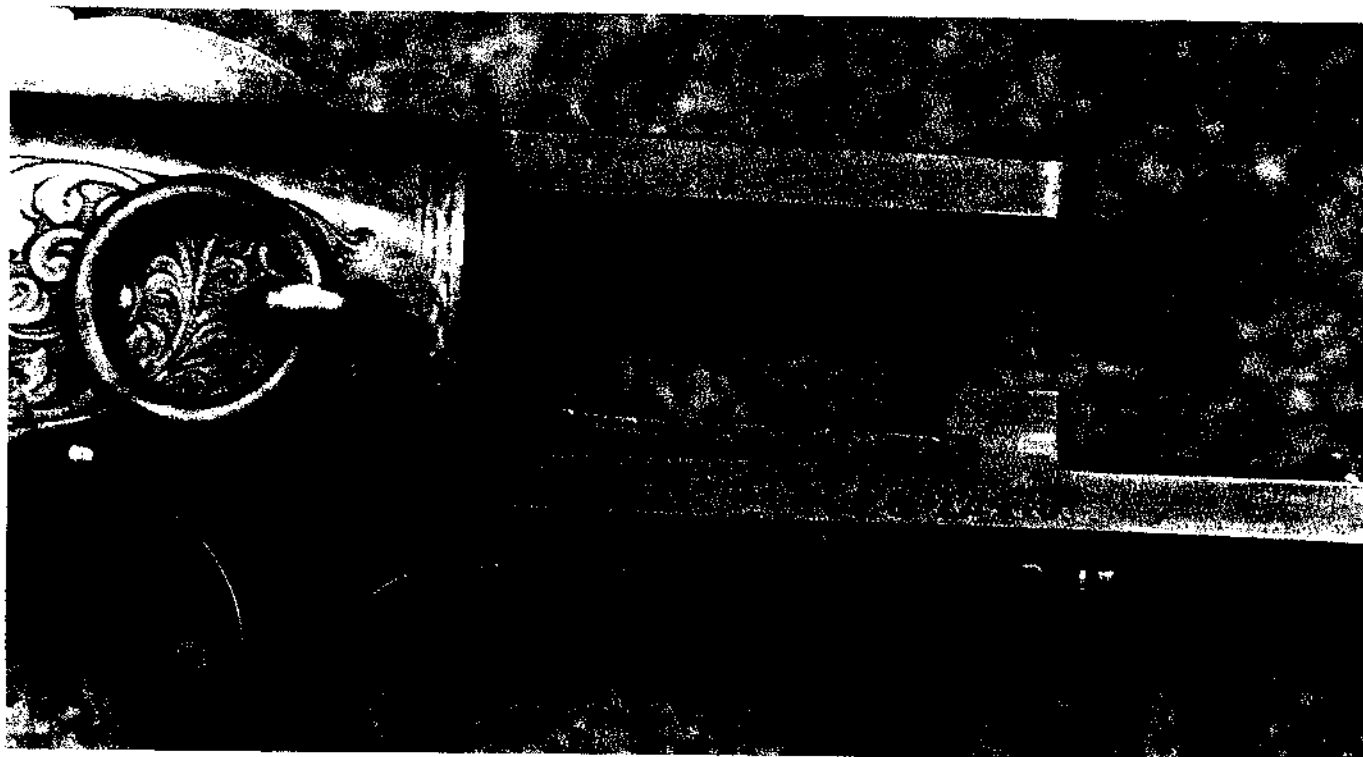


tor of the Cody Firearms Museum, offered a well-constructed argument that Model '66 production probably began with its own serial number sequence, rather than continuing the serial number sequence of the Henry Rifle. Then, in the January/February 1992 issue of *Man at Arms*, Mr. Wiley Sword presented an equally well-constructed rebuttal to Mr. Houze's conclusion. Mr. Sword supported the traditional opinion that early production of the Model '66, or "Improved Henry," was treated as a continuation of "Old" Henry Rifle production and, therefore, initially numbered within the Henry serial number sequence.

For Winchester collectors and students, the debate has remained unresolved. One of the earliest attempts to explore this subject is found in John Parsons' 1955 book, *The First Winchester*. On page 102, Parsons concluded, "...it is the belief of the author that Model '66 serials began in the vicinity of 13,500, approximately where the Henry's left off." Parsons further observed, "...the range of collectors' serials from 13,500 to 40,000 is quite complete, every thousand being represented with few exceptions." The absence of Model '66 serial numbers below about 13000 suggested that initial numbering for the gun ran concurrently

with the last remnants of Henry production.

Parsons went on to comment about some lower serial numbers found on a few Model '66s known to exist in collections. He said, "A few specimens of the Model '66 have been reported with serial digits of three or four from 100 to 2611. While no explanation for their separate numbering is known, the frame characteristics of such pieces are later than those in the 14,000 range. Yet most have inside serials which would date them in 1868, before serial 20,000." Parsons believed the low serial numbers were part of separate serial sequences applied to specific foreign



orders. He noted that such a precedent was set with a special Swiss order for Henry Rifles which contained its own separate serial sequence, beginning with number "1", and which was produced concurrently with regular production of the Henry rifle after serial numbers had passed 10,000.

It is known that some time during the early production of the Model '66, a five-thousand gun order was shipped to Japan and another five-thousand gun order was shipped to South America. Orders of that magnitude most certainly would have received special attention. Consequently, each order might have been assigned a specific serial sequence from 1 to 5000 in order to keep track of the production. Because these orders occurred very early in the production of the new rifle, they became excellent testimonials for other foreign buyers.

For example, in 1870 and 1871, Turkey and France purchased 57,000 of the new Model '66s.

In 1970, George Madis, noted Winchester authority and author of *The Winchester Book*, examined the records of Albert Tilton, a long-time employee of the Winchester Company. Madis examined these records, that dated back to 1867, at the Winchester Museum in New Haven, Connecticut. On page 57 of his book, Madis stated that Tilton's records showed "...serial numbers assigned to the model 1866 were from 12,476 to 14,813 in the year 1866..." Thus, Madis narrowed the range of serials for early Model '66 production to a specific serial range. It's likely that Tilton was referring to "normal" production of the new gun, exclusive of specially-numbered foreign orders that came in after production started.

The research done by Madis 25 years ago established "12476" as the initial serial number for the Model '66. Other Winchester researchers and students have accepted that number as the likely "first number." For example, in the January/February 1992 issue of *Man at Arms*, Wiley Sword wrote, "As was concluded by the earlier researchers, the Model '66 was produced with serial numbers continuing from the brass framed Henry production, beginning with serial numbers about 13000 (#12476 lowest known M1866), and were intermixed with the last of the Henry rifles, some of which carried numbers into the 14000 range."

More recently, in 1994, another researcher, Mr. Arthur Pirkle published Volume I of *Winchester Lever Action Repeating Firearms*. This 202-page book covers in



great detail all aspects of the Winchester models 1866, 1873 and 1876. In several references, he specifically mentions the serial number "12476" as the initial serial number for the Model '66. It appears that both Mr. Sword and Mr. Pirkle used George Madis' original research from 1970 as their source. They also subscribe to Parsons' belief that the few known low-numbered Model '66s were part of specific foreign orders which were produced after the initial production began.

If we shift focus slightly to another related topic, the names used in the barrel address on the Model '66, we might gain additional insight. A small degree of speculation has developed about when the name was changed from "Henry" to "Winchester." In the July/August 1992 issue of *Man at Arms*, Mr. Wiley Sword concludes that the change occurred around the 23000 serial range. He suggests that a carbine, serial #23169, might be the earliest known "Winchester" marked Model '66. His conclusion is similar to the one reached by George Madis. It also agrees with the conclusion reached by Mr. Tom Hall, then curator of the Winchester Museum. In a February 15, 1952 memo, Mr. Hall stated, "I have found that the name Winchester was first marked on the barrels of the guns somewhere between serial number 21220 and 23265."

Let's keep that 23000 serial range in mind while examining another scrap of information regarding Model '66 production. There exists in the Winchester files at the Cody Museum, a handwritten note from Mr. George K. Walker, official Winchester historian from about 1905 to the 1940s. The note briefly states, "About 10000 guns assembled of 1st Type Model 1866 (Imp. Henry) Rec. similar."

"Type" in today's classification of the Model '66 refers to subtle variations in the shape and design of the brass frame receiver. There are generally acknowledged to be four distinct "types" of Model '66, but these designations evolved long after Mr. Walker ceased to be connected with Winchester. At the time Mr. Walker jotted down his note, "type" possibly referred to the change in barrel address because he noted that the receivers were similar. If this were the case, then subtraction of 10,000 guns from the 23000 serial range, indicated for the changeover, would give us a serial range

near 13000 as the starting point for initial "Improved Henry" production. This would support the traditional argument that initial serial numbering for the Model '66 ran concurrently with Henry rifle production.

In Mr. Walker's production notes, contained in the Cody Museum files, he commented on the very first shipment of the new model, as follows: "...1866 Sept 15th Mr. Hartley, NYC 1 Improved Carbine." Presumably, Mr. Hartley was a Winchester representative in New York City. This information would indicate that the first domestic shipment was about one year earlier than generally believed. In his book, Parsons cited comments by Winchester employees that the first domestic shipment went to Omaha, Nebraska, in August 1867. In any



case, the New York City shipment in 1866 might be important when we analyze the existence of a carbine with a very early serial number which we know was shipped to New York City in 1866.

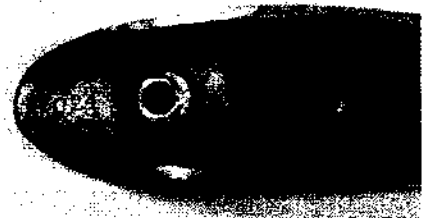
There exists a Model '66 carbine, with serial number 12476, which was engraved by L.D. Nimschke. This carbine was initially marked with the serial number 12476, in the correct location on the inside of the lower tang. At some point, that number was lightly marked over with a series of "X" marks and a new number, 13024, was stamped forward of the old number. A small assembly number "25" is also stamped on the lower tang and the inside of the left side plate. In addition to the peculiar serial numbers, the initials "L.D.N." are stamped on the inside of the upper tang. These initials belong to Louis Daniel Nimschke of New York City, the foremost firearms engraver of his day. He was well-known as an independent engraver who performed work for many gun makers. R.L. Wilson notes in his book, *L.D. Nimschke Firearms Engraver*, page xix, "The weapons to be engraved were brought to him, generally in the white (i.e., without finish); they were engraved, and then given a finish..."

The engraving pattern on this carbine contains a blank scroll on each side of the receiver. It is similar to patterns seen on several Henry rifles engraved by Nimschke (see pages 37 and 42 in *The Winchester Book* by George Madis, and pages 47-50 in *Winchester Engraving* by R.L. Wilson). Such a scroll would be appropriate if the gun were to be inscribed later with the owner's

name or other personal information.

Because all the early records on the Model '66 have been lost, we can only speculate as to the significance of peculiar serial numbering combined with Nimschke engraving on this carbine. From Walker's notes, we know that the first Model '66 was a carbine and it was shipped to New York City. It is possible that the carbine's frame, number 12476, and butt plate were shipped to New York to be engraved and then returned to the Winchester factory for final assembly. At the time of return, number 12476 had already been assigned to another gun so production workers merely picked out the next unassigned number, 13024, and applied that number to the remaining parts for final assembly. The number 13024 is found in the correct location on the butt stock, butt plate and the lower side of the barrel.

It seems reasonable that a Winchester manager might reserve the first frame produced of the new "Improved Henry" for special treatment. At that point, he might consider the leading firearms engraver of the day, Mr. Nimschke, who had considerable previous experience with the Henry rifle. A scroll pattern would have been an appropriate choice for the first representative of the new model. Fragmentary evidence points to the carbine shipped September 15, 1866, to New York City as a possible candidate for "The First Model '66." We will probably never know for cer-



tain but when George Madis examined this carbine he concluded, "It is my opinion that number 13024-12476 could well be the first model 1866 produced and that it is probably the first model 1866 engraved by Nimschke." □

Sources:

- Madis, George, *The Winchester Book*, Brownboro, Texas, 1985.
- Parsons, John E., *The First Winchester, The Story of the 1866 Repeating Rifle*, New York, 1955.
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- Sword, Wiley, *Man at Arms*, January/February 1992; July/August 1992, Lincoln, Rhode Island.
- Cody Firearms Museum, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming.