

# The 1855 PURDEY

— LARRY’S SHORT STORIES #285 —

From the original factory order books, we know that 23-year-old W. Sturgis Hooper, of Boston, Massachusetts, ordered this gun in August of 1854. He was traveling in England and Europe with his parents and sisters at the time. Purdey called this a “duck gun,” because of the large bore. From their founding in 1814, they only made 35 of these “duck guns,” and the Purdey folks have recently advised this was one of the largest they ever built. This particular duck gun would have been intended for use from a small boat (punt boat), to shoot ducks and geese flocked up on the waters in Boston Harbor. It was completed and delivered the following May, 1855, but things had changed for Mr. Hooper during the last nine months.

The Purdey order book identifies the gun as follows: 7 Bore, 40” barrels, cylinder chokes, 14-1/2” length of pull, price 55 pounds — about 275 U.S. dollars, at the time. Of course, it was a black powder, muzzleloader.

Mr. Hooper was an educated young man, a member of the Harvard Class of 1852, and he liked hunting and shooting. From the

Harvard Memorial Biographies, Volume II (published 1866), we know that Mr. Hooper developed a serious health condition, while in Europe, after ordering his Purdey. He suffered from chronic weakness the rest of his life and died in 1863, at age 30. After careful examination of the gun and the breech plugs and reading Mr. Hooper’s biography, it’s unquestionable that this gun has never been fired.



*This Purdey was designed to be a serious waterfowl gun of the time; it’s a 7 bore, with 40” barrels and weighs 14 pounds.*

Apparently, Mr. Hooper never had the strength to take this fourteen-pound shotgun on a duck hunt.

From the beginning, I understood that 7 bore was not legal for waterfowl; those U. S. laws were passed in the 1930s. But, I thought it would be nice to shoot a Missouri Spring Turkey. Alas, it has

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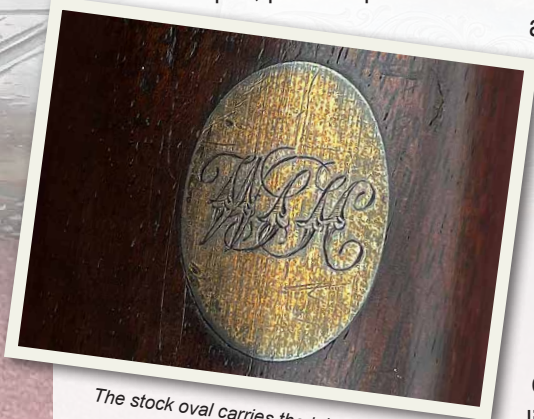
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been outlawed for that purpose also. Ok, so I could just take it to Texas to shoot

a turkey; certainly, the Texans would allow it. But then, my inspection revealed no evidence it had ever been fired, and I developed a kinship for its original owner, after reading his 15-page memorial. So, what does one do with an unfired Purdey shotgun made in 1855? Well, I guess you just enjoy caring for it, and keeping it unfired. It will be displayed in the Boardroom on the MidwayUSA campus.

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*The stock oval carries the initials, of the original owner, WSH, William Sturgis Hooper.*



*Looking close, there is some rust on the lockplates, but the lockworks are still mostly bright and shiny. These are called “bar-action” locks, with the mainsprings located in front of the tumblers.*