

Glassick & Company Plains Rifle

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All photographs by Tim Prince, www.collegehillarsenal.com*

When one thinks of muzzle loading rifles used by the mountain men, fur trappers, traders and other intrepid pioneers of the American West the name that most often springs to mind is Hawken. Certainly, Jacob and Samuel Hawken of St. Louis, Missouri set the mold for the Plains Rifle when they made what they called their “Rocky Mountain Rifles” in the 1820s. These quality rifles, light enough to carry all the time, short enough to be used on horseback and capable of knocking down big targets at long range, were developed from the long Pennsylvania-Kentucky style rifle and were popular among fur trappers, traders and later plainsmen.



Fig. 1 – Glassick & Co. Plains Rifle, right side.

Other gunsmiths in the west soon started making guns in the popular style of the Hawken brothers. While many were in St. Louis, such as J.P. Gemmer (who had worked for the Hawken brothers before starting his own firm), Horace Dimick and Reno Beauvais, others were located elsewhere; such as Stephen O’Dell of Natchez, Mississippi, and Frederick Glassick of Memphis, Tennessee.



Fig. 2 – Glassick & Co. Plains Rifle, left side.

Frederick G. Glassick was a gunsmith, gunmaker and retailer working in Memphis during the tumultuous years leading up to the American Civil War. He is probably most famous as the partner of William S. Schneider, who made up the second half of the firm **Schneider & Glassick**. Schneider & Glassick repaired hundreds (if not thousands) of guns for the Confederacy during the twelve-month period from April 1861 to March of 1862. They are also credited with producing (or at least retailing) one of the rarest of the secondary Confederate revolvers, the Schneider & Glassick, of which only about 20-50 are believed to have been manufactured and only 3 or 4 authentic specimens are known today. The work they performed for the Confederacy ranged from simple repairs of locks and mechanisms, to altering shotguns for cavalry use by “*cutting off*” barrels and adding musket sized cones (nipples), along with sling rings or swivels.

According to Frank Sellers' **American Gunsmiths**, Frederick G. Glassick worked under his own name (or as F. Glassick & Co) in Memphis from 1840-1864, and worked as Schneider & Glassick from 1860-1862. Sellers also noted that William S. Schneider worked under his name (or as Schneider & Co) in Memphis from 1859-1873. However, the Memphis City directories reveal that the two men were both working out of the same location for most of their careers and were working under the name "**Schneider & Glassick**" much earlier than had been previously thought. The 1849 Memphis City Directory lists neither man in business in Memphis, suggesting that Glassick was probably not working there prior to about 1850, while the 1855-56 Memphis City Directory lists "**F Glassick – Gunsmith**" working on Jefferson Street and "**William S. Schneider – Gunmaker**" at 20 Jefferson Street. This same directory also lists "**Schneider & Glassick – Gunsmith**" also at 20 Jefferson Street. The next available directory is for 1859, and both men are again listed individually as "gunsmith" (Glassick) and "gunmaker" (Schneider). The firm "**Schneider & Co**" is also listed as "gunmakers". The next available directory is a post-Civil War 1865-1866 directory that no longer lists Glassick, but does list "**Wm Schneider Gunsmith 193 Main**". Schneider disappears from the 1866 directory but reappears at 42 Washington Street in 1867, where he remains in business through 1873. The 1874 directory lists "**Mrs. Wm. Schneider – Gunsmith Shop 42 Washington**". No 1875 directory is available, but even "Mrs. Wm. Schneider" is no longer listed as of 1876. Apparently, Schneider & Glassick made a go at working as partners around 1856-57, but gave up by 1859. They then reunited about 1860 and worked together through the fall of Memphis to Union forces in March of 1862.

While the firm of **F. Glassick & Company**, which is not listed in the post-war Memphis business directory for 1865-66, it was taking out advertisements in the Memphis Daily Appeal in late 1865, and the advertisements continued intermittently through the spring of 1870, with most being taken during 1867. The advertisements list Glassick & Co as:

IMPORTERS, Manufacturers and Dealers in Guns, Rifles, Pistols, Gun Material for Gunmaker's use, Gun Implements, Sporting Apparatus, Fishing Tackle, etc.

The ad lists the firm as being located at "No. 250 Main Street, under Odd Fellows' Hall. Memphis, Tenn." and also states that Glassick & Co offered gunsmithing services, noting: "Repairing done and warranted." Like his sometime partner William Schneider, Glassick advertised that he was a "manufacturer" of guns, but in reality it is unlikely that he made many, if any at all. Rather Glassick appears to have concentrated on selling arms made by other makers, and often marked them with his retailer's mark. He likely also derived a substantial income from working as a gunsmith and repairing arms in the Memphis area. The handful of F. Glassick & Company marked arms that have been examined are the work of other makers, with Glassick's name added to the guns. Percussion derringer type pistols with Glassick's mark are known, but like those offered by Schneider (and later Schneider & Glassick), these guns appear to be the work of Nashville gunmaker Franz J. Bitterlich. A small number of sporting rifles with Glassick's mark are known as well.

Firearms author and historian Charles Worman postulates that the location of Memphis on the Mississippi River may have created a substantial market among the riverboat men for derringer style pocket pistols, and this may explain why the most commonly encountered Schneider, Glassick or Schneider & Glassick marked firearms are of that pattern. The location of Memphis, like Natchez, also created a reasonable market for "Plains Rifles" among the men who used that river port city as a jumping off point for the southern routes further west, particularly the gold fields of California.

The rifle illustrated in this article is one of the rarely encountered **F. Glassick & Company** marked half-stocked Plains Rifles that was probably made and retailed during the 1850s. It is a nice example of a mid-1850s Plains Rifle that was retailer-marked by a very desirable and rarely encountered Memphis gunsmith. It is a high quality percussion plains rifle that, following Glassick's business model, was made by another gunmaker but sold by Glassick under his firm's name. The top flat of the rifle's octagon barrel is marked in a single line: **F. GLASSICK & Co, MEMPHIS, TENN.** However, the percussion lock is marked in a single line on the lower edge, forward of the hammer: **MOORE N.Y.** This mark suggests that the rifle was manufactured by either J.P. Moore or Daniel Moore, who were both working in New York State as gunmakers during that era. It is possible that Moore only produced the lock, but realistically, based upon what we know about Glassick's operation, it is more likely that Moore produced the entire rifle.



Fig. 3 – F. Glassick & Co. mark on top of barrel.



Fig. 4 – Lockplate, double triggers and German silver trigger guard with two finger rest extensions. Note the gun maker's name "Moore, NY" on the lock, as well as the engraved decoration.

The rifle is a classic mid-1850s half-stock plains style percussion rifle, although the barrel is slightly longer than typical for these arms, and the gun is of the highest “trim level” or grade usually encountered for that type of gun. The typical Plains Rifle has a barrel length of about 30” to 36”, although both shorter and longer examples have been noted. The rifles also came in three basic trim levels, with the lowest level being an unadorned, “workingman’s” rifle usually with a single trigger, the mid-level rifle being brass or iron mounted (with or without patchbox) and usually with double set triggers, and the finest grade having German silver mountings, often with a circular patchbox and double set triggers.

This particular rifle is about 55 ½” in overall length with a 39” octagon barrel that measures about 7/16” across the flats and just shy of 1” in cross section. The breech is decorated with a pair of platinum bands, indicative of a higher end rifle. The bore measures about .45 caliber, and appears to have had the first couple of inches of the bore nearest the muzzle bored smooth as a built in “false muzzle” to facilitate bullet starting. This was done to speed the loading process and to prevent damage to the muzzle while starting the bullet. It should not be mistaken for the removable “false muzzles” found in high quality very accurate target and bench rest rifles of the period.

The barrel is secured to the stock with two wood screws through the breech plug tang and a pair of wedges through the stock and barrel tenons. The barrel has a heavy 25 ½” long under lug, with two iron ramrod pipes secured to it. The half-stocked forend is tipped with an iron cap. The balance of the rifle’s furniture is of German silver, an option only found on the highest grade of the plains rifles of the era. The trigger guard, buttplate, round patchbox, entry pipe, lock screw escutcheon and wedge escutcheons are all of German silver. A German silver decorative figure is mounted on the cheek rest of the rifle, showing a sporting man with his dog and rifle at the shoulder. The circular German silver patchbox is set into the right side of the butt and is lightly engraved with simple decorations. The buttplate and entry pipe have simple engraved embellishments.



Fig. 5 – German silver patchbox (closed) with engraved decoration. Note the checkering on the wrist of the stock.



Fig. 6 – German silver patchbox with trapdoor open showing the circular hole. Also note the German silver buttplate.



Fig. 7 – German silver decoration on the cheek rest on the left side of the stock.

The silver trigger guard has very nicely executed foliate vines engraved on it. It has a pair of finger rest extensions at its rear, and the guard surrounds a double-set trigger mechanism with a heavily curved rear “set” trigger and straight front “firing” trigger.



Fig. 8 – Silver trigger guard. Note the engraved decoration.

The percussion lock is secured to the stock with a single screw through the flat of the stock opposite the lock. The lock is decorated with a punch dot and double-line border pattern around its edges and simple foliate engraving at the front and the rear. The hammer has the same pattern of foliate engraving as well. The rifle has simple fixed sights, with a semi-buckhorn rear sight dovetailed onto the barrel about 10" forward of the breech plug. The front sight is a German silver Rocky Mountain style blade dovetailed about 1 ½" from the muzzle. The blade is about 1" long, .13" tall and .05" wide. A simple, and somewhat crudely fashioned 38" long wooden ramrod is located under the barrel, secured by the two iron pipes and the German silver entry pipe. The ramrod appears to be a replacement.



Fig. 9 – Muzzle, replacement ramrod and German silver front sight.

Although this **F. Glassick & Company Plains Rifle** has seen a lot of use, it is in remarkably very good condition overall. It appears to be all original and complete with the exception of the replacement wooden ramrod. Plains rifles, no matter what trim level or grade, were made for rough, hard usage and the current condition of many of them reflect that usage. The rifle illustrated here retains good markings throughout, although the Glassick retailer mark on the barrel is slightly weak. The barrel is mostly smooth with a dark brown coloration that appears to be a combination of remaining original browned finish, oxidized brown patina and some more recent touch-up browning or toning to make the appearance more even. The barrel shows some moderate pinpricking and light pitting around the breech area, indicative of significant use with the highly caustic mercuric percussion caps of the period. Otherwise the metal remains mostly smooth, with only some scattered areas of light pinpricking and some small flecks and patches of minor surface oxidation. The barrel also shows some impact marks and minor surface mars around the breech area as well.

The bore of this rifle rates about fair to good. It is dark and dirty and appears to only retain traces of the original rifling, although a cleaning might improve it somewhat. As noted, the upper couple of inches of the bore appear smooth, probably for use as a false muzzle for bullet starting. The percussion lock has a medium pewter patina, with some scattered pinpricking and minor surface oxidation present, as well as some oxidized age discoloration. The hammer has a darker patina and shows light to moderate pitting over its surfaces, again the result of the corrosive percussion cap flash.

The action of the rifle functions correctly, with the set trigger mechanism operating as it should. The sear and tumbler both show wear, and the hammer will no longer engage in the half-cock

notch. However, the full-cock position does operate correctly and the trigger pull with the trigger set remains very light and crisp. All of the German silver hardware remains in fine condition and any engraved embellishments remain relatively crisp and clear. The mountings have an attractive dull silvery patina with a slightly milky tone, showing nice age. The patchbox is in fine mechanical shape and functions as it should, closing tightly and opening only when appropriate pressure is applied. Both sights appear original to the rifle and present a sharp, clear sight picture. The stock of the rifle is in very good condition and matches the condition of the balance of the gun very well. The stock is solid, complete and full length, with no splices or breaks noted. Upon removing the barrel is appears that there was an internal crack in the stock that was repaired at some point in time, but there does not appear to be any replaced wood and no structural issues appear to be present in the wood. The stock retains nice edges and shows no obvious signs of sanding. The cheek rest remains crisp and sharp with nice edges as well. The stock does show some minor bumps and dings, but nothing serious or indicative of abuse or misuse.

One can speculate about the history of this particular rifle. While it is possible that the rifle went west during the Gold Rush era, it is just as likely that it remained in the south and may well have gone to war with a Confederate volunteer at the very beginning of the American Civil War. While civilian rifles did not remain in Confederate service very long, they certainly played an important role in the arming of the southern volunteers during spring and summer of 1861. Memphis marked guns from this era are particularly desirable and very scarce, and they are rarely offered for sale.



Fig. 10 – Left side of rifle. Note the German silver furniture, including the decoration on the flat of the stock opposite the lock.