

R.L. WILSON

**1730 Kearny St., G-1
Telegraph Hill Tower
San Francisco CA 94133
wilsonbook@gmail.com
website: wilsonbooks.com**

Historical Consultant
Colt's Manufacturing Co., Hartford
and to
'The Art of American Arms'
and
'Silk and Steel Women at Arms'
Museum Loan Exhibitions
'Son of a Gun' - BBC-TV
'Colt Firearms Legends' - SONY
'The Guns That Tamed the West' - A & E
'The Story of the Gun' - A & E
'The Gun Industry in America' - BBC-TV/Open University
'Annie Oakley' - Riva Productions for PBS American Experience
Chairman, Antique Arms Committee
U.S. Society of Arms and Armour/America Remembers
Fine Colts The Dr. Joseph A. Murphy Collection
The Arms of Tiffany (with Janet Zapata) (2006)
The Art of the Gun, Mini-Series, 5 Vols. (with RM Lee)
The Art of the Gun, Maxi-Series, 5 Vols. (with RM Lee)

Samuel Colt Presents
The Arms Collection of Colonel Colt
L.D. Nimschke Firearms Engraver
The Evolution of the Colt
The Rampant Colt
Colt Commemorative Firearms
Theodore Roosevelt Outdoorsman
The Book of Colt Firearms
The Book of Winchester Engraving
Antique Arms Annual
Colt Pistols (with R.E. Hable)
Paterson Colt Pistol Variations (with P.R. Phillips)
The Colt Heritage
The "Russian" Colts
Colt Engraving
Rare and Historic Firearms (Christie's)
Winchester 1 of 1000
Colt's Dates of Manufacture
The Deringer in America, 2 Volumes (with L.D. Eberhart)
Colt An American Legend
Rare Firearms - A Benefit Auction (Christie's)
Winchester An American Legend
The Peacemakers
Steel Canvas
Ruger & His Guns
The Colt Engraving Book (two volumes)
The Official Price Guide to Gun Collecting
The World of Beretta
The Paterson Colt Book
The Guns of Manhattan (2011)
Blue Book of Colt's Dates of Manufacture
Theodore Roosevelt Hunter-Conservationist.
Boone & Crockett Club Publications
American Arms Collectors The Al Cali Collection

**The Historic, Presentation-Inscribed and
Low-Serial-Numbered
Winchester Model 1873 Sporting Rifle
From William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody
to His Friend Major Frank North U.S.A.
Serial No. 291
Rare First Variation of the Newly
Introduced Winchester Model 1873
with Several Early Features**

**The Model 1873 the Most Celebrated of
Lever-Action Repeating Firearms
from the 19th Century**

**The Model Designation and
Serial Number
Engraved on the Lower Tang:**

Model 1873

291

The Left Sideplate of No. 291 Hand-Engraved:

Presented to

Major Frank North U.S. A.

from

Buffalo Bill

**The Gift from Cody in Appreciation of
Major Frank North's Recommendation to
E.C.Z. Judson *a.k.a.* Ned Buntline
to Create a Super Star of the American West
For the Traveling Stage Play Which Became
"Buffalo Bill's Combination"
and Later Evolved into The Greatest Show of
Its Kind in History:
"Buffalo Bill's Wild West"**

**Major North Having Been Offered The Opportunity
for Such National and International Stardom
by Ned Buntline -**

**But Demurred Instead To His Old Friend
and Fellow Frontier Scout and Indian Fighter:
"Buffalo Bill"**

**

**Thus Launching William F. Cody's Career
As a Major Figure in the History of
the American West
and of the Magical World of "Show Business"**

Ever since before the writer became devoted to researching and publishing books on fine guns and Americana, he has been an ardent admirer of William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody. This fascination is reflected in the Random House publication, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West An American Legend*, co-authored with Greg Martin (1998).

That respect and admiration is also reflected in the special section of the author's *The Peacemakers* book (Random House, 1992), devoted to Cody, to the Wild West stage (The Combination) and traveling shows (Buffalo Bill's Wild West), and to firearms and their unique role in Western films and television programs.

The research into the *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* volume was quite in contrast to numerous books by others on Cody - which are primarily biographies, and deal very little with what historians and curators today term "material culture."

Thus, instead of presenting history *per se*, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* offered a unique and refreshing look at

the life, times and artifacts of this amazing American figure. Cody's captivating story was told using historical fact and interpretation, but featuring the firearms and accessories, objects and relics, documents, and "material record" of his life as a frontiersman, and of his unprecedented career as a showman.

MAJOR FRANK NORTH, U.S.A. – CODY'S DEBT to an EXTRAORDINARY and GENEROUS FRIEND – IT WAS A "BIGGER THAN LIFE FRIENDSHIP"

Besides being Cody's partner in a Nebraska cattle ranching enterprise, Major Frank North had a longtime friendship with Buffalo Bill. And they had served together on the rough and often dangerous American Frontier West. As a genuinely modest man, Major Frank North was simply not interested in carving out a career in show business.

So when Ned Buntline was seeking an authentic hero of the frontier for a show business enterprise, he first approached Major Frank North. An Indian fighter, a scout, and a hunter, North was a proven master of life on the prairie. He had his own troop of Pawnee Indian scouts, and held the rank of captain and then later major in the frontier U.S. Army.

But North was not interested in developing a career as a show business personality. Instead, as related in the memoirs of Buffalo Bill's business manager for many years, Nate Salisbury, North generously told Buntline that the man he wanted was "over there under that wagon." That man was, of course, William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody.

Salisbury's memoir began with his return following a year's theater engagement in Australia in 1876 with his troupe, the Salisbury Troubadours (for a period poster of that organization on display, visit Bill's Gay 90s Speakeasy, 57 East 54th Street, New York City). The talented showman and business man was deck side on the steamer *City of Sydney* with an agent of Cooper and Bailey's Circus, J.B. Gaylord. After a bit of reminiscing, Salisbury finally discusses Ned Buntline (following quoted from Salisbury's memoirs, as presented on page 49 in *Buffalo Bill's Wild West An American Legend*):

. . . . Ned Buntline had so firmly written Cody into contemporary history of the Great Plains [via a series of dime novels, starring Cody] that he had made a hero on paper at first hand. While on this subject I want to note what I consider **a most remarkable feat** [boldface by the present writer]. The man who today is known in the uttermost parts of the earth as a showman would never have been a showman at all if Ned Buntline not made him notorious and he dripped from the point of Buntline's pen as a hero. Buntline was looking for somebody to make a hero of and first tried to boost

Major Frank North into that position but the Major being a real hero could not listen to that sort of thing but said, "Buntline if you want a man to fill that bill he is over there under that wagon." Buntline went over to the wagon and woke up the man he made famous as Buffalo Bill. Between story and the stage Cody became a very popular man with a certain class of the public and was notorious enough for my purpose. . . .

BUFFALO BILL'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY PAYS STIRRING TRIBUTE to MAJOR FRANK NORTH, U.S.A.

When published in 1879, *The Life of Hon William F. Cody Known as Buffalo Bill The Famous Hunter, Scout, and Guide An Autobiography*, proved a sensation. Cody was soon to be a national hero. His future as a touring Wild West star, whether in a stage show, or within the far more grand outdoor arena, was assured.

Believed to have been written largely by Cody himself, here is what the great frontiersman said about his friend and "pard," Major Frank North, on their first meeting during "A Military Expedition" (Chapter XXI) operating out of Fort McPherson, Nebraska (p. 249):

I made the acquaintance of Major Frank North,* and I found him, and his officers, perfect gentlemen, and we were all good friends from the very start. The

Pawnee scouts had made quite a reputation for themselves as they had performed brave and valuable services, in fighting against the Sioux, whose bitter enemies they were; being thoroughly acquainted with the Republican and Beaver country, I was glad that they were to be with the expedition, and they did good service.

*Major North is now my partner in a cattle ranch in Nebraska.

Later, on page 252, Cody reveals that it was through Frank North that Buckskin Joe, Buffalo Bill's favorite horse, came into his possession:

A few days after [asking North about the horse], I persuaded the Indian [who was then using it - and in whose hands in a running fight with Sioux Indians Cody had seen the steed's outstanding qualities], by making him several presents, to trade horses with me, and in this way I became the owner of the buckskin steed, not as my own property, however, but as a government horse that I could ride. I gave him the name of "Buckskin Joe" and he proved to be a second Brigham [an earlier favorite of Cody]. That horse I rode on and off during the summers of 1869, 1870, 1871 and 1872, and he was the horse that the Grand Duke Alexis rode on his buffalo hunt. In the winter of 1872, after I had left Fort McPherson, Buckskin Joe was condemned and sold at public sale, and was

bought by Dave Perry, at North Platte, who in 1877 presented him to me, and I still own him. He is now at my ranch on the Dismal river [partners with Frank North], stone blind, but I shall keep him until he dies.

The bond between Buffalo Bill and Major Frank North was as strong as blood.

The inspiration for the presentation of the Winchester Model 1873 Sporting Rifle, Serial No. 291, inscribed from Buffalo Bill to Major Frank North, U.S.A., was because of Cody's enormous debt to his friend and fellow Wild West adventurer.

This is one of the great stories to emerge from the American West.

And it is the presentation Winchester Model 1873 No. 291 which is the visible, tangible artifact which documents that extraordinary saga and equally extraordinary friendship.

The COMPELLING STORY of BUFFALO BILL and BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST

When Guy M. Wilson, Master of the Armouries, H.M. Tower of London and director, Royal Armouries Museum, heard the story of Buffalo Bill from the writer – as best revealed in historical artifacts related to Cody, Annie

Oakley, Frank North, and others - Wilson and his staff eagerly produced the greatest traveling exhibition ever presented on Cody and his times.

That exhibition, which toured four museums and two countries from 1998-2000, began at the Royal Armouries Museum, Leeds (Yorkshire), with a grand party – at which the Leeds Symphony played music which had been performed originally by Buffalo Bill's Wild West orchestra. A play was presented during the opening, based on Buffalo Bill's Combination, with characters of Cody, Annie Oakley, and wild Bill Hickok (one of Cody's favorite actors and a fellow scout and hero of the Plains). That performance was repeated at the other sites in the museum tour.

The exhibition was later featured at the Tennessee State Museum, Nashville, the Colorado Historical Society, Denver, and the Autry Museum of the American West, Los Angeles. Knowing the show was destined to be viewed by vast and enthusiastic crowds, the author prepared copies of *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* to be signed by participants at the opening ceremonies at each venue. Among those signatures found in this series of books were several by descendants of Buffalo Bill, living both in England and in the U.S.

The unique fanfare connected with each exhibition opening also included such guests as members of the British Parliament and the U.S. Congress, former U.S. Senator Alan Simpson (Chairman, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming), the U.S. Ambassador to Ireland

(a former Congressman), the Governor of Tennessee, numerous stars of the Wild West silver screen and television (particularly at the Autry Museum opening), and innumerable other dignitaries.

Gene Shalit of television's famed "The Today Show" reviewed the *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* book, for Christmas titles of note, and the book was also recognized by *Vanity Fair* in their Christmas listing. In Shalit's review, he notes how "Cody's guns were loaded – and sometimes Cody himself was loaded."

The writer's collection of programs, videos (including of Shalit's "Today" review) and memorabilia – as well as opening night signed *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* books – remains a highlight in his career, now spanning 50 years [beginning with the landmark loan exhibition and 313-page book *Samuel Colt Presents*, at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford (November 3rd 1961 to January 1962)].

APPRAISAL of the BUFFALO BILL to MAJOR FRANK NORTH, U.S.A. WINCHESTER MODEL 1873 SPORTING RIFLE

Based on a lifelong study of the life and times of William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody, and of his colleagues – among them Major Frank North and Annie Oakley - the writer's determination of the current market value of the

Historic Presentation Model 1873 Winchester Sporting Rifle Serial No. 291 is at \$1,000,000 (one million dollars).

The evaluation presented herewith is the price at which this unique historic artifact would sell between a willing buyer and a willing seller, both being aware of relevant facts and neither being under any compulsion to buy or to sell. The Buffalo Bill to Major Frank North Winchester is an American treasure, worthy of the finest museum or private collection – and unique in the annals of the Great American West.

Had the author known of Buffalo Bill's Winchester gift to Major North, that rifle would have been featured in the *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* book, and would have been pictured on the front cover of that title's dust jacket.

This rifle is more important historically and as an artifact of the Great American West than any Winchester Model 1873 Sporting Rifle in any museum in the world. Serial No. 291 Winchester Model 1873 reveals a story that is among the most captivating and fascinating of the West. To quote Cody's partner and the business brains of Buffalo Bill's Wild West:

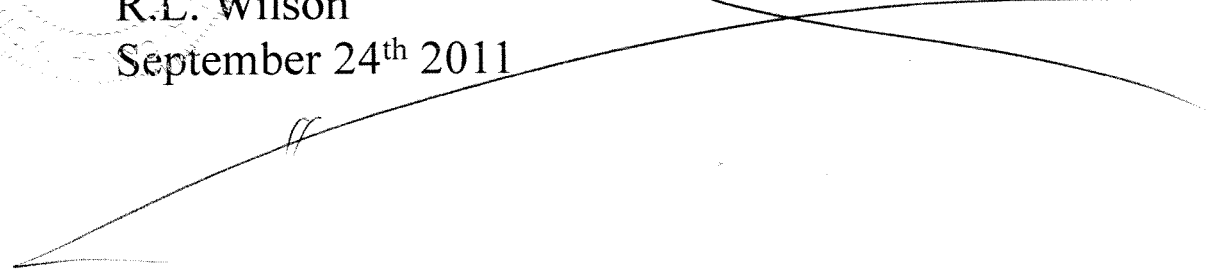
[Allow me to reveal what I] **consider a most remarkable feat** [boldface by the present writer]. The man who today is known in the uttermost parts of the earth as a showman would never have been a showman at all if Ned Buntline not made him notorious and he

dripped from the point of Buntline's pen as a hero. Buntline was looking for somebody to make a hero of and first tried to boost Major Frank North into that position but the Major being a real hero could not listen to that sort of thing but said, "Buntline if you want a man to fill that bill he is over there under that wagon." Buntline went over to the wagon and woke up the man he made famous as Buffalo Bill. . . .



R.L. Wilson

September 24th 2011



May 3, 2010

To the best of our knowledge, through verbal family history, this rifle was purchased by great-grandfather in South Dakota near the turn of the twentieth century.

The family later moved to Spokane, Idaho. When my great-grandfather passed away, the rifle passed to my grandfather. When my grandfather passed away the rifle was then in the possession of my uncle, Ted Guen. Ted then passed the rifle to his sister (my mother) and her husband.

When my father died in 1991, the rifle was given to me. About fifteen years ago, I met with George Maddis who offered me \$35,000.00

R. D. Wesley