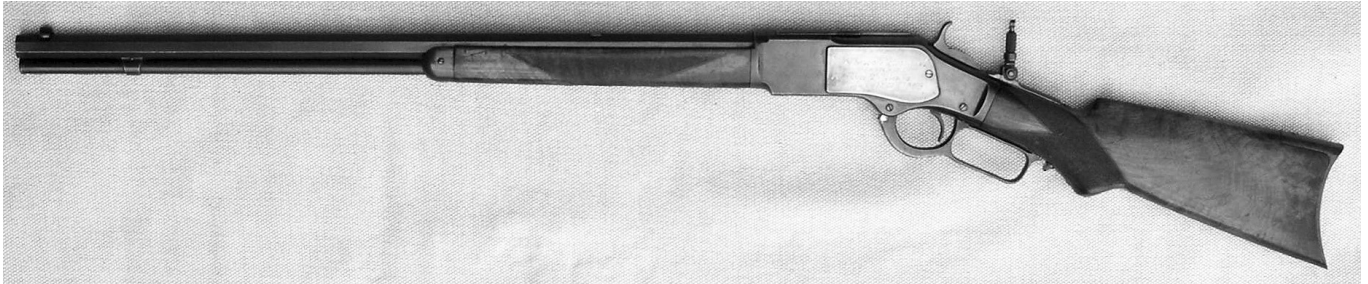


THE MARQUIS DE MORES-THEODORE ROOSEVELT PRESENTATION RIFLE

by Edmund Lewis, M.D.



Many years ago when reading John Parson's *The First Winchester*, I was intrigued by several of the illustrated guns. One of these was the Model 1873 presentation rifle given by the Marquis de Mores, to Theodore Roosevelt in 1885. It was not until much later that I found the authenticity of the rifle questionable for reasons that will be discussed later.

Theodore Roosevelt traveled West in September 1883 to hunt buffalo, landing at the small town of Little Missouri, on the west bank of the river of the same name which wended its tortuous way through the western part of Dakota Territory. This desolate, butte-ridden country

was first explored by French voyageurs who called it *Mauvaises Terres*, or the Bad Lands. Roosevelt so loved the land and the hard way of western life that he purchased a small ranch, the Maltese Cross, at Chimney Butte, several miles south of Little Missouri, where he wrote several of his books and began exploring the idea of raising cattle. For some time Roosevelt was considered a spectacled eastern dandy who hardly fit the mold of the local settlers and cowboys. In time, as is well known, he proved them wrong and more than gained their respect. Somewhat earlier, in March 1883, an even stranger creature had arrived in Little Missouri.



His name was Antoine Amedee Maria Vincent Manca de Vallambrosa, the Marquis de Mores, a young man of French nobility. He was of medium build with dark eyes, a black mustache waxed into sharp points and a very fierce and determined demeanor.

On the bluffs across from Little Missouri the Marquis founded the town of Medora, named after his titian-haired wife, Dora von Hoffmann, the daughter of Baron von Hoffmann, a New York banker and built her a fine chateau on the hill above the town, complete with twenty French servants, Sevres china and cases of fine wines. The man was a visionary ahead of his time and an entrepreneur who wished to develop a cattle ranch, abattoir and meat packing plant to ship beef to the Midwest and East. To this end, he purchased over forty thousand acres of rangeland. His goal was to build a meat packing empire to rival Omaha.

The Marquis was a graduate of the French military academy, St. Cyr, as well as Saumur, France's premier cavalry school. He was a crack shot and in Europe had a reputation as an expert duelist. When not tending to his cattle enterprise, he loved to hunt bighorn sheep in the buttes near Medora. When threatened by local cowboys when he attempted to fence his land, he faced them when he attempted to fence his land, he faced them down and killed one of them and although arrested for murder was acquitted. He frequently hunted with his neighbor Roosevelt and they developed a mutual respect for each other. However, at one point they had a serious misunderstanding and disagreement. The Marquis

thought Roosevelt had instigated the accusation of the murder and sent a letter that Roosevelt interpreted as a challenge to a duel. Cooler heads reigned and the matter was settled amicably.

THE RIFLE

The Model 1873 Winchester rifle that was purportedly presented to Roosevelt by the Marquis de Mores was obtained in 1940 from the J.G. Wallace collection by his

12 lbs. 6 ozs. Ref: Saterlee, page 43.
 122. Winchester, presentation L873 model, fourteen shot, center fire rifle. Barrel octagon, calibre .308 rifled, 24 inches steel. Adapted to .32 W. C. F. ctgs. Front sight bead and rear peep on tang. Selected walnut half stock with forend capped. Pistol grip and forend checkered. Engraved on left side of receiver, "TO HON. THEODORE ROOSEVELT from MARQUIS DE MORES, MEDORA, N. D. 1885". Serial No. 122. Marked, "Winchester Repeating Arms New Haven Conn USA—Kings Improvement—Patented March 29, 1866 October 16, 1860" on bbl., and ".32 W. C. F." and ".32 cal." on breech block, and "Model 1873" on tang. A notable presentation rifle, carrying its own story. 43 1/4 inches over all, weight 8 lbs. 11 ozs. Ref: Saterlee page 193.
 381. Sharps, 1852, breech loading percussion rifle. Barrel octa-

agent, F Theodore Dexter, a well-known dealer in antique arms in the middle of the last century.

Confusion was apparent in the advertisement of the sale. The rifle, listed as lot number 122, was variously described in the advertisement as a Model 1886 and as a Model 1876. The

advertisement states that the rifle was given to Roosevelt by de Mores after Roosevelt had admired it when they had hunted together and it was thought to have been engraved by a small-town jeweler. The price of the rifle was \$95.00. Dexter then advertised the gun in *The Dexter Antique Arms*



Trade Journal where it was correctly described as a Model 1873 in .32 caliber rifle inscribed on the left sideplate:

--TO--
 Hon. Theodore Roosevelt
 --FROM--
 Marquis De Mores
 Medora N.D. 1885

The rifle was purchased from Dexter by L.E. Phillips, father of the well-known gun collector Philip R. Phillips. He then shipped it to his son who subsequently donated it to the Woolaroc Museum in Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

The presentation inscription is a fake! In 1885, when the gun was supposedly presented, North Dakota was still a Territory and did not achieve statehood until November 2, 1889. Communication with Kenneth Meek, Director of the Woolaroc Museum, indicated that the

Museum had correspondence from John S. du Mont, a well-known firearms collector who had seen the rifle and in March 1981 wrote the letter illustrated. He, along with Leon "Red" Jackson, the prominent Dallas, Texas gun dealer, believed that the rifle was a fabrication. Du Mont further stated that the gun originated from Maurice Clark, a California collector-dealer. His letter further states "Clark peddled a lot of fakes and that is one". The rifle is a deluxe Third Model 1873 with no serial number on the lower tang. Inside serial and assembly numbers are mismatched on the stock, buttplate and inside tang. The museum staff

concluded with duMont and the rifle was withdrawn from exhibition. Mr. Meek told me it probably will never be placed back on exhibit with mention of its supposed connection to Roosevelt or the Marquis.

Theodore Roosevelt went on to become President of the United States. Antoine de Vallambrosa, the Marquis de Mores fared less well. He failed in his grandiose attempt to found a western beef empire. Several things

had prevailed against him. Although his wife's family was wealthy, de Mores himself was not and his father-in-law withdrew support from the enterprise. The blizzards and severe winter of 1885-1886 decimated western cattle herds including that of de Mores. Moreover, the Eastern meat packers Armour and Swift, along with the railroads successfully conspired against his endeavor and perhaps especially, Eastern consumers preferred grain fed beef rather than the grass fed beef from Medora. His Dakota

empire finally collapsed and he left Medora with his wife, never to return. He undertook further adventure in Indochina where he was commissioned by the French Army to build a railroad from the Chinese border to the Gulf of Tonkin. Political intrigue led to the failure of this project and he was recalled to France. The Marquis then traveled to Algeria and in 1895 participated in a plot to drive the British from North Africa. There he was killed in the Sahara by Taureg tribesmen.

While the Antoine de Vallambrosa failed to create an "Omaha of the North", he did succeed in founding a town that still exists and remains a fascinating place to

visit. In 1947 the Theodore Roosevelt National Park was established in Medora along with a fine museum exhibiting two of Roosevelt's elegant Model 1876 Winchesters and the cabin from the Maltese Cross Ranch. Today all that remains of de Mores empire is the chimney of the meat packing plant and the chateau he built upon the hill.

J. G. Wallace Bonded Sale

Agent, F. THEODORE DEXTER—P. O. BOX NO. 399, TOPEKA, KANSAS

Date Oct. 29, 1940.

As bonded agent for J. G. Wallace, in the sale of the Wallace Collection of Arms, on the above date, and as per your order representation that you are interested in seeing the arms with the intention of buying for cash those that fit your collection, and returning within 48 hours of receipt, such items as do not meet with your approval, I am shipping you the following arms.

**TO Philip R. Phillips
1201 Cherokee
Bartlesville, OKLA.**

No.	Description	Net Price
122.	<p>Winchester 1886 Model .32 C.F. calibre Rifle No. 122, given to Hon. Theodore Roosevelt by the Count De Mores, while they were hunting together in Medora. This is the 1876 Model with brass receiver. The story goes that Roosevelt liked the arm and the Count gave it to him and had it inscribed by a small town jeweler. While Bill Everson of Boozeman Montana was alive, this rifle could have been fully authenticated, and I urged that Harry Snyder do that, but they just let that slip, so when the collection was transferred to Mr. Wallace, there were no papers with the outfit. I know it to be a very bona-fide relic, but that's all for there is nothing to substantiate my opinion.</p>	<p>---\$100.00 5% off for cash---\$ 5.00 NET---\$ 95.00</p>



THE SOCIETY OF THE CINCINNATI

JOHN SANDERSON DU MONT, President General
BRIMSTONE FARM
HANCOCK, NEW HAMPSHIRE 03449

File - Arm 110

Rifle not genuine
Roosevelt gun -

J. S. DuMont is a
respected gun dealer -
Red Jackson is of the
same opinion -

20 March 1981

Dear Bob: I wanted to send you a line to
thank you for your many kindnesses to Mary
and myself on Thursday when we visited
Woolaroc with Phil Phillips.

We thoroughly enjoyed ourselves and
think you have done a grand job with the gun
collection.

When Red Jackson comes up, remind
him about the Roosevelt - de Mores Winchester
that is on display. That came from Maurice Clark
and is phoney.

When Roosevelt and de Mores were
at Medora - that was was Dakota Territory - +
not N. D. Clark peddled a lot of fakes -

and that is one. I did research on de Mores
and knew his son, the Duke of Vallombrosa.

Thanks again - and to Bill, too, from
us both.

Yours ever sincerely,
John duMont

Sources:

Dresden, Donald, *The Marquis de Mores: Emperor of the Bad Lands*, Norman OK, University of Oklahoma Press.

Internet: *The Marquis de Mores and Medora, North Dakota*. This internet net site features a fascinating video on de Mores and Medora and is recommended.

Parsons, John E., *The First Winchester*, William Morrow and Company, New York, 1955.

The Westerners Brand Book, *That Young Frenchman in the Badlands*, Vol. 2, pp. 2-6.

Woolaroc Museum, Bartlesville, Oklahoma, Kenneth D. Meek, Director.

Photos: North Dakota State Historical Society