



One Man's Trash... Is Another Man's Treasure

Story & Photo by Peter Caroline

I started accumulating guns at an early age. I say "accumulating" because the word "collecting" suggests some theme or direction. My direction was – and still is – anything that shoots or has the potential to shoot.

My first acquisition was a Daisy Golden Eagle BB gun that someone – my mother says, an enemy of the family – gave me when I was seven. A couple of years later, I was presented with a Japanese "Knee" mortar brought back, in its original crate, from the Pacific. Today, the BATF would consider it a "Destructive Device." Back then, it was an interesting curio. My parents tolerated it because, try as I might, I couldn't find any ammo for it. I also owned a rattletrap percussion African trade

rifle that my mother bought for me at Bannerman's in New York, relying on the salesman's solemn oath that the gun could not be fired. It took several weeks, but I got it working again.

Back in the 1940s and '50s, kids could hang out at gun shops and occasionally wheedle non-functioning pieces from friendly proprietors. There were plenty of old guns around then, and a muzzleloader without a lock or a cartridge gun missing one or several components could be

acquired for free or a dollar or two. The fun part was, putting the new treasure into operating condition. I learned a lot about back-porch gunsmithing from those old clunkers.

My buddy Dave was an even more skilled artificer. He once built a pair of flintlock pistols, using only handtools. We even used to make our own black powder, and the fact that we lived to adulthood is testimony to the divine protection of fools. I recall one of our projects, a brass-barreled

matchlock with a 1-1/2" bore. The only thing that prevented us from firing it was that, at this point, no drugstore within a five-mile radius would sell us any more potassium nitrate, a key ingredient for our home-made black powder.

At college, I was on a strict budget. By subsisting on peanut butter sandwiches and canned beans, I was able, over a period of time, to put together a Model 1873 .45-70 Springfield from unused original components purchased one at a time from Bannerman's and other downtown military surplus dealers.

My acquisition of dubious firearms continued during my time in the service. I was stationed at Fort Belvoir, VA, just a few miles down the road

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