



13 November 2019

## A Rifle Fit for The Centennial Celebration: Ulrich Master Engraved Peabody-Martini Rifle

by T. Logan Metesh



Few names stir more emotion in the arms engraving community than “Ulrich.” All told, the Ulrich family had five members who worked at Winchester. Their dynastic presence in Winchester’s engraving department lasted a staggering 81 years until Alden George Ulrich, son of Conrad Ulrich, died in 1949.

Conrad Ulrich joined the company in March 1871, and he was a bit of a latecomer. Two of his brothers had already been working at Winchester; John started in 1868 and Herman came onboard in 1870.

When you combine the words “Ulrich” with “exhibition grade” and “silver and gold,” then you’ve got yourself one helluva gun, which is the case with this Peabody-Martini rifle.

Peabody-Martini rifles owe their name to Henry O. Peabody and Friedrich von Martini, the former being an American arms designer and the latter being an Austrian engineer. The rifles were made by the Providence Tool Company in Rhode Island, and they had a production date range from 1873 to 1882. While the company was never able to secure an arms contract with the United States, they were successful with overseas sales. A contract with the Ottoman Empire yielded some 600,000 guns.



*Lot 169: Magnificent Documented Conrad F. Ulrich Master Exhibition Engraved and Silver and Gold Plated Providence Tool Co. Peabody-Martini Single Shot Rifle with Bayonet*

This rifle’s serial number - 5 - means it was probably made on the first day of production. That alone would make the gun sought after by collectors, but in this instance, the serial number takes a back seat to the rest of the gun’s appeal.



A one-of-a-kind example, this Peabody-Martini is an unusual exhibition grade military rifle engraved by the legendary Conrad F. Ulrich, made all the more impressive by its silver and gold plating. The Ulrich family didn't always sign their first initial(s), so it's not always possible to know for sure which one did the work, but that's not the case here. Marked on the front of this rifle's frame is "C.F. ULRICH," allowing for no mistake as to who created this work of art.

The rifle is believed to have been one of at least two that the Providence Tool Company had embellished for the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, which was the first official World's Fair to be held in the United States. The other rifle, serial number 2, is also credited to Conrad Ulrich. The event, which lasted for six months, attracted ten million visitors and witnessed the introduction of several important inventions and creations, some of which included Alexander Graham Bell's telephone, Heinz ketchup, and Hires root beer.



*The 1876 Centennial Exposition*

With more than 14,000 businesses exhibiting their products from more than 30 countries worldwide, it was essential for the products on display to be showstoppers in order to catch the attention of the ten million visitors whose eyes were no doubtedly glazed over from exhibition overload. Knowing that, Providence Tool Company pulled out all the stops to ensure that their exhibited items stopped attendees in their tracks.

The bayonet socket and locking ring, forend cap, barrel bands, breech end of the barrel, action, lever, and buttplate feature highly detailed interlaced scroll engraving with shell and crosshatch accents, as well as finely textured backgrounds.



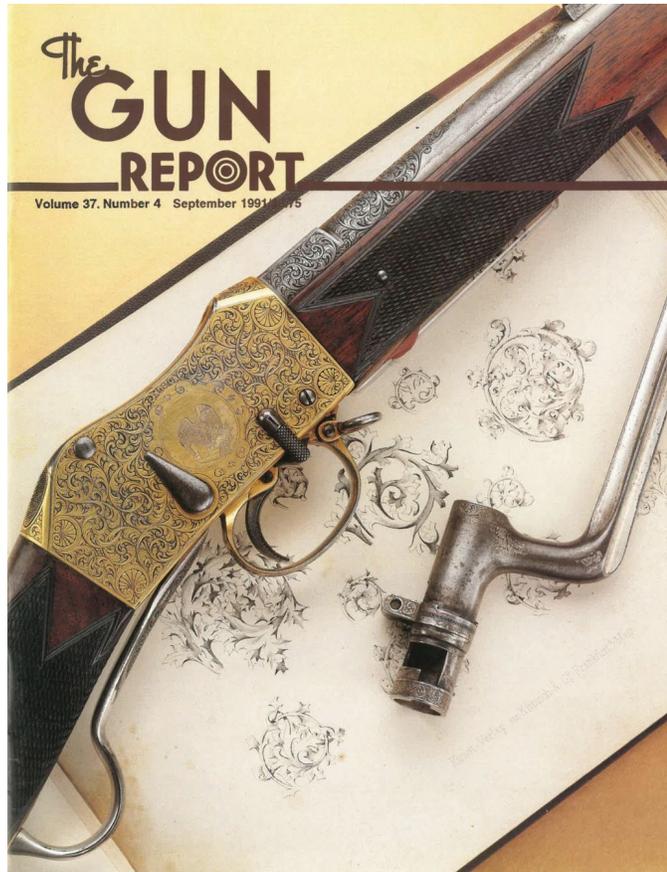
The left side of the action is hand engraved with "PEABODY & MARTINI. PATENTS./MANF'D'D BY/PROVIDENCE TOOL CO./PROV. R.I. U.S.A." (After all, it would have been a shame to rollmark that information when you could have one of the finest engravers in the world place it there by hand.) The right side of the action has a spread wing bald eagle perched on Columbia's shield, a fitting motif for the United States' centennial celebrations. The eagle on the shield may be based on Old Abe, the mascot of the 8th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiment during the Civil War. Old Abe was displayed in the Agricultural Hall during the exposition, and he was probably the best known bald eagle in the country in the 19th century. His cage included a special perch with a rendition of Columbia's shield as the base.



The forend cap, barrel bands, and action are finished in gold, while the barrel, buttplate, and lever appear to have been silver plated. Outfitted with military style sights, the musket-length forearm on this Peabody-Martini has multi-point checkering where your hand naturally grasps the gun. The same kind of checkering is present as at the wrist of the buttstock.



Of course, provenance and documentation is everything in the world of collectible arms, and this rifle has it. Tom Rowe's "Engraved & Interesting Peabody Martini" has a picture of the rifle in it, and the gun was on the cover of Volume 37, Number 4 of "Gun Report" from September 1991.



*"Gun Report" magazine from September 1991.*

Hand in hand with provenance and documentation is condition. Overall, this rifle rates extremely fine with 90%+ original gold plating on the action 25% original gold plating elsewhere, strong original silver plating in the protected areas, aged patina on the silver, smooth gray and brown patina on the balance, crisp engraving and markings, and general mild age and storage related wear. The wood is rated fine, with a few chips on the forearm, mostly crisp checkering, moderate dings concentrated on the sides of the butt, minor scratches, some nice figure, and glossy varnish. Mechanically, this excellent rifle is in perfect order.



The bayonet rates very good and has 30% original silver plating remaining with a gray and brown patina on the balance, some slight pitting, and crisp engraving on the socket and locking ring.

If you're a fan of low serial number guns, Peabody-Martini rifles, Ulrich-engraved guns, silver and/or gold plating, the 1876 Centennial Exhibition, or just American history in general, this gun is screaming your name. Bring it home at the December 2019 Premier Gun Auction. Place an early bid now; don't disappoint Lady Liberty.