The original Marlin 1894 (bottom) chambered short-action WCF rounds, like the 1892 Winchester. Both rifles are shown here with tang sights, popular and useful on lever-action carbines

The Model 1891, Marlin's first successful .22 lever rifle, owes some of its popularity to Annie Oakley, who used it in her shooting exhibitions.

The Lever

Rifles of John Mahlon Marlin

By Wayne van Zwoll
B&C Professional Member
Photos courtesy of Author

He came of age as Henry rifles anchored a lever-action empire. But Marlin carbines outlived the Winchester 94 – and the Savage 99. Now they put .30-06 punch under the hammer!

A pair of 330-horse diesels bleached our wake. We'd motored out of Wrangell on sun-shot water, hitting light chop as we cleared Prince of Wales Island. A red dusk settled onto the Pacific, its reflected light a shimmering aisle to Japan. "Bear Necessity" muscled through the waves at seven knots.

Alaska's 40,000 miles of shoreline exceeds that of the entire Lower 48. Circumnavigating Prince of Wales Island alone is a 400-mile trip. We'd need our 1,200-gallon diesel reserve, as even in quiet seas this 52-foot boat drank a gallon a mile.

Hunting by boat makes sense in southeast Alaska, where some areas get 18 feet of rain each year. Coastal mountains vault from barnacled beaches that hem dense forests with a shelf of jagged black rock. We could travel far in a boat, with clear views of tidal flats where foraging bears sought new grass.

"I've never hosted a hunter with a .30-30," admitted Mark Gala, thumb crooked easily over the wheel. "To tell you the truth, I'm not thrilled about it. These bears run big. The cover's thick."

We anchored in a cove ringed by the dilapidated buildings of an abandoned fishing village. Next evening, when seas laid down for the skiff, Mark and I motored into the bay and up a small stream. We moored with a long line to a rock. Alaska's seas can rise and fall 20 feet in six-hour tidal swings; careless mooring can leave your boat beached or adrift!

Donning packs, we followed bear trails through wet tidal grass. Presently, Mark spied two bruins at timber's edge, 150 yards distant. We waded a stream, careful not to splash. On hands and knees, I led, bulling through the dense growth, clutching the Marlin. Then the wind pivoted. "It's over," hissed Mark.

Instantly, the sow melted into the trees. The boar paused. About 90 steps. Kneeling, I pegged his elbow and fired. The 170-grain flatnose struck audibly. The animal plunged into the conifers.

We found no blood for 30 steps; then it painted a clear trail. We inched through dark-green rain-forest that soon closed in to hide everything more than an arm's-length distant. When the bear moved, my carbine came to cheek instantly and seemed to fire itself. But the animal was heart-shot, breathing its last.

Unlikely Genesis

Born May 6, 1836, near Windsor Locks in Hartford County, Connecticut, John Mahlon Marlin became an apprentice machinist soon after turning 18. His contract with American Machine Works provided him with a job until he reached the "full and entire age of twenty-one years." In return, Marlin agreed to work unpaid for six months, then join the payroll at $1.50 per week. After a year, he would get $2.50, then receive 50-cent increases for each six-month period—if not discharged, "without recourse or complaint, for any disobedience or insubordination."

In 1863, the New Haven directory listed John M. Marlin's home address as 130 James Street. He changed quarters at least six times during the next 10 years but was probably living in Hartford from 1867 to 1869. He may well have worked for Colt. His first gun patents—February 8 and April 5, 1870—show a Hartford address. By 1864 John Marlin was married to Martha Susan Moore, who bore him four children.

Before he became a husband, John Mahlon Marlin was a gunmaker. But lever rifles, for which the name became famous, lay far in the future. The first Marlins were single-shot, derringer-style, rimfire pistols, "Never Miss" and "Victor." Between 1863 and 1880, Marlin shipped 16,000. In 1870 he added single-action revolvers. The "OK" and "Little Joker" were solid-frame pocket models with spur triggers, initially in .22 Short. Heavier tip-up models in friskier chamberings followed. The mechanism most likely descended from a Rollin White design patented in 1855. In 1861 a near-copy of the White revolver, built by Smith & Wesson, was marketed by the Manhattan Firearms Company, then the American Standard Tool

Wayne (left) killed this Alaska bruin with Mark Gala of Peak 'n' Seas Outfitters. He used a Marlin 336 in .30-30 with a Leupold 2-1/2x scope.

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Company. In 1872 John Marlin evidently acquired rights to manufacture the Smith & Wesson pistol. White's original patent had by that time expired.

In 1887, Marlin introduced a double-action, tip-up revolver in .38 centerfire for $11. It remained in production only two years. By 1889, John Marlin had registered 10 handgun patents. Meanwhile, he'd begun building rifles, beginning in 1875 with Ballards. The 1861 single-shot by C.H. Ballard saw some action in the Civil War. Later it was manufactured by several firms before Marlin weighed in. Rejecting the Merwin-Bray improvement, Marlin employed his own reversible firing pin that allowed use of both centerfire and rimfire cartridges. Marlin listed 20 versions of the Ballard, .22 rimfire to .45-100. Spartan hunting models cost about $22. Target rifles with Schuetzen stocks and spirit-level sights went for $75 to $90. Marlin ceased Ballard production in 1890, after about 40,000 rifles.

John Marlin's first repeating rifle, with underhammer lever action and tubular magazine, didn't sell. Marlin abandoned it for a new design, announced in 1882. Six years later it was named the Model 1881. Incorporating patents by Andrew Burgess, H.F. Wheller and E.A.F. Topperwein, this side-loading, top-ejecting repeater came in .45-70 and .40-60. Its 28-inch octagon barrel with 10-shot magazine was joined later by 24- and 30-inch barrels of various contours. Marlin trimmed the receiver in 1885. At 8½ pounds with carbine barrel, this version was 2 pounds lighter than the original. A small-frame follow-up, another pound lighter, appeared in .32-40 and .38-55. First priced at $32, the Model 1881 eventually came with options: a set trigger, checkering, engraving, case-hardening.

When John Marlin submitted his 1881 for military trials, it started well, firing 10 shots in seven seconds. Then a cartridge exploded in the magazine. There were no injuries and no cause was given. But the Army dismissed the rifle.

A nettling fault of Marlin's 1881 was unreliable feeding from magazine to carrier. A split carrier with a wedge to expand it in operation resolved that issue. Offered in several forms, including one with a smooth bore, the gun was dropped in 1891 after some 20,000 copies. Its top ejection would be eliminated in subsequent Marlins, beginning with the Model 1889.

In 1884, Marlin was issued patents for a top-ejecting lever-action .22 rifle. Although it was never produced, patents granted that year to Remington designer Lewis L. Hepburn gave Marlin a terrific boost.

Lever Action Revival!

Marlin enthusiasts were blessed in 2005 by Hornady's introduction LEVERevolution ammunition. Designed expressly for tube-fed lever rifles, it features pointed bullets safe for use when rounds are held bullet tip-to-primer under spring pressure. During recoil, a hard, sharp tip could act like a firing pin to set off the cartridge in front. For years the only option was a flat- or round-nose bullet: a ballistic loser. Then Hornady's Dave Emary came up with a resilient polymer tip that deforms when pressed against a primer, but instantly regains its form when the pressure is removed. The sleek form of what are now called FTX or FlexTip bullets in flight ensure flatter arcs, higher retained energy. Frisky charges of new powders in LEVERevolution yield higher starting speeds as well. The idea was applied not only to traditional whitetail rounds, but newer options like the potent .450 Marlin. A 160-grain .30-30 bullet from the LEVERevolution load leaves a 20-inch barrel at 2,300 fps and at 250 yards hits half again as hard as standard softpoints.

The September following my Alaskan bear hunt, I hiked into Utah's mountains with that Marlin carbine—but with Hornady's new loads. Just after sunrise one day I heard elk sifting through the aspens. Playing the wind, I eased into the herd. Suddenly a bull sounded off, so close his bellow seemed to shake the trees! Only a small tangle separated us. I found a shot alley and fired just as the animal saw me. At 19 yards he wilted to the blast of my Marlin.

Some say the .30-30 isn't adequate for elk. But a 1939 survey of 2,200 elk hunters in my state of Washington put it and the .30 Remington (a rimless .30-30) atop the popularity chart. Hunters who fire at game 400 yards off with a .30-06 can hardly dismiss the .30-30's greater punch at 50!

That Marlin finished the season with a mule deer and a pronghorn, at 155 and 160 yards. The next year I picked up another Marlin, a stainless 336 in .308 Marlin Express, a new Hornady cartridge. Its 160-grain bullet at 2,660 fps almost matches Winchester's .308. Zeroed at 250 yards, the .308 Marlin Express lands 3 inches high at 100 and 1.7 high at 200. At 300, it strikes 6.7 inches low. There it's still moving at over 2,000 fps, towing 1,450 foot-pounds of energy. Pressure under 47,000 psi. I managed to kill a New Mexico elk with that iron-sighted rifle, still-hunting in close cover.

Dave Emary wasn't done. In the next months he fashioned an even more potent cartridge for the Marlin 1895. Based loosely on the .376 Steyr, the .338 Marlin Express starts a 200-grain bullet at 2,565 fps, scribing arc like that of a 180-grain .30-06 bullet to 300 yards. Energy at 400 is nearly identical.

Marlin lever rifles in .308 ME and .338 ME have disproved the notion that only bolt guns deliver long-range precision. Scoping my Marlin in .338 ME with a Grey Bull-modified Leupold 2.5-8x36, I once fired prone at a gong target the size of deer vitals, one shot each at 100, 200, 300, 400, 500 and 600 yards. All stayed well within the disk. Few bolt-action sporters would have done better!

The resilient polymer tip of LEVERevolution bullets gives them sleek form for flat flight and long-range punch—without compromising safety in the magazine.

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Prone, Wayne fired one shot each at 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, and 600 yards into this gong with a Marlin 1895 in .338 ME and a GreyBull/Leupold scope. No sighting shots. Fine Accuracy!

One of the first animals taken with LEVERevolution ammo, this pronghorn fell to Wayne's .30-30 Marlin at 160 yards. The grip repair? His partner ran over the rifle with a truck the day before.

The Hepburn Connection

Born in 1832, Lewis Hepburn built muzzle-loading rifles in his own shop from 1855 until 1871, when he joined Remington. A fine shot as well as a prolific designer, Lewis fired with the Creedmoor team to beat the defending Irish sharpshooters in 1874. He also developed the Remington-Hepburn No. 3 single-shot breech-loading rifle. Remington's financial crisis in 1886 sent Lewis to Marlin, where he used his considerable talent in the design and manufacture of the lever-action Models 1888, 1889, 1891, 1892, 1893, 1894, 1895 and 1897. In January 1910, Hepburn slipped on ice and broke his hip. It refused to heal. Bedridden, he lingered four years, dying in August 1914.

A growing demand for lightweight rifles blessed the Hepburn-designed Model 1888. Chambered in .32-20, .38-40 and .44-40, with barrels of 16 to 44 inches, it was available in many configurations. The 24-inch model held 16 rounds, weighed 6½ pounds, cost $18. Fewer than 5,000 were made before Marlin dropped the 1888 in 1892. Its successor, Marlin's side-ejecting Model 1889, was chambered for the same Winchester (WCF) cartridges. The most popular version was a .44-40 (.44 WCF) with 24-inch octagon barrel. But one customer ordered a 54-inch barrel, and Marlin built many 1889s with short magazines and pistol grips. Take-downs too. A saddle-ring carbine sported a 15- or 20-inch barrel. This great rifle faded away in 1895; eight years later, the last of its production run of 55,119 left the plant.

Lewis L. Hepburn had another hit with the Model 1891, Marlin's first successful .22 rimfire lever rifle. Side ejection, easy access to the action, and exhibition shooting by Annie Oakley sold this $18 rifle to the walls. A .32 rimfire version appeared in 1892, with the same interchangeability of Long and Short ammunition as offered in the .22. And .32 centerfire rounds could be used by changing the firing pin! In 1896, after a production run of 18,000, the Model 1891 gave way to the 1892. The new rifle looked much like its predecessor but had a better trigger and a firing pin block to prevent accidental discharge. Marlin produced more than 40,000 Model 1892s, all in .22 and .32 rimfire. The rifle was dropped in 1915.

Marlin Models 1893, 1894 and 1895 differed little in design from the 1892, but

they had bigger actions. The 1893 ($13.35 to start) handled the .32-40-165 and .38-55-255 cartridges. Its stronger lock-up and two-piece firing pin distinguished it from the Model 1889. The standard version had a 26-inch round barrel marked for smokeless loads. In 1905 the "Grade B" in .32-40 and .38-55 appeared. Stamped "For Black Powder," it was not made of the "Special Smokeless Steel" advertised by Marlin for its other rifles then. The Model 1893 remained in production until 1917, when war changed company priorities. It came back in 1922, when the .30-30 and .32 Special joined the list of chamberings. The rifle remained alive but not always well until 1936, reappearing only briefly between 1939 and 1933.

The Model 1893's short-action counterpart, the 1894, came in .25-20, .32-20, .38-40 and .44-40. At $18, it featured a 24-inch round barrel and case-colored fittings. The lightweight carbine version, with half-magazine and 20-inch barrel in .44-40, scaled just 5½ pounds. Market pressures undercut the price; in 1901 you could buy a standard model for $10.40!

Marlin's Model 1895 was a beefed-up 1893, designed for fatter cases. Initially bored to .38-56, .40-65, .45-70 and .45-90, it added the .40-70 and .33 WCF in 1897 and 1912. The take-down variation cost $3.50 more, bringing base price to $22. Full-length magazines were standard. Barrel lengths: 20 to 32 inches in 2-inch increments, with a surcharge of $1 per inch beyond 32. Carbines wore 15- and 22-inch barrels. A lightweight 1895, in .33 WCF, appeared in 1912, matching the Carbine's weight at 7½ pounds despite its 24-inch barrel.

The success of Marlin's take-down rifles prompted the introduction of a .22 take-down in 1897. It featured a thumb-screw on the receiver that exposed the action and unlocked the barrel. A bicycle version with 16-inch barrel came with a leather-and-canvas case you could strap to a bicycle's frame. The Model 1897 had a case-hardened receiver, hammer, lever and magazine cap. A half-magazine appeared in 1899; so too a magazine cutoff to improve feeding of mixed-length cartridges. The Model 1897 expired in 1916.

War, Swebilius and the 39

John Mahlon Marlin died in 1901, leaving sons Mahlon and John Howard in charge of the firm. On May 16, 1910, Marlin acquired Ideal Manufacturing, a New Haven toolmaker whose products served handloaders. Marlin stamped Ideal tools with its name and added it to the popular Ideal Handbook. Later Marlin sold the brand to Phineas Talcott. Ideal was bought by the Lyman Gun Sight Company in 1925.

Marlin prospered in the years leading to WWI. In 1914 Carl Gustaf Swebilius began designing guns for the company. Born in Sweden, Swebilius came to America in 1896 at age 17. He drilled barrels for Marlin, then worked as toolmaker. Later as chief engineer, Swebilius heavily influenced the design of Marlin sporting arms. He worked for Winchester too. In 1926 he formed the High Standard Manufacturing Company to make deep-hole drills, then five years later bought the defunct Hartford Arms Company to build High Standard pistols. He died late in 1948.

After the Versailles Treaty, the Marlin-Rockwell Corporation (formed in 1916 to manufacture Browning Automatic Rifles and machine guns for the war effort) began to divest itself of holdings. July 23, 1921, the Marlin Firearms Corporation was formed in Delaware, supplanting Marlin-Rockwell. The firm of Hopkins & Allen, recently acquired by Marlin-Rockwell, was tapped to build Marlin guns on H&A designs, from revolvers to hinged-breech shotguns.

The Marlin Firearms Corporation issued its first catalog in 1922, when it

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Hornady's Dave Emary cycles a Marlin in .308 Marlin Express. He developed that potent round and the subsequent .338 ME for Marlin's 24-inch-barreled 336 and 1895 rifles.

The 1895 was Marlin's first rifle to chamber long, big-bore cartridges like the .45-70.

introduced the Model 39, a lever-action .22 based on the 1892 and 1897 rifles. With 24-inch octagon barrel and a distinctive curve at the bottom of its pistol grip, the Model 39 sold for $26.50. It also featured quick take-down and would feed mixed different-length cartridges interchangeably. In 1932 Marlin eliminated a cut aft of the locking lug. An "HS" on subsequent bolts meant they were considered safe for high-speed ammo. The 39A came in 1939, with a coil mainspring, round barrel, beefier forend. After WWII, case coloring on the 39 receiver was replaced by blued finish. This fine .22 is now the oldest U.S. rifle still in production!

Alas, neither the engineering genius of Gus Swebilius nor John Moran's marketing skills could keep the Marlin Firearms Corporation from foreclosure as a heavy mortgage, back taxes, and steep re-organization costs overran tepid post-war demand. February 4, 1924, a foreclosure judgment went to Charles and Lillian Haskell, owed $200,000 on Marlin property. On May 10, the Haskells sold land and buildings to Frank Kenna for $1. Kenna conveyed all (including tax and mortgage obligations) to a newly organized Marlin Firearms Company for the same price.

Born in New Haven June 22, 1874, Frank Kenna, Sr., graduated from Yale's School of Law and established a practice, which he continued until 1939. He started his own advertising agency, dealt in real estate, helped organize the American Bank and Trust Company and served in the state legislature. January 15, 1926, Kenna incorporated the Marlin Firearms Company in Connecticut. During the Depression he didn't ask stockholders for a bailout. "Each preferred stockholder who purchased four shares of stock paid $100. He received a $52 shotgun and $14 in dividends. His net investment on each $100 was $34...."

In March 1929, frustrated rifle designer Charles Newton suggested to Kenna that Marlin build his new Leverbolt Rifle. He offered to split the profits. Kenna was a shrewd bargainer and agreed to test the market, accepting deposits for Leverbolt Rifles. In 1932, Newton's Leverbolt Company solicited hunters. But in the depths of the Depression, the advertising failed to generate the 500 orders Frank Kenna needed.

In 1937 the 11 percent Pittman-Robertson firearms tax bludgeoned gun-makers already struggling with weak demand. Kenna leased Marlin's idle plant space, filling 39 buildings with 110 small industries, some paying as little as $15 monthly rent. In 15 years, Kenna lost just $1,759 in uncollected funds, while rent receipts totaled nearly $2.5 million!

The Great 336

Marlin improved its Model 1893 in 1936, with a fuller forend, fluted comb and new sights. Rifle, Carbine and Sporting Carbine versions of the Model 1936 sold in 1937 for $32 each. Later that year, the designation was shortened to Model 36. Although steel buttplates were listed, apparently only hard rubber was provided, completing a change that began with "shotgun" rubber buttplates as options on 1889 rifles.

Business surged during WWII. Marlin would manufacture 50,000 M1 Garand and 314,000 M1 carbine barrels. Carl Swebilius fashioned a submachine gun: the UDM '42. While prototypes were built by High Standard, Marlin produced more than 15,000 in 9mm Parabellum. War in Korea drew contracts for rifle barrels and components for 20mm wing-mounted Orlikon guns.

Kenna fought the post-war slump by expanding Marlin's product line. Razor blades got plenty of promotion. But the company also sold cartridge belts, clay target throwers and Red Head gun cases—plus shaving cream, watch fobs, bicycles, whistles and handcuffs.

In December, 1947, Frank Kenna died, leaving the company to sons Roger and Frank, Jr. Roger assumed the presidency first. He'd apprenticed beginning in 1945 when Marlin bought the Hunter Arms Company. He'd tried to save L.C. Smith, keeping the shotgun on line until January 16, 1949, when flood damage collapsed the Fulton NY factory's first floor, spilling 14 milling machines into a raceway below. With damage estimates exceeding $75,000, the Fulton plant closed.

Like his father, Roger was a stellar businessman. In 1952 he moved Marlin's office to 715 Fifth Avenue in New York, then grew the Sears, Roebuck account by 50 percent. Roger died in March 1959, at just 49. Frank, Jr., youngest of the five Kenna

Wayne killed this Wyoming bull with a 50-year-old, iron-sighted Marlin 336 in .32 Special. One Hornady bullet through the lungs at 130 yards was enough.

children, took over. A Marine in the Pacific Theatre during WWII, he returned to study mechanical engineering. His apprenticeship came in Marlin's tool room.

In 1948, when Marlin's Model 36 sold for $61.45, it spawned the Model 336. This quintessential deer rifle has become the firm's flagship. In 1953 Marlin introduced "Micro-groove" rifling to replace Ballard-cut rifling. The many narrow, shallow grooves, quickly ironed in with a tungsten carbide button, delivered fine accuracy. First priced at $74, the 336 sold briskly in .30 WCF (.30-30). It thrived for a long time in .32 Special and .35 Remington too, but struggled in .219 Zipper. Only 3,230 Zippers were made before the cartridge left the 336 posting in 1959. Weak demand for this hot .22 confirmed that woodchuck hunters favored bolt guns. Marlin had one of those too, introduced in 1954, on a Sako action. The Model 322 in .222 Remington came with Sako's receiver sight. A switch to slimmer, stainless barrels prompted another label: the 422 Varmint King. Both rifles were gone by 1958. A big-bore bolt gun on FN Mauser metal appeared in 1955 under Marlin's banner. Stocked by Bishop, the Model 455 debuted in .30-06. The .308 and .270 were listed later, but only 59 .308s came off the line, and no .270s. The 455 died in 1959.

During the 1950s Marlin trotted out hammerless Models 56 and 57 lever-action .22 rifles. The 62, a variation of the 56/57, arrived later in .256 Winchester and .30 Carbine. It was designed also for the .22 Jet, but no rifles were so chambered. The 1960s brought a spate of affordable rimfire rifles, including the bolt-action Model 980 in .22 WMR, and a single-shot Model 122 Auto-Safe .22, both on the 81C action, circa 1939. The economical Auto-Safe failed to match the appeal of Marlin's Tom Mix Special, hawked to youngsters for $5.95 in 1937 and 1938. Marlin declared this "a sensational value" at "10 cents a day." But the Model 60 autoloader (1960) proved a hot seller. It remains wildly popular.

Too many levers?

Marlin's Glenfield line, introduced in 1964 to provide chain stores "plain vanilla" versions of the popular 336 lever rifle, survived until 1983. In 1963, Marlin began chambering the 336 in .44 Magnum. After it came the .444 Marlin, .375 Winchester, .45-70 and .356 Winchester. The .356, a rimmed version of the .358, was developed for Winchester's 94 Angle-Eject rifle, introduced by U.S. Repeating Arms. A companion round, the .307 Winchester, was slated for the 336. But only a handful of prototype rifles were finished. Incidentally, Angle-Eject Winchesters came nearly a century after John Mahlon Marlin did away with top ejection in his 1889 rifle. Scopes didn't figure into his decision; keeping empties from the line of sight and dirt out of the action probably did. The closed-top receiver also provided greater strength.

Myriad versions of the Marlin 336 include carbines with full-length magazines and straight grips, plus rifles with pistol grips and half-magazines under barrels as long as 24 inches. The Cowboy in .30-30 and .38-55 featured an octagon barrel and Ballard rifling. The Marauder, built only in 1963 and '64, had a 16¼-inch barrel. The Texan (1954–83) came in at least three variations, with and without saddle ring. One of my favorites, the 336A rifle, with 2/3-length magazine and 24-inch barrel, was manufactured from 1948 to 1962. I bought a .32 Special second-hand and found it one of the smoothest lever guns I've ever used. Equipped with a receiver sight, it helped me drop a fine Wyoming elk with one bullet at 130 yards.

In the mid-60s, Marlin announced the .444 Marlin cartridge and a rifle to fire it. The Model 444 (1965–71) had a straight grip, a 2/3 magazine, a 24-inch barrel in .444 Marlin. Initially loaded with a 240-grain .44 Magnum bullet at 2,400 fps, the .444 later featured 265-grain bullets of greater sectional density. Sporting (22-inch barrel), Outfitter (18½-inch) and XLR (24-inch) rifles came in 1984, 1999, and 2006.

In 1969 Marlin operations moved to a plant in North Haven, and within three years a new Model 1895 debuted, patterned after the original. It came with cut rifling—suitable for cast bullets—and straight-grip stock. Subsequent changes included a pistol-grip stock, Microgroove rifling. A cross-bolt hammer-block safety appeared on Marlin's other centerfire lever rifles as well. Cut checkering became standard in 1994. The 1895G Guide Gun, with 18½-inch ported barrel and cut rifling, arrived in 1998. The porting was later dropped. An identically configured 1895M in .450 Marlin followed in 2000. The 1895 Cowboy in .45-70 joined the series a year later, with a 26-inch octagon barrel and nine-shot magazine.

Meanwhile, Marlin had trotted out a modern short-action Model 1894, beginning in 1969 with a straight-grip .44 Magnum (20-inch barrel). Other chamberings came later, from .357 and .41 Magnums to the .32-20 in a traditional Carbine (2005). Marlin began offering stainless versions of the 1894, 1895 and 336 between 2000 and 2002. Over the last 40 years, the company's lever-action line has welcomed many new entries—and lost many others. CNC (computer, numerically controlled) machining has made minor changes economical, so Marlin and other gun makers can feed the insatiable demand for new product. For an overview of recent Marlins, look to the *Blue Book of Gun Values*. The 33rd edition has 2,432 pages!

In 2000, Marlin bought H&R 1871, the world's largest maker of single-shot rifles and shotguns. The acquisition would later bring hinged-breech Pardner shotguns and Handi-Rifles to Marlin's stable. Marlin has since undergone big structural change. Long a family-held company, and shepherded by Frank Kenna III from 1999 to 2007, it was bought by Remington Arms in December 2007, after Remington sold to The Freedom Group, an investment consortium. By April, 2008, Remington had announced closure of H&R's Gardner, Massachusetts plant. Two years later Marlin's North Haven factory was slated for shut-down. Production moved to the Remington facility at Ilion, New York. The Freedom Group has brought BFI, DPMS, Marlin and H&R under the Remington umbrella—though their product lines remain distinct.

Marlin lever guns appeal to me more with each passing year. It's not just nostalgia. Their quick pointing and easy cycling, their power and accuracy—these assets are truly practical. Still, if the lean carnivorous lines of a traditional lever-action don't jack your pulse, if you can dismiss its taut, solid waist in your hand, that eager, predatory spring to your cheek—well, you'd best check your pulse again! ■