

Historic Winchester Rifles  
Donated to Moultonborough Historical Society by  
Jordan Prouty

By Jane Rice

September 2002

At the regular monthly meeting of the Historical Society on June 11, Jordan Prouty spoke about the history of the first quarter-century of the Loon Preservation Committee. Following his program, he surprised the membership by bringing out four of his personal collection of historic Winchester rifles and donating them to the Society. These four models of Winchester repeating rifles are among the most historic firearms produced in the U.S., including the Model 1873, the "gun that won the West." They were manufactured in Connecticut, giving them an important New England connection. Because the Society buildings do not presently have either the security of the climate-control systems that would be needed to take proper care of this magnificent donation, they are being kept elsewhere until arrangements can be made for their care.

The earliest of the four is the Model 1873, and the example which was donated is a low serial number in the second model of this type manufactured. One frontiersman who was convinced of the usefulness of this weapon was William Cody, who was convinced that the repeating action saved his life when he wounded a bear in the Black Hills and it came after him. It was exhibited at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876.

John Browning, who later became a renowned arms manufacturer under his own name, was the designer of the Model 1886, which incorporated a stronger lever-action to load the shells from the magazine into the firing chamber. The Model 1892 was a simplified and lighter version of the '86, and was carried by Robert E. Peary on his expeditions to reach the North Pole, which he claimed to have attained in 1909. The shorter-barreled carbine was popular with cowboys on horseback, but all four models were used from the rubber plantations of Brazil, to trappers in the north woods, and everywhere in between.

The Model 1894 is the most successful center-fire Winchester ever produced, and remains in production to this day. Over five and a half million have been

produced. It was the first sporting repeating rifle to be able to use the new smokeless gunpowder in its cartridges. It was originally priced at \$18.00, and it, or another of these four models, was probably found commonly in most homes of the era, including many in Moultonboro who still used them for hunting white-tailed deer and other game animals in our forests. The example now belonging to the Society has a serial number of under 150,000, making it one of the earlier productions in the long his-tory of this model. All four have walnut stocks and are considered to be in "very good" condition.

This must be one of the most valuable donations our Society has ever received, and Jordan certainly deserves a very hearty thank-you from every member, as well as the round of applause he received.

Model 1873



Model 1886



Model 1893



Model 1894

