

A COLLECTOR'S WIFE SHOULD TAKE A HARD LOOK AT FIREARMS LEGISLATION

By Leon C. Jackson



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This may seem a strange and dry subject to be offered on a banquet occasion and directed primarily at the ladies. It has been done quite deliberately because I know from experience that if you ladies become sufficiently aware of the problems and sufficiently interested, you will do something about it and that is what I seek. For the past five years there has hardly been a meeting where I have not made a report to the Society on the legislative problem but I have not had the privilege of talking directly to you.

Why should you, as a wife, be interested in this subject? There are many reasons. If your husband belongs to this organization, it means that he is sincere in his collecting interest and dedicated to improving the standards of the hobby. It becomes then a release or pressure valve for him and if you will, a form of mental relaxation and therapy. If you think of his well being you want to protect this area of interest and relaxation.

There remains too a point of purely economic concern. For many of you, your collections represent a serious and important investment. For many it is an important asset of the family net worth and ultimately of the estate. It would be foolish indeed to ignore outside forces which could, and if successful would, destroy a substantial value in your family assets.

How can this be done? There have been serious proposals advanced for instance by the National Convention of the Americans for Democratic Action and by the Presidential Commission on Crime and Violence to confiscate all privately owned pistols or hand guns. In these proposals there is no exception for antiques or collector's items. The Commission suggested that the owners be compensated at a rate of \$20.00 per gun. I am sure that the owners of Collier revolvers, Walkers, Patersons and Forsyths would welcome this payment.

You may well ask "Just how serious is this problem?" In this, the 91st Congress, there are still 126 bills that have been introduced but not acted upon, which relate to firearms and I dare say that will be multiplied before the second session adjourns. Of those now in the hopper, 13 seek to repeal the Gun Control Act of 1968 and it would be great if action could be achieved on one of them but unfortunately they are pure political window dressing. Some 70 bills seek to delete or amend the requirements for record keeping on ammunition sales (several members of the Congress and the Senate have heard from home); 12 seek total registration of all firearms and licensing of their owners; 31 seek added and mandatory penalties for criminals who use a gun in the commission of a crime.

Barring a sensational political assassination, it is unlikely that any of this legislation will pass in this session of the Congress with the possible exception of relaxation on ammunition sales.

Probably the most dangerous threat in Federal legislation that we have to deal with does not mention gun controls. This is the so-called "Safe Streets Act," passed in 1968, which authorizes the Attorney General to make direct grants to States, Counties, Municipalities or combinations thereof as long as their population is 50,000 or greater to improve law enforcement. There is no restriction; he can buy new badges; build a new jail; buy a squad car or equip it with red lights and a siren. The one qualification is that the local agency's plan must be approved by the Attorney General. Do you know your City Council or County Commissioners Court (or whatever your governing body may be) well enough to know what they would do if the Attorney General said: "We will approve your project and grant \$250,000, provided you enact a firearms control and registration ordinance?"

You could and should ask, just what does all this mean in the economy of your family life. I will try to answer that. If you and your husband live an equal time in life, the problem is one purely of market value. I can recall in the early days of World War II buying guns at \$5.00 or less that sell today for \$250.00. A leading antique dealer in New Orleans, probably the most successful financially, told me that antique guns kept him in business during the depression of the 1930's (I am sure no one here can remember those days). He was selling those \$5.00 guns that now bring \$250.00 but he was buying them for \$1.00. Inflation is a fact of life and unless commodities have held their relative value, you are better off collecting butterflies.

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If you have outlived your husband (or expect to) you have an asset on your hands on which you need good advice. His collection could be worth a great deal more than you thought and the old man admitted or he may have been "conning" you all the time and it isn't worth half what he said. Whatever the answer to that, get the best professional advice you can get, and try to relate actual records to the facts of life.

However the correlation of this situation economically to the New York Stock Market is not unreal. If you have an unusual threat to ownership or basic liquidity, the bottom is going to fall out of the market. If you stand idly by and acquiesce to legislation that will destroy the worth of your husband's collection, who is to blame but you? How can it happen in guns? If so many restrictions, registration fees and whatnot are put on their ownership (and this has actually happened in New York City) many collectors will quit or turn to other things such as coins which are not controlled. When that happens, the market collapses and you have suffered tremendous financial damage.

What can you as an individual housewife or business woman do about it? Plenty. First garner a few of the facts and learn some of the "cliches" of the liberal opposition. A favorite statement is that if guns are registered and their sale controlled, it will effect a major reduction in crime. Answer: To be successful, that approach would not only require the compliance but also the complete cooperation of the criminal element. The criminal does not obtain his gun through commercial channels; he steals it or it is supplied to him by organized crime - the Mafia - for a percentage of the "take." Secondly, the gun with which Robert F. Kennedy was killed, was registered but that did not deter the crime. These are but two of countless examples.

This might be the clincher. The F.B.I. report "Crime In The United States" has consistently shown that less than 4% of major crime in this country involves the use of firearms. Suppose by some magic you could eliminate all guns and that percentage of crime in which they are involved. What would you then do about the other 96% plus in which guns are not involved?

A favorite argument is "You don't object to registering or licensing your car, why should you object to licensing and registering your gun?" The two situations are in no way comparable. Registration and licensing of guns has historically carried with it the police power to deny you the license to purchase or to own. The registration and licensing of automobiles are revenue measures to help pay for the public facilities they use i.e. the streets and the highways. No such analogy is possible on guns unless you use a public shooting range and there you pay a fee for that use. You don't need a permit to purchase an automobile; you can buy all you can pay for and further if you use them only on your own property you do not have to register or license them.

Finally there is the argument that the Constitution does not mean what it says; that the 2nd Amendment does not confer the individual right to keep and bear arms but rather grants the States the right to maintain a militia. The politician who uses this argument is either deliberately trying to mislead you or he is confessing an abysmal ignorance of Constitutional history. Reading the debate over the adoption of this amendment (you will find it in the Federalist Papers) will leave no doubt as to the intent. Further it is a basic, individual right, rooted in the original English Magna Carta at Runnymede, in 1215.

Having grounded yourself a little, express yourself by letter and telegrams to your two United States Senators; your Congressman and your State legislators. You don't have to confine yourself solely to this issue, but rather sound off on any issue of interest to you. Teach them thus to know who you are and to respect your opinions. Sometimes a donation to the campaign fund of one or two that you like will bring a quicker response and recognition.

Organize neighborhood, city or county groups of interested fellow citizens and invite candidates for public office to come before you and state their position on gun control and any other legislation of interest to you. This has been done in Arizona by gun clubs, collectors, shooters and hunters with large turn outs where the candidate can more or less count votes. His remarks have been tape recorded. In Florida, Frank Russell, a member of this Society, has pioneered a neighborhood group where candidates are invited to his home to discuss the issues.

Why am I so concerned about you and other women getting into this field? Because I know from personal experience that if you do become interested, you will do something about it. Some years ago I had a group of Dallas women working with me on this problem. We reached an impasse with the sponsor of the anti-gun bill and it became obvious that we would have to flood the legislature with protests in order to stop him. I went in to see my own Senator, a gravel-voiced old veteran and told him somewhat apologetically what we were going to do, for I knew he would support us. He said: "Red, get those damned women in North Dallas off my back and I promise you that bill will never get out of committee." He delivered on that promise.

When you see what can happen in committee and our legislative system, it scares you to death. The complete exclusion of all guns made in or before 1898 from the Gun Control Act was almost a miracle. I wish I could tell you the full story but I can't. We had lost that fight in both houses but won in conference com-