

SPENCER REPEATING RIFLE COMPANY

Not a great deal of information is available about the activities of Christopher M. Spencer during his "Boston period", which began in 1862. To be sure, a text on American gunsmiths (1) tells us that the company manufactured 12,471 rifles and 64,865 carbines and that this activity was carried on in the "Southerly wing of Chickering's Piano factory on Tremont and Camden Streets" (2). However, what did the building look like, what was its fate, who else was in business with Spencer, what was his position in the company, were cartridges ever manufactured there? These are questions that we have managed to treat with and answer, at least in part.

The building itself still stands today in Boston on Tremont Street, and is currently owned by Diversified Industries, Inc., of Boston. The present own-

ers had no knowledge of the former use of their building, nor could they provide any useful information or material. A brief tour of the building revealed only a sound, but rather dreary, edifice of typical period construction.

The building, as it stands today, is shown in Figure 1. It was constructed during the 1850's by the Chickering and Sons Pianoforte Company and Figure 2 is taken from an old Chickering booklet. Figure 3 is a print made

from a glass plate photograph from the Hawes collection, a photographer who was quite active around Boston during Spencer's period and later.

An examination of the City directories from 1860-1865 revealed a company advertisement (page 97 of the 1862 directory and page 92 of the 1863 directory). In 1862 the entry is listed, "Spencer, Christopher, riflemaker h. 87 Pembroke". This is the only year in which Spencer himself is listed in the City Directory.

Examination of the Corporate records at the State House in Boston turned up two important pieces of information. The index card in the corporate records is reproduced exactly as it was copied (Figure 4), and indicates that all property was sold in December of 1868 to the Fogarty Rifle Company



FIGURE 1

A recent picture of the Chickering Building as it stands today. The light coloration is due to the original red brick having been painted over.

in Boston. Sources on Spencer which have been examined indicate that the assets of the company were sold to Winchester in 1869 or 1870. As it turns out, this previously published information is correct in a roundabout way, since Fogarty (1) is listed as being taken over by Winchester in 1869. However, L. D. Satterlee (2) quotes a piece from the Boston Post, September 29, 1869, detailing the auction sale of the companies machinery. Several firms from "New York and Philadelphia" are listed as being heavy buyers, but Winchester is not among them.

A letter to Tom Hall, curator of the Winchester Gun Museum indicates that they never had any of the Spencer records. In any event, these Corporate records can certainly be considered a most accurate source.

A second item of interest was found in Corporate Record book No. 55 on page 103, which is a copy of the certificate of incorporation filed January 27, 1862. It is in fairly standard legalistic wording and indicates that the company was incorporated for the "manufacture and sale of firearms and ammunition". The document was signed by the officers and directors who were:

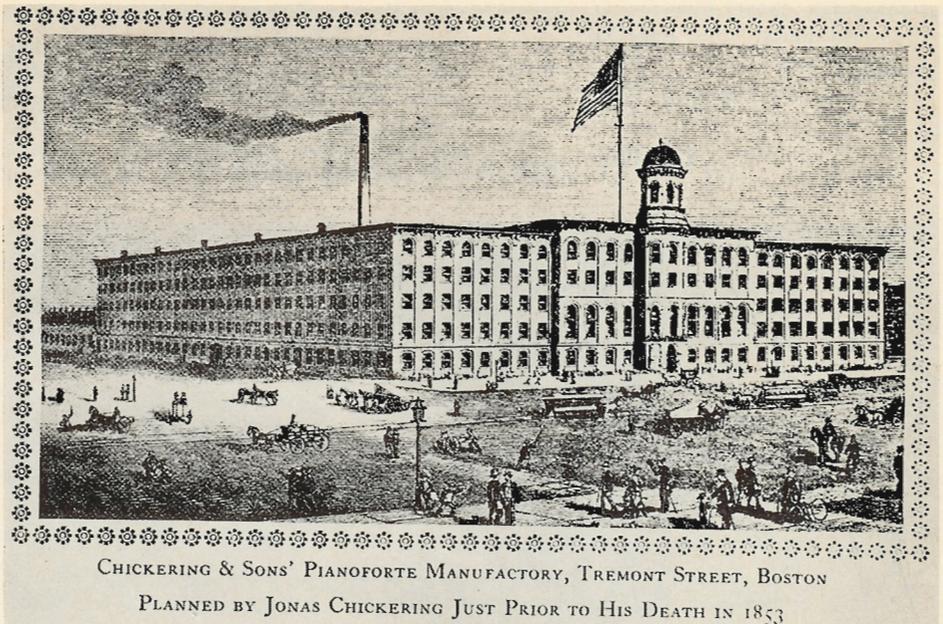
Joseph W. Clark, President
Warren Fisher, Jr. Treasurer

(Please Turn Page)

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CHICKERING & SONS' PIANOFORTE MANUFACTORY, TREMONT STREET, BOSTON
PLANNED BY JONAS CHICKERING JUST PRIOR TO HIS DEATH IN 1853

FIGURE 2

An engraving of the Chickering Building taken from an old company booklet.



FIGURE 3

Print of the Chickering Building taken from an original glass plate which is in the Hawes collection. It is believed that this photograph was taken during the 1860's.

Figure 4

Index Cards from Corporate Records

Returns	Letters	Remarks
1864	Est of val 1864	Cert. January 27, 1862
1865		Cap. \$200,000. par \$100 paid in \$200,000
Appeal 1865		
1866		Cert. of assessment filed January 27, 1862
Appeal 1866		
1867		Cert. of Installment February 27, 1862
1868		Sold all property in December 1868 to
Letter as 1869		the Fogarty Rifle Company of Boston. See Return 1869. Dissolved by 1872 C 354.

SPENCER RIFLE

(Continued From Page 15)

Directors:

Charles Cheney
Ward Cheney
Rush Cheney
Joseph W. Clark

Warren Fisher, Jr.

Note that Spencer himself was neither an officer nor a director of the company, and apparently, other than being the patent holder, was only an employee of the group. This is perhaps not as incongruous as it might seem

for he was only about 21 years of age at the time of the incorporation. The only further entry in the book is on page 106, which is merely a routine certificate of installment of an incorporation fee being paid.

Specific mention was made in the book that the company was incorporated for the manufacture and sale of "fire-arms and ammunition". Boxes of 56-56 calibre ammunition are known which are labeled "Armory - Chickering's Building, Tremont Street, Boston", as shown in Figure 5. However, collectors and students of cartridges have usually assigned the contents of these boxes to either Crittenden and Tibbals or C. D. Leet. With so little known of the exact nature of the actual type of machinery in the factory, this question will probably never be resolved.

Acknowledgement

The authors wish to gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Mr. J. Jackson of the Boston Athenaeum in locating figures 2 and 3 of this article and Mr. Martin Ofstein who kindly went out one very cold Sunday morning to take the picture of the building (Figure 1) as it stands today.

Literature Cited

1. Gardner, R. E., *Small Arms Makers*, Crown Publishers, New York 1963
2. Saterlee, L. D. "The Spencer Repeating Rifle", *The American Rifleman*, Vol. LXXIII Nos. 23 and 24, 1926.

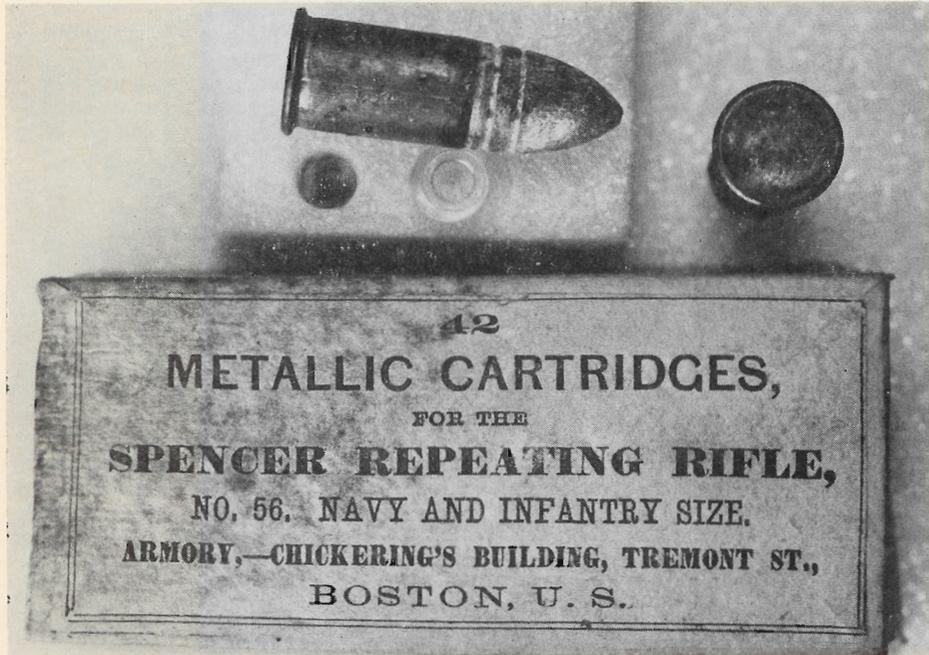


FIGURE 5

Label from a box containing 42 unheadstamped 56-56 Spencer cartridges.

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