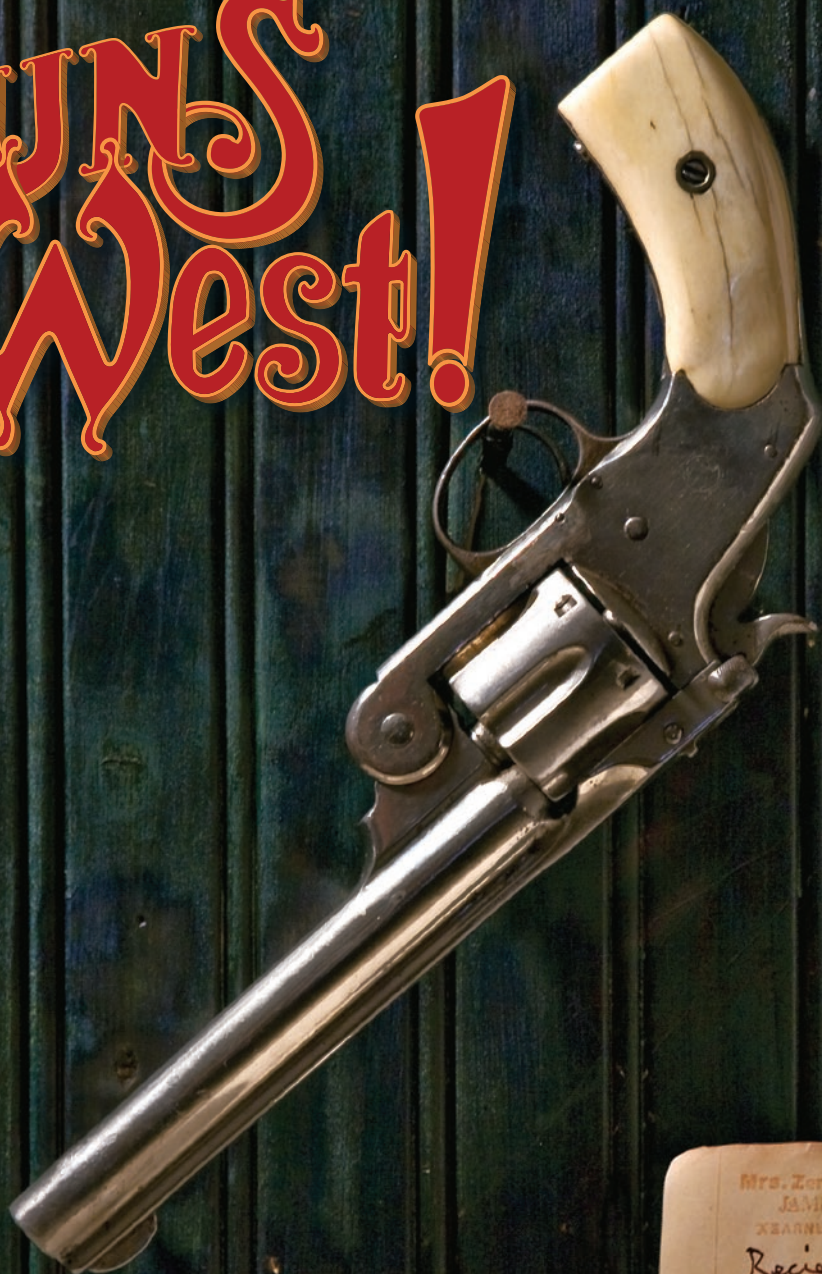


# GUNS West!



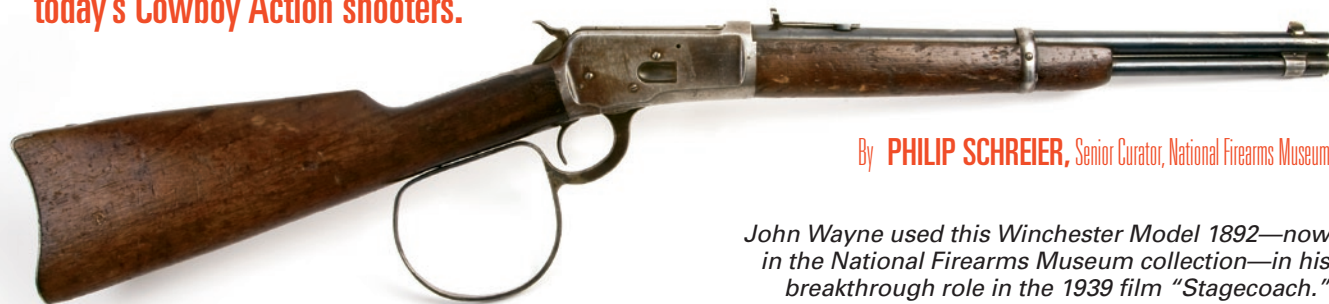
Mrs. Zerelda Samuel  
JAMES FARM  
KEARNEY, MISSOURI

Received \$39.00 from  
Mr. C.B. Parsons of  
Lexington, Kentucky  
for my son Jess's  
pistol, Smith & Wess  
#1984 size .44

Zerelda Samuel



A three-part temporary exhibit at the National Firearms Museum features dozens of guns from the likes of John Wesley Hardin, Jesse James and Buffalo Bill. But it also includes firearms from the Hollywood West—like John Wayne’s ‘92 Winchester from “Stagecoach”—and finally guns of today’s Cowboy Action shooters.



By **PHILIP SCHREIER**, Senior Curator, National Firearms Museum

*John Wayne used this Winchester Model 1892—now in the National Firearms Museum collection—in his breakthrough role in the 1939 film “Stagecoach.”*



he had a bit of trouble steadying the small slip of paper she was trying to fill out as a receipt. A terrible “accident” years previous had cost her an arm, and now, as she attempted to write one-handed, her penmanship was often erratic, reflective of the toll that 75 years of hard living had on her. Yet to the preacher’s son who stood patiently nearby, his journey of 600 miles to meet this woman was just about to pay off. He had come to western Missouri to travel the same roads and see the same sights that had once been the haunts of his childhood heroes. After a pleasant afternoon spent conversing and sipping lemonade with the widow, he was now, for the paltry sum of \$39, about to make the purchase of a lifetime. She had taken a shine to the man who showed such an interest in local history and, after many veiled comments and pointed questions, she admitted that since hard times had followed her nearly all her life, she might be persuaded to part with a family heirloom if the price was right.

Exactly 100 years later, the curatorial staff at the NRA’s National Firearms Museum opened a box from Old Town Station in Lenexa, Kan. Wearing white gloves and in an environmentally secure and controlled room, they carefully unwrapped a few layers of bubble wrap that held a large-frame revolver. Accompanying the gun was a small yellowed receipt that read: “Received \$39.00 from Mr. C.B. Parsons of Lexington, Kentucky for my son Jesse’s pistol, Smith & West # 1984 size .44.” It was signed, “Zerelda Samuel,” and bore the address “James Farm, Kearney, Missouri.”

In the world of firearms collecting, few guns have the privilege of having “good” provenance. Provenance being what we would call a clear and provable chain of custody from the original owner to present. In the case of famous historical characters, none captures the imagination more than the most famous outlaw in American history, Jesse James. There must be over 100 “my son Jesse” guns out there; half of them were manufactured after Jesse was shot dead by Bob Ford in 1882. Jesse’s mother, “Zee” Samuel, lived another 30 years after Jesse’s death, selling his guns and even freshly placed stones off his grave, right up until nearly the day she died.

Airtight provenance on a real Jesse James gun is rarer than hens’ teeth. While there is no conclusive proof that this particular Smith & Wesson New Model No. 3 revolver was an actual James Gang relic, the fact that it has a receipt from Zee makes it a celebrity gun nonetheless. In fact, it has better provenance than 99 percent of the guns out there that make similar claims

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*Smith & Wesson New Model No. 3, serial number 1984, (l.) was purchased from Jesse James’ mother, Zerelda Samuel, with a note describing it as “my son Jesse’s pistol.” Loaned by Jim Supica of Old Town Station, it is one of many significant Old West guns in the exhibit. Modern artifacts include Single Action Shooting Society badge No. 1 (r.) worn by Harper Creigh, the sport’s founder.*

and lack any form of believable James provenance.

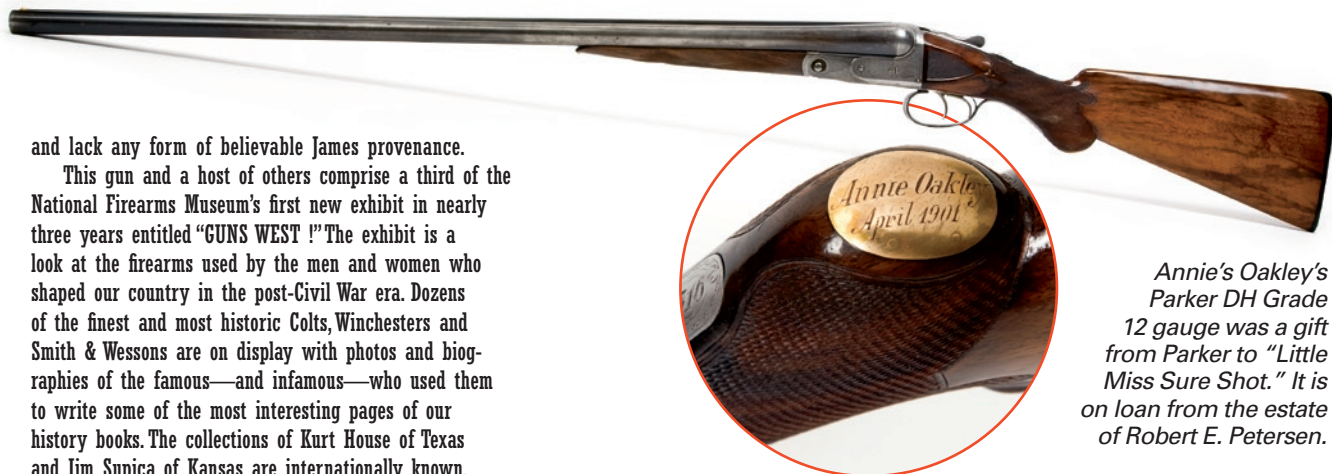
This gun and a host of others comprise a third of the National Firearms Museum's first new exhibit in nearly three years entitled "GUNS WEST!" The exhibit is a look at the firearms used by the men and women who shaped our country in the post-Civil War era. Dozens of the finest and most historic Colts, Winchesters and Smith & Wessons are on display with photos and biographies of the famous—and infamous—who used them to write some of the most interesting pages of our history books. The collections of Kurt House of Texas and Jim Supica of Kansas are internationally known, and many of the loaned objects are making their first public appearance.

Dime novelists such as Ned Buntline and showmen such as Buffalo Bill captured the attention of the country and the world with their tales of Indian raids and buffalo hunts. But it wasn't until 1903, when the Edison Manufacturing Co. of New Jersey produced a 12-minute film entitled "The Great Train Robbery," that the public fell in love with the West (the film was made in New Jersey) and with a new medium of entertainment: the movies.

Considered one of the first commercial American films, "The Great Train Robbery" became a wild sensation when "Bronco Billy" Anderson leveled a Colt at the audience in the last scene and fired a shot that sent hundreds of film goers scurrying for cover. Since then, thousands of films and television shows have all used the "old" West as a backdrop for some of the most beloved and remembered scenes of all time.

One third of the exhibit looks at these films, their stars and the guns they used to follow "the code of the cowboy." John Wayne's Winchester from his breakthrough role as the "Ringo Kid" in the John Ford classic "Stagecoach" as well as guns from Marlon Brando, Charlton Heston, Tom Selleck, Chuck Connors, Clint Eastwood and even Jerry Lewis are displayed with stills from the scenes that we all remember so well.

Shows such as "Davy Crockett" and "Daniel Boone" developed great following among the baby boomers of the post-World War II generation. Hardly a schoolyard in the 1950s was without an improvised "Fort Apache" where dozens of coonskin-cap-wearing tykes relived the roles of their heroes as seen on television the evening before. As they grew to adulthood, they carried with them their love of



Annie's Oakley's Parker DH Grade 12 gauge was a gift from Parker to "Little Miss Sure Shot." It is on loan from the estate of Robert E. Petersen.

the West and an interest in firearms. Some, including Phil Spangenberg, never lost the interest in donning a cowboy outfit and strapping on a sixgun. Re-introducing a Buffalo Bill style "Wild West" show, Phil has kept the spirit of the old West alive and inspired others to do the same. In the 1980s a group of competitive shooters took the spirit of the West to another level by introducing Cowboy Action shooting to the public, where participants dress up in period-style clothing and compete with 19th century firearms and their Italian-made replicas. In 20 short years they have turned the activity into the fastest growing shooting sport with close to 90,000 members in all 50 states and numerous countries.

A Marine from Texas by the name of Harper Creigh is known throughout the world by his alias "Judge Roy Bean" and is the co-founder of the Single Action Shooting Society. Comprising the final third of the exhibit are his guns, SASS badge No. 1 and his outfit displayed along with the Colt's, Rugers and Italian reproductions used by "China Camp," "Tequila," "Evil Roy" and a host of other men and women

who enjoy one of the most family friendly hobbies in the shooting sports community.

"GUNS WEST!" is a look at the way it was, the way it is and the way it might have been. It is sure to be a star attraction during the run of its exhibition. The museum is grateful to numerous lenders and donors including USFA, Colt, Cimarron, SASS and Ruger for their assistance in making the exhibit possible.

GUNS WEST! will be on exhibit in the William B. Ruger Gallery of the NRA's National Firearms Museum in Fairfax, Va., until January 1, 2009. Call (703) 267-1600 for details, or visit [www.nationalfirearmsmuseum.org](http://www.nationalfirearmsmuseum.org).

