

The story of the old 1886 Winchester that belonged to my grandfather Benjamin Garlock (1877 – 1971)

From the time I was a small boy growing up at Marshville I remember grandpa's 1886 model Winchester 38-56 sitting with the other family guns in a kitchen closet. In a young boys mind it was a remarkable thing. One which could be used to hunt huge game and settle frontiers. It was long and heavy with a full octagon barrel and full magazine. Grandpa had used it for many years hunting deer at Stratford. By the time I came on the scene its bore was not in good condition and 38-56 cartridges were almost impossible to obtain. Grandpa was getting old and the rifle was too heavy for him to carry. He took it to a man in Gloversville who cut the barrel off and reduced the magazine by about half. This ruined the authentic old rifle.

When I was 12 years old I began to collect a few old guns. At that time I asked grandpa then 65 years old to tell me more about the rifle and about the carving he had done on the stock. The upper tang of these earlier 1886 Winchesters were simply marked "Model 1886" with the company marking on the barrel. The serial number was on the bottom tang. The name of grandpa's father was carved in the stock: "V.O.GARLOCK 1886" who had owned the rifle before grandpa Ben got it. He assumed that since it was an 1886 model that his father had bought it in that year. A check of company serial number 95008 proved that the gun was actually made in 1894. Before VO's name was BJ GARLOCK and several marks which indicated deer he shot with the rifle. He carved a deer and trees and on the other side of the stock he crudely scratched an animal which he said was the only bear he saw in the woods. The bear ran under a brush pile and he never saw it again. Actually this artwork was done long before the barrel was shortened but much like that alteration it greatly reduced the value of the gun even though it helped create a family heirloom. When I was in my mid teens grandpa gave the old rifle to me. Since it was ruined as an authentic old Winchester I decided to have it further altered. I sent it minus stock and forearm to P.O. Ackley a reasonably famous barrel maker and gunsmith at Trinidad, Colorado. Ackley was well known for making light three quarter magazine 45-70 rifles on Winchester actions. This is what I wanted him to make for me. It was sent by United States Parcel Post. Over a year later I still did not have the gun back and could not get a reply from Ackley. The Palatine Postmaster, Ralph Ouderkirk had the postal inspector contact Ackley. The rifle came back to me but its strange story still was not complete. The action I received was not the one I sent. I know the serial number was wrong and the tang marking was also. It is possible that the later model action was stronger than my original sent one. The later actions were better heat treated and could stand heavier loaded cartridges. Nevertheless I returned the gun to Ackley and requested the original one sent back.

Then came the crowning touch. He replaced the lower tong with the one I originally sent with the right serial number but the upper tang still did not read "Model 1886" so I had only a small part of grandpa's old rifle. My gunsmith Ray Overbaugh of Cranesville, NY blued the gun and replaced the original wood. Here ends the strange story of an old family rifle.

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