

Richard H. Hicks

Pioneer Contemporary Long Rifle Builder

by Dick Toone

I first met Richard H. Hicks in 1949, when my Mother took me, at age 10, to have two converted percussion fowlers repaired. I don't know how she knew of him, but he was building Pennsylvania-Kentucky rifles in Cinnaminson, New Jersey, out of his gun shop dedicated to antique arms. Both guns were missing hammers and the nipples were beaten closed. The next time we met was a short time later when we returned to pick up the guns. On arriving at the shop, we were told by his wife that he was down the road in the gravel pit shooting a new gun. Mother drove to the pit and I heard the crack of a flintlock rifle for the first time. I had seen blanks "poofed" in the air at Williamsburg, but now I was forever hooked. When finished, Mr. Hicks went back to his shop with us and gave us the repaired guns, both now fully functional, with replacement original hammers and new nipples. I remember his shop was overwhelming with guns everywhere, powder horns, animal mounts, accessories, etc. He took down a Sharps "Buffalo Gun" and showed me how it was loaded with a cartridge that looked like a banana compared to the .22 cal. long rifle round I used in my Stevens Favorite. I bought a large raw steer horn from him so I could make a powder horn, which I made and still have, and I still have the fowlers as well.

A couple of years later, I received a catalog and business card from Richard Hicks saying he had moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico (see photos). In 1972, my wife and our two small sons drove our 1970 Ford Camper Special to Tucson, Arizona, to visit my sister and her family, and on the return trip stopped near Albuquerque where I found Richard Hicks listed in the phone book. He said he was no longer building Pennsylvania longrifles because a war injury to his back hurt when drawing the rifling bar, and there was not much of a market for that kind of a gun in his area. He was now doing sculptures of Indian heads and Western subjects.

Fast forward to January 2011; I thought of Richard Hicks while reading the latest *Muzzle Blasts* and saw a Richard Hicks in the "Last Relay." I quickly checked and it was not the Richard H. Hicks I knew. To my delight Richard Hicks called me in response to the letter I sent wondering if he remembered me.

RICHARD H. HICKS
Muzzle Loading Rifle Smith

SHOP OPEN MONDAY THRU SATURDAY 9 A.M. - 5 P.M.

3024 BARCELONA RD., S. W. ALBUQUERQUE, N. M.

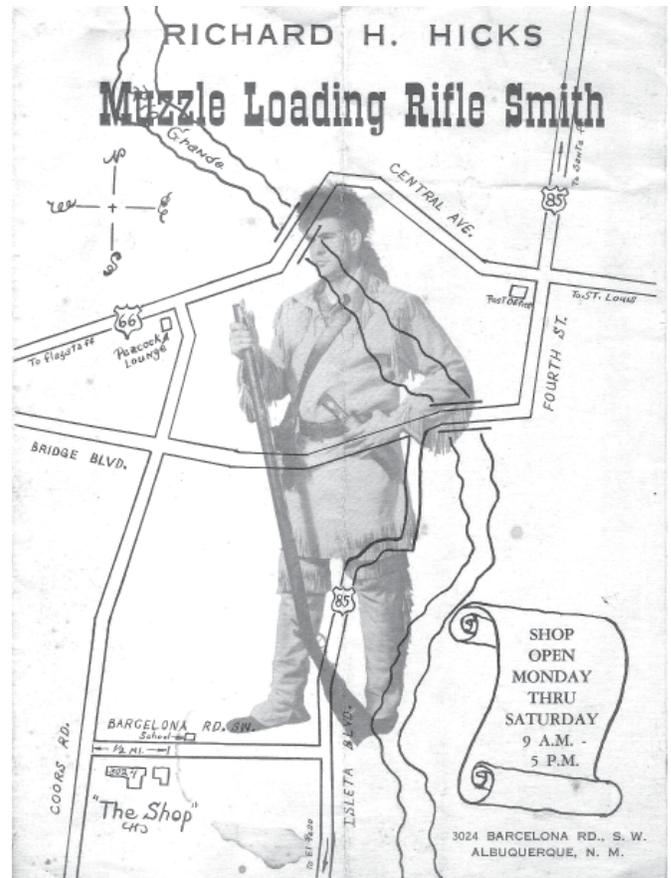
No. 8 STANDARD FIELD GRADE FLINTLOCK RIFLE. These may also be had in regular percussion or auto gun percussion. The stocks are early maple. The barrels are yellow brass. Calibers are .28, .45, and .50. Any length barrel up to 48 inches and any weight may be had from light weight sporting rifles to the massive bench gun. Price includes and starts at extra cost. Prices are: Muzzle gun percussion with patch box \$265.00. Regular percussion with patch box \$210.00. Flintlock with patch box \$225.00, and Double barrel metal breech flint or percussion with patch box \$385.00. These prices include Lyman model, extra nipples or flints, patches and cleaning rod.

No. 8 DELUXE FLINTLOCK PISTOL, shown with early maple stock and silver. These may be had in calibers .38, .45, and .50 and any length barrel. The pistol shown is \$180.00. Patch gun percussion in metal case percussion \$285.00, in regular percussion \$104.50, and in flint \$112.50. This includes Lyman model, extra nipples or flints, patches, and loading rod. These pistols may be made in matched pairs and used with accessories. Prices on request.

All rifles are made and tested with Black Powder.
NO other explosive will function with safety in these guns.

Please feel free to write for further information

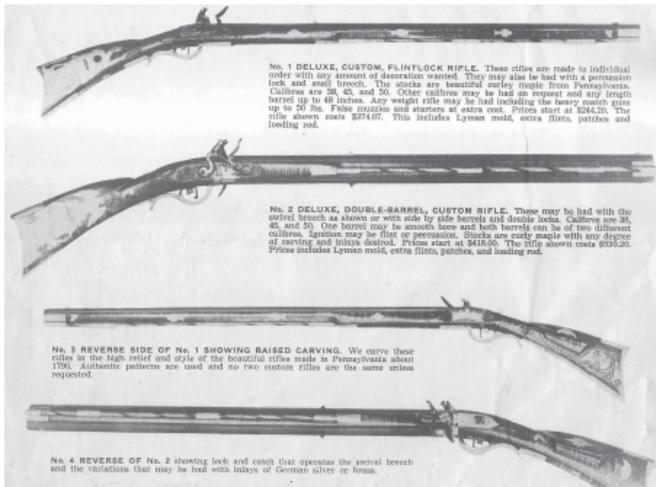
Price List, December, 1955
Subject to Change Without Notice
All Prices Shown Include Federal Excise Tax



As can be seen by the Richard Hicks brochure, he had been a serious flintlock gunbuilder. He confirmed that he had built nearly one hundred guns and that they are numbered and signed "R. Hicks." He said a few years ago he bought back one of his 20 lb. bench flintlocks for considerably more than he sold it for new. Long ago he closed the gun shop and sold off all his tools and inventory.

The purpose of this article is to let those who might have an "R. Hicks" gun in their possession know where and who it was that built it. Richard H. Hicks now lives with his wife in Cedar Crest, New Mexico. His family is descended from the New England Hicks that moved to New Jersey from Long Island, New York. Richard's father had a boat building business that did not survive the depression of 1930s. Richard grew up in his father's boat yard learning to use tools.

In 1942, he enlisted in the U.S. Marines. He was questioned by a grizzled old recruiting Sergeant, "What religion was Quaker?" which Richard had put on his enlistment form. "Never heard of it," the Sergeant said. Richard is related to 19th Century American painter Edward Hicks and his cousin Elias for whom the Hicksite split was named in the 1850s, when the more liberal "Hicksites" separated from the original Society of Friends. Most Quakers are conscientious objectors. Richard's brother and father, also Quakers, served in WW II as well.



After boot camp, Richard shipped aboard a LST for Hawaii, but soon after leaving San Diego, the ship ran aground at night near Catalina Island. As the ship was sinking, the Marines manned the landing crafts and launched at sea. They bobbed around until daylight when they saw an island beach on the horizon. Firing up their engines, they landed on the beach only to come under artillery bombardment from a Navy cruiser off shore. It seems the island was a naval firing range! Richard was the radioman, but could not make contact with the cruiser by radio, so his buddies boosted him up on their shoulders to wave a shirt till the shooting stopped. Another LST was sent to pick them up. Then it was off to Hawaii and the Marshall Islands. Richard landed and fought on three islands, but suffered severe injury on Iwo Jima.

After the war, Richard decided to build reproduction muzzle-loading guns based on a fascination he had developed with the guns from an experience he had with his father at Francis Bannerman's Island, where his father bought him an original flintlock pistol. Richard first started building guns in Plainfield, NJ. He then moved to Cinnaminson, NJ, next to his Uncle Tim's farm which provided him a place to shoot. He rifled barrel blanks and used some barrels from Jack Wycold. He also made some locks, used some originals, and some of Turner Kirklands. He made his own patterns for the brass furniture based on pictures of originals and had them cast at a foundry in Riverside, NJ, a few miles north of Cinnaminson, where he then lived. Richard was literally building the lock, stock, and barrels on his guns and trying to compete in price with originals. Richard moved to Albuquerque in 1950, for warmer weather, but met with little success trying to sell rifles there or at Friendship.

In the late '50s, he applied for a machinist job at Sandia Corporation by driving through the gate and up to the atomic energy plant with some rifles in his trunk to show them what he could do. They hired him as a pattern maker due to the expertise they saw in his rifles. Try that today! Ten years later with his injuries flaring up, Richard took up sculpting at home and that evolved into patterns for molds of Western art reproduced in fiberglass and sold at National Parks in the West.

In 1974, Richard started working in wood and procured a print of Benjamin Franklin's printing press from Independence Hall, in Philadelphia, PA. This brought him back to making things from scratch, involving casting the brass characters, iron forging, as well as the wooden frames. To date Richard has made thirty antique reproduction printing presses including an Adam Ramage press now displayed in the Capitol building in Montgomery, Alabama.



Richard H. Hicks

"MUZZLE LOADING RIFLE SMITH"

Shown with his Hand-Made Reproduction of a Revolutionary Period Flint-LOCK Rifle

By ROBERT KINDLEY

Among its other unique and interesting enterprises Albuquerque boasts of having one of the very few gunsmiths in this country who specialize in building muzzle-loading rifles and pistols — lock, stock and barrel. In his well equipped shop, located at 3024 Barcelona Rd. SW, Dick Hicks turns out excellent reproductions of the famous "Kentucky" rifle with the same hand finished care as did the pioneer gunsmiths of 200 years ago.

Dick is justly proud of the fact that every part of his weapons, from the smallest pin to the finished piece, is made in his shop. The barrels are drilled and reamed in a modern lathe then rifled in a hand-powered rifling machine. Lock parts are sawed from sheet steel or plate and filed to final shape. Brass parts are fashioned from sheet stock or castings and finished by hand. Stocks are sawed from curly maple planks, inletted and patiently finished by hand.

Power tools are utilized to speed up production in the rough work but to actually duplicate an authentic "Kentucky" in appearance and performance the majority of the operations must be performed by hand. In this Dick relies on the skill gained through years of experience with the various hand tools he uses.

In building his rifles Dick can and does duplicate any style of muzzle-loading rifle depending upon the customer's wishes. Barrel lengths may be had up to 48". Caliber depends upon the buyer's choice. The rifle may be either flintlock or percussion, and may be single barrel, double side-by-side, or over and under swivel type.

The long, graceful stocks which lend so much to the beauty of Hick's rifles are made from selected, Eastern curly maple. The barrel, lock parts, brass patch box, butt plate, and all inlays are carefully inletted by hand to give a perfect mating of wood and metal. After sanding the stocks are darkened with an acid-base stain to bring out the characteristic "tiger-stripe" effect of the maple. Then each stock is patiently hand-rubbed with a special oil finish to give it a deep, velvety glow.

Hick's rifles are as accurate as they are beautiful. Each one is carefully targeted before it leaves his shop and will group five shots in a 3" circle at 100 yards. Dick's rifles and pistols have been used in the National Muzzle Loading Matches and have won honors for many of their proud owners. In 1949 a Mr. Green won the Pennsylvania State Championship using a Hick's .45 caliber bench rifle and in 1954 one of Dick's flintlock pistols placed in three of the National Muzzle-loading matches!

For those discriminating shooters who demand the best in workmanship and who want to ban black powder one of Hick's rifles fills the bill. Albuquerque is proud to claim as one of its citizens this 32 year old ex-marine who at a relatively young age seems to have mastered the secret of the famous "Kentucky" rifle and what made it such an excellent weapon. By a combination of modern and pioneer methods this Southwest gunmaker has succeeded in producing flintlocks and percussion rifles and pistols on which any pioneer gunsmith would be proud to stamp his name!

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Now, Richard is 90 years old, a member of the "Greatest Generation," and is retired. He and his wife, have a married son and a daughter. Richard is a pioneer in contemporary longrifle building. He has enough parts to make one more printing press in his garage that he wants to complete someday. There being no Quaker Meeting Houses in the area, he and his wife still host a Friends Meeting in their living room one Sunday a month. **MB**

NMLRA

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Matches held at Camp Atterbury near Edinburg, Indiana. Atterbury is a very active military training base and as such any match may be cancelled due to the range being needed by the military. You must call one week prior to the shoot to be placed on a gate list and confirm the shoot date. Contact Pete Terpstra, (812) 278-9194.