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FORGOTTEN FIREPOWER

They might not have been name brand, but these pistols still helped win the West

BY T. LOGAN METESH

When thinking about guns of the Wild West, one cannot help but conjure up images of lawmen and outlaws armed with firearms made by Colt, Remington and Smith & Wesson. While these are accurate images, that isn't the whole picture. Plenty of companies like Merwin & Hulbert, Hopkins & Allen, Forehand & Wadsworth and others filled the niche market of inexpensive yet functional firearms. Not everyone decided to (or could always afford to) carry the "name brand" guns, so they went with perfectly serviceable firearms whose names and histories are relatively obscure in today's world.

Merwin & Bray

Before Merwin & Hulbert, there was Merwin & Bray. Begun in 1856, the company tried to carve out a place in the competitive revolver market of the mid-19th century. In an attempt to circumvent the Smith & Wesson-held patent by Rollin White for bored-through cylinders, Merwin & Bray manufactured a cupfire revolver. The front-loading design effectively skirted White's rear-loading patent, but it didn't take off. By 1874, Merwin & Bray called it quits and went separate ways.

Merwin & Hulbert

After splitting with Mr. Bray, Joseph Merwin teamed up with the Hulbert brothers, William and Milan, who owned a 50-percent share of the Connecticut-based manufacturer known as Hopkins

& Allen. A deal was struck where Hopkins & Allen would make the actual firearms, but they would be marketed under the Merwin & Hulbert name.

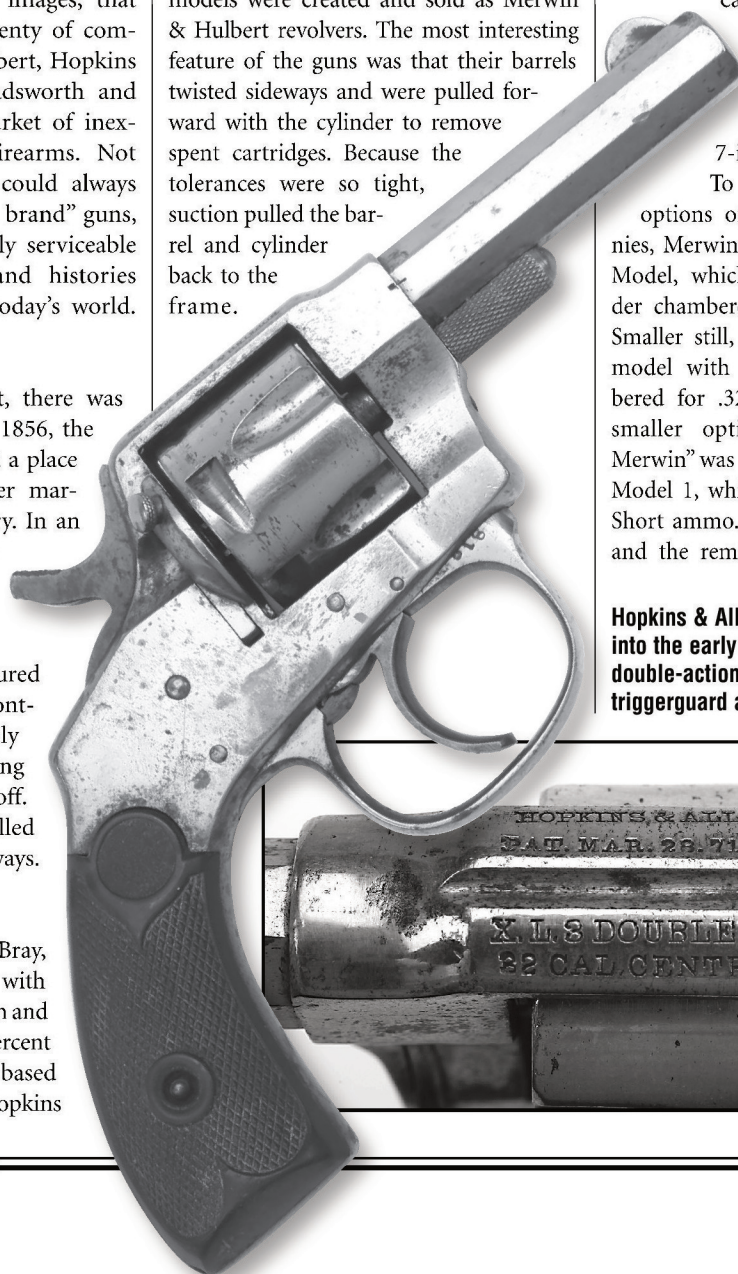
All told, more than a dozen different models were created and sold as Merwin & Hulbert revolvers. The most interesting feature of the guns was that their barrels twisted sideways and were pulled forward with the cylinder to remove spent cartridges. Because the tolerances were so tight, suction pulled the barrel and cylinder back to the frame.

The large-framed Frontier Model was built to compete directly with the Colt Model 1873 Single Action Army, Smith & Wesson's Model 3 and the Remington Model 1875.

While still chambered for .44-caliber cartridges, the Pocket Army was essentially the Frontier Model, but with a 3½-inch barrel—half the length of the Frontier's 7-inch barrel.

To keep up with concealable options offered by the larger companies, Merwin & Hulbert made the Pocket Model, which featured a six-shot cylinder chambered for .38-caliber cartridges. Smaller still, the company also offered a model with a five-shot cylinder chambered for .32-caliber cartridges. Another smaller option known as the "Baby Merwin" was a copy of the Smith & Wesson Model 1, which held seven rounds of .22 Short ammo. Smith & Wesson sued, won, and the remaining parts were destroyed.

Hopkins & Allen produced firearms well into the early 20th century, including this double-action XL3 revolver with its large triggerguard and rear sighting notch.



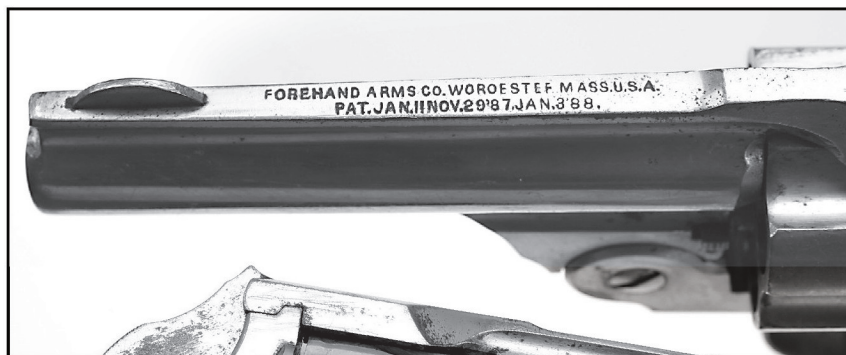
In 1894, the company declared bankruptcy, and its holdings were liquidated in 1896. Hopkins & Allen continued to sell guns under the Merwin & Hulbert name until the company folded in 1916.

Hopkins & Allen

Formed in 1868 after purchasing the defunct Bacon Manufacturing Company, Hopkins & Allen produced a wide variety of revolvers, rifles and shotguns throughout the rest of the 19th century and into the beginning of the 20th century.

The company's first revolvers were .31-caliber percussion guns modeled closely on the Bacon Manufacturing design that came before it. After Rollin White's patent expired, Hopkins & Allen began manufacturing cartridge conversions of its percussion guns. These revolvers were chambered for .22- and .32-caliber rimfire cartridges. Quite a few of its revolvers were sold to distributors who marked the guns with their own trade names, such as Mountain Eagle, Blue Jacket and Ranger.

By the late 1870s, the company had introduced larger revolvers, such as the XL Army, XL Navy and XL Police models. These guns were chambered for .38 and .44 rimfire as



In 1888, Forehand & Wadsworth began offering top-break models without hammer spurs.

well as .44 WCF centerfire cartridges. At this same time, the company also branched out into long arms and produced falling-block rifles and tip-up barrel shotguns.

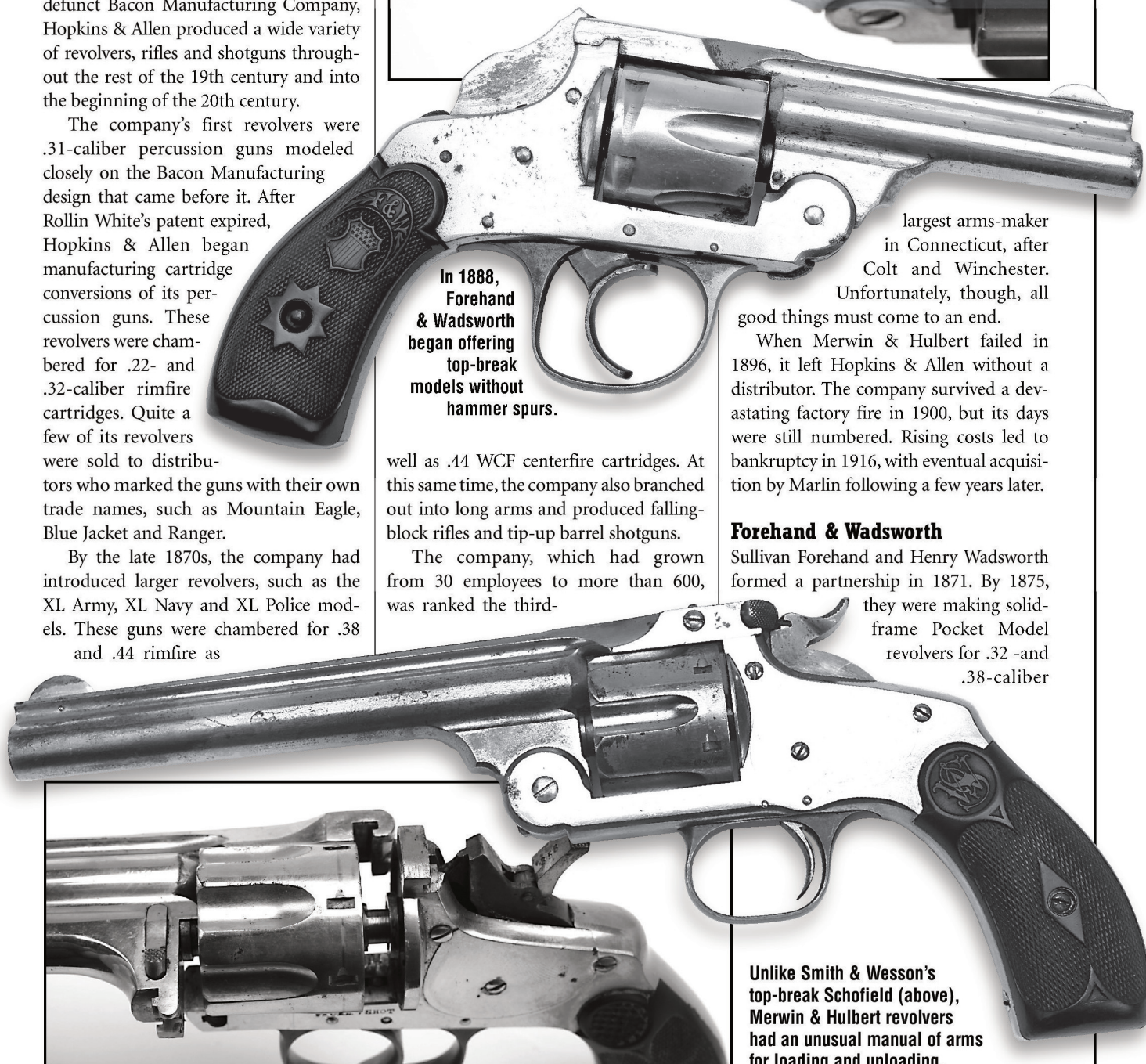
The company, which had grown from 30 employees to more than 600, was ranked the third-

largest arms-maker in Connecticut, after Colt and Winchester. Unfortunately, though, all good things must come to an end.

When Merwin & Hulbert failed in 1896, it left Hopkins & Allen without a distributor. The company survived a devastating factory fire in 1900, but its days were still numbered. Rising costs led to bankruptcy in 1916, with eventual acquisition by Marlin following a few years later.

Forehand & Wadsworth

Sullivan Forehand and Henry Wadsworth formed a partnership in 1871. By 1875, they were making solid-frame Pocket Model revolvers for .32 - and .38-caliber



Unlike Smith & Wesson's top-break Schofield (above), Merwin & Hulbert revolvers had an unusual manual of arms for loading and unloading.

Forgotten Firepower

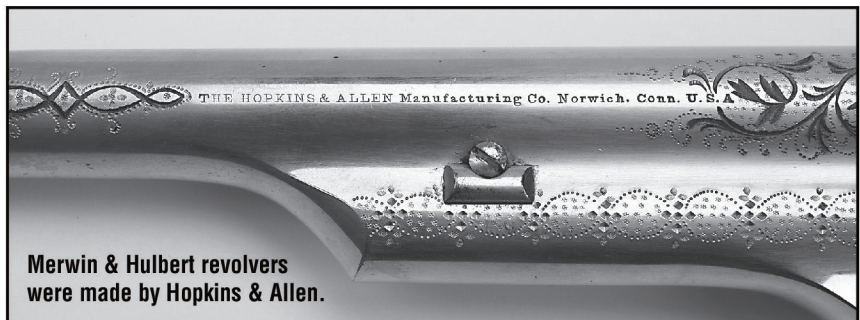
Pat Garrett (far right) is one of the famous gunfighters who owned a Merwin & Hulbert revolver (right). To unload these guns, you pull the barrel assembly forward and twist it.



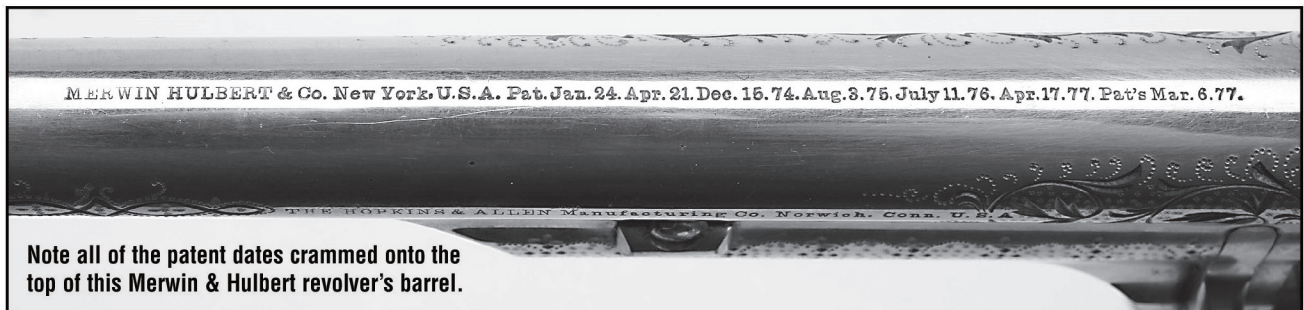
All told, more than a dozen different models were **CREATED** and **SOLD** as Merwin & Hulbert revolvers.



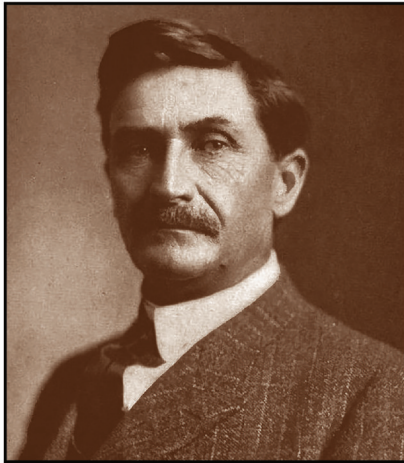
Merwin & Bray was known for making "cupfire" revolvers to get around Rollin White's bored-through cylinder patent.



Merwin & Hulbert revolvers were made by Hopkins & Allen.



Note all of the patent dates crammed onto the top of this Merwin & Hulbert revolver's barrel.



cartridges. In 1888, they added a top-break design to their catalog, still chambered for .32- or .38-caliber cartridges. These guns were double actions and had exposed hammers with no spurs. A so-called Hammerless Model was also offered, but this was essentially the same top-break design with a shroud covering the spurless hammer.

The most iconic revolvers made by Forehand & Wadsworth were the British Bulldog models. Chambered for .32-, .38- and .44-caliber cartridges, these double-action revolvers were made from 1875 until the 1890s. The topstrap above the cylinder had "British Bulldog" roll-marked on it.

Wadsworth sold his share of the company to Forehand in 1890. The firm was then renamed "Forehand Arms," and it succeeded until Sullivan Forehand died in 1898. His sons kept the company going until 1902, when they sold it to Hopkins & Allen. This was the logical choice since Hopkins & Allen had been contracted to make Forehand Arms' guns the decade before.

Sharing The Market

Companies like Colt, Remington, Winchester and Smith & Wesson produced a large number of the firearms used to

tame the Wild West. Their guns were carried by some big names in history: Wyatt Earp and John Wesley Hardin owned Smith & Wesson Model 3 revolvers; Billy Clanton was carrying a Colt Frontier revolver at the OK Corral.

Even so, those big companies did not have a monopoly on famous people:

Frank Hamer, Jesse James and Pat Garrett all owned Merwin & Hulbert revolvers. Pat Garrett also owned a Hopkins & Allen revolver. So, the next time you conjure up an image of guns from the Wild West, don't forget to include Merwin & Hulbert, Forehand & Wadsworth, Hopkins & Allen, and others, too. ★

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.38-40 Winchester	.44 Magnum	.30-40 Krag	.45-70 Govt.

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