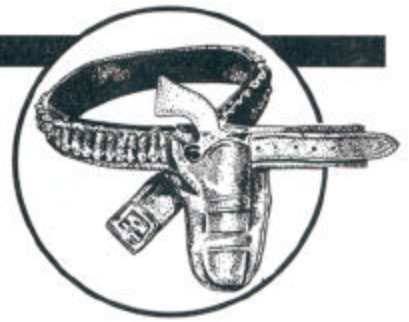


USFA's Henry Nettleton CAVALRY .45 COLT

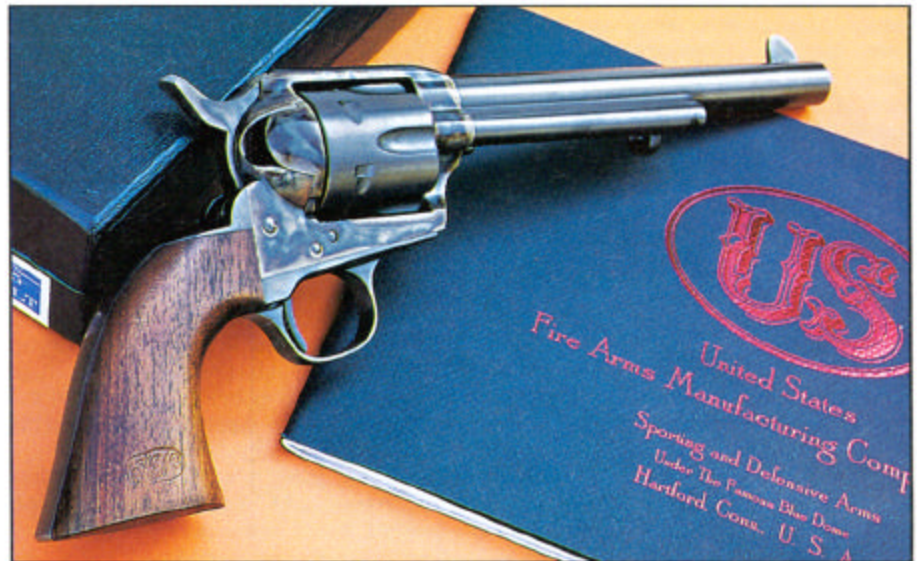


It's an authentic to the detail M1873 SAA revolver!

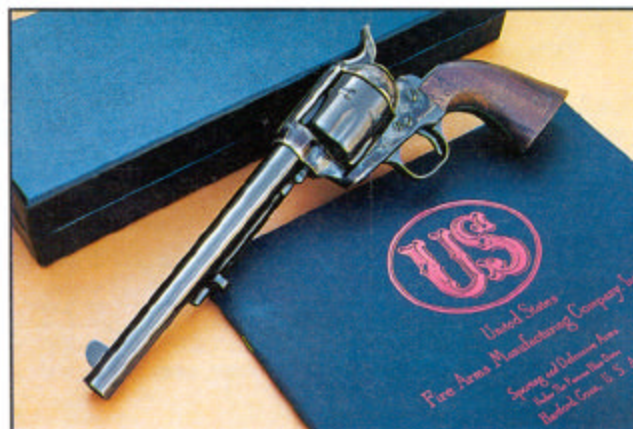
By Bob Shimek

United States Fire Arms Manufacturing Company is a relatively new outfit that's dedicated to producing slickly fitted and finished, high-quality replicas of a wide variety of Sam Colt's famed historic single-action wheelguns, whether of cartridge or percussion persuasion. The company, while admitting readily that raw material parts are made by subcontractors, makes no bones about its mission: "We do not build our guns down to a price; they are built up to a standard of excellence in design and workmanship," states the company policy on page 8 of the firm's seven-dollar, 64-page Collector's Edition catalog, which is in actuality as much a work of art as an advertising circular. I cannot dispute USFAMC's claims after recently examining the Henry Nettleton Cavalry revolver, which is a U.S. Fire Arms' replica of an 1878-dated US Army contract M1873 "thumb-buster." Indeed, I would add one further bit of praise: when it comes to creating as exact a replica as possible of a specific M1873 variation, United States Fire Arms Manufacturing Company truly does its homework, at least if the Nettleton is exemplary.

Who in the world is Henry Nettleton? We would probably have no idea, were it not for the fact that serious arms historians have been able to delve so deeply into the history of the famous handgun that USFAMC seeks to replicate, the hallowed Colt M1873 "Peacemaker." The task of these historians is aided by the fact that the original Colt product is so eminently collectible, and that Colt factory records sometimes aid the historian in his research. Hence, in the original Colt Peacemaker, we find a firearm with all



U.S. Fire Arms' Henry Nettleton Cavalry Revolver has its blued parts finished in the company's trademarked Armoury Blue, an old-timey pre-1900 era finish.



USFA's revolver replicates one of the M1873 models purchased by our government between 1873 and 1895.

the charm and collector interest of the German P.08 autopistol, but we need do less guesswork in reaching conclusions regarding its history, because we can know so much more.

The significance of the name Henry Nettleton is easily uncovered. Nettleton was a Principal Sub-Inspector, tasked with assuring the quality of revolvers made under U.S. Army contract by the Colt company. (Such contracts, which would come to encompass more than 37,000 guns, were first extended in 1873, with the last contract being issued in 1891.) As a Principal Sub-Inspector, Henry Nettleton was a civilian employed

by the government; this is in contrast to the Ordnance Inspectors, who were military officers also charged with ensuring that weapons made for the US government were up to spec. During the period when Nettleton was employed, both Principal Sub-Inspectors and Ordnance Inspectors marked the guns they checked with a "cartouche" stamped into the wooden sides of the grip. Cartouches typically consisted of the inspector's initials in decorative script, surrounded by a border. The Ordnance Inspector's cartouche appeared on the left side, the Principal Sub-Inspector's on the right side. The year of inspection appeared above the cartouche on the left side. The Principal Sub-Inspector's initials appeared on various other parts of the gun as well. In the case of Henry Nettleton, they appeared on an especially large number of parts, to include the frame, triggerguard, hammer, backstrap, barrel, cylinder, and even the base of the walnut grip (in addition to the cartouche on the right side of the grip).

Authentic To Detail

As stated previously, my examination of United States Fire Arms' replica of the



"H.N." (Henry Nettleton) stampings appear on assorted parts of gun.



On black powder style frame, a screw holds the cylinder pin in place.



It's marked as an 1878-dated Army revolver: with three-line patent legend and stamped "U.S.".

Nettleton showed that the firm had done some intensive research into how the original gun was marked. So far as my own research could discern, virtually all markings were accurately duplicated and were appropriate for the period. The year "1878" stamped on the left side of the grip, and the "JEG" Ordnance Inspector's cartouche appearing just below it were appropriate for a Nettleton-inspected revolver, the "JEG" standing for John E. Greer, a US Army Captain assigned to Ordnance Inspection duties at the same time Nettleton was employed. Even the replica's serial number was in the correct range for a Nettleton/Greer inspected original! The cylinder, as well as the underside of the barrel, bore the small "P" proofmark stamping characteristic of original guns. The "U.S." military property stamping was present on the left side of the frame beneath the cylinder cutout, as per the original, and the three-line patent legend, appropriate for a Nettleton vintage gun, was correctly replicated.

Needless to say, with so much attention given to accurately duplicating original markings, standard US-issue "Cavalry Model" characteristics were

GUNS OF THE OLD WEST

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correctly copied also. Frame was of the early "black powder style," wherein the cylinder pin is retained by a screw in the front of the frame, rather than by the spring-loaded transverse crossbar which was developed later. The ejector rod head was appropriately of "bull's eye" pattern. The finish was accurately replicated beyond all expectation: the frame, hammer, and loading gate were done up in U.S. Fire Arms' trademarked "Old Armory Bone Case Hardening," with lots of rich, deep hues; blued parts featured the firm's trademarked pre-1900-style "Armory Blue," which rendered a moderately reflective military blue finish said to replicate the military M1873s. I compared the finish on my replica to professionally done color photography of an original military contract revolver in near-new condition (I have no access to one of the few priceless minty originals, alas) and was impressed by the apparent similarity.

Then & Now Distinctions

Sole departures I could find from the original-pattern gun—and minimal they were—ran as follows. First, the legend atop the barrel was of course required to correctly identify the manufacturer—U.S. Patent Fire Arms—and thus could not replicate the original's barrel stamping. Second, I found a very few subcontractors' stampings subtly tucked away, and very neatly applied, in obscure corners on the piece. Third, the sole photo of an original Nettleton Colt I possessed showed the "HN" stamping on the underside of the butt of the walnut grip to be on the left side, not on the right side, as on the replica. However, I do not know if this was a rule with the originals, or if placement varied from example to example. Last, the USFAMC replica is of course proofed for use with modern SAAMI-spec smokeless powder ammunition; the original Colt was proofed for use with black powder cartridges only. But that was the extent of the differences.

It is at this point that I'll allow myself a bit of opinionating. My United States Fire Arms replica of the Henry Nettleton Cavalry revolver was to date the most carefully fitted and finished, slickest operating M1873 repro I have encountered. There were virtually no toolmarks visible externally, and when the cylinder was removed, there were noticeably fewer and lighter toolmarks than on other repros I've tried out.

Operating the controls added to the impression of care in manufacture: the gun lacked the "grittiness" one sometimes finds in some other M1873 repli-



Right side of grip shows Henry Nettleton's cartouche: "HN" initials.



Bullseye-style ejector rod head is correct for 1878-manufacture M1873.



Front sight is traditional blade.

cas and the trigger broke super cleanly. Lockup was very tight and solid, yet timing and part fit had been so carefully done that the bolt left virtually no marks at all on the cylinder when the gun was indexed. Flash gap was .005 inch, which is comfortably within industry tolerances. Hence, my Nettleton certainly appeared to deliver the quality that the U.S. Fire Arms catalog had promised.

A Shooter?

As to shooting U.S. Fire Arms' Nettleton repro, this is certainly possible. As the U.S. Fire Arms' catalog puts it: "Can (you, the buyer) shoot the gun? Yes, you can have fun. It's your gun and many people buy our guns just for that purpose." However, the reader should be aware that U.S. Fire Arms replica M1873 revolvers are TRADITIONAL single-action revolvers that lack any safety system beyond the hammer's so-called "safety notch." Their use should thus be confined to those who thoroughly understand the precautions necessary when loading and handling traditional-style single-action revolvers. It is not within the purview of this "history reproduced" oriented article to instruct the reader in the

Specifications: U.S. Fire Arms Henry Nettleton Cavalry

CALIBER: .45 Colt
BARREL: 7.5 inches
OA LENGTH: 13 inches
HEIGHT: 5 inches
BREADTH: 1.67 inches
WEIGHT: 45 ounces
PRICE: \$975

safe handling of traditional-style single-actions; the guidance of a competent instructor must be sought out. For the record, however, I will remind readers that when a traditional single-action revolver is loaded, the only safe readiness mode is with the hammer lowered over an EMPTY chamber, the gun having been loaded with five, not six, rounds; U.S. Fire Arms recommends also that the hammer be placed in the safety notch position as an additional precaution. Note that it is EXTREMELY dangerous for the hammer to ever rest on a loaded chamber—the firing pin would bear directly on the round's primer and even a light tap on the hammer would discharge the revolver. Furthermore, the hammer's safety notch is never to be regarded as providing adequate protection so that a loaded chamber may be kept under the hammer, since the traditional single action safety notch has been known to shear when struck a blow, firing the gun.

Final Notes

Hence, U.S. Fire Arms' replica of the Nettleton is as exact as one could imagine, complete to replicating the old-timey safety system. If you desire a repro that comes as close to the original as possible, this is the one.

For more information, contact: **United States Fire Arms Manufacturing Co. Inc.**, 55 Van Dyke Ave., Dept. CH, Hartford CT 06106; 860-724-1152 ●

References And Suggested Readings:

Cochran, Keith. **COLT CAVALRY, ARTILLERY, AND MILITIA REVOLVERS** (1873-1903). Rapid City; Cochran, 1994.

Exhaustive, super-detailed treatment of this subject, evidencing thorough scholarship. A "must-have" for Colt enthusiasts.

Wilson, R.L. **COLT: AN AMERICAN LEGEND**. New York; Artabras, 1985.

Superb and pleasingly detailed overview of the entirety of Colt history. Beautifully illustrated.