

YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO FIND! OR EVEN A BLIND HOG FINDS ACORNS.

by Chip Beckford



Figure 1. New Hampshire marked French model 1766 musket.

Lynn, take a look at the markings on the barrel, Does it say NH 1B No 85? It does she said! I wanted to be sure my eyes were not playing tricks on me and seeing what I wanted to see vs what was really there. Bingo I was right!

This New Hampshire marked musket, one of ten thousand arrived at Portsmouth, New Hampshire on one of the two ships that arrived in April 1777. An arrangement had been reached for French aid to supply arms and other supplies in October of 1776. New Hampshire was in desperate need of muskets for their troops and their committee of Safety through their Agent, John Landon managed to secure 2016 of these French Muskets and bayonets for the state of New Hampshire. The muskets were marked by well known New Hampshire silversmith John Ward Gilman with NH for New Hampshire, the Battalion, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd and the serial

number from 1- 672 for each of the three Battalions. This musket is the 85 musket for the 1st Battalion.

The trip had started out in late 2019 as a trip to see my sister who was in a nursing center in Arizona. After arriving in a thunder and lightning storm, always fun when you are landing in an airplane, we stepped into 116 degree heat!

Now everyone always says that Arizona is a dry heat, well at 116 degrees it felt more like a blast furnace to these Wisconsin Residents that left 40-degree temps just four and a half hours before.

After five days of visiting, trying to find out what had happened to my sister, talking to case workers and with nurses and family there we decided we needed a break, and we had a list of gun shops to look at as a change of scene.

I have to give my Wife Lynn credit, she is always willing to accommodate me on things like this, even after 43 years of marriage. Boy did I get the better end of that deal!

After visiting several Gun shops and seeing basically the same old things that you expect, we walked into a fairly large shop in a strip mall.

Looking around as we entered I saw a wall of black guns, AR's and other semi auto rifles and pistols. They were nicely displayed and there was a large selection, but that was not what I was looking for.

Going deeper into the shop I saw another section with revolvers and rifles, the cowboy action section of the store. Things were looking up at least as there looked like there could be some Single Action Colts that I also like.

After perusing the Colts and other revolvers, I glanced to the back wall and saw what appeared to be several musket length barrels sticking up from racks along the wall. Now things looked promising!

As I remember now, there were several Trapdoor Springfield's, a cut down foreign rifle on unknown origin and then I spotted a Flintlock musket.

As I picked it up I thought this is a French musket (Figure 1). Looking closer I saw that the lock was an early Banana style flintlock and older than the style of the musket, and that the wood around the lock had been repaired and wooden pegged to the stock.

I could tell that this repair was very nicely done and done a long time ago. I quickly glanced at the rest of the stock and the wood and the bands and all and all seemed to be original and complete.

I then rolled the musket over to look at the markings at the breech and stopped dead in my tracks. I had to look twice, asked Lynn to look at it, and then as I calmed down realized that I had a New Hampshire marked French model 1766 musket!

It was marked NH for New Hampshire, had a French proof mark, then 1B for First Battalion and No 85 the serial number for the musket. The Musket had obviously suffered damage to the lock area and had been repaired to continued its functional use, something that we see a lot with early military guns.

Wow, I could not believe it, a real New Hampshire marked musket here in Arizona? How the heck did it get here? My mind was racing as I looked at the price tag, saw it was reasonable and headed for the front counter.

I was then intercepted by one of the owners of the shop, who seeing I had a musket in my hands asked if he could help me, I said yes, I was interested in this gun and could he do any better on it?

I know you are all thinking, do any better? Yes, it is a collector's thing, we can never just pay face price without at least asking if there is any room in the price. He looked at the tag and said yes and shot me a figure. I said ok, and he then said he had another musket to show me.

As he went to the back room to get the musket, I took my new musket to the back counter and laid it there for safe keeping. He returned and had a, about new condition 1824 dated Harpers Ferry Flint musket in his hands. He obviously knew what this one was and had a hefty price on it as well. But it was very nice, but expensive. I looked it over and complimented him on it, but passed

on that musket.

At this point He was looking at me and said he thought he had met me before and then asked me what my name was? I introduced Lynn and myself and he then related he remembered me and had purchased several guns out of an estate I was selling years ago at a Wisconsin gun show, small world indeed.

He had had a gun shop in Illinois at the time and later moved to Arizona and started up this shop.

After chatting awhile, he took the Harpers Ferry musket into the back room and I continued to look at the other guns. I saw what looked like an English Rifle and picked it up. To my surprise it was marked J.P. Murray, Columbus Ga (Figure 2). On the lock and barrel, wow. I am familiar with J.P. Murray model 1841 copies, but had not seen a rifle by them before, though I remember that Dick Kennedy had done a presentation on Southern rifles and mentioned J.P. Murray as one of the makers. J.P. Murray of Columbus Georgia was a well-known Rifle maker prior to the Civil War. Making sporting, and target rifles. Originally from South Carolina, Murray was in partnership with Benjamin Hapoldt in Charleston from 1856 until they relocated to Columbus circa 1859. J.P. Murray worked for Greenwood and Gray in Columbus when they established their rifle works as foreman and master armorer making model 1841 rifles and carbines. These rifles locks were also marked with Murray's stamp from his civilian rifles. Only a handful of these civilian rifles are known.

It was a very nice half-stocked pre- Civil War .50 caliber percussion rifle that showed signs of having had a target sight on the stock behind the breech plug. It was in very good shape with a single notched tumbler often found on target rifles. That fit with the now missing target sight.

I thought, don't be a dummy, buy this one as well. Though not a Confederate Collector per se, I could not pass it up and though it would be fun to find out more about it to see if any rifles like it may have had any Confederate use, you never know. Besides, it was just a very attractive rifle no matter where it was used.

We then went through the same drill as before and came up with a price for the J.P. Murray, I now had two purchases. I thought to myself, how the heck am I going to get them back to Wisconsin.

Taking them on the plane was out of the question, so that meant we would have to find a way to ship them. The owner then told us he ships all over the country and would be glad to ship them to us, problem solved.

I told him that was great that I appreciated it, and complemented him on what a great Gun shop he had. Since we were old "friends" now he asked Lynn and I if he could give us a tour, what the heck we had the time and I told him that would be nice.

We had a great tour, he introduced us to his Wife and Son who handled the internet sales, they sell a lot on the internet, and we got the tour of the whole shop. He then went on to the computer and looked up what I had sold him back in 1989, boy what great records he had.

To say the least, we was greatly surprised in finding these two treasures in Arizona, and wondered how they had gotten there. My guess would be that they probably came west with the family that moved to Arizona for the warm weather, maybe from New Hampshire and the relatives sold them after the owners passed away.



Figure 2. Half stocked pre- Civil War .50 caliber percussion rifle made by J.P. Murray of Columbus, Ga.

That in itself is sad, as there was not any history with the guns, and more importantly, reinforced that we should all I.D. the special guns in our collections so that our heirs can realize the full value.

When we got home and I got the Musket I sent fellow Member Mike Carrol pictures of the musket and markings. This musket was not recorded in his records and represents a new find for these New Hampshire marked muskets. Mike did a very nice Presentation and article on these for the ASAC that covers their history¹. It is well worth reading.

I was doubly thrilled with the New Hampshire musket as I have three relatives that fought in the Revolution from New Hampshire, and two of them were in the 1st Battalion of New Hampshire troops! Maybe if we ever find the records of who they were issued to, we can see who carried this musket! If anyone out there has any

knowledge of this documentation, please let me know.

In ending, yes I was very fortunate in finding these two guns, and more fortunate in remembering the information that has been passed along by other members of the Society, especially in the case of the J.P. Murray Rifle².

There is another old saying that I would rather be lucky than good! Well I certainly was lucky on this trip for sure.

You never know what you are going to find, you just have to keep searching, there are still treasures to be found out there, sometimes in the least suspected places!

Endnotes

- 1 Carroll, Michael R. "New Hampshire marked muskets in the Rev. War", *American Society of Arms Collectors Bulletin* 100: 35-46. 2009.
- 2 Kennedy, Richard N. "Rifle Making in Antebellum Georgia", *American Society of Arms Collectors Bulletin* 60:45-49. 1989.

