

Rollin White Thesis - Script - Michael Helms

[Black title card: Rollin White's name, and the years of his life.]

(Paragraph 1): Rollin White's patent changed the world. And nobody knows his name.

[Fade to tintype of soldier holding revolver. Freeze on revolver shortly after "Colt's Revolver"]

(Paragraph 2): In 1850, loading a gun meant juggling loose powder, lead balls and percussion caps. It took a lot of coordination. And it took time. Even this Colt's revolver—a marvel that could shoot five rounds in rapid succession—took several minutes to reload.

[Fade to tintype of killed Civil War sharpshooter]

(Paragraph 3): Precious minutes spent reloading were fatal in times of war.

— pause —

[Fade to Rollin White patent]

(Paragraph 4): In 1855, a man named Rollin White patented a new gun design. He incorporated the European novelty of self-contained ammunition into a revolver. It looked a lot like the guns made by his employer, Samuel Colt. But White's design involved a complicated loading system that proved too troublesome.

(Paragraph 5): Samuel Colt scoffed at White's invention. He told Rollin that there was no future in cartridge ammunition. White's patent seemed destined to fade into obscurity.

[Fade to Soldier holding Volcanic Pistol]

(Paragraph 6): In 1855, two other enterprising businessmen were busy making their mark on the firearms industry. Daniel Smith and Horace Wesson had just perfected the Smith & Wesson Lever Pistol, like the one clutched by this soldier. Buoyed by its success, the partners sold their enterprise to Oliver Winchester, and they risked it all on an even more ambitious project. A revolver that would shoot cartridge ammunition.

[Fade to S&W Model 1]

(Paragraph 7): It was a courageous idea. The same idea that had been scoffed at by Samuel Colt. But the partners forged ahead and developed a prototype gun; a simple design that allowed the shooter to manually load cartridges into the rear of the cylinder. With this gun, reloading seven shots took mere seconds.

(Paragraph 8): There was only one problem. Part of Smith & Wesson's new gun had already been patented by Rollin White.

[Fade to photo of quarter and gun]

(Paragraph 9): White agreed to grant Smith & Wesson an exclusive license to his patent with a royalty of twenty-five cents payable for each gun produced. The catch? Rollin White had to defend the patent against anyone who violated it.

[Fade to Smith & Wesson Catalog and top break gun in box]

(Paragraph 10): Smith & Wesson's little gun caught on, and their near-monopoly turned them into millionaires. Defending the patent against violators bankrupted Rollin White.

[Fade to Lowell Arms Company revolver zooming to S&W roll mark on the top of the barrel]

(Paragraph 11): In violation of his own patent agreement, Rollin White also got into the business of producing guns. And like all of the other patent violators, he was forced to turn over his guns to Smith & Wesson.

(Paragraph 12): White's 1870 petition for relief was passed by Congress and vetoed by President Grant.

(Paragraph 13): White died penniless in 1892.

(Paragraph 14): In all of this, one question remains.

(Paragraph 15): Who **was** Rollin White?

[Black title card: Rollin White's name, and the years of his life.]

— pause —

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