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THE HUNTER
ONE-TRIGGER

Manufacturers of the
L.C. SMITH
HAMMER, HAMMERLESS AND EJECTORS.
ALSO
THE HUNTER ONE-TRIGGER
GUNS.

JOHN HUNTER, SECY.
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A B C CODE 5TH EDITION
CABLE ADDRESS "HUNTER" FULTON



Fulton, N.Y.

***L.C. Smith Exhibition Grade
Serial Number 18150
Finished August 4, 1947***

This is the information I have been able to find regarding your L.C. Smith shotgun. The L.C. Smith Gun Company manufacturing records for Serial Number 18150 are in the FWS Books and show that it is a 16 gauge Ideal Grade with 28-inch barrels. It was started on May 29, 1947 and finished on August 4, 1947. It was shipped August 6, 1947 to Bushnell & Wilson. It was returned to inventory on January 1, 1949. It was delivered to Marlin (second word illegible) on February 18, 1949. The purchaser column contains the notation "exhibition." The letters FWEOSP in the ledger indicate that it is a featherweight with ejectors, Hunter One-Trigger, and single sighting plane. No other information is available for this serial number. The Research Division has done its best to interpret and report information in the records to answer this request and assumes no responsibility for the recorded accuracy.

Anything that I can say about an Ideal Grade does not fit this shotgun. The ledgers only show that it was designated to be an Ideal Grade when it was started. In the photographs that you sent, it appears to be at the level of at least a Crown Grade. Since this is an exhibition shotgun, one can assume that it was never engraved with the Ideal pattern. Instead, it is likely that Serial Number 18150 was removed from the normal production line and engraved and stocked as an exhibition shotgun.

It is a unique shotgun and likely one of a kind. Mr. Ken Rogers' note of August 31, 2006 shows its association with the Wadsworth family furnishing additional historical merit and value to the shotgun.

The L.C. Smith Collectors Association invites you to keep up with the organization's events and latest information on shooting and collecting L.C. Smith shotguns by visiting www.lcsmith.org.

Sincerely,

James Stubbendieck
Research Division
L.C. Smith Collectors Association

***Records Search
Certificate
No. 99809***

THE MARLIN FIRE ARMS CO



Marlin • L.C. Smith • Hunter Arms

May 07, 2009

The original manufacturer's data for the serial number 18150, as extracted from the original L.C. Smith records housed in this museum, are as follows:

Shotgun
Ideal Grade
16 Gauge
Barrel Length: 28 inches
Featherweight
Selective One-Trigger
Automatic Ejectors
Single Sighting Plane Rib
Date Started: May 29, 1947
Date Finished: August 4, 1947
Date Shipped: August 5, 1947
Sold to: Becknell and Wilkins
Date Inventoried: January 1, 1949
Date shipped: February 18, 1949
Marlin Firearms Expo Gun

No other information is available for this serial number.

Sincerely yours,

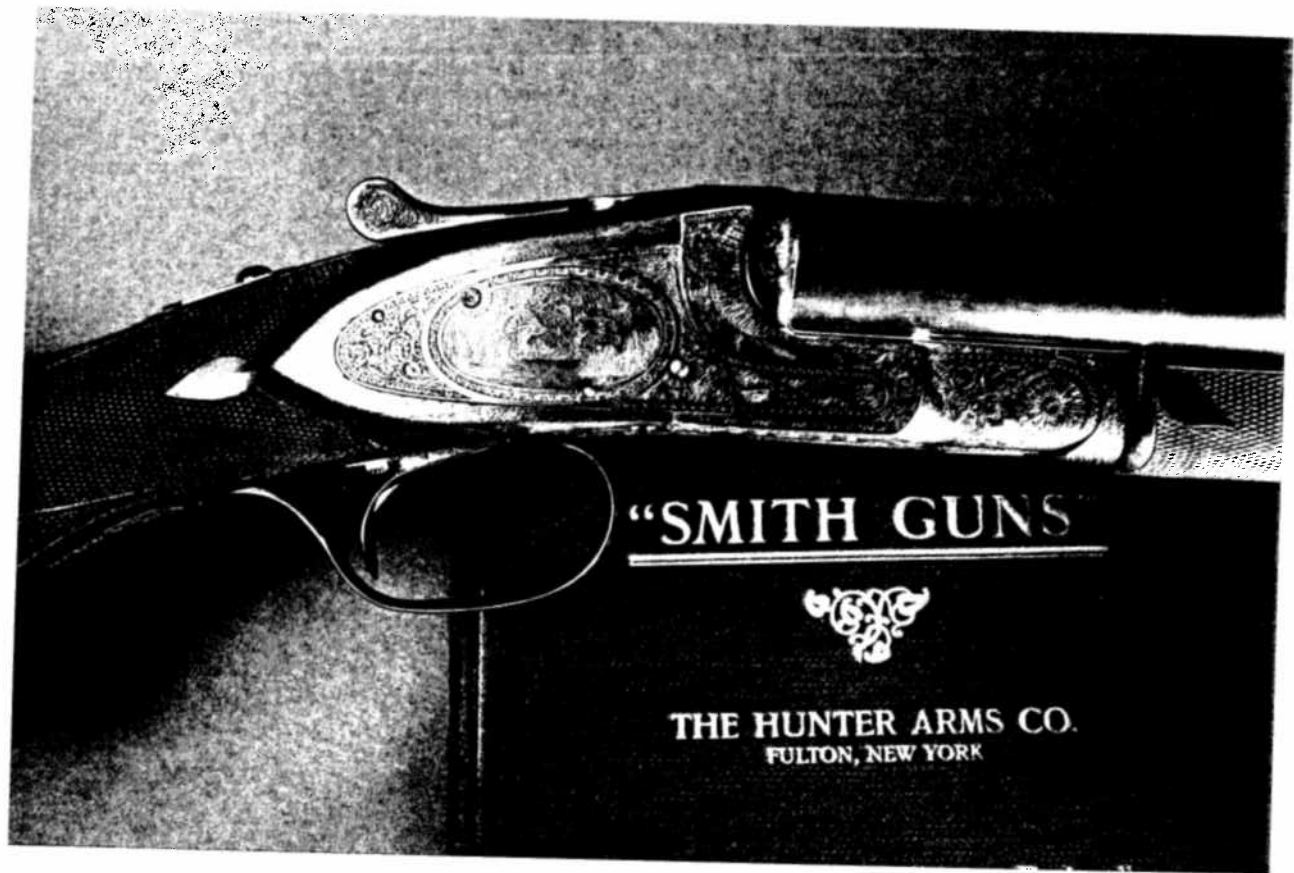
A stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "JAB", is written over the typed name.

Jessica A. Bennett
Records Specialist
Cody Firearms Museum

*Letter for Model Shotgun serial number 18150, page 1 of 1
This Factory Letter is a staff interpretation of handwritten, abbreviated records. Some errors may occur in transcription.*

A Salesman's Sample

by Tom Archer



Photography by Terry Allen

Those who have collected and studied the higher-quality American-manufactured double shotguns from the last century are well aware that each of those period makers offered their guns in a wide variety of grades and price points in a furious effort to capture as many sales as possible from within a highly competitive industry catering to a discerning shooting populace covering a broad spectrum of incomes and tastes. We also know from surviving records and research data that the overwhelming majority of guns produced by these makers was composed of the least-expensive models, and that maximizing sales revenues from these lower-priced "leader" models was the single most important factor in keeping these great companies in business. Still, and in spite of those economic factors, every one of these great old double gun companies continued to catalogue and produce a wide variety of high-grade guns with wood and metal decoration ranging from relatively modest to the most elaborately engraved and inlaid "museum quality" creations limited only by the artisans' imaginations.

From the outset these very highest-grade offerings were stunning in appearance. In comparison to a general utility sporting gun these creations were "vanity pieces"; they

were extremely expensive, and therefore their ownership was reserved for the most successful and elite individuals within the sporting community. The end result is that these most elaborately carved and engraved "one off" creations, regardless of maker, are extremely rare; all are now highly coveted collector pieces, and most of us can only appreciate and admire surviving examples through book and magazine photographs, and old catalog depictions. This researcher has also learned that these same makers produced a fair number of unique and highly desirable double guns having an assigned grade level stamp that does not fit any cataloged grade parameter. But then, as now, simple economics drove sales, and the economic truth was that, when faced with the possibility of losing an important sale, these makers really had no absolutes regarding cataloged specifications; they simply did, within reason, what was required to please their customer. But the reality is that out-of-grade oddities are the exception, and the overwhelming majority of graded American-made double guns are virtually identical within their assigned grade parameter, so much so in some instances that the study of those models can become boring. That reality is a lesson I've learned firsthand, for when

initially infected with the double gun bug, the only double guns I would examine were marked "Parker Bros"; I absolutely refused to consider anything else, and this resolute stubbornness continued for the initial two to three years of my personal double gun odyssey. And certainly no one could disparage my tastes in vintage double guns; for after all, the Parker shotgun has for decades enjoyed a superb reputation amongst "America's Finest" double gun offerings. But my attitude towards quality American double guns was forever altered one Saturday morning while attending a local gun show, for there I saw, and was privileged to examine first hand, an Optimus Grade Lefever. What a truly marvelous example of the gun maker's art it was, and suddenly, my eyes were opened to the fact that other period makers could, and did, create fine quality guns also!

So, upon returning home that day I carefully re-examined my treasured Parker gun collection. I had limited my modest collection to hammerless models only, and had managed to acquire great examples of all Parker hammerless models from the lowly and common Trojan Grade through the beautiful Grade B Parker including beautiful examples of the very rare Grade N and E Model hammerless guns. All were beautifully made, but somehow things were no longer the same, since for some unknown reason, my Parker collection had lost its luster. I no longer found Parker guns interesting and I was consumed with a burning desire to increase my knowledge base and expand my search for new and more exciting discoveries. So at that point my double gun quest went in an entirely new direction. I searched for things unusual, those rare and unique "one-off" pieces, and have never regretted that decision. And since that change in direction I've been privileged to examine a wide variety of extremely unusual high-grade examples of the American double gun from a variety of makers, the very best examples these great old companies could produce. And perhaps the most unusual example of the odd and unusual I've yet encountered is the subject gun featured herein: an L.C. Smith "IDEAL GRADE," gun number S18150.

The story itself begins several years ago when L.C. Smith collector, Cliff White, introduced me (via telephone) to Smith collector Rich Bever of upstate New York. It seems that Rich has lived near Fulton, New York, his entire life, and, having been infatuated with all things Smith related, had seen and collected many interesting Smith

guns and company artifacts over the years. During those telephone visits Rich and I spent quite a bit of time discussing some of the most unusual L.C. Smith related items and guns he had seen, but my focus has always been on the guns themselves, and I was especially intrigued with one of the guns he described. That gun was a very unusual "Ideal Grade" Smith gun that had remained within the family of the original owner, a former Hunter Arms Company employee. During our discussions of the gun, I had great difficulty trying to visualize


just how the completed gun must appear, since Rich described features far above those of any Ideal Grade Smith gun I had previously examined. Rich eventually forwarded some Polaroids of the gun, which revealed one of the most amazing Smith guns I had ever seen. We talked about the gun on several occasions afterwards, but since the gun was not for sale, I wondered if I would ever be allowed the opportunity to actually examine the gun personally.

Subsequently, quite a bit of time passed; then, in early 2007, Rich surprised me with a call to announce that, after many years of effort, he had finally acquired this unique Smith gun. Obligatory congratulations ensued, whereupon I asked Rich to share the history of the gun just as it had been related to him by the previous owner—John Hunter, great-granddaughter. Those readers who are familiar with Smith guns and have read some of the books and research published to date on the history of the Hunter Arms Company will recall that John Hunter, one of the original Hunter brothers, was the manager of the Hunter Arms Company

until that company went into receivership near the end of WWI. John Hunter had a granddaughter named Verna who married C.W. (Waddy) Wadsworth. They had two daughters, one of whom was named Barbie, and it was from Barbie that Rich had acquired the gun.

As a young man, Waddy Wadsworth was employed at the reorganized Hunter Arms Company where he worked as a draftsman. Mr. Wadsworth was reputed to have been a very affable guy with a great personality, and was a man well liked by his fellow workers. Whether his personal affability was a factor in Marlin's decision to continue his employment we shall never know, but Mr. Wadsworth remained at the gunworks after the Marlin Firearms Company acquisition, and, according to family history, it was during his employment under Marlin that Mr. Wadsworth acquired the subject gun.





any corresponding five-year period in the entire history of the L.C. Smith gun. Sadly, we can only speculate as to how the history of the L.C. Smith gun might have been written had Marlin acquired a more modern manufacturing facility, but the manufacturing machinery, and the gunworks building itself, had remained virtually unchanged from the day manufacturing operations initially commenced in 1890 until the Hunter Arms bankruptcy at the end of WWII and Marlin's subsequent acquisition. From surviving newspaper articles and company archives, historians know that this antiquated manufacturing facility depended on water power from an adjacent canal to operate all gunworks-related milling machinery and equipment, and that a portion of the old gunworks building itself had actually been constructed above that canal in order to access that power source.

The passage of time and lack of funds for proper building maintenance combined to take their toll on January 16, 1949, when the first-floor portion of the gunworks building housing heavy milling machinery collapsed into the raceway of the canal, and, as replacing this aging equipment and repairing what had become a tired and outdated manufacturing facility was deemed too costly, the final chapter of L.C. Smith

As to the gun itself, even the slightest glance at the accompanying photos shows this little Smith gun to be nothing less than spectacular as all aspects exude quality and attention to detail. Interestingly, when collectors focus their discussion of Smith guns to specific manufacturing periods, it is not uncommon to hear negative comments pertaining to those guns produced during the Marlin ownership period. At one point in the past, yours truly boldly declared that "Marlin-era Smith guns just aren't up to the same high-quality standards as Smith guns from the old Hunter Arms era." But I've since "changed my tune" and the real truth is that, although Marlin did introduce some less costly finishing processes in an effort to speed production and increase output, Marlin-era Smith guns are no different from their counterparts manufactured by Hunter Arms. Marlin continued to manufacture the Smith gun in the same facility where the Hunter brothers began Smith gun production in 1890, used the same tools and machinery that had been utilized for decades in the production of the Smith gun, and even retained the same highly skilled Smith gun technicians and artisans. And regarding Smith gun workers, a most interesting fact is that one of those employees, master engraver Albert Kraus, had begun his employment at the gunworks in 1890, 55 years before Marlin purchased the company! So in reality, Smith gun quality did not suffer under Marlin ownership and, in fact, production and sales of L.C. Smith guns during the five-year period that Marlin operated the gunworks was higher than that of

gun manufacture in Fulton, New York, was scripted. Guns in process were completed and additional guns assembled from parts on hand but by 1951, Smith guns were no longer available to the shooting public. As history's curtain began to fall for the final time on the great L.C. Smith gun, Waddy Wadsworth remained at the gunworks for some unknown period executing the last of his assigned duties.

To varying degrees, the ravages of time continue to handicap the modern-day researcher in his quest to uncover individual gun information, as thus far, there is no evidence that any of the original L.C. Smith order books containing detailed gun order specifications have survived. But all has not been lost, however, as through the efforts of Marlin historian Colonel William S. Brophy, the

From the surviving shipping records, the most complete, easiest to read, and least-confusing records cover the period from 1918 through the end of production, and it is from these records that we have the basic details regarding the manufacture of the subject gun featured

GUN RECORD									
HUNTER ARMS COMPANY, INC.									
GUN NO.	GRADE	TYPE	GA.	LEN.	STAINLESS	FINISH	REMARKS	QUANTITY	ORDER NO.
1301	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
2	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
3	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
4	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
5	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
6	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
7	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
8	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
9	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
10	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
11	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
12	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
13	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
14	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
15	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
16	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
17	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
18	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
19	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
20	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
21	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
22	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
23	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
24	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
25	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
26	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
27	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
28	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
29	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
30	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
31	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
32	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
33	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
34	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
35	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
36	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
37	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
38	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
39	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
40	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
41	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
42	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
43	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
44	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
45	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
46	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
47	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
48	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
49	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					
50	Ideal	twist	12.50	1/2					

[illegible]

herein. But before we examine that individual gun record itself, let us first examine a typical shipping ledger page from the Marlin production era, a copy of which is featured herein. The page itself is entitled "Gun Record - Hunter Arms Company, Inc.," and contains entries for fifty L.C. Smith guns from the mid-1946 production period. In spite of the fact that the heading is marked "Hunter Arms Company, Inc.," we know that this ledger page references Smith guns from the Marlin era because of the "S" serial number prefix entry noted within the "Gun No." column. One common trait peculiar to the L.C. Smith shipping ledgers from the Marlin-era production period is that complete serial numbers were recorded for the first and last gun entries only; all remaining gun entries were posted as partial serial numbers using the last one, two, or three digits as necessary to ID each gun. Perhaps this method was adopted to save accounting time, but with the exception that some very early Hunter Arms-era shipping ledger pages feature typed serial numbers in the "Gun No." column, all other posted details contained within the shipping ledgers are handwritten. In some ledgers these entries are in ink, as illustrated by the attached photo, and in others those entries were posted using a lead pencil. Some of the surviving records are now as much as 120 years old, pages have become yellowed and brittle, and many of the handwritten entries are badly faded and sometimes difficult to read. And although my personal opportunities to study these old shipping ledgers have been limited to period samples only, my observations are that the earliest ledgers generally provide fewer details to the researcher than do those ledgers from 1918 onward; and this is especially true with early records where the gunworks recorded the serial numbers of 100 guns on each ledger page.

Moving forward, the next column, "Grade", is self-explanatory and simply records guns as produced in the various grades offered during that production period, but the "Type" column is not so simple to understand and requires a bit of explanation. In this column are a series of letter entries representing factory designated codes which identify frame type (or size), as well as all factory installed optional features with which the gun was ordered and shipped. For the unfamiliar, and excepting the experimental "C" code Smith frames, L.C. Smith guns were manufactured using two frame types/sizes, the original standard sized Regular frame ("R" code) and the more compact Featherweight frame ("FW" code). By 1945, and perhaps earlier, the old standard Regular ("R") frame had been dropped from production, and all Smith guns were being manufactured on the smaller Featherweight ("FW") sized frame, as is evidenced by the fact that the frame code identifier for every gun on the example ledger page is noted "FW". And although not a feature found on most Smith guns produced prior to 1918, Smith guns manufactured after 1918 will always feature a prominent frame identifier stamp ("R" or "FW") on the water table that will appear as a prefix to the assigned serial number.

But, as Smith serial number blocks were sometimes reused, these frame stamps are also invaluable in determining the correct age and manufacturing period for a given gun.

For example, the surviving records clearly indicate another L.C. Smith gun was manufactured in 1919 that was assigned the same serial number as our 1947 vintage subject gun, which fact today is often the source of much confusion among Smith gun owners and collectors who do not understand how to properly interpret L.C. Smith serial number prefix stamps. But for the knowledgeable, determining the correct manufacturing period for either gun is as simple as verifying the serial number prefix stamped on the water table. For Marlin made a deliberate effort to distinguish their production period from that for Smith guns produced prior to their ownership; they simply modified the serial number prefix stamp to include the letter "S". And it is that "S" production code prefix stamp which differentiates a Smith gun made under the Marlin Firearms Company ownership from all other Smith guns; therefore, all Marlin-era Smith guns have a water table prefix stamp that begins "FWS."

Incidentally, when Marlin re-introduced the L.C. Smith gun for a brief period beginning in 1967, Marlin management decided to continue the original Marlin-era serial number sequence, but chose a different production code frame stamp to distinguish these later production L.C. Smith guns from those guns they had produced between 1945 and

1950. This final run of Smith guns is also unique in that these guns were actually manufactured at the Marlin gunworks facility in New Haven, Connecticut, and therefore are the only L.C. Smith guns not manufactured in Fulton or Syracuse, New York. These unique L.C. Smith guns were assigned an "M" production code identifier; and, as this final production run of the Smith gun was also manufactured using the Featherweight-sized frame, the water table serial number prefix stamp will be "FWML."

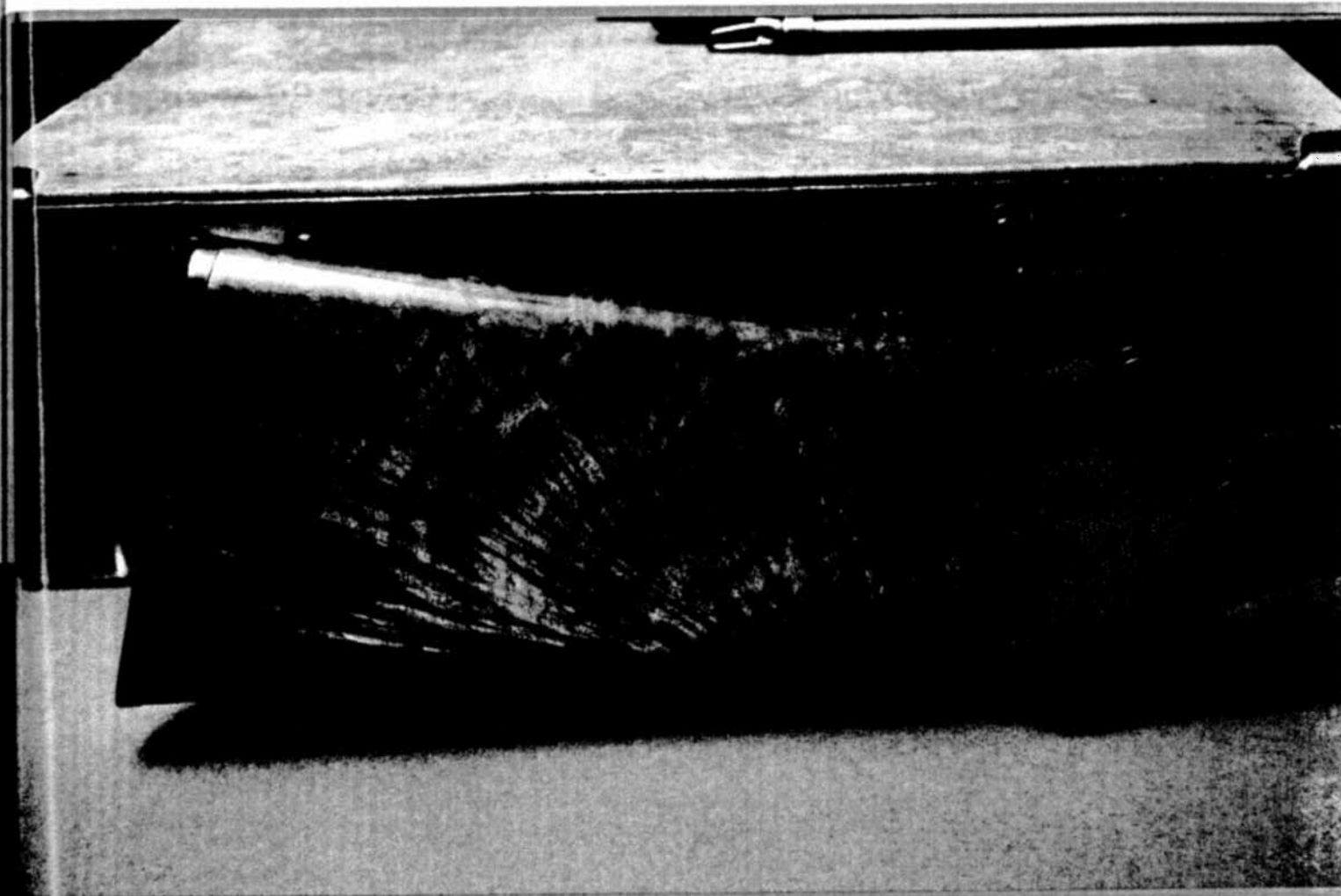
The remaining letter notations within the "Type" column are codes for factory equipped optional features ordered over and above standard production specifications. To simplify the accounting process, each option available through the gunworks was assigned an internal letter code which was then noted within the "Type" column on the appropriate ledger page. Among the options that could be special ordered were selective autoejectors, Hunter One-Trigger, non-selective Hunter One-Trigger, beavertail forearm, vent rib, raised single sighting plane rib, recoil pad, ivory beads, etc. and were respectively assigned letter option codes as follows: "E," "O," "N," "B," "V," "SP," "RP," and "IS." But of all the various option code symbols used, only the autoejector code "E" was ever stamped onto the gun frame itself; therefore, a Regular-framed gun shipped with autoejectors would bear the frame serial number prefix stamp "RE" (engraved on highest-grade Smith guns), while a Featherweight-framed gun would be stamped (or engraved) "FWE."

The next column heading "GA" denotes gauge or bore size, and is self-explanatory; as is the next column heading "LTH," which denoted the length, in inches, of the original set of barrels shipped with the gun. Obviously, as many vintage double guns have had their barrel tubes shortened,

this information alone is extremely important to collectors when determining the collectability and value of any vintage Smith gun. And although there are no examples shown on the ledger page depicted herein, if a Smith gun was ordered and shipped with two sets of barrels, that optional barrel set would also be noted within the "LTH" column, as an additional entry would have been posted listing the length of the second barrel set above the length notation for the primary barrel set.

"Order Number" was reserved to record a purchase order number that would reference the same number from the sales order records and once again, for whatever unknown reasons the entire column of this subject page has been left blank.

The final column heading, "Purchaser" allows the researcher to know the name of the company, or individual to whom a gun was shipped, although that information does not typically include purchaser address. In the early years of the Hunter Arms Company, Smith guns were often



A view of the highly figured and beautifully colored stock of Smith gun #S18150.

The next column heading "Started" denoted the day that particular gun frame received its assigned serial number. The following column headings, "Proof T" and "Pattern", indicate the date upon which a gun would have passed the gunworks in-house proof-testing operation, and the date specified chokes were pattern tested. On many pages of the ledger books these columns remain blank for unknown reasons, but where entries for those operations are included, most will bear the same date. The following columns, "Finished," and "Shipped," are also self-explanatory and denote the date upon which the manufacture of a specific gun was completed, and the date upon which that gun was shipped to the purchaser. The next column heading

recorded as being shipped directly to the actual gun owner, whose name was then judiciously recorded in the "Purchaser" column. Such information can be invaluable in attempts to trace the history of a particular gun, and equally exciting is the fact that some of those customer names are now recognized as the names of very famous individuals. But in the final years of Smith gun production it seems that virtually every gun ordered was shipped to a hardware, or sporting goods store, which may be evidence of how marketing and sales techniques changed and evolved over the decades of Smith gun production.

So now that one has a basic understanding as to the interpretation of a Marlin-era shipping ledger page entry,

let us examine our subject gun, L.C. Smith gun S18150, in greater detail. Immediately we see the "S" serial number prefix code clearly identifying this Smith gun as being manufactured in 1947, as indicated in the record, and therefore not to be confused with Smith gun 18150 shipped 28 years earlier in 1919. We also see the obvious grade identifier, "Ideal Grade," the frame size identifier code "FW," and immediately note this Smith gun was ordered with some desirable extra cost options, "EOSP." In collector speak, this L.C. Smith would be described as an Ideal Grade Featherweight ejector gun, with Hunter One-Trigger and raised solid Single Sighting Plane rib. We also note that this Smith gun was ordered as a 16 bore with 28" barrels, that its manufacture commenced on May 9, 1947, and further, that gun S18150 was subsequently completed on August 4, 1947, and then shipped on August 10, 1947, to Becknell-Wilkins Wholesale Hardware Company of Lubbock, Texas.

Hardware stores during this period served many functions for the small and mid-sized communities they served, so, in addition to being a full-line hardware company, Becknell-Wilkins also carried a full line of housewares, appliances, and sporting goods. And although Becknell-Wilkins was most likely selling Marlin-branded rifles and shotguns in conjunction with Marlin's L.C. Smith product line, and guns by other makers, no other details regarding the business relationship the Marlin Firearms Company may have enjoyed with the Becknell-Wilkins Company are known, and their mention herein would have no significance whatsoever with the one exception that this is the company to which the subject Smith gun was shipped.

It is at that point that the known facts pertaining to the history of L.C. Smith gun S18150 begin to blur. For as we examine the other handwritten entries found within this shipping ledger record, we first notice an odd entry in the "Pattern" column, "inv 1/1/49," and another odd date entry, "2-18-49," in the "Order Number" column. And finally, we note another handwritten notation, "Marlin Firearms," posted above the word "Becknell," which is followed by one other completely illegible handwritten entry above the word "Wilkins." What do these added notations signify? and exactly what is that illegible notation above the word "Wilkins"? Is it "exhibition"? "exposition"? or does it signify something else? "salesman" perhaps? Well, in spite of the fact that I have enlarged this handwritten notation many times over, and have studied that scribbled-up word/s at length, I remain clueless as to any interpretation that would give me a reasonable measure of confidence in my conclusion.

The story that came with the gun is that this "one-off" Ideal Grade L.C. Smith was conceived and designed to be a "Salesman's Sample," that into the manufacture of this gun was incorporated a variety of different features normally reserved for only the highest-grade Smith guns in order to demonstrate to potential high-grade gun buyers the quality, and various special features company artisans could incorporate into their highest-grade L.C. Smith offerings. From the shipping records it is clear that this gun was

shipped to Texas, but from that point forward however, there is clearly no evidence that would provide even the slightest indication as to the intended purpose for this gun once it was received at Becknell-Wilkins. Was this gun, as is alleged by the Wadsworth family history, received by a Marlin representative and then used as a "prop" to secure high-end gun orders, or could the gun have been retained within the sporting-goods department of the Becknell-Wilkins Company and used there as a fancy display and sales tool for Smith guns and the related Marlin rifles and shotgun product lines? During my research efforts no information was found that would indicate how large a gun distributor Becknell-Wilkins may have been, nor any indication regarding the extent of their business volume and how those sales volumes may have influenced management at the gunworks. So once again I am clueless in that regard, and can draw no conclusions with one exception: the fact that L.C. Smith gun S18150 was shipped to a distributor clearly indicates that this oddity was not an upgraded employee gun.

Obviously we have another instance here where, in a perfect world, old guns should have been manufactured with the ability to speak something other than *boom, boom*, but they can't, and the original ledger entry shall remain forever silent and confusing. But what is not confusing is the fact that the surviving record clearly shows this Smith gun as being an inventory item at the gunworks on January 1, 1949, which fact raises another question. Why had gun S18150 been returned to the gunworks? If the gun had indeed belonged to Marlin from the outset and been on loan to a sales rep, or company-authorized distributor, what prompted Marlin to request that the gun be returned? Again, no answer, but the fact that gun S18150 was in Marlin's possession on 1/1/49 clearly indicates that its return was not the result of Marlin's 1949 decision to cease manufacturing operations, as the partial collapse of the gunworks building did not occur until January 16, 1949, more than two weeks later. And although any reason as to why Marlin would have requested that gun S18150 be returned would be sheer speculation on my part, the fact that it was returned to Marlin, and not shipped back to Texas, would certainly indicate that gun S18150 was not a customer-owned gun.

My inability to answer these and other questions are sources of personal frustration, but the story of the gun continues. According to family members, Waddy Wadsworth was still employed at the gunworks when Smith gun S18150 was returned, and, finding this beautiful little small-bore Smith gun irresistible (who wouldn't?) subsequently arranged to purchase the gun for himself. Perhaps the final date entry, "2/18/49", was the date Marlin sold the gun to Mr. Wadsworth. I am also unable to answer that question, and sadly it seems, there may forever be a "grey" period of about 18 months in which the history of L.C. Smith gun S18105 will never be known. But what is indisputable however, is the fact that, for the next sixty-odd years, Smith gun S18150 remained within the Wadsworth family being lovingly preserved in virtually factory-new condition.

So, after many hours of research and study I remain unable to determine the original purpose behind the creation of L.C. Smith gun S18150; nor can I find any evidence, other than the story of the gun passed down through the family, that gun S18150 was an actual "salesman's sample." And I am not implying that the Wadsworth family story is not accurate, only that it cannot be verified by the actual record. I also have no legitimate interpretation of the illegible shipping record entry that might have given some indication as to the purpose of this gun, or assigned a more accurate quality level to the gun. But we do have the most important aspect of this story, the actual gun itself, one of the most interesting L.C. Smith guns I have ever seen.

As already noted, and as further illustrated by the accompanying photographs, this Smith gun has survived virtually unused, and retains all original finishes. Vintage guns in near new condition are extremely rare but from my perspective the most unusual aspect of this L.C. Smith gun is that the barrels simply appear to be out of place in comparison to the balance of the gun. As Ideal Grade L.C. Smith guns are only one grade level above the lowest model Field Grade gun, Ideal Grade guns are relatively plain guns as regards wood, checkering, and engraving. The Ideal Grade itself first appeared within the Smith gun model line in 1913 as part of the grades and model changes introduced at that time by the Hunter Arms Company, and all Ideal Grade models produced from that point forward are easily identified by the fact that the words "IDEAL GRADE" are roll-stamped* atop the right barrel exactly as seen with subject gun S18150. In fact, with the exceptions that this Ideal Grade barrel set features jeweled flats and an engraved serial number, there are no differences between this finished set of barrels and any other set of Ideal Grade barrels one would encounter, and this is the reason why these Smith barrels appear so out of place compared to the balance of the gun. Historically, high-grade Smith guns feature barrel sets made of finest quality "Whitworth Fluid Compressed Steel" featuring engraved wedges of fine scroll around their breech and muzzle ends, hand-engraved (not roll-stamped) maker and barrel steel ID markings, gold rib inlays, and other special touches. From my point of view, the fact that its makers elected to leave this set of Ideal Grade, "London Steel" marked barrels finished to Ideal Grade standards seems to give some degree of credence to the story that this gun was originally intended to be a factory sales sample.

But from that point forward the differences between this example marked "IDEAL GRADE" and all other examples of the Ideal Grade are dramatic! The stocks of this example were handcrafted from a fabulously colored and figured walnut blank, finished with many coats of "Rose Oil," and beautifully checkered with unique ribbon and border work equivalent to that of at least Monogram Grade quality. This example also features outstanding engraving work done in the traditional Crown Grade style, and prominently exhibits the trademarked gold-inlaid "crown" motif atop the opening lever, a feature reserved exclusively for the L.C. Smith Crown Grade gun. And although appearing to

be engraved in a standard Crown Grade motif, this Smith gun features uniquely engraved game scenes on both lockplates. The right-side lockplate features a rare waterfowl scene, as opposed to the standard Crown Grade dog motif, and while the left-side lockplate features what appears to be a typical Crown Grade dog motif, this scene was given some extra detail. Upon close inspection it is revealed that one of those pointing dogs is depicted holding a retrieved bird, a little extra touch of imagination I'd not seen on any other Crown Grade Smith gun. And although this Smith gun is not signed by the engraver, the fact that we see a pointing dog holding a retrieved bird is an indication that master engraver Albert Kraus himself was most likely the artisan who engraved that scene, as Mr. Kraus commonly used the "dog holding a retrieved bird" theme in the portraits he painted.

But the unique features of this special "Ideal Grade" Smith gun do not end there, as this example contains one other distinctive feature historically reserved for only the highest Deluxe Grade Smith guns, the raised "rope-roll" feature carved across the top of the standing breech. From earlier research I have learned that this was a time-consuming and costly feature to create, its execution being done entirely by hand and requiring many hours of chiseling, filing, and polishing to realize the graceful end result. I also learned that Albert Kraus, already in his late seventies when this gun was produced, delegated this type of work to the

young apprentice engravers under his tutelage whose time could be expensed at a more cost effective rate.

From personal inspection of this unique Smith gun I am convinced that all its features, as well as the engraving and remaining gun finishes are factory original, and that this gun is not the result of aftermarket cobbling, nor is it a "lunch box special" employee gun. And although each reader remains free to evaluate this most unusual Smith gun in whatever manner he may choose, I personally find that the commingling of these various Ideal, Crown, Monogram, and Deluxe Grade features have served to create the most intriguing L.C. Smith gun I have ever seen. Is this gun actually a "Salesman's Sample" as has been alleged? Perhaps we shall never know, but whether Smith gun S18150 is or isn't doesn't matter in my opinion; this L.C. Smith gun is so unique it stands firmly on its own merits.

In closing, I wish to express my personal gratitude to Rich Beyer for allowing this wonderful and historic L.C. Smith gun to be shared with the double gun fraternity, and also to LCSCA board member and *DGJ* author, Jim Stubbendieck for his invaluable contributions of information from the original L.C. Smith shipping ledgers. Finally, any reader wishing to obtain information on a Smith gun can request a research letter from the L.C. Smith Collectors Association; just visit their Web site, lesmith.org, and follow the appropriate link.

*Barrels of Ideal Grade L.C. Smith guns manufactured by the Hunter Arms Company were not roll-stamped with gauge markings.

Aug 31-2006

I Ken Rogers husband of Barb Wadsworth
who is Bob Wadsworth daughter and granddaughter
of Uerna Waddy Wadsworth received full payment for
one LC Smith 16 gauge crown grade shotgun
Serial # 18150

The gun was a salesmans sample for Hunter Arms
and includes many features that could be
special ordered on a Smith gun

Bob Wadsworth got the gun back from sales
staff after the company closed in 1945-50

The gun had remained in the family for
60 yrs

Ken Rogers