

THE FREDERICK WEEDMARK JR. ANTIQUE FIREARM

Prepared by Lloyd Westbrook – February, 2002

This firearm came into my possession on Dec. 29, 2001, right after the funeral of my first cousin, Marian Herdman (Lauber). Marian was one of two daughters by Osborne and Eunice Lauber (Weedmark). Their other daughter, Carie Flegg (Lauber), and husband Jim Flegg, received the firearm from Aunt Evelyn Henry (Weedmark), in order to keep this piece of family history in a direct Weedmark line. Jim and Carie held this firearm for about twenty five years, circa 1975-2000. At this time, Jim and Carie Flegg passed the gun onto Jim and Marian Herdman. Jim and Marian held the gun for about a year and a half until Marian's death. My grandmother, Emily Weedmark (Grawbarger), and her daughter, Evelyn Henry, confirmed to Jim and Carie Flegg, that this firearm had been passed down through the Weedmark line, the original owner being Frederick Weedmark Jr. This antique was passed down to son Hiram Weedmark from Frederick Weedmark Jr.

My Aunt, Evelyn Henry (Weedmark), a daughter of Hiram and Emily Weedmark (Grawbarger), was the last person to fire this gun according to Carie and Jim Flegg, and Jim Herdman, as related to them by Aunt Evelyn. This last firing would have been circa 1930, while out hunting ground hogs with her father Hiram Weedmark, with Evelyn blowing the head off a ground hog with the gun's final shot. Evelyn normally used a .22 rifle to hunt ground hogs, as their holes were a real danger to the few livestock and horses they had at the homestead in Beachburg, Ontario. Evelyn was a crack shot according to all that knew her. Anyone who new Aunt Evelyn would be shocked or amused to hear this, as she was a kindly, mild-mannered soul, who would not harm most living things. Such was small community country life though, in the early to mid 1900's.

I visited Halton Regional Police, where I spoke with the Area Firearms Officer, Constable Elizabeth Arsenault on Jan 02, 2002. She directed me to see gunsmith Gary Howe, at "Shooter's Choice," at 631 Colby Drive, in Waterloo, Ontario, N2V 1B4, 519-746-6394. This was to identify the firearm and determine if a permit was required. On Jan. 07, 2002, Mr. Howe determined (see attached note) that the firearm was manufactured in Belgium, prior to 1891, because of the proof mark found on the firearm. In conversation with Mr. Howe about this, he related that the firearm was a 12 gauge muzzle loader shotgun. It is a percussion type gun, using percussion

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caps to ignite the powder to fire the gun. The Belgium Proof mark on the gun is a circle, containing three lines of identification; the first line in the circle had the letter "E," the second line had the letters "L.G.," and the third line had a "picture of a five pointed star symbol," on it. In 1891, and thereafter, Belgium guns had the same proof mark, except that on top of the circle, a picture of a crown was added. There is little value to the gun except as a family keepsake. It is a **bonafide antique** because of the Proof marking on the gun, showing that the date was prior to 1891, and **requires no firearm licensing**. Mr. Howe also stated **this gun is not in good enough condition to shoot**. The Proof Mark indicates that muzzle loading shotguns used standard load, rather than proof load. This gun used black powder.

This double barrel shotgun was loaded by pouring powder down the barrels; then an over powder wad was inserted to hold the powder in place; then a filler wad was inserted; then shot was poured in; and finally an overshot wad was placed in. After each of these steps, a push rod (attached underneath the barrels) packed each section of the load appropriately into place. Finally the gun was stood on end, with the barrels pointing skyward. The gun hammers would be pulled back to the half-cock position, and percussion caps would be placed on the nipples to ready the gun for firing. To fire the gun, the gun hammers would be pulled all the way back to the full cock position, and you would be ready to shoot by squeezing the triggers. The hammers would strike the percussion caps, causing a small explosion sending fire into the barrels to ignite the powder. This antique firearm is original and genuine according to Mr. Howe, with the exception of the wood push rod. The original push rod would have had a metal piece attached at the end of the rod that would have been a perfect fit for the gun barrels to insure proper packing of the gun's load. The original push rod probably had to be replaced at some point, or the metal end part had worn out and was not replaced. After cleaning and oiling the gun and barrels, percussion caps would be placed on the nipples prior to loading the barrels. The gun would be fired once prior to installing their loads, so that the gun barrels would be dried out and ready to accept proper loading of the gun.

These percussion type muzzle loading shotguns were manufactured prior to 1891, and as far back as 1810. Shells for shot guns started coming on the scene circa 1860's and 1870's. **Mr. Howe estimates this gun was manufactured in the middle 1800's.**

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Some tips for cleaning and storage are as follows:

- this firearm should not be kept in the carry bag, unless it is slightly open and ventilated, and only if it is at room temperature. If the gun is kept in a cool or damp place and the carry bag is closed, it encourages rusting of all metal pieces. Basically, the carry bag is used for transporting the gun only.
- the gun is cleaned by using a good grade gun oil and spray. Currently, Remington "Rem Oil," spray with Teflon lubricant, is being used. The whole exterior of the gun is sprayed, including the wooden stalk, and simply wiped off with a cloth. You may spray inside the barrels, but they should be wiped out after as well.
- if the gun is openly displayed, it should be cleaned once a month; if displayed in a glass case (enclosed), cleaning need only be done once every six months.

Mr. Gary Howe had the whole gun apart, cleaning rust off all the metal parts, and oiling same. He did a great job, but did not try to disassemble the wooden stalk for fear of damaging it. Proper cleaning will maintain its current condition, and hopefully last for centuries to come, as a **Bonafide Weedmark Heirloom and Antique.**

I find it interesting and indeed proof that the dating of this antique firearm definitely prior to 1891, and probably manufactured in the mid 1850's, shows it must have belonged to Frederick Weedmark Jr., as his son, Hiram, was not born until 1867. Hiram would have been much too young, or not born yet, to have bought and handled a gun of this stature. Of course we have the story of Hiram's wife and daughter passing the information of ownership down to us as further confirmation.

(Interesting Note – Fred Weedmark JR's father, Frederick, died in 1863. It is possible he might have owned this gun originally, putting it in the hands of our first Weedmark ancestor to come to Canadian soil. However, we do not have any proof of this.) I am told by Carie Flegg that a powder horn was passed down with this firearm, but it has been misplaced at some point.

I am passing this antique firearm on to my nephew, Douglas Stewart, grandson of Myra Muriel Westbrook (Weedmark). It is my hope that this Weedmark antique will be kept in a direct Weedmark line in the foreseeable future.