

THE WINCHESTER MUSEUM



PRES. TOM HOLT, PAST PRES. HARRY KNODE, VICE PRES. TOM HALL, EDWIN PUGSLEY AND BOB RUBENDUNST SECY-TREAS. VISIT THE WINCHESTER MUSEUM.



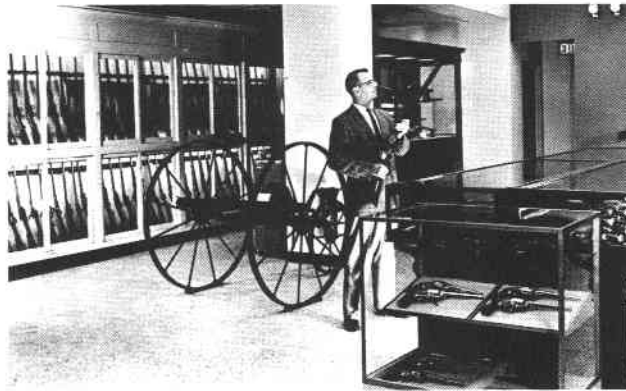
TOM HALL, CURATOR OF THE WINCHESTER MUSEUM SHOWS SOME RARITIES TO BOB BERRYMAN, JOHNNIE PECK AND BEVERLY DuBOSE.



DALE TERRY, RALPH MILLERMASTER AND BUD SHUMAKER LOOK OVER SOME CASED COLTS.



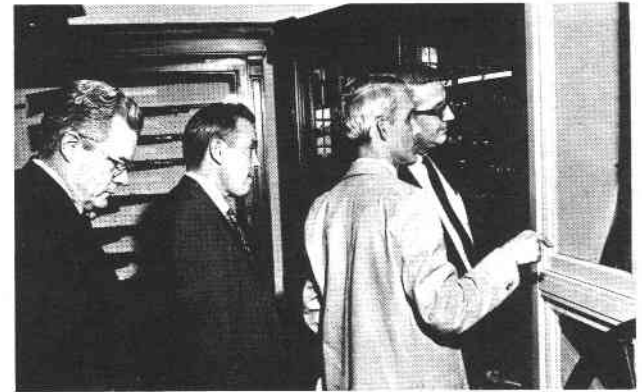
DR. ROBERT NELSON, TOM WIBBERLEY, DALE TERRY, PAUL MITCHELL AND JOHN CALLAN CHECK A BULLET MOLD.



CURATOR TOM HALL INSPECTS A WINCHESTER 73 SURROUNDED BY REVOLVING RIFLES, EXPERIMENTAL WINCHESTER PISTOLS AND A CANNON.



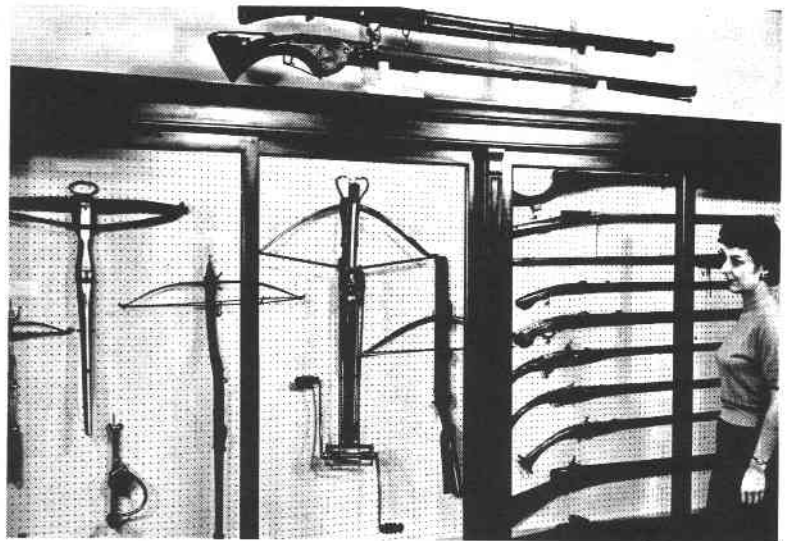
THE OLDEST GUN IN THE MUSEUM, A FOUR BARRELED HAND GUN OR CANNON MADE ABOUT 1460 IS HELD BY TOM HALL.



THE WINCHESTER MUSEUM



TOM HALL CHECKS A "GIFT GUN" ONCE PRESENTED TO A FRIEND BY "BUFFALO BILL" CODY. THIS GUN IS ENGRAVED, GOLD AND NICKEL PLATED.



CROSS BOWS, MATCHLOCKS AND OTHER EARLY ARMS BEAUTIFULLY DISPLAYED.



FROM THE FIRST FIREARM TO THE LATEST IS COVERED IN THIS FINE WINCHESTER MUSEUM.



A FEW OF THE REVOLVING CYLINDER ACTIONS ARE EXAMINED BY TOM HALL. THE EXPERIMENTAL CANNON WAS BUILT IN 1865 BY TIMOTHY TUFTS.

YE EDITOR WISHES TO THANK THE WINCHESTER MUSEUM, DR. JAMES R. LUCIE AND DR. WARREN M. MOORE FOR THEIR PHOTOGRAPHIC ASSISTANCE.

WINCHESTERS OF THE PAST

by Edwin Pugsley



EDWIN PUGSLEY

Since you are in Winchester country it occurred to me that you might be interested in having called to your attention some things that you probably already know but may have forgotten. At the beginning of our story, of course, is Oliver Winchester, and you will remember that he was born Nov. 10, 1810, a farm boy in Massachusetts; lost his father a year after he was born, which left his mother (his father's third wife) with several small children and no money. Remember also that there were no widow's pension, Social Security, or any of our other modern devices, so that a widow's outlook under those circumstances was exceedingly bleak. Oliver also had a more or less mythical twin brother of whom the New Haven family knows nothing. It was not until Harold Williamson started working on the book that I ever heard of the twin brother. He, however, was married and had several children, none of whom was ever heard of by the New Haven family. Possibly he was overshadowed by the success of Oliver — I do not know.

Oliver started farm work at the age of seven to help his mother; at 14 was apprenticed to a carpenter, and, when he finished his apprenticeship in 1830 became a contractor and built a church in Baltimore. Church building was a special art as very few ordinary carpenters understood the construction of trusses necessary to support the roof. When the Town of Branford, a suburb just east of New Haven, planned to build a new church they had to import a specialist from England to build the church roof trusses.

For some unaccountable reason, for which no one knows the answer, Oliver suddenly switched from contracting and started a small haberdashery store in Baltimore, marrying a girl, Ann Ellen Hope, from Maine in 1834. Although he started during the depression year of 1837, his store prospered. He began to buy merchandise, met an importer named Davis in New York and in 1849 formed the firm of Winchester & Davis to make men's shirts, and moved to New Haven, having in the meantime taken out a patent on a man's shirt.

The method of operation was to cut the material in the factory and send the pieces out to be sewed in the homes. Wheeler & Wilson had invented a sewing machine but for some reason Oliver was not particularly interested. It was not until Mr. Wilson brought a machine and his wife and plunked them in Oliver's office, she proceeding to sew a shirt before his astonished eyes, that he became interested in sewing machines, and ultimately became the sales agent for New Haven County.

Following the end of the Civil War a wave of new inventors flooded the country and patents issued at a very rapid rate. One of the inventors who contributed ideas later incorporated in the Volcanic was a man named Hunt (his model gun is on exhibit at the Museum). He invented the safety pin. Just imagine an economy without a safety pin. I am sure that if the distaff side of the audience were present they would appreciate the horrors of that situation. One of the early Lymans, progenitor of the Lyman Gun Sight Corporation started his fortune by inventing the hand clothes wringer.

With all these new gadgets coming on the market, men with a little risk capital available began investing in them, and Oliver Winchester was no exception. In 1855 he took a flyer on a pistol and special ammunition developed by a couple of mechanics up in Norwich, Ct. named Smith and Wesson, and became a small stockholder in that concern. The pistol and ammunition were about what you would expect a shirt-maker to grab, as both were about as worthless for the purpose for which they were designed as can be imagined. The pistol was not supposed to be cocked by the operation of the lever because it made too heavy a drag on the lever. It was necessary, therefore, to cock it with your thumb and, if your second finger was long enough and had sufficient strength, you might be able to operate the pistol one-handed; however, this was very doubtful and it usually required both hands to operate. The ammunition was just as crazy, consisting of a lead bullet hollowed out at the base with a little fulminate of mercury inserted for a combination priming and propellant charge. There was no seal at the breech, obturation if you wish to be technical, with the result that reasonable ballistics were practically non-existent. With all these strikes against the combination it failed, but not before Oliver had put more money into the venture and become its president.

Oliver Winchester, being a rugged individualist, took the tools and patents to partially compensate for the money he had invested in the wrecked concern. He set up shop in New Haven and proceeded to make the same pistol and ammunition, and even increased the number of models from the Smith & Wesson two to the Volcanic

Arms Co. six, plus the addition of a couple of carbines. The guns made in New Haven were ballistically no better than those made in Norwich, and the company failed every morning before breakfast, but by noon Mr. Winchester had a new set of directors and more money, and kept it going. How he did this was a mystery, but a testimonial to the trust he was able to engender in new capital.

The shirt business was progressing satisfactorily and by this time he had a large number of sewing machines and was changing the type of manufacture to making the complete shirt in the factory, doing away with outside contract sewing. As a consequence he needed somebody to supervise the mechanical operation of the machines. One theory advanced by students of the situation is that the sewing machines were the first reason for his interest in B. Tyler Henry who at that time was a gun mechanic at Robbins & Lawrence but who also had had extensive sewing machine experience. Whether it was the sewing machines or the Volcanic pistol that brought them together is not known, but subsequent records do not show that Henry had much to do with sewing machines after he got to New Haven.

Henry began experimenting with enlarging and strengthening the rim fire cartridge which was originally developed in France possibly 20 years before. Of course the addition of the cartridge case to the Volcanic action brought almost immediate success. However, the company was handicapped for lack of working capital and all sorts of devices were resorted to in its place. One was to allow Henry to use the machinery to make the rifles, charging him only for the labor and material that went into the production and allowing him to sell them where he could. This situation probably accounts for some of the queerly marked Henrys that occasionally turn up.

In order to acquaint the public and instill a little confidence in the flood of new gadgets totally unfamiliar to the potential purchasers, catalogs in those days consisted mainly of testimonials from satisfied customers. The Henry catalogs were no exception. There was one testimonial that always appealed to me. It concerned an Abolitionist who lived below the Mason & Dixon Line and who, his neighbors were sure, was an important link in the underground railroad for freeing slaves. After some deliberation, six of them called on him one morning while he was eating breakfast, with the idea of curtailing his activities. They began shooting at him at the breakfast table, one bullet breaking the tumbler in his wife's hand. He remonstrated with his callers, suggesting they not shoot him in the presence of his family as it would be a messy job, but that they go out behind the barn. His neighbors considered this a reasonable suggestion so they all repaired to the yard behind the barn. On the way out there our hero reached inside the door of the corn crib, grabbed his loaded Henry and killed five of them, one right after the other. He shot the hand of the sixth man as he was reaching for the pommel of his saddle and killed him with the 7th shot as he rode away. He wrote into the company and said he thought it was a very good gun.

However, many weaknesses showed up in the Henry and it was redesigned into the M/66 Winchester. These guns, the first to bear the Winchester name, were started in the Wheeler & Wilson factory at Bridgeport, and the gun was successful from the start. Some years previously Oliver Winchester had purchased a rather large tract of land in New Haven where the present factory is located, and apparently cannily decided that use of this for a factory would show another nice profit. Accordingly, he built the first line of buildings on the west side of Winchester Avenue, the first one having been torn down about a year ago and the space turned into a visitors' parking lot.

Meanwhile the management sensed the demand for a heavier gun and cartridge, and the Model 73, taking .38 and .44 Center Fire cartridges, was developed. It was decided to make this combination in the new New Haven plant. When New Haven heard that they were proposing to build a plant to make 200 rifles a day, the project became known as "Winchester's folly." Mass markets had not dawned on the public and it was freely predicted that if the factory ran one day a year it would be marvelous. However, the machines were almost kept running during the move from Bridgeport to New Haven. They would be shut down at 6 o'clock in Bridgeport, trucked by four-horse teams to the railroad station, delivered by rail during the night, and again carted by horse drawn wagons to the new factory where they were set in place under awaiting countershafts. The story is that some of them were actually running the next morning.

Orders for both guns and ammunition kept coming in and they sold quite a large order to the Mexican Government. There are several versions of the story about the order and about Oliver Winchester's assigning Thomas Emmet Addis to it. Addis is quite a mysterious figure and it is thought was working under a name changed from O'Connor, possibly due to some family trouble, in an attempt to change his identity. Anyhow, he was working in the factory, having come from Remington. How Mr. Winches-



ONE OF "WINCHESTER'S" FAMOUS PAINTINGS

ter came to select Addis is unknown, but he was told to deliver some 1,000 guns and 500,000 rounds of ammunition to the Mexican Government at Brownsville, Texas, and not to cross the border.

Addis left with the shipment and shortly afterward Mr. Winchester met Mr. Whitney down town and told him he had sent Addis on this mission. Mr. Whitney began to laugh and told Mr. Winchester that he was surprised at his gullibility, as he would never see either the guns, ammunition, or money. Although greatly worried it was impossible for Mr. Winchester to get in touch with Addis as he had no idea of where or how he had gone. Addis apparently disobeyed Winchester's instructions not to cross the border with his merchandise, and proceeded to do it. The Mexican Government was in the throes of their trouble with Maximilian and haggled about taking the shipment and paying for it. When Addis threatened to sell it to the Maximilian forces, the Mexican Government came through with payment in silver dollars.

Here the story diverges, as the version current in the factory when I first entered was that with the payment of the bags of silver dollars the Mexican Government agreed to furnish a company of soldiers to escort him out of the bandit-ridden country. The date for departure was set, but when the pack train with its Army guard arrived, Addis said he was sorry that he would be delayed, but they were to take the money and proceed, and he would catch up with them. This they did, packing the heavy bags on mules, and proceeded toward the American border. About the third night out the guards revolted, as was to be expected, and stole the money bags, only to find that they were full of nails. Meanwhile Addis had hired a light rig, taking the money with him, and drove furiously night and day to get out of the country. He kept himself awake by running his spurs up and down his shins, tearing his legs. He finally made it across the border and shortly delivered the cash to the company to Mr. Winchester's great relief.

The other story is that he hired a coach and, putting the driver and guards on the front seat, he sat on the back seat with loaded rifle and the money. After they had proceeded for a while he placed double the amount of wages agreed upon for the guards in a bag, disarmed them and made them get out, leaving them there with the money and Addis driving off with the rest of the cash. He kept himself awake by using the stickpin out of his tie to stick his legs until he had crossed the border and saved the cash. Either version makes a good story. Of course this established Addis as a permanent salesman and was the beginning of the Winchester Export Department as he proceeded to travel and sell extensively in South American and on the Continent.

Winchester's ability showed itself in several fields. He was a supersalesman, a financial expert and had the knack or luck to surround himself with competent people. Whether this was luck or foresight is hard to determine, but his greatest strike was in his son-in-law, T. G. Bennett, who married his youngest daughter Jane in May 1872. T. G. Bennett's family originated around Charleston, So. Carolina, but he came to a then famous New Haven Military School and on graduation enlisted during the Civil War with the Northern Army, coming out as a Captain, during which he spent a considerable amount of his time in command of colored troops. He subsequently graduated from Yale. It was T. G. Bennett's business ability and integrity that built the Winchester Repeating Arms Co. Remember that at the time the company was started interchangeable manufacture was by no means an accepted manufacturing procedure and there many excellent reasons advanced as to why the method would not work. It required a very large initial investment in machines, tools, fixtures and gages, a large inventory of work in process and a long lead time before even one article could be produced. However, both Winchester and Colt realized early the advantages and stuck to it. It takes considerable nerve when you find you have run an order of say 10,000 receivers and that one cut is slightly off. The receivers could be salvaged by making a corresponding change in the bolt or other operating components, which, of course, would destroy interchangeability with former production. T. G. Bennett had the nerve never to compromise and if parts were wrong they were scrapped and interchangeability rigidly maintained. Oliver Winchester, recognizing T. G.'s ability, gave him free rein. Mr. Bennett, while he controlled the majority of the Winchester stock, contented himself with the title of Secretary of the company for many years.

His Western salesman soon reported the increasing success of three young Mormons in the gun business, and he stepped on a train in about 1880 and went to Utah, hiring the Browning brothers - a tremendous stroke of genius.

The demand for a heavier caliber rifle and cartridge continued and the Company met it with a pantographed enlargement of the M/73, bringing out the much larger M/1876 or Centennial model, named from the great Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of that year. This gun was identical in design with the Volcanic - Henry - M/66 and M/73 Winchesters, and had a fantastic lot of long black powder cartridges adapted to it. However, the Government was actively developing more powerful and smaller caliber cartridges. The Spencer took a 56/50 Rim Fire cartridge, and that was shortly reduced to .50 Caliber enclosed primer Center Fire, and finally the .45-70-500 appeared. This cartridge was more than the M/76 could handle pressure-wise and the Company was scrabbling to find the answer. It was supplied by John Browning in the shape of a wooden model that eventually became the 1886, which was our strongest action. Many years ago I searched diligently for that wooden model but it had disappeared.

The Brownings produced several models a year and the Company bought every model that the Brownings designed. Tom Hall has some 30 or 40 models that never went into production. Mr. Bennett found that the Brownings had started to produce a single shot improvement of the famous Civil War Sharps, and bought the inventory of finished guns and components.

Models produced were the Single Shot, M/86, the lever action shotgun M/87, the M/90, 92, 93, 94, 95, 97, 1901, '02, '04 rifles. We all know that the Model 94, the first gun designed for smokeless powder, has killed more game than any other rifle in history, and the M/97 became the yardstick to measure the performance of all shotguns including the double gun.

About 1906 John Browning brought to New Haven a totally new shotgun - the Self-loader - the first of its kind. Mr. Bennett was away on a fishing trip but Mr. Browning, knowing the organization, went directly to the Patent Department and began patenting the gun to the hilt. As it was an automatic, many of the applicable hand-operated gun patents could be renewed. About the time the patent coverage was complete Mr. Bennett returned. Mr. Browning called and said he had a new gun, and Mr. Bennett said he was delighted - how much did the Company owe him? Mr. Browning said that as this was a totally new device he did not want to sell it outright but wished to put it on a royalty basis. The word "royalty" to T. G. was like a red rag to a bull and he had consistently refused to enter into any royalty agreements. He was perfectly willing to pay handsomely for models but not on a royalty basis. As a result, the cordial and profitable relationship of the preceding 25 - 28 years between the Brownings and the Company was severed. Browning took his invention to Mr. Hartley, President of Remington, who was tickled to death at the prospect of getting one foot in the Browning door. He told Mr. Browning that he had a short directors' meeting at 2 p.m. but it would be over by 2:30 when he could spend whatever time was necessary with him. Browning was waiting in Mr. Hartley's office for the 2:30 meeting to be over when word came down that Mr. Hartley had died of a heart attack on the directors' table. This sudden death upset the Remington organization and, not wanting to wait, Mr. Browning stepped on a boat and went to Liege, Belgium. Fabrique Nationale welcomed him with open arms, but by this time Remington had recovered sufficiently to start burning up the wires to Browning not to sell the American rights to his new gun. This situation put Browning in the driver's seat and he extracted an extremely favorable contract for the American rights.

I entered the Company in 1911 when they were feverishly trying to worm their way through the patent fence they had built around the gun, and the Winchester M/11 was the result - never a truly satisfactory arm.

By this time Mr. T. G. Bennett was practically retired, although he kept a guiding hand on the shoulder of his son who was the Operating Vice President. In the latter part of 1912 and the beginning of 1913 a prewar depression set in and we began to run out of orders. The Model 90 ran 400 a day from its inception, and the Model 94 likewise, and these standard guns began to slow up, an unheard of condition. There were some Government orders being advertised and one day I asked Mr. Bennett if we should not consider putting in a bid. He shook his head and said that he did not want U. S. Government business as it was a sure way to lose money. He refused to bid in spite of the decreasing demand for his product.

An interesting epilogue to me was when Mr. Laloux, president and majority owner of Fabrique Nationale, showed me the directors' table in their directors' room where Mr. Browning had died, also of a heart attack.

The year 1914, of course, brought the war and the tremendous expansion of the plant, but Mr. T. G. Bennett did not wish to be heavily involved in the new rush. He was a tall, well built man as he had been a wrestler in College, wore a close cropped beard, had steel gray eyes that looked right through you, very quiet spoken and an extremely modest and retiring man.

I am sure Oliver would have been pleased to learn that by the time T. G. left the Company the Revised Edition of Webster's Dictionary contained the word "Winchester" as a famous American rifle.

The passing of T. G. Bennett brought to a close the direct influence of Oliver Winchester and his famous son-in-law, and I find myself in the situation of the little boy who was sitting on a cake of ice. A kind lady asked what was the matter and he said, "My tale is told."