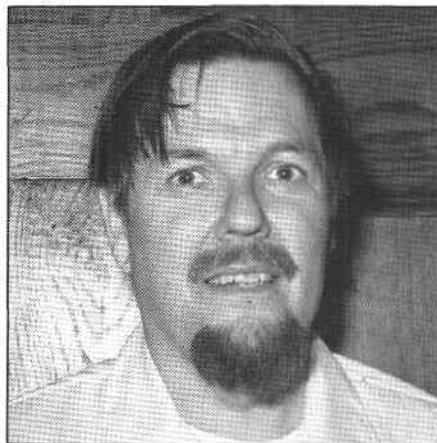


# HOW TO RESEARCH A GUNMAKER

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)

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.