

# MASTER COLLECTOR / HISTORIAN PROFILE

## DR. JAY HOPKINS



*Editor's Note: There have been only three Guild members who have attained the status of Master Collector / Historian in over 25 years of the Guild's existence. Dr. Jay Hopkins achieved this status on March 5, 2022 which was the culmination of his collecting powder horns and antique firearms over several decades. Those who fill this void are to be highly commended for their dedication, research, expertise, guidance and sharing of knowledge. Their contributions to our Guild is of great importance and hopefully more will follow to become Master Collector / Historians.*

*Current recipients include:*  
Glenn Beall  
Jay Hopkins  
Carl Dumke

*In accordance with the Guild's Standing Rules, two of the major requirements for anyone to become a Master Collector / Historian are that an individual must "Show a superlative collection of horn articles presented in a historical context. (i.e. carved powder horns, folk art powder horns, screw tip powder horns, snuff boxes, combs, etc.) to be reviewed by the Awards Committee for evaluation at the annual meeting." In addition "...the candidate must give an original presentation to the HCH at an annual meeting on the collection" followed by a written "copy for the study and advancement of current and future Guild members." A high standard indeed, but those achieving this level have a vital and essential role in our Guild.*

### Introducing Dr. Jay Hopkins Master Collector / Historian



Dr. Jay Hopkins' story is truly remarkable. He was born in San Diego, California, where his father was stationed during WWII. He bought his first old gun when only four and living in Washington state. From there the Hopkins family moved to St. Louis during Jay's high school years and it wasn't till early college when his interest in guns of the Old West and Civil War became his primary focus. His undergraduate work started at Washington University where he earned both football and baseball scholarships. However, he later transferred to Duke University for his last two years where he was also awarded a baseball scholarship, clear evidence that he was an overachiever even at an early age – Student, Athlete, Collector!

Following graduation, Jay entered Duke Medical School and finished his orthopedic training. He met his future wife Beverly who was from Lancaster, Pennsylvania and through her family met Pennsylvania gun collectors and was subsequently introduced to the longrifle. It was an instantaneous attraction, as the primary focus was art and architecture rather than condition. While looking for rifles in the 60's Jay came across screw-tip powder horns which he thought were wonderful and were largely ignored by collectors in general. As he continued collecting both rifles and horns, Jay said he "met additional people so afflicted, including Roland Cadle; we began to realize that professionally made horns (those made by turners) were made throughout the time period (1750-1850) and throughout the distribution of longrifle making and had regional characteristics. I probably got my very first powder horn in the mid to late 1960s."

Having completed his orthopedic training at Duke University in Durham, NC, Jay did two years as an intern and first year of surgical residency at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Upon completion of his orthopedic residency requirements, he joined the Air Force and as one of the last of the Berry Plan<sup>1</sup> physicians, entered the service as a Major and a fully trained orthopedic surgeon. Jay was sent to Japan, which was not requested, but turned out to be a life changing experience. "I was the only Air Force orthopedist for Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. Since the Berry Plan had ended, very few specialists were joining up. On paper, the Air Force was supposed to have seven

<sup>1</sup>The Berry Plan: A Vietnam War era program in the U.S. that allowed physicians to defer obligatory military service until they had completed medical school and residency training. More than 42,000 physicians and surgeons were affected by the plan.

people in those slots .... I served 1974-1976. Vietnam had essentially ended. I was part of Operation Baby Lift.<sup>2</sup> It was a wonderful experience. I was very impressed with the Air Force and all it was able to achieve. I was awarded the Medal of Commendation."

After leaving the Air Force, Jay moved to Lynchburg, Virginia where he practiced orthopedic surgery specializing in sports medicine for the next 32 years. He retired in 2008, which has allowed him "more time for my hobbies." During this time Jay and his wife Beverly raised their family and for the last forty-five years they have lived in Lynchburg. Jay said "We raised our family – two daughters – who fortunately came back to live in Lynchburg, so our five grandchildren grew up in the same neighborhood. That has been a true blessing."

Jay has been a member of the Honourable Company of Horners since its beginning in 1996 and was one of the speakers at the inaugural meeting at the Mercer Museum. He stated that his "contributions have been primarily in the form of presentations of which I've done many. I am not an artisan, so my focus has been on the original horns. My primary interest is in professionally made powder horns and specifically their regional characteristics. I do enjoy other horn implements but have not focused on or collected those."

As a collector, Jay has "literally seen dozens of horn collections from all over the states and visited a number of museum collections. Ones that left a lasting impression were those of Charlie Kaufmann, Gene Kendall, Al Rehder, Burt Hamrick, Mel Hankla, Bill Ivey, among many others. Probably the most significant factor was that they had all kept a good history of the horns in their collection. All too often, once powder horns have reached the marketplace and subsequently collectors, the original history with the horns is lost. These gentlemen did an excellent job of maintaining that."

When asked about any special horn related projects he had worked on that had special meaning he responded: "The big project with which I've been involved is the three-volume study which became *Bone Tipped and Banded Horns: Regional Characteristics of Professionally Made Powder Horns, Volume I and II*. Now that they are published, Volume III, which will finish the series, is now well under way."

His horn collection forms a prominent part in his three-volume horn study. Parts of it have been on exhibition many times, including the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Art, the National Muzzleloading Long Rifle Association, the Kentucky Rifle Association, Fort Pitt, and The William King Museum at Abingdon, Virginia, among others. When asked

about how he wanted his contributions to horn work and collecting to be remembered, he replied that "Hopefully my three-volume study will provide a useful framework for regional identification going forward. The evidence that I have used for my attribution is admittedly thin so if my work can stimulate corrections or changes to designations, I would find that successful. It is an ongoing study. There are several horns in Volume I whose designations have been changed."

Jay's future plans regarding the research, history and collecting horn artifacts include continuation on the three-volume study .... "I am probably halfway through preparation for volume three and hope to include some unusual chapters such as x-rays, priming horns and possibly blowing horns."

In addition to being a Guild member since its inception, Jay has been a long-term member of Kentucky Rifle Association, joining in 1967. He also belongs to the American Society of Arms Collectors and has been a part of all of the Virginia Rifle groups and meetings.

Regarding his favorite publications related to collecting horn artifacts he said that he is a regular reader of *Muzzle Blasts and Muzzleloader*. "I greatly value *The Horn Book* which I think is a remarkable publication. I continuously watch the internet through auctions, eBay, and other outlets. I think the internet has opened up the horn world a bit as it allows horns to again surface from original sources as opposed to entering the general market where often that crucial history of the horn is lost. It's an exciting art field and deserves to be better understood. For whatever reason, the horners did not leave us a good road map of their work. Essentially nothing is signed and there is very little mention in the historical record which is surprising because their output was a truly remarkable example of utilitarian folk art."

In closing Jay stated that "I do greatly value the Guild, its members, and its aims. I would like to see the number of antique horn collectors increased in the Guild and that they attend our annual meeting. From the beginning it was supposed to be a combination of artisans and collectors – old and new – which I always thought was of great benefit. So, to be recognized by an organization that I value so highly is quite special."

CONGRATULATIONS TO  
**DR. JAY HOPKINS!!**  
Master Collector / Historian

For more information on Dr. Jay Hopkins go the 2018 *Horn Book* Summer Issue and read the *Bone Tipped & Banded Horns* article on page 26. – wec

<sup>2</sup>Operation Babylift: Thousands of babies were orphaned during the Vietnam War. As the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) threatened Saigon at the war's end, America designed Operation Babylift to evacuate children many of whom were orphaned, some fathered by American servicemen which made them extremely vulnerable to the advancing NVA.