



Written for the May 2019 Premier Gun Auction-#76

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04/15/2019



Lot 31: Extremely Rare and Well Documented Experimental Patent Model Colt Model 1851 Navy Revolver for Schenck Hair Trigger Device.

Hair triggers were not a new idea when Mr. Schenck of San Antonio patented his related device in 1866. What was new, however, was Schenck's method of creating and safely utilizing the hair trigger. The whole purpose of this kind of modification is to allow a firearm to be discharged with very little pressure on the trigger, such as the minuscule amount that can be applied by a strand of hair before breaking. The idea behind this is that the less pressure applied to the trigger, the lower the chance of the gun moving off target when it is fired, thus resulting in a more accurate shot.

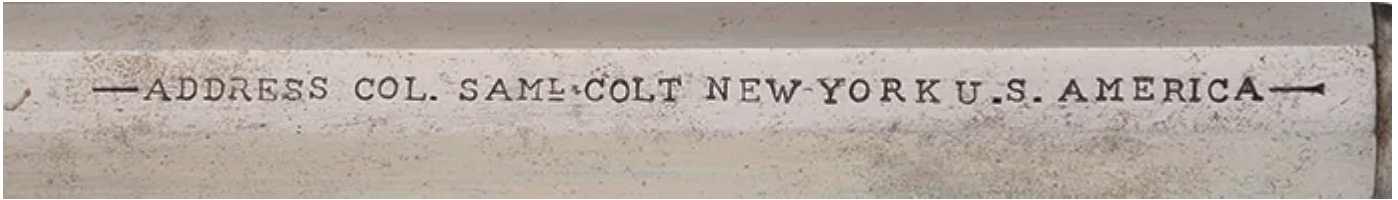
The fitting of a hair trigger to any kind of gun generally requires the work of a skilled gunsmith because an intimate knowledge of the inner workings of a gun are needed to complete the job. If done incorrectly, the gun could be rendered completely inoperable or functionally hazardous to the shooter. Once a firearm had been altered for a hair trigger, that was the one and only way the gun could be fired. This made it potentially dangerous if the gun was to be used by someone who was unaware of the gun's modification. Schenck's new patent created a way to mitigate this issue, specifically with Colt's Model 1851 revolvers. A gun outfitted with Schenck's invention allowed the hair trigger to be adjusted by anyone who could use a screwdriver, which eliminated the need for a gunsmith to modify the gun. This would save the gun owner both time and money.



Lot 32: Rare Documented Patent Model for Schenck Hair Trigger Device for Colt Revolvers with Original Patent Card.

His trigger guard device also incorporated a safety that could engage and disengage the hair trigger. This meant that the gun could still operate with a normal weight trigger pull if the user so desired. They could even choose between the hair trigger and the regular trigger on alternating shots – something that was unheard of before then. Control of the safety on Schenck's hair trigger was by way of a "dog" on the right side of the revolver's frame. The use of a "dog" goes back to the flintlock era, when a safety catch that resembled a dog's ear could hook into a notch on a cocked hammer, preventing it from falling. When Schenck's dog is engaged, it moves a plate in the trigger guard that blocks the hair trigger from activating. It's a concept that seems simple enough, but was actually quite complex, as is evidenced in Schenck's drawing and description submitted to the Patent Office.

Apparently, there was some interest in Schenck's device by those at Colt in Connecticut. He visited the factory and demonstrated his creation to curious employees, but it doesn't seem to have gone any further than that. The invention was never adopted by the factory as a standard offering on their guns. In R. L. Wilson's *The Book of Colt Firearms*, it is noted that just six examples are known to have been created, with fewer surviving. While originally designed for Colt's Model 1851, there is at least one Model 1860 known to have been outfitted with the device.



The Premier Firearms Auction coming up in May has one of the Model 1851 revolvers outfitted with Schenck's hair trigger and lock device. The "host gun" is a standard, Late Fourth Model 1851 Navy revolver with round trigger guard, capping channel in the recoil shield cut-out, thick loading lever catch and V-type, bevelled, loading cut-out in the barrel lug. The "PATENT" marked trigger guard is a replacement with slightly wider bow and other modifications to accept the Schenck trigger attachments. The barrel has a non-standard, dove-tail mounted, pinch-top front sight. The late style hammer has bordered knurling on the spur.



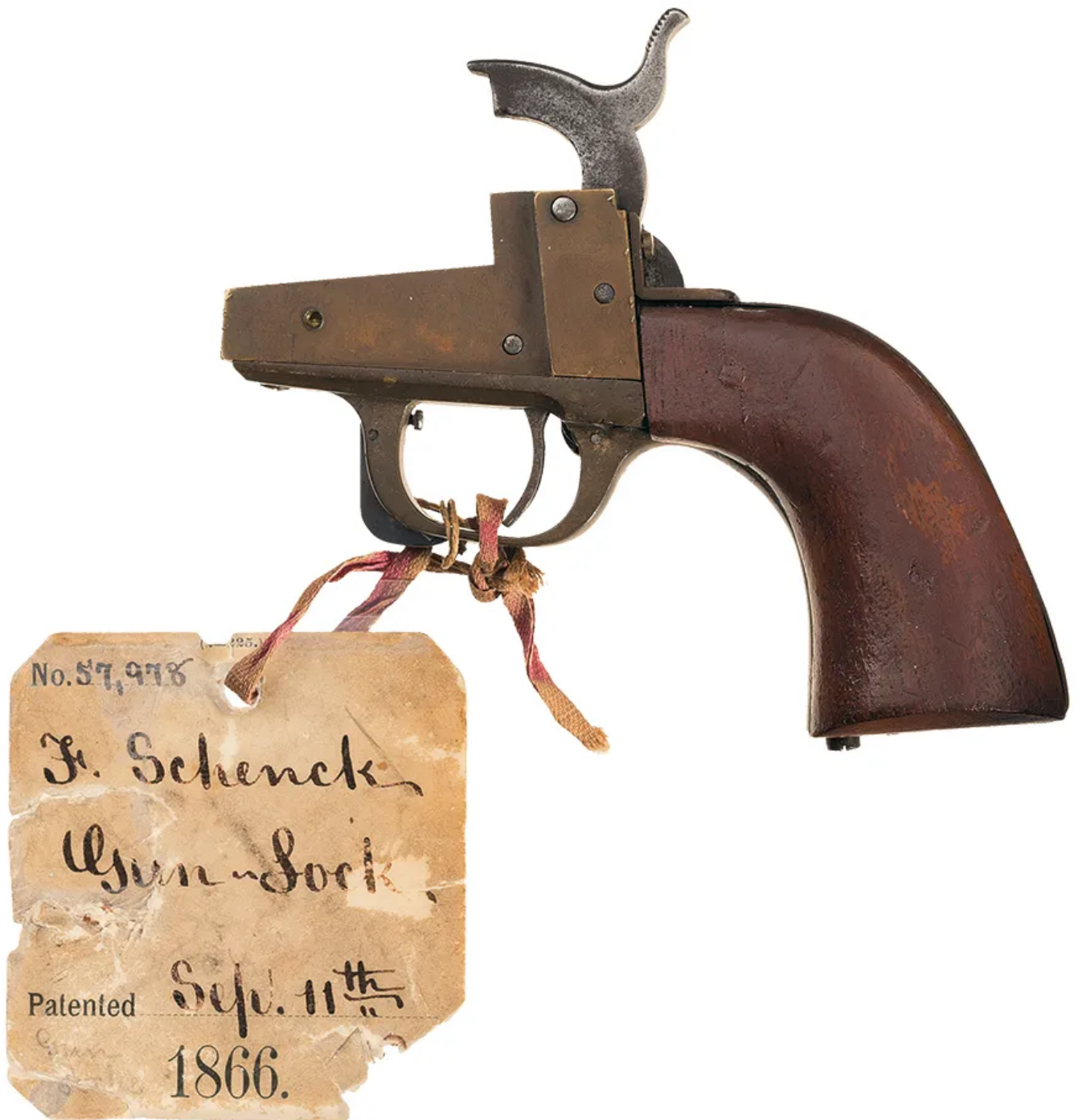
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The revolver components have been polished bright, the brass trigger guard and backstrap have a natural finish, and the one-piece walnut grip has the standard varnish finish. The top barrel flat is roll-stamped: "—ADDRESS COL. SAML COLT NEW-YORK U.S. AMERICA—" in one line. The cylinder is roll-engraved with the standard Texas Navy battle scene and "COLTS PATENT No." markings. The left side of the frame is roll-

stamped "COLTS/PATENT" in two lines. The full serial number is stamped on the barrel lug, frame, and backstrap. The partial serial number, "97772" is stamped on the wedge and "7772" is stamped on the cylinder and cylinder pin. All of the visible serial numbers match. The loading lever and trigger guard are not serial numbered.



As if it wasn't special enough to offer up one of only a half-dozen examples of Schenck's device, his actual patent model is also available in this auction. While the gun offered here is, at most, one-of-six, the patent model is truly one-of-a-kind! The handmade model and patent card are illustrated and described in *The Book of Colt Firearms*, giving it solid documentation and provenance. Attached to the trigger guard is the original patent card "No. 57978" marked: "F. Schenck/Gun Stock/Patented Sept. 11th/1866."



The model consists of a brass frame, trigger guard, backstrap, Colt percussion hammer, and one-piece walnut grip from a standard Colt revolver. The trigger guard and frame have the Schenck Hair Trigger modifications described earlier. This is the actual piece of physical evidence that Schenck submitted with his drawings and written application to prove that his design was more than just an idea – it was an actual working invention, ready to be installed on Colt's revolvers. The model is displayed in a contemporary frame with a copy of the patent drawing, allowing you to easily see how Schenck's invention works both in theory and in practice.

To be able to offer both a patent model (with the paper card, no less!) and an actual production version of said model is exceedingly rare. This may be a once in a lifetime opportunity to add these items to your collection. Don't let some competing bidder one-up you and separate these two items. These pieces of history deserve to stay together, so bid like their future depends on it!