

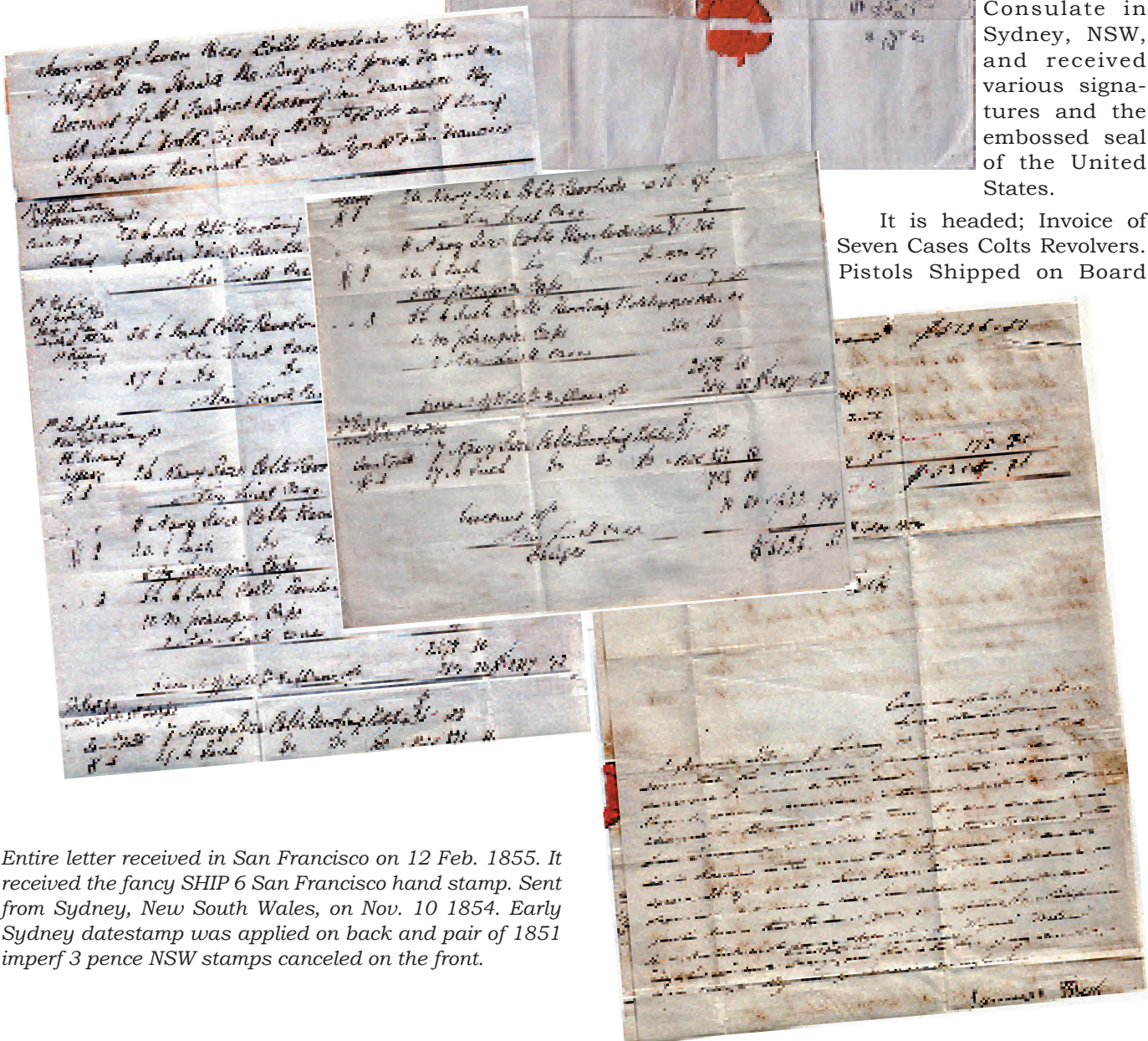
Colt's Patent Fire Arms

by Anthony Fandino



This entire letter is an invoice sent from Australia to an arms agent in San Francisco accounting for receipt and payment for Colt revolvers. It itemizes each case one by one listing content, prices and the ships from which they were received. These Colt revolving pistols (the most advanced for their day) were sent to Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, from New York and San Francisco aboard ships *Rapid*, *William*, *Euphrasia* and *Seargo*. This invoice had to be sworn as to verity before the U.S. Consulate in Sydney, NSW, and received various signatures and the embossed seal of the United States.

It is headed; Invoice of Seven Cases Colts Revolvers. Pistols Shipped on Board



Entire letter received in San Francisco on 12 Feb. 1855. It received the fancy SHIP 6 San Francisco hand stamp. Sent from Sydney, New South Wales, on Nov. 10 1854. Early Sydney datestamp was applied on back and pair of 1851 imperf 3 pence NSW stamps canceled on the front.

the Brig M, A. Jones. For and on Account of W Barnet Keesing San Francisco. By W. Saml. Folk Sydney Nov. 9th 1854 and Being Shipments Received From New York & San Francisco.

Varying quantities of the following were listed:

- 30.6 inch Colts Revolving Pistols
- 35.6 " " " "
- 37.6 " " " "
- 56.6 " " " "

- (26) Navy Size Colts Revolvers
- 8 " " Revolving Pistols

Flasks, Moulds & wrenches. Tin Lined Cases, 5 and 10m Percussion Caps.

The total was \$5,307.26. A considerable amount for that time.

Lt. Col. Lachlan Macquarie, the soldier who replaced Capt. Bligh (of mutiny on the *Bounty* fame), held governorship of the British penal colony of New South Wales 1809-1821. Australia at the time consisted of huge tracts of land called states. NSW became self governing in 1855 and in 1901 was federated into the commonwealth of Australia. Its origin was as a penal colony. Macquarie was determined to make NSW more than a convict prison—but less than a colony of free settlers. He visualized a colony of reformed convicts reshaping their lives in a new environment. He achieved much despite heavy opposition from a British home government that could see no further than a penal colony. Regular convict arrivals did not cease until 1840. His successors ruled with legal authority and with little restraint from the weak legislative councils. This so-called age of Tyrants gave way to the era of Squatters. These were ex-prisoners who occupied land outside of settled areas. The policy of restricting settlement gave way to squatting, for by the 1840s the colony became profitable due to the value of fleece shipped to England from the “out-back.” Nevertheless, there was much agitation before nomadic shepherds became “boundary riders” with fenced stations or homesteads with unfenced runs. After 1840 large tracts of land were thrown open to free settlement. Gold was discovered in NSW between 1823 to 1842 but mining was discouraged. However, the California goldfields whetted the appetites of colonial and government officials alike and by 1851 the Australian gold rush led to the desire of newcomers to carry “protection”.



Samuel Colt and the original Colt revolver as patented in 1835. Following in the style of engraved sporting views of earlier gunsmiths, Colt engraved Cavalry pursuing Indians on the cylinders of his Dragoons arms, War ships engaged in battle on his Navy pistols and a stagecoach foiling bandits on the pocket pistols.

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Samuel Colt, born at Hartford, Conn. (1814-62), inventor of the modern revolver was famous for replacing the one-shot shotgun with a revolving chambered gun. Each cylinder in the chamber held a load that fired when the gun's firing pin set off a copper cap discharging a shot. A ratchet rotated the chamber, locking it into position so that another bullet was ready to be fired. As a young seaman Colt noted that whichever way the helmsman turned the wheel each of its spokes always lined up with a clutch that locked it into place. He conceived the idea that it could be applied to a firearm. Another innovation was the conical bullet in preference to the spherical then in use. He was granted his letters patent in 1835/6.

The company he founded failed in 1842. In 1846 the Mexican-American war broke out and Texas Rangers possessing Colt pistols persuaded the government to order 1,000 for the army. Colt was once more in business and by 1855 Colt's Hartford factory was the largest private armoury in the world. Colt, whose pre-Civil War sympathies lay in the Confederacy, changed allegiance in 1860 when fighting broke out. He supplied many thousands of guns to the U.S. government. What is less known is that Colt was the earliest contributor to the development of the factory assembly line and process of “production in series”—known today as mass production of machine tools. His success stemmed from marketing a well conceived product in which interchangeable parts were guaranteed to fit from gun to gun.

I'm reminded of the joke about the man who attempted to create a popular soda beverage and gave each failure a number until he reached six—when he sold the business. The next fellow relabelled it and made a fortune selling “Seven Up”! Colt originally produced a five chambered revolver. This was followed by the more successful gun that became legendary—the Six Shooter.

By 1870 Manifest Destiny in action meant that the Colt along with other firearms—Winchester, Springfield and Sharpes—had reduced the native population of the United States by half. It was said in the old West that: “God created man, but it was Sam Colt's revolver that made him equal”...so went the frontier saying.