



Return of the Roosevelt

A historic Theodore Roosevelt revolver finally returns to Sagamore Hill 16 years after it was stolen.

SIXTEEN YEARS AFTER its initial theft from Sagamore Hill, Theodore Roosevelt's historic Colt revolver has been recovered by the FBI and returned to its home at Oyster Bay, Long Island, N.Y.

On June 14, representatives of the U.S. National Park Service accepted the revolver from FBI agents who recovered the gun in Florida last fall.

Made in Hartford, Conn., in March 1895, Colt double-action revolver #16,334 has experienced a most interesting life. It was received by the U.S. Government and entered the arms inventory of the *USS Maine* when she was commissioned in September 1895. At approximately 9:38 p.m. on Feb. 15, 1898, while resting at anchor in Havana, Cuba, the *USS Maine* was suddenly blown up, with a loss of 266 officers, sailors and Marines.

News of the ship's loss reached Fleet Headquarters in Key West, Fla., whereupon the officer in charge of the U.S. Naval Station, Commander William S. Cowles, was dispatched on the *USS Fern* to render aid and assistance to the stricken ship and crew. As the first American naval vessel to arrive in Havana, Cowles sent divers aboard the *Maine* to recover the dead and to make initial inspections of the ship in order to determine the cause of the explosion. In an effort to locate the keys to the ship's magazine bunkers, Navy divers recovered Colt

double-action revolver #16,334 while searching the quarters of the ship's captain, Charles D. Sigsbee.

Commander Cowles later presented the revolver to his brother-in-law, then Assistant Secretary of the Navy and NRA Life member Theodore Roosevelt.

Shortly after war was declared on Spain by the U.S. in April 1898, Roosevelt resigned his Navy position and organized a regiment of cavalry known as the 1st U.S. Volunteer Cavalry, more

popularly known as "Roosevelt's Rough Riders." Though he was presented with at least one high-grade revolver (a Smith & Wesson) and had numerous others in his personal collection, Roosevelt chose the Model 1895 Navy from the *USS Maine* as his sidearm during the military campaign in Cuba.

On July 1, 1898, Roosevelt's Rough Riders charged up Kettle Hill, then San Juan Hill in the campaign for Santiago, Cuba. Of the gun's performance, Roosevelt wrote: "Two Spaniards leaped from the trenches and fired at us, not ten yards away. I closed in and fired twice, missing the first and killing the second. He doubled up as neatly as a jackrabbit."

In what would become one of the most iconic images associated with the entrance of the United States on the world stage at the dawn of the 20th century, Roosevelt was photographed wearing the



revolver on the top of San Juan Hill at the culmination of his "crowded hour." The charge and subsequent capture of both of the hills effectively

The inscription on the recently recovered Colt double-action carried by Roosevelt during the "Rough Rider" raid on San Juan Hill reads "July 1st, 1898, San Juan, Carried and used by Col. Theodore Roosevelt."

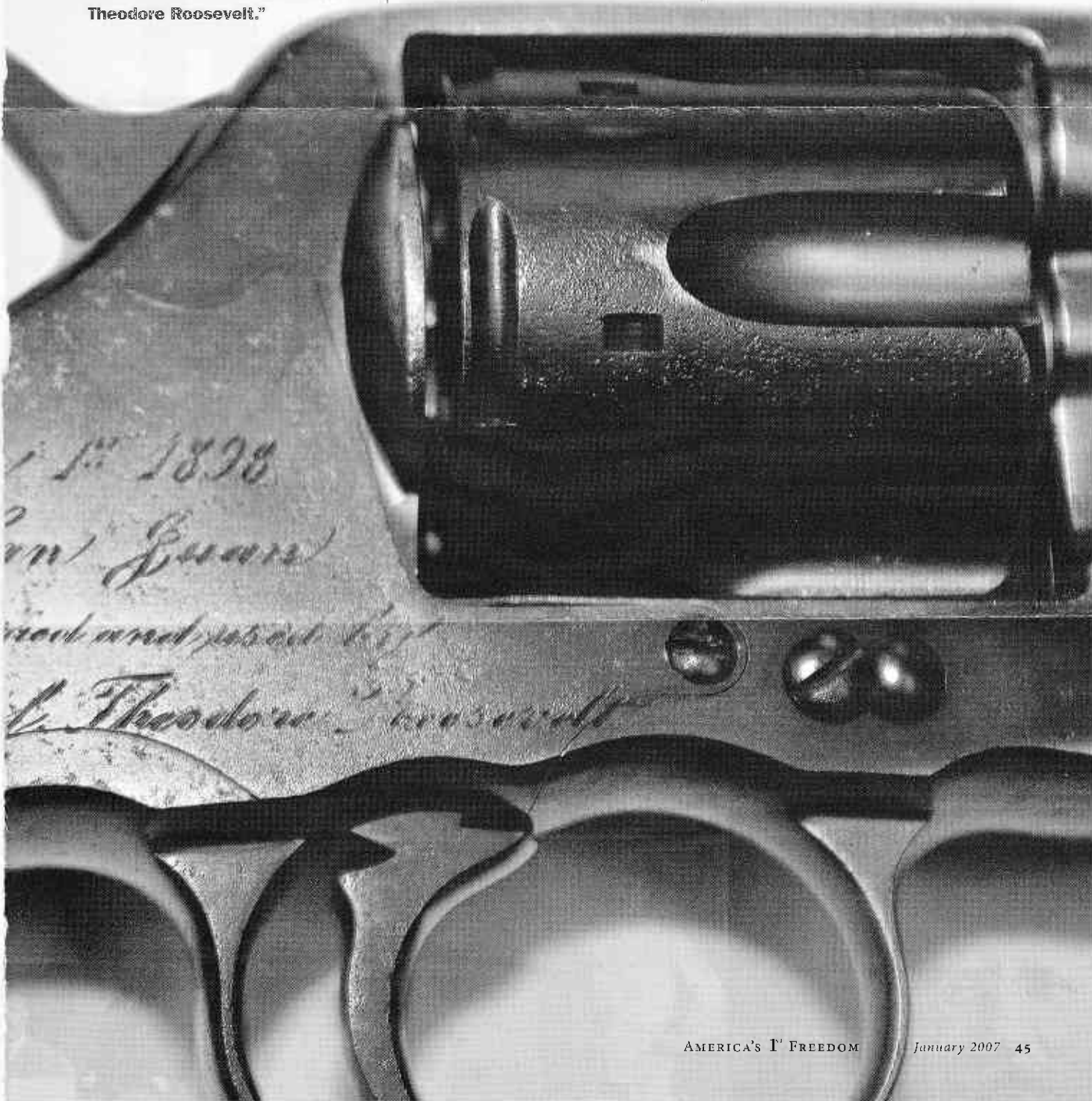
ended the two-and-a-half-month war with Spain. Roosevelt's actions that day earned him the Medal of Honor, our country's highest award for valor in combat.

The revolver stayed in Roosevelt's beloved Sagamore Hill for many decades following his death in 1919. The gun was later moved to "Old Orchard" (located in a corner of the

Sagamore Hill estate), the home of his son, Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt Jr., who is also a Medal of Honor recipient.

In 1963, the gun was stolen from Old Orchard. The thief abandoned the revolver in the woods, where it lay rusting for some months before it was recovered.

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Then, in April 1990, the National Park Service reported the gun stolen again in a robbery that occurred between April 5 and 7—no one is quite sure of the exact date. A thief managed to lift a corner of the display case in which the revolver was displayed and, by using the weight of the case against itself, popped the internal door lock, opened the door and removed the gun.

At one point in the mid-1990s, the gun was rumored to have been recovered and subsequently destroyed in a gun “buy-back” program in Pennsylvania. Evidently, a recovered revolver bearing the same serial number was acquired and destroyed in that program. A closer check with recorded information from the destroyed gun proved it to be a different model of the same caliber and serial number.

For 16 years the FBI, the National Park Service, interested collectors and historians looked diligently for the missing artifact with no results or even whispers about its whereabouts.

That all changed last summer when Andy Anderson, of DeLand, Fla., was shown a revolver by his girlfriend. He had expressed an interest in historic items, and she soon produced the missing Roosevelt revolver, which she had retrieved from her husband’s closet where he had kept it hidden for the last decade or so.

Anderson, not knowing the gun had been stolen or was even associated with Sagamore Hill, called the Roosevelt homestead in September 2005 and spoke to Amy Verone, curator and chief of cultural resources for the National Park Service.

“I think I’ve seen Teddy’s gun!” he told her. That set into action a chain of events that had the FBI on his doorstep within 24 hours.

The following day, FBI agents from Philadelphia’s Art Crime Team made contact with Anderson. His girlfriend again retrieved the gun from her husband’s closet and gave it to Andy, who then turned it over to FBI agents without incident.

On June 14, 2006, Robert Wittman, FBI agent, and Robert Goldman, former federal prosecutor and member of the Art Crime Team, arrived at Sagamore Hill with the recovered revolver in a suede case.

Placing the revolver on a mat in the office of NPS Curator Amy Verone, Wittman asked me to inspect the revolver and to make a judgment as to its authenticity. Looking over the serial numbers and proof marks and comparing the gun to some of the rare photographs taken prior to its theft, I consulted with Springfield Armory Park Ranger and historian John McCabe and pronounced, “There is no question in my mind, this is President Roosevelt’s original

As inscribed, Roosevelt’s revolver was retrieved “From the sunken battle ship Maine.”

revolver—a true piece of American history and a national treasure.”

Later that same day, Park Superintendent Greg Marshall welcomed the revolver home with a ceremony on the front porch of Roosevelt’s cherished Sagamore Hill. Above and behind the superintendent, just over the doorframe, is a Latin inscription carved into the hearth: *Qui plantavit curabit*, which translates to, “He who has planted will preserve.”

The revolver is home once again, planted firmly in the consciousness of the national psyche by its use in the opening act of the 20th century, and now preserved for the ages with the possessions and trappings of an icon of American history. **16**

Man Charged With T.R. Revolver Theft

Just prior to press time for this issue, federal prosecutors charged a man with stealing Roosevelt’s historic Colt revolver.

Anthony Tulino has been named in a misdemeanor criminal charge filed in U.S. District Court in Central Islip, N.Y. Tulino was charged with the theft of the historic firearm.

Tulino is a former New York resident who later moved to Del. and, Fla., where the revolver was recovered after a tip from a woman who said her husband kept the gun hidden in a closet.

We’ll keep you posted as the case progresses.

—THE EDITOR

National Firearms Museum Senior Curator Philip Schreier (center) inspects Roosevelt’s recovered revolver with FBI and National Park Service staff.

