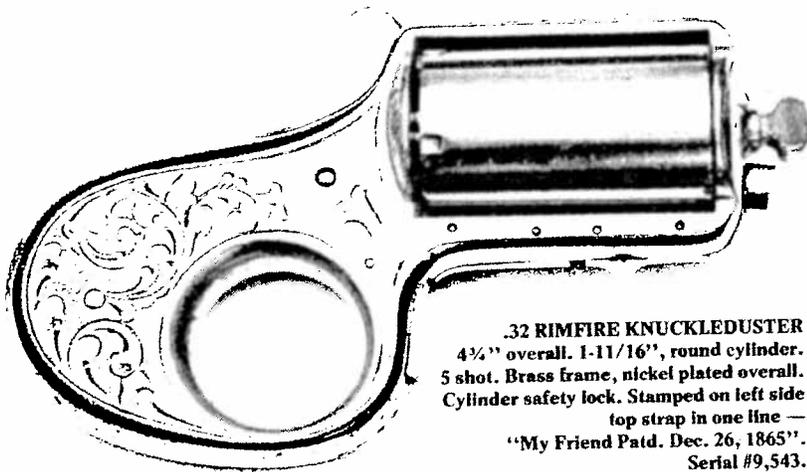
"Knuckleduster" meant nothing to the officers, but a picture of the old gun factory from SAM'S magazine did. They directed me up a narrow blacktop road and after considerable winding around we arrived! Unfortunately, the sun was going down and our pictures were destined to not be the best. My heart was beating wildly as my son, Larry, and I walked through that creaky old building. At one point, my foot penetrated the floor to the knee. This old monument was truly a shrine to me. Unfortunately, the connecting gristmill had collapsed the previous summer. Oh, for a metal detector! Maybe someday.

After carefully removing a loose brick for my collection, we drove back to town to locate a motel. The motel owner, a resident of long standing, gave me the name of a local

schoolteacher whom she had heard knew something of the Reid family. The teacher quickly referred me to her sister, who by amazing coincidence, lived in the old Reid home across from the gun factory! Another phone call and the lady agreed to talk with me. Not even considering supper, off I went, back to the gun factory and across the metal bridge, which had replaced the covered one in 1919 and into James Reid's home itself! Mrs. Simpkins, in her late fifties, had been born in that very house and the old family deed showed that James Reid Sr. had deeded the property to her great grandfather, James Bird, in November of 1883. Her family had known of the property as the Catskill Mill property and the Belfast Mill property. Mrs. Simpkins thought that I should talk with her Uncle Jack Packer, age 83, since he had known several of the Reid children in his youth. It was rather late at night as I drove up to the Packer residence, but Jack, a retired dairy farmer and his wife, Florence, were still up. They graciously invited me in and filled me in on all the children of James Reid Sr. by his second wife. This was the first revelation that the gunmaker had remarried and that there were children other than James Jr. and Annie. Later research bore out his recollections as being very accurate indeed. It was about midnight when I got back to the motel and everyone was sound asleep, but not I — I tossed and turned the whole night through!

Arriving in New York City the next morning to the noisy sounds of that bustling city and the bumper to bumper traffic, we worked our way over to 167 and 171 East 26th Street. As we surely had known, but didn't want to believe, the buildings were of modern vintage, but that didn't suppress my imagination for what it could have been like in the 1860's as Reid and his employees observed the lawless Civil War draft riots in the streets below from the second floor windows of the original Reid gun factory. We headed for home.

Thus began several years of letter writing and phone calling. City directories, the libraries, the bureaus of vital statistics and private re-



.32 RIMFIRE KNUCKLEDUSTER
 4 1/4" overall. 1-11/16", round cylinder.
 5 shot. Brass frame, nickel plated overall.
 Cylinder safety lock. Stamped on left side
 top strap in one line —
 "My Friend Patd. Dec. 26, 1865".
 Serial #9,543.

Like its .22 counterpart, production of this model began with cylinder locks and brass frame and ended with no locks and in the rare iron frame. It is estimated that 3,400 brass frames in this model were produced. A few of these .32's had a trap door in the butt (instead of the usual removable sideplate) to get to the mainspring and various cylinder pin head shapes will be found. The lowest serial number in brass is #6,805 and the highest is #17,295. Of the rare IRON frame model, probably only 200 were produced with 12 specimens known at present. The lowest number iron frame is serial #17,247 and the highest is #17,965. (Author's collection.)

searchers were of little help. We could not find out if Charles T. Reid was living or not! If he was deceased, where would the family history and photographs have gone? Could there have been a living relative that Charles Reid could have neglected to tell Mr. Smith about? All of the many, many letters of inquiry seemed to produce nothing but frustration.

Nothing productive was developed until Sam Smith had a chance recollection of Charles Reid's employment. The personnel director of that company mentioned a penciled notation "Masonic Home, Utica, New York" at the bottom of his personnel record. They didn't know what it meant. Several letters to the Superintendent of that institution struck paydirt! Charles T. Reid had had a daughter, but her Florida address was 12 years old. The operator quickly supplied me with a phone number, and I vividly recall the night my trembling fingers carefully dialed each digit and I asked of the "hello" if she could possibly be the great granddaughter of James Reid Sr., the famous gunmaker from Cauterskill, New York? Her reply was — "Yes"!, and not only that, but she possessed the information and pictures I had been searching for!

While the great-granddaughter, (Mrs. Doris Reid Tischer) was able to provide me with pictures and family background, I found that I was able to fill in equally as many gaps that she was unaware of. After about fifteen



.22 RIMFIRE KNUCKLEDUSTER
 4 1/2" overall. 1-7/16" round cylinder.
 5 shot. Brass frame, GOLD PLATED,
 with smooth iron cylinder.
 Cylinder safety lock. Stamped on left side
 on top strap in one line —
 "My Friend Patd. Dec. 16, 1865".
 Serial #6,775.

This is the standard, most common type of Reid gun found, however, only four Reid guns are known to be gold plated. Patent #51,752 was granted Reid on December 26, 1865, and it provided for a sliding cylinder lock safety and the formation of a ring-frame as a handle. The cylinder lock safety was incorporated about half way through this model's production. The safety, when pushed into the front of the frame and into the cylinder, would allow the firing pin to rest between the uneven number of cartridges. This idea would only work on an odd number cylinder. The cylinder pin had a right hand thread for the first several thousand pieces, but since the turning direction of the cylinder tended to unscrew the pin at the same time, a pin with left handed threads was substituted. Several variations in cylinder pin shapes will be noted on this model. The earliest of this model was simply stamped "My Friend" and without the patent date, on the left bottom strap. It is estimated that 9,900 were produced in the brass frame. The lowest serial number known is #3,454 and the highest is #17,096. The really rare guns of this model are the end of production, IRON frame pieces. It is estimated that only 350 were made and 11 are now known. The lowest serial number is #17,373 and the highest iron frame is #17,716. (Author's collection.) (Please turn to page 50)

MY FRIEND JAMES REID

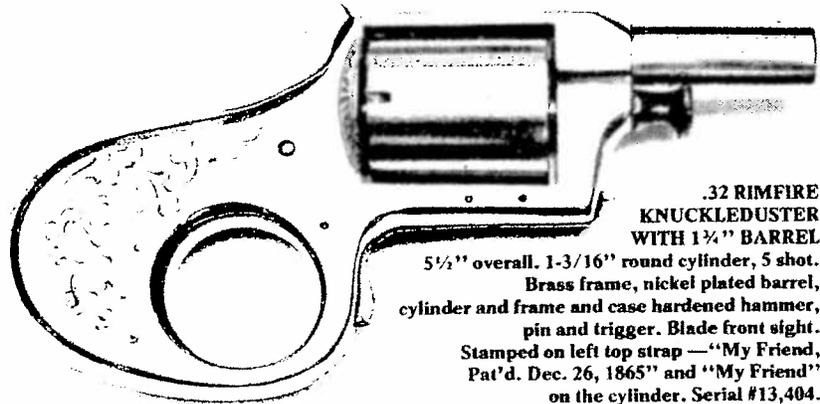
(continued from page 35)

dollars worth of talking, we concluded that we would probably be able to get together in person within two months for a real visit, and since she suggested that she might be willing to part with James Reid Jr.'s mahogany jewel box with his engraved nameplate in the top, and the original pictures of James Reid Sr. and the old homestead, the visit was inevitable.

Needless to say, this writer was elated. The breakthrough had been made. True, no leads had developed on James Reid Sr.'s children by his second marriage or on his eldest child Annie but things were breaking.

A notation on the cemetery records in Albany had shown that an Annie Reid Wilson had been "removed to Seymour, Connecticut" and I had been pursuing that lead to no avail. Seymour cemetery records indicated no one with that name buried there. One of the Seymour officials took an interest in my research project and advised me that she was putting a notice of my project in the local paper to see what it could produce.

Paydirt again! And what a shocker! In less than a month after I had located James Reid Sr.'s great granddaughter in Florida, I received a phone call in my office (I'm a school principal). The voice on the other end of the line said, "Mr. Grimes, I live



**.32 RIMFIRE
KNUCKLEDUSTER
WITH 1 1/2" BARREL**
5 1/2" overall. 1-3/16" round cylinder, 5 shot.
Brass frame, nickel plated barrel,
cylinder and frame and case hardened hammer,
pin and trigger. Blade front sight.
Stamped on left top strap—"My Friend,
Pat'd. Dec. 26, 1865" and "My Friend"
on the cylinder. Serial #13,404.

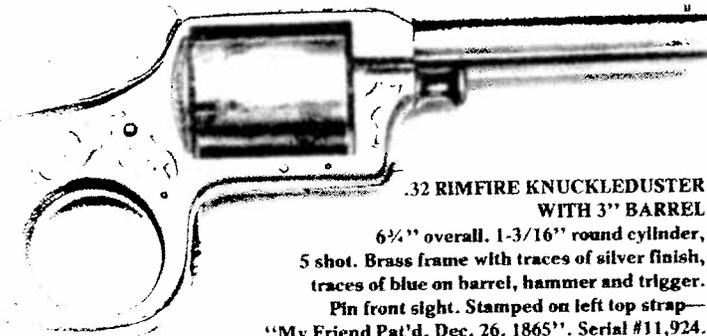
On this model, a streamlined version of the 3" barrel model, the top strap has been milled flat to nearly the hammer where a raised piece of the strap was left and grooved for a rear sight. An estimated 150 of this model were manufactured and 11 are known to exist. The lowest serial number known is #11,848 (unusually far out of the serial number range of the other known specimens) and the highest is #13,404. (Author's collection.)

in England and am on my way back there this evening, but am calling you from North Haven, Connecticut. I read the newspaper article on your research and thought you would be interested in knowing that James Reid Sr.'s great, great, great grandson was born a few days before in Rose Memorial Hospital in your city, Denver!" He had to be kidding! It couldn't be! That is the very hospital where two of my own children were born! It was true. The baby's father,

Roger Dickey, was the great, great grandson of Annie Reid Wilson, and Annie was buried in Seymour. Roger had married a Denver girl, Gayle Sawyer, and they wanted their first child to be born in Denver. His wife and new baby were going to stay on a couple of weeks with her parents. Needless to say I called right away, and arranged a visit with her. Here again, I was able to supply her with family information they were unaware of and link the two branches together.

It was one of the most exciting times of my life to get to actually hold James Reid Sr.'s great, great, great grandson, Alexander Reid Dickey, in my arms!

In July of 1975, we had a memorable visit with Doris Tischer, and are happy to possess the prized jewelry box and pictures. Unfortunately, no factory records of any kind have been found to date, but we are on the trail of a silver paperweight with James Reid Sr.'s name on it. Unfortunately, Mrs. Tischer had disposed of it a month before I located her. While no family members were aware of any Reid guns in the family, Mrs. Tischer related a heartbreaking story. Her father, Charles T. had inherited a collection of the guns from his father, James Reid Jr. The guns were mounted in a large glass case about six feet high and three feet wide, and the lower part of the case had pull out



**.32 RIMFIRE KNUCKLEDUSTER
WITH 3" BARREL**
6 3/4" overall. 1-3/16" round cylinder,
5 shot. Brass frame with traces of silver finish,
traces of blue on barrel, hammer and trigger.
Pin front sight. Stamped on left top strap—
"My Friend Pat'd. Dec. 26, 1865". Serial #11,924.

This frame was very similar to the standard .32 knuckleduster, but rather than being a "made over" frame, it was completely redesigned. The cylinder lock safety on the standard knuckledusters now becomes a cylinder pin lock. Note that the cylinder has been shortened considerably. The top strap is rounded and has a V groove the entire length to act as the rear sight. While a mushroom shaped cylinder pin was standard on this model, one specimen is known with a rounded-knurled pin and a fluted cylinder as on the final model. It is estimated that 350 were produced and 23 are known. The lowest serial number is #11,833 and the highest, #12,019. (Author's collection.)

drawers where he kept fine measuring tools and instruments. During some marital strife in the early thirties, Charles sold the entire collection and would never tell his wife or daughter to whom he sold it!

The Dickey side of the family was under the impression that James Reid Sr. was in the gun manufacturing business in Belfast, but there is no evidence to bear this out at present.

THE GUNS

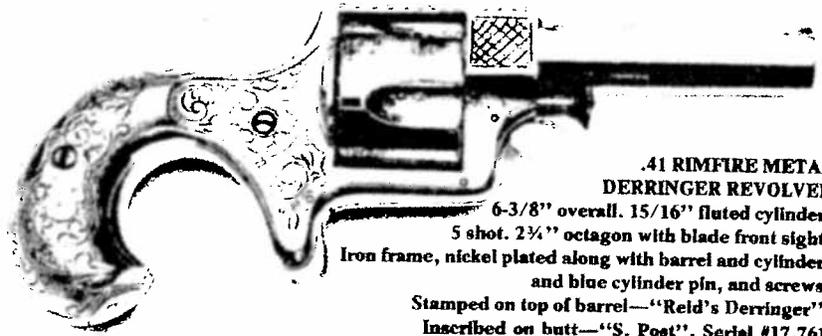


Sam Smith, in the 1952 *Gun Collector* magazine, hypothesized that James Reid Sr. began production of his first gun in New York City with serial #1 (#19 is the lowest serial number known now), and continued on through to serial #18,522 (the highest serial number now known). He believed that James Sr. used the "batch" system, or making a batch or run of guns, changing models back and forth, but continuing on through with consecutive number sequence. When one looks at the wide range of serial numbers in certain models, a strong case can be made for this reasoning. However, since several identical serial numbers are known on the New York revolvers, some collectors are inclined to believe that each New York model generally had its own separate numbering system. Mr. Smith is inclined to "yield" on a separate numbering system for the little single shot percussion pistol.

It is interesting to note that after perfecting a .22 and .32 cartridge revolver, Reid would end New York production incorporating the percussion cap. Probably public demand and resistance to change brought this about.

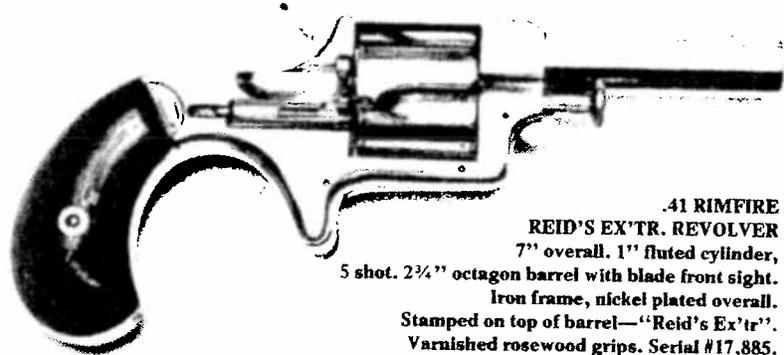
None of the New York guns are known to have been advertised in any catalogue.

Charles T. Reid had written that the New York guns were "used for many years by the New York City Police Department" but this is certainly doubtful because of such limited production and since several of the models were outright infringe-



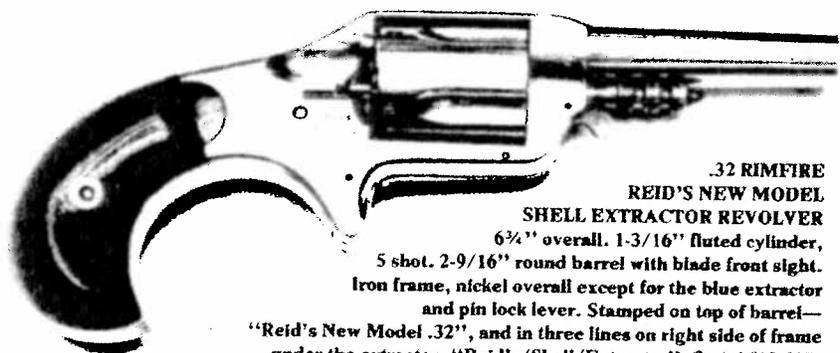
**.41 RIMFIRE METAL
DERRINGER REVOLVER**
6-3/8" overall. 15/16" fluted cylinder,
5 shot. 2 3/4" octagon with blade front sight.
Iron frame, nickel plated along with barrel and cylinder,
and blue cylinder pin, and screws.
Stamped on top of barrel—"Reid's Derringer".
Inscribed on butt—"S. Post". Serial #17,761.

No variations are known in this model. It is estimated that 75 pieces were produced and 8 are known. The lowest serial number is #17,716 and the highest is #17,783. (Author's collection.)



**.41 RIMFIRE
REID'S EX'TR. REVOLVER**
7" overall. 1" fluted cylinder,
5 shot. 2 3/4" octagon barrel with blade front sight.
Iron frame, nickel plated overall.
Stamped on top of barrel—"Reid's Ex'tr".
Varnished rosewood grips. Serial #17,885.

This more conventional looking revolver, except for the long curved handle, has an unusual spring loaded cylinder along right frame with a pivoting "lip" which grasped the rim of the cartridge to extract it, and which also acts as a loading gate. No variations are known in this model. Out of an estimated production of 200 pieces, 9 are known to exist. The lowest serial number known is #17,796 and the highest is #17,929. (Author's collection.)



**.32 RIMFIRE
REID'S NEW MODEL
SHELL EXTRACTOR REVOLVER**
6 3/4" overall. 1-3/16" fluted cylinder,
5 shot. 2-9/16" round barrel with blade front sight.
Iron frame, nickel overall except for the blue extractor
and pin lock lever. Stamped on top of barrel—
"Reid's New Model .32", and in three lines on right side of frame
under the extractor, "Reid's/Shell/Extractor". Serial #18,203.

This was Reid's most conventional looking revolver and no variations are known. The extractor was a bit of an improvement over the extractor on the .41 Reid's Ex'tr revolver in that the spring housing (cylinder) was removed and the spring loaded into a groove in the frame itself. An estimated 150 pieces were produced and only 5 are known. The serial number ranges on this model have been lost. (Author's collection.)

ments of the Rollin White patent held by Smith and Wesson.

When Reid began his Catskill production with his ever famous knuckleduster, it was probably because of his imaginative and creative mind, (along with his business savvy) that he would come up with something dramatically new and different, and he did! Several later researchers have concluded that a guard at Sing Sing Prison gave Reid the idea of the knuckler as a dual purpose weapon, but Mr. Smith could find no evidence to substantiate this. It was probably just folklore!

Also, the "My Friend" designation was probably added like so many other common names on guns of that period, and had no particular significance other than to create a catchy and pleasant name.

Charles T. Reid also wrote in a letter of record that some of his grandfather's guns were stamped, "Never Shoot a Man If You Can Knock Him Down". No guns are known with such an inscription.

An 1873 catalogue offers the .22 knuckleduster for \$10.00 (including 100 cartridges), and the .32 for

\$12.00. A catalogue of 1879 shows the marked decline in interest of the little guns, for by then the price had dropped to \$6.00 and \$7.00 respectively. The G.W. Turner & Ross catalogue, of Boston, Massachusetts, shows the .32 Final Model pistol for sale at \$6.75 each or \$13.00 per pair.

While many paper boxes were undoubtedly made, none have been uncovered to date. In fact, only one cased Reid is known. Several small formfitting, contoured and lined snap-cases and leather holsters are known for the knuckledusters, and possibly they were a factory item.

It is also interesting to note that no knuckledusters or knuckledusters with barrels are known to be without engraving.

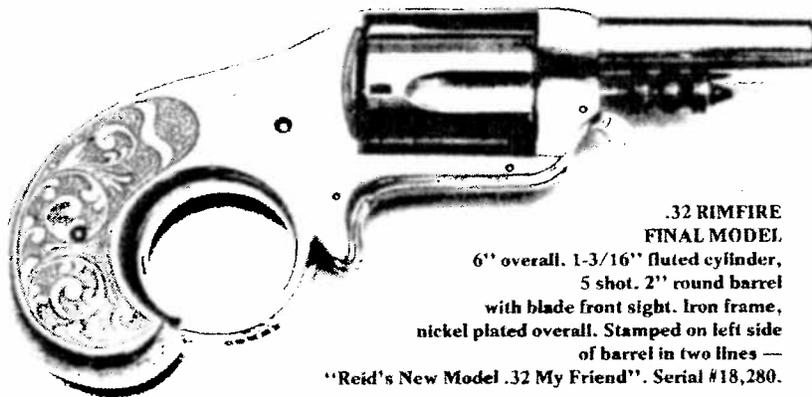
Full serial numbers can be found on the Catskill guns at the bottom of the butt or ring and the last two digits were usually stamped on cylinder, the head of the cylinder pin, the cylinder lock safety and the trigger.

Gun collecting is becoming an expensive hobby but a good investment. The fine and rare guns are also getting very hard to find, but well worth the search.

This writer firmly believes that more important than the aforementioned reasons, the "healing effect" of this interesting and exciting hobby cannot be overlooked. A retreat to one's den and the collection can have an exhilarating and tranquilizing effect on one who has had a tough day at the office or on the job, thus allowing some diversionary time to relax and get himself together for another day.

Hopefully this article may inspire a collector to probe a little deeper than he has before, beyond the guns themselves, and into the past, to find out how that gun really got started and what really motivated the inventor. For those of you who have passed off this idea as too much work, why not think of combining the search with a little traveling, reading, visiting, and letter writing, and call it fun! Who knows, you might get so interested that you will develop the same emotional attachment as I have with "My Friend", James Reid.

Charles M. Grimes



.32 RIMFIRE
FINAL MODEL.
6" overall. 1-3/16" fluted cylinder,
5 shot. 2" round barrel
with blade front sight. Iron frame,
nickel plated overall. Stamped on left side
of barrel in two lines —
"Reid's New Model .32 My Friend". Serial #18,280.

This was Reid's final gun to be produced before going out of business in 1884 and it appeared he may have reverted back from his most typical revolver design to an earlier style in order to recover his business—but to no avail! Several pieces in this model are known to have the pointed hammer, but most have the rounded hammer as found on the knuckledusters and knuckledusters with barrels. Some pieces have a curved-milled dip in the back of the top strap just forward of the hammer, and one piece is known to have a grooved loading port in the right side of the frame. The pointed cylinder pin with three knurled rings, is standard, as on the previous model. An estimated 125 were manufactured and 18 are known. The lowest serial number known is #18,280 and the highest is #18,542. (Author's collection.)

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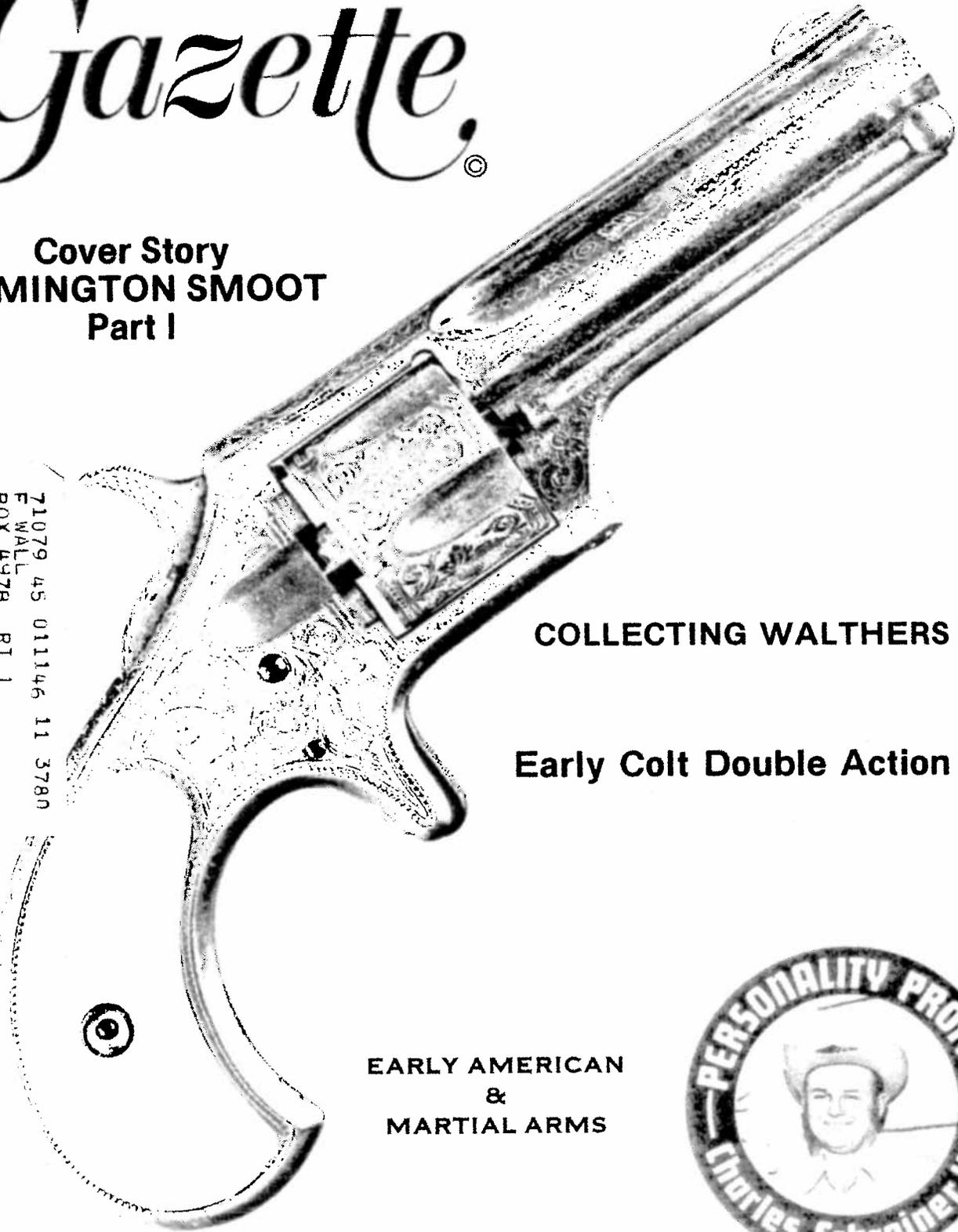
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