

Early American 22-Caliber Handguns

by Erwin J. Hill, Jr.

It is with pleasure that I address you today, on the subject of Early American .22 Caliber Handguns.

I think it appropriate to begin by reviewing with you, a brief history of how the .22 cartridge was developed, and what followed as a result. It is my belief that this cartridge alone revolutionized the firearms industry.

When the rim-fire self-contained cartridge made its appearance in the mid-19th Century, it was really no novelty. French Soldiers used paper containers which held a powder charge only. The ball or projectile was carried separately. It was only a matter of time before ball and powder, or shot charge and powder, were combined in the same case.

M. Flobert, in about 1840, developed a small rim-fire cartridge now known as a bullet breech cap. The original purpose of the BB cap was to allow the enthusiast to practice indoors, with both rifle and pistol. There has been little or no change in the basic construction of this cartridge. The body is punched out of sheet copper and then drawn into a tube. The rim is then added, and filled with a primer. The original primer, fully corrosive and rather unstable, was pure fulminate of mercury. Ignition of the charge was effected by trapping the rim between the face of the barrel and the firing pin, or hammer.

Here in America, in 1852, Horace Smith and Daniel Wesson founded a partnership in Norwich, Connecticut, which was ultimately to become world-famous as Smith and Wesson of handgun fame. Some sixteen years earlier, four years before M. Flobert had invented his rim-fire cartridge, Colonel Samuel Colt had brought out his famous revolver and so thoroughly did he cover his patent that it was virtually impossible for anyone to make a revolving firearm, handgun or carbine, legally. Naturally many gunmakers were anxious to make a repeating weapon which would not infringe upon Colt's patents, and Smith and Wesson began to develop a system invented by a Mr. Jennings.

In this system the ammunition (consisting of a hollow lead bullet with a black powder propelling charge) was carried in a tube magazine under the barrel and fed into the chamber by a trigger guard lever, but the cartridge was inefficient and doomed the weapon. In despair and contemplating having to wait until Colt's patent expired, Smith and Wesson took up the .22 rim-fire. They planned to use this caliber in a weapon with a bored-through cylinder. Strangely enough, Colt had never thought of this contingency: all his weapons were loaded from the front of the chamber which was solid at the rear. However, in 1855, Rollin White had forestalled Smith and Wesson and secured a patent on the bored-through cylinder. A deal was concluded between the parties and two years later, in 1857, Smith and Wesson made their first .22 rim-fire repeating revolver, using all metal cartridges. This ammunition was an improvement on Flobert's BB caps and was virtually the modern .22 short.

The original .22 Smith and Wesson cartridge shot a 30-



grain bullet, propelled by a 2.6-grain black powder charge. On April 17, 1860, Smith and Wesson secured a joint patent on the rim-fire cartridge and held undisputed control of the metallic cartridge field for about 10 years.

The little .22 was soon in great demand by officers during the American Civil War, and to the populace, as a personal defense weapon, in revolver, single shot, and pepper-box form.

In the New England states there were many gunsmiths, machinists, and blacksmiths that had tried their hand in making firearms. This break-through of improvement upon any ignition system that had previously been used excited the imagination of all those who had a working knowledge of fire-arms, and as a result, there sprang into being, several who were quick to recognize the potential of this improvement. This caused Smith and Wesson, through Rollin White, (in the agreement on the purchase of his patent of the bored-through cylinder) to take steps to protect the patent from infringement by others.

In 1861 Rollin White and Smith & Wesson brought suit in Federal District Court in New York against Herman Boker for selling breech-loading revolvers made by the Manhattan Fire Arms Manufacturing Co. The case was settled in favor of Rollin White in 1862. Other litigation involving the April 3, 1855, patent was carried on almost to the time it expired on April 3, 1869.

After the 1862 decision against Manhattan, several other companies came to terms. Among these were Bacon Manufacturing Co., of Norwich, Conn., Moore's patent Firearms Co., of Brooklyn, N. Y., Lucius W. Pond, of Worcester, and James Warner of Springfield, Mass.

L. W. Pond, losing his decision in court, did not discontinue his manufacturing of revolvers. He, instead, looked for a way to circumvent the patent rights held by Smith and Wesson, and in doing so, produced from 1863 to about the end of the Civil War, an unusual fire-arm known as the "Pond Front Loader". This piece consists of sleeves (7 in number) which accept a cartridge loaded at the back of each sleeve. The sleeves, along with the cartridges, were then inserted in chambers at the front of the cylinder. The back of the cylinder, being solid (with the exception of slots milled into each chamber, allowing the nose of the hammer to come in contact with the head of the cartridge) also acted as the breech. There is also a notch between two chambers on which the nose of the

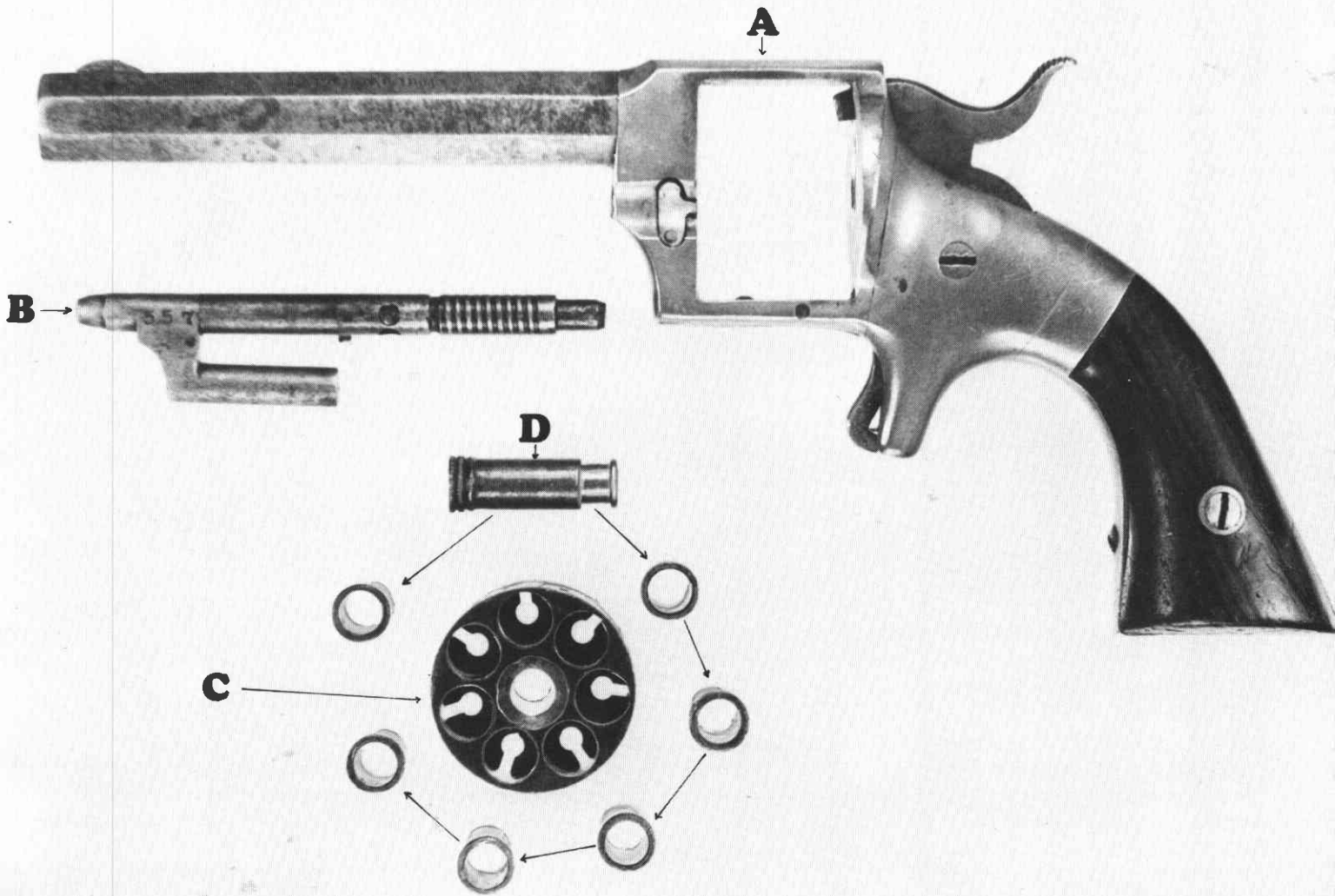


Figure 1-A. L. W. Pond revolver, disassembled (Author's collection).

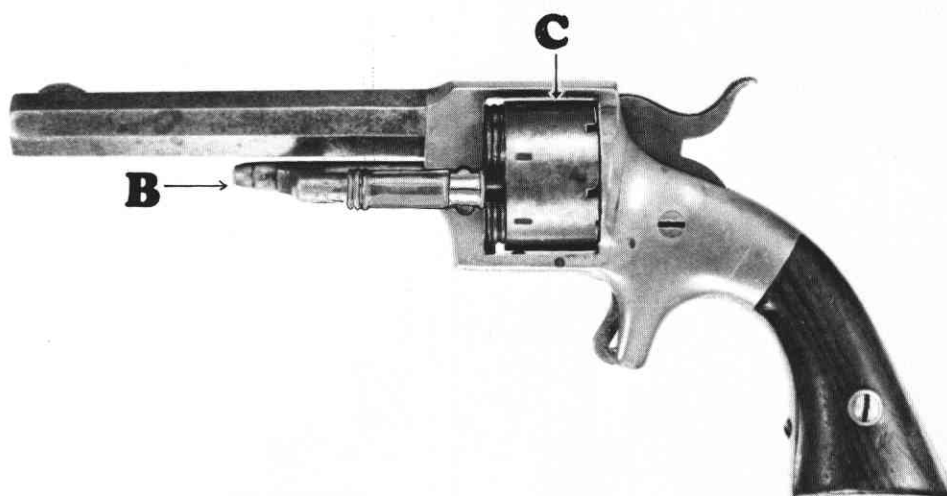


Figure 1-B. L. W. Pond — Assembled showing cartridge being ejected from sleeve. Author's Collection.

hammer rests, to act as a safety. The cylinder can not be turned until the hammer is drawn back. The cylinder pin has, as an integral part, a rod used for the purpose of ejecting the spent shell, and works in the following manner: the pin has two indentations, one for indexing the pin when the piece is loaded ready to fire. In this position, the ejector rod hangs below the barrel. To eject the spent shells from the sleeves, it is necessary to press the cylinder pin release button, located at the right side of the frame. This activates a plate, located and recessed in the left side of the frame, releasing a pin attached at the top and inside of the plate, this allows the cylinder pin and ejector rod to be rotated approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ turn to the left. The cylinder pin and rod are then held securely by the second index, and brings the ejector rod in alignment with a sleeve in the cylinder. The sleeves at their front have a slightly raised knurled end. By using the thumbnail, or a suitable instrument, they can be brought forward onto the rod thereby forcing the spent shell from the sleeve.

Figure 1-A, shows the piece broken down with its component parts arranged beginning with: A — Main frame of revolver. B — Cylinder pin and ejector rod, (note the indentations for indexing). C — Cylinder with a view looking down at its front, showing the chambers with the slots at the rear of each chamber, as described above. D — The sleeves, the upper-most laying on its side with a cartridge half inserted at its rear. The other six positioned around and outside their respective chambers within the cylinder.

Figure 1-B, shows the piece assembled: note the cylinder (C) with the slots showing at its rear to accept the nose of the hammer. The knurled end of the sleeves protrude at the front of the cylinder when fully seated. The cylinder pin (B) is shown rotated $\frac{1}{4}$ turn and a sleeve brought forth on the ejector rod with a spent shell being forced from the

sleeve.

The Pond shows a high degree of planning and is a well-made piece. It is difficult to find with all the original parts, especially the sleeves, cylinder pin and ejector, which were easily misplaced or lost through negligence. Perhaps if one can imagine the frustration in loading and reloading the revolver, particularly if under duress, parts could have been left behind during a hasty retreat.

On his cessation of producing firearms, L. W. Pond, being a machinist, returned to tool and die making.

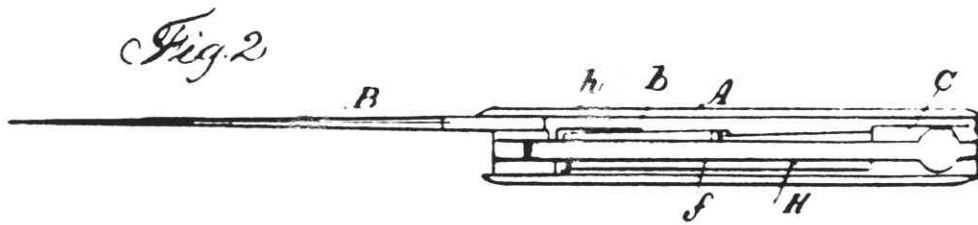
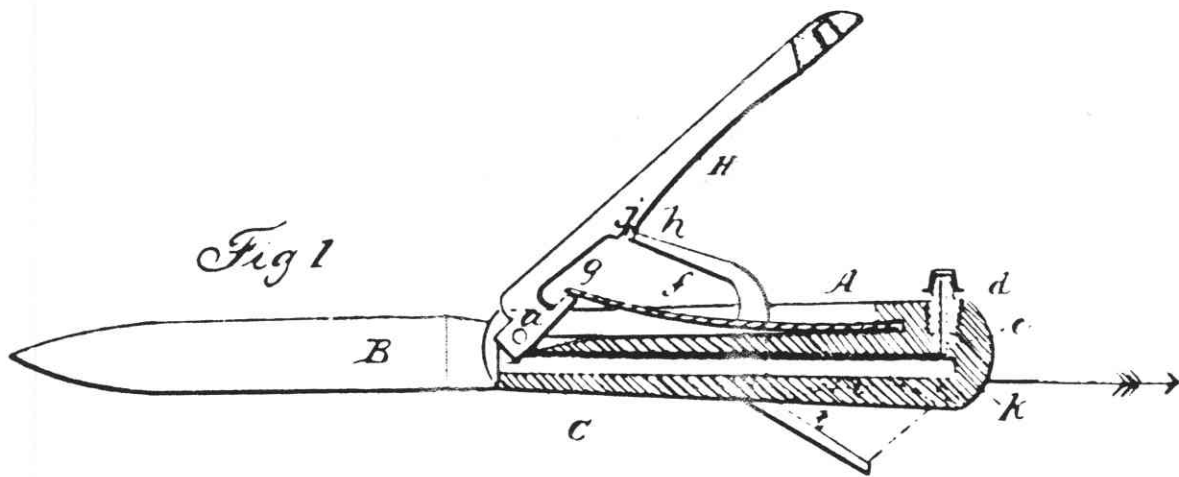
In the State of Maine, in the County of Waldo, there is a small town named South Montville, where on August 5, 1832, a set of twins were born. One was named Thomas Jefferson, the other Andrew Jackson, their parents being William C. and Jemima Peavey. Both Thomas and Andrew apprenticed and became blacksmiths. They were listed in the 1856 business directory as being engaged in that profession. Many blacksmiths of that era, through their ingenuity and inquisitive minds, loved to experiment with guns, knives and whatever suited their fancy. Andrew's choosing evidently leaned toward firearms, for on September 5, 1865, he was awarded a patent entitled "Improvement in Combined Pocket-Knife and Pistol"; Fig 2-A shows a copy of this patent #49-784. Take note that this particular piece is a percussion device. In Fig. 1 of the drawing, the letter (H) denotes the hammer. When triggered, one can see that it comes in contact with a percussion cap, shown positioned at the butt end, or the back and top end of the knife handle.

Four months later on January 13, 1866, A. J. Peavey petitioned the "Commissioner of Patents of the United States of America" for a patent on a "New and Improved Combined Pistol and Knife". The petition was received in the patent office on January 27, 1866. The following is a direct quote from page 1, of that petition.

A. J. PEAVEY.
Knife and Pistol

No. 49,784

Patented Sept. 5, 1865



Witnesses:

Thos Fusch
Wm Green

Inventor:

A J Peavey
By Munn & Co
attys

Figure 2-A. A. J. Peavey Patent #49-784.

"To all whom it may concern. Be it known, that I, A. J. Peavey of South Montville, Waldo County, Maine, have invented a new and improved 'Combined-Pistol and Knife', and I do hereby declare that the following is a full, clear, and exact description of the same, reference being had to the annexed drawing, making a part of this specification.

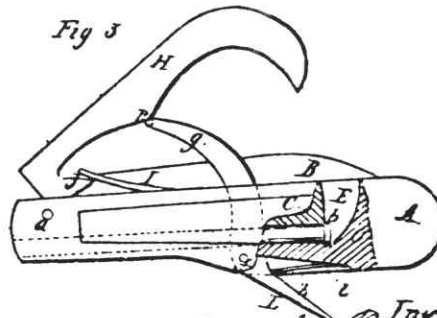
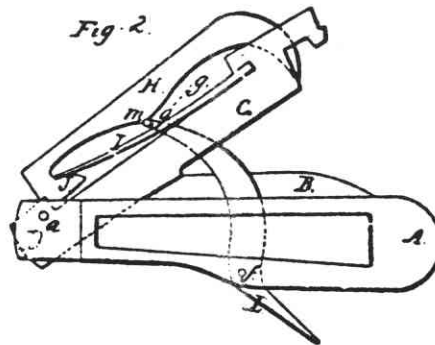
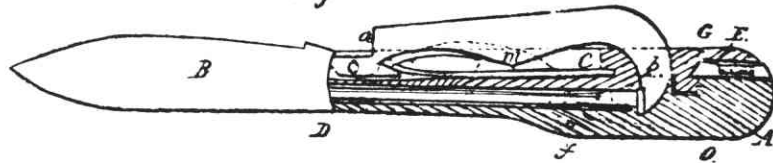
"The present invention relates to a combined knife and pistol, invented and patented by me on the Fifth day of September A.D. 1865, and it principally consists in so hanging or arranging the barrel of the pistol portion of the combined Knife and Pistol, within the knife blade casing or handle, that its breech end can be swung up and out of the same, to allow a metallic cartridge to be inserted

therein or removed therefrom, as the case may be, which barrel when swung down and into place within the knife-handle is there firmly held by means of a spring catch properly arranged therefore, by releasing which spring catch the barrel is free to be swung up as above explained".

This would indicate that Peavey, after receiving his patent of 1865, did not produce the percussion knife and pistol, but went to work almost immediately on the latter, that being the cartridge model described in his petition. This writer has never seen, nor knows of anyone who has encountered, the percussion model. H. Gordon Frost, in his book entitled Blades and Barrels, states: "While none of Peavey's percussion knife-pistols have been

Figure 2-B. A. J. Peavey Patent #53473

J. A. Peavey.
Combined Pistol & Knife.
No 53473. Patented Mar. 27. 1866.
 Fig. 1.



Witnesses:

J. M. Blount
Jas. A. Service

A. J. Peavey Inventor.
Per Munnell
A. J. Peavey

encountered by this author in over twenty years searching, there are specimens of his .22 caliber rimfire knife-pistol which are nearly identical, from an external appearance, to the percussion patent drawings”.

Peavey was granted his request for the new and improved cartridge model on March 27, 1866; Fig. 2-B shows this patent #53473. Fig. 2-C shows the piece, serial #452, with the knife blade opened and the barrel in its raised position, the hammer blade and trigger that holds the hammer in its cocked position as in Fig. 2-D when the barrel has been seated within the handle of the knife casing, ready for firing.

Returning for a moment to Fig. 2-B, note the hammer (H) in the patent drawing. It consists of a hook shaped end, and in the 9th paragraph of Peavey's specifications he states: “(H) is the hammer of the pistol made of a hook shape and hung at the front end of the barrel upon the pivot (A) of the knife-handle, which hammer extends toward the breech end of the barrel, through a slot (C) of suitable shape of the breech piece (O) of the knife-handle, to the metallic cartridge in the barrel, against which it is held and when swung up or “Cocked” brought to bear with sufficient force to explode its fulminate, by a bent spring (I) fixed at one end to the upper side of the pistol-barrel and at its other resting upon the arm (J) of the under side of the hammer (H)”.

Of the few specimens examined, and photographs of the piece found in various books, this hook shape is not evident. There is instead, as seen in Fig. 2-D, a stepped end.

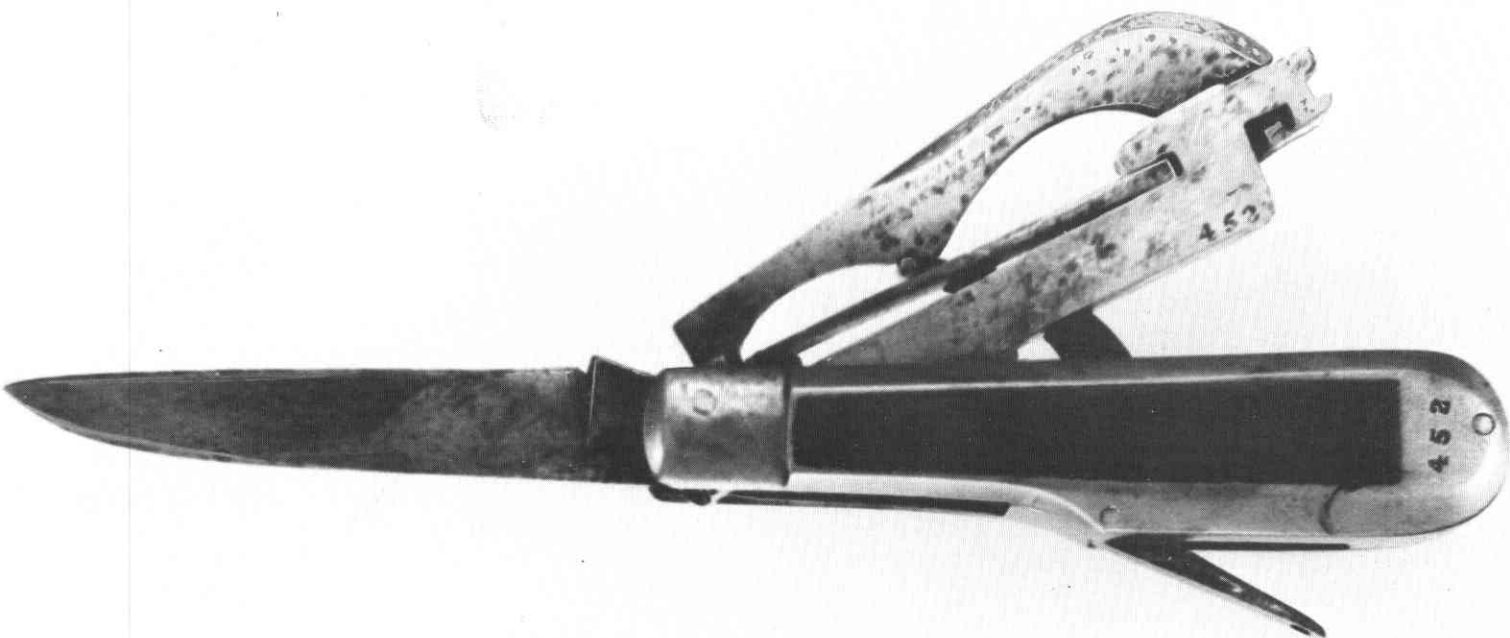
A plate located in the breech serves as a wedge and ejector, which pivots off center on a pin. When loading the knife pistol it is necessary to depress the barrel separating

it from the hammer blade, which remains in the cocked position. This allows the plate to be rotated up and forward as seen in Fig. 2-E, (Note the ejector nose at the forward end of the plate). When seating the cartridge in the chamber, the ejector nose precedes the *inside rim*. The plate is then rotated to align the notch at its rear with those in the breech, this also brings the wedge of the plate to rest against the *outside rim* of the cartridge. Fig. 2-F shows the plate in a position that the wedge may be seen. The notch in the plate is larger than those in the breech of the barrel, this allows (when the breech is seated in the knife handle and held there by a spring catch) enough play that its top rear portion extends slightly above the top of the breech, being held there by the wedge resting against the outside rim of the cartridge. When the hammer blade is triggered it slams down, the stepped end striking the rear portion of the plate, driving the wedge into the rim of the cartridge discharging the piece. When ejecting the spent shell the plate is rotated again, the ejector nose coming in contact with the inside rim of the shell, causes it to be brought from the chamber. The piece is then ready to reload.

The Peavey knife pistol served a three-fold purpose. It could be used as a defense weapon, or as an alarm against intruders. By securing the piece with the knife blade near a window or door, a cord is attached to a hole in the trigger and brought through an opening in the butt of the handle, the cord is then attached to the window or door. If either is opened it triggered the pistol sounding a report, hopefully, frightening the intruder and alerting the occupant of the room of impending danger. Or, if one had nothing to do, he could whittle his time away.

The piece is signed on the left side of the hammer blade in two lines. The top line reads: A. J. Peavey. The second

Figure 2-C. Peavey knife pistol serial #452, knife blade open, barrel in raised position. (Author's Collection).



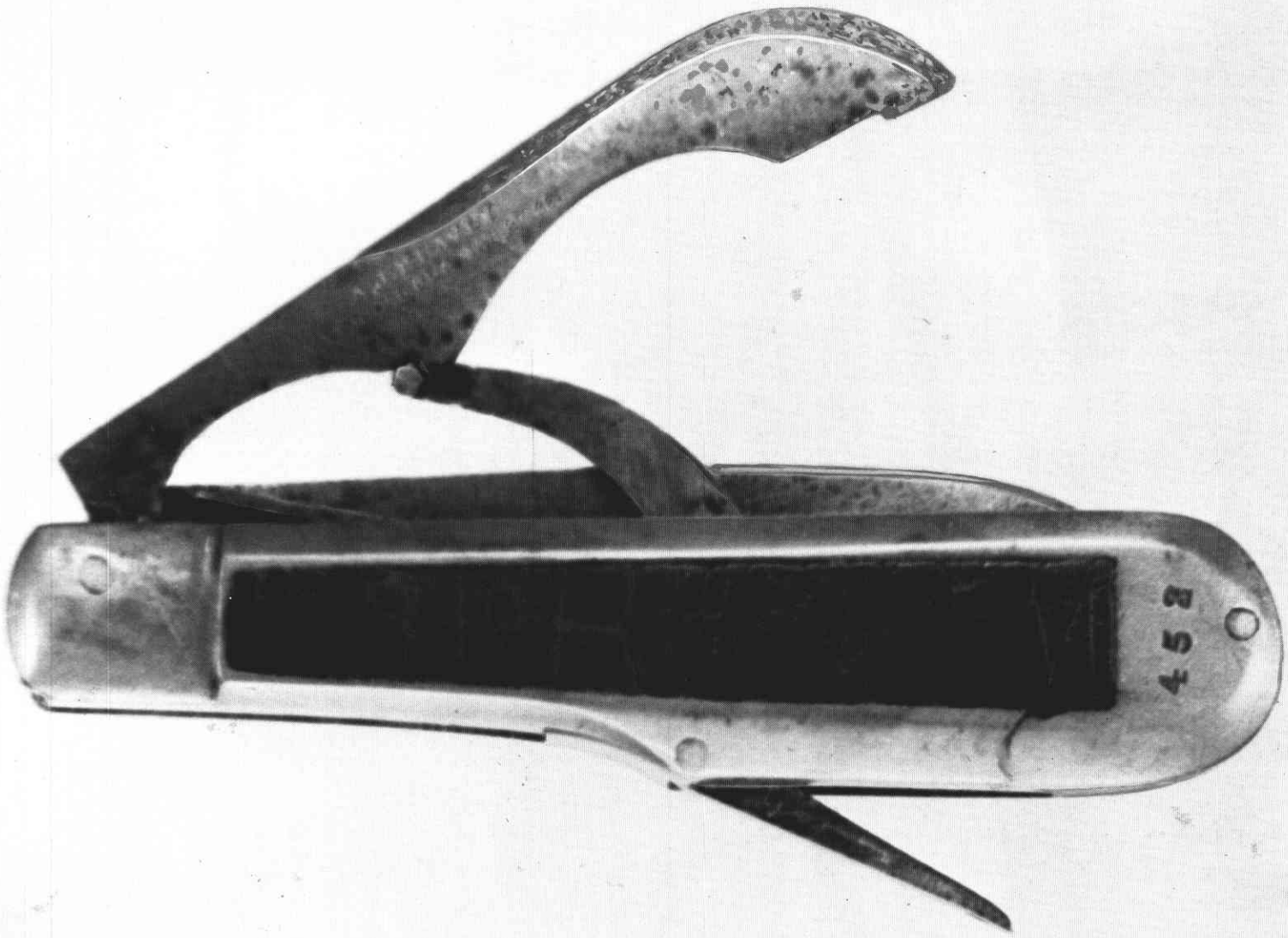


Figure 2-D. Peavey knife pistol, barrel seated in knife handle ready for firing. (Author's Collection).

line reads: Pat. Sept 5, 65 & Mar 27, 66. Serial numbers appear in three places: (1) on the left side of the brass handle near its butt (2) on the left side of the barrel near the breech (3) on the right side of the wedge and ejector plate.

How many of these unusual knife and pistol combinations were manufactured is not known. They are rarely seen for sale; the few surviving specimens are found only in collections of those who favor oddities and knife pistols.

Peavey was listed for a number of years in Maine business directories as a blacksmith, following the acquisition of his patents. However it is evident he did not lose his desire to create and manufacture firearms, especially those that were unusual, for on January 18, 1876 (some ten years after receiving the patent on his knife pistol) Edward P. Boardman and Andrew J. Peavey were

granted as Joint Patentee's a patent on "Improvement in revolving Fire-Arms". The patent drawing # 172-243 is shown in Fig. 3-A.

This revolver was described in the specifications as being of novel construction in that the size of the implement is greatly reduced, while its effectiveness is increased. It was easily carried in the pocket, as it did not have the stock or handle most commonly found in pistols of this nature. It being also well known that most pistols, whether revolvers or otherwise, required cocking by an independent, or entirely different motion of the hand from that made in discharging the same. That is to say, the hammer is drawn back and set by one movement and the trigger pulled by another. It was their contention that in their design, this revolver could be fired or discharged much more rapidly, as one had only to cradle it in the palm with the end of the barrel resting on the second

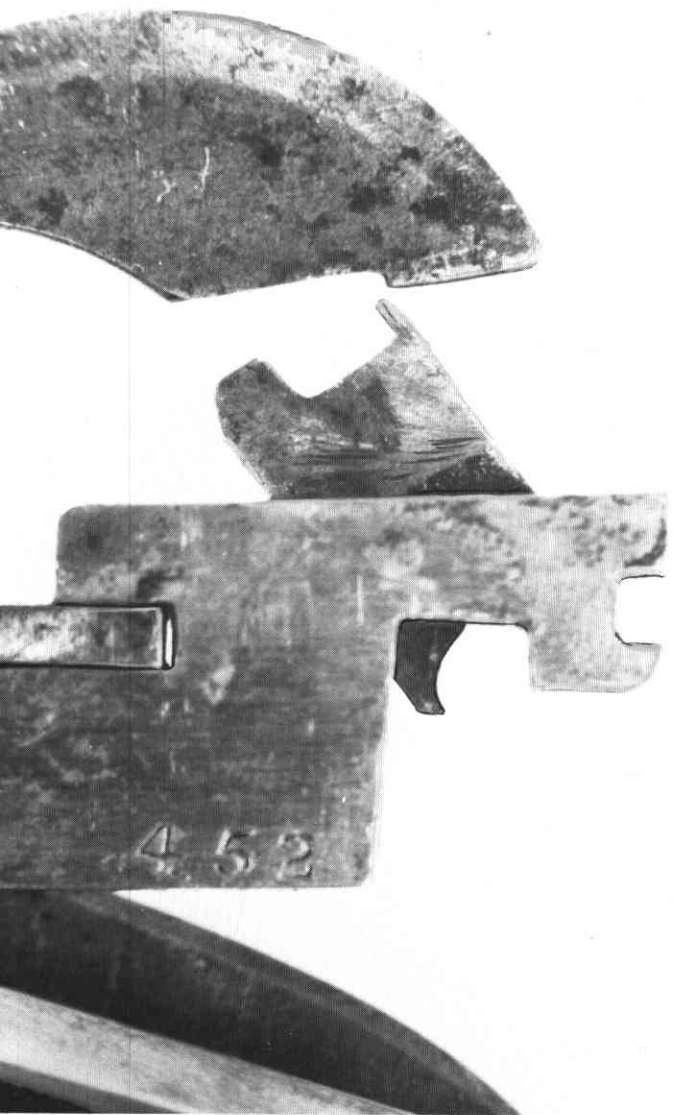


Figure 2-E. Wedge and ejector plate rotated in breech showing ejector nose.

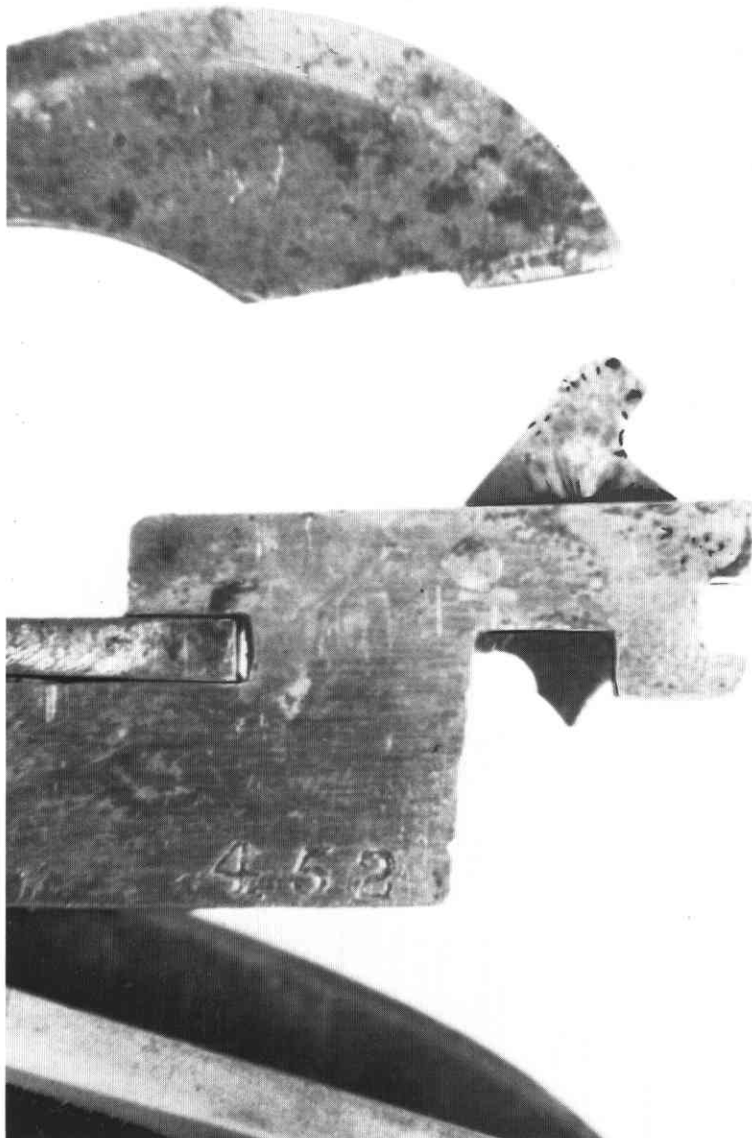
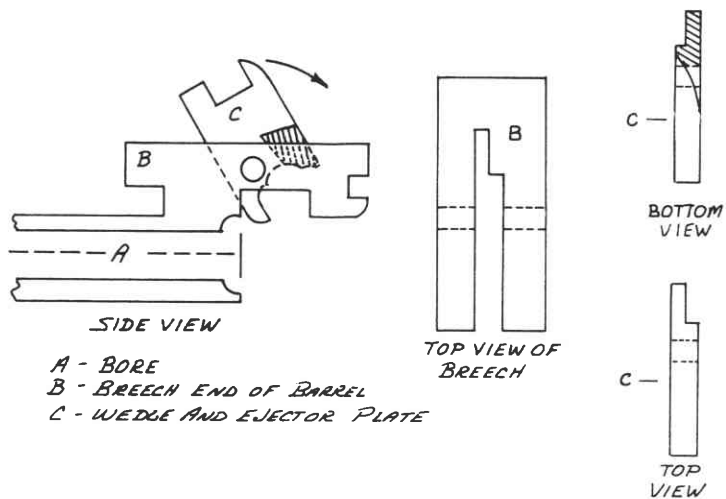


Figure 2-F. Wedge and ejector plate rotated showing the wedge.

Figure 2-G. Breech, wedge and ejector plate.



finger, the forefinger being placed around the "pull" and being double action, five shots could be fired in quick succession. The pull or stopple served a dual role: being hinged, it could be folded down over the muzzle preventing foreign substances from entering the barrel.

As to how it derived its name is mere speculation. But imagine, if you will, Boardman and Peavey discussing this piece together, or perhaps showing it to a friend. In the conversation, the diminutive size being brought out, how compact for carrying it was, then someone exclaiming, "Well! It's little all right!" In any event, the little revolver was tagged with that name, which also became its trademark.

Appearing on the right grip, (made of hard rubber, with which they were regularly supplied) are words "All Right Fire Arms Co. Manufacturers, Lawrence, Mass. U.S.A." on the left "Little All Right" Patented Jan'y 18, 1876, running vertical to the name Little All Right are the words *Trade* on one side and *MARK* on the other. These are the only markings to be found on the piece, with the exception of serial numbers. More often the revolver will be found with

rosewood grips or other woods, mother of pearl, and ivory. The original hard rubber was easily broken, cracked or chipped, and had to be replaced. Serial numbers appear on the front of the frame directly below the hole that holds the cylinder pin and under the barrel next to the frame. Fig. 3-B shows two examples of the little gun, the uppermost serial #374 with the original grips, the lower serial #461 with rosewood. Two distinct differences also appear in these two. Note the cylinder pin release button on the top specimen, located on the right side of the frame. The bottom specimen on the left, which also has a latch extending underneath its frame, which, when released by pulling down, will allow the cylinder to rotate. Fig. 3-C shows serial #461 without the grips. The latch, hammer and main-spring are easily discernible. Why these differences in the two is as yet unexplained, but it is hopeful that somewhere along the way, in the collecting fraternity the reasons will emerge. Fig. 3-D is a copy of an original order blank of the All Right Fire Arms Co., Lawrence, Mass.

Again one wonders how many were manufactured and

Figure 3-A. Patent drawing #172-243 for a Boardman and Peavey revolver.

E. P. BOARDMAN & A. J. PEAVEY.
REVOLVING FIRE-ARM.

No. 172,243.

Patented Jan. 18, 1876.

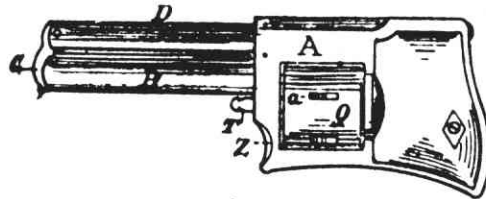


Fig. 1.

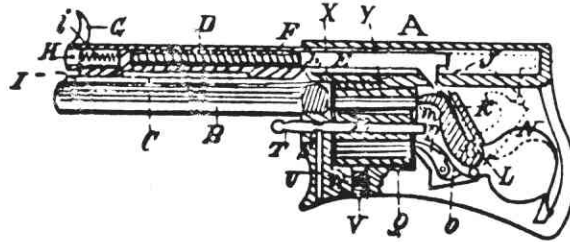


Fig. 2.

Witnesses:
Level Sobham,
Afred Davis

Inventors:
Edward P. Boardman,
Andrew J. Peavey,
Per C. Shaw,
Atty.

NATIONAL PHOTO-LITHOGRAPHIC WORKS, WASHINGTON, D. C.

how long they (Boardman & Peavey) were in business together. In answer to the latter, on Feb. 19, 1975, this writer received a letter in response to the question, signed by Katherine M. Gordon, Resident Director of the Andover Historical Society, Andover, Mass. Fig. 3-E is a reproduction of that letter. From this answer and other information gathered, it is believed they dissolved their

partnership and discontinued production, but the date is unknown. It is vague as to what happened to Boardman. Andrew J. Peavey is thought to have returned to South Montville, where his home still stands. He died at the age of 65, in 1897, survived by his wife Julia I. Peavey who died in 1928. Fig. 4, grave of Andrew J. Peavey and his wife Julia I., Pine Grove Cemetery, South Montville, Maine.

*Figure 3-B. Top: Little All Right serial #374 w/original grips.
Bottom: Serial #461 w/rosewood. (Author's Collection).*

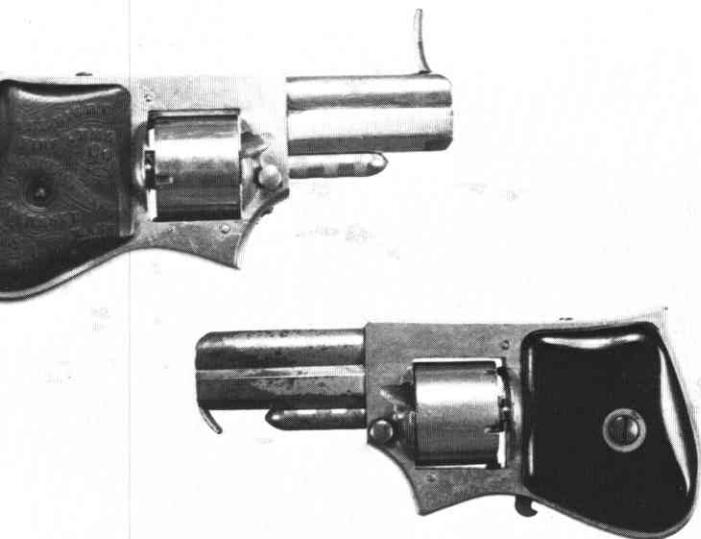
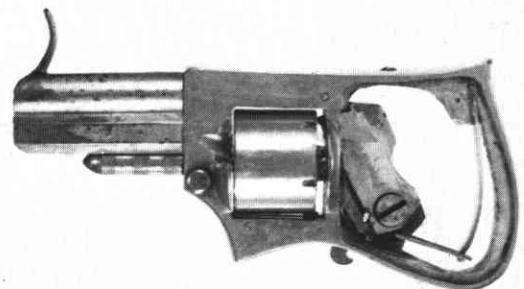


Figure 3-C. Serial #461, without grips. (Author's Collection).



TERMS CASH ON RECEIPT OF GOODS.

Inspection of Goods allowed before acceptance and payment therefor.
When desired, goods will be sent by mail, carefully packed and registered,
on receipt of price, together with 21 cents each, additional, postal expenses.
Remit by Draft, Money Order, or Registered Letter.

Order.

1877.

ALL RIGHT FIRE ARM CO.

LAWRENCE, MASS., U. S. A.

GENTLEMEN:

Please ship to us. by EXPRESS, as early as practical, the following mentioned goods:

FILL, giving number required, together with Size, Finish and Price.

NUMBER REQUIRED.	SIZE OF CARTRIDGE.	STYLE OF FINISH.	PRICE, NET.	REMARKS.

Very Respectfully,

These Revolvers are manufactured from Finest Steel and unsurpassed for Workmanship and Finish.

Figure 3-D. Copy of original order blank. All Right Fire Arm Co., Lawrence, Mass., U.S.A., Courtesy Herschel Logan.

ANDOVER HISTORICAL SOCIETY
The Amos Blanchard House

97 MAIN STREET
ANDOVER, MASSACHUSETTS 01810

February 19, 1975

Mr. Ervin J. Hill, Jr.
Box 1, Station E
St. Joseph, Missouri

Dear Mr. Hill:

In reply to your inquiry of February 7, we can give you very little information as Lawrence, Massachusetts is a city which adjoins our town.

We did, however, call the City Clerk's office there. They could only tell us that according to their directory of 1877, both Edward P. Bordman and Andrew J. Peavey were machinists. E. Palmer Bordman had a machine shop at the corner of Franklin and Methuen Streets. In the 1879 directory of businesses, they did not have anything listed for Mr. Bordman. It is possible that they were in business for a short time only.

Sincerely yours,

Katherine M. Gordon
Katherine M. Gordon
Resident Director (*Miss Gordon*)

KMG/w
Enc.

The Author greatly acknowledges the cooperation of the following
Collectors and Historians
Demeritt, Dwight D. Jr., N.Y.
Sellers, Frank M., Denver, Colo.
Suydam, Charles R., Covina, Calif.
Logan, Herschel C., Santa Ana, Calif.

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- (1) Demeritt, Dwight D. Jr., *Maine Made Guns and Their Makers*, J. S. McCarthy Co., Inc., Augusta, Maine 1973. Published for the Maine State Museum by Paul S. Plumer, Jr., Hallowell, Maine.
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- (3) Frost, Gordon H., *Blades and Barrels*, Waloon Press, El Paso, Texas
- (4) Chapel, Charles Edward *The Gun Collector's Handbook of Values*, Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, Inc. New York.
- (5) Winant, Lewis, *Firearms Curiosa*, Bonanza Books, New York
- (6) Andover Historical Society, Andover, Mass.
- (7) General Service Administration, Washington, D.C.

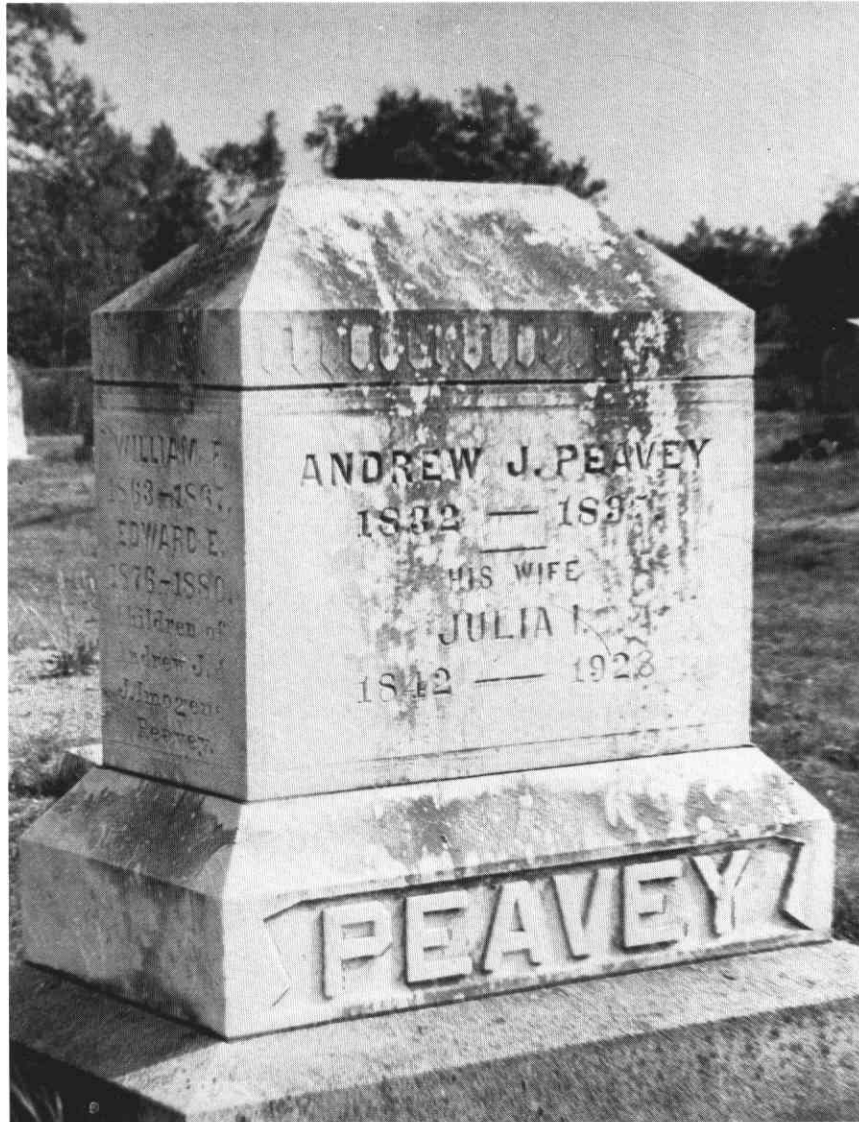


Figure 4. Grave of Andrew J. Peavey and wife Julia I., courtesy Dwight D. Demeritt, Jr., N.Y.