

POINTS WEST

JOURNAL OF THE BUFFALO BILL HISTORICAL CENTER ■ CODY, WY ■ SPRING 2003

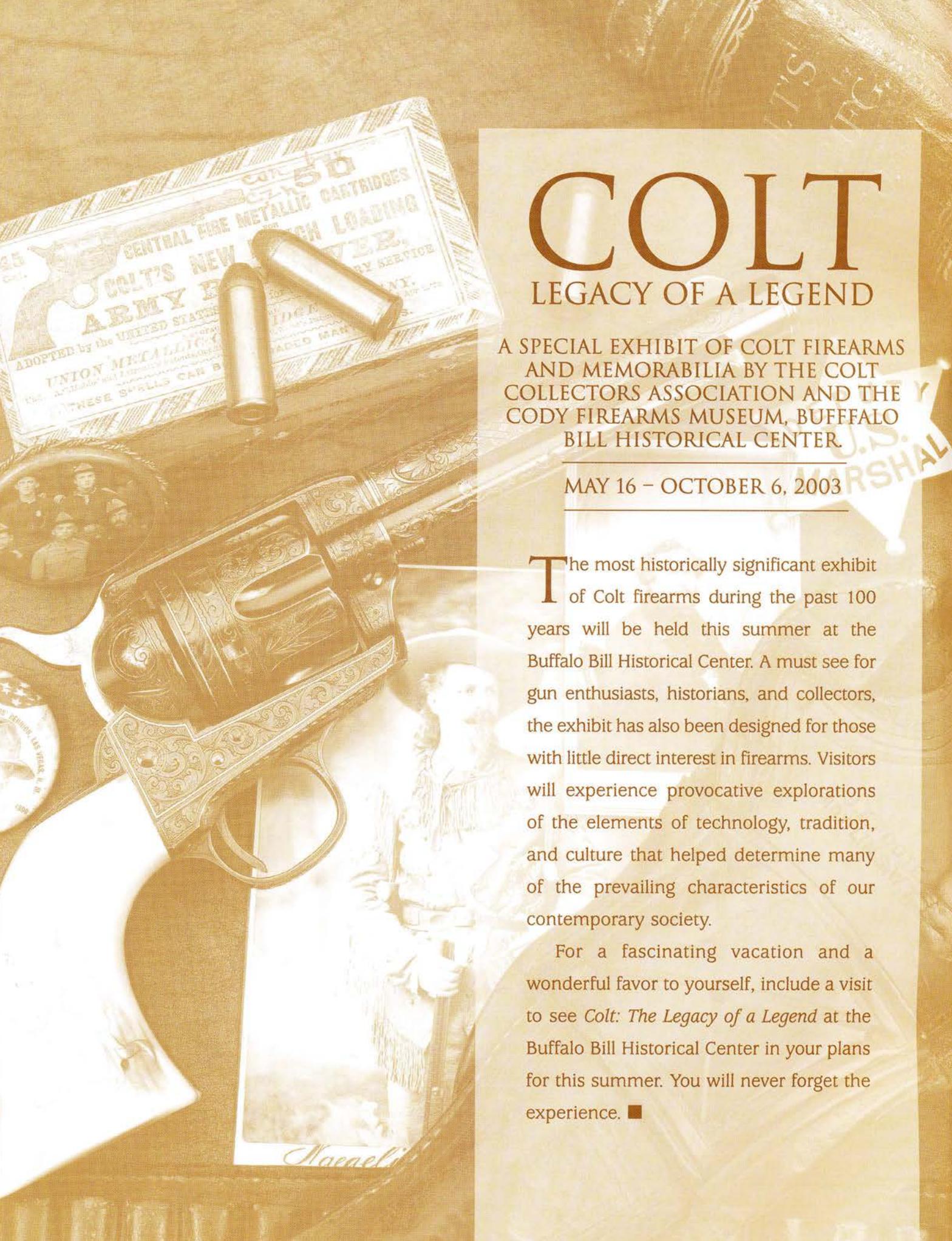


DEPUTY
U.S.
MARSHAL

RIDERS' UNION LAS VEGAS, NV
1899

J. E. FOOTER
RAWLINS, WY

Maecel



COLT

LEGACY OF A LEGEND

A SPECIAL EXHIBIT OF COLT FIREARMS AND MEMORABILIA BY THE COLT COLLECTORS ASSOCIATION AND THE CODY FIREARMS MUSEUM, BUFFALO BILL HISTORICAL CENTER.

MAY 16 - OCTOBER 6, 2003

The most historically significant exhibit of Colt firearms during the past 100 years will be held this summer at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. A must see for gun enthusiasts, historians, and collectors, the exhibit has also been designed for those with little direct interest in firearms. Visitors will experience provocative explorations of the elements of technology, tradition, and culture that helped determine many of the prevailing characteristics of our contemporary society.

For a fascinating vacation and a wonderful favor to yourself, include a visit to see *Colt: The Legacy of a Legend* at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in your plans for this summer. You will never forget the experience. ■

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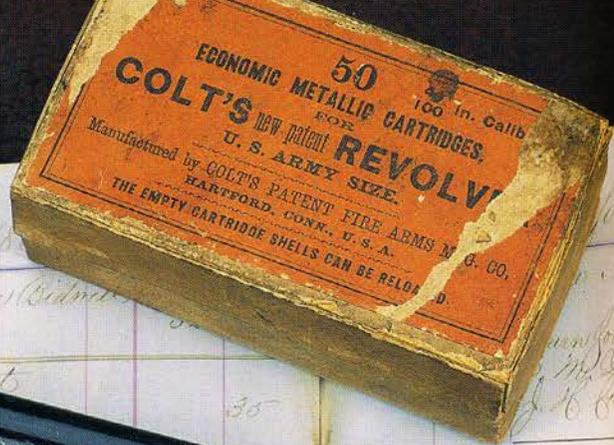
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The Buffalo Bill Historical Center is a private, non-profit, educational institution dedicated to preserving and interpreting the natural and cultural history of the American West. Founded in 1917, the Historical Center is home to the Buffalo Bill Museum, Whitney Gallery of Western Art, Plains Indian Museum, Cody Firearms Museum, Draper Museum of Natural History, and McCracken Research Library.

Cover: This image is the cover of *Colt and Its Collectors*, the exhibition catalogue for *Colt: The Legacy of a Legend*. Engraved and Gold-Inlaid Colt Single Action Army Revolver, .45 caliber, 5.5 in. barrel, serial number 172485. Commissioned by Sears Roebuck & Company in Chicago, Illinois, this revolver represents one of Cuno A. Helfricht's finest efforts. In addition to having been engraved with exquisitely cut intertwining scrollwork, as well as strapwork panels, the barrel, cylinder and frame were inlaid with gold edging bands. The pearl grips were also carved by Helfricht with a high relief standing portrait of Columbia on their right side. Following its shipment to Sears on October 23, 1897, it remained in that firm's inventory for a number of years. In the company's 1901 catalogue, it was advertised for sale as Item No. 34494 with the notation that while it had cost \$60.00 to be made, the pistol could be purchased for \$50.00 cash. Described by Sears in that catalogue as "... one of the nicest Cow Boy revolvers you ever saw ...", number 172485 epitomizes the quality of Colt's best work at the end of the nineteenth century. From the collection of Dr. Joseph A. Murphy; L.236.2002.2. Printed with permission of the Colt Collectors Association. Courtesy of K.T. Roes, WordsWorth, as published in *Colt and Its Collectors*. Photo by Paul Goodwin.



THE COLT BREECHING

Just Saturday afternoon a trial of the new Colt system of breech-loading revolving pistols was made at the Crystal Palace, London. The new system, which is the result of the improvements made by the late Mr. Colt, is a simple and easy one, and is the only one of the kind that is not liable to jamming. It is the only one that is not liable to jamming. It is the only one that is not liable to jamming.

New Metallic Cartridge
FOR SALE BY THE TRADE GENTLEMEN
—MANUFACTURED BY—
Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Co.
HARTFORD, CONN.

COLT'S,
METALLIC CARTRIDGE,
Army Six Shot Revolving Pistol



.44 Calibre, Weight 2 lbs. 11 oz., Weight of ball 212 grains or 80 to the pound.
The Drawing is one-half the size of the Pistol.
PRICE \$16.

COLT'S,
METALLIC CARTRIDGE,
Navy Six Shot Revolving Pistol

.36 Calibre, Weight 2 lbs. 11oz., Weight of ball 140 grains or 80 to the pound.
The general appearance of the Pistol is the same as that of the Army Pistol. See cut above.

Hartford Saturday November 14, 1858

163. 1812. A. D. D. To Ambrose (Bidm) 185.

185. 37. Hartford 1858

*For 1/2 in. No. 10 Shot Gun & 1/2 in. Wad
for 1/2 in. No. 10 Shot Gun & 1/2 in. Wad
Wednesday November 18, 1858*

W. B. Burdon Dr To Machinery 50

To Jandries 50

Friday November 19, 1858

Dr For Pistols Cartridges 80 us

Friday November 20, 1858

Dr For 1/2 in. Pistols 50

November 21, 1858

November 22, 1858

November 23, 1858

*2,000 March Backlog
average at 75,000 Buck*

Friday November 25, 1858

November 26, 1858

November 27, 1858

120. 1112. Ambrose (Bidm) 148

171. 520. 1858

399. 200. 1858

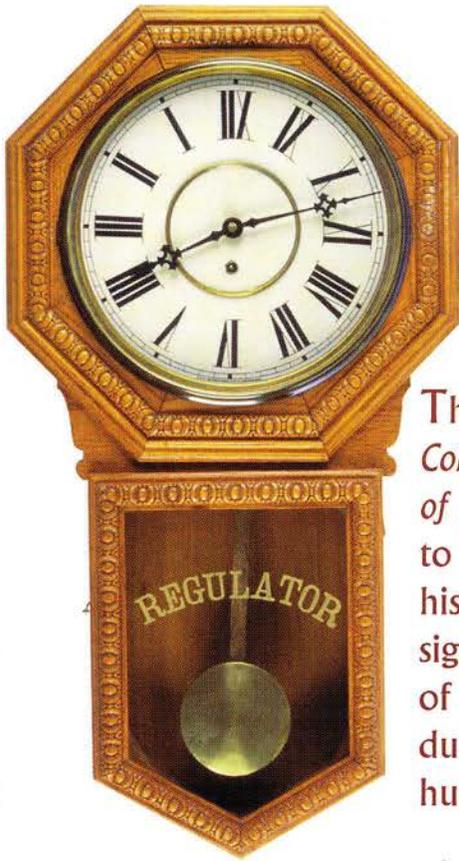
171. 520. 1858

171. 520. 1858

*581. Co. Parry
1477. Chas. H. Blaine
1432. West & Ford*

TURNING BACK THE CLOCK

by Warren Newman
Interim Curator, Cody Firearms Museum



Waterbury Clock Co., Waterbury, CT, U.S.A.; lower glass: REGULATOR; lower face: MANUFACTURED BY WATERBURY CLOCK CO. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyo. Gift of Charles Pyle Family; 2000.25.1 Image altered for editorial purposes.

Left: Three Richards Conversions of Colt Model 1860 Army Revolvers to .44 Colt centerfire caliber. Printed with permission of the Colt Collectors Association. Courtesy of K.T. Roes, WordsWorth, as published in *Colt and Its Collectors*, Paul Goodwin photo.

The exhibit, *Colt: The Legacy of a Legend* promises to be the most historically significant exhibit of Colt firearms during the past one hundred years.

It was a typical small-town, southern café. The old men sat around in the dim light, talking and laughing, drinking coffee. The menus were faded and stained. The service was slow and a bit too casual. Perhaps we should have continued driving and looked for another place to stop? As it turned out, that would have been a mistake, because the food was outstanding. The eggs were fresh and delicious; the country-style bacon was thick and lean; the coffee was hot and rich with flavor; even the grits were great. Refreshed, we were ready to get back on the road.

We paid the bill and prepared to depart. I glanced up at the big clock hanging above the door that led outside . . . then did a double take. Something about it wasn't right. It suddenly dawned on me that, while the hands were moving in the right direction, the clock essentially was running backwards. The stately black Roman numerals on the off-white face were arranged counterclockwise. Even as the hands moved ahead, it was becoming earlier, rather than later, with every swing of the pendulum. As we continued our trip along the Mississippi highway, I kept thinking about that clock. How remarkably it symbolized our frequent attempts to turn back time — to return to life as we once knew it — to experience

the things we missed previously by being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

There is a real sense in which it will be possible to turn the clock back, at least for a time, at the Cody Firearms Museum at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming, from May 16th through October 6th, 2003. The occasion will be the exhibit, *Colt: The Legacy of a Legend*. It promises to be the most historically significant exhibit of Colt firearms during the past one hundred years. It should be simultaneously, even for those with little interest in firearms, one of the most provocative explorations of the development of many of the elements of technology, tradition and culture that helped determine the nature of contemporary society.

The Colt exhibit has been planned to achieve these ambitious goals through a distinctive dual design. The first part of the design will consist of an almost incredible array of more than seven hundred firearms produced by the genius of Samuel Colt, his associates and his successors. The second part of the design will examine the societal themes that moved through and beyond this astonishing industrial accomplishment in the Connecticut River Valley to influence virtually every aspect of our lives.



Pair of Colt Single Action Army Revolvers known as the Cowboy and Indian Colts. Engraved and gold inlaid by Leonard Francolini. From the Collection of Dave Grunberg; L.123.2003.3. Printed with permission of the Colt Collectors Association. Paul Goodwin photo.

These themes will be dramatized in a succession of intriguing visual, auditory and sensory experiences. After being welcomed to the exhibit by the voice of actor Tom Selleck, those attending will wend their way through a virtual forest of towering legendary figures who made indelible marks on the myth of the West. These figures will be readily recognizable as the heroes and villains of frontier America, remembered not only on the basis of their actual exploits and endeavors, but also as they have been depicted for us by historians, Western artists, the actors in Buffalo Bill's Wild West productions, often imaginative journalists, and by the tellers of the tales that would become embedded in the oral tradition of an energetic and expanding nation.

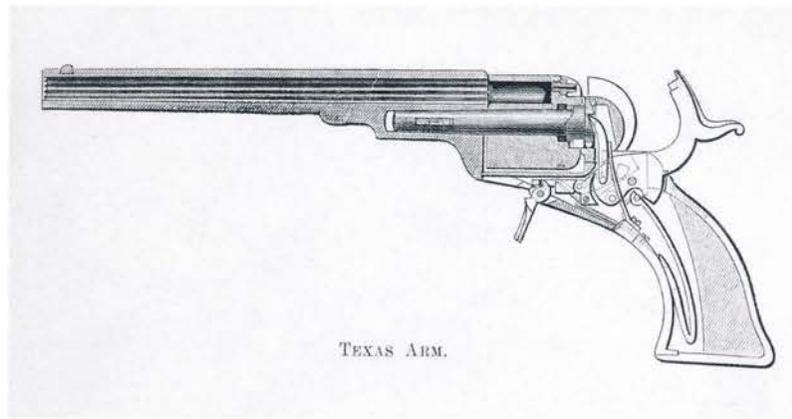
It is a myth that has been sustained and nourished, and often distorted, even into the present, by Western films and television productions. Through this seemingly real and powerful imagery, we have developed remarkably similar mental pictures of cowboys and Indians, lawmen and outlaws, wagon trains and uniformed cavalry, saloons and gamblers, gunfighters and shootouts, miners and railroad workers, cattle barons and settlers. These images are a mixture of reality, legend and fanciful distortion. They have influenced our speech and attire, our value systems and behavior far more than we usually realize. They have become an integral and determinative part of the fiber and fabric of our nation and the heart of the captivating story of the development of the American West.

The legacy of the man, Samuel Colt, will be wound like a golden thread throughout the displays of the exhibit. That thread will guide those who follow it into an intriguing experience of a truly amazing life. It is a life that, in spite of its brief 48 years, was filled to overflowing with a busy, bustling energy that rarely subsided. It propelled Sam Colt into unexplored territory time and again. His lifelong fascination with firearms began while he was a mere lad. He was disassembling and reassembling guns by the time he was seven years old. When he was 16, while serving aboard the sailing vessel *Corvo*, he developed ideas for



a functional and reliable revolving cylinder handgun. He gave substance to his ideas by carving the parts for such a gun from pieces of wood. Those priceless carvings provide one of the many highlights of the exhibit. Determined to transform the wooden models into workable firearms, Colt became a showman in order to raise the necessary funds. Billing himself as "Dr. Coult of Calcutta," he put on demonstrations of the wondrous properties of the "laughing gas" nitrous oxide and engaged in several other dubious pursuits in order to employ the services of gunsmiths like John Pearson of Baltimore who created the early prototypes of his designs.

Colt moved beyond obstacles and failures to the successful development of the world's most famous handguns and of a manufacturing empire. He became a pioneer in the principles of parts' interchangeability and volume production that would become hallmarks of the American Industrial Revolution. He also explored concepts of advertising and mass marketing that would usher in an entirely new era in merchandising. He used both celebrity and expert testimonials and endorsements to promote sales. He commissioned salesmen, consigned merchandise and granted quantity discounts as motivational devices. Each of these techniques would become a prevalent and enduring commercial methodology over time. With a proud, courageous and assertive "rampant" colt



Drawing of a Paterson Colt revolver. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyo. Gift of Olin Corporation, Winchester Arms Collection. P.20.1200



The Cowboy and Indian Colts in their leather case, with accessories. From the collection of Dave Grunberg; L.123.2002.3. Printed with permission of the Colt Collectors Association. Paul Goodwin photo.

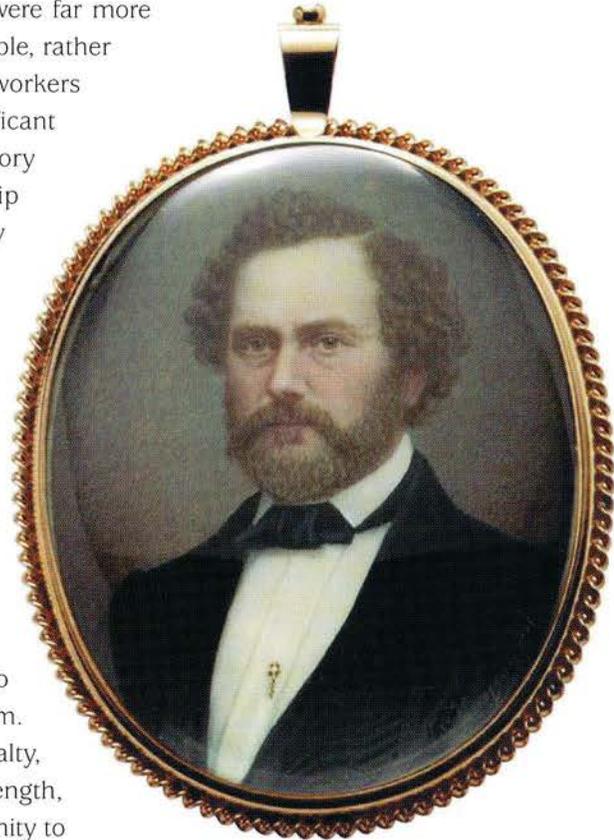
as a personal and corporate trademark, Sam Colt made his name and his guns international legends in a relatively brief period of time. They still are, more than 140 years after his death. One can turn back time long enough to ascertain how he did it at the Colt exhibit in Cody, Wyoming.

To engage in a retrospective of the Colt factories, the firearms manufacturing facilities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, doesn't sound much more than mildly interesting to many of us. It would seem to entail the dutiful responsibility of walking politely through lines of noisy, oily machinery and listening to tedious, detailed explanations of production processes. We expect the machines to be tended by melancholy laborers who repetitiously perform their assigned tasks while waiting for the long work day to come to an end. That would have been, in fact, a realistic expectation of a great many factories of the time. To experience the factories of Samuel Colt, however, was entirely different, because they *were* different. They were operated by different kinds of people and run in different ways. Those differences make even a brief encounter with the factory theme of the Colt exhibit a surprising and memorable experience.

Although designated with rather ordinary names like the Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company (Paterson, New Jersey) and the Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company (Hartford, Connecticut), they were far more than mere workplaces. They were communities of people, rather than just jobs. They provided surprisingly well-paid workers with a sense of identity, of belonging, and of significant participation in a worthy endeavor. The Hartford factory afforded recreation, shopping and even worship opportunities for its employees and their families. They had a challenging company emblem, their own marching band, and a special unit of uniformed military militia. These things brought a spirit of collective pride and unity to people who had come from countries all over the world to blend their unique skills and abilities into the pursuit of common goals.

As a result, most of them worked for Colt for the duration of their productive lives, were succeeded by their children, and then by their children's children. They constituted the first and foremost dedicated multinational and multigenerational work force in this country. They had been given the opportunity to become a part of Sam Colt's exciting and daring dream. They reciprocated with an intense and enduring loyalty, and with the creation of quality products of strength, precision and reliability. Visitors will be given the opportunity to get to know those laborers at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center this summer.

These extraordinary workers produced more than the tools of westward expansion. They also produced works of art.



Gerald S. Hayward, *Colonel Samuel Colt*, (1856), on ivory, 3 x 2.375 in. Courtesy Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Conn. Bequest of Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt. 1905.67



Top: Colt First Model Ring Lever Rifle 78.1.3232

Bottom: Colt First Model Ring Lever Rifle 78.1.3229

Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyo. Gift of Olin Corporation, Winchester Arms Collection.

Right: Selection of Colt Model 1892, 1902 and New Service Revolvers, as used by the U.S. Army. Printed with permission of the Colt Collectors Association. Courtesy of K.T. Roes, WordsWorth, as published in *Colt and Its Collectors*. Paul Goodwin photo.

Their engraving, inlaying, metal finishing and wood working skills created highly embellished, special-order and presentation firearms of striking beauty. Checkering and elaborate hand carving enhanced the rich graining of wooden stocks and handles. Other handles were made of ivory and mother-of-pearl. Metals were engraved with a variety of scenes and made ornate with intricate scrollwork patterns, then enlivened with highlights of silver and gold. These guns became the jewels of firearms production. Viewers will move through a veritable jewelry shop to observe them.

Perhaps the most unexpected theme to be presented in the Colt exhibit is the quality that makes this, and any other exhibit, possible. It is the phenomenon of the collector and his or her collections. Sometimes considered overly compulsive, and even aberrant, behavior, collecting is, nonetheless, a nearly universal activity. Almost everyone collects something, whether it is stamps, coins, toys, firearms, thimbles, salt and pepper shakers, antiques, automobiles or pennies. The impulse for so doing seems to be diversely motivated: by the desire to acquire, by the hope of profit, by the quest for knowledge, by a fascination with history, by a concern for conservation and preservation, by the excitement of discovery, and by various other motivations.

The rewards of collecting are similarly varied and multifaceted. There is the pride and pleasure of ownership, the simple satisfaction of possession, the enjoyment of sharing with and teaching others, and an unusual sense of the extension of the self beyond the boundaries of mind and body into the objects collected and the memories and stories associated with them. Not the least of these rewards is the capability of developing, and the privilege of enjoying, an exhibition like *Colt: The Legacy of a Legend*. Through it, we can almost literally turn back the clock and then emerge from the experience renewed, stimulated, and refreshed.

Do yourself a wonderful favor. Be there! ■



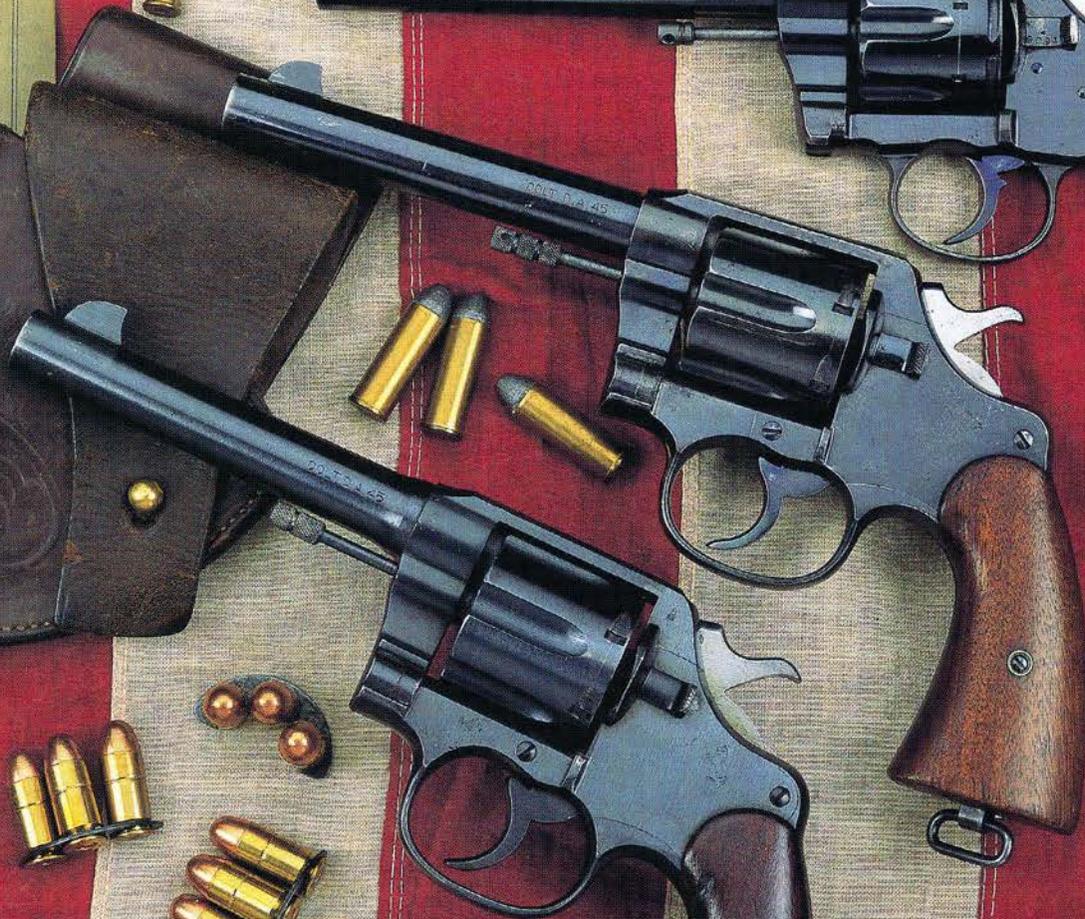
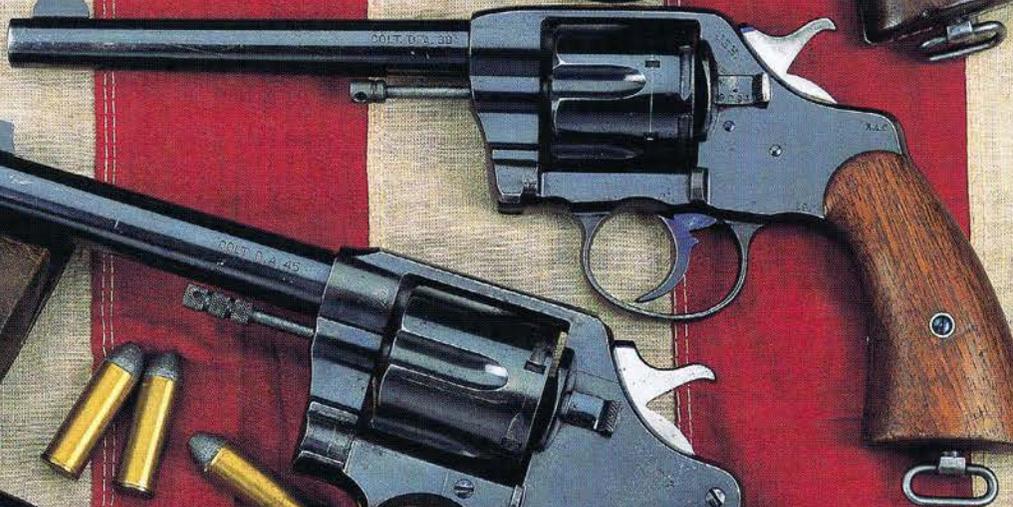
Hand-Book

Colt's Double-Action
REVOLVER

Caliber .45 Model 1917



Patent Fire Arms
HARTFORD, CONN.



Sam Colt & Industrialists

by Maryanne S. Andrus
Curator of Education

Social histories of the American Industrial Revolution have shed light on the management of factories and working conditions for laborers over the past hundred years. Within this sweeping panorama of labor history, there are unique voices that invited — or forced — change; some voices came from men who have become icons of America's industrial power. Others who contributed valuable expansion and growth to labor conditions, though, have remained relatively unknown. Two manufacturing giants, Samuel Colt and Henry Ford, differ in the level of fame they achieved yet illustrate a similar kind of personal power and determination — shared characteristics that shaped American manufacturing for generations.

An appreciation of Sam Colt's contribution to America's history does not lie solely with his development of superior, repeating firearms. Lesser known is his inventive vision in his Hartford, Connecticut factory: the use of interchangeable machine parts, assembly line production, implementing a shorter, ten-hour workday, addressing employees' physical discomforts within the factory, providing recreational outlets for employees, and building modern, custom housing for his work force. His personal charisma and the infrequent but harsh use of coercion are also elements that helped shape his factory. Colt's commitments to his invention and to overseeing successful mass production were fundamental to his success.

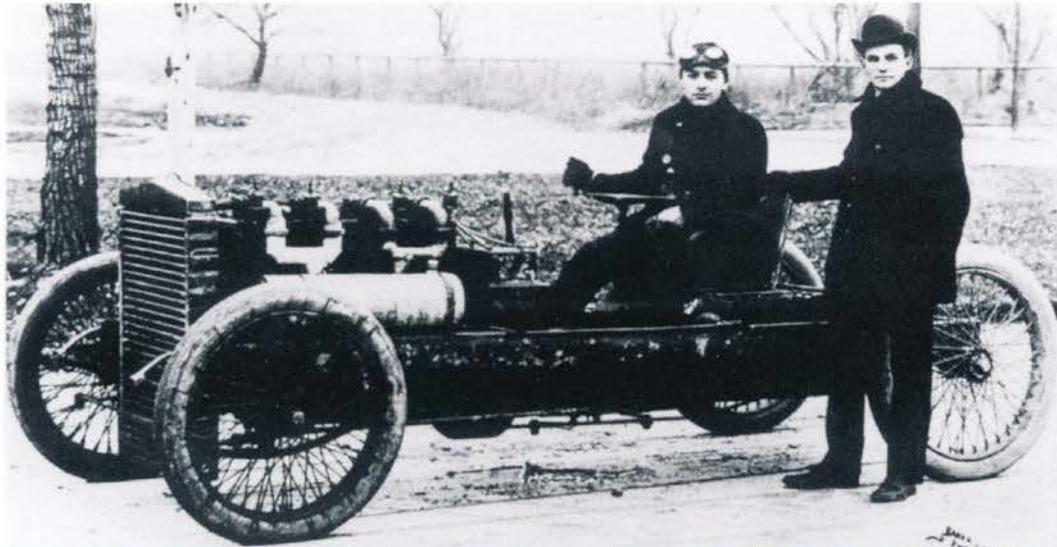
Henry Ford is a world-renowned figure of early twentieth century automobile manufacturing. His fame rests on both his personal drive to manufacture a reliable and affordable automobile and a factory system borrowed from successful management processes of earlier industrial pioneers. A generation later than Colt, Ford adopted the practice of using interchangeable machine parts, assembly line production, and addressing employees' housing needs. However, he did bring unique vision to the workplace, pulling together all parts of the manufacturing process under one twelve-acre roof at the Rouge Plant in Dearborn, Michigan. To the assembly line process, he added a moving assembly conveyor. As well, Ford implemented the \$5 workday in 1914, his version of profit sharing with employees. In a less positive light, however, his leadership was defined by a personality known to be complex and, at times, contradictory. This was coupled with a regrettable reliance on coercive, sometimes brutal, control of employees' lives.

Similarities between these two manufacturers are striking. Both men were self-made, having only attended a few years of schooling: Sam in an apprenticeship at his father's silk mill in Hartford and Henry at the one-room Scotch Settlement School in Dearborn. They each married distinctive, compelling women who remained faithful to them in life and to their "best" memories in death. Both industrialists drew on their own hard beginnings when organizing their factories, implementing new



Henry Ford. Courtesy of
Dearborn Historical Museum,
Dearborn, Michigan.

Henry Ford: with Vision



Henry Ford (right) and race car. Courtesy of Dearborn Historical Museum, Dearborn, Michigan.

working conditions to motivate factory employees to devoted service. Both men suffered through business failure before they established the factories that built their fortunes. The Patent Arms Manufacturing Co. operated from 1836–1842, before it folded. It was reopened in 1848 as the Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Co. Ford made two unsuccessful attempts to build a company before the Ford Motor Company was incorporated in 1903, with Ford as vice-president and chief engineer. In addition to similarities in fortune, it seems undeniable that Ford studied and learned from Sam Colt's business acumen.

Overarching control of employees' lives was also a trait shared by the two. Colt was sued in the 1850s for coercing employees' votes for the Democratic Party and for firing 66 Republican employees. Similarly, Ford adopted many paternalistic policies to "reform" his employees' personal lives. He was one of the nation's foremost opponents of labor unions in the 1930s, hiring toughs to break up labor rallies. His strong-arm tactics culminated in the "Battle of the Overpass" in 1937, where one man suffered fatal injuries, many others were seriously injured, and Ford was court-ordered to stop interference with union activity.

Another characteristic that both industrialists shared was the love of invention. Both Colt and Ford had lesser-known, sideline inventions that they developed. Colt worked on waterproof cartridges, submarine batteries and explosive harbor-defense systems, while Ford developed race cars and promoted aviation by developing the Tri-Motor airplane. Both men built mansions that took opulent architecture to new heights. Today, Colt's Armsmear and Ford's Fairlane are museums, each dedicated to the forceful, formative voice that gave rise to America's industrial dominance. ■

HOW



Wild Bill Hickok wearing 1851 Navy revolvers. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyo. Vincent Mercaldo Collection. P.71.1632.1

GOOD WERE THEY?

*by Warren Newman
Interim Curator, Cody Firearms Museum*

Hickok is reputed to have shot down five desperadoes in Leavenworth, Kansas, when he was twenty-one years of age.

He came to be known as the “Prince of Pistoleers.” His name was James Butler “Wild Bill” Hickok. He was born on a farm in Illinois in 1837, but he seemed destined from the outset to be a lawman rather than a farmer. As a young boy, he practiced shooting with a pistol until he became highly proficient in its use. He subsequently left home to seek out a means of livelihood that would capitalize on his skills with a gun. In the process he became the first really famous gunfighter of the American West.

Hickok is reputed to have shot down five desperadoes in Leavenworth, Kansas, when he was twenty-one years of age. In 1861, he is said to have killed a man named David McCandles in Rock Creek, Nebraska. He attracted much more attention when he killed another gunfighter in Springfield, Missouri, in July 1865. His opponent was an acquaintance named Davis Tutt. Tutt and Hickok became involved in a dispute over a purported gambling debt. The argument was apparently exacerbated by their amorous interests in the same woman. The end result

was that they engaged in a classic walk-down shootout. Although they fired at each other virtually in the same instant, Tutt missed and Hickok’s bullet found its mark, striking Tutt in the chest. Hickok was arrested and tried in a court of law for the shooting, but the jury quickly decided that he had acted in self-defense.

Wild Bill’s growing reputation as a gunfighter earned him the sheriff’s job in Hays County, Kansas. He performed so admirably in the position that he was soon appointed marshal of the bustling cow town of Abilene in the same state. There his personal dominance and marksmanship skills began to assume legendary proportions.

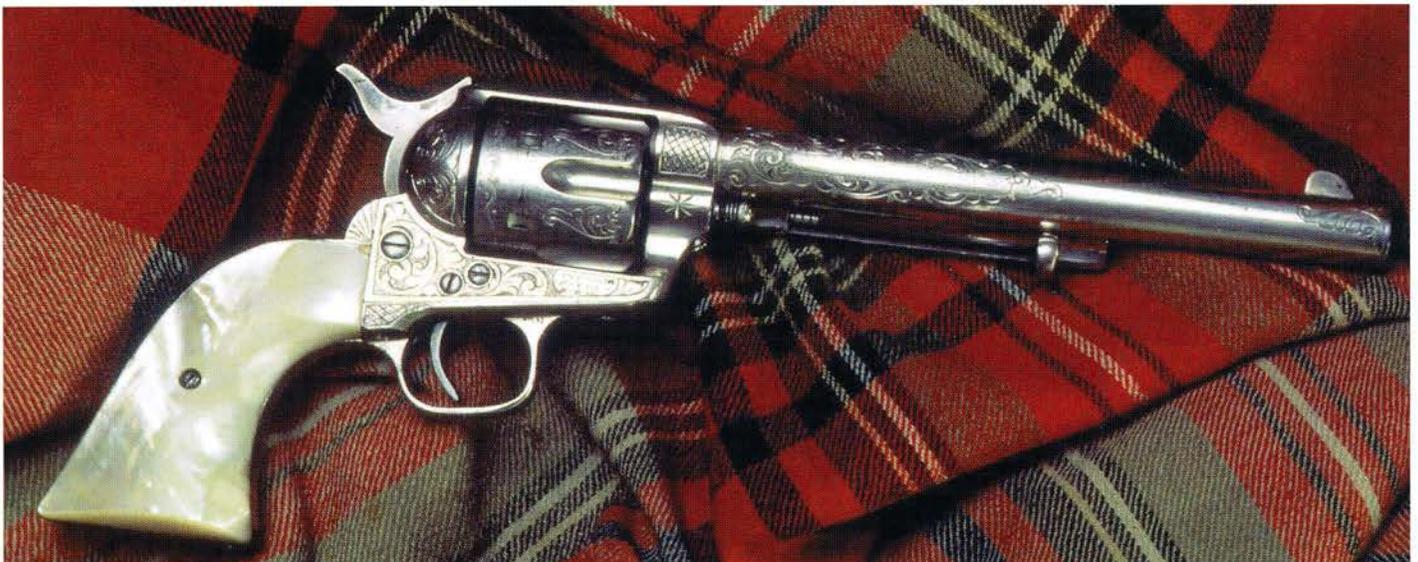
One writer, Colonel George Ward Nichols, claims to have observed Hickok put six bullets into a six-inch letter “O” on a sign between 50 and 60 yards away without using the sights of his pistol. General George Armstrong Custer, for whom Hickok had ridden as a scout, said of him in 1872, “Of his courage there could be no question,” and “his skill in the use of the rifle and pistol was unerring,” but “he was entirely free from all bluster and bravado.” Custer went on to assert, with respect to Hickok as a lawman, that “his word was law.”

Even after Wild Bill had been murdered, shot from behind while he was playing cards in Deadwood, South Dakota in 1876 — a crime for which Jack McCall was tried, convicted and hanged the following year — the legend continued to grow. Three years later an article in the Cheyenne, Wyoming, *Daily Leader* described his capabilities with his famous Colt Model 1851 Navy cap-and-ball revolvers:

“His ivory handled revolvers . . . were made expressly for him and were finished in a manner unequalled by any ever before manufactured in this or any other country. It is said that a bullet from them never missed its mark. Remarkable stories are told of the dead shootist’s skills with these guns. He could keep two fruit cans rolling, one in front and one behind him, with bullets fired from these firearms. This is only a sample story of the hundreds which are related to his incredible dexterity with these revolvers.”

The journalist’s use of such phrases as “bullets that never missed their mark,” terms like “incredible dexterity,” and the description of a pair of revolvers that were said to be “unequalled by any ever before manufactured in this or any other country” did more than ensure an impressive reputation. They made of him a legend, whose exploits, regardless of their degree of authenticity, were firmly embedded in the minds of the tens of thousands of people who heard and read of him. Wild Bill was, after all, a very opportune man to lionize. He was tall and broad shouldered, with penetrating eyes that seemed to search out the innermost being of others. His long hair, flowing like a mane and accented by his preference for ruffled and fancy clothing and broad-brimmed hats, made him an imposing figure. He was a gentleman, with a deep fondness for the ladies, treating them with personal attention and flawless courtesy.

His mystique had grown in spite of some difficulties along the way during his lifetime. In a gun battle in which he killed Phil Coe over a sign that he considered offensive in Coe’s famous Bull’s Head Saloon, Hickok, sensing further danger, whirled and shot his own deputy Mike Williams who was standing behind him. Even that tragic mistake seemed unable to diminish the magnitude of the legend that enveloped him. “Wild Bill” Hickok became a powerful and enduring image of a



Colt Model 1873. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyo. Gift of Lillian E. Herring. 1988.9.1



Cased pair of Colt Model 1851 Navy Revolvers. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyo. Gift of James R. Woods Foundation. 1979.4.1.1

professional lawman and deadly gunfighter in the American West. He and others of his kind, like Wyatt Earp, Bill Tilghman, Bat Masterson, several Texas Rangers, and the Colts they carried, were significant agents of change from disorder and uncontrolled violence to a modicum of order and respect for the law in a tumultuous era.

How good were they? Were they men of fairly ordinary capabilities whose exploits were exaggerated in the telling and retelling across the years by people who needed heroes? Were they made into larger-than-life legends by imaginative journalists, by the intentional sensationalism of dime novelists, and later by Western movies and television productions? These are questions that need to be asked by thoughtful people who are interested in the story of the American frontier, particularly since the appetite for stirring portrayals of spectacular skills of violence often seems greater than the longing for realism.

Perhaps a good way to find some of the answers is to look more analytically at the saga of Wild Bill Hickok and some of the claims of his shooting skills that have been cited. Fortunately, it is possible to do so against the vastly enlarged database of well over a hundred years additional experience of guns and their capabilities, of the ballistics of ammunition, and of the mental and physiological propensities of men engaged in violent confrontations.

Colonel Nichols' account of Hickok's ability to place six bullets into such a small space at 50 to 60 yards without using the sights on his gun cannot be claimed to be completely impossible, but it can be said to be highly unlikely. Even the top shooters speak convincingly of the extreme importance of a clear and steady sight picture with a handgun at such a distance. Further light is shed on the matter by Hickok's regular practices. He often put on public exhibitions of his shooting skills—probably both to enhance his reputation and to discourage those who might attempt to gain notoriety by trying to gun him down. He would also often engage in friendly marksmanship matches with others who were recognized as outstanding shots. A number of observers attested that in neither instance would he ever shoot without taking dead aim; he was just very quick in acquiring it. It is quite possible that this unusual speed in acquiring a good sight picture might have led observers to conclude that he was not using his sights at all.

The most successful gunfighters across the years have always been men of iron nerve who were smooth and quick in drawing and pointing their guns, but who invariably took sufficiently deliberate aim, except at very short range, to ensure accurate shot placement.

Interestingly, Wild Bill was sometimes beaten in the shooting matches with his skilled friends. The winners, however, would affirm consistently that he was essentially unbeatable in an actual gunfight because of his calmness and poise. Almost everyone in the midst of the crisis of a violent and potentially deadly confrontation experiences a rush of adrenalin that causes a restriction of sight known as "tunnel vision," shaking hands, unanticipated general body movements and quick, shallow breathing. Hickok had the ability to remain steady, deliberate and unshaken, enabling him to handle his pistol quickly while using his sights well enough to attain precise shot placement. Another key to his deadliness in a shootout was that he never had the slightest indecision or hesitation in pulling the trigger on an adversary. The reluctance to use deadly force on another human being often results in a momentary delay that costs a combatant his life. Hickok's ability to control that impulse, along with his speed and accuracy, made him an extremely dangerous gunfighter and contributed to his reputation as a legendary lawman.

What about the Colt Model 1851 Navy percussion revolvers that he favored? How good were they? Many contemporary marksmen deride the depictions of both the shooters and the guns of the frontier era. They contend that the skills of the gunslingers were shamelessly exaggerated for effect, and that the guns themselves could not have performed anywhere near the levels claimed. The production of firearms, they say, was not nearly so advanced, nor individual firearms sufficiently well-designed or well-made to have enabled such feats. In addition, the ammunition of the time was too primitive to have been even marginally effective. Given our frequent conviction of the overall superiority of "modern" production machinery and methods, their contentions can be rather persuasive.

Fortunately in this area of interest we are not dependent upon personal opinion alone. There is a limited but solid body of observational and experimental data regarding the speed and accuracy of the guns of the frontier. Some of it is from that era; the rest has been developed more recently by using the guns of that period. An example from the era is provided by a prominent shooting exhibition put on by Texas lawyer, killer and shootist John Wesley Hardin at the opening of his saloon in El Paso on 4 July 1895.



Jesse James at 16.
Buffalo Bill Historical
Center, Cody, Wyo.
Vincent Mercaldo
Collection. P.71.2167

Hardin pierced cards from a faro deck using a .38 caliber Colt Lightning Double-Action revolver. He shot at close range but quite rapidly. His shot placement was remarkable, often with five shots grouped in the same ragged hole. The double-action guns afforded some advantages for fast shooting and were used by a number of shooters before the turn of the century.

Tests conducted by the U. S. Army with handguns in 1876 and 1898 provided surprising indications of their accuracy. The .45 caliber Colt Single Action Army revolver turned in average groups of 3.11 inches at 50 yards, and in the later trials a Colt Peacemaker shot groups of 5.3 inches at 50 yards and 8.3 inches at 100 yards. These period observations and tests made it readily apparent that frontier handguns were both precisely made and capable of real accuracy.

Contemporary tests of the guns of the West also tend to confirm their effectiveness. In a recent controlled experiment a Colt Model 1851, like the ones used by Wild Bill Hickok, proved capable of putting three bullets in a 3 inch group at 25 yards. A Colt Model 1873 Single Action Army, like the ones worn by Doc Holliday, Jesse James and Billy the Kid, placed three rounds in a 3¹/₂ inch group. A Colt Model 1860 Army percussion revolver shot a three round 5 inch group. These results are very impressive, particularly in view of the age of the guns.

How good were they? They were astonishingly good — both the best of the men and the best of the guns. They compare favorably with contemporary production guns and lend considerable credence to the claims of the speed and accuracy of the early American gunfighters. Our cynicism about some of those claims is completely understandable, but sometimes they deserve a closer look. ■

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THE GENTLEMEN'S AGREEMENT

by Robert N. White
Curatorial Assistant, Cody Firearms Museum

Why did Samuel Colt produce only pistols and Oliver Winchester only rifles? The sacred lore of firearms legend holds that these two giants of the Industrial Revolution, after a tentative foray into each other's territory, sat down and forged a "gentlemen's agreement" that there would be no further incursions.

According to the story, both men realized that there was room enough in the growing firearms industry for both to limit themselves to their respective areas of expertise—Colt would stick to the perfection and production of the revolver and Winchester would do likewise with rifles—and both would still reap a handsome profit. In truth, other factors less to do with honor than with timing, design, legal maneuvering and political influence decided the course of their enterprises.

The nineteenth century was the age of Social Darwinism and two of the fittest of the survivors were Samuel Colt and Oliver Winchester.

The nineteenth century was the age of Social Darwinism and two of the fittest of the survivors were Samuel Colt and Oliver Winchester. Indeed, when it came to who ruled the brutal jungle environment that characterized the business world during this time, both Colt and Winchester were the tigers. Had there been any association between them, there was sure to be more in the way of savage competition than agreement.

Colt patented his first firearm in January of 1836 under what was to become known as Colt's Master Patent. Through that patent and a subsequent extension, he was able to insure that his company would be the exclusive producer of revolving pistols in the United States well into the Civil War.



Oliver F. Winchester. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyo. Gift of Olin Corporation, Winchester Arms Collection. PN.20.2544b

Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company was soon producing a large number of improved firearms. These included a well-accepted line of revolving rifles, the manufacture of which predated Winchester's arrival on the scene by over a quarter of a century. Colt solidified his position as the inventor and manufacturer of revolvers, though, when he filed and won a historic patent infringement lawsuit against the Massachusetts Arms Company in 1851.

By the time of the Civil War, Colt had narrowed his production exclusively to the revolver. He introduced a progressively more advanced series of pistols which would serve both the Union and Confederate armies through the bloody years of the Civil War, and that would later see use by the frontier army and other settlers in the West. Samuel Colt did not live to see this, however, as he died at the youthful age of 48 on January 10, 1862.

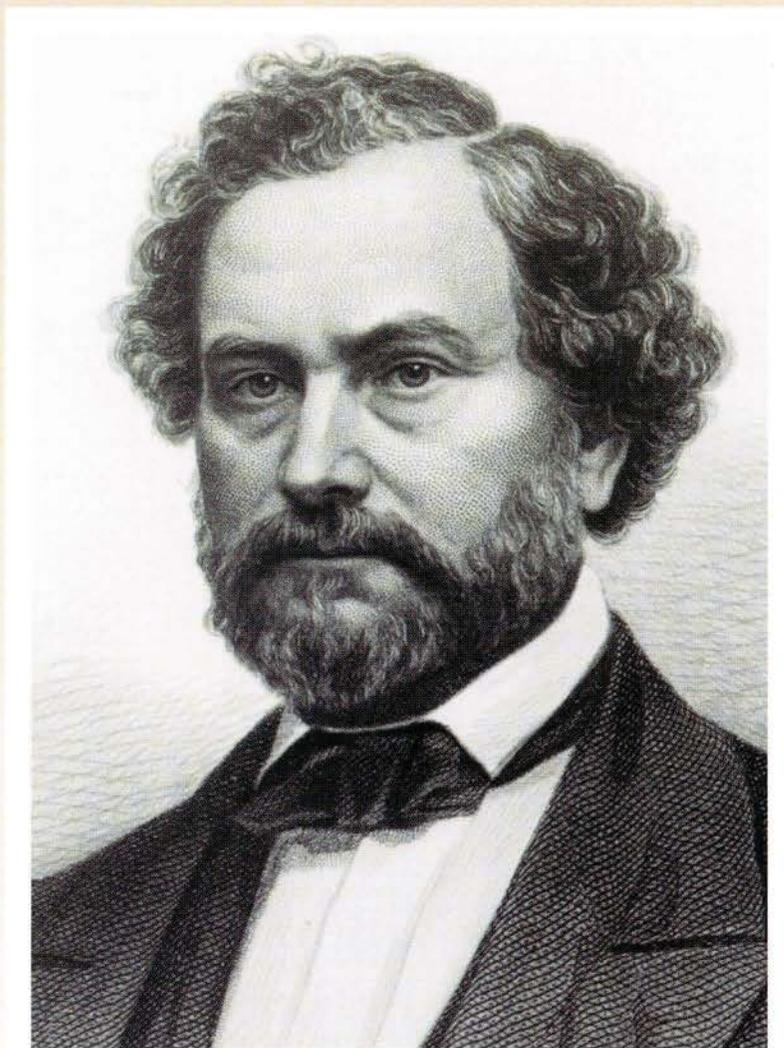
Samuel Colt's health was already failing in 1857, when Oliver Winchester gained control of the failed Volcanic Repeating Arms Company from fellow investors. One of Winchester's first moves was to hire Benjamin Tyler Henry as plant superintendent of the newly formed New Haven Arms Company with instructions to develop a cartridge and a rifle. Henry's toggle link and lever action

rifles were introduced in 1860. As opposed to handguns, Winchester realized that rifles were best suited for Henry's design, and it was this that led him to plot his company's future course.

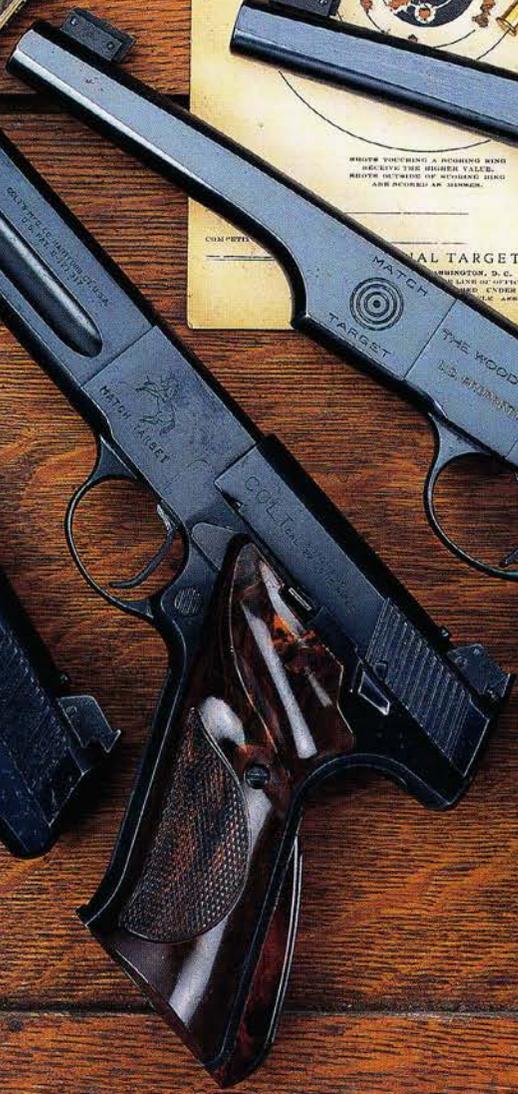
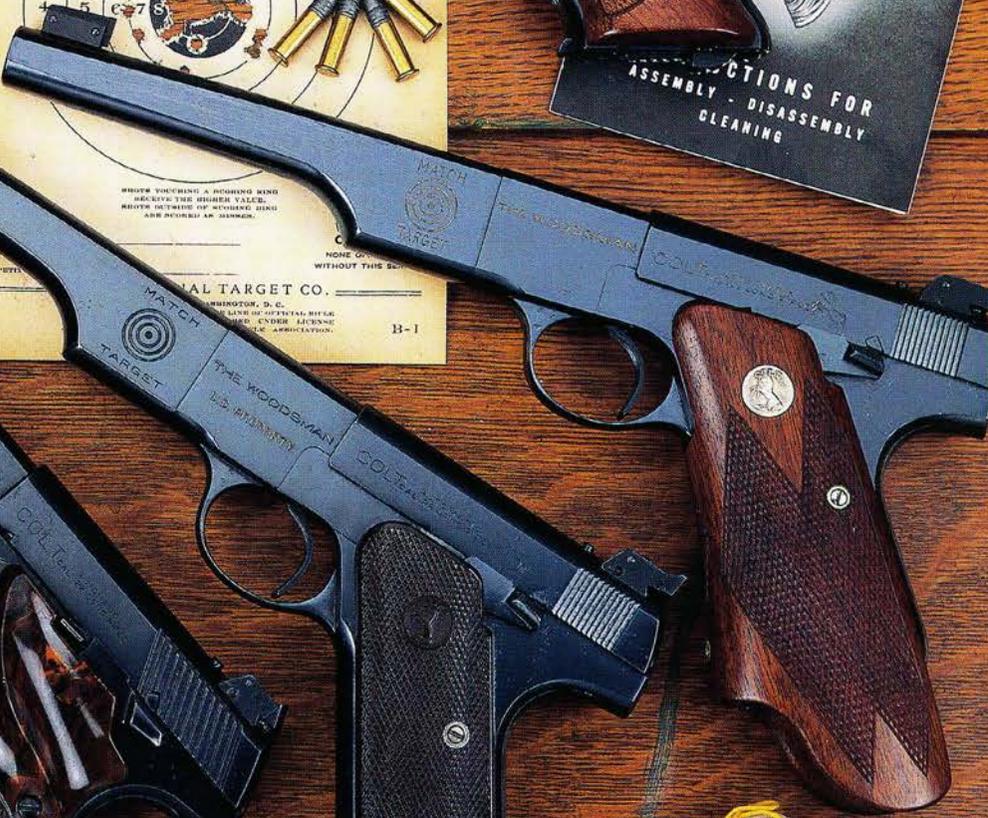
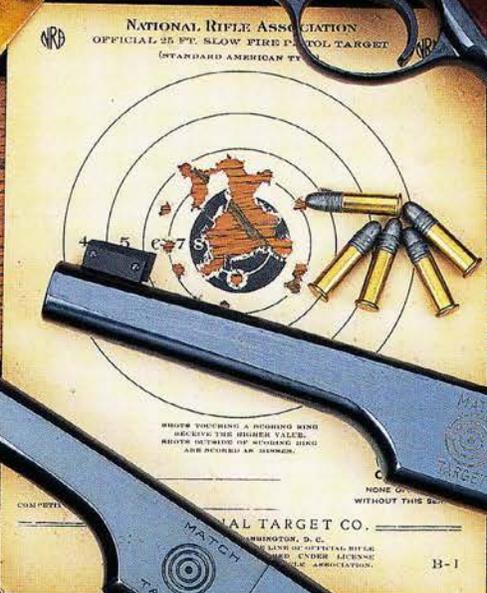
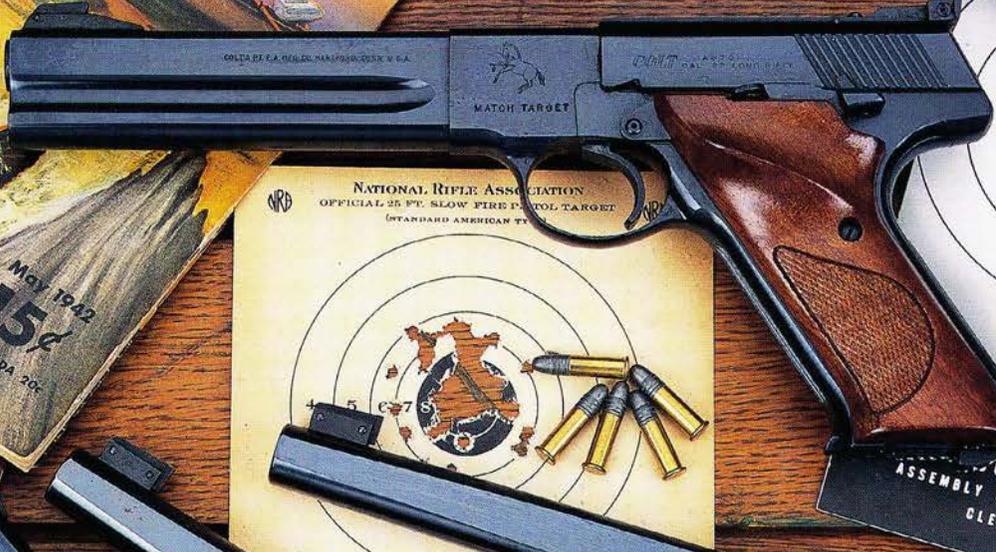
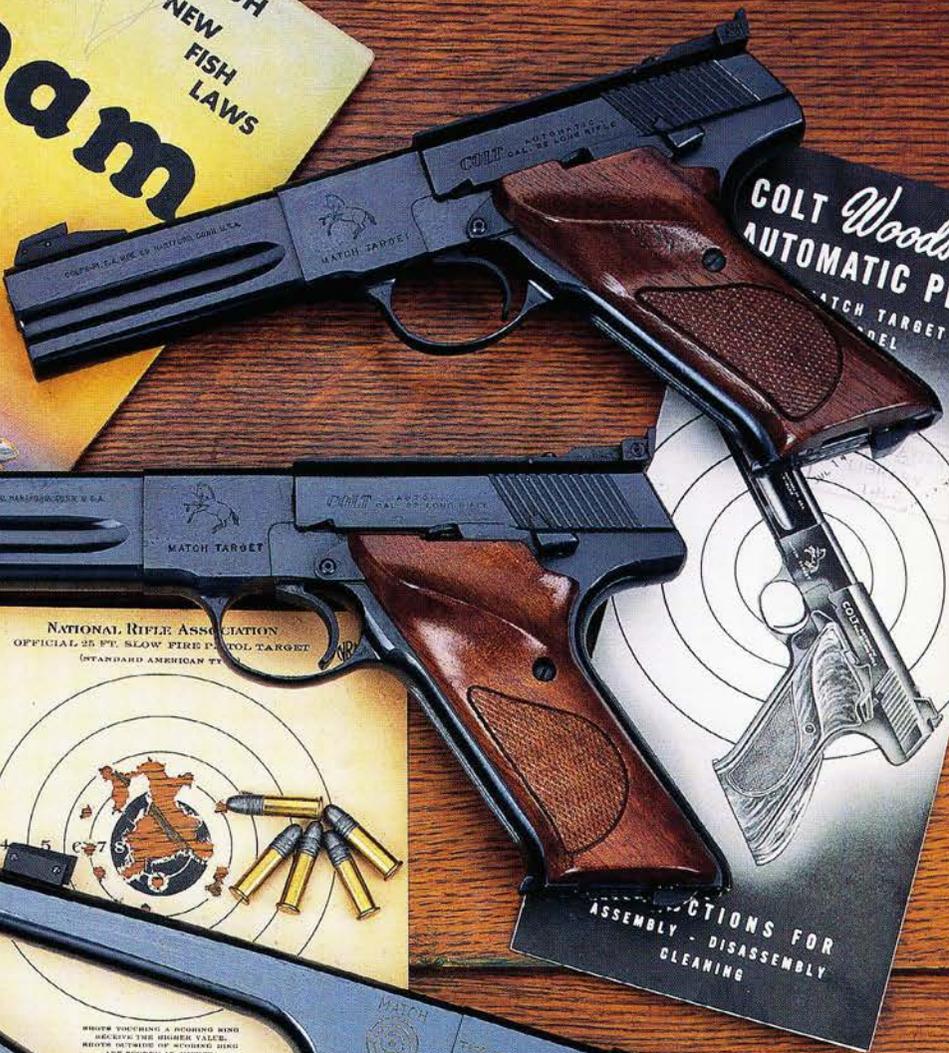
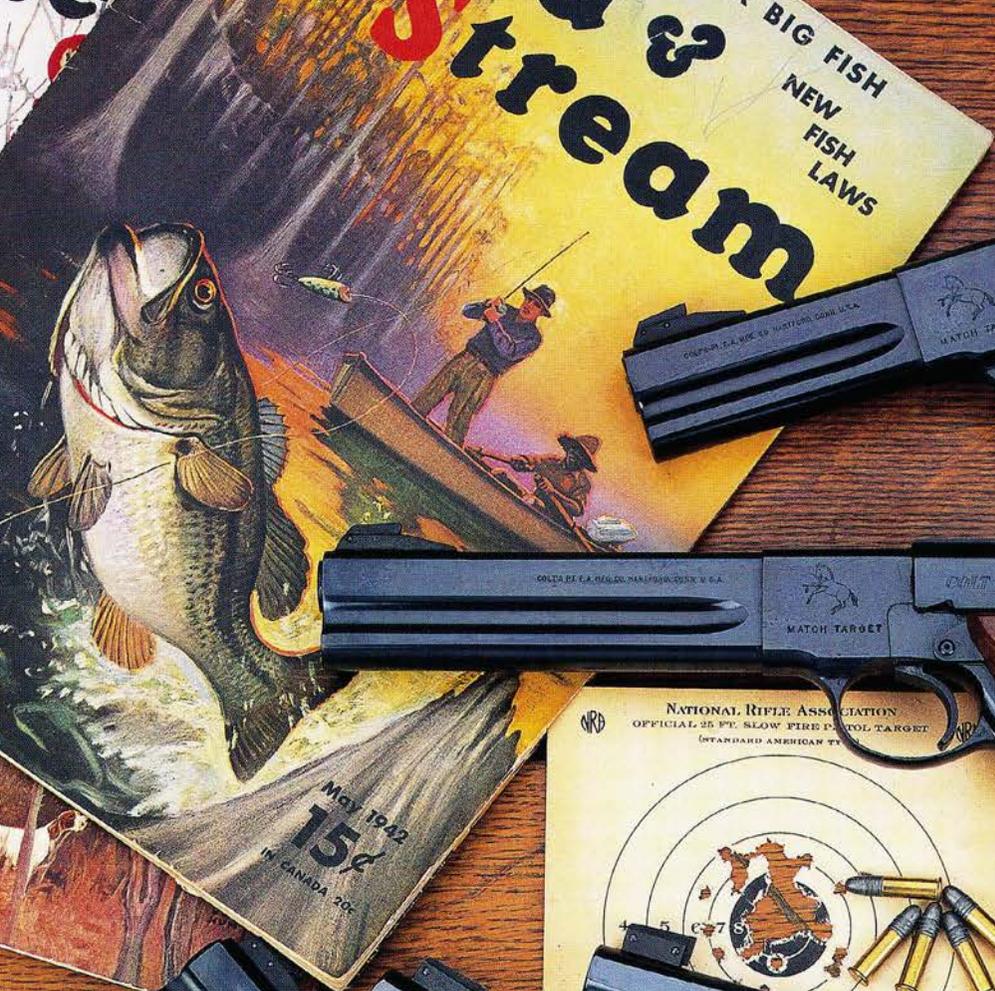
Winchester was no less a survivor than Samuel Colt in the ruthless *laissez-faire* American economic atmosphere. Winchester vigorously defended his company in the courts and the corridors of political influence, and he successfully challenged and halted a hostile takeover of the company led by Henry, his former plant superintendent. This incident led to Winchester's total control of the company, which he quickly reformed as the Winchester Repeating Arms Company in 1865. In terms of longevity, Winchester had more endurance than Colt, living and ruling his company until 1880 when he died at the age of 70.

In 1884, four years after Winchester's death, top officials of the Winchester and Colt companies met to discuss the continuing battle between them over market share. Well after the death of both company founders, an agreement was forged that would bind Colt to revolvers and Winchester to rifles. For the most part, this agreement has lasted throughout the past century and continues to this day.

A gentlemen's agreement alone was not a factor in the separation of these two giants of the American Industrial Revolution and their products. When it came to business, neither Colt nor Winchester was a gentleman. Both were ferocious competitors, with survival and success at any cost as their prime motivators. As much as anything else, the design of the firearms they manufactured shaped the direction and the market of each company. ■



Samuel Colt, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyo.
Vincent Mercaldo Collection. P.71.1293



Colt Collecting Passion or Obsession?

by K. T. Roes

It's a rare person who doesn't collect something. From a humble assemblage of matchbook covers to the immensely varied accumulations of monarchs, collecting is a universal human endeavor.

The urge to collect has many roots, some darkly psychological and others purely utilitarian. It also has many results, ranging from obsession to pure joy. It is the human desire to accumulate that lies at the heart of every museum on the planet.

Entering the word "collecting" in an Internet search engine produces 4,560,000 results. Entering "gun collecting" narrows the focus, but still offers 238,000 options for further examination. Entering "Colt gun collecting" produces 6,650 results. That avid interest is best

represented by the Colt Collectors Association (CCA), a 2,500-member group with an international membership list. The CCA is a relatively young organization, formed 20 years ago by Colt aficionados who were members of the Texas Gun Collectors Association.

Colt collectors are nearly as varied as the guns they prize. The acquisitive impulses that drive them form a long list as well. Some collectors are searching for beauty, others value history. Some are seeking the rare and almost unobtainable. Others are fascinated by engineering skill, technology or metallurgy. Most admire Samuel Colt as an innovator and a salesman.

Colt collecting can strike at any age. Many collectors can track the origin of their interest to early childhood but others have come to it in later years, when affluence has aided accumulations. Collector Dave Grunberg of Vernon, Connecticut, is a collector whose path began as child, although he did not

acquire his first Colt until many years later. Growing up in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Grunberg engaged in the usual activities of children the world over. One day, while playing outside, he found what appeared to be an expensive fountain pen lying on the ground. The police officer who was asked to help return the pen to its owner rewarded the young Grunberg by offering to let him hold his Colt .45 caliber semiautomatic pistol. The Spanish-speaking young boy had trouble deciphering the inscription on the top of the gun but he never forgot the heft of the heavy weapon.

Years later, after his family had immigrated to the United States, Grunberg served in the United States Army. "They issued me a Colt .45. It was like *deja vu*, here I am. So I carried this thing for about four years and upon my discharge, I read in a flyer about a Colt for sale,"

Colt collectors are nearly as varied as the guns they prize.

he recalled. After buying the inexpensive gun, Grunberg learned that it had been made in Italy and was not a bona fide Colt at all. "Then I started getting serious about owning some real Colt firearms," he said. "My affinity was always towards the single actions or cowboy guns. I watched the black and white serials every weekend and you always wanted to emulate them, whether it was Roy Rogers or

Hopalong Cassidy. My hero was Randolph Scott."

Living near Hartford, Connecticut, the long-time center of Colt manufacturing, Grunberg found it easy to meet collectors and Colt factory employees who guided him as he refined his interest in second and third generation engraved firearms, his passion today.

Growing up in Norway, Tor Karstensen had different early influences. "I got my first gun from my father, at the age of 5, in 1945," he recalled. "It was a small .22 revolver. I couldn't use it for serious use, of course, but I played with it. Right after the war there were a lot of guns available in Norway, so we young people got interested and started gun clubs."

"There were 350,000 German soldiers in Norway when the war ended and they left all their guns there. Norway was flooded with guns. A lot of them were taken to the sea and dumped but a lot of them remained among the people of Norway. We have always been a country where a lot of guns existed," Karstensen explained.

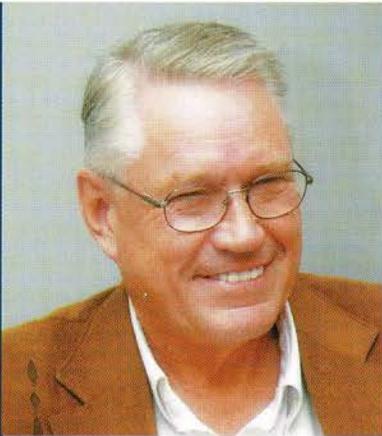
By the time Karstensen was 20, he was a full-fledged gun collector. His first "American" gun was a 1911 Colt .45, although it had been made in Norway. As Karstensen's gun collecting interest matured, he completed his collection of M1911 pistols. Today, he has a complete collection of Kongsberg Colts, manufactured in Norway under a 1915 licensing agreement.

An engineer, first for Boeing and then as director of maintenance activities for Scandinavian Airlines, Karstensen has an affinity for mechanical things. He describes the Colt Peacemaker (Single Action Army) as a gun with "a nice aesthetic design . . . a really neat, thoughtful gun."

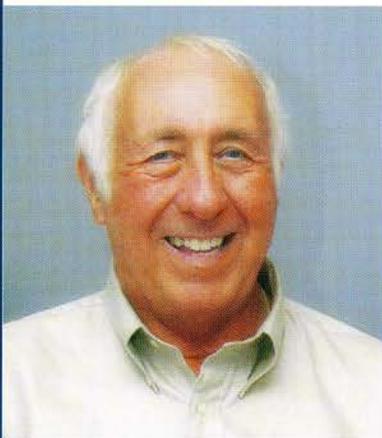
Illinois collector John Blickhan agrees. He chose to focus on Colt collecting in part because they "have prettier lines than any other gun. They just look right and feel right."

Blickhan always liked old guns. At one time he had collected "almost the full realm of Winchesters and Civil War carbines." After concluding that his interest was too broad, he chose Colt as his focus. Because the earliest of collectible Colts, the Patersons, were expensive and rare, Blickhan decided to "start with the Walker and end with the Single Action Army." What he had not realized at first was "there are a lot of guns and variations in between."

Blickhan's wife, Kitten, is the other half of a collecting team. She acknowledged that women are relatively rare among Colt collectors. "I'm an anomaly as a woman," she said. "I don't think there are very many women who take an active collecting role. They may support their husbands, and man a table at a show but they don't actively shop for guns. It's a rare thing to have a woman take



Tor Karstensen



John Blickhan

such an intense interest in it.” For the Blickhans, however, “We decided early on that it was a hobby we could share as a couple,” Kitten explained. “Now, we have each become a collecting monster,” each with a different set of collecting goals.



Kitten Blickhan

Blickhan relies on his wife to spot alterations in firearms, an unfortunate but all-too-frequent happening in the collecting world. “She has a keen eye,” he explained, and a calm approach to purchases. “I fall in love with every gun,” he laughed. “We don’t watch television. We tinker with guns. I like to research and find out information. In the winter time, we’re down there (gun room) almost every night,” he said.

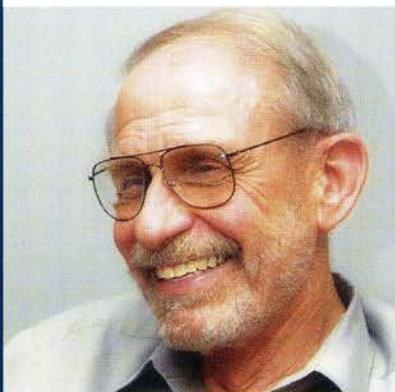
Kitten Blickhan is on the CCA board along with California collector Karen Green, the club’s secretary. Although she started her interest in Colt because her husband is a collector, Karen Green soon developed a fascination with Derringers and in Samuel Colt, the Colt family, and company memorabilia. Now, members of the CCA laughingly refer to her as “Karen Colt.”



Kevin Cherry

After a 19-year CCA membership and a nine-year stint as secretary, Green is aware of the benefits of collecting and the friendships that grow over time. “Collecting has encouraged us to travel more,” Green explained. “We’ve had some very enjoyable experiences. I just wish we had more time to devote to it. There’s so much to know and so much to learn. And there are so many wonderful people who share this collecting interest,” she said.

Nearly every Colt collector agrees. The collecting fraternity is filled with fast friendships, despite the distances separating members. As CCA historian Lowell Pauli put it, “My best friends don’t live in Oregon where I live. They are members of the CCA. I may not see them as often as I would like to but they are still my best friends.”



Lowell Pauli

Firearms collections represent sizeable investments. As Dave Grunberg explained, “It almost becomes like a 401k. It’s like fine art. It appreciates through the years and it’s almost inflation proof.” However, Grunberg put his finger on a common thread, when he said, “For some people, what I do is sheer lunacy. But for me, it’s enjoyment.”

The thrill of the chase—finding a gun that’s older, more rare or in better condition than the one before—propels collectors ever forward. Collectors use words like “joy,” “thrills,” “excitement” and “happiness” to describe their favorite activity.

Finding the right gun even has medicinal purposes. “It’s dynamite when you get bit by bug,” Pauli said. “I can be down in the dumps and then I find something great and suddenly, I’m euphoric.” ■



Patsy Montana and the Prairie Ramblers, 1937. Cowboy Songs Archive.
Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyo. Gift of Janet McBride.



RIDING THE RADIO R·A·N·G·E

by Lillian Turner
Public Programs Director

In this age of satellite television and internet radio with the world's programming available at the click of a remote or a mouse, it is hard to imagine a time when radio was rural America's lifeline to music, news, and sports.

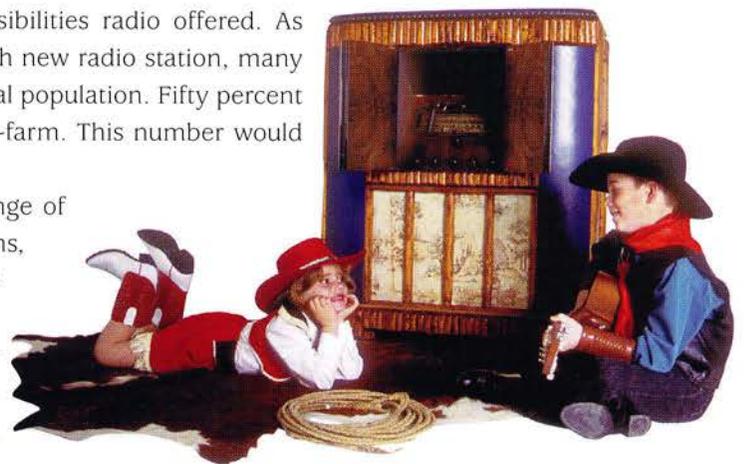
Radio was in its infancy when World War I began. Young David Sarnoff, who would become a powerful figure in the development of the broadcast industry, as early as 1916 wrote a memo to his boss at the Marconi Company suggesting the use of radio as entertainment: "I have in mind a plan of development which would make radio a household utility in the same sense as the piano or phonograph. . . ." Little did he realize how prophetic was this statement.

However, radio's development was slowed by America's entry into World War I at which time all commercial and amateur use of radio was halted. For the duration of the war, the use of radio was reserved for the war effort.

When civilian radio restrictions were lifted in 1919, the pioneer broadcast industry could not have anticipated the rapid growth that would occur over the next 20 years. By 1924 it was already ranked 34th on the list of all industries in the United States. In the post-war years America prospered, especially its middle class. Americans enjoyed the highest national average income in the world. The boom was evident in America's buying into the new technology. There were nine million automobiles in the United States when the census was taken in 1920. By 1928 the number had risen to 26 million. In 1930, for the first time, the census included the question: "Does this household have a radio?" The prosperity of the 1920s insured that half of America's homes had a radio by 1930 (12 million Americans had access to radios).

The rapidly growing industry needed a wide variety of programming. England's successful broadcast of opera star Nellie Melba's June 15, 1920 concert was considered a "stunt" at the time, but it awakened Americans to the possibilities radio offered. As producers sought to find the perfect format for each new radio station, many chose programs to appeal to the country's large rural population. Fifty percent of America's population was rural — farm and non-farm. This number would drop slightly to 45 percent during the 1930s.

Although radio stations experimented with a range of programming which included sports events, sermons, news, presidential addresses, and comedy, music played a large role in most stations' daily schedules. Many performers and musical groups filled daily program slots, offering everything from barbershop to hillbilly, dance music to gospel, along with traditional and original cowboy songs.



A classic example is station WLS in Chicago. Sears-Roebuck and Company was intrigued by the potential offered by this new medium for reaching the lucrative farming market. Having first toyed with the idea of buying time on radio stations, Sears chose instead to invest in its own broadcast facility. Sears signed on the air on 500 watt WES (World's Economy Store) on April 9, 1924, and continued running test programs for the next two nights. The listeners lit up the switchboard after hearing the broadcasts. The station officially went on the air on April 12, changing its call letters to WLS (World's Largest Store). Among the performers on opening night were Grace Wilson singing "At the End of the Sunset Trail" and movie cowboy hero William S. Hart reciting "Invictus."

Sears was in on the ground floor of radio, offering programming and selling radios and their accessories. Attuned to the needs of its rural audience, it stated in its 1925 Sears catalogue: "WLS was conceived in your interests, is operated in your behalf and is dedicated to your service. It is your station." Growing from an obscure local signal to a Midwestern powerhouse in a little more than four years, WLS reached out to its rural audience with farm news, comedies, radio serials, civic programming, and a wide variety of music. Over 130 musical acts regularly performed for free and nearly 60 different bands made WLS their radio home! Included in the programming was cowboy and western music.

On April 19, 1924, WLS premiered the *National Barn Dance* which became one of the longest-running and most popular western and country shows in radio history. Its four-hour (later two-hour) format delighted listeners whose response by telegrams on opening night insured the program's future. The *National Barn Dance* appealed not only to the rural audience but also

to those nostalgic for their rural roots or just for programming that reflected a simpler era instead of the frenetic Jazz Age in which listeners found themselves.

Although Sears sold WLS to *Prairie Farmer Magazine* in 1928, *National Barn Dance* remained popular until the station was sold to ABC in 1959. Western musicians whose careers were launched by regular appearances on WLS included Gene Autry, Rex Allen, Pat Buttram, Patsy Montana and the Prairie Ramblers, Eddie Dean, the Girls of the Golden West, and Louise Massey and the Westerners. The popularity of *National Barn Dance* resulted in similar programs appearing on other radio stations from New York to Hollywood.

The success of such programs as *National Barn Dance* helped popularize traditional cowboy music and the western music written and performed during the 1930s and 1940s. In addition to the large productions, radio stations also began to feature individual performers who soon developed into popular radio personalities. Two of these were John I. White and George B. German.

John I. White was a performer who developed an interest in traditional cowboy music. Although not a musician by profession, when first given the opportunity to perform on New York radio station WEAF in 1926, White began a music career which lasted until 1936 when he retired from music. His best-known years were those from 1930 to 1936 when he performed as "the Lonesome Cowboy" on Pacific Coast Borax's *Death Valley Days* on network radio helping create the public's image of the singing cowboy.



Gene Autry and the WLS Cast. Cowboy Songs Archive, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyo. Gift of Janet McBride.

White was among the first of the radio personalities to publish and distribute a folio of cowboy songs, an idea that would catch on with the public and would be copied by other performers. Although the folios were a significant contribution to the preservation of cowboy music, White's collection of the histories of cowboy songs—information he used in his programs—ultimately resulted in the publication of an important work on that genre, *Git Along, Little Dogies* (University of Illinois Press, 1975).

George B. German began performing on radio station WNAX in Yankton, South Dakota, in 1928, a station which reached farming and ranching country from western Minnesota and Iowa through the Dakotas and Nebraska into

eastern Montana. Like White, German sold hundreds of folios of cowboy songs over the air. Glenn Ohrlin, noted singer and collector of cowboy songs, states in his book, *The Hell-Bound Train* (University of Illinois Press, 1973): "My own earliest interest in cowboy songs was probably directly sparked by one of his [German's] folios, which had a bucking horse photo in it, and my aunt Irene's bag of cowboy and hillbilly songs, which she learned from both the folio and the radio program"

By the 1930s, in order to capitalize on the increasing popularity of cowboy and western music on the radio, Gerald King, then program director at KFWB in Los Angeles, started a new transcription company, Standard Radio, the purpose of which was to make recordings and to sell or lease these to stations in need of programming. Among the performers making transcriptions for King was the increasingly popular western music group, the Sons of the Pioneers, even prior to their involvement in movies. King would eventually produce a general music library which could be leased to radio stations, but the Sons of the Pioneers' transcriptions were sold to radio stations. Some of their transcriptions were still being played well into the 1950s.

Radio was playing a significant role in the preservation and promotion of cowboy songs. Live performances whetted the public's appetite for this musical genre, while the folios and recorded transcriptions kept the music on the air and in the homes for decades to come.

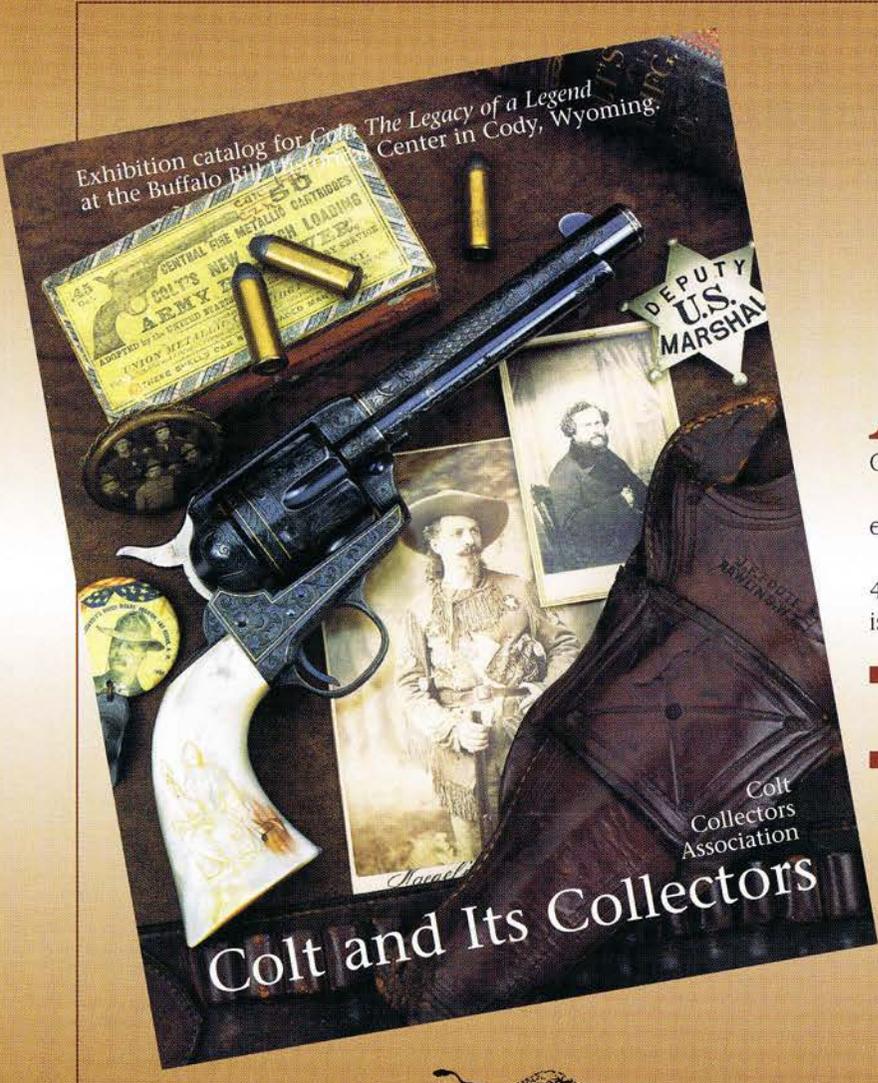
"Riding the Radio Range" will be the theme of the 21st annual Cowboy Songs and Range Ballads program at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming, April 4–6, 2003. The Cowboy Songs Symposium on Friday, April 4, will focus on the joint histories of radio and western music with presentations by Don Cusic, author/editor and music business professional; Gene Davenport and Stan Howe, performers, radio personalities, and western music historians; O. J. Sikes, nationally syndicated reviewer of western music, western music historian, and host of an Internet radio music show; and Hal Spencer, chairman of the Western Music Association advisory board, president and CEO of the Manna Music Group, and son of Tim Spencer, one of the founding members of the Sons of the Pioneers. A special feature of the program this year will be the radio show format of both night concerts—one of which will be broadcast live.

For further information about the Cowboy Songs and Range Ballads weekend, check the Historical Center's website at www.bbhc.org. ■



Pee Wee King & His Golden West Cowboys, featured on WLS *National Barn Dance*, with Carolina Cotton who appeared on *Hollywood Barn Dance*. Cowboy Songs Archive, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyo. Gift of Janet McBride.





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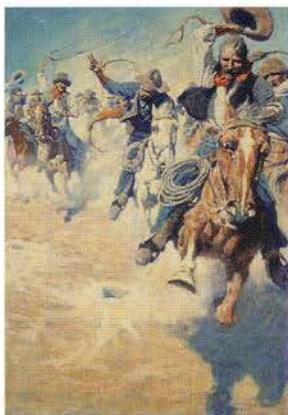
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