

The Smith & Wesson Model Number Two Army

A COLLECTOR'S DREAM

by
Ron Curtis



History has not given the Smith & Wesson Model Two Army its proper place. When it was new, the Model Two Army was a top-of-the-line revolver and a legitimate technological marvel. It was on the cutting edge during a period of time that contained many other new concepts and ideas relating to the firearms industry. But for some inexplicable reason, the Model Two just doesn't seem to get very much respect from today's collectors. I think that this is a huge mistake. Not only is the Model Two Army a beautiful piece of mechanical artwork, but it also exists in just enough variety to make it a near-perfect collecting field.

Smith & Wesson was the leader that would take us into a new era, playing a great part in the history of the United States as well as many other countries, due to the Rollin White patent on the bored-through cylinder. Smith & Wesson was in an enviable position, holding rights to the exclusive patent on a cartridge revolver. This advantage was quickly turned into an extremely popular and profitable product. The Model Two Army was perfectly suited to customers demanding a belt-sized pistol that could be carried in the waistband or a small holster. It could be loaded quickly and simply with the new waterproof metallic cartridge and proved ideal for the soldier as well as those on the home front.

The timing was crucial, as the first guns reached the

marketplace in June of 1861 — only two months after the first shots were fired marking the beginning of the American Civil War. This was a time of dramatic turmoil, the likes of which American citizens had rarely experienced. Fear of invasion gripped the North, and Northern soldiers were searching for compact personal sidearms that they could carry to war. Orders for the Model Two Army rose so fast that by 1862 the company was forced to close its order books because they already had orders for more arms than they could produce in the next three years. Talk about a success story!

From the military point of view, a major drawback to Model Two Army's use as a sidearm was its relatively small .32 rimfire caliber, which lacked the punch of more traditional .44 cap and ball pistols. However, it certainly had an advantage over other smaller caliber pistols, such as the Colt Pocket Model. The Model Two Army had a completely self-contained cartridge — no cap, no wad, no powder, no ball and no ramrod. This advantage of the Model Two Army proved to be an instant hit, and by 1865 both Horace Smith and Daniel Wesson were each earning about \$164,000 per year — the only six figure incomes in the state of Massachusetts.

This pistol, itself, has been referred to in several ways (Model Number Two, Model Two Army, and Model Number Two Old Army) with the original factory designation being

On this page and the previous one, we see Smith & Wesson Model Two Army, Serial Number 66, better known as one of the Lombard Revolvers. (Courtesy of C.B. Wilson)



Model Number Two. The word “Army” was added to promote its use as a sidearm during the Civil War. The designation “Model Two Old Model” was adopted by collectors in order to set it apart from the later Model Two .38 First Issue “Baby Russian.”

My Model Two Army collection began fifty years ago when I was in San Antonio Texas training for the 1960 Olympics with the Modern Pentathlon Team. While we were there, the movie *The Alamo* was being filmed. Several team members went over to watch the filming and we had the privilege of meeting some of the cast, including John Wayne. As we walked back to Fort Sam, we passed a pawn shop and in the window there was a revolver that looked interesting. I had to have it! Five minutes later I came out of the shop \$35 poorer but one S&W Model Two Army richer. I soon learned that the Model Two Army was a design that lent itself to being used for engraving, inscriptions and presentations. My quest for these and other variations began.

Once I was out of the service, I became an avid S&W collector. After a few years, I began to focus on the Model Two Army, and by the mid 1970s I had over one hundred in my collection. When I laid them out in numerical order, I discovered that several changes had taken place over the years. After studying my own revolvers and others that I was able to inspect in person, I expanded my research by sending out cards asking collectors for details of pistols in their collections. In the end, I determined that there were at least eight distinctive and significant manufacturing variations of the Model Two Army. These results were published in an article in the Smith & Wesson Collectors’



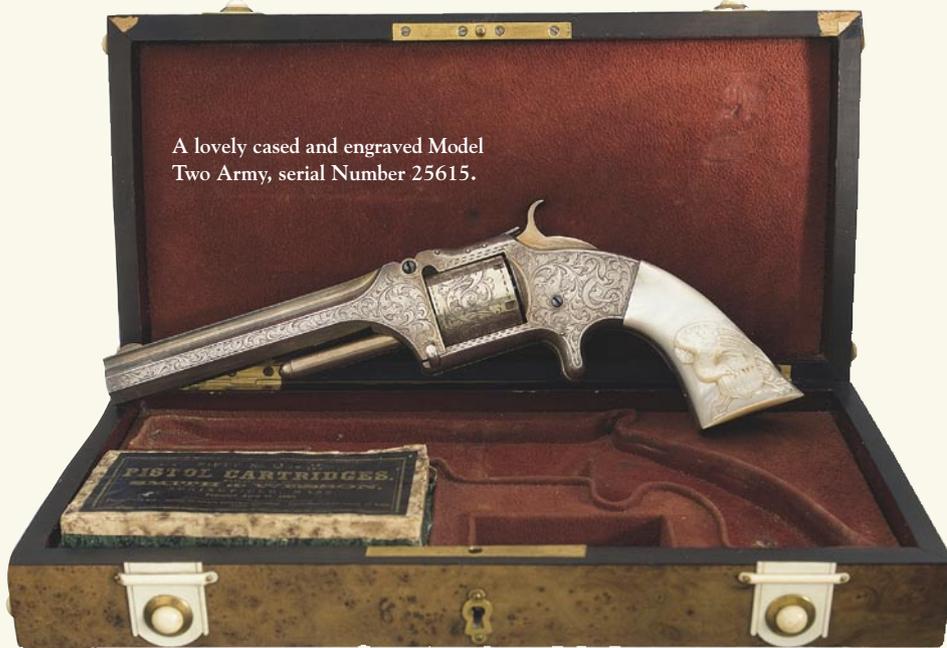
Association Journal. All of the details are also available on an Internet website that I maintain: www.model2project.com Currently, I am in the process of finishing a book on the Model Two Army and I continue to gather information and photographs for that project.

So why do I think that the Model Two Army is a collector’s dream? That’s simple. It affords you so many possibilities for collecting: historical examples (Civil War presentations and inscriptions, guns owned by outlaws, lawmen, judges and politicians); aftermarket modifications (grips, shoulder stocks, re-chambering, finish and engraving); various rare or interesting markings (factory, dealer, foreign country), patent infringements, patent evasions and copies.

In this article, I will discuss all of these subjects and show some wonderful examples from the many areas of collecting that the Model Two Army offers. Who knows...maybe you will get hooked, too!

Manufacturing Variations

The Model Two Army was a well-designed revolver. It was a “tip-up” style and underwent few major engineering changes from the time of its introduction. Most collectors break the variations that did take place into two large groups. First, there are the early revolvers, which had only two pins holding the cylinder stop in position. The second group started at approximately serial number 3330, when a third pin was added to the top strap, limiting the vertical movement of the cylinder stop. The reason for the addition of this third pin has never been explained clearly. However, it has been theorized that it was incorporated to prevent breakage of the cylinder stop. However, as I mentioned earlier, these two large groups



A lovely cased and engraved Model Two Army, serial Number 25615.

(bottom right) Presentation Smith & Wesson Model Two Army Revolver of Colonel Edward Anderson, Serial Number 20147. Aside from the revolver, sword and Black List, which are described in the text, we see a number of other mementos of his bloody career. Anderson was a Christian minister before the Civil War and entered service as a chaplain. He later became Colonel of the 12th Indiana Cavalry. That unit was charged with eradicating Confederate guerrilla and “bushwacker” activities in occupied southern states. Anderson’s orders were to exterminate opposition — literally. Many of these executions were performed by Anderson personally. After the war, he returned to his job as a clergyman. (Photo Courtesy of Norm Flayderman)

can be further broken down (based upon more minor changes) into a total of eight distinct variations that a collector might want to pursue. There isn’t room to explain them all here, but every one is outlined with illustrations on my website: www.model2project.com.

Civil War Production

Aside from these mechanical variations, many collectors also like to associate these pistols with their historical era. There are essentially two major periods of production. The first includes the Civil War and the second begins with the influential Paris Exhibition in 1867.

Approximately the first 34,000 or so Model Two Armies (roughly 45% of total production) were produced during the Civil War period. This period of production includes many pistols presented to (or owned by) famous Civil War figures, both military and political. These are often inscribed and/or engraved, providing a virtual treasure trove of collectable examples. Thus far, our survey has recorded over 200 known examples attributed to use by specific owners during the Civil War.

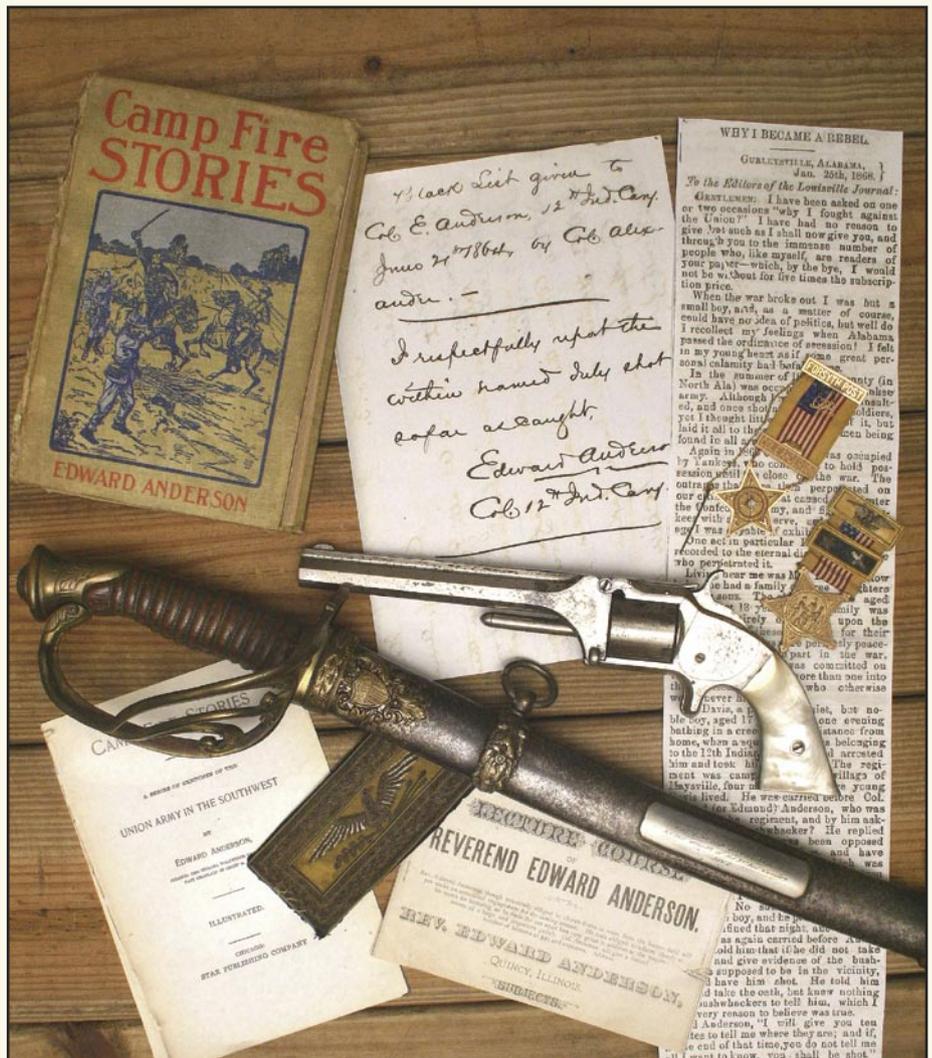
However, at the conclusion of the war, demand simply disappeared. Sales dropped to one third of what they had been during the war. The bottom had

virtually dropped out of the market. It was time for a change.

Post-War Production

The famous Paris Exhibition of 1867 opened up new horizons for Smith & Wesson, exposing them to new customers and fresh markets. They were able to launch new advertising campaigns and establish relationships with a number of active distributors, both foreign and domestic.

Marketing by Smith & Wesson’s competitors became more aggressive with the expiration of the Rollin White patent in 1871. To increase interest in the pistols, authorized Smith & Wesson dealers began to offer special features. The manufacturer would ship the arms to the dealers, who would add such things as engraving, inscriptions, special finishes and custom grips. The dealer would sometimes add his name and address to the gun. These variations offer many fascinating avenues for collectors.



A cased pair of S&W Model Two Army revolvers. Serial numbers 22404 and 22436, each gun is in excellent to mint condition. One grip on each gun is distinctively inlaid with a large silver, shield-shaped plaque engraved with an upraised hand clutching a dagger, and the motto "I Make Sure." On a second, oval-shaped plaque is inscribed: "Presented to Lt. Col. R.L. Kilpatrick by a Few Friends." Accompanying this cased pair are Kilpatrick's presentation Civil War officer's sword marked to retailer "G.W. Simons & Bro/Philadelphia, Pa" with elaborate presentation plaque reading, in part, "Presented to Cap't R.L. Kilpatrick/By The Officers Who Were Prisoners

Of War/At Salisbury, N.C. For His Instructions in Sword/Exercises..." Kilpatrick, who was originally from Scotland and had served in the Black Watch, formed an Ohio unit known as the "Highland Guard," which became the 5th Ohio Infantry. He was captured, exchanged, lost his arm at Chancellorsville, and (amazingly) returned to service with his regiment in the Atlanta Campaign.

(Courtesy Norm Flayderman)



Historical Examples

Civil War examples represent just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to historical pistols. The Model Two Army was known to have been owned by such notable figures as U.S. President Rutherford B. Hayes, General George Armstrong Custer, "Wild Bill" Hickok, Texas Ranger William "Bigfoot" Wallace, William Wadell of Pony Express fame, and John Fetterman. In addition to these famous individuals, numerous lawmen, outlaws and other well-known characters also used the Model Two Army. Many of these revolvers are inscribed or otherwise well documented. Previously unknown examples continue to emerge all the time.

Presentation and Engraved Examples

The Model Two Army was an especially popular canvas for engraving and lavish, deluxe presentation pistols are eagerly sought out by Smith & Wesson collectors. We will show a few exceptional pieces in this article. The earliest known presentation pieces are serial numbers 62 and 66, often called the Lombard Guns. Both of these historical revolvers survive today, although they are now in different collections. Serial number 66 is illustrated on the first two pages of this article.

These famous Model Two Army revolvers have 6-inch barrels, nickel finish and lavish engraving. They were presented by Springfield, Massachusetts, Mayor Bemis and ex-Lt Gov.

Trask to Capt H.C. Lombard (Capt. of F Company 10th Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteer infantry) on July 16th, 1861. Both pistols are inscribed on the backstrap.

Hosea C. Lombard was born in Springfield in 1832. He was an officer in the Massachusetts militia before the Civil War and then mustered in as a Captain of Company F, 10th Massachusetts Infantry on 21 June 1861. There is a lengthy newspaper article that describes a committee of "prominent citizens presenting a brace of army pistols" to Lombard at the time. He was an inspector at the S&W factory after the war and also built a single-shot .22 pistol under his own name. Lombard was chief Engineer of the fire department, officer of the city police force and deputy sheriff of Hampden County until his death.

Another wonderful engraved Model Two Army is serial number 25615, shown on the previous page. It was a featured gun in the famous Ottoman collection and is now in the collection of Kevin Patrick Hogan. In the top of the case are initials that have been attributed to Daniel Baird Wesson, indicating that this may have been his personal gun.

Famous dealer and collector Norm Flayderman has a soft spot for the Model Two Army. Two of his treasures are illustrated here, the first of which started him in collecting historical firearms. On the previous page we see a truly lovely historical group relating to well known Civil War personality

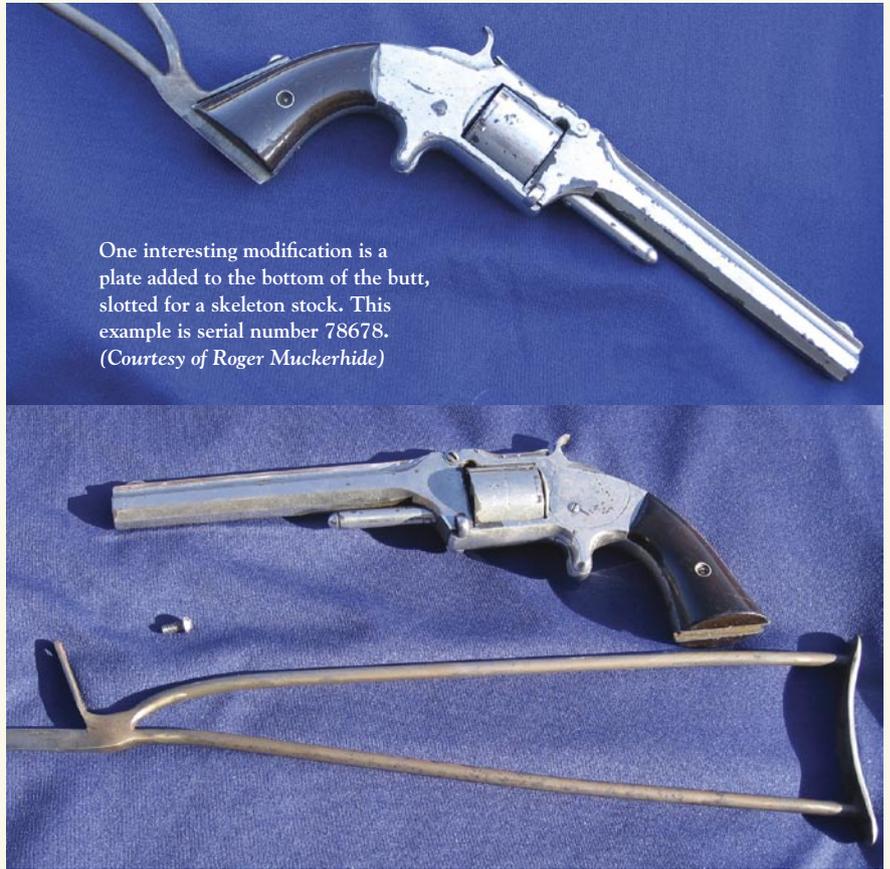
Serial Number 15702
with an 8-inch barrel.
(The John Otteman
Collection)



Col. Edward Anderson — who was a clergyman in private life but showed no mercy during wartime. Included are his inscribed presentation Model Two Army S&W accompanied by a presentation sword. Both of these arms were given to him by the officers of his regiment. Also shown is the back of the “BLACK LIST” of Confederate guerillas he was given by his commanding officer, showing his own notation that they had all been “...duly shot so far or caught.” Not shown is a letter in his own handwriting personally admitting to many other such executions.

Modifications, Factory and Aftermarket

Some of the most fascinating pistols that a collector can own are prototypes, patent



One interesting modification is a plate added to the bottom of the butt, slotted for a skeleton stock. This example is serial number 78678. (Courtesy of Roger Muckerhide)



Collectible ammunition for these revolvers is a specialty all of its own. (Lloyd Hudson)

models and factory modifications. One particularly intriguing Model Two is the one with an eight-inch barrel shown at the top of this page. It is built on a larger frame and has target sights. Indeed, it must have been S&W's first target pistol. I have heard that three existed, but after 40 years of searching, only this one has emerged. So keep your eyes open...there might be more out there.

Much more common are modifications that took place after the revolver left the factory. These modifications could include such changes as: rechambering to another caliber, alteration from rimfire to centerfire, the addition of a shoulder stock (as shown above) or lanyard ring, altering the barrel length or adding a loading groove to the frame. All of these modifications make great collectibles, and since many were done by either the owner or a local gunsmith, that provides endless variations in this category. The adding of a loading groove was an especially practical modification. By filing down the recoil shield and filing a groove, one could load simply by inserting the cartridge without having to take out the cylinder. However, you would still have to take cylinder out in order to eject spent shells.

Ammunition and Holsters

A good portion of Smith & Wesson's fortune was due not only to their production of cartridges, but to the royalties they received when others manufactured them, which was three cents, because of D.B. Wesson's Patent. The factory not only produced cartridges for their guns, but also for other manufactures. All of these cartridges and their packaging are highly sought out by collectors today.

(left) Open style holster that became popular following the Civil War.



Flap style holster. (Courtesy of C.W. Slagel)

Although they aren't factory-original accessories, holsters are always an exciting discovery on a Model Two pistol. At the beginning of production, almost all of the original holsters on these pistols are of the military, flap style. However, towards the end of the 1860s, the California open style became more common. We also see cartridge belt and holster combinations showing up in this later period. Not much research has been done on holsters for early Smith & Wessons, but it would certainly make a fascinating study. Some examples are shown here to whet your interest.

The Number Two in the Field — Some Special Groups to Look For

It is pretty well known that Ben Kittredge of Cincinnati, Ohio, played an important role in the Model Two Army. Kittredge obtained a contract with the State of Kentucky for 2,600 of these revolvers.

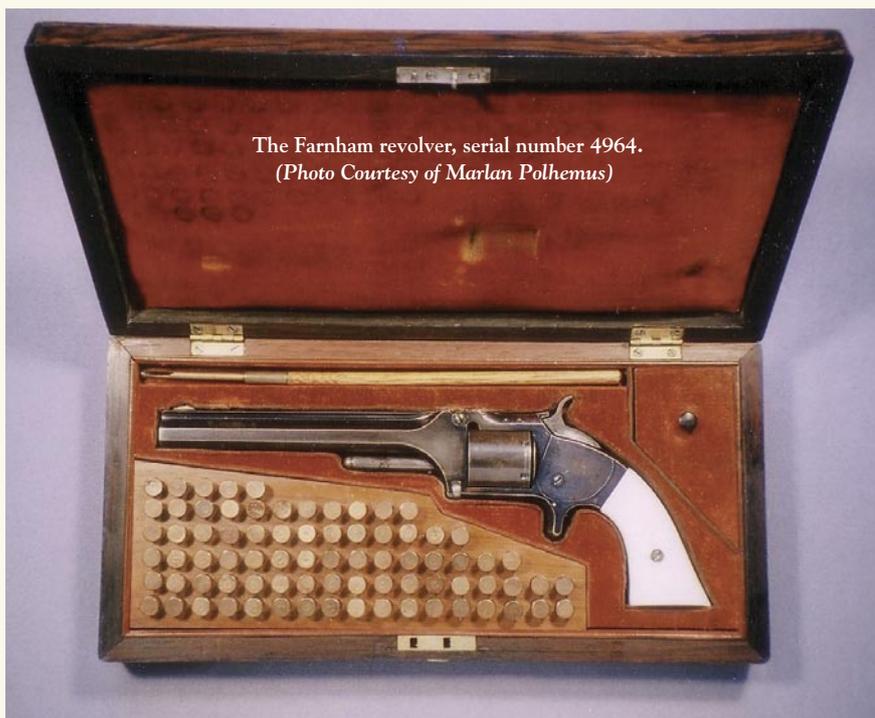
The serial number range appears to be in the area of six thousand to eight thousand. They are marked on the left flat "Manufactured for B. Kittredge Cincinnati Ohio." The majority of the marked examples that have been observed come from the 6800 to 7900 range. The rest were unmarked — thus the only answer to the question is a factory letter. They were not particularly in a block, so any Model Two from 5400 to 7900 just might be part of the Kittredge contract. The later Kittredge guns will appear with two different markings, or again, no markings at all. Kittredge may have purchased as many as 10% of the total production.

Next are the Japanese-marked Model Two Army revolvers, most of which show up in the fifties serial range and remain until the end of production. The earliest Japanese Model Two is serial number 102, which is in the Japanese National Museum. Since they were a particularly early contract purchase of American arms by Japan, these Japanese-marked Smith & Wessons would make a great addition to any collection.

A small group also went to Canada, and they are inscribed "BBNA" (British Bank of North America). The Kingston, Ontario, police department was the first to purchase the Model Two. They were used in the Fenian raids. Also, one thousand units reportedly went to Europe for the Franco-Prussian war.



Holster rig with cartridge belt. (Courtesy of C.B. Wilson)



The Farnham revolver, serial number 4964.
(Photo Courtesy of Marlan Polhemus)

offering some of the most elegant, silk-lined examples. These cased sets usually included compartments for ammunition as well as assorted tools and a cleaning rod. While the majority of casings were designed for a single pistol, they were also available for pairs of revolvers.

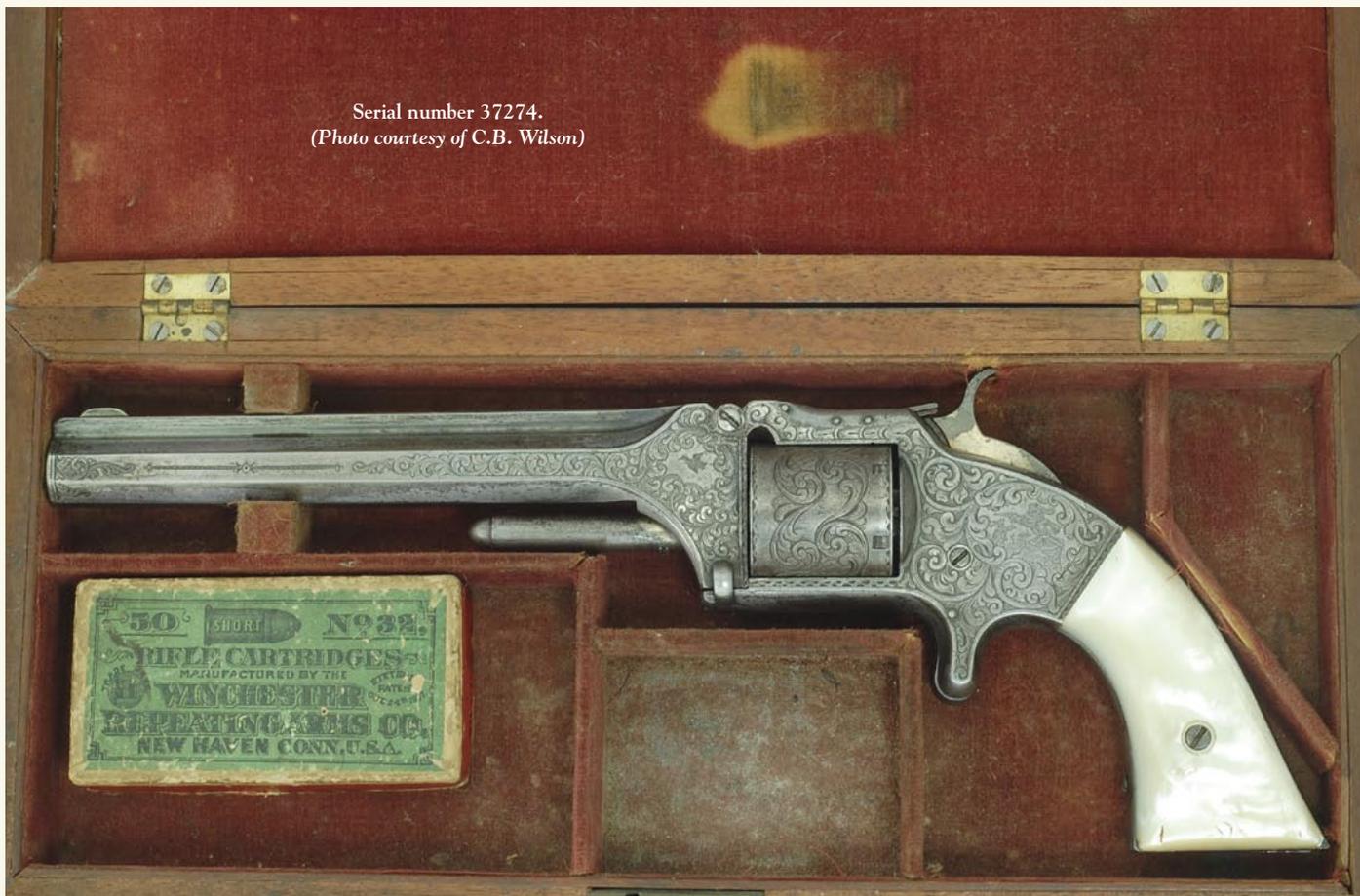
Infringements, Evasions and Copies

The relationship between Smith & Wesson and Rollin White was not what might be considered an ideal. In return for agreeing not only to renew the patent, but also to defend it against infringements and evasions, White was to receive \$.25 for each pistol produced, including the Model One, first issue and second issue. White did not feel that this was adequate to cover the costs of defending the patent, which proved to be significant.

The Rollin White patent and all of its ramifications is practically a study in and of itself. The bored-through cylinder protected by the patent was clearly an improvement in the loading of a pistol. Because of the Rollin White patent, many Smith & Wesson competitors continued to produce revolvers that were either direct infringements of the patent or attempts to evade it. This situation creates

Cased Examples of the Model Two Army

The Smith & Wesson Model Two Army can be found in a variety of types of cases. Most commonly found are the wood cases, thought to have been made by M.W. Robinson, a large Smith & Wesson distributor located in New York. These are usually made from mahogany, but they are also seen in walnut and, occasionally, cherry wood veneer. Other dealers offered cases in both wood and fancy leather bound styles, with the huge New York dealer Hartley and Graham



Serial number 37274.
(Photo courtesy of C.B. Wilson)

an interesting separate category of collecting: pistols manufactured specifically in order to evade or even purposefully infringe upon the patent.

There were also outright copies. Like any hugely successful product, the Smith & Wesson revolvers stimulated the production of copies (with no attempt to honor the patent), both domestically and abroad. A huge number of illicit copies were manufactured in Europe, with two of the major sources being England and Belgium. Copies from Germany, Sweden, Italy and even Japan have been found with varying degrees of quality, many of them unmarked. Like infringements and evasions, these copies offer an intriguing opportunity for collectors who appreciate their historical value.

After 50 years of collecting the Model Two Army, it seems that I have more questions than when I began the journey. With your help, I feel that we can gather much more information and answer many more of our outstanding questions. If you have a Model Two Army, please send me information through this magazine. Some of my unanswered questions are:

- The exact serial range of the early Kittredge contract with Kentucky.
- Any information on Cooper and Pond, who ordered 2,000 Model Two Armys. Only three have appeared in our survey.
- Information on any Model Two Army marked "Second Quality". (Factory records show 35, but only one is known.)
- Pistols made with 4-inch barrels. (Factory records show about 400 produced, but very few have shown up.)
- The Russian contract negotiations. (Different models were submitted to the Russian government for approval. Was a Model Two Army ever submitted?)
- The significance of "XX" assembly numbers. (Several have been observed and all but one show some kind of modification.)

These questions still require answers and your help is needed. □



Serial numbers 22404 and 22436, also shown in another photograph earlier. These pistols are in their original, walnut case with fancy grain

and inlaid brass corners, with the center of the lid inscribed "R.L. Kilpatrick/ U.S.A."
(Courtesy of Norm Flayderman)