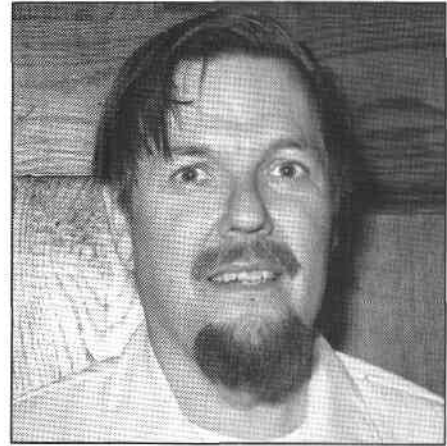


# HOW TO RESEARCH A GUNMAKER

By Frank M. Sellers

A section of our by-laws says that the primary purpose of our organization is to further the study and *research* of the weapons that we collect. Thus our purpose is not only to collect guns, swords, other edged weapons and papers and documents and other items, so I decided to talk about the various methods of finding out about the guns that we all collect. We have several ways of doing this; the easiest way, of course, is to get an item that has the full address and name of the maker. That makes it fairly easy to proceed with further research. Sometimes you have an unmarked item, and that makes it immensely more difficult, so for ease of presentation, I will go into the items that are marked, at least partially. To start with, let's take a gun that has both a name and an address on it — how do we go about researching it? The easiest way is to find a book that covers that type of gun, or if not the type of gun itself, its time period may have some information. Thus books are a primary source for most researchers, and just as a point of information I would like to ask some questions of the group. I think that it would be an interesting thing to know how many in the crowd here have at least 25 gun books in their library? I notice that several did not hold up their hands, but it looks like at least 90 of you do. How many have a hundred? About 70 of you: that is very good, this is an unusual group; an average group will not have that many books. How many of you have 500? — ah — it gets a little smaller. How many a thousand? There are a few of you — I was going to ask how many had five thousand but I guess I won't go that far. A thousand books is a very advanced library, but you can come across the name of a maker that cannot be found in your library of a thousand books, so then where do you go? Well, given a lot of time, and if you have a lot of interest, if you figure that the maker was from a certain area, you can go to historical societies of that area, libraries in that area, state archives, or the little old lady who happens to know everything that happened in her little town. They are a very good source of information, not only on gunmakers, but the makers of other types of things. Say that you do go to a historical society — what type of information can you look for there, because you won't have books in a state library on the subject of guns; they don't seem to stock many of those in public libraries. Your source documents could be a state or city business directory, if they have such, that is if you happen to be working in an area after 1800: before 1800 you won't find many business directories or just plain city directories, or county or state directories. You do have newspapers as a good source, if



you have an unlimited amount of time and a willingness to go over old, dusty, falling-apart documents, or, in most cases today, microfilm readers (in my case the microfilm records are more of a problem because most libraries do not have sufficient equipment that the researcher can use). Many microfilm readers are in less than good condition, because they have only one, and there are ten thousand people who want to use it. You have other sources; often you will find court records, probate records on cases that are not subject to lawsuits, tax records, patent records, and in some cases manuscripts done by earlier historians who have done county histories or city histories. All of this requires a lot of time, and there are no easy ways to go out and do research. I did mention the census records; you have to go to Washington to the National Archives to get the complete records, but in some cases state libraries will have copies of the national report for their own state. Colorado has all of the Colorado ones, Louisiana has theirs and some of the other states surely do, but this leads to one of the big pitfalls in doing this, unless you have unlimited time, for if you did a little study on the time required to examine these census reports just for the state of Colorado, which is very easy, Colorado being one of the newer states, the earliest census report that is even applicable for the state of Colorado is 1860. I researched just 1860, 1870, 1880 and 1890 for gun makers in Colorado, gun makers and gun smiths, and in slightly less than four weeks I was able to do this one small state. This is only 15 rolls of microfilm. You have to read them item by item, because it is often not clear to who is a gunsmith and who isn't a gunsmith. Carlos Gove, who was one of the prominent early Colorado gun makers, is listed in the early 1860 census as a grocer, and in

(continued on page 36)

# N.R.A. Adopts New Judging Criteria for Gun Collector Displays

Because many Society members actively participate in and/or direct regional and club-sponsored gun shows, because ASAC members were active in its adoption, and because uniform criteria for judging at gun shows, as at most collectors shows, should be a standard practice, it was felt that the new N.R.A. Judging Criteria for Gun Collector Displays would be of interest to all members.

Through the efforts of Allan V. Cors, Chairman of the N.R.A. Gun Collectors Committee, and Robert Sears, Manager of the N.R.A. Annual Meetings, it is possible to present this material before publication in the N.R.A. "Gun Collectors Newsletter," from which it may differ slightly.

## NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

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### JUDGING CRITERIA FOR GUN COLLECTOR DISPLAYS

The judging criteria shown below was adopted by the NRA Gun Collector Committee at its February 20-21, 1982 meeting. Conceived and proposed by C.R. Suydam, these criteria and scoring system were used to determine winners of the display awards (NRA Gun Collector Committee Trophy Bowl and Best Educational Group Awards) at this year's NRA Annual Meetings and Exhibits in Philadelphia.

	Maximum Points
I. EDUCATIONAL FACTORS	
A. TITLE: Is there a title for the display? (No title, No points)	5
B. CONTENTS: How well does the display fit the title?	5
C. LABELING:	
1. Is the title adequately explained or amplified?	5
2. Are individual specimens properly and adequately identified?	15
D. RELATED ITEMS: Are catalogs, pictures, accoutrements, or other items used to further the purpose of the display?	10
II. THE MATERIAL OF THE DISPLAY (Guns or Other Items)	
A. COMPLETENESS: Material displayed relative to title.	15
B. CONDITION: How does condition compare to material available?	15
C. RARITY OF ITEMS DISPLAYED	10
D. COLLECTOR IMPORTANCE OF ITEMS DISPLAYED (Is this popular or less-popular material?)	5
III. GENERAL APPEAL	
A. Skill evidenced in construction and creativity of display.	5
B. Neatness, general appearance and general public appeal. (Is the public interested?)	10

(Maximum total 100)

Mr. Suydam's explanation of the system's three major areas follows:

I. EDUCATIONAL FACTORS. A major reason for displays at gun shows is to educate both fellow collectors and the general public on the beauty, safety, ingenuity and other factors which present a positive image of firearms.

A. Title: The display should have a title which *accurately* explains what it is. Any legible title displayed gets the five points listed.

B. Contents: Does the display fit the title? If the title is too general or vague, it may be difficult for the contents to fit it. For example, if the title is "Colt Firearms" and the display shows only one type of Colt, the display doesn't fit the very general title.

Labeling: 1. Is the *title* adequately explained or amplified? In the example above, a subtitle, "Selected Single Action Armies," can explain the limited number of models shown. This amplification should generally be brief, but some displays may require a paragraph or more to tell all of the details. An *important* five points!

2. Are the individual specimens properly and adequately identified? If this display shows ten SAA Colts, why are they there? What are the special features, serial numbers, dates, other unusual features. Remember, this is for the benefit of those who *aren't* experts in the field. 15 points shows this is a major factor in judging.

C. Related items. These are the frosting on the cake. They add to the general interest of the display, and often to its appeal or general attractiveness. Not all material has a wide choice of such items available but reference books and related pictures can usually be found. 10 points indicates a relatively important factor.

## II. MATERIAL OF THE DISPLAY

A. Completeness of the display, *in relation to the title*. This could be said in reverse: Does the title really describe what is being shown? Since the judges use the title of the display as the literal guide to its contents, a poor title can lose the display many points. For example, consider a good display of Model 1873 Winchesters titled simply "Winchesters:" since no other Winchester models are shown, "completeness" judging would rate only 1 or 2 of 15 possible points. Had there been a subtitle, "Selected Winchester Model 1873s," with explanation as to why they were selected, the completeness score could be 12 or more. 15 points makes this an important factor in judging.

B. Condition. How does condition *compare to material available?* This encourages the collection of the best available specimens while making allowances for arms normally in poor condition, and penalizes refinishing or restoration *if not acknowledged* in the display.

C. Rarity of arms displayed. Rare and unusual items are generally more interesting than those which are commonly seen.

D. Collector importance of items displayed. The more popular items receive more points because they interest more people. An outstanding display can change this if it introduces new material to collectors.

## III. GENERAL APPEAL

A. Skill in construction and creativity. This rewards the collector who has the skills and takes time to make his display attractive. Only 5 points are possible so as not to penalize too heavily the unskilled whose arms are good.

B. Neatness, general appearance, and general public appeal. Very closely related to point A above, but with emphasis on the "stopping power" of the display: Does it aid gun collecting by encouraging people to stop and look? A skillfully organized display will normally be high in general appeal.

This summarizes briefly the factors used in judging gun displays, but a final word should be added: It is important to remember that good judges are looking for ways *to take points away*. They are not charitable. To be fair to all, they must judge strictly by the form.

## IV. METHOD OF USING THE CRITERIA

The recommended method of using this material is:

A judging form, listing the criteria and with space for name of exhibitor, name of display, and location in the show (if necessary) is given by the show manager to each person or group exhibiting. The exhibitor completes the identification section and returns the form to the show manager. (The form can, of course, be completed by the show manager, but the value of having the exhibitor do so is two fold: it gives him a chance to study the criteria by which he will be judged, assures him, as far as possible, that the judging will be honestly done, *and* it makes him responsible for being sure that his form is available for the judges.)

The show manager selects three competent judges who have expertise in varying areas of collecting, one of whom is named "Chief Judge." The forms are delivered to the chief judge, and the three judges, *together*, view all of the exhibits, reaching a *consensus*

of the number of points each is to receive for the various judging criteria. This is usually done after the show is closed to exhibitors and public, to allow the judges privacy in their deliberations. After all exhibits have been evaluated, the judges assemble, total the points, review them — and perhaps the displays — and again come to a *consensus* as to their ranking. If there are special award categories (best educational, best military, etc.) these are determined at this time. The results are returned to the show manager as soon as possible.

The advantages of this method are: uniform judging criteria, known to those exhibiting; maximum use of judges' combined expertise; minimization of personal bias in selection of winners, and, if widely used, a

uniform standard of judging from one show to another.

**Disclaimer.** The introduction to the N.R.A. criteria material, written by Bob Sears, might lead one to believe that the judging criteria were wholly my idea: not so! My first knowledge of a similar judging form was that used by the Colorado Gun Collectors about 1972; this I quickly adopted for use at the old California Arms Collectors shows at Disneyland. I later wrote two articles on judging at gun shows which appeared in the November, '73, and March, '74, issues of *Arms Gazette*. The latter included another similar list of criteria now known as the *Arms Gazette* standardized judging form, which is still widely used. I *did* propose the present form and explanatory material to the N.R.A. after the 1981 Annual Meeting in Denver, but it was due to the efforts of Mr. Cors, Mr. Sears, and the Gun Collectors Committee that it was adopted by the N.R.A.

C. R. Suydam



## How To Research A Gun Maker . . .

(from page 33)

the 1870 census as an entrepreneur. In the 1880 census, two years before he retired, he is finally listed as a gunsmith. If you happen to be looking for gunsmiths in the first 30 years of the census of Colorado you won't find Gove listed, although he appeared in Colorado long before the first census. Such errors occur because the listing is made by a census taker who lists what he thought the description should be, not what it actually was. That is one of the pitfalls of using a census; one of the joys is when you do find one, you will find him listed with all of his workmen, who live with him. This will give clues to additional makers whom you may never find any other way. The city directories have the same basic problems as the census report: they will either be not listed in the classified section which required a payment, or they will be listed under some other category, such as jewelers, merchants, general merchants, machinists, and related categories. If you have a name and a location you can generally find some sort of information on just about anybody, after 1800, through either census reports or directories. Once you have that information, it will give you an idea of what further research you must do in newspapers, books and other histories of the area. You will have, in the case of patentees, which will be mostly after 1850, the patent office records, either the patent records themselves or other documents

that you can obtain from the patent office or the National Archives if you have names and dates. That is about all we have except the tax records, and tax records are a very interesting thing to try to research to find information. The Pennsylvania rifle collectors are very fortunate in not only having very complete tax records still available from the state, they also have the accessibility. The state of New York has all the tax records that the state of Pennsylvania has on the New York people, but unfortunately New York also has a law stating that tax information cannot be released without the written permission of the person on whom the tax records are held. And it is sometimes difficult to get the permission of someone who died in 1700.

This is a report on the basic research that can be done to find information and I would at this time throw it open to questions, for I notice a lot of blank faces, and I don't know if that is tiredness or boredom.

**Question—**Where are the tax records kept?

**Answer:** The county court houses are usually the best source; in Pennsylvania I notice that in Harrisburg there is a large amount, also some in a storage facility just east of Lancaster; if Ron Gabel were here he could name the location. If George Moller were here he could also enlarge on another source which I did not mention, Government Documents.