



Lot 6: Documented Factory Engraved Winchester Model 1873 Lever Action Rifle with Extremely Rare Seven-Leaf Express Sights, Factory Letter and R.L. Wilson Letter Attributing to John Ulrich



Auction: 72

Serial Number: 402762B

Manufacturer: Winchester

Model: 1873

Gauge: 44 WCF

Barrel: 24 inch octagon

Finish: blue/nickel

Grip: N/A or Unknown

Stock: walnut

Condition:

Very good. 20% of original nickel plating remain (mostly in the protected areas), otherwise the rifle has a mottled gray patina with some minor pitting. The wood is good with a couple sizeable chips missing near the upper tang, some chipping near the metal surfaces and some minor pressure dents and scratches. The lever is loose; the action functions properly. An extremely rare Ulrich engraved Model 1873 with factory documented African safari type sights for only the serious Winchester collector who seems to have it all!

Description:

The accompanying factory letter lists this rifle with an octagon barrel in .44 caliber, set trigger, sling and swivel, factory engraving at an added cost of \$2.50, nickel trims, and 7-leaf express and Beach sights when it was received in the warehouse on December 22, 1891, and shipped on December 24. A letter from noted firearms historian and author R.L. Wilson describing this rifle in full detail is also included. The engraving consists of scrollwork and borders. A running deer is engraved inside a circular panel on the left side plate. The scrollwork extends to the forend cap, dust cover, cartridge elevator and buttplate tang. In his letter Wilson identifies the engraving as "classic Ulrich family American scroll" and "the probable engraver of this rifle was John Ulrich." (A similar factory engraved rifle is pictured and described in R.L. Wilson's "Winchester Engraving" on page 194.) The rifle is equipped with factory documented Beach and 7-leaf express rear sights, a combination associated with African safari hunting. The first six leaves to the rear sight feature inlaid silver sight lines and are numbered 1-6 respectively. The seventh and final leaf is graduated from 7-10 for 700 to 1,000 yards. According to Winchester expert and author George Madis, "[special order sights] will be rarely found on antique Winchester; very few people would specify non-standard sights." In fact, Madis' study only shows one example with a leaf sight, and that was only a 3-leaf. The sights on this rifle suggest a special order by a buyer who was an experienced hunter and alludes to hunting expeditions in foreign lands. The type of rear sight on this rifle is more generally associated with the big game rifles produced by famed London makers such as Purdey and Holland & Holland. Wilson states in his letter that not even a single 1 of 1,000 Model 1873 rifle had the type of sight combination as seen on this rifle. The top barrel flat is marked with the two-line address/patent dates information ahead of the rear sight. The upper tang has the model marking, and the lower tang has the serial number. Sling swivels are attached to the forend cap and underside of the buttstock. The type of sling swivels have been identified by Wilson as a rare feature on Model 1873. Mounted on a smooth forearm and straight grip stock fitted with a crescent buttplate featuring a trapdoor (cleaning rod not included). The rifle has a half blue/half nickel finish. According to Madis, "Half-plated finishes, in which the receiver and trimmings were plated, was not as favored as full plating."