

Hawken Exhibit and Seminar at Spring Shoot

by Tom Schiffer

The NMLRA has provided a venue and encouragement to learned individuals for many years. This is designed to allow those who have spent their lifetime acquiring information in their field of interest, to share it with their fellow NMLRA Members. Over the course of some decades now, NMLRA has hosted those who were able to tell us about shooters

like Annie Oakley, makers and users of long-range rifles, and even one who worked making movie props for *Dances with Wolves*. We have also hosted Phil Schreier, bringing and showing treasurers from the National Museum and Harry Hunter from the Smithsonian. This remains an opportunity to share with the NMLRA membership, their hard-won knowledge and experience.

In June of 2019, Bob Woodfill organized an exhibit of Hawken rifles and pistols that if original would aggregate a collector's value of over \$1.4 million. In this writer's opinion, you would do well to hire precision craftsmen to reproduce them for much

less than that. Again, in my opinion, as far as faithful copies are concerned, Jake and Sam Hawken, themselves would have a tough if not impossible task telling the difference.

This June featured two separate but related events: an exhibit of Hawken-styled rifles and pistols on Saturday and Sunday

and on Saturday night, a seminar by Bob on the origin, evolution and eventual demise of the original Hawken Shop in St. Louis. The Hawken brothers did not make rifles to show off in the gunroom. They made rifles, combining robust designs with rather svelte lines well calculated and subtly evolving to survive the rigors of frontier life

This is eloquent evidence that NMLRA is the world leader in muzzle loading education; education from muzzle loading 101 to post graduate courses. What follows is an outline of what Bob intended to accomplish in his exhibit:



Three of the main participants at this memorable event. The middle gentleman is Art Ressel, the founder in 1973 of the 20th century iteration of the Hawken Shop in St. Louis where Jake and Sam Hawken hung their shingle. Gregg Roberts (far left) is the present owner of the Hawken Shop now located in Oak Harbor, Washington. Last is Bob Woodfill who kind of grew up on the NMLRA's National Range at Friendship, IN. Bob, who lives about twenty miles from Friendship, was the main organizer of this event and author of several learned articles on Hawken rifles appearing in Muzzle Blasts recently. The rifles before them represent prototypes of the current offerings of the Hawken Shop. The bottom rifle is from a Hawken Shop kit made by Bob.



The tall gentleman you see here is John Brier, grandson of the late T. K. Dawson (1930-1989), who built many memorable Hawken copies, probably the very first really good ones. The gentleman in the red shirt is Bob Roller who made rifle locks worthy of a Hawken rifle for many years. The two youngsters are John's son Kenton and daughter, Kelsi.



Three generations of T. K. Dawson's kin: his daughter, Diane, grandson John Brier and his great grandson Kenton.



The rifles on these three racks were crafted some half-century ago by T. K. Dawson.



The rifles on the two tables depicted here were all crafted by Bob. It would take a forensic expert to determine that they were not made by Sam & Jake. It is this writer's opinion they would be wrong at least half the time! They represent more than a half-century of thought, study and craftsmanship.



This is a close-up view of several flintlock Hawken rifles

The Hawken Exhibit at Friendship, June 8-9, 2019

Bob Woodfill

The Hawken exhibit was an informative and educational display of representative Hawken rifles as they transitioned from the flintlock, through the percussion, and finally into the cartridge rifle eras. Bob Woodfill exhibited 14 rifles, copied from original Hawken rifles in museums, showing the transition. A rifle representing Hawken rifle Serial No. 1 was displayed.

It was a heavy .69-caliber, full-stocked rifle that Colonel Ashley had Jake and Samuel Hawken build in the winter of 1822/23 to defend his keelboats, as they went up the Missouri River to establish fur trading boats. Next in the evolution, was a rifle that could have been made by the Hawken brothers for the mountain men during the fur era, before

the introduction of the percussion cap in the St. Louis area in about 1830. Several J&S Hawken rifles—including the famous Medina Hawken were shown and demonstrated the classic 1840s style of rifles built between 1825, when the J&S partnership was formed, and 1849 when Jacob Hawken died of cholera. An outstanding 1840s Hawken rifle believed to have been the personal rifle of Sam Hawken was presented. Next, several rifles that were made and stamped S. Hawken St. Louis by Sam Hawken between 1850 and 1859 when Sam went to Denver while gold prospecting were shown. Finally, rifles representing late-period S. Hawken rifles—in-

cluding the famous Jim Bridger and Kit Carson Hawkens, and the final version of the Hawken—the .45-70 Trapdoor Springfield Gemmer-Hawken were exhibited showing developments after the Hawken shop was sold to Watt and Gemmer in 1860. Gemmer had Hawken rifles in stock until 1894, and maintained a shop in St. Louis until 1915.



Bob taking us through the chronology and evolution of the Hawken rifle with examples of the main changes. All of the rifles in Bob's display (fourteen) were carefully researched and crafted by him as copies of original Hawken rifles, and all signed and dated by Bob on the underside of the barrel.

WA, displayed a prototype of the final development of the muzzle-loading Hawken rifle. He is offering a kit of this late-period Hawken rifle, with all authentic parts that have a provenance back to the original Hawken shop in St. Louis in the 1830-60s.

Finally, Mark Brier, grandson of Tom Dawson, exhibited several Hawken and Kentucky-style rifles that were made by Tom Dawson, a legendary name that goes along with other Hawken enthusiasts such as—John Baird, Bill Large, Bob Roller, and Andy Baker. MB

Special exhibitors were present including Art Ressel, who purchased the Gemmer estate, and re-established The Hawken Shop in St. Louis during the heyday of Hawken building at Friendship in the 1960s and 1970s. Greg Roberts, who is the current owner of The Hawken Shop, now located in Oak Harbor,