

A TALK GIVEN BY

MR. EDWIN PUGSLEY

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EDWIN PUGSLEY

Ladies and Gentlemen, I first have a very pleasant duty and that is to thank you all for the announcement that was just made to me a few minutes ago, that I have been elected an honorary member of your Society. I appreciate this no end and wish to thank you for it.

I thought you might be interested to hear a little about the origin of the collection you are going to see today. Ray has said it is a combination of two, but actually it contains many others. The Winchester collection just seemed to happen. Possibly the old boys were too lazy to throw the guns away so some of them survived. Those came generally from companies which the company purchased in the early days or were collected for patent purposes. Mr. Oliver Winchester, if you have read the book, you will realize was a rugged individualist. The companies that he first started in the Volcanic days, failed every morning before breakfast but before night he had a new company organized with a new set of stockholders -- and how he did it, Lord only knows. However, as soon as the M/66 and the M/73, which Mr. Parsons has so ably written about in his new book, got on a paying basis, the management became allergic to anybody making a repeating or a lever action gun, and they, although still no financial giant, began buying up these various companies. As a result you will see in the collection today guns from companies I'll wager many of you never heard of. I doubt whether many in the room ever heard of the Fogerty Arms Company, but you'll find two or three Fogerty lever actions. Adirondack Arms Company is a little bit better known and some of you probably have specimens from the Adirondack Arms Company though there are two or three rather odd ones in the collection. One of the big companies that

they bought was the Whitney Arms Company, but I'm sorry to say very few guns survived in the Whitney Inventory. When I first came to town in 1911 and went to work for Winchester, I deposited my \$25.00 in one of the banks here of which Mr. Eli Whitney was the Chairman of the Board, and knowing that the Walker pistol had been made out here in Whitneyville, I was just sure that in Mr. Whitney's barn there was four or five cases of brand new Walkers. I finally got my nerve up one day to accost Mr. Whitney in the bank and tell him I was interested in old guns and, by any chance, did he know anything about any Walker pistols. He said no, he had never heard of them, he didn't know anything about them but there was quite a few boxes of old guns that had come over from the plant when Winchester bought it in the 80's, which were stored in the hay mow of his barn and why didn't I come up sometime and open them up. I said just call me and I'll be there. But, unfortunately, Mr. Whitney took ill shortly after that and never recovered, and so I didn't get a chance to open up those boxes. A number of years later, a good many years later, I happened to run across his son-in-law, Mr. Gilliard, President of the New Haven Water Company, (incidentally, the Whitney family starting from Whitneyville Armory Company furnished New Haven with water and the Whitney family still owns the New Haven water works). I told this story to Mr. Gilliard, (Mr. Whitney's son-in-law), and he said: "We're going to tear that barn down in about two weeks, I'm glad you spoke to me, come on out and we'll open up the cases." Of course, I could see these Walkers coming back over the horizon and began to wonder just what I was going to do if I got a whole case of brand new Walkers, how I would handle it, etc. I shortly called at the Whitney residence and we opened up the barn and went up in the hay mow. In all the dust and dirt; way over under the eaves, sure enough were four or five boxes. They all happened to be rifle length boxes, but that didn't make any difference, I was sure there might be some Walkers in there -- we opened up the boxes and all that was in them were a few old Rolling Block Whitney Muskets of 1873 vintage and so the myth of the Walker pistol went out the window, or rather the hay mow, right then and there.

The company took the principle of interchangeability very seriously from the very start. If any of you have read Miss Dyrup's articles on the interchangeability debate in Springfield Arsenal, you will see what a terrible bout it was; while interchangeability was originally credited to both Whitney and North, the two

families fought over it for a number of years, but, unfortunately, the clock industry has come along now and have produced pretty good evidence that clocks were made interchangeable before the guns were. The Volcanics were quire interchangeable and the Henrys and M/66's were more so. I believe Winchester is the record holder on that score, as we could, up to a few years ago, furnish parts for the M/66 on an interchangeable basis. Our next rival was Colts, but they could only go back to their M/73 Single Action.

Many of the guns in the Winchester collection came there by lawsuits. For example, one of the guns you will see in the collection was made when we were sued by Bannerman for the 1893 pump action shotgun. The '93 was the forerunner of the '97, put out in '93; unfortunately it lacked a lock in the fore end. Those of you who are familiar with the M/97 probably do not realize that when the gun recoils, the weight of your left hand keeps it where it was and the gun kicks back thereby unlocking the action. The M/93 was put out without such a lock, and by holding back hard on the left hand when you pulled the trigger, you would open the gun as soon as the hammer fell. Due to the frequency of hang fires in the early shotgun ammunition, too often the shot shell that was in the chamber would be ejected before the slow primer ignited the charge which gave it certain undesirable sales features and the gun was withdrawn from the market until the designers could think up this lock. Meantime, Bannerman came along. They owned the Spencer slide-action shotgun, and sued the company for the slide action. Although the company had a Model 90 on the market, (a .22 caliber pump action), they had no intentions of being stopped on the '93, so they went all over the world looking for pump action guns. You will see some of the craziest guns up there which were either bought abroad, or made from foreign design. The company bought several designs of guns in the design stage only, made samples in our own model room, and made them all work. The trial was held in New Haven and the company lawyers took these models and live ammunition into Court where our side offered to shoot them in the Courtroom to prove they would work. The Court kind of objected, and thinking it wasn't quite necessary, the other lawyer jumped up and protested that only an expert could shoot those guns and that they were not suitable for the general public. Mr. Johnson, our designer and quasi lawyer, replied, "Well, your Honor, over there in the corner is a piano. Now, I can't play the piano, but there's probably lots of people in the room who can and almost everybody in the room can operate these guns. We'd really like to shoot 'em." However, the judge ruled this out, but we won the case and all of these freak guns are up there in the showcases today where you can see them.

Along about the mid 80's the Colt Patent Firearms Company brought out a lever action rifle designed by a Mr. Andrew Burgess. The Burgess was a lever action rifle that was so close to our Model '73 in general appearance, that you'd almost have to look at the inscriptions to see which was which. The relationship between Winchester and Colt had always been most cordial. The salesmen abroad had always carried each others goods and when they had an order for pistols, Colt would throw the ammunition order this way and when we got some ammunition orders, we'd throw the pistol orders to Colt. However, when they brought out the Burgess lever action rifle Colt was getting a little bit too close to home, with a rifle that looked so much like the '73. There was working here, at that time, a Master Mechanic who had been Master Mechanic at Colt for many years, by the name of William Mason. He is one of the unsung heroes that nobody has ever heard of, who was responsible for much of the successful automatic machinery in use in the plant today. He was the developer of our automatic barrel drills and we were the first people who were able to drill the full length nickel steel barrel and the first people to drill full length shotgun barrels. When I first went through the plant in about 1906, they were rolling the shotgun barrels in taper rolls using a billet of steel some 12 or 14 inches long through which about a 3/4 inch hole had been drilled. This was heated red hot and with a rod through the hole was rolled out under taper rolls into a shotgun barrel blank with a rough hole through it. Mason had done some pistol designing when at Colts, so Mr. Bennett, President of Winchester, went to Mr. Mason and asked him to make a couple of .44 revolvers. Mason went to work and made up some revolvers -- you can see them up in the collection today -- and Mr. Bennett went up to Colt with these two big guns in his satchel. He was cordially received by the President of Colt and they talked about a little of everything and finally Mr. Bennett said, "We would like it very much if you could help us out; we're in a dilemma and I know that if you would, you could help us greatly. We are thinking about going into the pistol business and I've got a couple of models here and if you'll just criticize them and tell us where they are wrong from the trade standpoint, you'll save us an awful lof of money and time." Mr. Bennett got the pistols out and they discussed the various merits and demerits of the pistols and then they got to talking about rifles in general. The President of Colt sent for whatever cost figures they had and the two men worked over them all afternoon, and when they got through, Colt was surprised to find that they had never made any money in rifles -- there just was no money in rifles and he had been able to prove to Mr. Bennett that he'd lose his shirt if he went into the pistol business. There was absolutely no money in the pistol business and so as a result, Winchester never went into the pistol business and Colt dropped the lever action rifles.

The story has an interesting sequel to me. When John Olin came here, after the Olins purchased Winchester, in 1932, I was factory manager, and he called me in one day and laying on the table was a German automatic. He asked me whether I knew the gun and when I said I did, he asked why we didn't make it. I told him we had the machinery necessary and could make it. When he asked me again why we did not make it I told him the story about the session that had been held in the 80's. Mr. Olin thought a minute and then said, "Well, I guess if it was good enough for T. G. Bennett it's good enough for John Olin. We won't go in the pistol business." There was a gentlemen's agreement made, in the days when it was perfectly legal, before the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, which has survived two or three receiverships and dozens of changes of management and held tighter than any legal document could possibly have been drafted.

In the late 90's Winchester bought the Burgess Arms Company of Buffalo, a company that had been formed by the same Andrew Burgess who had designed the lever action put out by Colt in the previous decade. It is believed that at that time a very peculiar Civil War Musket, the hammer of which is Abe Lincoln's head, came to the Winchester plant. When the trigger is pulled, the underneath part of the chin pops the cap. It's a breech loader and I've never seen anything like it and probably some of you fellows can solve the mystery - We've never known what it was. It has a sliding bayonet a little like the Hall Carbine, but other than that it is just a very odd contraption. Another rare and interesting gun that has been at the plant at least since 1880 is the sliding lock rifle made by North, which you will see in the collection. We know that it was here in 1880 inasmuch as it is illustrated in the book "American Inventions and Improvements in Breech Loading Small Arms, Heavy Ordnance, etc." by Charles B. Norton, published in 1880. The caption of the picture reads as follows: "Repeating Arm Made by S. North, Middletown, Conn., 1825. In the possession of the Winchester Repeating Arms Co., New Haven, Conn."

In so far as my own collection is concerned, I started it when, of course, I was just a kid back in 1895 and in those days, twenty-five, or fifty cents was my limit -- whatever my weekly allowance was, was my limit for guns for a good many years. It's astonishing what a reasonably good job you could do in those days on twenty-five, fifty- seventy-five cents, and, as a kid, that is what I was allowed to have. I was raised winters on a little plantation in North Florida, and everybody carried a gun down there just as soon as they could waddle. I was allowed to have a rifle and a shotgun, but my parents were somehow old fashioned and didn't think that an eight or ten year old boy ought to have a .45 Colt pistol and live ammunition. I don't know where they got that idea, but nevertheless, they insisted on it pretty consistently. Of course, a pistol was the only thing I just had to have. I was going to bust if I didn't have one. I finally wangled the parts of an old Colt Navy out of the house man and put it together, making some of the missing parts, and it is one of the few pieces that I've kept. When I went to Prep School, my allowance was a bit larger and I still spent most of it for old guns rather than chocolate sundaes, etc., and continued it in College. When I got up to Boston, I ran across a man who was a dentist and one of these blatant advertisers - they didn't have neon signs in those days - but he had an electric light sign - "Painless Dentistry" etc., and I found that he had a big collection of arms. A story interesting to me developed from that. During the Civil War there were three men names Bates, Brooks and Butler, who were great cronies up North, enlisting together. Their names all began with B which tended to keep them together and at the end of the Civil War, Butler came out as General Ben Butler; he opened up the Confederate Arms Dumps to Bates and Brooks, where they picked out a fabulous lot of stuff, generally in threes, and General Butler's was the third, of course. The foundation of what became the United States Cartridge Company's Gun Collection was thus formed. Brooks' collection was set up in his saloon in Hartford and some of you probably have the book issued on that collection in 1899. Bates had his collection in Boston, but so far as I know never set up and it was Bates' son that I was talking to. He had the stuff stored, he said, out in a place 20 miles out of Boston, and consequently I went out there one cold day and walked back and forth, up and down the street. The only number that I could see that corresponded to the address he had given me was a Ladies' Embroidery Shop. It didn't seem to me that there would be a gun collection in a Ladies' Embroidery Shop, but I finally got nerve enough to go in and inquire about it, and a very prim old lady said; "Yes, they're in the back room." So, I went in the back room and they were certainly there - They were just piled in every which way, a very large Civil War Collection. I finally wangled some money from my father and bought that Bates collection and that was the backbone of my Military collection. I was probably a week ahead of time in buying the collection, because - I didn't know it at the time, - Bates was under indictment and went to jail the next week and he was just cleaning up his assets before he went. Had I known that I probably could have saved some money, but nevertheless, the guns are here.

Now, I don't want to talk any longer, you are more interested in the guns than you are in talk. I can only reiterate what Mr. Hall and Mr. Holmes have said, we are delighted to have you here and are very much honored that you ladies and gentlemen traveled such unusual distances to look at some old guns. Incidentally, I'm delighted to see all you ladies here, because I know from long and hard experience that the first thing a gun collector has to collect is a good-natured wife and it's a great tribute to have you ladies here. I, therefore, thank you again for the honor you have paid me in making me an honorary member of this Society and suggest that Tom start the group to the other side of the street.