

THE STORY

OF

THE THREE FINE SHOTGUNS ORIGINALLY OWNED BY

ELEUTHERE IRENEE DUPONT, HIS WIFE, SOPHIE

MADELEINE DUPONT, AND JAMES ANTOINE BIDERMANN.

THE THREE GUNS REFERRED TO IN THE FOLLOW-
ING PAGES HAVE BEEN PHOTOGRAPHED AS A RE-
CORD FOR FUTURE INTEREST AND FINENESS OF
WORKMANSHIP.

C O P Y

June 20, 1952

Mr. Stephen V. Grancan
Curator of Arms
Metropolitan Museum of Art
5th Avenue & 82nd Street
New York, N. Y.

My dear Mr. Grancan:

I hope, with the aid of your vast experience with antique, French, fire arms, you will be able to throw some light on this very interesting problem.

I have inherited through successive generations a very beautiful, old shot gun produced by Cheret, Rue Des Prouvairs, Paris.

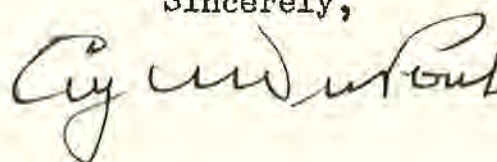
The barrels are $36\frac{1}{2}$ inches long. The bore is slightly less than 20 gauge. The maker's name and address is gold inlay. In addition, there is gold inlay $3\frac{1}{2}$ by $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in the breach. Also the muzzle and front sight ($4\frac{1}{2}$ inches below) have very fine design in the same metal and the gun is equipped to handle percussion caps. On the right and left sides of the locks below the cap nipples is the word "Heret". Could he have done the work of changing over the gun?

Pasted on the stock is a card of recent date, reading: "In the year 1800 E. I. duPont decided to establish a powder mill after shooting some very poor American powder. This incident was the start of the DuPont Powder Company".

The question is - was this gun a flintlock originally and later altered for caps? If this was done, the above statement would be O.K. I think this runs true, as many old flintlock guns had been adapted to the use of caps about 1820. The operation might have been done around that date. What interests me particularly is the thought that the gun might be years older than the year 1800 because before the French Revolution, Irenee' duPont was wealthy enough to afford an expensive gun. Afterwards, he was very low financially. His life span was 1771 to 1834. Do you know when the gunmaker "Cheret" was in business and can you give me the date when he first made cap guns?

I would certainly thank you for any information that you may be able to give me on this subject. Best regards.

Sincerely,



EduP:ak

C O P Y

The Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York 28, N. Y.

Department of Arms and Armor

June 23, 1952

Mr. Eugene duPont
Greenville, Delaware

Dear Mr. duPont:

I have a record of the gunsmith Cheret who worked in Paris, rue des deux écus, "Arqer de S.M. le Roi de Naples", and who was active between about 1785 and about 1790.

There are supposed to be at least eight known fire-arms by this gunsmith. If you wish to know the location of the eight pieces, I suggest that you write to Dr. Arne Hoff, Tøjhusmuseet, Copenhagen, Denmark.

The detonating cap was invented in 1814 by Joshua Shaw, so that the conversion was made after that date.

Believe me

Sincerely yours,

/s/ Stephen V. Grancsay
Curator

C O P Y

July 2, 1952

Mr. Stephen V. Grancsay, Curator
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York 28, N. Y.

Department of Arms and Armor

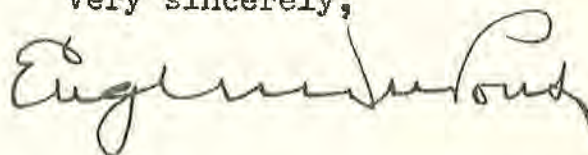
Dear Mr. Grancsay:

I have your good letter of June 23rd on the subject of the antique Cheret gun, about which I wrote you on June 20th.

The information you gave me is most interesting and you will be glad to know that I have written to Dr. Arne Hoff, asking for some information about the eight other Cheret firearms now in existence. I am enclosing a copy of the letter I am writing to him, for your information.

Best regards.

Very sincerely,



EduP:ak

C O P Y

July 2, 1952

Dr. Arne Hoff
Tøjhusmuseet
Copenhagen, Denmark

Dear Dr. Hoff:

I am enclosing for your information, copies of my two letters to Stephen V. Grancsay, Curator of the Department of Arms and Armor, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York City.

The object of this letter is to ascertain if possible whether E. I. duPont, in the year 1800, actually shot this gun, as described on a note glued to the stock which states "that it was the start of the DuPont Powder Company".

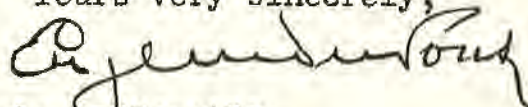
The following information may be of assistance in determining the correct solution of this problem:

- (1) The gun is now equipped for percussion caps.
- (2) It must have been originally a flintlock, because caps were invented in 1814.
- (3) The maker, Cheret, was active between 1785 and 1790.
- (4) Perhaps it was changed to a cap gun later than 1814. If this was true, it must have been a flintlock in 1800.
- (5) The name "Heret" engraved on both sides of the locks might have been the man who made the alteration.
- (6) The Museum states that there are eight other Cheret guns in existence. Are they flintlocks and have they all been altered for the use of caps? Can you give me any information about this?

I am enclosing \$1.00 in currency which will take care of any out-of-pocket expense you may incur in gathering the information I would like very much to have.

Best regards.

Yours very sincerely,



EduP:ak
Enc.

P.S. Do you know anything about "Heret"?

C O P Y

Arne Hoff, Ph. D., Curator of Small Fire Arms

Tøjhusmuseet

15/7 1952.

København, Frederiksholms Kanal 29, den
Telf. Central *16037

HermedBilog

Mr. Eugene duPont,
Greenville, Delaware.

Dear Sir:

I have received your letter of July 2, 1952, concerning your Cheret-gun. Pray forgive me, if it will take some time before you get an answer. I have to make enquiries in Paris and Munich to give you a proper answer.

Yours very sincerely,

/S/ Arne Hoff

C O P Y

AH/GH.

Tøjhusmuseet

8/9/ 1952

Nr. 1135

Mr. Eugene duPont,
Greenville, Delaware, U.S.A.

Dear Sir:

Owing to the difficulties in getting the necessary informations from Paris, we have first now been able to answer your letter concerning the Cheret gun in your position.

The gunmaker Cheret is mentioned in the Almanach de Paris 1789 under the headline "gunmakers" as living in the rue des Deux Ecus. Unfortunately there is nothing about him in the still existing dictionaries or trade year-books till 1805, where he is mentioned again in the Almanach portatif des commercants as living 28, rue des Prouvairs. Here he is still met with 1806-09, and after two years' slip where the almanacs are missing, we find in 1812 that his widow has taken over the shop, followed 1813 by Cheret fils, who has moved to 12, rue du Roule.

Consequently, your gun must have been produced later than 1789 but before 1812, which again means that it must have been altered from flintlock to percussion. This alteration should be visible on the lockplate where the holes from the screws of the firesteel and its spring have been filled out. They can always be traced, if not on the surface then at least inside the lock (see drawings). On the barrel the conversion was most frequently made by soldering or screwing on to the barrel a plug with a nipple, but often the bottom end of the barrel was cut off and a new breeching substituted with build-in nipples. Also on the barrels the alteration should therefore be visible.

To your central question: Could this gun be the one used by E. I. duPont in 1800? The answer will thus be: Very probably.

As for the HERET appearing on the lock we should suggest it to be CHERET with a missing C in front. That at least would give a natural solution. Is the signature perhaps placed so that the conversion into percussion could have caused the C to disappear? A gunmaker Heret is not known in our files.

The eight other firearms by Cheret shrink into only two, as the six of them are only known from an old inventory (about 1790) of the guns of the house Pfalz-Zweibrücken, a branch of the Royal house of Bavaria. The two remaining guns are most probably two of the guns from this inventory. One is no. A 5941 in the former Bayrisches Armémuseum, Munnich, a flintlock doublet from about 1790. The other, no. 13/765 in the Bayrisches Nationalmuseum, is also a doublet, signed Cheret, rue des deux ecus, arg(ebusi) er de S.M. le Roi de Naples. Neither of the guns, unfortunately, are dated. On the barrels, however, of the gun in the Nationalmuseum are the marks of the barrelmaker Henri Renet (Stöckel's dictionary of gunmakers, mak. no 920. Renet is mentioned 1788.

C O P Y

There have been no expenses connected with this inquiry, so we take the liberty to send you under special cover a catalogue in English of our ordnance collection. When the English guide to the Small arms collections will be finished in about a month's time, you will get that too.

Yours sincerely

/S/ Arne Hoff
Ph.D., Curator, Small arms dept.

C O P Y

October 9, 1952

Dr. Arne Hoff
Tøjhusmuseet
Copenhagen, Denmark

Dear Dr. Hoff:

Very many sincere thanks for the very thorough and painstaking research you made on my cap equipped gold inlaid Cheret gun. Your diagnosis and my careful inspection with an expert gunsmith has proved beyond a doubt that originally it was a flintlock and later altered for percussion caps after 1814 when caps were invented. This improvement in firearms was a common practice in those days. There was an indistinct letter "C" before the name "Heret" on both locks, making it "Cheret". In surmising this, you were entirely correct.

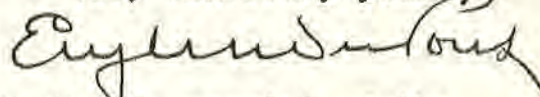
Years ago, my father told me the gun belonged to E. I. duPont and since it was so outstandingly beautiful, there is no doubt in my mind that it is the flintlock that he used when gunning here in America with Colonel Toussard years before 1814 when caps were invented. It was on this occasion that after having exhausted his supply of English powder, he was forced to use American made powder which was so poor that he decided to manufacture his own, thus the start of the DuPont Powder Company.

It will be of interest to you to learn that Pierre S. duPont, of Kennett Square, Pa., has in his possession the original flintlock owned by Sophie Madeleine duPont, the wife of E. I. duPont. The stock is beautifully inlaid in silver and has a leather cheek pad to ease the recoil. Years ago, my father told me she owned it.

In sincere appreciation of the trouble you went to in running down this evidence, I am enclosing a check in Danish currency, amounting to \$50.00 in our American money.

With kindest regards.

Very sincerely yours,



EduP:ak
Enclosure

P.S. I acknowledge with many thanks receipt of the booklet "The Cannon Hall". It is very interesting. I am also enclosing a copy of a letter about the flintlock shotgun owned by Sophie Madeleine duPont, wife of Eleuthere Irene duPont. You will find this of interest.

C O P Y

November 18, 1952

Mr. William A. Hart
The DuPont Company
Advertising Department
DuPont Building
Wilmington, Delaware

Dear Mr. Hart:

A few days ago, I was much interested to read in our local newspaper a description of the burial of a lead box containing historic articles of the year 1952, pertaining to the DuPont Company. Unfortunately, the photographs of two historic guns were not included.

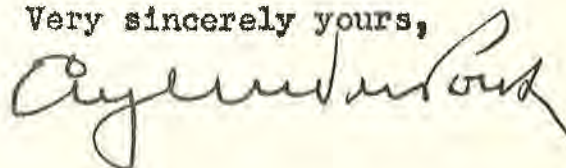
Noting that duplicates will be kept in two other places, the thought occurs to me that in the year 2002, on the 200th Anniversary of the Company, some future generation will be interested in the photograph of the gun used by E. I. duPont. On a shooting trip, he exhausted his supply of English powder and had to purchase some of American manufacture, so poor that he decided to manufacture his own - thus starting the DuPont Powder Co.

Through successive generations this beautiful gold inlaid gun has been passed down, and is now in my possession. It is caliber 24, with barrels $36\frac{1}{2}$ inches long and is in perfect condition. Originally it was a flintlock made by the famous gunsmith "Cheret", but like most old guns, after 1814 it was modernized for the use of percussion caps. A few years ago, I personally and successfully shot ducks with it. Its photograph at present is in the files of the Advertising Department.

In addition to these most interesting facts about the founder's gun, you will be further pleased with the knowledge that P. S. duPont, with no idea of its origin, has held for years the original flintlock gun used by Sophia Madeleine duPont, wife of E. I. duPont. It differs from the one in my possession, in that it was made by another fine French gunmaker by the name of "Arlot", and while of the same caliber 24, it has a leather cheek pad to absorb the recoil of the powder charge, is shorter in the stock, and has gold inlay on the barrels. The forend, the trigger guard and the butt plate are beautifully embossed in solid silver. In fact, it is a museum piece of the highest quality.

This gun also should be photographed and the pictures of both guns included with the other valuable records.

Very sincerely yours,



C O P Y

Arne Hoff, Ph. D.,
Curator, Firearms.

Tøjhusmuseet

24/11 1952.

Mr. Eugene duPont
Greenville, Delaware, U.S.A.

Dear Mr. duPont,

My very best thanks for your kind letter and the check of kr. 344,-. Normally we are not supposed to charge any fee for our research work, but I think nobody would react to my acceptance of your so friendly token of appreciation.

It was very interesting to hear about the flintlock gun of Sophie Madeleine duPont in the possession of Mr. Pierre S. duPont. The name Arlot in Paris I have only met once before, inlaid on the barrels of a flintlock gun, late XVIII century, in the collection of one Mr. Edm. Fleischhauer in Colmar (Alsace, France).

I shall be looking forward to see the photographs of both this and your own gun. By the way, I think I could brew a little article on those guns for "The Connoisseur" or a similar wellknown collectors' magazine, if you could wish so and would think me qualified for it.

With kindest regards.

Very sincerely yours,

/S/ Arne Hoff

C O P Y

December 19, 1952

Dr. Arne Hoff
Tøjhusmuseet
Copenhagen, Denmark

Dear Dr. Hoff:

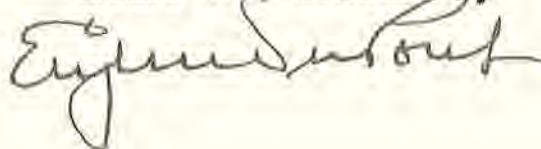
I am very sorry that there has been such a delay in my reply to your very nice letter of November 24th on the subject of the two antique shotguns owned by Eleuthere Irenee duPont and his wife, Sophie.

As one of the powder company Directors, I sincerely appreciate your offer to write an article about these two guns for "The Connoisseur" or a similar collectors' magazine. In order to be of assistance to you in this connection, I am forwarding to you, by Parcel Post, a DuPont 150th Anniversary book, several magazines and pamphlets and pictures of both guns.

As the postal laws of the United States prevents any writing inside a parcel post package, I am enclosing a slip of paper, on which I have written "Best wishes from Eugene duPont", this to be pasted inside the DuPont book.

Many thanks for what you propose to do, Merry Xmas, Happy New Year and my best wishes to you.

Yours very sincerely,



EduF:ak

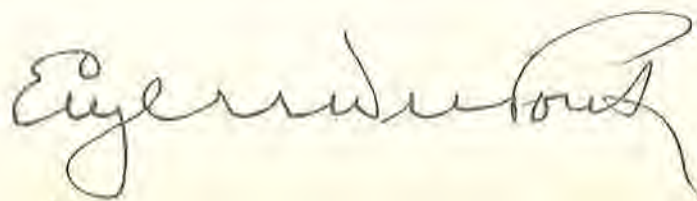
C O P Y

The History
of
James Antoine Bidermann's Gun

In my collection of firearms, I also have the fine gun belonging to James Antoine Bidermann who was a most efficient and devoted son-in-law of Eleuthere Irenee duPont. Both James Antoine Bidermann and Alfred I. duPont for years assisted Eleuthere Irenee duPont until his death in 1834. For the next three years they took charge of the business affairs of the Company. At the end of that time, James Antoine Bidermann retired and on returning to France, he paid in full the old French claims against the Company incurred by Pierre Samuel duPont, father of Eleuthere Irenee duPont.

Like Eleuthere Irenee duPont's firearm, the Bidermann gun was originally a flintlock and was altered for the use of percussion caps about 1815, when this type of primer was invented. I have recently shot ducks with it successfully.

Since he was related by marriage and as both were enthusiastic shooters, it is but natural that Eleuthere Irenee duPont's gun should be passed on to James Antoine Bidermann. He left both guns to my father, who informed me of their previous ownerships.



MS
1877
Wilmington, Del. Aug. 1857

MS
1857