

L.M. Brownell, a Wyoming custom gunmaker.

Lenard M. Brownell, 1922 - 1982: A Custom Gunmaker

Harold L. Bailey, Jr.

Today we are going to do something a little different: we are going to be discussing a contemporary American gunmaker: this is fitting, since this maker was from the great state of Wyoming and it gives us the opportunity to recognize a native son during this the Centennial year of the State of Wyoming.

In 1980, while employed with Cities Service Company in Tulsa, Oklahoma, I was responsible for permitting, design, and development of a large surface coal mine near Gillette, Wyoming. The services of a Laramie, Wyoming, engineering firm were used to package the permit for submittal to state and federal regulatory agencies. The President of this firm was a gentleman named Dick Welsh. Dick kept telling me about some gunmaker near Sheridan, Wyoming, who was the best in the United States. I always thought this was peculiar since I had lived in Gillette for five years prior to 1980 and I had never heard of Lenard Brownell. I, therefore, thought that there was some embellishment to Dick's oratory; however, his accolades stuck in my mind.

After Armand Hammer got through with Cities Service Company, I was back in Gillette in 1983 working for another mining firm. At this time I acquired a Ruger Model 77 Mannlicher because I thought it was a nicely designed firearm. During the course of the acquisition, the gun store clerk told me that the stock was designed by Lenard Brownell in Sheridan, Wyoming. All of a sudden, Dick Welsh's oratory had meaning.

I proceeded over the next several years to search for a Brownell rifle in the Sheridan gun shops. In March, 1987, I made my first purchase, a 1950s era Mauser varmint rifle in 250 Savage caliber. It was not much for exotic beauty but it was great for wood to metal fit, the mark of craftsmanship.

As I have come to learn, and the rest of the world already knew, this cowboy gunmaker from northern Wyoming was truly one of the best, if not *the* best, gunmaker in the United States. There was no embellishment to Dick Welsh's oratory; it was indeed true. What follows is the tale of Lenard M. Brownell, Wyoming's Premier Contemporary Gunmaker.

WHAT IS A CUSTOM GUN?

Before going too much farther, it may be worthwhile to define just what a custom gun is. The words "Custom Gun" have a mystique about them that conjures up visions of Kornbrath engraved Griffin and Howe or Owens rifles,

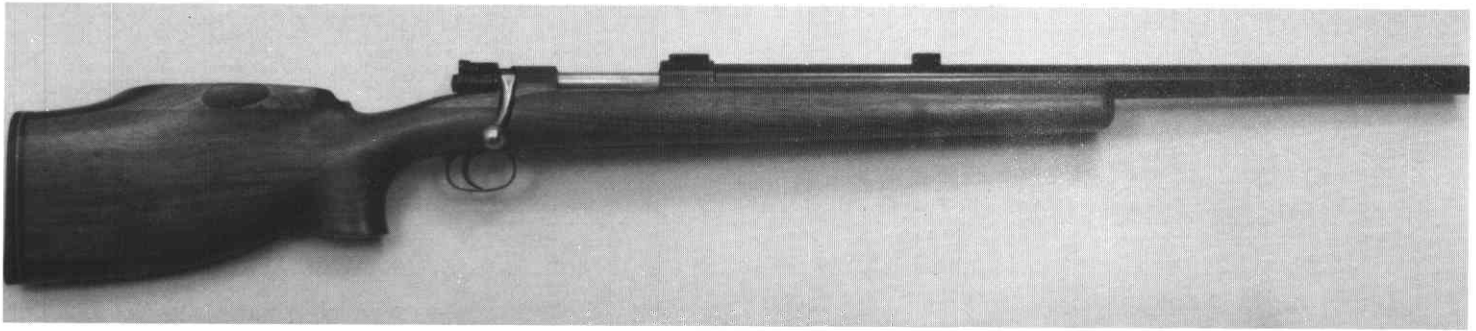


which in turn bring forth visions of dollar signs. Custom guns have been in existence from the first day man developed gun powder and a means to propel a projectile: the beautiful firearms made by the European masters were all custom firearms. It has only been in the 19th and 20th Centuries that there has not been a predominance of custom firearms, due to the cost effectiveness of modern manufacturing methods and the interchangeability of parts. In the period from the mid-1920s to the present, there has been a resurgence in the shooting public's desire to own something better and, hence, the Griffin and Howes and Owens have given way to the Kennedys, Brownells, Goens, Fishers and to the Dakota Arms and Kimber type of firearms manufacturers. It would appear that there are now more outstanding gunmakers than at any time in our nation's history.

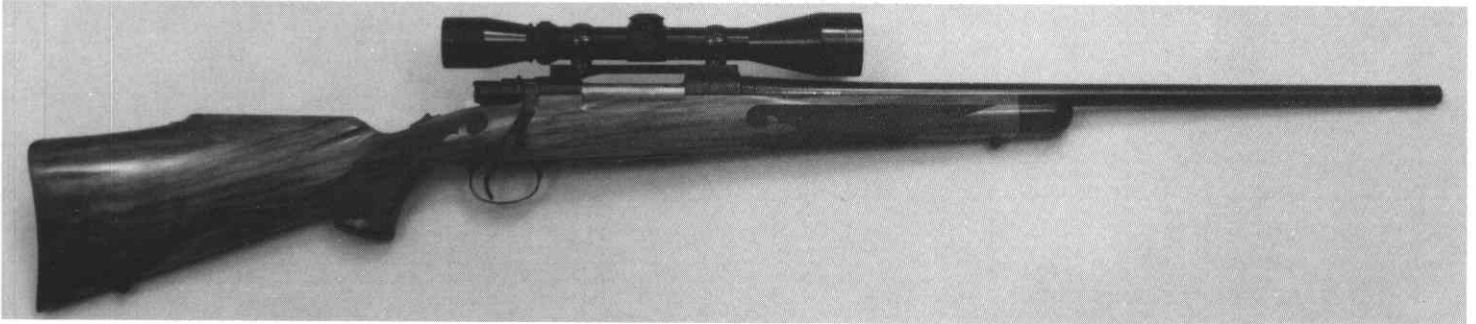
Since this article concerns Lenard Brownell, his definition is noteworthy, as well as crisp and to the point. To him, a custom gun is "one made to a specific set of one's individual desires". This definition transcends the spectrum of artistic excellence and financial capabilities. A custom gun is, therefore, that which is in the eye of the beholder and goes from a Bishop stocked war relic to the magnificence of the guns of the previously mentioned contemporary makers.

WHO WAS LENARD BROWNELL?

In 1922, Sheridan, Wyoming was the cosmopolitan center of the northern plains where they merged with the Big Horn Mountains. As a center of commerce, it served the ranching, railroading, coal mining, brewing, sugar beet processing and related support industries. It had



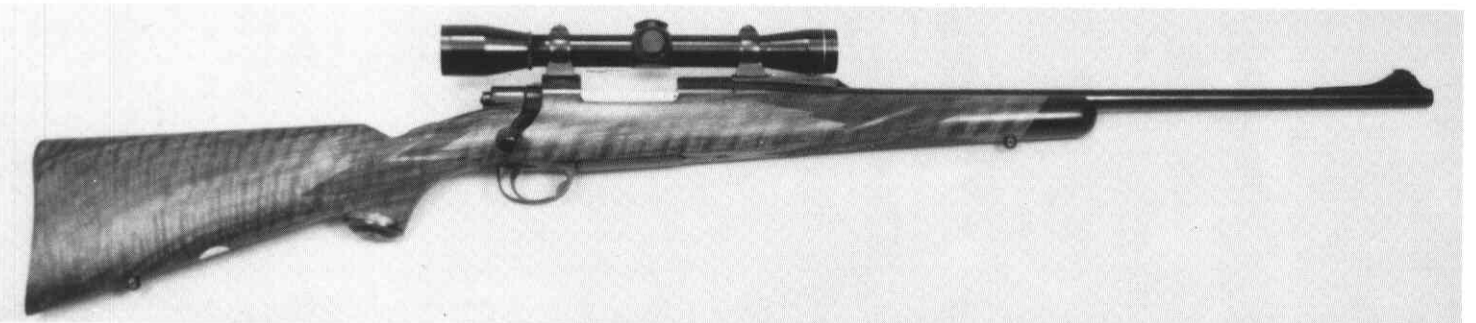
First acquisition, a 1950s varmint rifle.



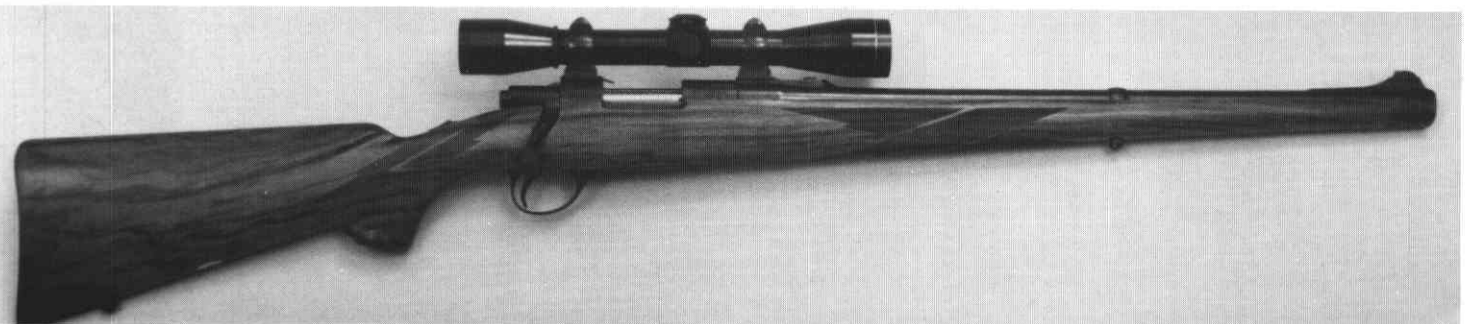
Second acquisition, an early 1960s sporting rifle.



Fat stock sporting rifle.



Slim stock light mountain rifle.



Mannlicher stocked Sako rifle.

approximately 12,000 people, which is about its current population. It was a gem of a town, sitting on the Bozeman Trail and containing the "Inn of the 69 Gables" as Bill Cody's Sheridan Inn was called. The trolley car still ran up the main street and out to the small coal mining camps such as Deitz, Model, and Kleanburn. It truly stood on the edge of the western frontier. It was into this environment that a young man named Lenard Brownell was born on October 5, 1922.

Lenard's father, a railroad employee, passed away when Lenard was a boy and he spent much of his childhood with his grandfather, a Livingston, Montana, Justice of the Peace and night sheriff. He learned about horses, cowboys, and guns while with his grandfather. He also learned independence, motivation for excellence, and persistence, all qualities that would benefit him in later life. It was during his childhood that he acquired an interest in art. He carved animals, cowboys and the wooden stagecoach model which for so many years was displayed in the Sheridan Inn. It is, therefore, not surprising that after graduation from the Sheridan High School, he attended Woodbury College in California, where he acquired a degree in Commercial Art.

After graduation from Woodbury, Lenard served as an officer and fighter pilot in the Air Force during WW II. He was stationed in Meridian, Mississippi, and Chandler, Arizona. While in Chandler, he married his college sweetheart, Catherine Chase, in December, 1944. Upon release from the service, Lenard and Catherine returned to Sheridan, where he worked for several years as a machinist at the Sheridan Iron Works. In 1948, Lenard became a full time stockmaker. His creativity with wood caught the eye of Lucian Cary, a firearms writer for *True* magazine, who thought that the stock on a Fox Sterlingworth shotgun that Brownell had displayed at the 1949 N.R.A. show in Denver was like a \$100 saddle on a \$5 horse.

In the 1950s, in addition to his stockwork, his machinist experience turned him into a local Sheridan gunmaker. His skill with both metal and wood started to become known nationally. He did contract work for Mashburn Arms in Oklahoma, Griffin and Howe asked him to come to New York, and Roy Weatherby tried to secure his services. Bill Ruger did in 1965 secure Brownell's services, and their friendship lasted to the end. Lenard designed the stocks used on most of Ruger's longarms, including the Number 1, Model 77, and all Mannlicher types. In 1965, the Brownells moved to New Hampshire, where Lenard was responsible for Number 1 rifle stock production to 1971, when they returned to Wyoming.

In the 1970s, the experience gained at Ruger with investment castings led to a series of gunsmith accoutrements which included bolt handles, quarter ribs,

bolt stops, grip caps, Mannlicher stock forend tips, scope rings and bases and flexible cleaning rods. It was during this latter portion of Lenard's life that he became renowned as a master of his trade. Spectacular stock execution, coupled with exquisite engraving by America's leading artists, resulted in the production of firearms that had no peer. His motto was : "Accuracy with Beauty".

In 1980, Brownell began a relationship with Kimber of Oregon when he critiqued their Model 82 rifle. He was commissioned in 1981 to make a Mannlicher stock for the Model 82 series. This ultimately became the Continental series of Kimber rifles and resulted in the production, in 1986, of approximately 185 Brownell commemorative Mannlicher rifles.

Lenard was an avid hunter with a keen interest in sheep and birds. He was also an outstanding benchrest and smallbore target shooter, was the Wyoming state smallbore champion for six years in the 1950s and 1960s. He taught marksmanship and coached the Sheridan Junior College rifle team for nine years. He attempted to provide guidance to novice gunmakers, about which Pete Grisel, founder of Dakota Arms, had this to say: "I generally have found that the people with the secrets aren't as good as they think they are. That is one of the things that I admired most about Lenard Brownell: he had no secrets and would tell you anything you need to know."

Brownell was honored by his peers at the 1981 N.R.A. show in Denver as the premier firearms maker in America. Six months later, cancer ended the life of a great craftsman and human being. Lenard Brownell is the only contemporary American gunmaker who ran a major firearms manufacturing facility and who was recognized for his excellence not only by his peers but by industry, through the issuance of a commemorative rifle. His legacy remains and provides a challenge to all present and future gunmakers.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A CRAFTSMAN

When I acquired my second Brownell rifle, I asked the seller how he could identify the gun as a Brownell, since it was unmarked. He told me that it had all the characteristics of one of his guns though these were never well identified. Fortunately, the rifle was illustrated in the 1962 edition of the *Gun Digest* and its authenticity is assured. My search to understand the Brownell characteristics has at this time given me confidence in identifying true Brownell stock qualities, though I cannot say the same about metalwork. Without proper identification, metalwork is almost impossible to identify, and this is somewhat sad, since much of his work after 1972 was devoted to the custom metalwork end of the business. This section, however, will address both wood and metal characteristics.

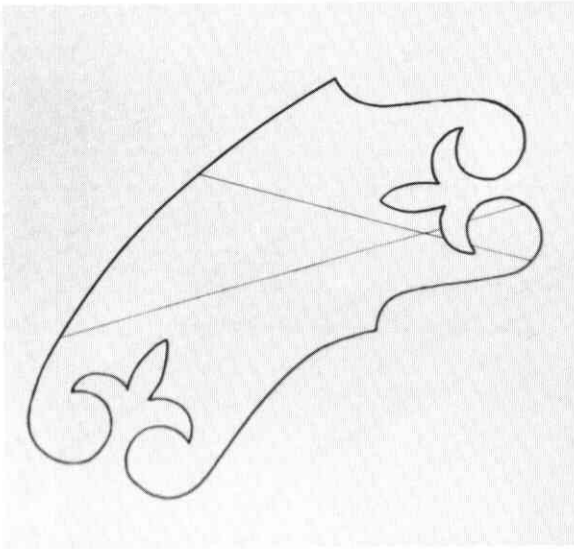
Stock Characteristics

All things go through evolutionary trends, some for the better and a lot for the worse. In Brownell's case, as time passed, his craftsmanship and innovation in design improved to the point where he was indeed a master custom gunmaker. This was particularly true with respect to stock execution.

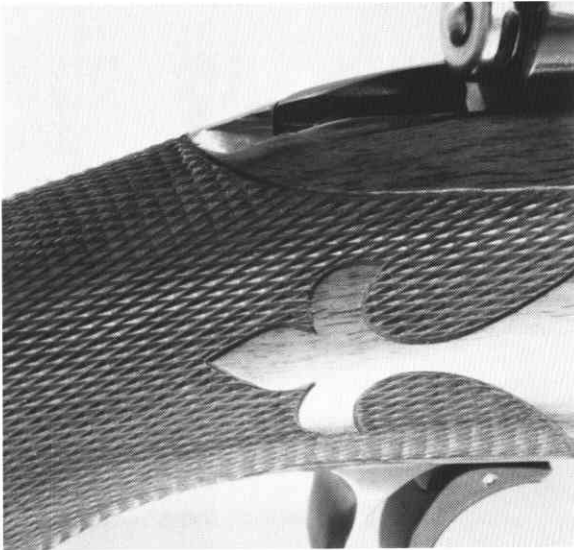
There are essentially three evolutionary periods: the period from 1948 to 1953, from 1954 to 1956 and from 1957 to 1982. The initial period is known to me as the "fat stock" period. The transition period is somewhat hazy but is exemplified by the change in the Fleur-de-lis checkering pattern, about which more will be said later. The master or last period is exemplified by slim stocks, and exquisite Mannlichers, as well as the combination and integration of metal and wood. The stock characteristics are many and, at times, somewhat vague. The most pronounced ones pertain to stock shape, checkering, pistol grip caps, fore-end tips, cheekpieces, and buttplates.

Stock shape. As indicated, there were three developmental periods. The first and third were evidenced through stock design while the second relates to the transition from the Kennedy fleur-de-lis checkering pattern to his own distinctive pattern. In the early 1950s, stocks had a greater drop at the heel than in the 1960s and all early period Brownell stocks evidence this trend. In addition, the early stocks had a fat or heavy looking fore-end and these are distinctive. The grace and slimness of later sporting stocks was absent. The transition of the smooth shape was completed by 1956, after which all sporting stocks are exquisite. Target and Varmint stocks retained their eye-pleasing form throughout the period of manufacture; however, some of the later Varmint stocks exhibited a slimming of the fore-end.

Lenard Brownell's major forte was his Mannlicher



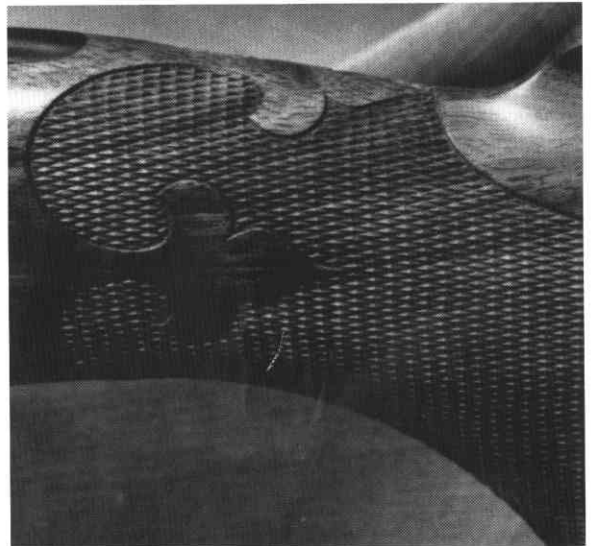
Early fleur-de-lis pattern from Kennedy's *Checkering and Carving of Gunstocks*.



Mid 1950s fleur-de-lis form.



Early 1960s fleur-de-lis form



Final fleur-de-lis form.

stocks. He was a master of the Mannlicher. The Mannlicher stocks are found with and without cheekpieces. There are few Monte Carlo types, with most being of the Continental variety. Most Mannlichers will have the wood to metal fore-end joint at an angle to the barrel, even though Brownell's commercial variety had a perpendicular joint. Most will also have a butterknife bolt handle. All the Mannlicher features combined to make a most pleasing package that was recognized by both Ruger and Kimber in the early 1980s.

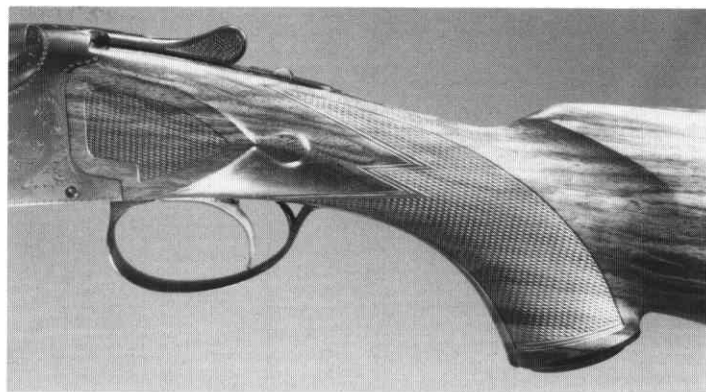
Checkering. Checkering of gun stocks is undoubtedly the most time consuming and frustrating of stock making activities. Lines must be straight and parallel in order for the job to look good. Pertinent Brownell comments from the Kennedy book on checkering are:

1. Correct your mistakes at the time you make them.
2. Do not overrun the borders.
3. Do not leave the hard to get ones (diamonds) flat on top.

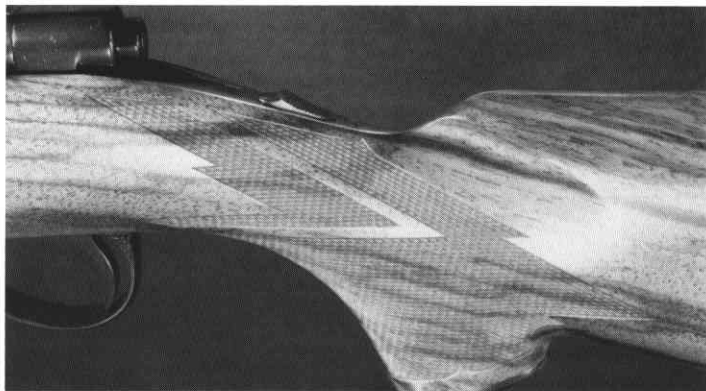
The comments give some insight into the man: he was a perfectionist and had little room for mediocrity.

A review of Brownell's checkering patterns establishes an evolutionary trend best illustrated by the point and fleur-de-lis patterns. Early point patterns had both fore and aft checkering lines parallel on both the grip and fore-end segments. This pattern then changed in the transition period to the diamond format with the checkering lines converging on the fore-end portions of the stock. Later or master period point patterns may be enhanced with milled or open borders in a discretely attractive fashion. Throughout his life, the fleur-de-lis *pattern* did not appreciably change. The *fleur-de-lis* did change: it progressed from the open or Kennedy type of the early period to a semi-open type of the transition period to the classic Brownell type of the master period. It is this Brownell fleur-de-lis that is a distinguishing characteristic and one which aids in establishing the periods of craftsmanship. The fleur-de-lis pattern has never been bordered; it has on occasion been observed paneled, whereby the checkering surface has been slightly relieved. The small brass fleur-de-lis master template originally used by Lenard is now owned by a Glenrock, Wyoming, custom gunmaker, who used it to finish the checkering on the last gun that Brownell stocked, a Winchester Model 42 shotgun with a combination point and fleur-de-lis pattern. This combination pattern was one of the more common patterns.

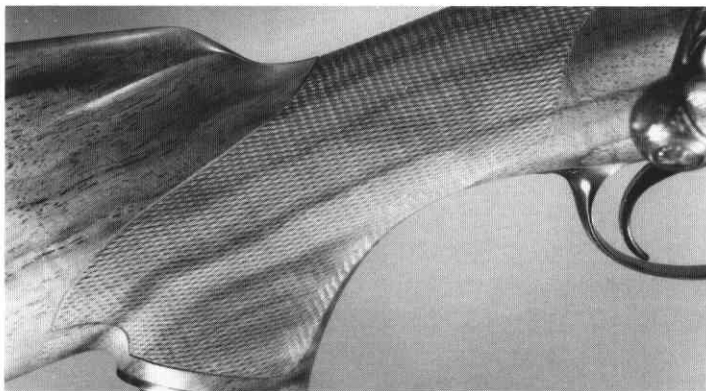
Other Brownell patterns included the ribboned point pattern, which was used quite frequently, primarily on his more outstanding guns. In addition, there are ribboned fleur-de-lis patterns which are somewhat unusual. Also unusual are free-form patterns and those which



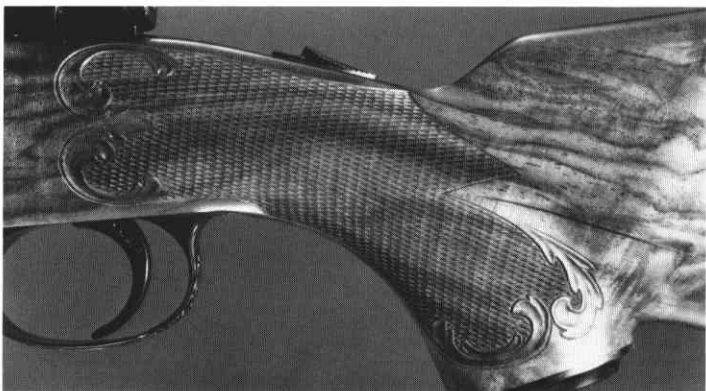
Point pattern checkering on a Browning shotgun.



Ribboned point pattern.



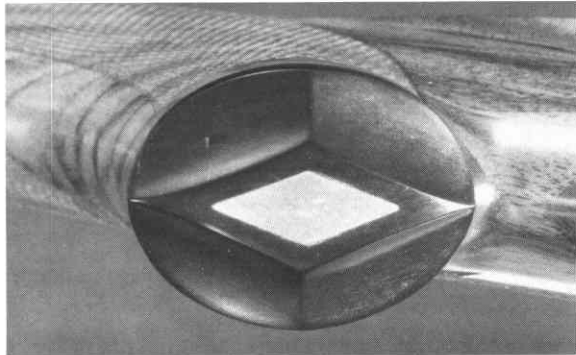
Free form pattern.



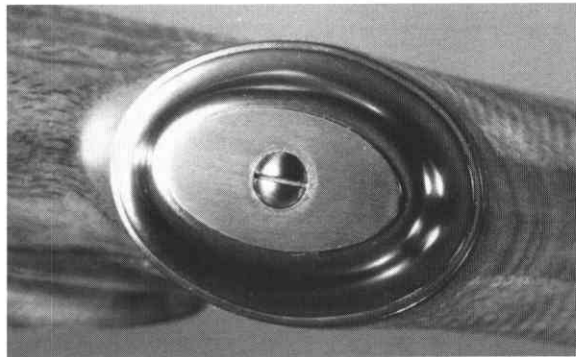
Carving with checkering pattern.



Plastic Neidner grip cap.



Brownell's diamond grip cap from the late 1950s.



The commercial Brownell grip cap of the 1970s.

incorporate carving. Brownell expressed his thoughts on carving as follows: "I myself believe that unless carving is well done it has no place on a gun, which also goes for metal engraving." Though he didn't like carving that which he executed was exceptionally attractive. Normally checkering was done with 22 or 24 lines per inch as laid down with Dem-Bart power tools and outlined with tools of his own design.

The wood of choice for Brownell was walnut, particularly French walnut. His admiration of the wood extended to his house in Wyarno where he finished the living room with it. It is interesting to note that the two most magnificent Mannlicher rifles that he made were for himself and his son. These two guns, the father-son pair, were stocked with side by side blanks of French walnut. He would, however, use any wood a customer desired. Stocks made of laminated walnut and maple are known.

His wife's Winchester Model 52 target rifle was stocked with fiddleback maple and she used this gun to become the Wyoming State Woman's Smallbore Champion for several years in the early 1960s. In general, maple stocks are uncommon. Synthetic materials such as Kevlar or fiberglass were never used.

Pistol Grip Caps. Grip caps were almost an area of poor taste in the years up to the late 1950s. Many of his early stocks used multicolored or solid colored plastic Niedner caps and, on occasion, gaudy german silver caps from Frank Mittermeier's catalog. This attitude changed around 1960, as a predominance of Neidner checkered steel caps, as well as some horn and ebony caps, begin to appear. Also, at this time, a black plastic cap appears which contains a gold or silver diamond over the grip cap screw. These were specifically designed for Brownell by an engineer in Cleveland, Ohio, and are a characteristic identifying feature of Lenard's guns of the period. After the return from Ruger in 1971, the Brownell cap predominates and is somewhat of a distinguishing characteristic, even though it is one of the most popular caps on the accessories market. Trap caps of several variations were used, though only on the fancier guns, and they can be considered as rare. Lenard did not think much of skeleton caps and it is doubtful if he installed any. He did install on at least one gun a combination wood and metal cap with the profile of his cap. This was a beautiful and unusual installation, since it had small cleats which were inlet into the wood at the heel and toe parts of the cap.

Fore-end Tips. As well as being a master of the Mannlicher, Brownell was a master of fore-end tip installation, though on many of his stocks a fore-end tip was not installed. His schnabel tip is encountered frequently and is one of the most graceful. It gives the impression that as one's eyes grace the barrel from muzzle to butt, the rearward curve of the tip helps carry the eye to the butt. No other maker has fabricated a similar tip and, hence, this tip is a distinguishing characteristic. It was made only in the master period.

Many classic gun connoisseurs become distressed at tips that are not jointed perpendicular to the barrel. Brownell liked diagonal tip joints, since they blended with the sweep of the bolt handle and gave an overall symmetry to the rifle. He would, however, use either perpendicular or diagonal joints and both are common. Mannlicher tips also used both joints, with the diagonal type predominating. Early rifles will have only perpendicular joints, while both are evident in the master period.

As a general statement, it appears that more guns were made without tips than with them. The most spectacular tip he installed was a metal inlay done on rifle Number 94. Gunmakers who have viewed the tip wonder how it

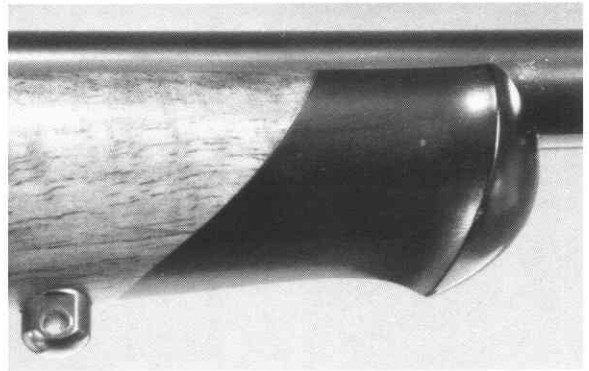
was installed. The combination of tip and swivel escutcheon is unusual. This installation was done on one other gun which was made for a Vice-President of Orvis, the Vermont sporting goods firm. The Orvis tip is, however, held in with two screws. The Orvis gun is the last numbered gun. It is Number 127 and is engraved "Omega"

Cheekpieces. Cheekpieces came in five styles, which I refer to as the Continental, Classic, Monte Carlo, Contemporary and Target. The only difference between the Continental and Classic styles was the greater elongation of the Continental style. It is more frequently encountered on the Mannlicher rifles. All cheekpieces except the Target types could be had either with or without shadow lines as well as beveled edges. On Continental and Classic types, the cheekpiece joined with the top of the comb flute, a distinct characteristic. On Monte Carlos with a shadow line, the shadow line and crest of the cheekpiece rolled over the top of the comb, join and are feathered into the opposite side of the stock. These characteristics were in evidence in the master period. On Monte Carlo and Contemporary types, the bottom lines of the cheekpiece faded into the grip checkering in a point which the checkering encloses; this is evidenced on guns of all periods.

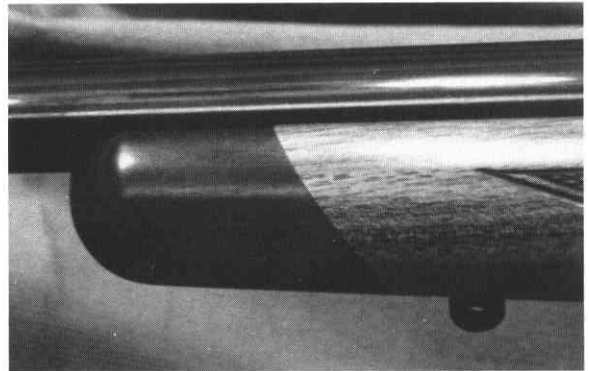
Perhaps the most beautiful of Brownell's cheekpieces were the Target type. They appear to float above the stock so as to properly position the head at scope level in a most graceful fashion. They are in all periods of manufacture and have not been duplicated by other makers.

All cheekpieces are distinctive of Brownell's work and are indicators of authenticity.

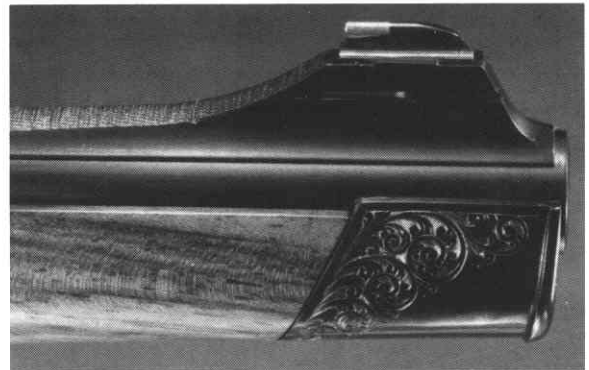
Buttplates. With all custom gunmakers, buttplates and grip caps appear to be a specialty unto themselves. Brownell used solid and ventilated pads made by Pachmayr and marked "Custom Gunstocks/L.M. Brownell/Sheridan, Wyoming." These were used into the late 1950s and contained a white line spacer which time



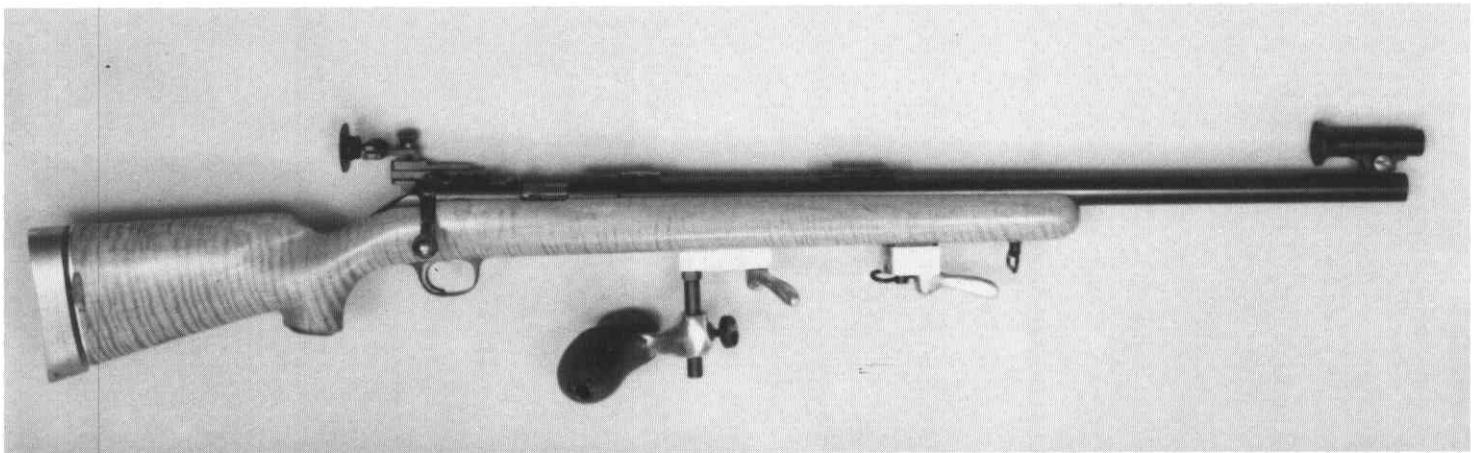
The characteristic Brownell schnabel fore-end tip.



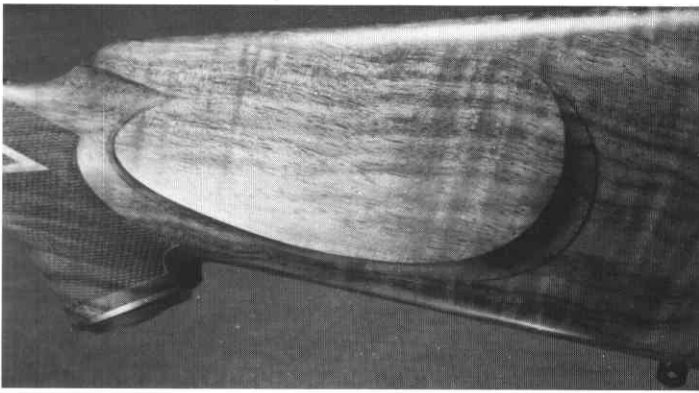
The diagonal fore-end tip joint on a sporting rifle.



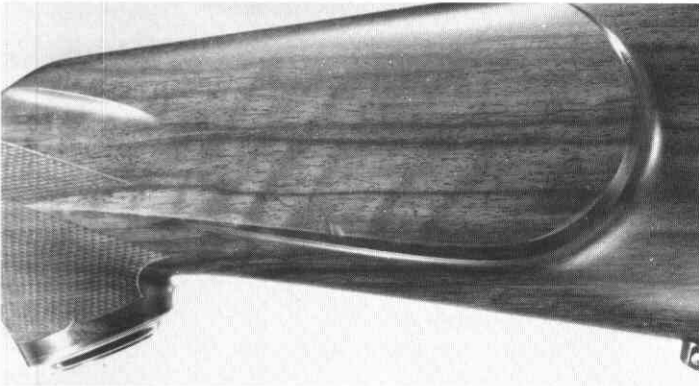
A diagonal fore-end tip joint on a Mannlicher rifle.



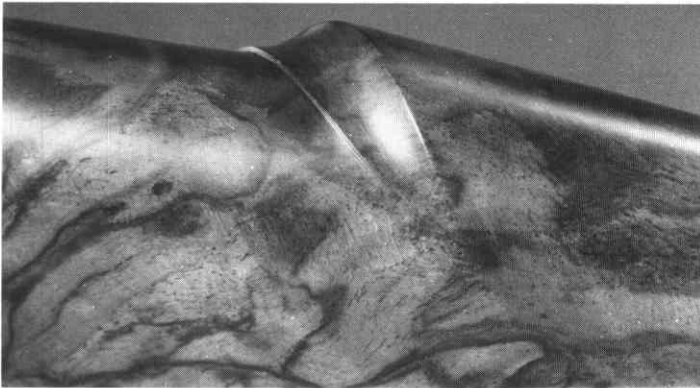
Mrs. Brownell's Winchester Model 52 target rifle.



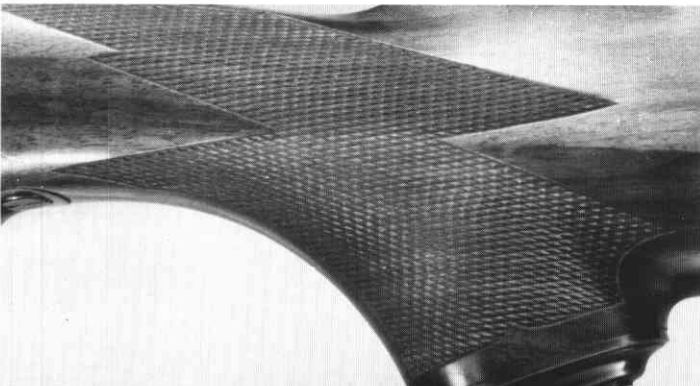
The classic cheekpiece.



The contemporary beveled edge cheekpiece.



Comb roll-over on a shadow line Monte Carlo cheekpiece.



"V" in checkering pattern at bottom cheekpiece termination.

relegated to an unacceptable status. In the early 1960s, unmarked Pachmayr pads that had a fan type pattern on the butt were used. All the pads were black, with the exception of some red pads used on shotguns and on Mrs. Brownell's light mountain rifle.

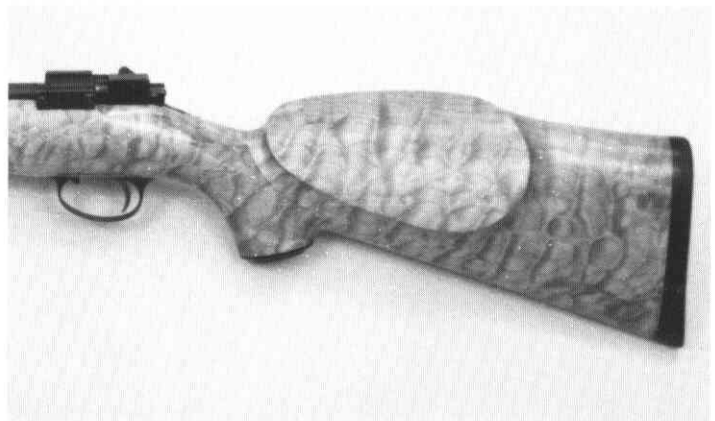
The steel Niedner buttplate predominates prior to 1972.

After his return from Ruger, all sorts of innovative creations appear. At this time, trap plates with plastic liners branded in the bottom of the liner with the LB brand make their appearance. On fancy guns these liners will be lined with leather. The plates were acquired from Al Biesen in Spokane, Washington. Beautiful skeleton plates, horn or ebony heel and toe plates, checkered wood butts, and any other type of artistic or functional type of plate could have been fitted. The characteristic butt plates are the marked rubber pads of the early period and the trap Niedner plate with the plastic liner of the master period.

For clarification, the LB brand is Brownell's registered Wyoming livestock brand. He used it as a trademark on the accessories line and his art work. The accessories marked with the brand, in addition to the trap buttplate liners, included the bolt knobs, grip caps and scope rings.

Metal Characteristics

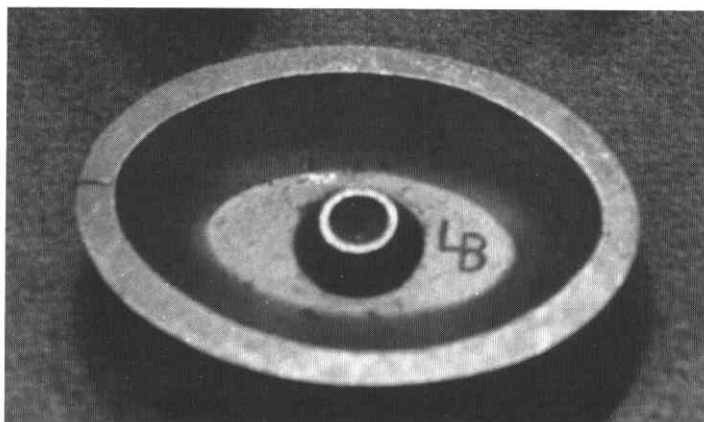
The identification of rifles that contain Brownell metal work is about impossible for all periods. There are some indicators in the master period, but even they are not well defined. In the initial period, it is doubtful that Lenard did any metal work. In the transition period, rebarreling and chambering became feasible, as did the modification of bolt knobs. Hot bluing was also done in conjunction with a shop in Buffalo, Wyoming. This arrangement continued until his departure for New Hampshire in 1965. Major metal work in the transition period was farmed out to craftsmen such as N.B. Fashingbauer in Wisconsin or Hugh Mildren of the Sheridan Gun Shop in Sheridan, Wyoming. Fashingbauer installed most of the tang safeties prior to 1971. All bottom metal was either reworked factory metal or it was acquired from outside sources such as E.T. Blackburn in Utah.



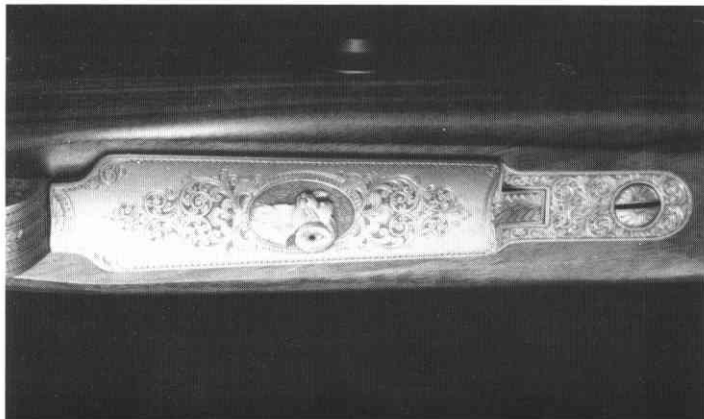
Brownell's floating cheekpiece on target rifle stocks.

After 1972, capabilities were enhanced with the acquisition of new metal working machinery and Brownell did all gunsmithing tasks except rust bluing, which was farmed out. The metalsmithing business permitted him to hire an assistant in 1976 to handle the volume associated with the accessories and metal work, which now included quarter rib and sight work as well as some bottom metal and tang safety installation. Specialized skeleton butt plates and grip caps were made as needed for his own creations.

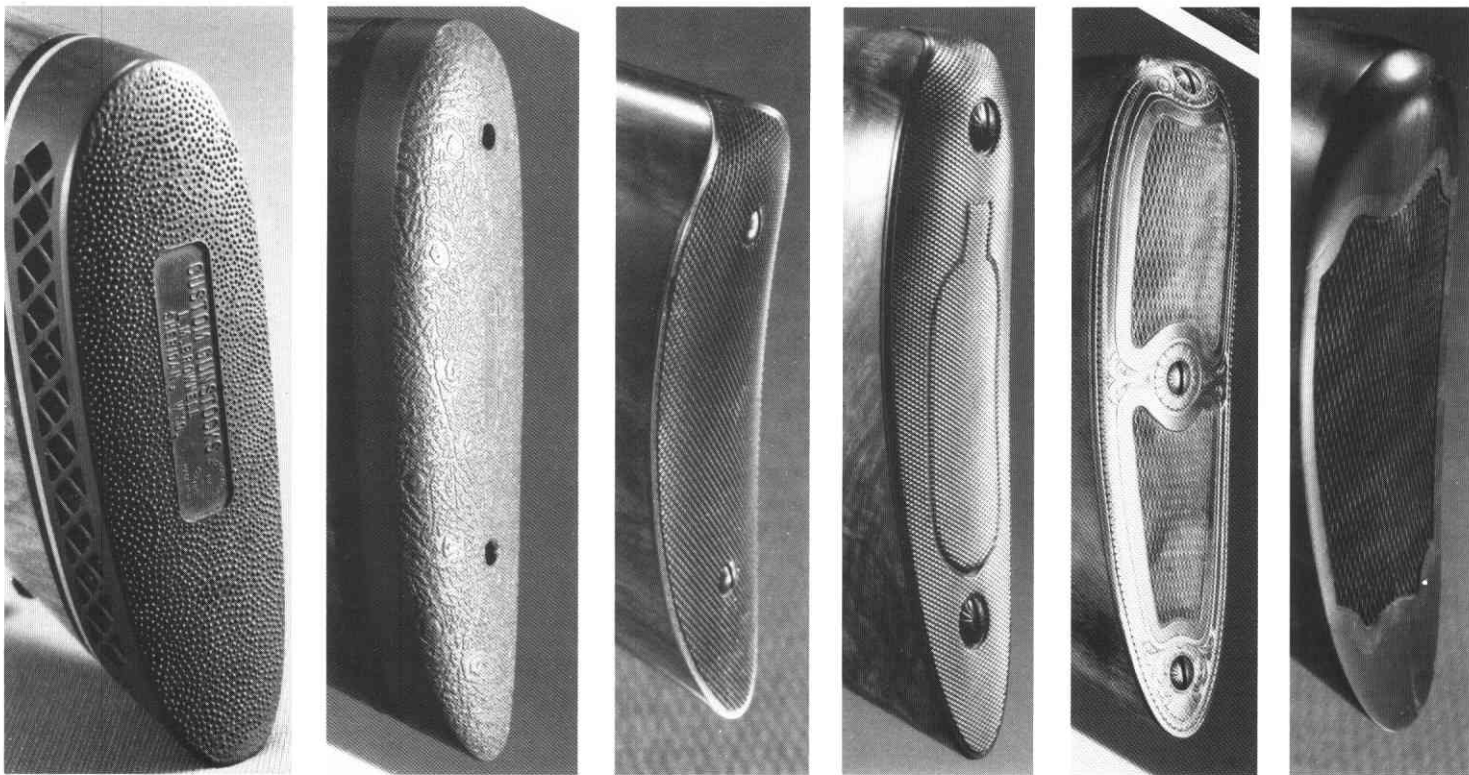
In addition to the gun work, in the early years, Lenard made bits and spurs in a limited quantity. On some of these, he did exceptional engraving which if pursued could have made him into an outstanding engraver. As far as engravers went, he considered John Warren of Eastham, Massachusetts, to be the best contemporary engraver in the United States. Warren engraved most of Brownell's guns, the most outstanding of which is the Ruger Number 1 shown on the cover of the September-October 1981 issue of *Rifle* magazine. The French finish on the receiver was done by Warren and this finish is present on at least three rifles. Very few Brownell guns will have gold inlay, since Lenard felt it was gaudy and not durable on a working firearm. Engraved gold initial plates were installed at customer's request and these appear to have been engraved by Lenard.



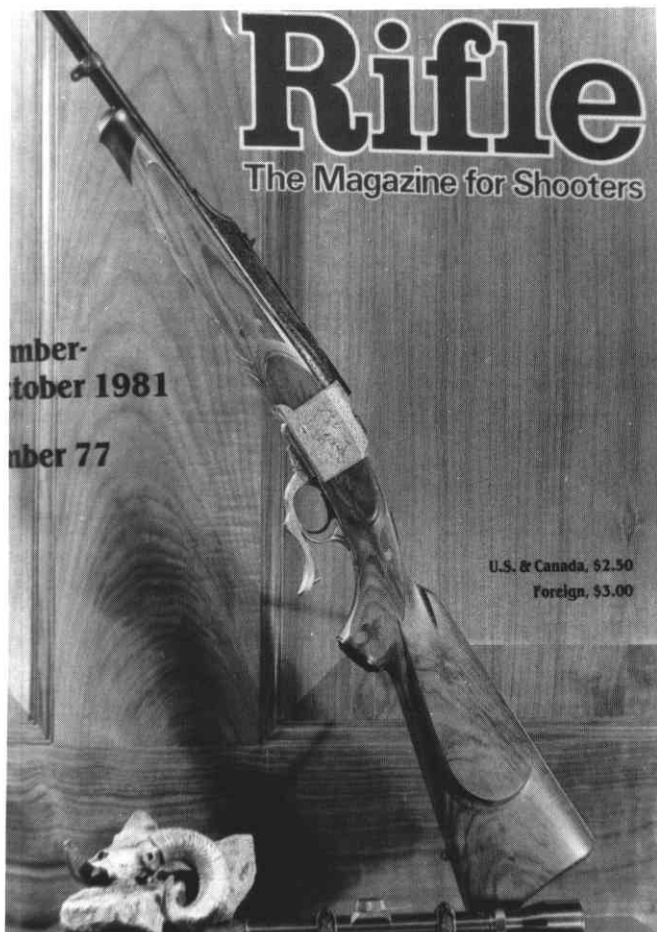
Brownell brand marked scope rings and grip cap.



John Warren engraved floor plate from rifle Number 94.



Left to right, an early Brownell marked rubber butt plate, a later red rubber "Old English" Pachmayr butt plate, a typical Neidner steel buttplate, a typical trap type steel butt plate, an example of a hand crafted skeleton butt plate, and an inlaid horn heel and toe plates.



Cover of the September-October issue of the *Rifle* magazine showing an outstanding Brownell conversion of a Ruger Number 1.

MARKING AND NUMBERING

Product marking is in most instances the ultimate expression that a craftsman can make with respect to pride in the product produced. In the West, this was evident

with art, leather goods, and firearms; it is a common practice. Brownell initially did not mark any metal part of the guns he worked on: he was a stockmaker and as such the only marking known has been on the rubber Pachmayr solid or ventilated buttplates that he installed. These buttplates were marked in three lines "CUSTOM GUNSTOCKS/L.M. Brownell/Sheridan, Wyo." It is evident that in the early 1960s he stopped using these pads: his marked pads included a white line spacer which he felt lacked class and, hence, was discontinued. It is unfortunate that a number of these pads got into circulation sometime after this death and these may appear on some non-Brownell stocks, though none have been observed by the author.

Metal marking started in the early 1960s. There is an unnumbered barrel-marked magnum rifle with a Brownell-marked rubber buttplate in California. This is the earliest known metal-marked rifle; it is assumed that it was made in 1961. In late 1962 or early 1963, barrel marking and numbering started and continued to the end. It should be noted that only those guns which received extensive metal work, including new barrels, receiver modifications, or some other unusual characteristic qualified for marking and numbering. There are exceptions to the rule and Number 112 is one. This L 46 Sako varmint rifle was originally made in 1959 with an unchecked stock. It was subsequently acquired by Mr. Chester Hape, who had it checkered in 1979 by his next door neighbor and friend, Lenard Brownell, and at this time it received its barrel marking and serial number.

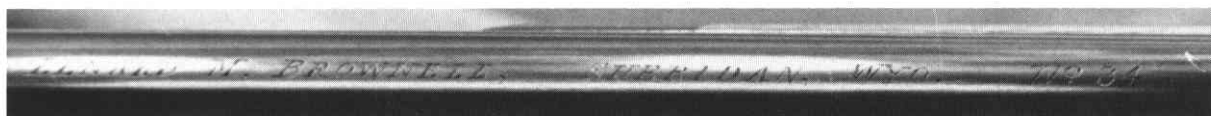
Barrel markings between serial number 1 and 58 are variable. In this range, all markings appear to be professionally hand engraved with the exception of some guns below number 30 which are lightly stamped with



Engraved Wyarno barrel marking.



Brownell engraved Wyarno barrel marking.



Engraved Sheridan barrel markings.

block letters. These were done by a local Sheridan jeweler. All addresses in this range will indicate Sheridan manufacture. All guns above serial number 58 are of Wyarno manufacture and these were engraved by Brownell using a pantograph following brass templates which produced either block or slanted letters. As with most human endeavors, there are exceptions to the rule. Serial Numbers 42 and 43 have a Newport, New Hampshire, barrel marking. These two guns were made for Catherine and himself and as such did not violate any employment agreements with Ruger. Catherine's was a light mountain rifle while Lenard's was a Mannlicher. Both were magnificently engraved by John Warren. There is a modified No. 1 Ruger, about which more will be said later, which as no number but is marked with both the Newport, New Hampshire, and Wyarno, Wyoming, address. These are but a few of the oddities.

There are no records for guns made prior to 1972; however, after that date records are in existence. The construction of an appropriate serial number sequence is a combination of fact and fiction and is as follows:

BROWNELL SERIAL NUMBER SEQUENCE			
YEAR	NUMBER	ADDRESS	TOTAL MADE
1963	1-15	Sheridan	15
1964	16-30	Sheridan	15
1965	31-41	Sheridan	11
1966 thru 1971	42-43	Newport	2
1972	44-52	Sheridan	9
1973	53-69	Sheridan & Wyarno	17
1974	70-74	Wyarno	5
1975	78-85	Wyarno	11
1976	86-93	Wyarno	8
1977	94-100	Wyarno	7
1978	101-107	Wyarno	7
1979	108-112	Wyarno	5
1980	113-121	Wyarno	9
1981	122-127	Wyarno	6
1982			0

The last gun, No. 127, was engraved "Omega". It is estimated that Brownell worked on approximately 600 guns during his career.

THE RUGER ASSOCIATION

Employment by Sturm, Ruger & Company in 1965 was undoubtedly the most significant learning experience that a cowboy gunmaker from Wyoming could ever be exposed to. The relationship started in 1963 when Bill Ruger and Lenard got in a pickup truck and drove from Sheridan to Whitehorse in the Yukon Territory on a hunting trip. It was on this trip that plans for development of the Number 1 single shot rifle unfolded and Bill asked Lenard to be a part of the program. The fabrication of a new single shot rifle was intriguing to Lenard, since as gunmaker he had difficulty acquiring good actions to make custom guns. To make a long story short, the

Brownells moved to Newport, New Hampshire, in the fall of 1965.

While at Ruger, Lenard was responsible for stockmaking, quality control and shipping of the Number 1 rifle. He arrived before the plant was completed and was involved in the exciting times associated with the startup of a new facility. He is credited with the design of the stocks on the Number 1, the Model 77, and all Mannlicher types. As time passed and the developmental stage matured, Lenard became a production overseer. He had time to think about art, gun accessories, the custom gun business and improvements in the Number 1. It was during this period that he made a positive contribution to the Model 77.

The Model 77 originally was introduced with a "dog leg" bolt handle that was somewhat less than enthusiastically received by the shooting public. In an effort to correct this shortcoming, Bill Ruger asked Brownell what he could do to correct the problem and a bolt handle of Lenard design was installed in 1970 on the Model 77; it was to become standard issue.

The Number 1 had several shortcomings that concerned Lenard. He didn't think the trigger was good enough; he felt the parallel tang sides encouraged stock breakage and the tang safety was sloppy. In addition, he felt the action could be lightened without jeopardizing strength or accuracy. He started on the refinements he felt necessary while at Ruger; the Brownells returned to Wyoming before the project was completed. After languishing for several years, the refined Number 1 was completed in 1978. It had a double lever trigger, tapered tangs, a crisp safety and a receiver that was 8 ounces lighter than the standard. To top things off, it was very accurate! This "One of a Kind" rifle was marked in four lines on the side of frame as follows: "EXPERIMENTAL #1/Lenard Brownell/Newport, N.H. & /Wyarno, WYO."

In 1981, Lenard made the prototype Mannlicher Model 77. This gun is shown in the 1982 *Gun Digest* and it essentially ends the Ruger association.

THE BROWNELL LINE

After his return from Ruger in late 1971, interesting things started to happen. The custom gun business was started again, a new house was built in Wyarno, and a new line of gunmaker's accessories was developed.

The new accessories started to appear in early 1972 and took the form of continental pattern grip caps, double lever scope rings and bases, and bolt handles. All these items were investment castings made by Ruger's Pinetree Casting subsidiary from 8620 steel. About this alloy Brownell had this to say: "it is a moderate alloy that has enough guts to more than do the job but not so critical as to induce disadvantages." These items were the high volume, big ticket items in the line. The grip caps are

DOUBLE LEVER SCOPE MOUNT
BY
LENARD M. BROWNELL



In making up custom rifles, I have found a need for something beyond the available commercial scope mounts. The idea of a double lever mount is not original with me but has not been available. To fulfill the need, I have tooled up to manufacture a limited number of mounts with standard type as well as custom bases using the most solid of all systems and the only system that goes back as far as the dovetail.

I offer the mount in an esthetically clean form. I have incorporated a unique system of serrated dovetail in one dovetail to absorb recoil. This eliminates the need of grooves and studs for this purpose and gives greater choice of ring placement for the best eye relief.

Standard bases available for popular bolt actions. Quarter ribs or special bases made to order require the gun and scope.



LENARD M. BROWNELL — CUSTOM RIFLES
BOX 25 WYAND, WYO. 82945

Early 1970s double lever scope ring advertisement.

currently used on Kimber firearms, the rings and bases are sold and manufactured as Kimber's own, and the bolt handles are favorites among custom gunmakers. Concurrent with or slightly after the introduction of the previous items were Ruger M77 and Mauser 98 bolt stops, Mannlicher forend tips, and flexible cleaning rods.

The chronology of the introduction of these accessories is not well defined. Rifles produced in 1972 exhibit all aspects of the line with the exception of the flexible rod. The line was advertised in the *Rifle* magazine from September, 1975, through April, 1982. The flexible rod was first mentioned in the January, 1979, edition and the bolt stops appeared as "New from Lenard Brownell" in the March, 1980, issue. This is clouded by the description of the bolt stop in the 1974 *Gun Digest*. It is interesting to note that the custom gun part of the business was never formally advertised. In the 32 years between 1950 and 1982, Brownell's work was shown in 22 issues of the *Gun Digest*: this was the main advertising medium. He did put out small flyers on the accessories, the first of which made its appearance in late 1972.

In general, the line was a moderate success. With the exception of the rings and bases and the bolt stops, all the other items were less costly than the competition. This undoubtedly accounts for the Kimber grip cap sales and the use of the Mannlicher forend tip on all Ruger and Kimber Mannlicher type rifles.

After Lenard's death, the business became a partnership between Catherine Brownell and Ross Billingsley, who had done metal work for Brownell since 1976. The partnership was dissolved when Catherine sold the business to Ross in 1986; it continues to provide all the accessories with the exception of the rings and bases.

THE KIMBER CONNECTION

Kimber of Oregon started manufacture of Model 82 .22 caliber rifles in 1979, with initial shipments commencing in early 1980. At this time, Lenard Brownell was retained by Kimber to critique the Model 82. The critique gun was serial number LB8, an early Model 82 without a bolt detent. According to Greg Warne, former President of Kimber, Brownell worked on receiver tang modifications as well as stock modifications. It is apparent that the tang modifications were adopted in late 1982.

Perchance as a result of this work, Brownell was commissioned by Kimber in 1981 to fabricate a Mannlicher stocked Model 82 complete with a butterknife bolt handle. This rifle, serial number 2453, was subsequently engraved by Bob Evans and was the proto-type for Kimber's Continental series of rifles. This gun is shown in the 1986 Kimber catalog.

In addition to the preceding work, Kimber held Brownell's accessories in high esteem. Brownell's grip caps were installed on all rifles. It is, therefore, not very

The Model 82 .22LR Brownell... limited edition full length stock in memory of a great friend of Kimber.

The Model 82 Brownell is an exciting new addition to Kimber's product line. Only 500 units will be produced bearing the name of the late Lenard Brownell, great friend and contributor to Kimber. Mr. Brownell built a prototype full length stocked Model 82 .22LR in 1982 as a new model he believed would be very fitting to Kimber's product line.

The Model 82 .22LR Brownell will have the following distinguishing features:

- A full length Mannlicher style stock, made from AAA grade claro walnut.
- A special butter knife bolt handle with a checkered underside.
- Express type open sights, one leaf folding, one stenciling.
- A round top receiver, drilled and tapped for Kimber scope mount bases.

* Special BROWNELL engraving: engraving markings on the receiver and a 1 of 500 serial number designation.

Special Note: The rifle pictured here is the original prototype finished by Lenard Brownell for Greg Warne, President, Kimber of Oregon, Inc. It was subsequently engraved by engraver Robert Evans, Oregon City, Oregon. The stock on this particular rifle was made from a specialty selected piece of English walnut and should not be confused with the wood which will appear on the production version of this rifle. It will be manufactured from late grade AAA claro walnut. The action in this particular rifle is an early Model 82 .22LR. The production version will be the new Model 82 "B".



Page from the 1986 Kimber catalog advertising the Brownell commemorative Mannlicher rifle.

surprising that prior to his death in 1982, arrangements were made with Kimber to purchase all tooling and rights for the double lever scope mounts which Brownell had designed while at Ruger. The mounts were a significant addition to the Kimber product line.

As a result of the relationship, and in recognition of Brownell's contributions, Kimber decided to market a duplicate of the Brownell prototype Model 82 Mannlicher as a limited edition of 500 guns. These were marked on the left side of the rear receiver bridge with "L.M. Brownell" in either script, or block letters. The serial numbers were prefixed with an "LB". Advertisement of this commemorative rifle was made in the previously mentioned 1986 catalog. Kimber abruptly discontinued production after only 185 guns had been manufactured. The announcement of the discontinuance was contained in the May 16, 1986, *Dealer Newsletter*. The Kimber Brownell commemorative is the only commemorative firearm that has given recognition to an American custom gunmaker.

The Kimber connection thereby ended; however, the scope mounts are still advertised as being of Brownell design and the Brownell grip caps are used on all series.

ARTISTIC ENDEAVORS

Brownell's efforts to make a living as a gunmaker relegated art to a position of secondary importance. Though relatively dormant for a period of twenty years, the urge to sculpt blossomed in the late 1960s and took the form of both gifts and commercial items. While at Ruger and as a bit of humor, he cast an animal with the head of a duck and the tail of a pheasant. The name of this "hybrid" is left to the reader's imagination. At this same time, he made his first major bronze, a groundhog. Both the groundhog and the "hybrid" are dated 1969. The number of "hybrids" is unknown; there were four groundhogs cast. In addition to the "hybrid" giveaway item, he also had cast some silver horseshoe belt buckles and some small owls made out of both brass and silver. The owls are felt by some to be the most difficult item to find, though all his art is exceptionally scarce.

Commercially, his efforts have included sculptures of Big Horn sheep horns, a cock pheasant, and a Labrador retriever. The sheep horns which were called "Winter Kill", were cast in silver and bronze. The silver edition had fourteen castings out of a planned twenty. Six orders were unfilled due to Brownell's failing health. There were ten sales of the bronze edition. There were thirty castings in bronze of the cock pheasant and approximately one hundred castings of the Labrador retriever called "Beau". Advertisement for the "Winter Kill" and pheasant sculptures was by a small flier endorsed by John R. Rohner, Professor of Natural History at the University of Colorado.

Rohner was a family friend.

Lenard and Catherine had a fondness for birds, particularly pheasants. In addition to hunting them, they fed the birds that lived around their Wyarno residence: one year their generosity provided the birds with 1100 pounds of feed. The sculpting of a pheasant is, thus, understandable. The next sculpture on Lenard's agenda was to have been a grouse, which also frequented the Wyarno area. It is unfortunate that Lenard lost his battle with cancer, thereby depriving his family and friends of his creative abilities.

NOTABLE BROWNELL QUOTES

To close this paper, the following published and unpublished quotations were gathered to provide some insight into Brownell's character.

About himself:

"Most of my career, I have been known as a stockmaker in spite of my efforts to change the impression. I have always built complete guns. A stock is certainly a major portion of the gun, but I prefer to be known as a custom gunmaker."

About work:

"Do not try to do an hour's work in 55 minutes."



Winter Kill sculpture

About customers:

“The biggest failing of customers is to try to do everything they have seen, read about, or heard about on one gun.”

About the trade:

“It gives me a chance to be creative, which is what makes artists tick, and the clientele is not the usual shop lifting, bad check writing types that ordinary main street businesses are faced with.”

About screwdrivers:

“Screwdrivers of poor quality that don’t fit are the most expensive ones you can buy because of the damage they cause.”

About quality:

“Quality is to a product what character is to a man.”

About gun design:

“You design guns with your eyes and not a ruler.”

About a poor shooting custom gun:

“There is nothing as sorry as a beautiful lemon.”

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Mr. Bud Morrow, Sheridan, Wyoming
Mr. Leroy Prill, Ranchester, Wyoming
Mr. Dick Welsh, Columbus, Ohio

★★★★★★

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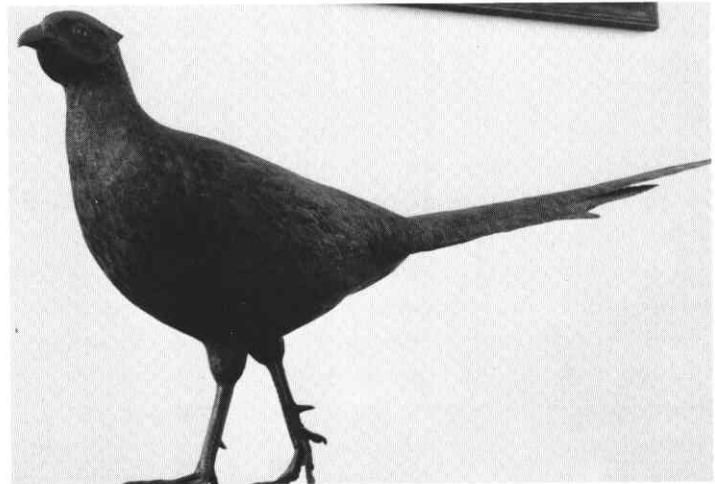
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Owls and Hybred art.



A dog called “Beau”.



Pheasant sculpture.



The Brownell's living room in Wyarro, Wyoming, residence.