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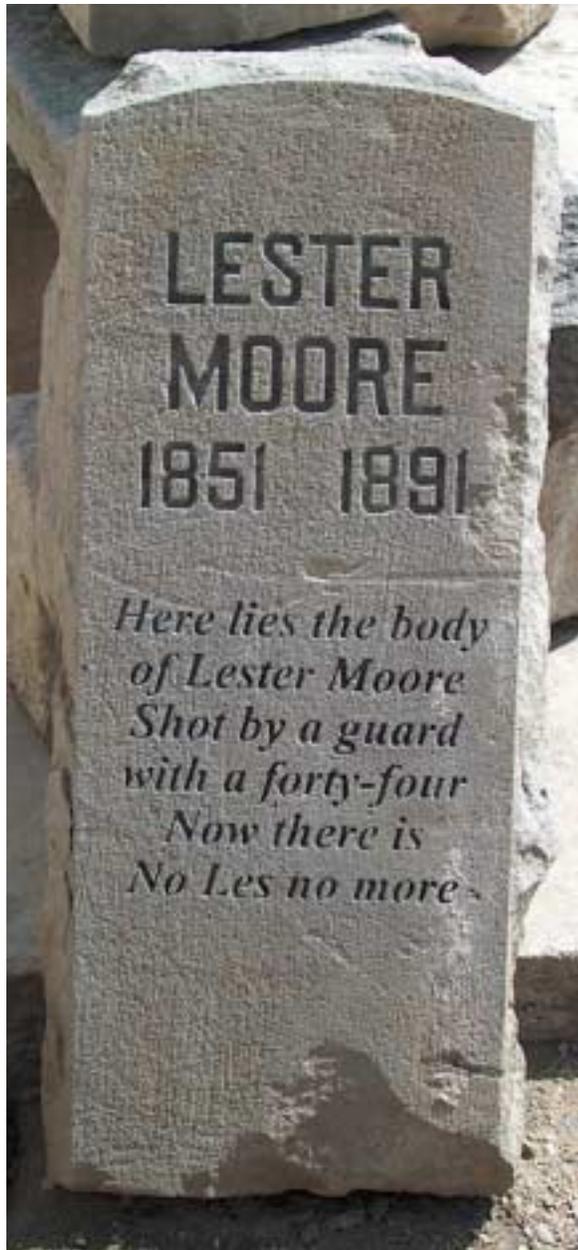
The J. Curtis Earl Arms Museum

Making plans for your summer vacation? If you are coming to southern Idaho, you may find the J. Curtis Earl Memorial Exhibit within the Old Idaho Penitentiary Historic Site a worthwhile visit.

Old Idaho Penitentiary is, by itself, a worthwhile experience—built starting in 1870, and still in use until 1973, the prison is a sobering reminder that the romance of the Western desperado often ended up in a stone cell, or at the gallows. The walls and major buildings are built of cut stone.



There are also a few reminders of the dark humor associated with a 19th century prison, such as what happened to one inmate who apparently didn't behave himself—with grave consequences.



J. Curtis Earl left a lifetime's collection of arms for the exhibit that bears his name, ranging from Bronze Age spearpoints to late 20th century submachine guns.



In between are the usual collection of flintlocks, blunderbusses, percussion firearms, and military weapons.





In addition to many dozens of weapons, representing all the phases of firearms development, the museum has some very well-done educational exhibits, that should make this a bit more interesting to family members who might not share your fascination or knowledge of guns. As an example, the section on swords includes this poster explaining the terminology.

Basic Parts of the Sword

Pommel The knob on the hilt of a sword which supports the rear of the hand.

Grip Whatever covering is adhered to the hilt.

Guard The knuckle guard protects the knuckles and the crossguard is designed to prevent the hand from going over the blade.



Hilt The handle part of the sword covering the tang.

Tang The projecting shank on a sword that fits within the hilt.

Blade

Another part of the exhibit intended for the person who doesn't know much about guns explains what sights are, and then provides several examples with (non-firing, of course) firearms.



Taking Aim

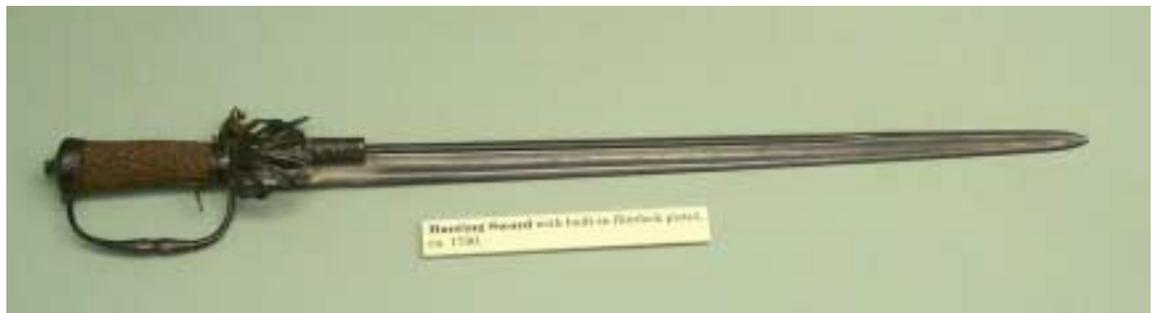
Aiming at a target is called sighting. Shooters look through sighting devices to get a more accurate aim.

Sights are mechanical or optical devices mounted on a barrel that allow a gun to be aimed. Try out the five sights we show here. Aim at the targets and see if you can match what you see to the sight pictures shown above the guns.

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The museum also has some of those oddities that make it stand out—such as this circa 1750 combination hunting sword and flintlock pistol.



At the same time, it includes crowd pleasers, such as this M1883 Gatling Gun, resplendent in its polished brass fittings.



The Old Idaho Penitentiary and the J. Curtis Earl Memorial Exhibition (to give its formal name) is open 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM from Memorial Day – Labor Day, and noon to 5:00 PM the rest of the year. Admission is \$4 for adults, \$3 for children 6-12, with a discount for AAA members. You can reach the Old Idaho Penitentiary at 208 334-2844, or <http://www.idahohistory.net/oldpen.html>.

Clayton E. Cramer is a software engineer and historian. His last book was *Concealed Weapon Laws of the Early Republic: Dueling, Southern Violence, and Moral Reform* (Praeger Press, 1999). His web site is <http://www.claytoncramer.com>.