

# Moline firearm auction house sells history

By Jonathan Turner

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**MOLINE** — If some of the guns at Rock Island Auction Company talked, they'd shoot off some pretty tall tales. And they'd all be true.

Owner Pat Hogan, who launched the world-renowned business 15 years ago, is happy to offer his own rapid-fire delivery.

"Look at this over here," he often says to a visitor viewing the staggering array of firearms at his 23,000-square-foot facility at 4507 49th Ave.

Mr. Hogan's favorite gun of the 2,500-some to be sold at a premiere auction this weekend is a Colt Dragoon Revolver, manufactured in 1852, "with a deluxe factory engraving, fancy, highly figured walnut grips and is complete with a factory English-style case and accessories," according to the full-color, highly detailed auction catalog.

The revolver — appraised at up to \$260,000 — has a polished blue finish on the barrel and cylinder, a case-hardened loading lever, frame and hammer and silver-plated

trigger guard and back strap. It's embellished with the scarce Hartford "donut scroll" pattern engraving employed by Colt in 1851-52.

"This is a work of art," Mr. Hogan said Thursday. "I love the history."

The intricate designs, delicate engravings, sculpted ivory grips, rarity of manufacture, pristine conditions and unique places in history occupied by these firearms make them so valuable. And Rock Island Auction (RIA) sells more antique and collectible firearms than any comparable business in the world, said vice president Judy Voss.

"It's an artwork. People see it that way," she said. "You learn about the engraving, the history. It's amazing."

Ms. Voss said the revolvers, rifles and other guns are "an investment. A lot of people, instead of putting money in a bank or the stock market, are putting it into collectibles, like jewelry and fine art. That's why we think the business is doing so well."

This investment is stable and appreciates in value year after year, she said. RIA has

done a lot more national marketing in the past few years, including full-page ads in *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *Chicago Tribune* and *Baltimore Sun*. It heavily promotes its catalogs and Web site, [www.rockislandauction.com](http://www.rockislandauction.com).

The company achieved \$28.6 million in auction sales last year, of which it takes a percentage based on the item sold, including several world records. One was last December's sale of an early 1850s Colt Belt Model Paterson Revolver for \$414,000.

Ms. Voss said it came from a Pennsylvania man selling his stepfather's collection for his mother so she could buy a new car. An initial collector offered \$8,000 for it. The seller later invited Mr. Hogan to inspect it, and it was estimated it would sell for \$275,000 because of its condition and rarity.

The family ended up selling it for \$850,000 in an RIA auction.

"Firearms collecting is really big," Ms. Voss said. "It's bigger than we thought all over the world."

"We're after the collector. They're the ones that have expendable income," she said. "They're the ones that spend to get what they want."

Typically, people come to RIA to sell after the death of the collector or a divorce, Ms. Voss said.

"We get our stuff through human calamity," Mr. Hogan agreed. "Most of these guys don't give them up while they're still breathing. It's a

very passionate endeavor. It can be very expensive. Some guys will collect with such a fervor."

That applies equally to Mr. Hogan, who has a wide variety of Smith & Wesson guns behind glass cases in a vault at RIA.

"You're looking at American folk art," he said, noting most gun collectors collect something else, like art or coins. And they often collect every variation of the gun.

That's certainly true in a large display of an entire 1892 Winchester collection of 14 rifles, valued at up to \$162,750.

This weekend's auction, which starts at 10 a.m. today, also includes:

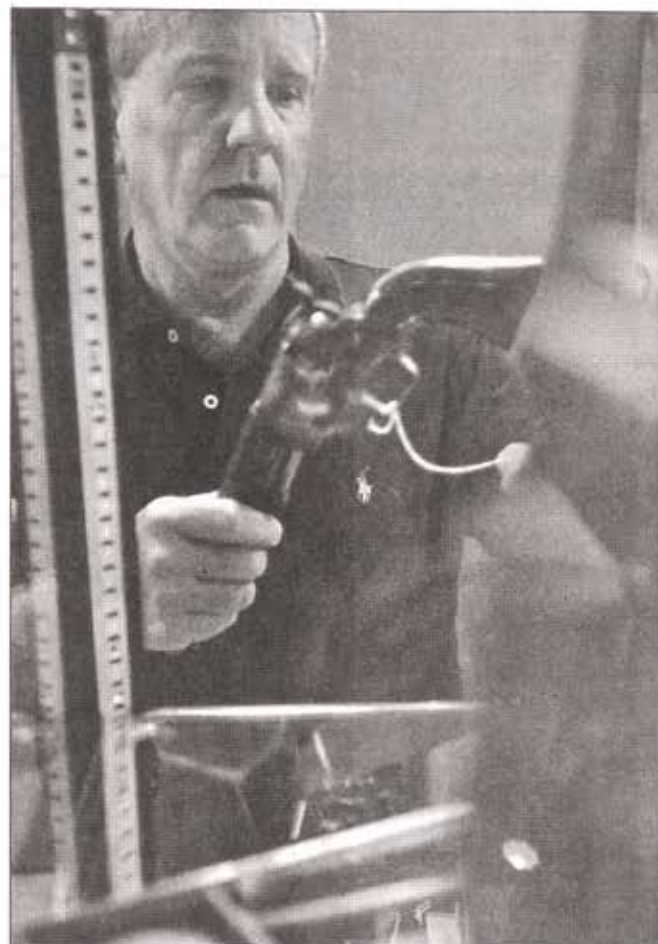
► A Colt Thunderer revolver that belonged to Pat Garrett, the New Mexico sheriff who shot and killed the infamous outlaw "Billy the Kid" in 1881 (valued at up to \$275,000).

► A pair of Navy revolvers presented to the commander who led "The Charge of the Light Brigade" by the inventor of the Colt firearm, Samuel Colt (estimate: \$225,000 to \$375,000).

► A Winchester rifle with seven gold inlaid animals (no other Winchester rifle is known to have more than six) and a carved walnut stock and inscribed gold plaque (estimate: \$190,000 to \$280,000).

A public viewing begins today at 10 a.m. Viewing also can be done between 8 and 10 a.m. on the auction days which run through Monday.

Though in Moline, the



Patrick Traylor / staff

Patrick Hogan, president of the Rock Island Auction Company, pulls a Colt Revolver out of its case. The revolver was presented by Sam Colt to the British commander of the famous charge of the Light Brigade during the Crimean War. The gun is part of the collection featured during the company's premiere antique firearms auction on Saturday through Monday at the company's showroom and warehouse at 4507 49th Ave. in Moline.

company is called Rock Island Auction in honor of the Rock Island Arsenal where many of the guns were made or refurbished, Mr. Hogan said. "When they see RIA, they know exactly where we're at."