



Official State Historical Center of the Texas
Rangers law enforcement agency.

**The Following Article was Originally Published in the
*Texas Ranger Dispatch Magazine***

The *Texas Ranger Dispatch* was published by the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum from 2000 to 2011. It has been superseded by this online archive of Texas Ranger history.

Managing Editors

Robert Nieman 2000-2009; (b.1947-d.2009)

Byron A. Johnson 2009-2011

Publisher & Website Administrator

Byron A. Johnson 2000-2011

Director, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame

Technical Editor, Layout, and Design

Pam S. Baird



Funded in part by grants from
the Texas Ranger Association Foundation

Copyright 2017, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, Waco, TX. All rights reserved. Non-profit personal and educational use only; commercial reprinting, redistribution, reposting or charge-for-access is prohibited. For further information contact: Director, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, PO Box 2570, Waco TX 76702-2570.



David V. Stroud

Many of the 20th century weapons displayed in the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum in Waco have the name of the Texas Ranger or his initials engraved somewhere on the firearms, documenting the owner's affiliation. George W. Chapman's Model 1907 Winchester, Glenn Elliott's Colt .38 Super, and Sergeant Rudy Flores's Chief Special have been featured in previous *Dispatches*,¹ and Elliott's gun is displayed in the museum. However, most of the articles for the *Guns of the Texas Rangers* series have featured 19th century weapons with no known Texas

1. David V. Stroud, "Ranger Chapman's 1907 Winchester," *Dispatch* #13, Spring 2004; David V. Stroud, "Glenn Elliott's Colt .38 Super," *Dispatch* #24, Fall 2007; and David V. Stroud, "Ranger Rudy Flores's Chief Special," *Dispatch* #22, Spring 2007.

Contents and design of the Texas Ranger *Dispatch*™ are copyrighted by the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum and other named copyright holders. Permission is granted to print copies or excerpts for personal use and educational coursework. Commercial use or redistribution requires written permission from the Office of the Director, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, PO Box 2570, Waco, TX 76702.



Ranger association other than being the types of guns available during the production period of that firearm. The assumption that some Rangers used those particular models is illustrated by the outstanding collection of weapons displayed in the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame Museum.

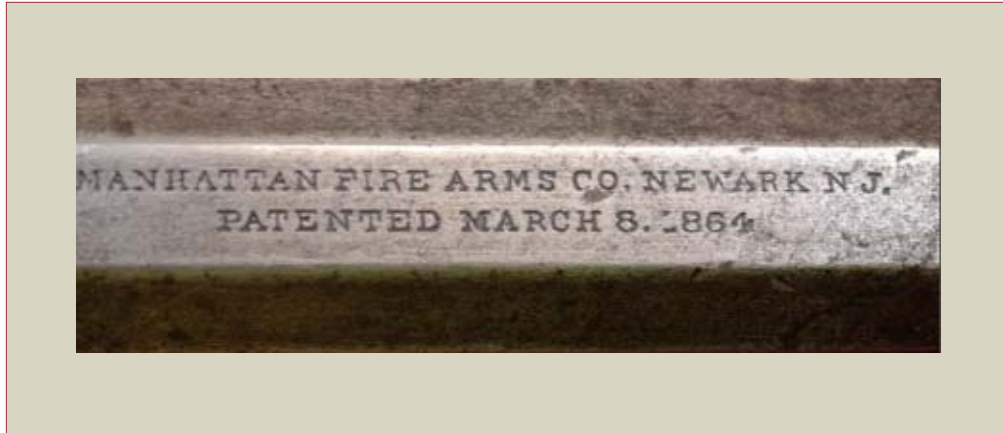
There is a rule that “the older the weapon, the less likely is the known owner.” Exceptions are few and far between, but there are some. Major John B. Jones’s Manhattan Revolver is one of them.

In May 1874, Governor Richard Coke appointed Jones to command the legislature-created Frontier Battalion in northwest Texas and gave him the rank of major.² The exact date of Jones’s appointment may have been May 9, as that is the date he listed on his copy of the enlistment oath.³ To celebrate his appointment and commission, Jones’s friends may have presented him the featured Manhattan Revolver, which is inscribed “Maj. J. B. JONES Texas Rangers” on the silver-plated backstrap.⁴

Over the past forty years, I have attended gun shows and picked up (after asking the owner’s permission) what appeared to be a Colt Navy, Belt, or Pocket Revolver, only to learn it was a Manhattan or Bacon.⁵ Those three types of Colt firearms are so similar in appearance that many collectors have mistaken them. Often, they have also believed the old patent infringement stories in which Sam Colt was the winner against Manhattan, and Manhattan won against Bacon. Another explanation of the similarities is that “The .31 Caliber Manhattans were probably made by Bacon.”⁶ None of these stories is correct. They are the result of patents protecting similar-appearing Bacon, Colt, Nepperhan, and Manhattan .31 caliber revolvers.⁷ After examining the patent infringement evidence, Waldo Nutter, the author of *Manhattan Firearms*, concludes, “. . . as regards the aspects of infringement, imitation and copying, Manhattan was considerably more sinned against than sinning.”⁸

The Colt Manufacturing Company has monopolized multi-firing revolvers ever since Sam Colt received an 1836 patent to protect his production of that line of handguns. And he protected it with vigor. He took the Massachusetts Arms Company to court in 1851 and won the verdict handed down on June 30.⁹ The important judgment sounded a clear warning to any would-be infringers.

2. Randolph B. Campbell, *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 305.
3. Chuck Parsons, “19th Century Shining Star: Major John P. Jones,” *Dispatch #16*, Spring 2005.
4. Jewelers were the professional non-factory inscribers during the 19th century.
5. David V. Stroud, “Colt 1851 Navy,” *Dispatch #4 Summer 2001*; David V. Stroud, “Guns of the Texas Rangers: The ‘49 Colt,” *Dispatch #15 Winter 2004*; Waldo E. Nutter, “Manhattan & Bacon,” *Manhattan Firearms* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1958), 40.
6. Nutter, 3.
7. Norm Flayderman, *Flayderman’s Guide to Antique American Firearms . . . and their values* (Iola, WI: Krause Publications, 2001). Photographs: Colt, p. 75, Manhattan, p. 111, Nepperhan p. 315.
8. Flayderman, 75. Pages 47-80 in chapter III detail the patent infringements as well as the Manhattan patents. Thomas K. Bacon was associated with Manhattan before beginning the Bacon Manufacturing Company in November 1858.
9. Flayderman, 2



The inscription on the barrel of the Manhattan Revolver of Texas Ranger Major John B. Jones.

However, with Colt's patent protection ending in 1857, competitors anticipated that date with the enthusiasm of true capitalists. This group included a new kid on the block: the Manhattan Fire Arms Manufacturing Company.¹⁰

Manhattan Fire Arms Company was formed in New York City on May 26, 1855, and there are several New York City directory editions (1855-1858) that list the business in that municipality. In actuality, those addresses were office locations only.¹¹ The firm began production in Norwich, Connecticut, in 1856 with a single-shot Bar Hammer and three-, four-, and five-shot, double-action, Pepperbox pistols. Later, there were also five-shot, single-action, .31 caliber revolvers. In 1859, the manufactory relocated to Newark, New Jersey, and began production of their single-action, five- and six-shot, .36 caliber Navy Type revolvers. These were made in five slightly different sequences from 1859-1868 and proved to be Colt's best seller. By 1868, sales of revolvers ultimately reached 78,000 in spite of never receiving a government contract during the Civil War.¹²

10. Nutter, 1. Author's note: The name of Manhattan Fire Arms Company is often misspelled. According to company records, "Fire Arms" should be two separate words, not combined into "Firearms". According to Mike Meuwly on manhattanfirearms.com, "There are two things that are a challenge in searching the Internet for information on Manhattan Fire Arms. The actual name of the company according to company records is Manhattan Fire Arms Manufacturing Company. If you look closely at the barrel addresses, you will see that "Fire Arms" is two words. I believe the title to Nutter's book which shows "Firearms" as one word was meant to describe the guns themselves not the company name. But Nutter's use of the one word in the title adds to the confusion of today."

11. Nutter, 6.

12. Flayderman, 110-111; John D. McAulay, *Civil War Pistols* (Lincoln, RI: Andrew Mowbray Inc., 1992), 114, 143. The .36 Caliber was extremely popular as a secondary martial revolver, purchased by officers, enlisted men, and civilians—but not by the US government. A secondary Confederate weapon is one that was not produced by a Confederate state manufactory but was imported from overseas and purchased by the Confederate government or was US-manufactured and captured from or surrendered by a federal officer or enlisted man.



As with all Manhattan firearms, the five .36 caliber series are blued and equipped with varnished walnut grips. Factory engraving, inscribed backstraps, and fancy grips of either burlled walnut or ivory (plain or carved) were available at additional cost:¹³ The guns in the series are also identified by the following characteristics:

- Series 1: Five-shot cylinder: "MANHATTAN FIRE ARMS MFG. CO. NEW YORK" on top of the barrel; no 1859 patent date on the cylinder; available with 6½", 6", 5", or 4" barrel; estimated number produced: 4,200 between January 1860-1868; serial numbers 1-4200.
- Series 2: Five-shot cylinder: "MANHATTAN FIRE ARMS MFG. CO. NEW YORK" on top of the barrel; "DEC 27, 1859" patent date on the cylinder; available with 6½", 5", or 4" barrel; estimated number produced from January 30, 1860-September 1, 1861: 4,200; serial numbers 4201-14,500. Produced 4,200 of them, but there are over 10,000 serial numbers?
- Series 3: Five-shot cylinder: "MANHATTAN FIRE ARMS MFG. CO. NEWARK N.J." on top of the barrel; 1859 patent date on the cylinder; 6½", 5" or 4" barrel; estimated number produced between September 1, 1861, and April 1, 1864: 30,000; serial numbers 14,501-45,200.
- Series 4: Five-shot cylinder: "MANHATTAN FIRE ARMS CO. NEWARK N.J./ PATENTED MARCH 8, 1864" in two lines on top of the barrel; 1859 patent date on the cylinder; 6½", 5", or 4" barrel; estimated number produced between April 1, 1864, and January 30, 1867: 24,000; serial numbers 45,201 to 69,200.
- Series 5: Six-shot cylinder: "MANHATTAN FIRE ARMS MFG. CO. NEWARK N.J./ PATENTED MARCH 8, 1864" in two lines on top of the barrel cylinder; stamped with the 1859 patent date, 6½" barrel; estimated number produced between June 30, 1867 and December 1, 1868: 9,000; serial numbers 1-9,000.¹⁴

The .36 caliber Manhattan cylinders were roll-engraved with the following five scenes, each enclosed in an oval frame:

- Three ships in full sail and a rowboat containing six men
- Three men with pistols firing at a man with a sword and two soldiers with muskets and bayonets
- A wounded soldier seated on the ground firing at a cavalryman with a sword
- Two men standing in a rowboat shooting at men on shore
- A cavalry charge against infantry¹⁵

Through the years, the Manhattan Fire Arms Company produced Pepperboxes, Bar Hammer single-shot pistols, and also small .22 caliber, single-action revolvers. The company manufactured fewer than one thousand .31 caliber Manhattan clones with "LONDON PISTIOL COMPANY" on the

13. Nutter, 158.

14. Flayderman, 111-112; Nutter, 148, 154, 157, 167, 175. Nutter listed the first serial numbers of each series as 0 (175). Because these are estimated numbers, I changed the 0 to 1 to avoid questions as to why the same number appears in different series. Manhattan must have considered their Series 5 a new model because the serial numbers begin over, starting with 1. Also, Mr. Nutter believes the Series 5 to have been the best Manhattan firearms the company produced (187).

15. Nutter, 148-149.

Manhattan Revolver of Major John B. Jones



Right side



Left side

barrel top and “PATENT DEC. 27, 1859” stamped on the frame below the cylinder. It is believed that the reason for the clones was because they were sub-quality .31 caliber Manhattans. The firm wanted to sell them with a name that would prevent the public from knowing their true origin and not damage the manufactory’s reputation in an extremely competitive market.¹⁶

On November 23, 1868, Manhattan Fire Arms incorporated as American Standard Tool Company, and production priority shifted from firearms to tools and machines. With the decline of firearms production, Manhattan produced its last two revolvers. One was a Saturday Night Special type of .22 caliber cartridge single-shot marked “HERO / M.F.A. CO.”, and the last was another .22 caliber cartridge revolver with the barrel marked “AMERICAN STANDARD TOOL CO.”¹⁷

During the Panic of 1873, the American Tool Company ceased operation. From April 1869 to February 1873, it had manufactured about 30,000 Heroes and 40,000 .22 caliber, cartridge, single-action revolvers identical to the Manhattans.¹⁸

Major John B. Jones, the Ranger whose Manhattan Revolver is displayed in the Texas Ranger Museum, was the man chosen by Texas Governor Coke to lead the Frontier Battalion. He was considered by his contemporaries as handsome enough to turn women’s heads. A neighbor once portrayed him as the perfection of neatness, dressed in a dark, well-kept suit and wearing a white shirt with a black bow tie. The neighbor also described a heavy black moustache and dark hair, smooth olive skin, and penetrating black or dark brown eyes that were piercing, twinkling, sparkling, and sympathetic, seeming to see through your very soul.¹⁹ But looks can be deceiving. As far as criminals were concerned, the Frontier Battalion’s commander was altogether one of the most dangerous men who ever lived.²⁰

16 Nutter, 85.

17 Nutter, 185; Flayderman, 113.

18 Nutter, 199; Flayderman, 113.

19 T. R. Fehrenbach, *Lone Star: A History of Texas and Texans* (New York: McMillan Publishing Co., Inc. 1968), 587.

20 Fehrenbach, 587.



Readers of the *Dispatch* may wonder why I have provided such little information on the Major Jones. That's because Chuck Parsons did an outstanding [Shining Star article in the *Dispatch* #16, Spring 2005 issue](#). Therefore, there is no need to retell Jones's story. I will instead concentrate on his revolver.

Major Jones's Manhattan is a five-shot, Series 4 revolver, serial number 66072, with a 6½" barrel stamped "MANHATTAN FIRE ARMS CO. NEWARK N. J." in one line and "PATENTED MARCH 8, 1864" below. The revolver's condition indicates use, but not abuse, with a light brown patina covering the metal, and the five-panel cylinder scenes worn but still visible enough to recognize them if one knows what to look for. The walnut grips still contain a generous amount their original varnish. Unlike the case at Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company, there is no known chronological record of serial numbers for Manhattan Fire Arms Company. However, the Series 4 revolver did not go into production until April 1, 1864, and the high serial number of Major Jones's revolver suggests post-Civil War manufacture during the historical period of old west Texas Rangers, gunslingers, and Indian fights.²¹ Solely because of the inscription on the backstrap, I believe Major Jones received the Manhattan on the day of or soon after his commission and appointment as commander of the Frontier Battalion on May 9, 1874.²²

The date 1874 is approximately one year after the introduction of the Colt Peacemaker and six years after the beginning of percussion revolvers converted by Colt and others to fire metallic cartridges. Many gunmen did not immediately abandon their percussion cap and ball revolvers to acquire the new metallic cartridge models. This was due to expense and lack of availability of the weapons and ammunition required. Many were also reluctant to give up tried and true firearms. Their trusty weapons had been used in many life-threatening instances such as the Civil War, and many were hesitant to gamble their lives on new and yet unproven weapons. Therefore, stating that Major Jones received and used a percussion revolver several years after the introduction of metallic cartridge handguns is a historical fact rather than a writer's wish.²³

The detail that Major Jones's Manhattan's backstrap is inscribed "Major J. B. JONES Texas Rangers" is enough historical evidence to indicate the revolver was a presentation to him. It is not a gun that he purchased before his assignment/commission and then had inscribed to commemorate the event. Of the thousands of 19th century handguns displayed in museums and offered for sell by scrupulous dealers, only a fraction of a percent are professionally inscribed. More than 99% were owned by men who never paid to have their handguns engraved with their initials, name, and/or

21 John D. McAulay, *Civil War Pistols: A survey of the Handguns of the American Civil War* (Lincoln: Andrew Mowbray Inc., 1992), 118; Bill O'Neal, *Encyclopedia of Western Gunfighters*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983), 10-14; Robert M. Utley, *Lone Star Justice: The First Century of the Texas Rangers* (New York: Berkley Books, 2002). A revolver serial normally indicates date of manufacture (if the records are available, such as Colt's is) but not date of shipment. Also, some serial numbers were in batches rather than chronological order.

22 Even if the assumption is incorrect, that in no way lessens the historical significance Jones's revolver.

23 David V. Stroud, "A Unique Colt 1860 Richards Transition Army Conversion," *Dispatch* # 28, Spring 2009.

Manhattan Revolver of Major John B. Jones



The inscription on the backstrap reads: "MAJ. J.B. JONES Texas Rangers"

organization. I believe the same is true for gun owners today. However, presentations seem to demand a professional inscription to document the event. Therefore, the featured Manhattan revolver inscribed on the backstrap "Maj. J.P. JONES Texas Rangers" seems more likely than not to indicate a presentation.²⁴

I believe friends of Major Jones purchased the Manhattan from a local gun dealer such as J.C. Petmecky at 507 Congress Avenue in Austin and then paid a jeweler to hand-inscribe the backstrap. As a token of their respect and admiration, they presented the handgun to the recently commissioned Texas Ranger major and Frontier Battalion commander.²⁵ Nineteenth century Texas Ranger-documented weapons are extremely rare, and the Manhattan used by Major John P. Jones is one of the rarest.²⁶

24. David V. Stroud, *Inscribed Union Swords: 1861-1865* (Kilgore, TX: Pinecrest Pub. Co., 1983), 18. An 1864 *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* ad mentions the engraving of soldiers' identification pins at 3 cents per letter, which would have been about 75 cents (\$20.00 in 2008) for that of Major Jones. As with all historically inscribed weapons, one should be aware of modern-day fake inscriptions.
25. Chris Hirsch, *The Texas Gun Trade: A Guide to the Guns Made or Sold in the Lone Star State, 1780-1899* (Woonsocket: RI: Andrew Mowbray Incorporated, 2008), 130. Jewelers were the inscribers of the 19th century, as indicated in countless newspaper classifieds. Major Jones's Manhattan is professionally inscribed.
26. The inscription reads as a presentation rather than something Major Jones would have had inscribed to document ownership simply because of the S included after *Ranger*.



Thanks to Kevin Hoffman of Civil War Preservations <http://www.civilwarpreservations.com> for allowing me to write an article featuring Major John P. Jones's revolver.

Thanks to Ruth for providing the outstanding photographs.