

Just about once or twice a month, a customer will come into my gunsmithing shop with a discontinued or obsolete model of firearm. It may be a treasured family keepsake or a favorite gun that has been in service for many years. With a look of grave concern, the owner says, *"I don't know what happened – I was shooting a round of skeet and all of a sudden it just wouldn't fire. Can you fix it?"*

Usually I can – but occasionally the problem is finding spare or replacement parts for a still popular but no longer produced firearm. It gets real dicey when a particular model has been obsolete for more than 10 years. Some models had recurring weaknesses that were never corrected while the gun was in production – that part has more than likely been sold

out long ago. The only option is finding the part through a used parts dealer – or fabricating one, which is often too costly to be viable. Well, I can say without reservation, that I have found the mother load of parts for many models of Winchester firearms – hidden in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains. NuLine Guns Inc. has, without doubt, the largest supply of 'pre-64' (and newer) parts in the good old U.S. of A!

Unless you are from Missouri, and frequent its back roads, it's a pretty safe bet that most people would not be familiar with the Rhineland (MO) area. It's a small town located well off the beaten track about an hour or so south and west of St. Louis and is the home of NuLine Guns.

Once through the door, I found

myself staring at shelving stacked to the ceiling with spare parts – in bins, baskets and boxes. To my right was a room occupied by five ladies who handled the phone orders, invoices and bills while also pulling and packing parts to be mailed throughout the country. Jennifer is the office manager and in charge of pulling parts, while Jessie handles the daily correspondence and 'phone enquiries. Paula takes care of all the receiving chores, with Hannah handling the shipping of guns and parts back to their owners. Lacy is the computer whiz and maintains the company's web site.

The owner, Jerry Stevens, was busy at the counter – discussing the project on a customer's old Model 12 Winchester pump. I let my eyes wander up and down the tall stacked shelving while I patiently waited for him to finish with his customer.

I could see what looked like about 50 or so 101 Winchester over and under rifle barrels on a distant shelf – and to their right, a large

NU-LINE

STEVE FISCHER FINDS A GOLD MINE OF OBSOLETE GUN PARTS

GUNS



SUPER X-1 BOLT ASSEMBLIES READY FOR SHIPMENT.



NEED A GAS PISTON SLEEVE FOR A SUPER X? HERE'S SEVERAL HUNDRED!

stack of gas piston sleeves for Super X-1 auto loaders. A bit further down the aisle, hanging in long rows, was literally several hundred Super X-1 shotgun barrels. I had expected to find Super X parts here but what I didn't expect was that they had just about ALL of them – or at the very least, most of them! And another thing I was not aware of was that they also have a more than ample supply of parts for most all of the obsolete models for the 'pre-1964' Winchester line.

A LITTLE HISTORY

A term almost synonymous with Winchester Firearms is the term 'pre-64'. That was the year that the superbly built firearms were discontinued by a complete changeover in the model offerings – and in the manufacturing techniques used up until that date.

Since the mid 1800s, Winchester arms were considered by many to be the equal or better than just about any gun manufacturer in the world. Several of their models were already legendary, so the announcement of the model changeover was a shot, literally, heard around the World. It brought about the end of production for what has become some of the most collectable and prized firearms produced in the U.S. Some of the more prominent models include the venerable Model 12 pump (after a long production beginning in 1912), the

Model 88 and 100 center fire rifles (one a lever action and the other an auto loader), the Model 21 side by side that today demands a very deep pocket if you wish to own one, and my personal favorite, the Model 42 .410 pump shotgun (also in the premium price category when you can find one!). No longer would some of the most favorite guns of the U.S. hunting and shooting world be available other than a few exceptions coming out of the custom shop – generally pricier than the average pocket book could afford.

Many in the gun business saw this 1964 changeover as the 'kiss of death' for a historical and popular gun company. Up against a rock and a hard place, brought about largely by heavy competition from their biggest competitor, Remington Arms, Winchester found that it was fast losing ground against the competitively priced models such as the 870 pump and the new Model 1100. The realization came to them that to be competitive, they would have to cut the high production costs of their current line and adopt models that could be more competitive at the retail market place while also being less expensive to produce.

The new models didn't have the sales appeal for the buying public. Indifferent sales eventually led to a change of ownership and a new name – U.S. Repeating Arms Company – but this change only delayed the inevitable. The final reality came in mid-2006 with the

BELOW: I DON'T THINK THEY WILL BE RUNNING OUT OF WINCHOKES ANY TIME SOON!



BELOW: MANY PEOPLE NEVER REALIZED THAT THE WINCHESTER 101 COULD BE HAD WITH A DOUBLE RIFLE BARREL OR A COMBO BARREL OF A SHOTGUN AND RIFLE BARREL IN THE OVER/UNDER CONFIGURATION. HERE ARE A BUNCH OF THEM!



I WAS PLEASANTLY SURPRISED TO ALSO FIND THEY HAD AN EXCELLENT SUPPLY OF PARTS AND WOOD FOR THE STILL POPULAR MODEL 101 OVER AND UNDER – INCLUDING THE DOUBLE RIFLE MODEL...

closing of Winchester U.S. Repeating Arms. (Not to be confused with the Winchester-Olin Corporation, who is still very much alive and well, but primarily in the ammunition and component business and no longer in the firearms manufacturing business). The closing ended the production and sale of the Model 70 bolt action rifle, the Model 1200 pump shotgun, and sadly, the Model 94



SMALL PARTS, SCREWS, SPRINGS, ETC. ARE CAREFULLY INVENTORIED AND STORED IN THESE BINS FOR EASY ACCESS.

RIGHT: THE FAMOUS TEST FIRE WINDOW!



lever action rifle – a model that had been in constant production for over 100 years!

BACK TO THE STORY

So, what does all that have to do with NuLine Guns you might ask. The fact of the matter is that Jerry Stevens was smarter than your average bear! Seeing the writing on the wall many years ago, he fortuitously bought up all the Winchester parts he could get his hands on and is now one of the world's largest sources for the majority of now obsolete Winchester firearms parts. Probably best known for their huge cache of Super X-1 auto loader parts, the company can also supply parts for many of the 'pre-

64' Winchester models such as the Model 12 pump in both 12 and 16 gauge, the Model 97, Model 25 and Model 42 pump shotguns. In side by sides, they have a healthy supply of parts, and some wood, for the Model 21, 23 and 24. For auto loading Winchester models, they have parts and wood for the Model 50 and 59 shotguns and of course the Super X-1. Even the single barreled shotguns are represented – with parts available for the Model 37 and 37A.

I was pleasantly surprised to also find they had an excellent supply of parts and wood for the still popular Model 101 over and under – including the double rifle

model. Prior to this discovery, my source for such parts was sketchy at best, with one source in Canada that meant never ending problems of paper work and customs to get them across the border.

The Winchester 'pre-64' rifle line is also well represented with parts and wood for the Model 70 bolt rifle, the earlier Models 670 and 678, and the Model 88 lever action and Model 100 semi-auto rifles.

My tour of this wealth of Winchester parts was led by Jerry himself – the 'semi-retired' skipper of this busy shop. He laughingly

pointed out that semi-retired meant that he only worked 50 or 60 hours a week now – having slowed his pace after so many years in the gun repair business. He is ably assisted by Terry Wagner (Shop Foreman), Billy Bass, Josh Norton and John Freeman. Although they all specialize in much of the Winchester line of firearms, they do work on all makes and models of firearms in need of repair or rebuilding.

I watched one of the gunsmiths installing a barrel liner into a worn out .22 caliber rifle to bring it back to the function and accuracy it had about a zillion shots ago. NuLine can also do magic to those well shot out Model 12s by welding up and re-machining the worn out bolt

and action slide rails inside the receiver. As in any full service gunsmithing facility, they offer full refinishing of firearms – including bluing, plating and wood refinishing to bring new life to a precious heirloom.

A trip 'downstairs' led me to a room overflowing with machinery that allows NuLine to produce parts – such as the stainless magazine tubes for the Winchester Super X-1 as well as other parts and screws that have been exhausted from original inventory.

As we continued the tour, I was quite taken by the test fire room. Almost every gun that gets repaired, rebuilt, or serviced usually requires a few test shots to ensure proper function. It was a small room with a glass window on the outside wall. I was actually in a well built cider block and steel lined room where all the test firing is done – right out the window! This window faced down hill into a heavily wooded safe area, allowing the gunsmith to stay warm within the building and still do the necessary test firing. (One of the many perks of being waaay out on the farm and far from the city lights).

I can say without reservation that I was thoroughly impressed by this excellent gunsmithing facility. Not only because of the huge amount of spare parts on hand, but also by the quality of the full service work. All of the technicians at NuLine are well experienced professionals with many years of experience and know-how. It certainly shows.

It's also very reassuring to know that many of those fine old Winchester guns still have a good supply of parts and will be able to remain in service for many years to come – thanks to the foresight of Jerry Stevens. ■

Give them a call at 573-676-5500 or visit them at www.nulineguns.com