

Brief History of The Winchester Repeating Arms Company

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Drawing of Winchester Headquarters, New Haven, CT

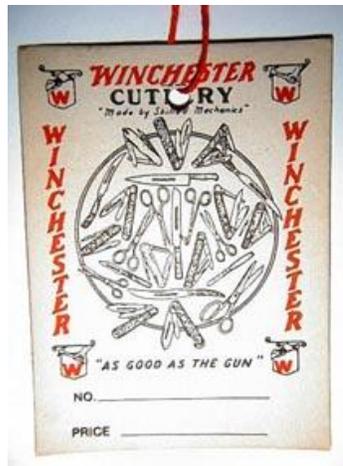
Another great venture capitalist, Oliver F. Winchester, was the founder of a manufacturing company that shared a common history with Simmons Hardware Co. The time period for this was from 1922 until 1929, when the hardware related interests of the two companies merged to become The Winchester Simmons Company.

Mr. Winchester, familiarly known as "Governor Winchester", was born in Boston, MA, November 30th, 1810. In his twenties, he worked at the carpenter's trade in various cities, becoming a master carpenter before he reached his majority. His entry into the business arena in 1834, was as a Men's Furnisher in Baltimore, MD. In 1848, he came to New Haven Ct, where he engaged successfully in manufacturing.

In 1855, Mr. Winchester became interested in firearms and organized a company known as the Volcanic Arms Company, which purchase an invention called the Volcanic Repeating Rifle. In order to extend its activities, the company was reorganized on April 25th, 1857, under the name of the New Haven Arms Company.

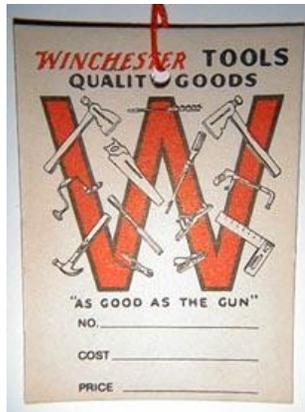
After a great deal of experimental work, Mr. Winchester engaged Mr. B. Tyler Henry, an inventor, to assist in the improvement of the Volcanic rifle. The Henry Repeating Rifle was the result of this move. The business grew steadily and toward the close of the Civil War, 1864-1865, numerous rifles were in service

In 1865, to provide for the further expansion of the business, a new company, the Henry Repeating Arms Company was chartered. The name was changed in 1866 to the Winchester Repeating Arms Company. The company's Model '66 Winchester was the first successful repeating rifle in the world. By 1872, its factory had grown until it covered an area of two acres and stepped into the manufacture of metallic cartridges.



The Winchester Store String Tag

From these beginnings the business grew steadily. Winchester expanded facilities and its manufacturing plant at New Haven covered over eighty acres of ground and was recognized as the leader as well as the pioneer in arms and ammunition manufacture, and the name "Winchester" was known the world over as a synonym for quality and service.



The Winchester Store String Tag

Following the end of World War I, they made the decision to manufacture tools as well as firearms and ammunition. Partly this was done to better utilize their plants and equipment which had been beefed up to meet the demands for steel-related war goods. However they did not have much success in distributing these tools and hardware goods on a national scale. Distributed under "The Winchester Store", they launched a nationwide marketing campaign.



Winchester Store Sign

Photo contributed by Darrel Bradley

Around 1919, the company expanded into other areas of manufacture and product distribution, even going so far as to come close to having "retail" stores, putting the famous Winchester brand on nearly everything from tools, sporting goods to houseware and hardware items, with its slogan being"As Good As The Gun".



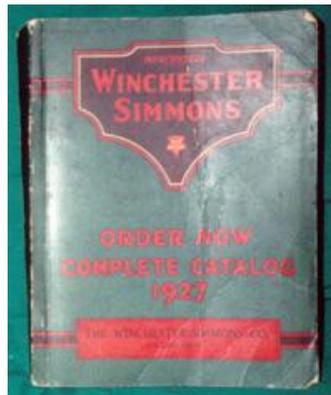
The Winchester Store Logo

In 1922 Winchester Repeating Arms Company merged with Simmons Hardware Company. This new company was known as The Winchester-Simmons Company.



Winchester-Simmons Co. Letterhead

Here are some interesting and collectible items bearing the names of both companies.



Winchester-Simmons Co. 1927 Catalog
Photo from Simmons and Co. Auctioneers Archives



Winchester-Simmons Wooden Wheelbarrow
Photo contributed by Dean and Marilyn Perkins

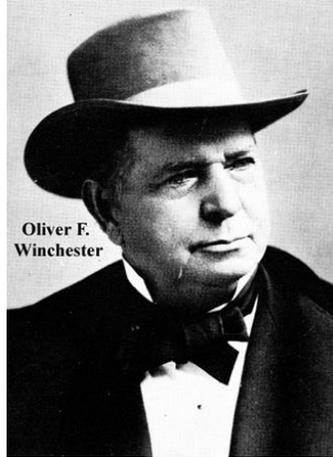


Winchester-Simmons Razor Display
Photo contributed by Bob Simmons

This merger was a financial disaster for both companies. In March of 1929, the Simmons Hardware Company announced that they were reverting to their original status and the name Winchester would no longer appear in conjunction with Simmons Hardware

By 1931, Winchester was in bankruptcy and no longer producing tools. Subsequent mergers and partnerships changed the name and look of the Winchester logo. It was Winchester-Western for a while, starting in 1931 and today, Winchester™ is produced and marketed by the Olin Corporation.

Mr. Winchester was a public spirited citizen, serving as first a Republican state elector, a city commissioner in New Haven and finally in 1866, he was elected Lieutenant Governor of Connecticut. He contributed freely to religious, educational and other similar causes---one of his most notable gifts being the property on which the Yale University Observatory is located. Although Mr. Winchester died September 10, 1880, this man of the most upright character and the organization which he founded has continues through the many years of its development, to follow the inspiration of its first leader.



Oliver Frederick Winchester
Founder of Winchester Repeating Arms Company

Some Interesting Links

www.thewinchesterstore.com
<http://www.winchestercollector.org/>

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- **THCKK is a not-for-profit organization formed in March of 1996. It serves to distribute information and provide an interactive forum about vintage hardware companies such as E.C. Simmons, (Keen Kutter), A.F. Shapleigh (Diamond Edge)and The Winchester Store (and the popular collectibles bearing their logos and associated house brands)as well as other historically interesting hardware companies such as "Our Very Best" (Hibbard, Spencer & Bartlett), Blue Grass (Belknap Hardware), Stanley, etc. are included as interest dictates(Witte, Wyeth, Lee, Sargent, etc)**

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