

I am very flattered that noted firearms writer and expert, Ross Seyfried has volunteered to write an occasional column for my humble newsletter. I am particularly grateful for Ross' help because I am a pretty small fry who couldn't otherwise afford to pay for as esteemed a talent as Ross.

Ross is a full-time rancher in Oregon who became a writer and photographer to complement his hobby. Ross has written for *American Rifleman*, *American Hunter*, *American Handgunner*, *Field and Stream*, *Outdoor Life* and many other hunting/shooting magazines. He spent 20 years as Shooting Editor at *Guns & Ammo* and is now a regular contributor to *The Double Gun and Single Shot Journal*. Ross also currently works for the NRA as a writer and consultant.

He was a licensed professional hunter in Zambia and Tanzania and is currently a licensed guide and outfitter in Oregon. He was a U.S. National Shooting Champ and the 1981 World Champion shooter. Ross has collected fine (and usually Damascus) doubles for more than 30 years and has grown to specialize in single shot rifles and ball & shot guns. His interest is not only in collecting, but in making the ammunition for and hunting with virtually every one of his collection from flintlocks to hammerless ejectors in sizes from .17 to 4-bore.

Abby Mouat, Brighton, MI

June, 2010

OLD CATALOGS

Something of Great Value by Ross Seyfried

Because you are reading this you are at least superficially aware of Cornell Publications and their passion for recreating old catalogs from the arms world. I have been a customer for many years and have a wide spectrum of their catalog reprints; but even with this familiarity and exposure I am continually taken aback by the extraordinary and magnificent resource that Cornell has to offer.

I suppose it is fair to ask, in this day and age of computers, internet and apparently endless free information, "why bother with hundreds and hundreds of old catalogs?" If we cut to the chase I can tell you that there is information and knowledge in



these old catalogs that simply does not exist elsewhere. As both a professional writer and "reader" I have found over the years that much of the "information" that is out there is simply opinion, not fact. Worse yet, much that is printed is

nothing more than parroting of something said by some other "expert" who only thought he knew. I often see things like "they did this or that, this was THE load, or they never made one of those." If you open an old catalog from the day when shooting was the most important sport on Earth, you will often find the "experts," really do not know. People often ask me, "how do you know, or where did you find that?" More often than not, the answer is, "it is in the XYZ original catalog."

When you open an old catalog you are looking at reality, not opinion; and these facts from the makers, in the day when it mattered answer many questions. What load did Marlin use in their .38-55? Did Smith & Wesson have a way of defeating black powder fouling in their revolver barrels? Do you take the barrel out of the rifle when you clean your 1873 Winchester? What kind of a bullet did Rodda use in their 300-yard long range ball and shot gun. Did Winchester make High Wall rifles chambered for the British cartridges? What was the real performance of the German 8 x 57 cartridges? Is that Westley Richards best quality, hand-detachable lock, magnum 12 gauge

made in 1925 *with Damascus Barrels* a fake? The answers to those and millions of other questions are right there in the old catalogs!

I use the catalogs in another way; they are the basis for my formula to determine the value of a collectible gun. I freely admit that my philosophy of collecting is different than most and that my “formula” generally does not apply to the rarity-driven markets. In essence when I evaluate a piece, the final number is based on two things: how much did it cost when it was new and how much of the original is left? Said another way, how good was the gun and what is its condition. While the condition must be determined by skilled eyes, the original cost can be found in the maker’s catalogs from the day when the gun was made. Back then a gun that cost 100 Pounds Sterling was a much better and more valuable piece than one by the same maker that only cost 15 Pounds . . . even though they were made by the same maker in the same year. Of course the knowledge is not limited to just English or American guns. Cornell Publications has catalogs from many nations around the world, and the list is always growing.

It is fair to ask; where do these 3000 old catalogs come from? Many reside in “Abby’s basement,” while more often than not, dedicated collectors loan their original catalogs to Cornell Publications. The reprints that Cornell sells are scanned from the originals, and then digitally reprinted. The original catalogs are often ridiculously rare, expensive and fragile, so the reprinted versions are wonderful, even if you have an original, because you can actually handle and use them on a daily basis. And for those of you with originals who might contemplate loaning them for reproduction, I urge you to do so. I have loaned many of my precious originals and can tell you they are treated with great care, returned undamaged and accompanied with much gratitude! Once the original has been added to the Cornell data base, they can be reproduced on demand . . . made to your order if you will. The quality is quite wonderful, with slick and often full color covers, neatly bound and all at about the cost of a box of shells.

With this introduction I think it will be fun and perhaps useful if from time to time I pick an individual catalog and share an overview of its contents. In the next installment we will peek in Abby’s basement and find a new addition to the list. This will be a “Stoeger’s Bible” 1950 edition. It comes from a time I truly wish I could recreate, and I suppose in a way we can think of these grand old catalogs as time machines . . . ones that can take us back to when one of the finest and most complete sources of guns, ammunition and supplies was right on 5th Avenue, New York! I will pour through the more than 500 pages and pick out fun things to share with you, things that illustrate the theme and wonder of the old catalogs.

Elk Song Ranch, 2010