

Legacy's 1892 Pumas



SHOOT!

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MAGAZINE

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Getting Started
in Cowboy
Shooting

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.44/40s**

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Guns, Gear, Shooting and the 1800's



SIXGUNS, LEVERGUNS, and LEATHER

By: John Taffin, aka Sixgunner



TAKIN' STOCK A GRIPPING AFFAIR—PART 5



Three famous Colt Single Actions sixguns that were the daily working sixguns of Elmer Keith for three decades. See the article for the details on these ivory-stocked Colts.

When I first started thinking seriously about sixguns, there was very little in print and certainly nothing as exotic as the Internet for gathering information. We take gun magazines for granted today, but the only thing available in the early 1950's was the *American Rifleman*, and sixgun articles were few and far between. The gun magazines began to appear with the first issue of *Guns* arriving in January of 1955. My heart almost stopped, I know it at least skipped several beats, when I saw that first issue on the newsstand. Three years later, *Guns & Ammo* debuted as a quarterly, followed by *Gun World* in 1960, and *Shooting Times* being offered first in newspaper form before it became a magazine. The first magazine strictly for handgunners, *American Handgunner*, arrived in 1973, and, of course, **SHOOT! MAGAZINE** is still relatively new and ready to start its fourth year in publication. It is unique in being directed at cowboy action shooting and all the related equipment that goes along with this great sport.

Magazines were sparse, however such companies as Fawcett published several little 6" x 9" paperbacks about guns, and I still prize a copy of *Fighting Handguns* issued in 1958 and authored by, a then relatively unknown, Jeff Cooper. All Fawcett books and their like sold for the grand sum of 75 cents. I recently added a second copy, in

like-new condition, to my library. This time, however, the cost was \$49.00. How times change!

Several books during the course of my teenage years had a great effect on my future life. First, of course, is *The Book of Books*. Secondly, while in grade school I discovered the *Boys Life of Theodore Roosevelt*, and finally in the mid-1950's, *Sixguns* by Elmer Keith. I do not want to count the hours spent in *Sixguns*. One of the reasons this book is so appealing is the fact Keith was not content with just any ordinary

that someday I would know Elmer Keith and actually get to both handle and photograph some of his great sixguns.

The picture with this article may be the only one in existence of three of his favorite Colt Single Actions, all wearing ivory grips. Those three beautiful sixguns, from top to bottom, are a 7-1/2" King Custom .44 Special (notice the barrel-band front sight), another King Custom 4-3/4" .45 Colt with an S&W rear sight, and, of course, the very famous #5SAA, his highly customized 5-1/2" .44 Special. If he had had his way, this latter gun would have become a standard offering from Colt. Colt declined, and the result was the emergence of Ruger in the

1950's with a modern single-action. The three pairs of ivory stocks on these sixguns are carved with a longhorn steer head, a Masonic symbol, and a Mexican Eagle.

Where does one get beautifully-carved ivory today? I know of two sources. There are certainly others, however these are the two that I use. I know I will get excellent quality ivory, as well as superb craftsmanship, from these two gentlemen.

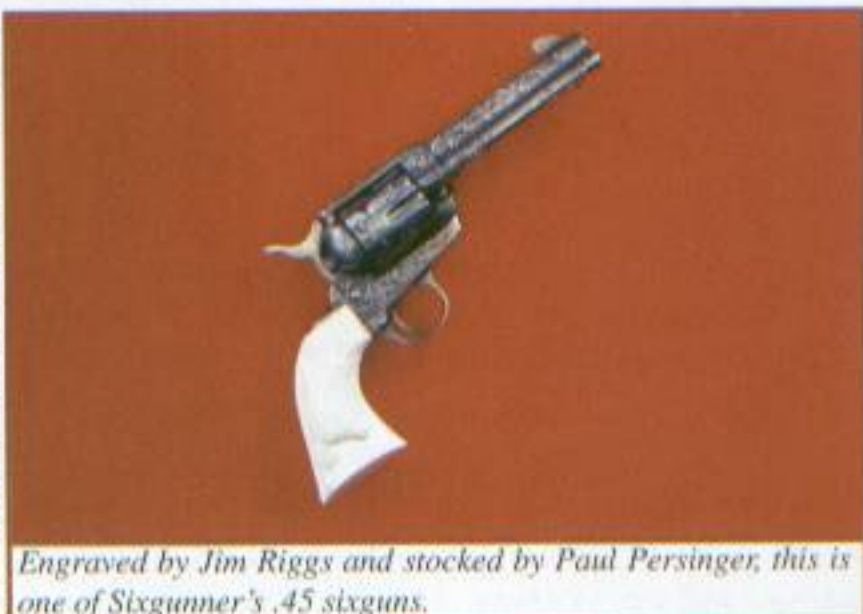
PAUL PERSINGER: The Colt Single Action Army is one of the few factory sixguns that come with stocks that fit my hand. The only reason to replace them is to come up with a more exotic material than black rubber eagle grips or the extremely plain walnut



These four sixguns all have ivory. The bottom sixgun is a Colt Single Action with one-piece stocks, and the other three are from Texas Longhorn Arms. They include a West Texas Flat-Top Target, a South Texas Army, and an Improved Number Five, all built by master gunmaker Bill Grover.

sixgun, but rather preferred .44s and .45s customized to his specifications, which almost always included ivory grips.

As I got married, started a family, and worked full-time while attending the state university full-time, doing both in tandem so my wife could stay home with our three little babies, I often dreamed of the future and the fine sixguns I hoped to own someday myself. In those times, I had to be content just to keep going back to the pages of *Sixguns*. Little did I know then



Engraved by Jim Riggs and stocked by Paul Persinger, this is one of Sixgunner's .45 sixguns.



Right-hand and left-hand Colt stocks beautifully-carved by Paul Persinger.



7-1/2" SAA .45 by Colt, leather by San Pedro, carved ivories by Paul Persinger.



85-year-old 1st Generation .45 Colt fitted with ivories carved in the fleur-de-lis pattern by Peacemaker Specialists, in El Paso #1930 Austin leather.



Stocks on Colt Single Actions rebuilt by Peacemaker Specialists with stag, carved ivory, and one-piece ivory.

stocks found on 3rd Generation Colts. Once I had that first pair of floral-carved El Paso Saddlery holsters, the factory grips on my 7-1/2" Colts looked oh so plain. Something drastic had to be done.

The grip frames were pulled off and sent to Paul Persinger with instructions to provide one-piece ivory stocks with one set carved on the right panel and the other on the left. Persinger is an artist of tremendous talent in several mediums (his drawings are unbelievable), who can duplicate any of the carved ivory stocks that were offered by Colt on their cap-n-ball presentation pieces, any of the several well-known carvings found on single-action Armies, or he can work from a picture or sketch.

There was a reason Elmer Keith chose ivory other than for its beauty. His double-action sixguns, especially for using heavy .44 Special and .44 Magnum loads, were all fitted with carved ivory grips so that the carvings would fill in the natural crease in his closed palm. This was very important for controlling recoil with these double-action revolvers. Keith also did the same thing with his single-action sixguns, and I intended to follow his lead. For my two 7-1/2" Colts, I went with the carved longhorn steer skulls, since they not only look good, but they also naturally fill in the crease of my shooting hand making it much easier to control the recoiling sixgun with heavier than standard loads, and also to keep the sixgun from shifting in my hand while shooting cowboy action .45 loads.

Persinger outdid himself with these stocks. The carving is carried out to perfection, and most importantly, the raw material he started with is of extremely high quality with lots of "marbled milk" showing. Tony Kojis, who often fits grips for me, looked at Persinger's work, studied it, removed the backstrap to look closer, and said, "This guy is the best I have ever seen!" Paul Persinger is a true western artist working in ivory.

For more information, contact Paul Persinger at (915) 821-7541.

PRECISION PRO GRIPS: Bob Leskovec of Precision Pro Grips works with several media, including exotic woods, the same as he does with silver inlays, ivory, and acrylics, with both of the latter being offered in carved motifs. My first stocks from Leskovec were Elmer Keith style carved in ivory acrylic for an S&W Elmer Keith Commemorative 4" .44 Magnum and a 7-1/2" Colt New Frontier .45. Then came a pair of ivory grip panels for an Ed DeLorge engraved 1911. All ivory is not the same. The best grip makers look for ivory that is creamy, has a lot of grain showing, or both. Leskovec shops carefully for his ivory.

As a salute to Elmer Keith, who pretty much packed his single-actions away with the arrival of Smith & Wesson's 1950 Target .44 Special, followed five years later with the arrival of the magnificent .44 Magnum from Smith & Wesson, I have started a special project. He preferred these sixguns to have 4" barrels and, you guessed it, ivory stocks. I realize that this magazine is dedicated to single-action shooters, however the grips pictured on a pair of 4" .44 Specials that have been expertly stocked by Precision Pro Grips can be also duplicated on any single-action sixgun. Having now had the opportunity to examine these grips and use these sixguns for several months, I can say that they are also exquisite examples of the gripmaker's art. Although I have said repeatedly that certain guns are really dressed up by certain grips, I must again say that this pair of .44 Special sixguns is really special. However, I am afraid that I may have to finish this project by having both guns fully engraved. Great grips deserve engraved sixguns.

For more information, contact Precision Pro Grips at (724) 449-8360.

PEACEMAKER SPECIALISTS: In a previous installment, we mentioned Eddie Janis of Peacemaker Specialists and some of their products, especially their buffalo bone grips. Since that time, I came across a Colt Single Action Army 4-3/4" .45 Colt, circa 1917. This old gun was traded to a store in a mining camp many, many years ago, and has resided in the store owner's family for more than 50 years. The interior of the cylinder was good, the barrel was very good, the hard rubber eagle grips were slightly warped, and about 10% of the finish remained. The cylinder had more play than necessary and the springs were tired. I sent it off to Eddie to have all the springs and inner parts replaced, and while it was there I also traded the scarce hard rubber eagle

