

Pepperbox

The gun

This firearm is a 1849 Sprague & Marston .31 smooth-bore Pepperbox cap-and-ball muzzle-loader revolver. The term "Pepperbox" is used for revolvers where, instead of a six-shot cylinder and a single barrel, it has six barrels. This is a double-action handgun (the hammer cocks as the trigger is pulled). It has no provision for replacing the percussion-cap nipples when they wear out and these look quite worn. Other cap-and-ball firearms have nipples that screw in and out with a nipple wrench and replacements can be fitted. This is a smooth-bore weapon; it has no rifling to impart gyroscopic spin when the bullet is fired. Muzzle loaders that are rifled need to have the bullet be only as large as the lands (high points) in order to fit down the muzzle. The bullet would be covered in a greased cloth patch so the patch will grooves (low points) and still seal the combustion chamber from gas leaks. This Pepperbox, being a smooth-bore, may not have needed patches since the balls could be molded just the right size to fit. Since this is a revolver, we tend not to call it a pistol. Since it is a smooth-bore, we may accurately call it a gun.

<http://tmcdb.tripod.com/lotg1.html> has more to say about Pepperboxes: The Pepperbox was a pocket gun with six rotating barrels using the old percussion cap firing system. Mark Twain once wrote something along the lines of, "The safest place to be around a Pepperbox is directly behind it." This came from the well-known fact that the Pepperbox sometimes discharged all six barrels with a single trigger pull. The action of a revolver comes in two varieties, single and double. A single-action revolver requires the hammer to be manually pulled back for the next shot, the trigger simply brings the hammer down when pulled. Double-action revolvers do all the work with a trigger pull.

<http://www.antique-guns.com/> calls the hammer a bar hammer. The value attached was £495

http://www.wbauction.com/gun_auction_catalog_page_6.htm has a cased set of Sprague & Marstons listed for \$500.

http://www.butterfields.com/areas/prices_realized/prices7251a.htm has a Sprague & Marston listed for \$528.75

<http://www.collectibleskingdom.com/civil.htm> has a Sprague & Marston with a 3 1/2-inch barrel. This site shows the trigger guard. I captured the photo (peppat.jpg)



The family story

The Diggles-family story is that my grandfather, Robert Newton Diggles, when he was a child, was playing with another little boy in the crumbling walls of the old Fort Jones when the other boy found this gun. Grandpa coveted it so he offered the other boy a nickel for it but the other boy didn't want to part with it. Grandpa offered a dime and still no luck. Well, Grandpa, being the son of a rich merchant, offered the other

boy a quarter. That was too good to pass up so the other boy sold the gun to Grandpa. Jim Moore and I speculated that it belonged to an officer, as enlisted men did not tend to have such nice handguns; they mostly used shoulder weapons, we think.

The timing works. The gun was patented in 1849 and the fort was operated from 1852 to 1857. The town got its name in 1860 Grandpa was born in the town of Fort Jones on June 10, 1875. In about 1892, his parents packed up the family and moved to Palo Alto where Senator Stanford had just opened a new school. Grandpa's older brother, Arthur, was in the first graduating class (he and Herbert Hoover were both geology majors in that class). Grandpa (also a geology major) and some of his sisters graduated in 1900. Grandpa opened an assay office in San Francisco in 1904 and still had this Pepperbox. The assay office burned down two years later with the rest of the town in the Great 1906 Earthquake and Fire of April 18 (<http://www.sfmuseum.org/1906/06.html>). That is when the barrel broke off at the rotation shaft and the grips were charred. The shaft has been lost. There used to be a trigger guard but we don't know when that was lost. There also may or may not have ever been a ramrod; I don't think the design of the weapon was conducive to storing a ramrod anywhere.

Fort Jones info

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From [http://totalescape.com/destin/all\\_towns/ftjones.html](http://totalescape.com/destin/all_towns/ftjones.html)

Originally a stage stop & tavern on the stage route between Yreka and the old town of Shasta, the town was first named Wheelock in honor of its founder. The military fort, Fort Jones, which was operated from 1852 to 1857, was named after Colonel Roger Jones. The fort, located a few miles from the town, was abandoned in 1857, leaving only its name to hold.

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From <http://www.scottvalley.org/fortjones.html> and captured in the folder "Fort Jones web page"

Fort Jones - The Fort

With the advent of the California "Gold Rush," Captain Edward H. Fitzgerald of the 1st Dragoons was ordered to establish a fort in present Siskiyou County. In 1852, he selected a site in "Beaver Valley" (Scott Valley.) By 1855-56, Indian conflicts subsided and Fort Jones became little more than an outpost. In 1858, orders were received to evacuate the fort.

Until the end of the Civil War, the fort was used by local militia, but by 1870, the structure had begun to decay. Some time after the turn of the century, remaining fort structures collapsed.

Today, an historical marker on Eastside Road and the town of Fort Jones are the only evidence that the fort ever existed.

Fort Jones - The City

In 1851, Brown and Kelley built a cabin in Beaver Valley. Eventually O.C. Wheelock purchased the cabin and established a trading post and "house of public entertainment." His business was frequented by soldiers stationed at Fort Jones half a mile away. The place was known as Wheelock.

By the 1880's, it had four stores, a semi-weekly newspaper, a church, two hotels (dance Hall and Western Hotel), Beem's Livery Stable, telegraph, express office, two blacksmiths, flour mill, meat market, shops, saloons and dwellings. The post office was established as "Ottitiewa", the Indian name for the Scott Valley branch of the Shasta tribe. It was also known as Scottsburg and Scottville. The town's name changed to Fort Jones around 1860. In the 1880 census, there were 400 people.

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## **Photographs**

Pepperbox photos were taken by Mike Diggles on January 13, 2003 with a Canon digital Elph S300 2.1-megapixel camera.

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030113-3108\_Pepperbox\_right.jpg  
030113-3109\_Pepperbox\_scale.jpg  
030113-3110\_Trigger.jpg  
030113-3111\_Muzzle.jpg  
030113-3112\_Pistolgrip\_left.jpg  
030113-3113\_Pistolgrip\_right.jpg  
030113-3114\_Cap\_nipples.jpg  
030113-3115\_Broken\_shaft.jpg  
030113-3116\_Breech.jpg