

# THE OLD STANDBY

BY RUSS SNOWDEN



**RUSSEL BAER, ALMA BAER, CHARLES BAER, ELMER BAER, TOM BAER**

Wandering through the Routt County Court House, one can't help but notice the outstanding gun collection handsomely displayed on the wall of the second floor. These guns are eye catching because of their obvious longevity, and because of their finely restored condition. A THREE WIRE WINTER staff member (Russ Snowden) wondered where these guns came from and some of the history behind them. So, research began with Alma Baer, the daughter of Elmer Baer, who told us how she and her family came here,

and how the gun collection came to be.

"There were four Baer boys, Tom, Elmer, my dad, Sherm, and Charley. They were in White City, Kansas, and Uncle Tom and Charley were bachelors. They got to wandering around and ended up out here in 1895. (My dad was a contractor and builder who built a lot of these old homes in Steamboat Springs.) When my Uncle Sherm passed away, that just about did in my dad. He couldn't stand it alone, so the boys out here had all the work they could do in building.



“So they wrote us and said, Why don’t you come out here for the summer, and see if you like it? So we came out in 1902 to Wolcott on the stagecoach, the one there in back of the museum. My dad was crazy about Steamboat and threw in with his brothers and got to work. He sent my mother and I back to Kansas to sell a small farm we owned, and a house in town, and his workshop. He never left here. Mother and I made six round trips on that old stagecoach to work, to sell things, and getting things cleaned up, and to ship the furniture. Course, I was only about three years old and have been here ever since.

right. Uncle Charley said, ‘You know what I’m going to do with them? Get them in working order and get ammunition. Then we will make a collection and put them someplace!’

“Well, anyway Uncle Charley was working on these guns out in his garage. He greased and polished them and did all those kinds of things. I used to go out there quite often and watch him ‘cause I was interested. He never finished. He passed away before he ever got done. Aunt Alma, I was named after her, got one of the Selbe boys to finish them up.”

Max Selbe now lives in Hotchkiss, Colorado, so I wrote him a letter and asked him what he remembered about the fine gun collection. He



**BUCKWORTH, ALLEN, SHAW, CLAY MONSON, BROBECK, ELMER BAER, RUSSEL BAER, GOODING,  
CHARLES BAER, SS STEVEN, JOHN BURROUGHS**

“My dad was a gun hound from way back, and when he built our new house on Pine Street, he made a cabinet for them. I lived with 30 or 40 guns all my life. He had a whole lot of guns, and he liked them all. He talked about them, fixed them, and worked on them. All those kinds of things. In fact, the three boys were great gun men, all of them. That collection belongs to Tom Elmer and Charley Baer (in the courthouse). Before they were put there, after my dad was gone, Uncle Tom passed away first and Dad took all the guns. And my dad was the next one to pass away and after that Uncle Charley. My Aunt Alma and Uncle Charley came down to the house one day after Dad was gone and said, ‘Alma, I’m going to take some of your Dad’s guns.’ There was nothing I could say except all

told me about his part in helping fix the guns and some about Charley Baer.

“I well remember Charles Baer’s gun shop on the corner of Fourth and Pine, in his garage behind his house. When we came to town on Saturday afternoon from the ranch, I would hoof it up to Charlie’s shop to watch him work on a rifle or a clock or even make a key for a padlock. Most of his work was done by hand, as I don’t recall much in the way of power tools. He maybe had a grinder and sander, but that was about it. He always took time to explain what he was doing, for he knew I was fascinated by the trappings of his trade, and that he knew he had a good listener in me.



go out to watch them shoot. Charlie was so excited about shooting and he was a great gun man.

"My Aunt Alma presented the collection of guns as Charley Baer's. I hounded them to change the name and add Tom and Elmer's names also. The biggest part of the guns were my dad's. I got a hold of Mr. Utterback and a young man that was the janitor to help change the label. Later Mr. Utterback came to me to see how I wanted the plaque to read. The new plaque was put in to read Tom and Elmer's names."

My research went on. I picked several of the old guns and found more information about them. By running an ad in the local paper Carl Young supplied me with what he knew about some of the guns. Carl came here in 1969 and

taught school at the junior high school for three years. Then he went to work for the Yampa Valley Electric for four years. Carl has a great interest in guns and hunting. Through his interest in guns he contributed much information about the old guns.

beautiful place. When we would all go there for dinner, Uncle Tom would take me. I was the only little kid that got to go. It was a great thing to do, the dinner was so lovely. We had such a good time, just visiting and talking.

"Then Dad got busy and got a couple of ladies to shoot. We had to shoot twenty five blue rocks to win. I won a spoon. I think I hit twenty four of them.

"The guns were from all three of the boy's collections. I lived with guns all my life. At times we even went to Denver and Oak Creek to trap shoot and mother and I went along.



### **GUN CLUB SHOOT**

**FRONT ROW ED KLINE, CHARLES BAER, DR. KERNEGLIAN, JOHN BURROUGHS,**

**ELMER BAER, ALDEN WESSELLS      BACK ROW L.L. BO L.L. BROWN, STEHLEY,**

**FRED ZICK, RILLEY ARMSTRONG, WALTER KEMMER, CLAY MONSON,**

**EARL MI EARL MILNER, DR. BERTRUM, MR. STILLWELL**

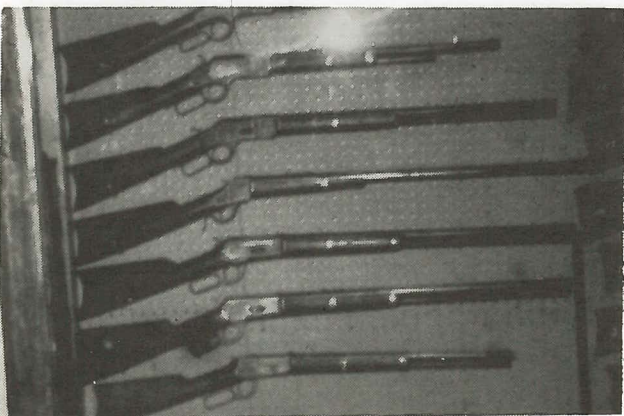


“Among the items in his shop was a fifty five gallon barrel of empty brass cartridges of about any caliber that had ever been made up until that time. He would allow me to go through them picking out various calibers for my cartridge collection. I still have many of these old time brass cartridges which are impossible to find now a days.

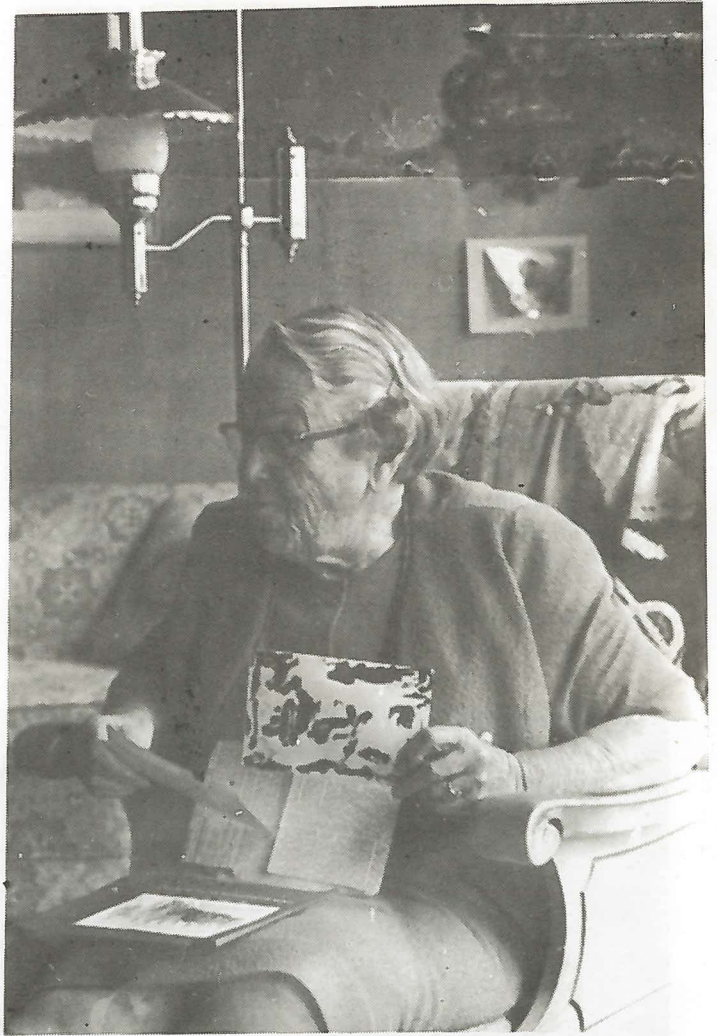
“At that time there were only a few houses on third street (mid 1930’s) and none east of Charlie’s house. He had a window that folded up in his shop and he would fire the rifles to check and sight them. He shot from his shop window at a target on the hillside about where the road goes up to Fish Creek Highland behind where Safeway is now. I think it figured to be about three hundred yards.!

“I was not aware of all the fine guns Mr. Baer had accumulated until many years later when I went to see his widow about renting a place to store some furniture. She told me of his fine collection of firearms which he had willed to the town of Steamboat Springs. The town had no place to display them, and Mr. Baer had stipulated that they must be displayed in a safe place. I became interested in the collection and went to Claude Luekins who was county commissioner, and, I believe, mayor also, and Mr. Luekins agreed to give us four hundred dollars to build the showcases and agreed to allow us to place them next to the county clerk’s office in the hallway of the court house. I went to Mr. Art Gunprecht and he agreed to build the cases for this figure. I believe it actually cost only about three hundred dollars when he turned in his bill. The biggest part was for plate glass, as Art charged very little for his labors. It took me about two years to clean, polish, repair and identify each item and with the help of Henry Muhme and Marvin Scott we finally got them on display in the county court house.

“This is a very fine collection of western firearms covering an era from the 1840’s to 1920’s, roughly an eighty year span of history, that these weapons played an important part in the development of this area.”



**THIS IS PART OF THE FINE GUN COLLECTION AT THE COURT HOUSE**



## **ALMA BAER TELLING US ABOUT THE GUN CLUB**

Alma told us some interesting tidbits about the Steamboat Gun Club, “It started in 1910 or somewhere in there. The men would have shooting events every so often where they would choose sides and shoot to see which side would win. Then they would have a banquet at the Harbor Hotel and the losing side would pay. I always got to go because Uncle Tom was a bachelor, and he would take me. I wasn’t too interested in shooting because I had too many other things to do, but I had to learn to shoot because of my dad. My dad took me out to the gun club place, down by the Lithis Spring. That was the first place the gun club had, and there was a nice little building there. There they could keep things. They had a fine gun club. They would split the club in half and have two teams and shoot it out. The team that broke the most blue rocks was the winner. They had lines to stand on. When the blue rocks were thrown into the air you would shoot to break them. The one that broke the most was the winner. Then they would be entertained by the ones who lost. There were big dinners at the Cabin Hotel. My dad built that old hotel. It had two hundred rooms or so, a





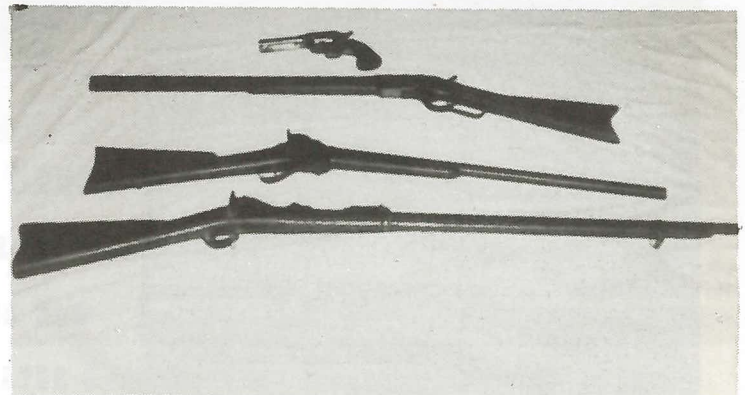
**CARL YOUNG HOLDING HIS FAVORITE  
RIFLE A REMMINGTON 30-06**

## **SHARPS BORCHARDT .45-70**

"This was the last rifle to be made by the famous Sharps Rifle Co. of Bridgeport, Connecticut. Earlier Sharps rifles had been used successfully in the Civil War and later on in the wholesale buffalo slaughters of the late 1860's and early 1870's. However, the Sharps Borchardt was not introduced until 1878 and found fame mainly as a very fine target -sporting military rifle in various versions. This rifle was also known as the "Model 1878 Hammerless Sharps." Unfortunately, this fine rifle was discontinued in 1881 when the Sharps factory finally closed down for good.

"The design of this rifle was so advanced that modern copies have been made in recent years. The Colt factory produced a modified (and very expensive) version a few years ago and a company called Artistic Arms still makes Sharps Borchardt actions and complete rifles. The Sharps Borchardt is a single shot rifle with a falling block actuated by a finger lever located on the underside of the action. The rifle has no hammer either external or internal. The cartridge is fired by a striker mechanism (like a modern bolt action rifle) which is automatically cocked as the under lever is actuated. The rifle has a safety that looks like a short second trigger located behind the actual trigger.

Although the Sharps company produced rifles for many large and powerful black powder cartridges many of them designed for or by the Sharps people, the .45-70 government cartridge was a common chambering. This is the same cartridge that was used in the model 1873 Springfield rifle (our standard military arm at that time).

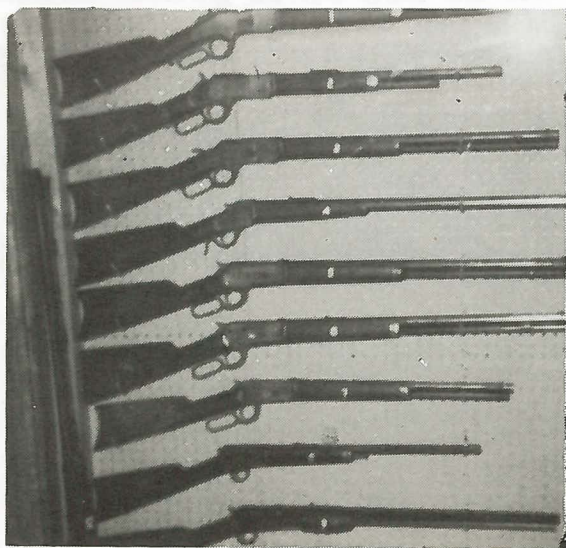


**SHARPS 50 CAL. 44-40 RIFLE 44-40 PISTOL**



## SPRINGFIELD CARBINE .45-70

"In rifle cadet, officers model, and carbine versions this was our standard military arm from 1873 to 1892. Even after the Krag rifle was adopted in 1892, the old .45-70s were still in use by militia and guardsman for years. Our troopers carried this type of weapon during the later years of the western Indian wars (Custer's forces were so armed). Some of our troops even carried the then obsolete blackpowder shooting Springfields into battle during the Spanish American war where they were greatly outgunned by the enemy's 1893 Mausers. Anyhow, the concept behind the Springfield .45-70 goes back to our own Civil War. Several earlier versions came and went between 1866 and 1873 when the .45-70 Springfield was adopted as our military's standard. The rifle is often referred to as the "Trapdoor" Springfield due to the manner, which the front hinged breechblock moves as the rifle is being loaded and unloaded. The rifles were single shot blackpowder arms designed to fire a fixed cartridge consisting of a .45 caliber lead bullet weighing 500 grains (1/4 of a pound) and 70 grains of blackpowder. Early cartridge cases were of soft copper, which gave extraction problems (many of Custer's troopers were said to have been killed while trying to extract a swollen and stuck cartridge case from their carbines.) Later on, cartridge cases were made of stronger brass as they are today. The .45-70 cartridge is still being manufactured, over 100 years after it was first introduced. And modern, strong rifles for the old cartridge are being manufactured today also. Apparently the recoil of the .45 70-500 cartridge was a bit severe in the carbines, which were considerably lighter in weight than the long infantry rifles. So another version of the cartridge, loaded with a 405 grain bullet and 55 grains of blackpowder was developed. Even this version is no 'mouse load'.



GUNS ON DISPLAY DONATED BY ALMA BAER

"The first center fire rifle that I ever shot was a model 1884 Springfield infantry rifle in .45-70 caliber. One look at the large hole in the barrel and the heavy cartridges that we had mail ordered from the now long defunct Bannerman outfit convinced me that I was about to get hurt (if not crippled and maimed for life).

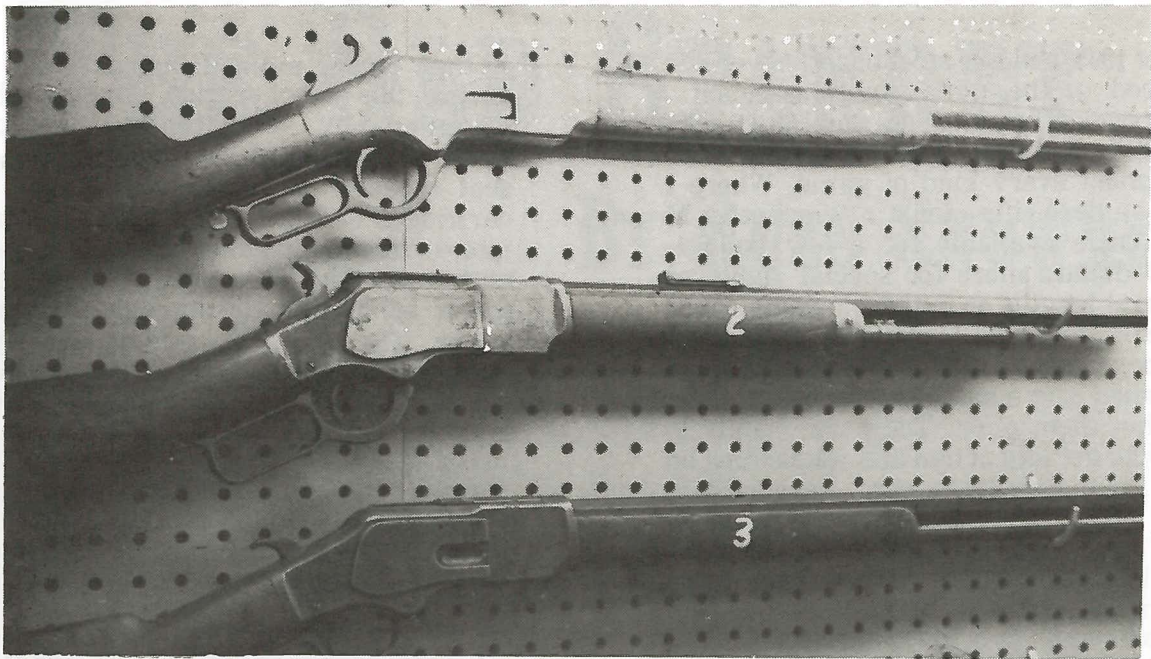
Nevertheless, I put the huge external hammer into its 'load' position, opened up the trapdoor-like breech block, and shoved a cartridge into the rifle's chamber. Assuming a prone position and taking careful aim at the length of 4" x 4" that we had set up against a hillside for a target, I squeezed on the old rifle trigger. The noise, the smoke, the smell and the impact on the target were greatly satisfying. The huge lead bullet had almost blasted the 4 x 4 in two. The rifle had not broken me in two. In fact, I hardly noticed the recoil at all. My only regret came to be that we hadn't ordered more ammunition, since it was almost all soon gone.

"There are lots of rifles called 'Springfields' since for many years the armory at Springfield, Massachusetts was the principle place where small arms were developed and/or manufactured. The first .45-70 Springfields were the model 1873, followed by similar models of 1875, 1877, 1884 and 1888. Production of these types ceased in June of 1893. The Krag repeating rifle (some even refer to it as a Springfield) was adopted in 1892, obsoleting the old blackpowder single shot models. 'Trapdoor' Springfields found their way into civilian hands in various ways, as did most of our obsolete-surplus military rifles before recent years. Many were used for target practice, casual 'Plinking', and big game hunting. The nostalgia craze has even prompted one major U.S. arms manufacturer to produce modern copies of the over 100 year old Springfield.

## WINCHESTER MODEL 1886

"A large lever action rifle with a tubular magazine located beneath the barrel and with an external hammer. This is the kind of rifle (along with the lever action Winchester models 1866, 1873, 1876, 1892 and 1894) that people usually associate with 'cowboys and Indians' and 'The Winning of the West.' The model 1886 was designed for shooting big game animals. The basic design for this firearm was developed by the Utah gun genius John M. Browning. He,





## THESE MODEL 1886 WINCHESTERS

along with his brother Mathew S. Browning, was granted a patent for the design on Oct. 14, 1884. The patent was subsequently sold to the Winchester Repeating Arms Co. who further developed the design and put it in production as the Winchester Model 1886. According to the National Rifle Association, the rifle was not catalogued until October 1886, but actual deliveries had begun by August of that year. I was once lucky enough to buy (for a very cheap price) a beat up model 1886 which had originally been chambered for the blackpowder .40-82 cartridge. Since the rifle was of no interest as a collector's piece, I had no reservation about modifying it. The barrel was rusted out, the stock and tongs broken, a replacement rear sight soldered on. I had the rifle rebored and rechambered for the .45-70 government cartridge, put on new stocks and sights, hand polished the metal and had a gunsmith reglue it. The finished product was good looking, hand, accurate and powerful. Like a dummy, I sold it to a buddy who wanted it more than I did.

"The original model 1886 rifle was dropped from production in 1935. But its design was so good that it was immediately replaced by a somewhat modernized version called the Winchester model 71. This rifle continued in production until 1957, which means that Brownings idea lasted as a production item for over 70 years. Not bad! I once owned a Model 71 too, and it was a very accurate smooth operating, nice looking and powerful rifle. I sold it for \$160 several years ago. Today, I could get twice that much for it. Oh well! The model 1886 was originally chambered for the blackpowder cartridges of .40-82, .45-90 and .45-70 caliber. The .45-70 cartridge is still being

manufactured and a number of modern rifles are being made for it today, more than a hundred years after it first appeared. The .50 caliber version of the model 1886 did not appear until 1899 and did not last very long. With the buffalo almost extinct by then, and mastodons and dinosaurs long gone, the sportsman of the time must not have felt much need for such a large cartridge. The factories ceased producing the .50 caliber M 1886 cartridge by about 1935, and loaded rounds are now collector's items. The M 1886 .50 caliber cartridge must have been a powerful job at least at short range. The bullets were over one half inch in diameter (.512") weighed 300 grains. (450 grains in another loading and were backed by a blackpowder charge of 100 to 110 grains. An even more powerful high velocity smokeless powder load was produced for a while.

"You also mention a model 1886 in .45-90 caliber. This was also originally a blackpowder cartridge loaded with a .45 caliber lead bullet weighing 300 grains and a 90 grain powder charge. Other versions of this cartridge existed at one time or another, including a high velocity smokeless powder loading, but all are obsolete today.

## WINCHESTER MODEL 1894

"By far, this was America's most popular "deer" rifle. Even before the rifle was subjected to changes necessary to make its mass production easier and cheaper, there had been about 2 and 1/2 million of these rifles produced. This rifle was originally produced in the blackpowder calibers .32-40 and .38-55. Early in



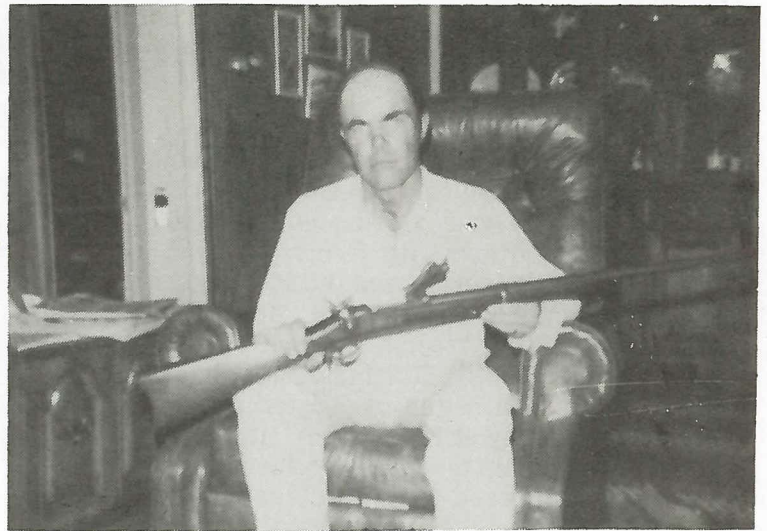
the spring of 1895, a nickle steel barreled version was produced in the fantastically popular smokeless powder boad called the .30 30. The "thirty-thirty" has been used over the last 80 years on almost every kind of game. Where I came from a deer rifle meant a Winchester M 1894 .30-30. Once available for a few dollars (plus a few dollars more for special sights or wood or barrel lengths or buttslock shape) good pre WWII specians now bring over \$300 each. Even carbines made as late as 1963 can be worth \$200. I've owned over a half dozen of these rifles, and have shot them often. They are handy to carry, quick to get into action and (depending on your tastes) cute as a bug's ear, especially in the carbine versions. They aren't very powerful compared to more modern rifles chambered for cartridges like the .30-06 and the increasingly popular "magnums". The little 1894's aren't usually as accurate as a modern telescopic sighted bolt action big game rifle. But they are still very popular, and many sportsmen buy one for the dainty wife or the beginning kid, when in reality they just want one for themselves.

"All model 1894 Winchesters have tubular magazines located beneath the barrel and external hammers. The empty fired case is extracted and ejected, the hammer cocked, and a fresh round from the magazine is chambered as the finger lever is operated. A person familiar with one of these rifles can fire off a string of shots from one almost as fast as it takes me to say so. Some '94 Winchesters in .30-30 caliber have seen limited useage by military and police units in various parts of the world. I used to know WW II veterans who thought that their service rifles used the .30-30 cartridge (which they didn't). Until recent years in many places in our country, the average hunter only knew two calibers: Twenty-twos (as in .22 rimfire) and thirty-thirty. In a modified "modernized" form, the '94 Winchester .30-30 is still being produced. A far cry from the fine old rifles that several old timers around town still own but the basic design is still there. When the rifle and cartridge first came into common useage, the hunters were supposed to be very impressed by how 'flat' the rifles shot, and indeed compared to the older blackpowder cartridges, the little .30-30 did shoot flat as a 'tight stretched clothesline'. Compared to the most modern cartridges however the .30-30 has a trajectory more like a hand thrown softball.

## SPENCER CARBINE

"During the American Civil War the standard military rifle was a large caliber muzzle loading firearm. In an attempt to increase the fire power

of the troops many firearms were designed during this short period. One of these was designed by Christopher Spencer and patented on March 6, 1860. This rifle was a seven shot repeater designed to fire fixed metallic cartridges of rim fire type which were loaded into a bubulat magazine located in the buttstock of the rifle. The rifle could be fired many times more rapidly than the standard military muzzle loader. The military's Ordinance Department was not exactly wild about these new fangled repeaters, but some of these weapons were adopted for military useage and first appeared in the battle of Antietam in Sept. 1862. President Lincoln personally tested the Spencer rifle sometime in 1863 and was so impressed by it that he leaned on his army ordinance people to get the rifle into more wide spread use.



**HAROLD BALDWIN HOLDING HIS  
SPRINGFIELD CARBINE .45-70**

Harold Baldwin has been a prominent citizen in this community all his life. Taking time off from his busy ranching profession he has volunteered to instruct youngsters in the safety of handling firearms. Many members of this community look to his expertise for the knowledge and safe use of firearms so naturally I approached him for information for my gun story.

"The present Routt County Rifle Club was formed in the early 1940's. They required the building that they have now for the inside rifle range. What is now the Rifle Club used to be a fish hatchery belonging to the state of Colorado. It was turned over to the city who sold it to the rifle club. The early members of the rifle club were very active in trap shooting and indoor target shooting. Trapshooting was one of the most widely going part of the club.



I began my activities with the club in 1951. I became a member of the local gun club as well as the National Rifle Association shortly after joining the club I started working with the Boy Scouts in gun training. From there I took over the junior division of the rifle club. From then to the present time, I still act as a leader in the local gun club. Some of the early activities of the club were turkey shoots and marשמanship contests. They had shooting matches with the National Riflemen's Association and the D.U.N.

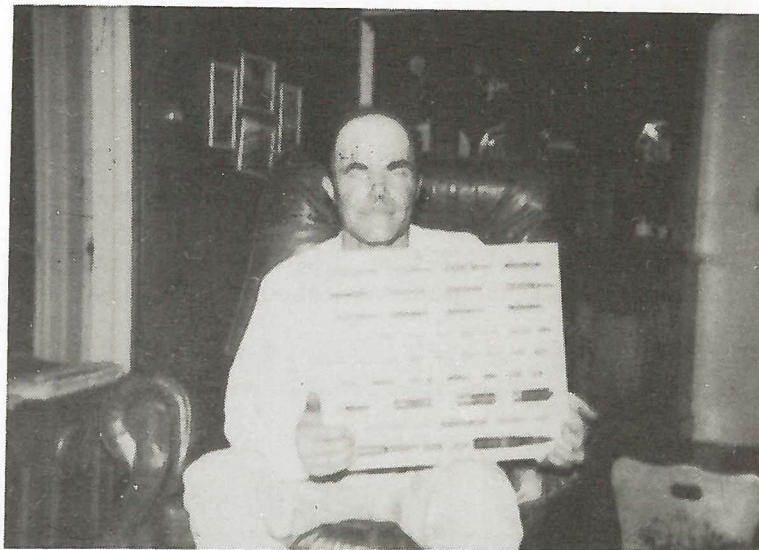
They had to shoot a minimum of seven targets and were scored on them. At the present time the activities of the rifle club is centered around the trap shooting club. We have three to four registered trapshoots a year, which everyone is invited to and the club would have shoots once a week during the summer. The money that is made from the trapshoots goes to support the junior program. We are in the process of trying to interest more people in indoor target shooting.

For the previous two winters we've had a very active pistol club. The indoor rifle range is limited to small rifles. We have a target set up for 357 magnum and a 38 special.

The police department uses the range weekly for pistol practice. For the next several weeks the sheriff's posse will be doing the same thing.

"The junior rifle club is for the training and marksmanship and safety of handling of firearms. In the basic rifle course we go through the parts of ammunition and guns and how to care for firearms. We also go through a hunter's safety course and also go into a program for marksmanship training with emphasis all the time on the safety of handling firearms. The youngsters who belong to the club each week fire a qualifying target. The kids who score on the target get issued medals and awards as they complete the various stages of the course. There are five different stages in the program. They are promarksmen and marksmen and marksmen first class, sharpshooter and expert rifleman. They must shoot the minimum of ten targets in each stage of the program. As they complete each stage of the program they have earned their award. The highest award that they can earn is the expert rifleman. They have to shoot the total of forty targets, in each of the four positions. I have given out only two of these awards as long as I've worked with the junior riflemen.

"As long as I have taught the junior rifleman's association I am pleased to say there has never been an accident or injury of any kind in the history of the rifle club. It has been a very safe club. The youngsters that comes out of the club have a very astute knowledge of firearms. It is a very worthwhile course for both girls and boys to know the proper handling of firearms and ammunition and the dangers and to have a healthy respect for them. Many people are



**HAROLD BALDWIN HOLDING  
HIS FINE SHELL COLLECTION**

afraid of firearms. This is not necessary. One should never be afraid of them but should have a healthy respect for them. I don't think anyone who has been through the hunter's course or the rifle club would say that they are afraid of them

The hunters safety course is sponsored by the Colorado Division of Wildlife along with the National Riflemen's Association. The hunters safety course requires a minimum of eight hours of classtime followed by an exam in order to receive a hunters safety card. This is necessary by law in the state of Colorado in order to get a hunting license of any kind.

Each year we approximately put 300 people through the hunter safety program. (Starting the middle of August and running to the first day of hunting season.) I think that anyone who has been through this course will find it very worthwhile. Not only in terms of the need of getting a hunting license but for the practical knowledge of the safety of the firearm and for field safety.

I got interested in gun safety through an accident with a firearm myself because of carrying a .22 caliber revolver. I had been working on the ranch and was carrying the gun with me for the purpose of trying to get rid of numerous porcupines that were plaguing the cattle. I returned home after being in the field all day. The revolver was in a holster that didn't have a safety strap on it. While putting the gun away I took it by the back of the holster and put it on the shelf. The gun fell out of the holster and onto the floor and went off. The bullet hit my leg and at first I didn't know what had happened. It felt like a bee had stung me in the leg. Then I realized what had happened when — saw the blood on the side of my shoes. I realized that I had been hit when the gun went off because I



handled it in an unsafe way. I decided to teach others to avoid the same thing that happened to me. I always feel that if I can teach someone to avoid the mistake I made that is well worth my time in doing it.

"At any rate, Spencer rifles were produced until the firm failed sometime in 1868 or 1869. The Winchester Firearms Co. bought up the remaining stock of Spencer rifles and parts, as well as the patents, and continued their sales until about 1872.

The rifle had a large external hammer which had to be separately hand cocked for each shot.

The cartridges fed from the magazine into the chamber automatically as the finger leve was actuated. Originally chambered for the .56-56 Spencer cartridge (350 grain lead bullet plus about 45 grains of blackpowder) the rifles were later also chambered for the .56-50, .56-52 and .56-46 Spencer cartridges. All of these were blackpowder rimfire cartridges, and all were obsolete by about 1920.

Special thanks to Ray Klumker, Harold Baldwin, Carl Young, Leise Clark, Joe Keyser and Max Selbe for supplying information for this story.

