



Figure 1. Among the museum's most popular exhibits is a recreated 1950s child's bedroom, complete to the original Hopalong Cassidy linoleum on the floor and the Davy Crockett coonskin cap on the wall. (All photographs in this article are from the galleries of the National Firearms Museum. Courtesy of Talmadge Rutledge, NRA photographer.)

## Remarks of the President of the NRA Foundation Delivered to the American Society of Arms Collectors May 28, 1999, at Tucson, Arizona

Sandra S. Froman

Mr. President, Members of the Society, Fellow Collectors, and Guests:

I am delighted to have the opportunity to address you this morning. I want to welcome you to my adopted hometown of Tucson, Arizona. For those of you who may be dismayed by the summer heat, I offer this food for thought, which appears on a billboard on the road to the airport. In white letters on a black background, the billboard asks you to ponder the question: "If you think it's hot here . . ." And it's signed "God." I moved to Arizona almost 15 years ago to have more opportunities to collect and shoot firearms. I've always believed this is God's country, and now I know I was right.

I'm here today to talk to you about the National Firearms Museum.

You see here one of the exhibits at the National Firearms Museum—a child's bedroom circa 1950. My bedroom growing up was very much like this, with the cowboy hat and six gun hanging on the coat tree. It is one of my favorite exhibits at the museum.

All good talks begin with a story, and mine is no exception. This story takes us to Great Britain.

### INTRODUCTION

After the First World War, the British government disarmed its population through restrictive gun legislation, leaving the country effectively unprotected after the army's staggering defeat at Dunkirk in 1940. A desperate plea was sent to America to lend firearms of any type to Britain. John Hession, like many other National Rifle Association (NRA) members, responded by sending a firearm. In all, thousands of sporting arms were sent to combat the aggressions of the Axis powers. However, Hession had lent his prized match rifle, a gun with which he had set many international shooting records. He had personalized the rifle's achievements with plaques that noted its distinguished record in Olympic competition as well as the significance of the rifle to him. The stock plaques reflect its presence in competitive events and Hession's desire for the rifle to be returned. One plaque on the firearm reads, "For obvious reasons the return of this rifle after Germany is defeated would be deeply appreciated." Hession's Springfield M1903 rifle was sent to



England, spent 5 years with the British army, and was returned to him after the cessation of hostilities. Few firearms better illustrate the adage "swords to plowshares" than this classic Springfield, initially issued for service in the First World War, mustered out into civilian competition, and then returned to military usage when a nation called. This prized firearm was donated in 1950 and is proudly on display today at the National Firearms Museum.

More than a simple display of guns, the museum offers an astounding and inspiring reminder (like the story I just related) of how important firearms have been in securing America's hard-won freedoms and the important role they continue to play in our everyday lives.

Much has happened since members of the Society viewed the National Firearms Collection in 1994. Among the most obvious, we built a brand new state-of-the-art firearm museum. Opened in June of last year, the museum plays an integral role in meeting our Association's mission to its members—educating the American public about the legitimate role of firearms in our democracy and the constitutional freedoms we enjoy as a nation of free people.

Upon entering its doors, one will visit galleries that show the importance of firearms in keeping and maintaining national peace and freedom. The idea of an armed populace is not a new one, but it has been carried through to the modern age in only a handful of countries. The United States has a long history of firearms being used in a positive manner to uphold the ideals of our Constitution and the principles of democracy. In the 20th Century, through two world wars,

America has shown its ability to conquer a foe through training in the effective use of firearms. The American right to freedom and liberty was achieved and is maintained through the use of firearms.

I would like to highlight several important purposes that the museum serves.

First, it preserves firearms as physical artifacts of history.

On display in the museum is a wheel-lock gun that made its way to America on the *Mayflower*. The owner was John Alden, an important and wealthy colonist who paid off the Plymouth colony's mortgage. This wheel lock firearm, a rarity in those days, was probably used to harvest the wild game served at our first Thanksgiving.

Through the story of guns, we are able to trace our American heritage from a truly fascinating and unique angle. We find that firearms played a pivotal role in some of America's most important historical events. The museum seeks to chronicle this history while educating the viewer about the important and positive aspects of firearms.

Second, the museum preserves firearms as artifacts of technology.

Many of you may recognize the name of W. H. B. Smith, renowned author of several books on firearms. Mr. Smith is also known as the "father of firearms invention," because he created "concept guns." Several of these original prototypes are on display in the museum: prototypes that were used by America's most popular manufacturers—Ithaca, Colt, and Savage, to name just a few. The Smith collection was donated to the museum because it offers a unique forum to showcase the technology of firearms development while paying special homage to Mr. Smith.

Firearms technology must be understood and celebrated in the context of what it has allowed us to do—win wars, settle and tame the West, protect our homes and

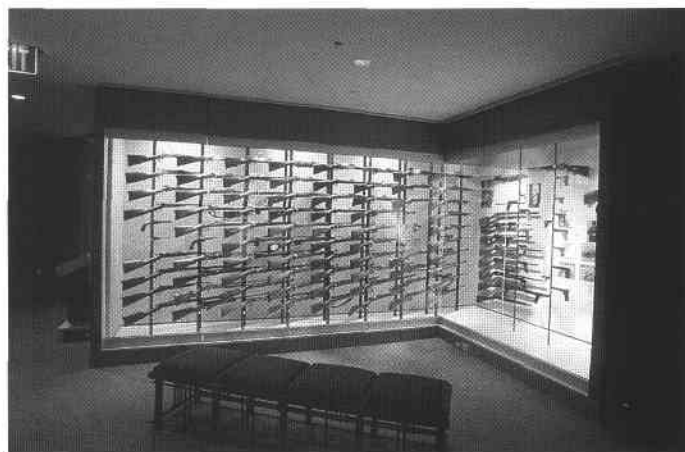


Figure 3. Arms collectors can trace the evolution of many bolt-action rifle designs and self-loading models developed by John Browning and John Garand while traversing the museum's historical timeline of exhibits.

property, and supply law enforcement agencies with the equipment needed to secure peace.

Finally, the museum preserves firearms as artifacts of artistry.

In 1990, Prince Charles donated his beautiful, hand-crafted *Feinwerkbau* air rifle to the museum. The donation of the rifle was the prince's way of thanking the NRA for training British soldiers in the use of firearms before World War I.

Returning to America, we have the classic Kentucky rifle well represented in the National Firearms Museum collection. We have examples from the golden age and even percussion conversions of the long rifle that gave service on the frontier.

#### MUSEUM'S ORIGINS

Let me turn for a moment to the origins of the museum. In 1877, the first collection of firearms was donated to the

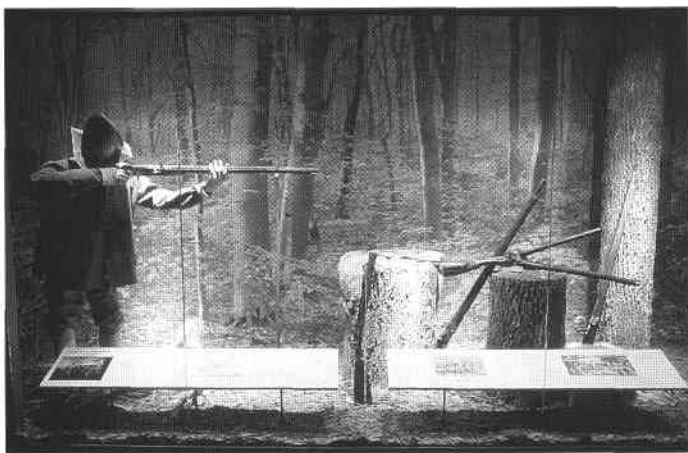


Figure 2. Firearms from America's colonial era are represented in a number of unique environments, including this scene of an early Virginian preparing to fire a matchlock from a forked rest.

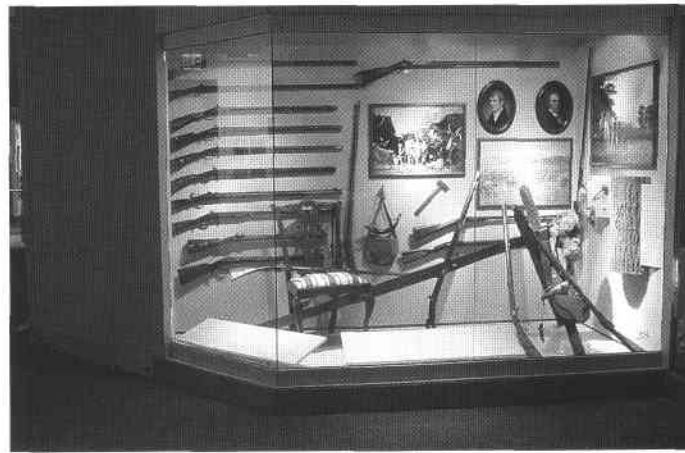


Figure 4. Classic Kentucky rifles as well as an early big-bore air gun provide insights into the Lewis and Clark Expedition and the beginnings of American target shooting.

NRA from General Ambrose E. Burnside, NRA's first president, for research and technical reference. From that time on, the NRA began actively building one of the most extensive and important firearms collections in the world. By 1937, 250 firearms were put on display at NRA headquarters in Washington, D.C. In 1993, relocation of NRA Headquarters to expanded facilities in Fairfax, Virginia, offered the long-desired opportunity to build a state-of-the-art museum dedicated exclusively to firearms and their pivotal role in our nation's history and development.

With its growing collection of 3,500 firearms, the museum's exhibits are continually being added to and enhanced. For example, the National Firearms Museum collection holds both civilian and military Henry rifle examples; you'll hear about the Henry rifle from your President Hank Truslow, later this morning. New to the museum is a display of all three Sokolosky .45 prototypes—also known as the Rolls Royce of .45s. The collection includes (1) the original prototype, (2) a preproduction model, and (3) the original,



Figure 5. Seen through windows in the museum's Revolutionary War gallery, firearms and related colorful graphics allow visitors an opportunity to view firsthand historic pieces that helped shape a nation's destiny.

actual-release model. The National Firearms Museum is the only institution in the world to have all three prototypes on exhibit.

Most important, however, the museum serves as a resource for scholarly and technical research for professionals, collectors, organizations and institutions. Along with a 4,000-volume research library, the museum is becoming recognized as the nation's central repository for accurate information on firearms and related data.

#### THE NEW NATIONAL FIREARMS MUSEUM

There are currently over two thousand firearms displayed in 82 permanent exhibits that showcase the diverse roles that firearms play in our history and culture.

#### *The Firearm Is Vital to Law Enforcement*

The NRA has been involved in law enforcement issues since 1918. In both legislative areas and training, the NRA has been instrumental in defending and working with peace officers nationwide. Additionally, the NRA has sponsored law enforcement competition since 1962 and has led the fight against crime by proposing tough legislation to deal with repeat offenders. The NRA has developed instructor training courses for law enforcement agencies in a variety of disciplines, including rifle, pistol, shotgun, and submachine gun.

One of the firearms on display embodies this relationship between NRA and law enforcement. The Colt Border Patrol was designed for the U.S. Border Patrol by the late Bill Jordan and the late Harlon Carter, former NRA President. It later developed into the popular double-action "Trooper" revolver introduced by Colt in 1954. The prototype revolver on display in the museum, featuring the heavy barrel used in production models, was the late Bill Jordan's personal firearm.

#### *The Firearm Is Important in Economics and Commerce*

The late 1950s marked a heightened interest in Civil War firearms as the centennial approached. Reenactors waging battles in blue and gray soon discovered that the supply of original black-powder arms in shooting condition was limited and expensive. Entrepreneurs such as Val Forgett of Navy Arms and the late Turner Kirkland of Dixie Gun Works traveled overseas to have the more popular percussion revolvers and military muskets reproduced for the American market. This widespread attention soon galvanized the Colt company into returning to producing its own Civil War-era models, beginning with the popular model 1851 "Navy"



**Figure 6.** Several Union breech-loading carbines are part of a Civil War arms factory exhibit that replicates the Harpers Ferry engine house taken over by abolitionist John Brown during his 1859 raid.

revolver. Colt quickly discovered that higher stateside labor and other manufacturing costs meant that American-made revolvers could not compete with lower priced imports. Colt subcontracted with Italian companies to produce their “second-generation” black-powder revolvers as parts, which were shipped to the United States for assembly under Colt supervision. Colt proofed and marketed the revolvers under its own logo, numbering them sequentially after the original serial number ranges. The Colt model 1851 Navy percussion revolver is on display in the museum.

### *The Firearm Is Essential to the Military in Protecting Our National Interests*

The NRA was established in 1871 as an association for military competition. Its goal was to improve the shooting ability of American soldiers and civilians stemming from the poor marksmanship of Union soldiers during the Civil War. The founders of the NRA, many former Union army officers,

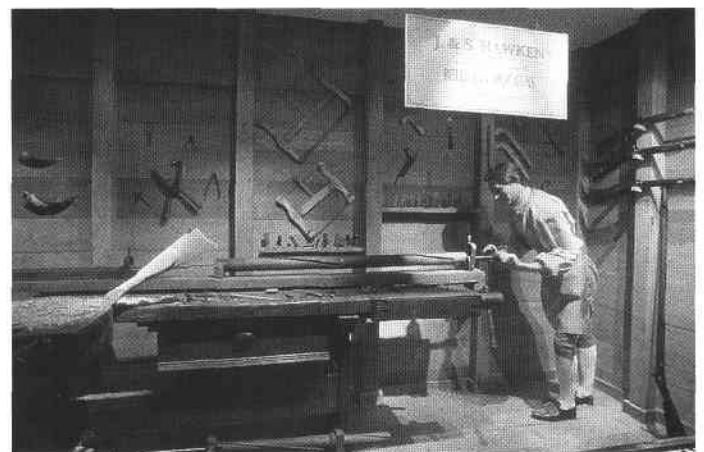
deemed it necessary for Americans to be able to handle firearms proficiently in order to defend America against aggressors. During the 19th and into the 20th century, the NRA organized shooting competitions and marksmanship classes for all to attend. The military benefited from NRA training by drawing from the pool of trained shooters for World Wars I and II. The museum boasts an extensive collection on the importance the firearm has played in defending our nation.

### *The Firearm Celebrates American Legends*

Two years ago, a woman named Phyllis Hall from Arizona called the National Firearms Museum in search of information pertaining to her recently deceased husband’s firearms collection. Her husband had been a supporter of the Second Amendment, and she was confident that the NRA would have the expertise to help her. Mrs. Hall was pleased with NRA’s assistance and, as a thank you gift, she made a donation from the collection. As it turned out, her husband was the nephew of General Douglas MacArthur, and the donated firearm was General MacArthur’s Colt Model M1903 pistol. This valuable firearm is currently on display in the National Firearms Museum for all to see and enjoy.

The 13 galleries of the museum take the visitor on a journey through America’s history. The galleries are windows through which we view the significant epochs in our nation’s past including the Revolutionary War, the Fur Trade, the California Gold Rush, the Civil War, the Wild West, both World Wars, Vietnam, Korea, the Persian Gulf—and perhaps other eras still to come.

In addition to the permanent exhibits, the William B. Ruger Gallery provides the opportunity to display visiting collections. A beautiful room honoring one of America’s great gun designers and manufacturers, it showcases the finest in

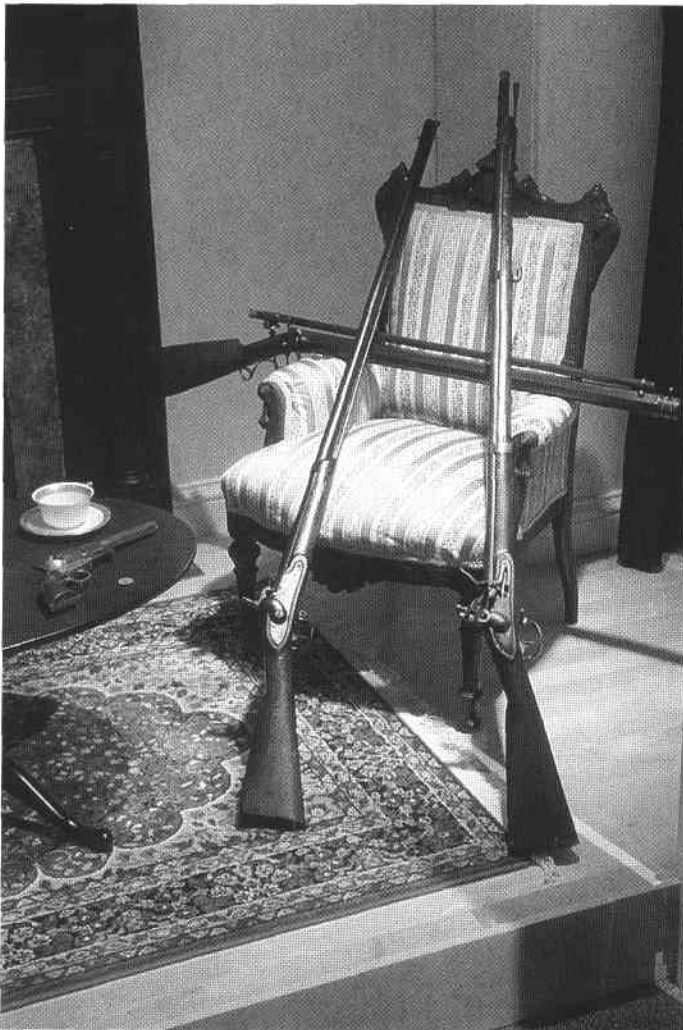


**Figure 7.** With period rifling machines and gunsmithing tools, one of the favorite St. Louis haunts of mountain men and pioneers—the Hawken Rifle Shop—is reborn. Two original Hawken rifles are included among the many muzzle-loaders in the museum.





**Figure 8.** An original daguerreotype image provided the inspiration for this San Francisco mercantile housing a selection of long arms or handguns destined for flush prospectors. Real California gold nuggets, dust, and coins complement the goods offered for sale.



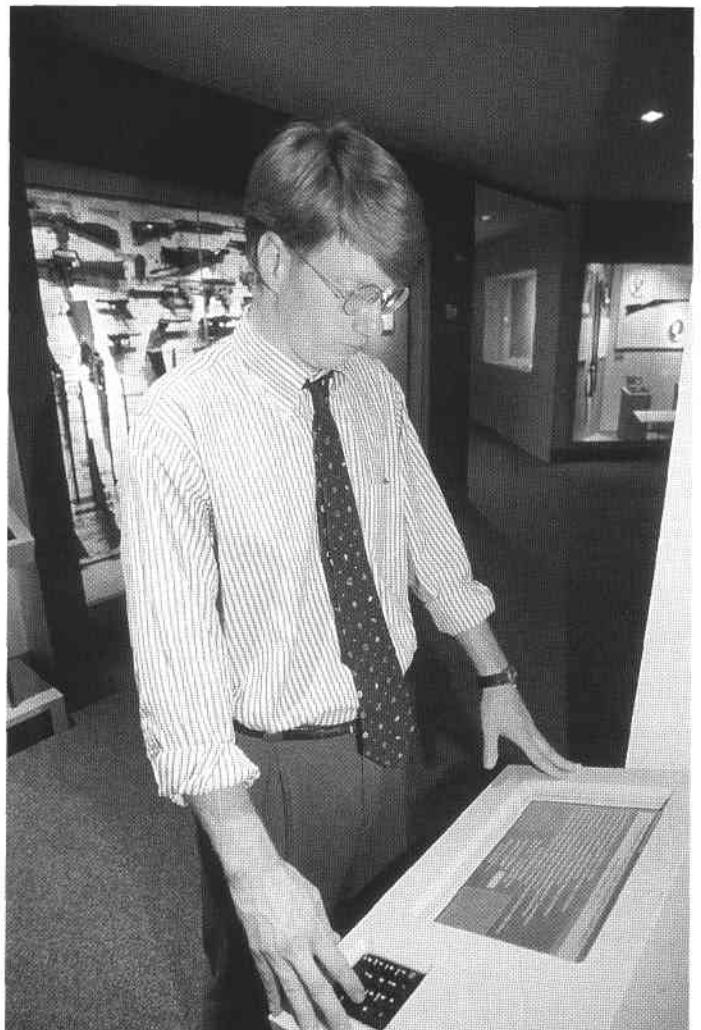
**Figure 9.** Confederate shoulder arms, including a massive sharpshooter's telescope rifle, are presented in a traditional parlor setting that includes a portrait of General Robert E. Lee as well as guns made throughout the Southern states.

public and private firearms collections. Currently, the William B. Ruger Gallery is hosting for 6 months a private collection that chronicles the evolution of Allen's Pepperbox Revolvers and the California Gold Rush.

We hope that you, Mr. Ruger's fellow members of the Society, will take an active leadership role in presenting "the best of the world of arms collecting" in his gallery by exhibiting your collections so that the world can see and learn about them.

#### THE FUTURE—DRIVEN BY INFORMATION

We live in an information society. More information is available more quickly than ever before. The National Firearms Museum is positioned to take advantage of the incredible opportunity technology provides. At strategic locations throughout the museum, 14 computer terminals provide visitors with the ability to interact with the museum collection.



**Figure 10.** Fourteen computer stations throughout the museum allow visitors to interact with artifacts on display. This growing database will be a future part of the museum's dynamic Internet Web site, allowing in-depth, on-line research.

Information from the museum's displays, and data from its collection, library, and archives, are becoming accessible to millions of people world wide via the Internet. The Internet technology will ultimately allow on line tours of the galleries, instantaneous downloads of text and graphics, and unique educational and research opportunities to learn about the development, technology, artistry, history, ownership, and use of firearms.

The museum's Web site will eventually permit a college student anywhere in the world to embark on a "virtual-reality" tour of the museum complete with the sights and sounds of a restored, fully functional Coney Island shooting gallery. During this tour, the student will be able to pick up a firearm, turn it around and examine it in detail, all while seated at the computer. The visitor will be able to click on a button for in-depth historical information about the item. Think of the possibilities—the number of visitors to the museum will be limitless. The museum will truly be open to anyone, at any hour, around the world, providing incomparable opportunities to educate the public about firearms and their significance in America's past, present, and future.

#### THE FUTURE—STRATEGICALLY LOCATED

As they say in real estate, the three most important things are location, location, location! The National Firearms Museum is located in the greater Washington, D.C., area at the NRA's headquarters building in Fairfax, Virginia. The museum is strategically located between two busy airports (Washington Dulles and Reagan National) and immediately off Interstate 66. Situated along what Allan Cors describes as the "history corridor"—an area with several first-class museums and historic sites in northern Virginia, the museum is accessible to more than 25 million tourists who visit our nation's capital each year.



Figure 12. The National Firearms Museum is a state-of-the-art educational facility built to tell the story of firearms, freedom, and the American experience for the next generation of arms collectors and beyond. The museum hosts daily touring groups from schools and youth-oriented organizations.

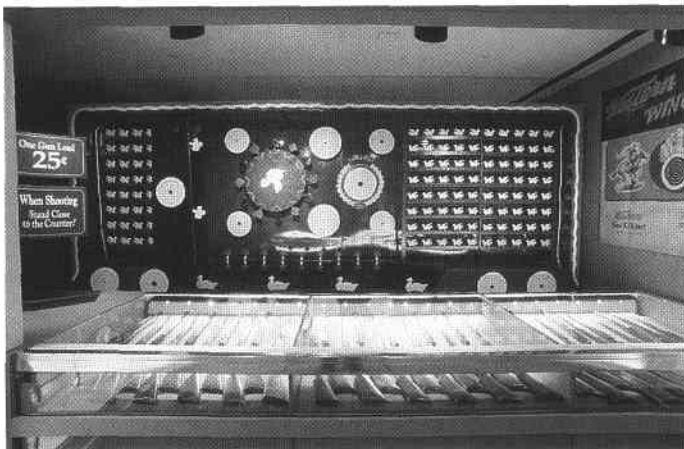


Figure 11. A restored Coney Island shooting gallery that actually still springs into operation, with ringing bells and twirling targets, forms the centerpiece of a display on recreational activities with firearms.

It offers a place where NRA members can see and hear our collective commitment to preserving America's constitutional heritage. It's where a school child on a field trip can learn about the role firearms have played in this country's proud history. It's where parents will teach their children about the positive aspects of firearms and perhaps rekindle their own memories of learning gun safety, going hunting for the first time, and admiring the fine workmanship of a special heirloom rifle.

#### THE FUTURE—LONG-TERM STABILITY

While controversy is nothing new to the National Rifle Association, the organization has become stronger, not weaker, because of the recent past. While there will always be the opportunity for board members to express differing points of view, the board dynamics have changed for the positive. We now have a stable board of directors that is

moving forward with purpose and energy to achieve the association's goals. Because of this, we have been able to attract people of the highest caliber, such as Allan Cors, back to serve on The NRA board of directors and the NRA Foundation board of trustees. These are the people who, with your support, will lead the association into the new millennium.

In addition, management of NRA operations is better than it has ever been. Our new headquarters building, which many of you have seen, is now fully leased, generating rental income for the association. Membership is on the rise, we've reduced the association's debt, and our portfolio is growing to meet today's needs and the needs of the future.

But we must talk not only of today's needs, but also of ensuring the future financial stability necessary for our survival.

The museum's construction, endowment, and collection are all realities that could not have been possible without the generous contributions of donors. Here is what is being done to ensure that your gifts will be carefully maintained and used for their intended purpose.

First, the National Firearms Museum is an affiliate of the American Association of Museums (AAM), the national governing body for professional museums. We have been an AAM member since 1983. To prepare for AAM accreditation, many new museums go through a rigorous three-stage evaluation process called the Museum Assessment Program (MAP). The MAP process, conducted with reviewers from other museums, is designed to ensure that a museum is operated in a professional manner, that it adheres to the highest management standards, and that it remains true to its mission. The museum has already passed the first stage, called MAP I, and is in the process of continuing through the MAP sequence (MAP II and MAP III) to prepare for AAM accreditation. Once accredited, the National Firearms Museum will be in the top 6% of the highest-rated museums in the United States. The MAP process, and later accreditation review, will provide objective assurance to our donors that their gifts are being prudently and professionally managed.

Second, to ensure that the museum will remain a world-class institution, we have an accredited, high-quality staff, which includes well-respected firearms experts, educated and accredited museum professionals, and a strong finance team.

The Curator of the National Firearms Museum, Doug Wicklund, served with the National Park Service and with the Smithsonian Institution. He has been an editor of *The American Rifleman* and has been associated with the museum collections for more than a decade.

Last, the proper care of its firearms and artifacts is a top priority of the museum. The Conservation Laboratory is vital to carrying out this priority by using the most up-to-date preservation technology. Enhanced research capabilities allow staff to gather and disseminate data to collectors and other museums on the improved preservation, documentation, and storage of artifacts. The laboratory is pioneering methods on how to better understand and care for valuables. Just recently, we received a donation of an Austrian mountain Howitzer cannon. This cannon had sat on the donor's balcony, exposed to the elements, for more than 25 years, and was nearly destroyed and lost forever. The museum staff, however, using the latest technology, was able to restore this valuable historical relic. It will soon be on display.

As President of the Foundation, I along with my fellow trustee and museum donor, Allan Cors, can assure you that the policies and management procedures are in place to guarantee strict adherence to donor wishes. Gift agreements accompany every gift and are a permanent guide for each gift's use by the museum. The NRA Foundation Board of Trustees oversees management of foundation assets and requires compliance with all applicable Internal Revenue Service regulations.

More than 98% of the firearms in the museum collection are donations received by The NRA Foundation. Because The NRA Foundation is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization, gifts to the foundation are tax deductible by the donor to the full extent of the law.

Our number-one goal in securing the future of the National Firearms Museum is to provide a permanent endowment. Initially, we will raise a \$10 million endowment, which will secure its operation and growth in perpetuity. Supporters who appreciate the importance of the National Firearms Museum are donating financial and material support as never before to ensure its success and continued growth. It's the only way to ensure the future of the museum.

Many members of the American Society of Arms Collectors have recognized this and have become distinguished museum benefactors, including: Allan Cors, Val Forgett, Eldon Owens, Ron Peterson, Bill Ruger, and John R. Woods, along with the families of the late Bill Brophy and "Red" Jackson. The Bob and Ruth Rubendunst Endowment is a rapidly growing fund that will help ensure the future of the museum. Many more of you are helping to achieve the mission of the National Firearms Museum, and while I can't thank each of you by name, you have my deepest appreciation for your continuing support.

The American Society of Arms Collectors is widely accepted as the most dedicated group of firearms collectors



in the United States. Each of you should consider what you can do to help in this effort. Collectively and individually, you have the knowledge, resources, and contacts to help us reach our \$10 million endowment goal and make the National Firearms Museum the best museum of its kind in the world.

Many excellent opportunities for gallery and exhibit sponsorships still exist. Doug Wicklund and I will be happy to talk to you individually about opportunities. Sponsors are recognized for their contribution in a number of ways that include the option of a permanent endowment in the donor's name or that of a friend or family member. There are various ways to fund such a sponsorship including over a period of years suitable to the donor's financial needs.

#### STEWARDSHIP OF OUR HERITAGE

In closing, I would like to remind you that the National Firearms Museum is an integral part of carrying out the NRA's vital mission. The NRA has broad responsibilities as a steward of our firearms rights and traditions. Likewise, we as collectors shoulder a special responsibility to protect and preserve America's firearms heritage. Bob and Ruth Rubendunst recognize this; the Alden family who donated the Mayflower firearm recognizes this, and so do thousands of other donors

and supporters. I hope that you too will do what you can to become part of this important effort.

Having begun with the story of John Hession sending his match rifle to Britain, it seems appropriate to end it with a story of an Englishman who came to America.

Sir A. B. Cunningham, a well-connected Briton, was serving as an aide to General Eisenhower in 1942, when he was called to serve his country during the invasion of Africa. Eisenhower gave him a gun to protect himself. Later, Sir Cunningham became an admiral and served diligently and bravely in World War II. He eventually moved to Washington, D.C. As most of you probably know, there is a total ban on handguns in the District of Columbia. Sir Cunningham knew that if the authorities were to find his valuable firearm, it would be destroyed. Sir Cunningham donated his Colt .45 pistol, given to him by General Eisenhower, to the NRA. He knew that the NRA would take care of preserving his small piece of history. We are proud to display Sir Cunningham's pistol and to be able to tell this story.

We are stewards of a great legacy left us by America's founding fathers. They changed history when they gave us the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. It is our proud duty to follow in their footsteps by securing America's great firearms heritage now and forever. Please help by supporting the National Firearms Museum.