

# SCHNEIDER & CO PISTOLS – An Extremely Rare Cased Pair of Single-Shot Percussion Pistols

*By Tim Prince  
College Hill Arsenal*

*All photographs courtesy of Tim Prince of College Hill Arsenal in Nashville, TN.*

This is a really fine and wonderful cased set of very scarce Schneider & Co. marked Memphis single shot percussion rifled pistols c1856-1860. The guns are very high quality and appear to have been manufactured by Robert Sieber, a noted St. Louis gunsmith who also worked for the famed Hawken brothers. To my knowledge only one other set of “belt” sized cased, Schneider marked pistols are known. Nearly all other Schneider marked guns are of the “derringer” or “pocket” size.



## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

William S. Schneider was a gunsmith and gunmaker working in Memphis, TN during the tumultuous years leading up to the American Civil War. He is probably most famous as the

partner of Frederick Glassick, who made up the second half of the firm of 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 probably adding musket sized cones (nipples) and sling rings or swivels.

According to Frank Sellers’ *American Gunsmiths*, William S. Schneider worked under his own name (or as Schneider & Co) in Memphis from 1859-1873, worked as Schneider & Glassick from 1860-1862 and Frederick Glassick worked under his name (or F. Glassick & Co) in Memphis from 1840-1864. Apparently most of these dates and research are wrong, as delving into Memphis City directories that are available online 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. The 1855-56 City Directory for Memphis lists “*F Glassick – Gunsmith*” working on Jefferson Street (between Main & Front) 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 1865-66 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, and even “Mrs. Wm. Schneider” is no longer listed as of 1876.

What is interesting is that apparently Schneider & Glassick made a go at working as partners around 1856-57, but apparently gave up by 1859. They then reunited about 1860 and worked together through the fall of Memphis in mid-March of 1862. According to a January 3, 1858 advertisement by Schneider & Company in the **Memphis Daily Appeal**, the firm wanted to: “*Return thanks to their friends and the public in general, for their liberal patronage for the last two years, and to inform them that they keep on hand a large assortment of fine GUNS & PISTOLS of their manufacture. Also: DERRINGER & COLT’S PISTOLS.*” The ad goes on to list the other related items offered by the company. This advertisement clearly places the establishment of the firm Schneider & Co sometime around January of 1856 (two years earlier than the date of the advertisement). Although his ad clearly states that Schneider offered “*guns and pistols, of their own manufacture,*” the handful of extant examples that bear the Schneider & Co mark are all guns that were manufactured by other makers and then retailer marked by Schneider. Most examples are small “derringer” style pistols, which are generally believed to have been manufactured by Franz Bitterlich of Nashville, TN. To my knowledge, only a handful of pistols are known to be marked by Schneider that are not “derringers”, and of those I am only aware of two double cased pistol sets that bear his name.



## DESCRIPTION

This pair of pistols is an example of one of these extremely rare Double Cased Pistol Sets retailed by Schneider & Co of Memphis, Tennessee. Based upon the style of the guns, his documentable working period and markings on the barrels, I would place the guns as circa 1856-1860. The guns are a pair of very finely crafted single shot, percussion rifled pistols. Both guns are marked on the top barrel flat in two lines: **SCHNEIDER & Co / MEMPHIS. TENN**, and are numbered on top of their breeches **1** and **2** respectively, indicating that they were manufactured as a pair. (Note: *To make it easier to differentiate between the two guns in the photographs the #1 gun has its hammer down in most photographs while #2 has its hammer cocked in most photographs.*)



*Pistol #1 – Right side*



*Pistol #1 – Left Side*



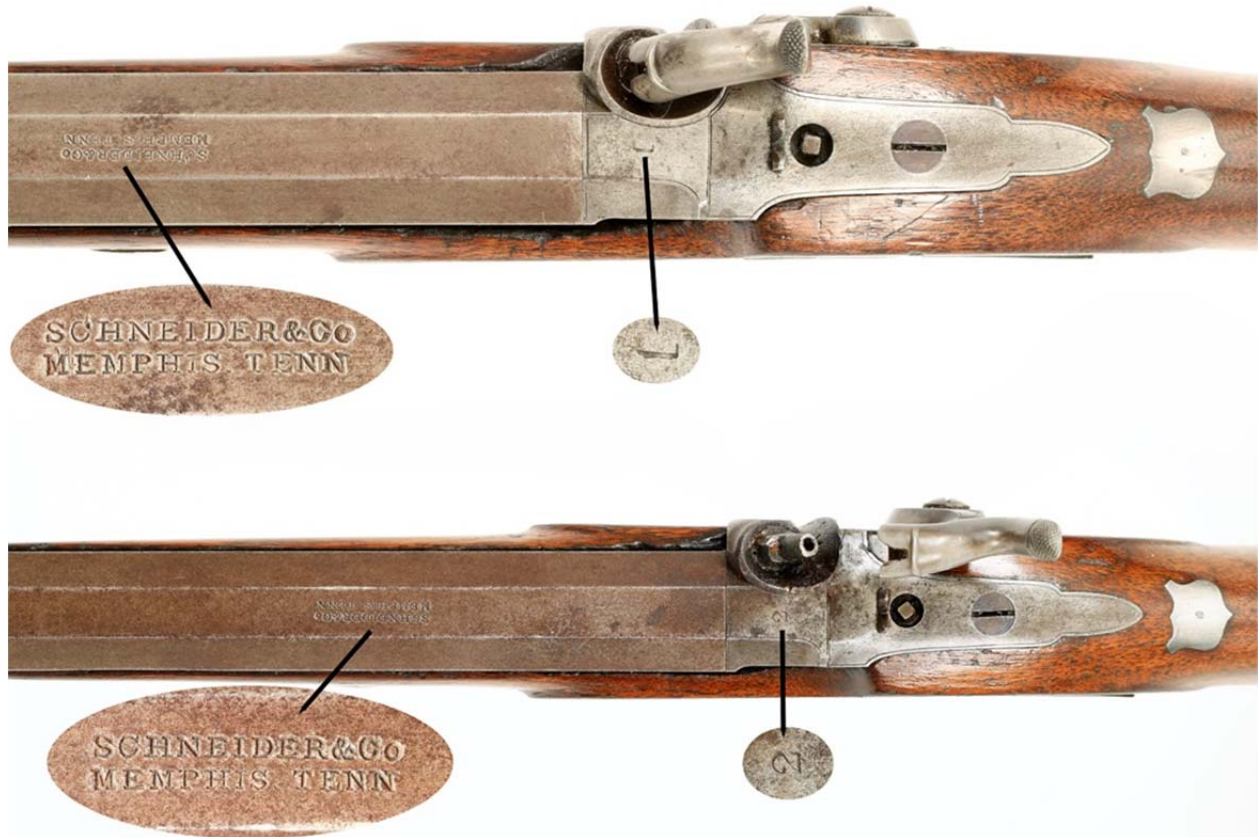
*Pistol#2 – Right side*



*Pistol #2 – Left side*

The guns bear no other markings externally, but both are stamped under the barrel: **R. SIEBER**. Robert Sieber was a gunsmith and gunmaker working in St. Louis, Missouri circa 1857-1867. According to Sellers he worked for Jacob & Samuel Hawken in St. Louis circa 1857-1858. The 1857 St. Louis directory lists Sieber as a gunsmith located at 31 Washington Avenue. As no

guns (to my knowledge) marked by Schneider have been identified as his actual production, it is safe to assume that these pistols were manufactured by Sieber and retailed by Schneider. It is unclear if Sieber or Schneider did the accompanying casing, but from an economic standpoint it probably would have been more profitable for Schneider to manufacture the casing for the set.



*Top View of pistols. Note Schneider & Co. stamp, numbers and small hole with recessed square post that may have been for long-range sights.*

The pair of pistols are nominally 15 1/8" in overall length, with 9" long octagonal barrels that measure about 3/8" across the flats. The bores are nominally .42 caliber and are rifled with seven grooves and the barrels, which were originally browned, are about 7/8" thick. The barrels are equipped with hook breeches and are secured to the stocks with a single wedge and the breech hook. The entire cased set (two pistols, case and accessories) weighs about 6 pounds.

The sights consist of a small fixed notch rear sight mounted on the breech tang and a .45 inch long "Rocky Mountain" German silver blade front sight dovetailed into a notch in the top of the barrel. A small hole with a recessed square post is present in the top of the tangs, and I believe that these receptacles accepted long-range peep sights that are no longer present with the set.

The unmarked percussion locks are secured with a single screw that enters from the front of the lock, between the hammer and the bolster. The locks were originally case hardened. They feature high quality internal parts and each tumbler is equipped with a fly, like a fine target rifle lock of the period would be. The pistols have adjustable triggers that are very responsive and border on being "hair triggers" to contribute to very accurate shooting.

The iron trigger guards are lightly engraved on their bows with decorative floral splays and detailed borders. Both trigger guards have very ergonomic, yet artistic spurs at their rear to enhance the shooter's grip.

The pistols are mounted with simple German silver embellishments, with large oval butt caps, shield shaped escutcheons in the wrists, flowing decorative side plates and small inlays on the leading edge of their subtle Schnabel forends. The barrel wedges also pass through a pair of German silver escutcheons.



*Pistol #1 – Right and left sides. Note the lock, side panel and trigger guard spur. Also note the screw in front of the trigger for adjusting the trigger-pull.*



*Pistol #2 – Right and left sides. Note the lock, side panel and trigger guard spur. Also note the screw in front of the trigger for adjusting the trigger-pull.*



*Pistol #1 – Top and bottom*



*Pistol#2 – Top and bottom*

## CONDITION

These pistols are in overall very good+ to near fine condition and are very high quality target grade pistols, without excessive embellishment. They appear to have been designed as high quality working guns rather than simply decorative arms. Both guns retain some traces of their original browned finish on the their barrels, with pistol #1 retaining mere traces and pistol #2 retaining about 10%-15% of its original brown. Both pistols have barrels that retain sharp edges and very crisp, clear markings. Both guns show some light pinpricking around the breech and bolster area, as well as around the muzzle, and they both show some lightly scattered minor surface oxidation and pinpricking scattered along their lengths. Neither gun exhibits any real pitting to speak of on the barrels.

Both pistols retain very good+ to near fine bores, with strong rifling in both bores. The bores are fairly bright and show only some lightly scattered pitting along their lengths. A good scrubbing would probably improve both bores to some degree.



*Pistol #1 – Butt and muzzle.*

*Pistol #2 – Muzzle and butt.*

The locks of both pistols retain some of their original case hardened coloring. Both locks retain about 50% faded case colors on their interiors and about 10%-20% faded and dulled case



hardening on their exteriors. The hammers retain slightly more case coloring, probably about 30%+ faded and dulled colors. The overall appearance of both locks is smooth dull pewter gray with some traces of blue and purple mottling mixed with darker smoky gray and brown tones. Both locks are mechanically sound and function exactly as they should, although the #2 pistol will sometimes not hold on full cock, suggesting the adjustable trigger needs some minor attention. The lock functions perfectly when removed from the pistol and remains very crisp. The single screw securing each lock is fire blued, and each screw retains about 50% of its original fire blued finish, which has dulled and faded.

The trigger guards have very attractive smoky blue-gray patina, suggesting they were probably originally blued, and the current appearance is that of faded bluing.

The one-piece walnut stocks are both in about near fine overall condition. The stocks are solid, full length and free of any breaks, cracks or repairs. Both stocks show a small, old sliver of wood missing along the barrel to stock joint. Pistol #1 is missing this small piece of wood just forward of the bolster and pistol #2 is missing this small piece on the reverse where the barrel and breech join. Both are minor and not particularly noticeable, but they are mentioned for exactness. The stocks have finely checkered grips that remain relatively crisp and sharp with only some light wear to the sharpest high points of the checkering. The stocks both show some minor bumps, dings and surface mars from handling, use and storage, but nothing substantial. The stocks appear to have been finished in oil and hand rubbed to a fine sheen. Much of that original luster remains present on the wood.

## **THE CASE AND ACCESSORIES**



*The pistols in the case with accessories.*

The guns are contained in a period case that was clearly designed for the pistols. The case measures 18" x 10" x 2 3/4" and appears to be made from highly figured mahogany with a soft wood bottom. The case remains in about very good condition with the expected nicks, dings and mars that a pistol case endures during its lifetime. A grain crack is evident in the top of the case. The dovetailed joints remain solid and the case is mechanically strong, although it appears to have slightly warped during its lifetime. The interior of the case is lined in dark blue velveteen that may be original to the casing. The lining shows moderate wear and thinning, contributing to the belief that this fabric has been in the case for at least the majority of the set's lifetime. The interior dividers are in good condition but many are loose or even partially detached. The pistols fit the casing perfectly, and there is no doubt they go together.

The case contains a number of accessories that may or may not be original to the pistol pair and the casing. It is likely that at least some of these accouterments were added either as replacements during the working life of the pistols or at some point over the last 50 years.

The accessories include an adjustable copper powder flask with an octagonal cross section and a tapered, rounded bottom. The flask measures 7 15/16" long, 2 7/8" wide and tapers from 1 1/2" thick at the top to 1" thick at the bottom. The adjustable spout still functions as does the charger and charger spring.



*Accessories on top of mahogany case. They include: two cap tins, starting rod, rammer, cleaning rod, cone or nipple wrench, adjustable copper powder flask, two bullet molds and case key. The balls are not shown.*

Two iron single cavity scissor-style bullet molds are included in the casing. One is marked **85** for "85-bore" and has a .392" cavity. The other is marked **80** for "80-bore" and has a .406" cavity. Most of the lead balls in the casing measure about .402"-.404" suggesting they were cast from the 80-bore mold. This would suggest the balls were intended for use with a patch of about .0075", which would produce a loaded diameter of .419" (ball + 2 thickness of patch). A .0075 patch would be about twice the thickness of a modern sheet of 22lbs paper. The smaller 85-bore

mold would allow a much thicker .0135” patch to be used, about 4 times thicker than the above-mentioned paper. A tightly patched round ball would be quite accurate in these pistols.

The presence of a heavy-duty, lead-tipped starting rod suggests this was used to start the patched balls in the muzzle. A rather crudely carved wooden rammer that is exactly the right length for the barrels is also present. This rod shows good usage and may be a period of use replacement. A brass tipped ebony shafted cleaning rod is present, with a removable iron jag head. An iron, “T” shaped cone (nipple) wrench is included with the set, but it is not appropriate to the casing because it is not the correct size for the pistols, being slightly large, and should not be used.

Two period japanned cap tins are included with the set. One is a small, Eley Brothers marked tin and the other is a tall, unmarked tin that is lined with paper. Both tins retain some period caps. The original key for the case is included and the case lock still functions correctly.

## **PROVENANCE**

This set was discovered in an old home in Memphis during the 1960s and has been part of some of the most famous and heralded southern pistol and arms collections in the United States. Over the years this set has been part of the Frank Berry II collection, the John Montague collection and the John Ashworth collection. It is harder to imagine better provenance when it comes to southern retailer marked (especially Tennessee and Memphis marked) arms.

This wonderful set will be a real centerpiece in any collection of high quality antebellum southern pistols. These are wonderful, unmolested guns that belong in a very advanced collection.

***About the author:*** *Tim Prince is a noted authority on antique arms, particularly Civil War weapons. He is a recognized expert on Confederate weapons. He is one of the co-authors of "The English Connection," the definitive book on Confederate Civil War purchases of arms and equipment from England. He is also the owner of College Hill Arsenal, a purveyor of fine antique arms, accoutrements and accessories for both the beginning and advanced discriminating collector. See [www.collegehillarsenal.com](http://www.collegehillarsenal.com)*