



BY MIKE BELIVEAU

**During the last quarter of the 19th century** there were a number of companies that turned their hands to manufacturing lever action rifles. Names like Evans, Whitney and Spencer have long since faded into obscurity. Only two manufacturers found lasting success in the lever gun market: Marlin and Winchester. Of the two, Winchester was by far the dominant force in the marketplace. Among Old West aficionados, two Winchester models really stand out: the Model 1873 and its John Moses Browning-designed successor, the Model 1892. The 1873 Winchester is often called the gun that won the west. Even though that designation has fueled its share of gunroom debates over the last hundred years, at least the '73 was there. But you'd never know it if you got all of your history from Hollywood movies. According to most of the movies made during the 20th century, the only lever gun on the western frontier was the '92 Winchester. So it's safe to say that, while the '73 Winchester won the "real" west, the model '92 won the "reel" west.

According to Hollywood, 1892 Winchester were used as early as 1843 by Comancheros on the Texas frontier and by Texas lawmen in the 1880s. Right through the 1960s it was rare to see any lever action rifle besides a '92 in an American-made western movie, regardless of the supposed date of the action. The one notable exception was Ray Mann's 1950 classic, *Winchester '73*, starring Jimmy Stewart. As the title suggests, a '73 Winchester played an important part in the story. In that movie they used an actual '73, and we should all be grateful that they didn't just use a '92 and call it a '73. That's exactly what they did in that same film for all the other lever actions used. In several scenes, characters referred to their Henry or Spencer rifles, but each time they were holding a '92 Winchester. If you're any sort of firearms buff, that kind of anachronism makes you wince, and can ruin an otherwise fine film.

To those of us who were raised on Hollywood westerns, the Model 1892 (bottom) was the iconic rifle of the west. But Hollywood's "Reel" rifle wasn't even invented when the Model 1873 (top) was taking the "Real" west.

# A Tale Of TWO LEVER ACTIONS

Timeless classics of the silver screen and real life — Winchester's 1873 and 1892!