

OLD SHOTGUNS

— LARRY'S SHORT STORIES #144 —

It was an intense amount of labor, but truly a labor of love to be able to study and generally understand America's old double barreled shotguns – the side-by-sides made in the United States from the 1860s till the 1950s. Names like Parker Brothers, L.C. Smith, A.H. Fox, Ithaca, Lefever, Remington and Winchester are permanently burned into my brain, along with a few other brands and thousands of bits of trivia about design improvements and manufacturing changes throughout the years of production.

Parker was the first, beginning production shortly after the Civil War ended in 1865. Remington (in business since 1817) produced their first side-by-sides in 1873, and abruptly discontinued them in 1910. L.C. Smith fired up in the early 1880s and Ithaca about 1885; with Lefever during that same time. A.H. Fox in 1905 and Winchester in 1931, were the last of the great brands. American

guns were heavily influenced by innovation in England; the sliding bolt, top lever, forend latch and boxlock action were all invented there. Choke

came along quite early — later, Damascus and twist steel barrels gave way to fluid steel; and hammers were moved from the outside to the inside, with the new actions called hammerless. Finally, automatic ejectors and single triggers became options and lightweight frames and smaller gauges were offered. From beginning to end, the design of the break-open side-by-side shotgun took about 50 years.

My introduction was Dad's old Belgian made, rabbit eared 12 gauge. When we opened the gun shop in 1977, there



Parker was the first to make break-open side-by-side shotguns in the United States. This back action model, serial #284, was one of their first, produced in 1870.

wasn't much interest in side-by-sides. That all changed in the early 1990s; *The Double Gun Journal*, and other magazines, began to picture and write about them – and sporting clays (a new shotgun sport) was just getting under way. There was a serious awakening of interest in these plentiful and inexpensive old shotguns.

Who made the best? In my opinion, Parker Brothers paid the most attention

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to the quality of fit and finish. The L.C. Smith sidelock was the best design of the 19th century, being equaled or surpassed in the 20th century by A.H. Fox and the Winchester Model 21.

I've been accused of having a PhD in Gunology; if there's any truth to it, certainly my serious study of old shotguns is one of the reasons why.



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This L.C. Smith sidelock was made in 1928; it has been custom upgraded with fancy wood and nice fine engraving.



The last of the old shotguns was the Winchester Model 21, introduced in 1931. This one was made in 1939 and has been customized to suit its current owner.