Company Origins

Established in 1869, the United States Cartridge Company was led by the controversial attorney, politician, and Civil War general Benjamin F. Butler who, at the time, was a Republican congressman from the Fifth Congressional District (Essex County). Butler secured contracts for munitions with the federal government, which aided his fledgling company, initially incorporated with a capital of $25,000. Additionally, the increasing popularity of hunting, especially among the nation’s growing middle class, resulted in an ever-greater demand for shotgun shells and rifle cartridges. The U.S. Cartridge Company quickly grew to rival such major ammunition manufacturers as Remington and Winchester.

Benjamin Butler

Much is written about Benjamin Butler as a political and military figure, but the skill, shrewdness, and acumen he displayed in the many business enterprises in which he was engaged has received far less attention. As a major shareholder of the Middlesex Mills, beginning in the 1850s Butler emerged in the late-antebellum years as one of Lowell’s wealthiest residents. In 1865 he joined with several other local capitalists to form the Wamesit Power Company and the United States Bunting Company, the works of which were located along the Concord River at the former Oliver M. Whipple property. An astute judge of technical and managerial talent, Butler brought together a group of men to oversee these firms, as well as the cartridge company, and the two manufacturing concerns proved to be highly profitable.

Inventors: Joe V. Meigs

For many years local merchant De Witt C. Farrington served as treasurer of U.S. Cartridge and presided over the company’s financial affairs. For mechanical skill, however, Butler relied on the gifted inventor Joe V. Meigs, whom the general had convinced to move from Washington, D.C., to Lowell to join the company. From a prominent family in Nashville, Tennessee, Meigs was born in 1840. His father, Return J. Meigs, was a lawyer and Whig politician who served as U.S. attorney for the Middle Tennessee District. Upon the outbreak of war Return J. Meigs remained loyal to the union although he was part of a citizens committee that opposed President Lincoln’s request to send troops to put down the rebellion. Nonetheless, feeling the heat from the city’s many Southern sympathizers, Meigs moved his family to Staten Island in 1861 and eventually settled in Washington, D.C., where Lincoln appointed him clerk of Supreme Court. The younger Meigs followed his father into the legal profession, but specialized in patent law and areas
related to the mechanical arts. During the Civil War he joined the Union army while working in the War Department and proposed to Secretary of War Stanton that African Americans be organized into army units in his former home state of Tennessee, primarily to serve as sentries and aid artillery batteries. Appointed captain, Meigs was placed in command of the first all-black artillery battery in the United States military and engaged in a number of campaigns in the Volunteer state. After the war he returned to Washington and worked in the court of claims, handling patent litigation.

Joe V. Meigs achieved national recognition for his patented single-track, elevated railway, a short experimental section of which was constructed in East Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the late 1880s. Despite its promise, this mass transportation system was never built in any other city.

Shortly before joining U.S. Cartridge Meigs patented a breech loading firearm and upon taking the position of “inventor” with Butler’s company, he patented a metal cartridge with an improved firing chamber that helped solve the problem of accidental explosions of firearms. Butler appointed Meigs agent of the company when it began operations in 1869 in a stone building erected by the Wamesit Power Company, next to S.N. Woods’ grist mill, two years earlier. Meigs remained agent until the mid-1870s when Charles A. R. Dimon, also a Union army officer who served under Butler during the Civil War, replaced him. In the 1880s Meigs gained national renown as an inventor of a single-rail elevated railway system, for which he oversaw construction in East Cambridge. Meigs and Butler also pursued water transportation projects, forming the Pentucket Navigation Company in the 1870s with the aim of dredging sections of the Merrimack River to create a navigable waterway from Newburyport to Lowell. Unlike the U.S. Cartridge Company, however, neither of these enterprises were successful. Meigs eventually moved to Charlestown, Massachusetts, where he died in 1907.

Company Management: C. A. R. Dimon

For many years the key manager of the cartridge company was Charles A. R. Dimon. Born in Fairfield, Connecticut, in 1841 and educated in the local academy, Dimon became a clerk in the merchant house of an uncle in Salem, Massachusetts, his before enlisting as a private in the Massachusetts Eighth Volunteer Militia, commanded by Butler, in 1861. Dimon’s intelligence and ambition caught Butler’s attention and he was rapidly promoted to the rank of major while serving under Butler in Louisiana. Dimon gained renown for training and commanding a group of former Confederate soldiers who joined the Union army and became known as the “Galvanized Yankees.” After the war Dimon returned to Massachusetts and eventually settled in Lowell after Butler appointed him agent of U.S. Cartridge in the mid-1870s. Under Dimon’s capable management the company grew and by the early 1880s it employed 250 workers. Although the company produced primarily cartridges, paper-shot-shells, and primers, it engaged for a few years in the manufacture of the “Lowell Battery Gun,” patented by De Witt C. Farrington and similar to the more widely used Gatling gun. Its works expanded with the construction of additional wood–frame factory buildings adjacent to Andrews Street and the company was recapitalized at $150,000.
Paul Butler

At about the same time Charles Dimon joined U.S. Cartridge, Benjamin Butler’s son, Paul Butler, having graduated from Harvard University in 1875, began working at the cartridge factory with Meigs. Unlike his father, Paul Butler eschewed party politics and immersed himself in the mechanical arts and inventive endeavors at the cartridge company. He succeeded Farrington as treasurer and after Benjamin Butler’s death in 1893 he was the cartridge company’s guiding force.

Dangerous Conditions

As in other 19th century manufacturing establishments, worker injuries in the factory of U.S. Cartridge occurred all too frequently. Workers at the cartridge company faced not only the common perils of injury from machinery and the belt-driven power system on the shop floor, but also from the dangerous nature of producing ammunition. The most horrific of these dangers struck in late July 1903 when an explosion, sparked by the ignition of gunpowder in one of the company’s powder magazines that was located just over the Lowell city limits in Tewksbury, killed 22 employees and nearby residents, while injuring more than 70.

The massive blast destroyed or severely damaged about 70 houses in Tewksbury’s Wigginville neighborhood and the shock was felt as far away as Haverhill, where windows broke and doors of homes “swung open with a crash as if by a gust of wind.” A closed-door inquest held at the Lowell Police Court in August was followed by Judge Hadley’s ruling in October that held Paul Butler and his aunt, Blanche Butler Ames, who were the principal partners in U.S Cartridge Company, responsible for the explosion. Likewise, the Dupont Powder Company, which produced the gunpowder stored in the magazines, carried some of the blame. One result of the disaster was the U.S. Cartridge Company’s construction of three magazines in South Lowell on the east side of the Concord River, south of the Boston & Maine Railroad tracks.

The Ames Family

About a year before the explosion in Wigginville, the cartridge company lost the services of Charles Dimon, who died of cancer while serving as superintendent as well as Lowell’s mayor. Assuming Dimon’s duties was Butler Ames, a nephew of Paul Butler and son of Adelbert and Blanche Butler Ames, Benjamin Butler’s sister. Like other members of his family Butler Ames attended Phillips Exeter Academy, graduating in 1889, but then went to West Point. A member of the class of 1893, Ames served only briefly in the army, but volunteered upon the outbreak of the Spanish-American War and attained the rank of lieutenant-colonel while commanding troops in Puerto Rico.

In 1900 Butler Ames and John O. Heinze established the Heinz Electric Company and located its factory next to the U.S. Cartridge Company plant.

Similar to his uncle Paul Butler, Ames was mechanically inventive and in 1900 he joined with John O. Heinze to form the Heinze Electric Company, manufacturers of electrical equipment, including coils for wireless telegraphy and, by 1905, electrical coils and magnetos for
automobiles. After 1902, Ames divided his time between Heinze Electric, which had its factory close to the cartridge company’s plant off Andrews Street, and U.S Cartridge. Paul Butler continued to serve as treasurer and eventually Ames Butler became the company’s president. The two presided over a period of expansion in the 1910s, during which time U.S. Cartridge constructed a group of brick factor buildings extending along Lawrence Street and the Wamesit Canal.

Wartime Boom

By 1917, U.S. Cartridge, inundated with orders for munitions from the United States military and its allies in World War I, was the largest employer in Lowell. With over 8,000 employees, nearly half of whom were females, the company’s operations included a plant in Billerica, manufacturing space in the former Bigelow Carpet Company’s factory on Market Street, as well as the works at the Wamesit Canal.

The Drive for Unionization

The wartime boom in the demand for munitions resulted in an unprecedented pace of production at all of the major American cartridge producers. This occurred at the same time that organized labor, notably machinists’ unions, with the support of an increasingly powerful American Federation of Labor, intensified efforts to expand membership and improve working conditions. A major unionizing drive at cartridge manufacturing plants in the summer of 1915 precipitated a number of work stoppages. In September, hundreds of employees at the U.S. Cartridge joined this effort as company officials were confronted with largest strike in the firm’s history.

Captain Thomas Doe, the plant manager, refused to negotiate with the machinists representing U.S. Cartridge workers. He locked out 500 employees who supported the union demands for an eight-hour day, increased pay, including overtime, and a formal grievance process for arbitrating labor-management conflicts. Unable to continue production, Doe initially shut down the factory. He subsequently attempted to resume production with strikebreaking employees who were met at the factory gate on Lawrence Street by jeering protestors. Pressured by the heavy demand for munitions U.S. Cartridge officials settled the strike in early October, with many of the wage and work rule issues resolved in favor of the machinists.

Corporate Takeover and Decline

While the Butler and Ames families controlled the cartridge company through most of the 1910s, the National Lead Company acquired half of all shares of U.S. Cartridge stock. After Paul Butler’s death in 1918, the Butler family sold its remaining interest in the company to National Lead. By 1922 the New-York-City-based National Lead Company, which also controlled the Winchester Repeating Arms Company, sought to transfer the operations of U.S. Cartridge to the Winchester plant in New Haven, Connecticut.

Despite attempts by local politicians, members of Lowell’s business community, and the city’s Central Labor Council to maintain production in the Spindle City plant, U.S. Cartridge curtailed its manufacturing and laid off employees. Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers appealed to the
various parties and conferred with the U.S. Justice Department to keep the plant open, but by late 1926 much of cartridge manufacturing machinery was moved to New Haven. One final effort to retain the production of radiators—this product line had only recently been established the Lowell cartridge plant—also failed and U.S. Cartridge closed down on January 1, 1927.

LOGUE (SCOTT) COLLECTION
UNITED STATES CARTRIDGE COMPANY
FINDING AID

BOX 1 AMERICAN – AMMUNITION
FOLDER 1-11

1. American Buckle and Cartridge Company – bio sketch
2. Ames Family Papers
3. Ames Family Papers
4. Ammunition Advertisement
5. Ammunition Advertisement – Magazine Covers w/ads on back
   Hunter Trader Trapper 12/1923
   Outdoor Life 2/1923; 12/1923
6. Ammunition – Defective WWI
7. Ammunition – Manufactured/Used by U. S. Cartridge Company and Label Listings
8. Ammunition/Firearms Advertisements: Brochures, Flyers, Pamphlets
9. Ammunition/Firearms Booklets – American Marksmanship
10. Ammunition/Firearms Booklets – How to Test Shells; How to Use Firearms; Shooters
    Attention; Small-Game Target Shooting; Sportsman Show
11. Ammunition/Firearms Booklets – Tests that Tell; U.S. Score Book for Rifle Shooting;
    Use and Abuse of Firearms

BOX 2 AMMUNITION – CONTRACTS
FOLDER 1-35

1. Annual Report – Adjutant General, State of Maine 1886; Chief of Ordinance to
   Secretary of War 1888
2. Article – Abstract of Papers –The Hooker Method of Intrusion
3. Article - The Aeroplane 12/5/1934 - Liquid Cooked Aero-Motors
4. Article – American Angler re. Paper Shells 1882-1883
5. Article – Arms and the Man
6. Article – Boston Globe 1886; 1894
7. Article – The Brook Trout and the Determined Angler
8. Article – Catholic Charities Review 1918
10. Article – Evening Sentinel 8/28/1918 – Alderman’s Action Arouses Interest
12. Article – Flag of the United States
14. Article – Hazard of Ammunition at Lowell Overstated 7/7/1917
15. Article – How America Went to War 1917-1920
16. Article – The Iron Age 1916
17. Article – Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine – How I Made My Autograph Book 1889
19. Article – Munition Production
21. Article – Rocky Mountain Bullet – The Kittredge Cartridge, by Howard Hoovestol
23. Article – Sportsman’s Show
25. Article – The Valentine Day Massacre: A Study In Ammunition Tracing
27. Belcher, Orlando F. – Bio Sketch
29. Butler, Benjamin F. – Bio Sketch
30. Butler, Benjamin F. – Financial
31. Butler, Benjamin F. – Personal
32. Butler, Paul. – Research Material
34. Contest – “Prize Name”
35. Contracts

BOX 3    CORRESPONDENCE – HISTORY
FOLDER 1-26

1. Correspondence – Hungerford (U.T.) Brass & Copper Company 4/6/1917; 1879
2. Correspondence – Lowell Cemetery re. Farrington-Meigs & Dimon
3. Correspondence – Martin, E. Wayne
4. Correspondence – from National Lead Company 1936
5. Correspondence – Priestel, George – Meigs & Sons
6. Correspondence – re. Purchases
7. Correspondence – from U.S. Cartridge Company 1914-1934
8. Court of Claims 4/6/1931 – U.S. Cartridge Company v. United States
9. Dimon, Charles A. R.
10. Expenditures of War 1917-1919 – War Time Wages
12. Explosion – Riverside Park
13. Farrington, DeWitt C. – Business/Family
14. Farrington, DeWitt C. – Photo
15. Financial – 1869-1937
16. Financial – Annual Returns 1913
17. Financial – Purchases
18. Financial – Wallace & Sons – Agent U. S. Cartridge – Purchase Receipt 10/14/1874
19. Firearms Collection
20. Firearms – Gatling Guns
21. Gallery Target – U. S. Cartridge Company
22. History - U. S. Cartridge Company from The Black Shells Book.
23. History – U. S. Cartridge Company
25. History - U.S. Cartridge Company – Layout

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**BOX 4**

**INTERNATIONAL – PATENTS**

**_FOLDER 1-18**

1. International Ammunition Assoc. Inc.
2. Lawsuit – Union Metallic Cartridge Company v. United States Cartridge Company
3. Lowell Airport Corp. – Lease w/Wamesit Power Company
4. Lowell Battery Gun Company
5. Lowell Battery Gun Company
6. Lowell City Directories – Entries
7. Lowell Gun Company
8. Lowell Ordnance Plant Remington Arms Company
9. Map of Lowell 1887
10. Maurer, N.H. Plant
11. Maxim Munitions Corporation
12. Meigs, Josiah (Joe)
13. National Lead Company
16. Order Forms (blank) – “US Shot-Shells”
17. Pan-American Munitions Company
18. Patents

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**BOX 5**

**PHOTOGRAPHS – PUBLIC**

**_FOLDER 1-11**

1. Photographs – Gardner/Gatling Cartridge (?)
2. Photographs (Photocopies) – U. S. Cartridge Company/Explosion
4. Price Lists – U.S. Cartridge Company
5. Price Lists – U.S. Cartridge Company
6. Price Lists – U.S. Cartridge Company
7. Price Lists – U.S. Cartridge Company
8. Price Lists – U.S. Cartridge Company
9. Price Lists – U.S. Cartridge Company
10. Public Documents

BOX 6 REMINGTON – WISE (J.B.)
FOLDER 1-17

1. Remington – Army/navy Revolvers
2. Reports – Chief of Ordnance 1874-1876; Industrial Chronology 1900; Secretary of The Navy 1873
3. Research Material
4. Research Material
5. Research Material
6. Saint Louis Ordnance Plant
7. San Francisco Plant – Selby Shot-Shells
9. Trademark – U.S. Cartridge Company
10. Trophy – “The Scout” & “Pipe”
11. Trucks & Passenger Car – Specifications
12. Two-Headed Partridge – Notes
13. Unclassified Material
14. Wallace & Sons – Bras & Copper Goods
15. Williamson’s Winchester
16. Winchester Repeating Arms Company
17. Wise (J.B.) Inc., NY

BOX 7 CDs - THUMB DRIVE
ITEMS 1-6

1. Butler (Paul) Undated “Son of Sarch Hildreth & B. F. Butler - 2010
2. Fraser, Dick – Springfield Museum
4. Martin, Wayne – Photo – 2010
5. Research Material on thumb drive
BOX 8 OVERSIZED ITEMS
ITEMS 1-11

1. Advertisements: American Gentlemen’s Newspaper 1878; Hardware Age 1912; Saturday Evening Post 1913
2. Advertisements: Forest & Streams
3. Advertisements: Forest & Streams
4. Advertisements: Forest & Streams
5. Advertisements: Saturday Evening Post
6. Advertisements: Saturday Evening Post
7. Advertisements: Saturday Evening Post
8. Advertisements: Saturday Evening Post
9. Blueprints: Radiator
11. Price List – U.S. Cartridge Company Paper and Brass Shot-Shells

BOX 9 ARTIFACTS
ITEMS 1-8

1. Pins: “U.S. Cartridge Co. 3 Years”; “U.S. Cartridge Co. 2 Years” (2)
2. U.S. Bullet Boxes (2)
5. U.S. Gallery Ammunition-Cal. 22. Short
7. U.S. Self-Cleaning Long Shot
8. U.S. Shot (4 oz.)

BOX 10 PUBLICATIONS
FOLDER 1-11

1. American Rifleman
2. Antique Ammunition Auction No. 3
3. Antique Ammunition Auction No. 4
4. Antique Ammunition Auction No. 5
5. Antique Gunpowder Cans and Kegs
6. The Black Shells – History of U.S. Brand Shot Shells
7. Buttweiler (Robert T.) LTD – Collector’s Ammunition
8. Cartridges for Breech-Loading Rifles
9. Cartridge Guide 1/69
10. Factory Notes 1916; 10/1918
11. The Gatling Gun

BOX 11  PUBLICATIONS
FOLDER 1-11

1. Howell (Wm.P.) Arms & Ammunitions Catalogue 1901-1902
2. It’s All In The Draw
3. New England Magazine 1899 May
4. NRA Collector’s Series
5. Pete de Coux – An Auction House for Ammunition & Related Items
6. Reference Catalog of Cartridges
7. Scorebook
8. Shot Shell In The United States
9. Small Arms Ammunition At the International Exposition, Philadelphia 1876
10. U.S. Ammunition (3)

BOX 12  PUBLICATIONS
FOLDER 1-3

1. U.S. Cartridge Company Dimensions
2. U.S. Cartridge Company Illustrated Catalogue of Firearms
3. Winchester Repeating Arms Company Catalogue 10/1911

*PUBLICATIONS [shelved w/collection]*

BOOKS 1-12

1. American Firearms Makers, by A. Merwyn Carey
3. Cartridge Manufacture, by Douglas T. Hamilton
4. Cartridges, A Pictorial Digest of Small Arms Ammunition, by Hershel C. Logan
5. The History and Development of Small Arms Ammunition, by George A. Hoyem
7. Remington Arms in American History, By Alden Hatch
8. Rimfire Cartridge In The United States and Canada 1857-1984 by John L. Barber
9. Small Arms and Ammunition In The United States Service, by Lewis
10. Winchester Cartridge Boxes 1856-1956
11. Winchester the Gun that Won the West, Harold F. Williamson
12.  Winchester Repeating Arms Company Catalogue 1927