



Firearms Collections of the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum

Excerpt of Project Report by Tom Andrews

Dance Brothers Navy Revolver

The following article has been adapted from a special project report on key artifacts in the Firearms Collections of the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum. This project report was written in 2018 based on extensive research compiled by project intern Tom Andrews.

Dance Brothers Army Revolver

History of J.H. Dance & Brothers

J.H. Dance & Brothers was a Texas gunmaker in operation during the Civil War. The firm began manufacturing firearms in 1862 in Columbia, Texas. James Henry Dance was originally from North Carolina, and moved to Texas with his family in 1848. In 1858, he built a house in East Columbia, Texas and opened a factory for metal and woodwork across the street shortly after. They produced gristmills and cotton gins.

The shortage of arms in the Confederacy prompted the startup of a number of small gunmakers. At the start of the war, the Dance family enlisted in the Confederate Army, but J.H. Dance's brothers, David Etheldred and George Perry were detailed back to the Columbia factory to produce needed supplies. They initially made mounted cannons and repaired wagons. In April 1862, the Dance's wrote Governor F.R. Lubbock requesting an advance of \$5,000 to produce firearms. In the letter they claimed they could produce fifty revolvers per week with the requested funds. Evidently the goal of fifty revolvers per week was never reached, as a letter from July 5, 1862 stated that they were about to finish three or four of their pistols. By October 2, 1862, they were able to ship a dozen revolvers to the San Antonio Arsenal. In December 1863, the factory moved several miles away from Columbia for fear of shelling from Union gunboats. It would appear that production of revolvers ended shortly after the move, making their total production extremely small, with an estimated 325-500 produced, 275 to 250 of which were in .44 caliber. The rest were in .36 caliber. The last recorded shipment of Dance Revolvers was April 18, 1895, with 25 pistols sent to the Houston Depot of Supplies.

The .44 caliber revolvers were copies of the Colt Army Revolver featuring an 8" barrel. The .44 caliber model has a larger and heavier frame than the .36 caliber example. A small number in the higher serial number range have full octagon barrels and boast a premium to value.^{1 2}

Information Specific to this Firearm

This pistol bears the serial number 3. The serial number appears on the underside of the barrel where it meets the frame, on the left side of the loading lever, on the trigger guard ahead of the trigger, and on the bottom of the back strap. The right side grip features German silver inlay in the shape of an urn.

¹ Flayderman, 641-42.

² Gary Wiggins, "Dance Brothers," Texas State Historical Association, n.d., <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/dhd01>.