

By Bob Woodfill

THE HAWKEN SHOP owned by Greg Roberts in Oak Harbor, WA is currently offering an authentic copy of a Sam Hawken classic plains rifle. The wood comes 95% inlet. The double-set triggers and lock are 100% assembled and require only a minimal amount of finishing. The hooked, patent breech has been properly fit to the barrel, and all of the barrel wedge and sight dovetails have been cut in the proper position on the barrel. The underib is installed.

The Rice .54-caliber barrel has 7 lands and grooves. The rifling is 12 to 14 thousands deep with a 1:48" twist as were original Hawken shop barrels. A copy of a T. Gibbons lock, similar to one of the original Gemmer locks is included. A hooked, patent breech and double-set triggers are copied from original Gemmer shop moldings. All accessories from the steel buttplate to the steel nose cap are also original Gemmer shop copies. The semi-inlet maple stock is an exact copy of an original S. Hawken rifle once owned by Art Ressel.

Because of these outstanding reproductions of original Hawken parts, I just had to order a kit to evaluate the parts, so I purchased a kit with a 34" long barrel and the standard grade maple stock. In this article, I will first discuss the components and the assembly of the rifle, and then the metal and wood finishes that I used.



THE HAWKEN SHOP kit

When my kit arrived, and I opened the box, I was extremely impressed with the high-quality of the components. And, yes, the patent breech was properly fitted to the barrel, and the double-set triggers and lock were fully assembled and working as advertised. As a rifle builder, I can tell you that this work saves a lot of time and 'mistakes'. The kit includes a set of assembly instructions and a full-scale drawing of a S. Hawken rifle for reference.

Let's look at the barrel first. My .54-caliber barrel arrived as ordered—tapered from 1 1/8" at the breech to 1" at the muzzle and cut to 34" length, plus it was again crowned for seating a round ball! The underib was installed with four small screws holding it to the barrel. The location and cuts were made for the two thimbles, again lessening the chance for mistakes. Four dovetailed cuts were made on the top and bottom of the barrel for the two underlugs and the two sights. Again, being cut properly and in the proper position saves time and potential mistakes. The patent breech was properly installed and indexed with no gap shown between the end of the barrel and the breech. Finally, just to put the icing on the cake, a copy of the famous stamp, S. Hawken St. Louis, was placed at the proper distance behind the rear sight slot. The barrel stamp is correct in size and style as the originals with a period after the S. and St. but with no comma between the two stamps. As were the originals, the stamping was made with two machine stamps [S. Hawken + St. Louis]. They seldom formed a straight line on the top of the barrel. Now how many of you have two machine made barrel stamps with the proper size and style of letters as the original Hawken shop stamps? Well, THE HAWKEN SHOP does! The barrel was smoothly polished with a #320 grit.



THE HAWKEN SHOP barrel stamp

I took the breech off of the barrel. An inspection of the breech plug shows excellent machining. The plug is indexed and fit snug to the barrel in two places! The breech plug was then retightened using anti-seize lubricant. You will need a breech plug wrench with a long handle to remove the breech plug without damaging it.



The powder chamber.

The bolster is connected to a large powder chamber about $\frac{1}{2}$ x $\frac{1}{2}$ with a straight line hole about $\frac{3}{16}$ in diameter.



In a small burlap bag which comes in the kit were the remaining components to build the rifle. In several sealed plastic bags was each of the accessories: butt plate, toe plate, barrel key escutcheons, thimbles, etc. And better yet, in each sealed bag was a smaller sealed plastic bag with the screws or bolts associated with that accessory! No excuse for getting them mixed. Included were the

THE HAWKEN SHOP parts.

appropriate size drills and taps. A great amount of thought and work has gone into assembling the kit with proper size screws and bolts, so that there will be no confusion as to which screw or bolt goes with which component. The drill holes in the components are properly positioned and countersunk so that the screws and bolts can be finished flush with the surface of the component.



The tang portion of the breech plug was nicely matched to the patent breech, but the final fit and shaping will have to be done after assembly. The holes for the two tang bolts on the top of the tang were properly located and counter sunk for the tang bolt heads—again a time saver and less of a chance for mistakes.

<u>Fitting the Butt Plate:</u> Following the kit's instructions, I started assembly of the rifle first with the butt plate and toe plate to avoid breaking the toe off in case a drop of the stock is made. Fitting the butt plate is aided by coating the inside of the butt plate with a layer of soot from a kerosene lamp. Where soot shows on the stock indicates contact with the steel butt plate and where unwanted wood can be removed.

With the butt plate tapped in place, you can center the two screw holes with a 7/32" diameter drill bit that just fits the pre-drilled holes in the buttplate. Drill only 1/16"

deep into the wood and continue drilling these screw holes about 7/8" deep with an 11/64" diameter drill bit that is held perfectly square to the butt plate surface. THE HAWKEN SHOP has supplied two extra wood screws which can be used either as slave (try) screws to form the holes or extras to be used in indexing the screws N-S. I always coat the wood screws with Johnson Paste Wax which serves as a lubricant and preservative when inserting the screws into the wood. The two butt plate screws are then tightened down positioning the butt plate. The two round-headed wood screws supplied with kit have had their heads modified to fit the concave holes in the butt plate. They are left high and not indexed during assembly. Later, during the polishing and finishing of the kit parts, they will be indexed and finished off flush with the surface of the butt plate. At that time the screw slots will have to be deepened with

a 3/8" diameter countersink. THE HAWKEN SHOP indicated that standard steel #8 wood screws can also be used.



Butt plate installed.

<u>Fitting the Toe Plate:</u> With the butt plate in place the excess wood left on the toe of the stock can be removed with a chisel cutting from the toe, forward to avoid chipping the wood. Next, a wood rasp is used to level the wood for the installation of the toe plate. As you fit the toe plate, you will have to file a 45° angle on the rear of the toe plate to properly join the butt plate. The top of the toe plate to the rear of the trigger bar is a straight line along the bottom of the butt stock.



Toe plate inlet..

Once the bottom of the toe plate has been deepened to form the desired line along the lower edge of the butt stock, the screws can be positioned over the pre-drilled holes with a 3/32" diameter drill bit. Detail is again adhered to by THE HAWKEN SHOP, as they provided two different length screws. Of course, the shorter screw goes in the pre-drilled hole towards the toe! At this time you can face off the flat edge of the toe of the butt plate to match the toe plate. The screws will be countersunk and indexed later during the finishing of the metal parts.

<u>Inletting the Tang and Barrel:</u> The tang almost fell into the mortise with some minor removal of wood. The soot shows contact at the head and tail of the tang, but that will change some when the tang bolts are tightened.

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Tang inlet.

The hook of the breech is inserted into the tang and the barrel lowered into the barrel mortise. Only a slight amount of scraping and sanding was needed in the barrel channel to fit the tapered barrel.

Fitting the Lock: As THE HAWKEN SHOP cautions in the instructions, the positioning and inletting of the lock has little room for error! I inletted the lock using the rear and bottom mortise edges as guides, which 'pushed' the lock as far up and as far forward as possible, without leaving any gaps around the edges of the lock plate. You will have to inlet the patent breech and barrel before cutting the notch for the bolster. I ground the bolster notch in the lock plate using a round grinding stone and a Dremel tool. Once the lock plate is inletted into its mortise to a depth of about 0.050" from touching the barrel, the hammer should be aligned with the nipple in an E-W direction. If not, you may have to heat and bend the hammer.



Lock fitted to the stock.

<u>Installing the Lock Bolt and Escutcheon</u>: Once you are satisfied with the position of the lock, you can drill for the lock plate screw through the pre-drilled hole in the lock plate with a #21 drill to the opposite lock panel. It is important in drilling this hole that you position the left lock panel flat or parallel to the base of your drill press. Remember the lock panels are tapered. The lock plate hole will be drilled slightly askew to the lock plate, but this will positioned it properly to avoid hitting the rear of the breech plug.

<u>Fitting the Tang Screws and Triggers</u>: The tang holes were drilled from the pre-centered holes on the tang downward into the pre-centered holes in the trigger plate. Once the pilot holes were drilled through to the trigger bar, the pilot holes were enlarged with a 11/64" drill bit. The holes in the trigger bar were tapped from the tang downward for the tang screws. Note that the front tang screw is drill and tapped at an angle into the trigger bar. I used the extra slave screws provided by THE HAWKEN SHOP to tighten the tang and trigger bar down to the wood. A little scraping was needed to fit the trigger bar to the trigger bar mortise. It should set squarely on the bottom of the mortise, so that when the tang screws are tightened, there is no movement of the trigger bar. Adjusting the Double-Set Triggers: The internal parts of the triggers were reassembled on the trigger bar and checked for clearance in the trigger mortise. The hammer can be cocked and let down on the nipple gently by holding down the front trigger. The hammer should also fire by either cocking the hammers or setting the double-set triggers, or by setting the double-set triggers and then cocking the hammer. The hammer should not move in the half-cock position by the pulling of either of the triggers. The creep or travel that the front trigger moves before engaging the hammer sear is adjusted with the small screw positioned between the set-triggers. The weight of pull can be coarsely adjusted by adjusting the rear hammer spring tension first. I was able to adjust the trigger pull with a minimum amount of creep to a 1 pound pull, again showing the results of the high-quality components provided in the kit.

<u>Barrel Underlugs and Wedges:</u> The dovetailed barrel underlugs are inserted into the barrel cuts and centered. I pin them with a small witness chisel from moving in an E-W direction and file off the edges flush with the octagonal flats to save removing unnecessary wood from the barrel channel.



Barrel lug installed.

I then draw the opening for the wedges in the underlugs on the side of the stock with a red pencil. The depth of the underlugs is the width of the tapered barrel at the barrel key locations.



Three drill holes are drilled between the guidelines. Some cross drilling of the outside drill holes with a hand drill will remove most of the wood between the guidelines. I then use a series of small files to enlarge the drill holes into a rectangular opening for the barrel wedge keys. The end of a barrel wedge can then be used to align the barrel key escutcheons for inletting. Draw a line around the escutcheon and as the instructions say, cut 'inside' the line! To make these cuts, I use a small screwdriver about 0.080" wide that has been ground into a chisel.



Outline of barrel key escutcheon.

I make lots of small cuts, inside the pencil line, with my small screwdriver/chisel and remove the excess wood with a $\frac{1}{8}$ " chisel. Repeated sooting the barrel wedge escutcheon and inletting to its mortise will produce a good fit. The escutcheon is then inserted into the mortise using the barrel wedge key as a guide. The two small wood screws, provided by THE HAWKEN SHOP, are then centered and drilled 5/16" deep with a 1/16" diameter drill. The final screws will be indexed and filed flush with the escutcheon during the fit and finish stage of the stock finishing.



Barrel key escutcheon installed.

Installing the Rear Thimble and Nose Cap: The rear thimble is inlet into the stock using a piece of a 7/16" wood ramrod to hold it in the soot lamp flame, and then placing it on the stock for fit. Once the rear thimble is inlet, the 7/16" ramrod can be used to make sure that the ramrod will fit the pre-drilled 7/16" diameter hole in the stock. THE HAWKEN SHOP has done a good job with the alignment of the rear thimble with the ramrod hole in the stock. The steel nose cap can then be inletted using the barrel as a guide. The nose cap joins the stock at a 90° angle to the centerline of the stock.

Again, the 7/16" dowel can be used to align the nose cap with the barrel. Once the rear entry thimble and the nose cap are properly positioned, I remove them and drill two #31 holes in the wood near their centers from outside of the stock. The barrel is then taken off and the two #31 holes are drilled from the barrel channel into both the rear thimble and the nose cap. Use a 6x40 tap to tap into the rear thimble and the nose cap. Insert the two 6x40 screws provided by THE HAWKEN SHOP into the rear thimble and nose cap. Any extra screw length projecting into the rear entry thimble or the nose cap can be ground off with a round grinding wheel and a Dremel tool, so that the ramrod can be inserted easily. At this stage I rough file the wood down and polish the rear thimble and nose cap.



Rear thimble and nose cap installed.

Installing the Underib: Next the underib can be positioned on the barrel using the four pre-drilled holes and screws. The rear of the underib will have to be cut to length. I leave only a 0.020" to 0.030" gap between the underib and the end of the nose cap for a professional look. I cut a small crescent in the end of the underib about 3/8" long with a ¼" diameter ball end mill and fill it with solder. With the underib screws aligned, I hold both the underib and barrel in place to solder the underib to the barrel, in a similar way that the original Hawken shop did. You can see the little crescent of solder on the end of the



Underib installed.

Attaching the Thimbles to the Underib: The thimbles are soft soldered to the underib. THE HAWKEN SHOP has located their position on the underib and milled a slot for each of them.



(Continued on page 30.)

<u>Making a Hawken-Style Ramrod:</u> I have examined several original Hawken ramrods. They generally have a brass tip about ³/₄" long with the wood dimpled on the muzzle end to seat a round ball. The other end of the ramrod has a tapered steel tip threaded for a cleaning jag. THE HAWKEN SHOP provided a proper length 7/16" diameter deluxe HICKORY ramrod in their kit.

The breech end tip of the ramrod is a $1 \frac{1}{2}$ " long 3/8" diameter commercial steel tip that has the end threaded for a jag or brush. Once the tip is snugly fit to the rod, I dill a 1/16" diameter hole through both the tip and ramrod and insert a 1/16" cross pin as the Hawken shop did. I countersink the 1/16" diameter holes in the tip with a 3/8" diameter countersink and peen the heads before finishing them off flush with the surface. Lastly, I put the ramrod end into a lathe with a live center, and taper both the ramrod and ramrod tip for about 6-8" for ease of seating the ramrod into the stock.



For the muzzle end of the ramrod I drill out a 7/16" brass tip and cut it to a $\frac{3}{4}$ " length. Once the tip has been fit and positioned on the ramrod, I again use a 1/16" cross pin to hold it in place. The final step is returning the ramrod to the lathe and countersinking the wood with a 5/8" diameter cutter to seat a round ball. This concave wood end always shows on original Hawken ramrods.

Installing the Sights: Both the rear and front sights were easily driven into the 3/8" dovetailed cuts on the top of the barrel. THE HAWKEN SHOP has provided the proper locations for the sights with the front sight positioned 1 ³/₄" from the muzzle. It is made of silver soldered on a copper base, just as it was on the originals.

Front sight.



The rear sight is a beautiful full-buckhorn, rear-sloping sight as were the originals. You will have to file a notch in the sight. I find a 0.100" width notch fits my old eyes.

Wood dim-

ple on end

of ramrod.

Rear sight.

<u>Finishing</u>: The finishing of both the wood and metal of THE HAWKEN SHOP kit begins first by shooting the rifle and filing down the sights for the desired Zero while the rifle is completely assembled. Once the sights are filed in, I mark them with witness marks, and remove them from the gun so that final barrel finishing is easier.



Tang screws filed flush with tang.

At this point I like to install and index the final bolts and screws. I then shape the stock and mill file all of the metal to the wood line. Next, I sand/shape the stock with #120 no-fill sandpaper from Brownells.

First, I establish a center-line for the forearm and buttstock. For the forearm a line is drawn from the center of the rear entry thimble to the center of the trigger plate. I will work from both sides of this line.



Center-line on bottom of forearm.

Next, I establish a center-line for the bottom flat of the buttstock from the finals of the trigger bar and the toe plate to get a straight line. The width of the toe plate determines the width of the flat which extends forward to the center of the double-set triggers.



Center-line on bottom of buttstock.

The center-line of the comb is drawn from to center of the rear tang screw to the center of the screw on the butt plate extension. The thin front edge of the comb should center on this line!



Center-line on the top of the comb.

I then shape the forearm sides from the center-line to form a round forearm. The same method is used on the top of the comb and the tang area. The width of the toeplate determines the width of the bottom flat of the butt stock and blends into the trigger bar at the position of the forward trigger.

Once the stock is shaped with files, I start the sanding using Brownell's No-Fill sandpaper in #120, #220, and #320 grits. I use a small flat piece of wood about 1 ¹/₂" X 3" and #120 to sand parts of forearm and the buttstock

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30 MuzzleBlasts

square. Now the stock should be about 99% shaped. After the #120 sanding I raise the grain of the stock with a damp rag soaked in water. The raised grains of wood are then sanded off with #220 flush with the surface of the stock. Another round of raising the grain and sanding with #320 is as far as I go down on sanding. After the #320 sanding of the stock, I rub 'sand' the stock with #0000 steel wool and make sure that all areas are smooth.

At this point, I stain the stock with Homer Dangler's alcohol based Golden Brown stain using a wool applicator and let it dry. If you like the color, then go ahead and apply the finish. If you want the stock darker, just apply another coat of Dangler's stain before applying the finish.

Birchwood Casey's Tru-Oil gun stock finish serves my purposes for a finish for Hawken rifles. After the stain dries, apply a liberal coat with a wool applicator and let it dry15-20 minutes and then WIPE IT OFF WITH A SOFT RAG. Wiping it off will not interfere with the underlying coat(s) of stain. I apply 5-10 coats of Tru-Oil followed by wiping with a soft cloth. Before the next coat of Tru-Oil is applied, I 'lightly' buff the stock with #0000 steel wool. Tru-Oil has a drier added to boiled linseed oil. The original Hawken stock finish was a lacquer mixed with a stain. During all of this sanding, staining and finishing of the stock, the metal parts remain installed on the stock to preserve wood edges and metal-to-wood fit. After the finish is applied and the stock dries thoroughly, I remove the metal accessories, polish them and either brown/rust blue or case-harden them and re-install them on the stock.

At this stage I again fire the rifle for a Zero before I deepen the witness marks on the sights/barrel. Scratches to the stock can be rubbed out using #0000 steel wool and a few drops of Birchwood Casey's Tru-Oil.

In summary, I find THE HAWKEN SHOP kit a true and accurate copy of a late-period S. Hawken rifle. All parts of the kit assembled properly. The fit of metal parts to the wood semi-inlet was excellent. Because of the pre-assembled lock, triggers, and breech, considerable time is saved and errors avoided.

I can recommend THE HAWKEN SHOP kit to someone who wants to build a true and accurate copy of a late-period S. Hawken rifle. Contact Greg Roberts at www.thehawkenshop.com for current prices and delivery. MB



around, whether it was mules, coonhounds or farm equipment. He told me one time that it was a good trade if both parties thought they got the better of the other. For not knowing any better, I feel like I got a decent deal on that rifle and gear."

Laboue chuckled. "I doubt Jake has more than ten dollar in whole lot. No matter. AFC will reimburse you for cost. Just show receipt to Crooks' clerk when you meet to sign contract."

Jon threw up his hand in silent resignation. "Then I guess the old fox got the better of me and the company."

Laboue patted him on the shoulder. "We French have a saying about that—C'est la vie."

The rest of the day was spent making final preparations for the major leg of the *Yellow Stone's* maiden voyage. At mid-afternoon, Jon joined Laboue at the AFC St. Louis headquarters to meet Ramsey Crooks. Crooks was Pierre Chouteau's administrative superior in the company, the ranking man and principal representative of John Jacob Astor. Laboue ushered Jon into Crooks' office, introduced him in a perfunctory yet courteous manner and quickly exited.

Crooks sat behind a massive mahogany desk strewn with documents and stacks of ledgers. He peered at Jon with a changeless, somnolent expression as if his baggy eyelids would close at any second. He breathed heavily, and his voice was punctuated with wheezes and coughs.

"So you're the young doctor who wants the adventure of a lifetime." Crooks began a chuckle that disintegrated into a fit of coughing. He tried to stifle the cough with a white handkerchief as he continued.

"Well, my good fellow, you shall have it indeed...if you are man enough. Our Upper Missouri activities are demanding on both man and beast. When I was younger, I could meet those demands—paddling a canoe all day or poling a keelboat with a dozen other sweating youngsters. Now all I can paddle is paper from the desk to the door. Among your various duties you'll be paddling paper yourself. All these Frenchies put together would not make one mediocre accountant. We need someone upriver with a head for numbers and facility with English."

"I don't see my primary capacity as an accountant for the company, Mr. Crooks."

"No, of course not. Monsieur Chouteau informed me of your proposal to vaccinate our Indian allies against smallpox. I just meant that an on-site English reader will take away the Frenchies' excuse for not understanding company directives."

"I'll be glad to help out in that regard."

"Good. Excellent. Then I wish you success in your venture. I'm sure you will learn a lot of practical field medicine in the next year. Do you have any questions before we enter into our contract?

"I'm sure they'll be answered in due time, Mr. Crooks."

Crooks' smile made his face look like a squat Halloween pumpkin.

"Spoken like a veteran engagé already. Here are duplicates of the contract. Please read them over carefully. If you agree to the terms, sign each where indicated by the X."

Jon read over the terms of the contract. They were simple and direct, with provisions exactly as Chouteau had described them back in Louisville. He signed both copies in script. Then he took out his personal stamp and inkpad set that had been given each graduate of Transylvania Medical College. He carefully stamped his name in block letters under his signatures. Crooks' eyebrows signaled his surprise as he looked at the stamped name.

"Ah, a nice touch, your personal name stamp." He placed one copy into a thick folder and handed it to Jon.

"Good luck to you, Dr. Austin."

As Jon rose to leave, Crooks offered a bit of parting advice. "Oh, and by the way, those barbed iron arrowheads that we trade to the savages—they will move through human flesh only one way forward. Remember that, and you can handle half of the medical situations you will encounter upriver."

Jon nodded his appreciation and closed the door gently behind him.

A half-hour later, Jon walked into the Hawken Shop. He heard Laboue's familiar voice in the shop area. When he saw Jon, he held up the heavy rifle and cycled the lock. A shower of white-hot sparks sizzled in the priming pan then fell crackling to the floor.

"Ho-ho! She's a good one, this flintlock, she makes sparks anytime, better than caplock. You find flints everplace, but I never see percussion caps growing out of ground, eh?"

Jake and Sam Hawken stood behind him. Both were beaming with pride in the pyrotechnic display.

"Yep, she's a good-un, shore enough. As our little good-luck gift to a new engagé, we put a spare set of set trigger springs in the pouch along with your bullet mold. You're good to go!"

Jon felt well equipped for his western adventure with a rifle in one hand and a surgeon's satchel in the other. He wondered which would get the most use.

The next morning, Jon and Laboue arrived at the docks before dawn. As on every morning, Laboue went straight into the Yellow Stone's hold. Jon had come to understand that the Frenchman desired no company during his daily pilgrimage into the dark recesses of the hold to get liquored up for the day. Jon climbed halfway up the steps to the top deck and paused when he heard the captain's voice.

"Mr. Chouteau, I don't think you realize the problem you're creatin' with overloadin' like we're doin'. The hold is chock-full. The decks are so cluttered that the firemen don't have room to stack cordwood. She's sittin' so low in the water now, if you load her down any more, I can guarantee you that we will be runnin' aground on every gravel bar between here and Tecumseh. She's been built for shallow draft, but what you're expectin' her to carry is defeatin' the whole purpose of her design."

"True, true, Captain, but as we proceed upriver, our load will lighten. Remember that much of the cargo will be off-loaded at Leavenworth, and much more will go off at Cabanne's Post. The river to that point is easily navigable and deep enough from the spring run-off not to cause a problem. Remember that I have been up and down this old river many times. I know firsthand of what I speak."

"Yes Sir, I know that, but that was in keelboats that could be polled off a bar just by swinging them end to end. The Yellow Stone can't be handled like that."

Captain Young dusted his cap against his thigh and walked to the pilothouse. Chouteau watched the captain for a long moment. When he turned to walk down the stairs, Jon's presence startled him. Chouteau forced a wry smile.

"Business as usual, Dr. Austin, no concern to you." MB



August 25-27, 2023

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Send your completed registration form to HawkenClassic@NMLRA.org Or mail to Bob Vogt, 1015 Uthoff Farm Ct., Fenton, MO 63026

Contacts:

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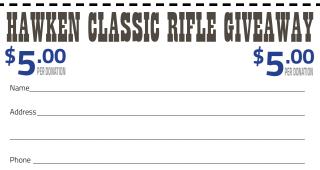
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