

# A Concise History of Colt Black Powder Reproduction Revolvers

There is still much confusion as to the manufacture of the Colt 2nd Generation Black Powder Reproductions, and the 3rd Generation Black Powder Reproductions known as the "Signature Series". It can be rather confusing, since there were actually three separate series of the Colt Blackpowder Reproductions that were made, so this may help clear up some of the confusion.

The production of the Colt 2nd Generation Black Powder reproductions took place in three stages. Initially, Colt Industries tested the waters with Val Forgett's help to build their first "C" Series 1851 Navy reproductions in the 1971-1973 time frame, which had included the now very collectible Grant and Lee Navy sets. These revolvers had the barrels, cylinders, and backstraps cast in Italy, but were finished off at Colt's facilities in Hartford, CT. where Forgett had the the frames, the center pins, nipples, all of the screws, springs made and built for every "C" Series gun at Colt Manufacturing. However, in late 1973, Colt Manufacturing Co. decided to seek a new supplier of components, and Lou Imperato, Colt's largest distributor at the time, was about to take over production.

Beginning in 1974, Lou Imperato replaced Val Forgett as Colt's supplier of components to build their percussion revolvers. These revolvers were completed in exactly the same way as all of their previously made 2nd Generation percussion revolvers – at Colt facilities - from 1974 to 1976. They had the barrels, cylinders, and backstraps cast in Italy, and were finished off at Colt's facilities in Hartford, CT. where Imperato had the the frames, the center pins, nipples, all of the screws, and springs made for every "C" Series gun.

The guns produced in this time frame were packaged in wood grain, cardboard boxes. The relationship with Imperato continued until Colt discontinued their entire "C" Series line of percussion revolvers in 1976.

It was in 1978 that a new relationship was born and Imperato began manufacturing the 2nd Generation "F" series percussion revolvers at Iver Johnson, which he then owned. It was there that all "F" Series standard production models were manufactured as The Authentic Colt Blackpowder Series, just as the "C" Series had been. While being built in considerable numbers, the guns were far from mass production, with each, as Imperato later explained to Colt, was virtually hand finished. "They were all hand fitted. We had the barrels, cylinders, and backstraps cast in Italy (as Forgett had done), but we finished them off in house. We made the frames, the center pins, nipples, all of the screws, springs, and built every "F" Series gun at Iver Johnson Arms. We even used the old style color case hardening method with the charcoal and bone meal, and Colt's exclusive Colt Blue Finish for the "F" Series. They turned out pretty good. In fact, I think our finishes were actually better than Colt's single actions being done in Hartford," says Imperato.

These new "F" Series 2nd Generation models came in black cardboard boxes with dark grey foam rubber inserts, and featured Sam Colt's portrait and signature on the lid and end label. This relationship with Imperato continued until Colt discontinued their entire "F" Series line of percussion revolvers in 1982.

# A Concise History of Colt Black Powder Reproduction Revolvers

Stage one was during the period when Val Forgett and Navy Arms built the revolvers in Colt facilities from 1971 -1973. Stage two was when Lou Imperato built the revolvers in Colt facilities from 1974 -1976, from the same source as Val Forgett. And stage three was from 1978 -1982, when Lou Imperato supplied these parts, but with the barrels, cylinders, and backstraps cast in Italy and the frames, center pins, nipples, all of the screws, and springs made in the United States at Iver Johnson. All the percussion models made from 1971 to 1982 either by Colt, or its subcontractors are regarded as authentic Colt revolvers and not Italian replicas.

Then in 1993, Lou Imperato formed the Colt Blackpowder Arms Company to create the 3rd Generation Series, known as the "Signature" Series, which were all under a "licensing" agreement with Colt Manufacturing, but had no connection to Colt at all, except for the name. Under this "licensing" agreement, Imperato at Iver Johnson was responsible for procurement of parts, quality control, final inspection, marketing, advertising, sales and distribution of the revolvers. This was a totally different agreement than either Forgett or Imperato had for the "C" Series or the "F" Series and these "3rd Generation" revolvers were never affiliated with Colt Manufacturing. It is this 3rd Generation Series, made between 1993 and 2002, that has created most of the confusion as to whether or not these "Signature Series" of revolvers were Italian made. Yes, the 3rd Generation Series was completely Italian made, but not the 2nd Generation "C" or "F" Series in the Colt Black Powder Reproduction Series.

## *References:*

"A History of Colt Black Powder Reproductions" by Dennis Adler

"Ninth Edition Blue Book of Modern Black Powder Arms" by John B. Allen and S.P. Fjestad with introductions to Colt's Manufacturing Company and Colt's Black Powder Arms Co. by Dennis Russell

The author and publisher wish to thank Mr. Dennis Russell for his valuable assistance updating the previous information from the section of the Blue Book of Modern Black Powder Arms.

"COLT An American Legend" by C.R. Wilson.