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John McAuley Palmer's Presentation Colt Root Revolver

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"With Compliments of Col. Colt"

Those five words (and variations derived from them) make up one of the most valuable phrases in all of gun collecting.

While John McAuley Palmer's name may not be very well-known today, he was an important figure in the 19th century. Important enough to merit receiving a factory-engraved and inscribed revolver as a gift from Samuel Colt himself.



Lot 8: Historic Cased Factory Engraved and Col. Samuel Colt Presentation Colt Model 1855 Root Percussion Revolver Inscribed to Civil War Union Major General and Illinois Governor John McAuley Palmer.

Manufactured in 1859 this Colt Model 1855 Sidehammer Pocket Revolver, more commonly known as a Colt Root Revolver, was selected for special treatment at the factory. Destined to be a presentation piece, this five-shot, .28 caliber revolver was expertly engraved by Gustave Young in his style of Germanic scrollwork on a punch-dot background. The final bit of engraving was the inscription, which read: "To John McAuley Palmer Esq/WITH COMPLIMENTS OF COL. COLT."



Once the engraving was completed, the gun received the iconic Colt high polish blue finish on the barrel, frame, and cylinder, while the loading lever and hammer were color case-hardened. Rounding out the piece of functional art was a one-piece grip made from beautifully figured walnut with a high polish piano finish.

The top of the barrel has the two-line Hartford address with pointing hand motif and the cylinder is engraved with the Cabin and Indian scene and "COLTS PATENT" markings. The serial number is stamped on the underside of the barrel, side of the cylinder, and butt. All of the visible serial numbers match.



Of course, no presentation-grade gun is complete without an equally impressive presentation case. Made of mahogany, the case has five internal compartments lined with brown velvet. In those compartments are a small tin of F. Joyce & Co. No. 21 percussion caps; a brass bow-leg double cavity bullet mold stamped "COLTS/PATENT" on the sprue cutter and "K" on the side of the right block; a pocket pistol powder flask with fixed charger embossed on both sides with an eagle and shield, crossed revolvers, and "E.PLURIBUS.UNUM" in a ribbon; numerous .28 caliber round bullets; and, of course, a key for the case.



So who, exactly, was John McAuley Palmer? Born in 1817 in Kentucky, he moved to Illinois as a child and would call that state home for the rest of his life. Palmer spent the early years of his career as a lawyer - hence the "Esq" in the gun's inscription.



John McAuley Palmer

In the 1850s, he was a member of the Illinois State Senate and eventually held the position as a presidential elector, helping his friend Abraham Lincoln secure the nomination for president in the election of 1860.

During the Civil War, he rose to the rank of Major General and commanded his troops admirably at battles including Stones River and Chickamauga. Unfortunately, he ended up butting heads with a fellow Major General by the name of John Schofield, who would later lend his name to a version of the Smith & Wesson Model 3 revolver. Palmer resigned after the altercation, but served in the military until 1866.

After his military career ended, he was elected as the 15th Governor of Illinois in 1868. In 1890, he served as a United States Senator for Illinois. In 1892, he ran for President of the United States and chose Simon Buckner, a former Confederate, as his running mate. The idea behind the ticket was to ease still-lingering tensions between North and South by teaming up two former generals from opposing armies. It didn't work; they received just 1% of the vote. Eight years later, in 1900, he died suddenly of a heart attack, ending an incredibly full and diverse life of 83 years.



Rating in overall fine condition, the revolver has a tight action, is all original, and retains 40%+ of the high polish blue, while the hammer and loading lever have nearly 80% of the case hardened finish. The grip is in very fine condition with most of the original finish and a few scattered and very minor handling marks. Gustave Young's Germanic scroll engraving is extremely crisp, and the inscription on the back strap is sharp.

The case exterior is in fine overall condition with a few scattered handling marks. The interior lining is faded, and the case bottom is discolored with some minor tears and compression marks. The accessories are in very good overall condition, with the cap tin and flask being of the period, but not original to the casing.



Simply put, this Colonel Colt presentation high quality, factory cased and engraved Colt Model 1855 Sidehammer revolver would be a standout piece in any advanced collection of Colt firearms. Available during the December 2019 Premier Gun Auction, place your bids and let Colonel Colt bestow his compliments on you.