



Official State Historical Center of the Texas
Rangers law enforcement agency.

**The Following Article was Originally Published in the
*Texas Ranger Dispatch Magazine***

The *Texas Ranger Dispatch* was published by the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum from 2000 to 2011. It has been superseded by this online archive of Texas Ranger history.

Managing Editors

Robert Nieman 2000-2009; (b.1947-d.2009)

Byron A. Johnson 2009-2011

Publisher & Website Administrator

Byron A. Johnson 2000-2011

Director, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame

Technical Editor, Layout, and Design

Pam S. Baird



Funded in part by grants from
the Texas Ranger Association Foundation

Copyright 2017, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, Waco, TX. All rights reserved. Non-profit personal and educational use only; commercial reprinting, redistribution, reposting or charge-for-access is prohibited. For further information contact: Director, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, PO Box 2570, Waco TX 76702-2570.


[Rangers Today](#)
[Visitor Info](#)
[History](#)
[Research Center](#)
[Hall of Fame](#)
[Student Help](#)
[Family History](#)
[News](#)

★ [Click Here for
A Complete Index
to All Back Issues](#)

★ [Dispatch Home](#)

★ [Visit our nonprofit
Museum Store!](#)

★ [Contact the Editor](#)

Guns of the Texas Rangers:

The Model 1897 Winchester

Article and Model 1897 Photos
by David V. Stroud



The development of a rapid-fire shotgun soon followed the development of rapid-fire rifles. Inventors such as Browning hoped that *lever-action* and *slide-action* (pump) action shotguns would prove as popular as Winchester rifles.



Winchester Model 1887 Shotgun
Courtesy Frank Ballinger

[Click Here for *Bonnie & Clyde's Hideout*](#)

In 1887, Winchester developed a lever-action shotgun loosely based on its rifle mechanisms. While it was an attractive weapon, it proved difficult to simply "scale-up" the lever-action mechanism to handle shotgun shells smoothly. Also, shotgun shells had more of the "dirty" black powder than smaller rifle charges. As a result, the M1887 suffered frequent jams, shooters complained that the lever-action was clumsy and tiring, and the copious black powder residue made thorough cleaning a chore.

To stay in the market, Winchester quickly developed the Model 1893 slide-action (pump) shotgun. Unfortunately, it too was a dismal disappointment. The Model 1893 was prone to jam and its slide mechanisms broke far too easily. Neither the Model 1887 nor the Model 1893 could satisfactorily handle

the powerful smokeless shotgun shells that were catching on with shooters.

Faced with losing the market to their competitors, Winchester corrected most of these problems and produced a classic -- the Model 1897. The company recalled the unpopular and now dangerous Model 1893 shotguns from dealers' stocks.(1)

The Model 1897 was a superior slide-action shotgun designed for the new smokeless powder. It was offered in 12 gauge with a 30-inch barrel until 1899, when the new 16 gauge with a shorter 28" barrel became popular.



Winchester Model 1897 Slide Action Shotgun Mechanism

The company offered the six-shot M1897 in a variety of styles: standard or field grade; special or standard trap (including the Black Diamond until 1919); and pigeon, brush, tournament, riot, and trench. Winchester's Model 1897 riot and trench guns were especially desirable to law enforcement personnel.

The six-shot 12 gauge trench gun (called *trench sweepers* in France during World War I) was first offered in solid frame only, then later (after number 833,000) with takedown receivers. (3) Winchester sold 19,196 of these bayonet-ready scatterguns to the U.S. government during the War.

Approximately 30,000 riot guns were sold by 1920. They differed from the trench gun in that no bayonet stud was present. However, quite a few 20"-barrel, 12 gauge shotguns were sold without trench or riot markings, and it is assumed that many of these were ordered by law enforcement departments. (4)

The Winchester Model 1897 became the most famous outside-hammer, slide-action in history. As with any Winchester, fancy wood and engraving was available at extra charge. According to a 1916 catalogue, the plain-finish example sold for \$25, while an engraved receiver with checkered and finer wood sold for \$100. Today, the Model 1897 field grade is valued between \$250 and \$500 (very good to excellent condition). The riot and trench range from \$450 to \$900. (5)

The Model 1897 pictured here has a replacement 18-1/8" nickel-plated barrel I bought while a member of the Single-Action Shooting Society. As with most wannabe Old West gunfighters, I

started with a 12 gauge, 18-½" double-barrel stagecoach gun complete with hammers. Soon I learned the slide-action was much faster.

I never dreamed of getting a pretty '97, but as luck would have it, my friendly gun dealer took one in on trade. To say it was "love at first sight" is an understatement. Words can't express the historical thrill when an onlooker commented that, as a boy in Arkansas, he had seen a deputy sheriff carry a "shiny '97 so the bad guys could see what he was holding."

I checked the serial numbers and learned my '97 had been manufactured in 1910. Having never seen another "shiny one," I'm sure the scattergun I "killed" metal targets with was once the weapon used by that forgotten lawmen. (6)

Markings

The patent markings below are found on the barrels of Model 1893 and Model 1897 Winchester shotguns:

**MANUFACTURED BY THE WINCHESTER REPEATING ARMS CO.
New Haven. Conn. U.S.A. Pat. NOV. 25, 1890. DEC. 6, 1892 &
JULY 21. 1896**

After serial number 51,300, the dates FEB. 22. 98 JULY 5. 10 were added.

Later Model '97s have the following barrel marking on their left side:

**MADE IN NEW HAVEN, CONN.—WINCHESTER—MODEL 97—
12 GA-2 ¾ CHAM—U.S. OF AMERICA—TRADE MARK**

or

**MADE IN NEW HAVEN, CONN.—WINCHESTER—MODEL 97—16
GA—2 ¾ CHAM—U.S. OF AMERICA—TRADE MARK**

The pre-1900 gauge markings on the Model 1897s are "12" or "16" near the receivers. The slide-action rods are marked:

**WINCHESTER
MODEL 1897**

After 1900:
**MODEL 1897
WINCHESTER**

In 1905:
**MODEL 1897
WINCHESTER—
TRADE MARK**

In 1907:
**MODEL 1897
WINCHESTER—
REG. IN U.S. PAT. OFF.**

Sources

The Winchester Handbook, one of a thousand by George Madis.

Flayderman's Guide to Antique American Firearms ... and Their Values, by Norm Flayderman.

Winchester: An American Legend, by R.L. Wilson.

Notes

(1) As a result of the recall, the Model 1893 became a collector's rarity. Only 35,000 were manufactured, and many are marked "R and R" for "Returned and Repaired." George Madis states that, in a survey, only 2,383 Model 1893 shotguns were reported. To encourage owners, Winchester offered to trade Model 1897s for their Model 1893s. The year most often given for the widescale introduction of the more powerful smokeless powder is 1898.

(2) There were 1,024,700 Model 1897s produced before it was discontinued in 1957. The 12 gauge outsold the 16 gauge nine to one, making the 16 gauge somewhat uncommon.

(3) "Trench sweeper" Model 1897 shotguns were so feared by the Germans, they asked for their ban as combat weapons

(4) The trench sweeper was manufactured until 1945.

(5) These are regarded as conservative estimates.

(6) The Model 1897 had a light blue finish until 1945, when it was replaced by black.

Texas Ranger

DISPATCH



Dispatch

Jr. Rangers

Corporate Club

Museum Store

Exhibits/Artifacts

Benefactors

All rights reserved. © 2003, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum. [Contact Us](#)

The Hall of Fame and Museum complex is located adjacent to Interstate 35 in Waco, Texas (midway between Dallas/Fort Worth and Austin).

