Christian Sharps Biography

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Contents

Christian Sharps Biography.....1

Contents.....2

Biography.....3

Biography

Sharps, a native of Washington, New Jersey, was employed under gunmaker John Hall (1788-1841) at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, before relocating to Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1844. In 1848 he patented his designs for a basic breechloading system and created a single-shot rifle that used a linen or paper wrapped cartridge. After first lowering the breechblock, the user then inserted the cartridge. As the breech was closed, a metal piece was sheared off the end of the cartridge, exposing the powder charge to the action of the percussion primer. Sharps' gun was both simple and strong. He formed the Sharps Rifle Manufacturing Company in 1851 to market his arms. Though Sharps himself resigned from the company in 1853, guns bearing his name went on to become very well known. By the end of the American Civil War, the Union Army had purchased approximately 100,000 Sharps rifles. Later, the Sharps rifle became the preferred gun of buffalo hunters because of its power and long-range accuracy. The Sharps system remains the basis for many single-shot rifles manufactured today.

But Sharps left his rifle company and soon turned his attention to pistols, succeeding in creating a.22 and.32 caliber rim-fire metallic cartridge four-barrel pistol. Sharps' invention featured a hammer with a ratchet that revolved the firing pin by cocking and firing the four barrels in rotation. Before he died in 1874, he had secured patents on more than fifty other inventions.