



Written for the December 2018 Premiere Gun Auction-#75

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Lot 2265: Rare and Historic Factory Engraved and Gold Plated Smith & Wesson New Model No. 3 Target Single Action Revolver with Pearl Grips and Factory Letter

Smith & Wesson's New Model Number Three single-action revolvers are big guns. When equipped with a 6.5-inch barrel, the gun weighs in at 39 ounces empty – or three pounds, three ounces. If desired, the gun could be fitted with an 8-inch barrel, making it even larger and heavier. Equal to – or possibly even larger than – the guns themselves are the historic names and events associated with the model. Annie Oakley owned more than one; her husband, Frank Butler, owned two. Theodore Roosevelt, Virgil Earp, “Buffalo Bill” Cody, and Henry Cabot Lodge all owned one. Bob Ford is reported to have used one to kill notorious outlaw Jesse James. (James himself is believed to have owned an earlier version in the Model Three family – the Schofield). They were also incredibly popular with champion shooters, such as Ira Payne, Oscar Olson, F. E. Bennett, Walter Winans, and James Conlin. Just those five men alone owned 42 between them!

The New Model Number Three was introduced in 1878, riding the wave of popularity from earlier Model Three variants. When production stopped in 1912, a total of 35,796 had been made. To say that the gun was a worldwide favorite would be an understatement. Approximately 40% of them were sent to foreign countries, including Russia, Turkey, Japan, Australia, Cuba, England, France, Germany, Argentina, Italy, Switzerland,

China, and others. Interestingly, even though they were available to buyers as brand new guns as late as 1912, all of the frames were made before 1899. This makes them all legally classified as antiques, even if they shipped in the final two years of the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th century.

As previously mentioned, the guns were popular with professional shooters. December's Premiere Gun Auction features two of those guns, one owned by Walter Winans and one owned by James Conlin.

WINANS' REVOLVER



Lot 2264: Olympic Marksman Walter Winans Shipped and Inscribed Smith & Wesson New Model No. 3 Single Action Target Revolver in Extremely Rare .45 Eley with Factory Letter

Born in 1852 to an American couple, Winans was born and lived in Russia until he was 18. He eventually moved to England and took the Oath of Allegiance at the US Embassy in London in 1908, but he didn't set foot in North America until 1910 at the age of 58. A modern-day Renaissance man, Walter was a sculptor, painter, horse breeder, author of 10 books, and an avid outdoorsman. He held hunting rights to almost a quarter-million acres of land in Scotland.

Most important to us, though, is the fact that Walter was a two-time Olympic medalist in the shooting sports. He took home gold at the 1908 Games in London and was one of six Americans to get a medal across the 15 shooting categories that year. Four years later, Winans took silver at the 1912 Games in Stockholm. Americans took home 14 medals from the 16 shooting categories that year. Walter's Olympic "speciality" was the 100 Meter Running Deer, where shooters have to land shots as accurately as possible on a full-size deer target travelling at 18MPH at a distance of 100 meters. No small feat!

Walter's work as a sculptor won him a gold medal in the Arts Competition in 1912 for his statuette "An American Trotter." That makes him the only American to win gold medals in both art and sport at the Olympics. New Model Number Three revolvers were some of Winans' favorite guns. He liked them so much that he owned 22 of them over the course of his shooting career!



This particular revolver was shipped from the Springfield, Massachusetts factory on February 26, 1890, according to the S&W factory letter signed by company historian Roy Jinks. It was part of a consecutively numbered four-gun order, all to be delivered to Winans in London. As such, the gun bears appropriate British proofs on the left side of the barrel and each of the cylinder chambers. Sporting a 6.5-inch barrel with checkered black rubber grips and a blued finish, the gun also bears all of the telltale markings of Winans' ownership. These include engravings of "WW/450" above an "X" along with a 4-dot target pattern and "TARGET 20/1891" on the back strap. The front strap is engraved "A487." It is also outfitted with an adjustable target sight designed by Winans himself.



All of that is impressive, but something much less conspicuous is what's really special about the revolver. Winans' gun is chambered for the .45 Eley cartridge. The standard chambering was for the .44 S&W Russian cartridge, and although more than a dozen different calibers were available, they are rarely encountered. According to the *Standard Catalog of Smith & Wesson*, guns in these different calibers are "scarce to rare" and "will bring premium" prices over those in .44 S&W Russian. The *Blue Book of Antique American Firearms & Values* also agrees, noting that a chambering of .45 Eley qualifies the gun as one that will command a "substantial premium." The revolver is mechanically excellent and retains 40% of its original blue finish with the balance a mottled brown / gunmetal gray patina mixed with some mild-minor wear from competition matches. The grips are in good condition with repairs at the tops, with some minor handling evidence and some wear to the checkering.



So here's what it boils down to: this is an impressive revolver owned by a two-time Olympic champion chambered in a rare caliber, both of which are verified by a factory letter and multiple industry-trusted publications. It just doesn't get any better than that!

Or does it?

CONLIN'S REVOLVER



New York City resident James Conlin is just as historically fascinating as Walter Winans, but in a different manner. Conlin ran a shooting gallery in Manhattan in the 1880s and 1890s. His first location was at 1222 Broadway, which today is part of the "Koreatown" neighborhood, just three blocks from the Empire State Building. By 1894, he had moved his gallery to the corner of Madison Avenue and 45th Street, not far from

today's Grand Central Station. It's hard to imagine a highly successful establishment dedicated to the enjoyment of the shooting sports on the island of Manhattan today, but it was no big deal back then. Aside from being a popular destination for shooters, Conlin's gallery witnessed the birth of the oldest known continuously operating organization for handgun competition – the United States Revolver Association. The USRA was formed there on March 5, 1900, when a total of 35 men from 13 states met to create a national organization dedicated to their sport.

In addition to being an astute businessman, Conlin was also an accomplished shooter. The Stevens company took note and named a pistol after him. The Conlin-named, Stevens-made single-action, tip-up barrel pistols were introduced in 1880 and a total of 6,500 were made before production stopped in 1903. A Stevens pistol similar to Conlin's namesake was owned by Annie Oakley and currently resides in the NRA National Firearms Museum in Fairfax, VA. The often embellished pistols were well-respected by the most celebrated shooters of the period.



Conlin's Smith & Wesson New Model Number Three revolver was shipped directly to him on November 5, 1892. A factory letter confirms that it shipped with a 6.5-inch barrel, gold plated finish, factory engraving, and pearl grips. It retains 70% of the original gold plating with the balance having flaked to a smooth gray patina. Some original case colors remain on the hammer and trigger guard. The grips are in fine condition with a small chip missing near the top of the right panel. Otherwise, the gun has minimal handling evidence, is mechanically excellent, and has highly attractive color.



This gold plating is highlighted by the 60% coverage factory intertwined foliate arabesque pattern engraving on a punch dot background. The engraving was executed by famed Master Engraver Gustave Young, who was hired as the S&W factory engraver in 1867. Jim Supica and Richard Nahas – the “gurus” of all-things S&W – note that Gustave “created some of the most exquisitely decorated Smith & Wessons ever made.” High praise, to be sure. Before coming to Springfield, Massachusetts, Young worked as an engraver for Colt in New Haven, Connecticut. The beginning of an engraving dynasty, Gustave’s three sons – Oscar, Eugene, and Robert – followed in their father’s footsteps. The final Young left the factory in 1916, ending a 49-year run of unparalleled engraving.

Another nearly identical Gustave Young engraved and gold plated New Model Number Three revolver, just 79 numbers away from Conlin’s, is housed at the Gene Autry Museum in California. That pistol is part of a three-gun set given to famed sharpshooter Annie Oakley by her husband, Frank Butler. If that doesn’t bump up the cool factor surrounding this gun even more, then I don’t know what does!

In summation, these two Smith & Wesson revolvers are big guns that are associated with big names and big histories! Don’t miss your chance to pick up one (or both!) of these impressive pieces of Smith & Wesson and shooting sports history in the December Premiere Firearms Auction.

