



Firearms Collections of the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum

Excerpt of Project Report by Tom Andrews

1860 Henry Rifle

The following article has been adapted from a special project report on key artifacts in the Firearms Collections of the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum. This project report was written in 2018 based on extensive research compiled by project intern Tom Andrews.

1860 Henry Rifle

History of the Henry 1860 Rifle

In 1858, B. Taylor Henry began experimenting with a more powerful rifle cartridge, spurred by the unsatisfactory power of the Volcanic Cartridge. That same year, he created the .44 Rimfire cartridge and a rifle that could fire it. Thus the Henry 1860 Rifle was born. After a setup period, the rifles were first offered to the public starting in 1862, with rifles produced that year numbering between sn 301 and sn 1300. Some number of rifles were returned to the factory to have half-cock hammers or lever latches added. It is also common to find sight dovetails cut into the receivers of rifles numbered below sn 3000. Factory assembly numbers were often placed on the forward part of the barrel under the rotating loading sleeve as well as on the sleeve itself and the retaining band which holds the front sight mount.

The early brass frame rifles are characterized by their brass frame and butt plates, changed from iron construction on the earliest rifles. These rifles were sold with a four-piece wooden cleaning rod often made from hickory and stored in the butt stock. Interestingly, this style of cleaning rod would not fit into the butt stock of a later brass frame rifle, which were paired with iron cleaning rods fitted with brass tips.¹

Information Specific to this Firearm

This rifle is an early brass frame model based on the low serial number and the style of cleaning rod. According to Madis, rifles in this serial number range were manufactured in 1862. The presence of a lever latch and the optic dovetail cut into the barrel suggests that this was one of the rifles which was sent back to the factory for modification.

The engraving on the rifle appears to be of a style consistent with that performed by Samuel J. Hoggson, and the motifs are nearly an exact match to s/n5050, as depicted in Little John's Auction Service October 2012 catalog. The pattern is also consistent with that present on the Henry in the Smithsonian collection which was presented to Abraham Lincoln. Finally, the engraving pattern is a near perfect match to that of s/n1011 as depicted in Madis' book. Hoggson was the New Haven Arms Company's factory engraver, and rifles ordered engraved from the factory appear to have been somewhat rare for this time period.^{2 3 4}

Unfortunately, we do not have information on the rifle's history prior to its acquisition by the donor, and it is not possible to say whether it could have been carried in the Civil War. However, it was definitely manufactured in the time period and shows wear which would lead to the conclusion that the rifle was used in some capacity during that era. In Madis' book, he makes multiple references to soldiers purchasing their own Henrys to use in place of their issued weapons. However, the engraving detracts from that argument as ordering an engraved rifle would have resulted in a delay in have ones order filled, likely unacceptable for a soldier going to war.

¹ George Madis, *The Winchester Book* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Edwards Brothers, INC., 1979), 27–51.

² Little John's, *Little John's Auction October 2012 Auction Catalog* (Orange, CA, 2012), 423.

³ "Henry Presentation Rifle," The National Museum of American History, n.d., http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_881516.

⁴ Madis, *The Winchester Book*, 50.