

# OTHER SHELBY COUNTY MAKERS

BY MARK BENDER

Volume 4 of the Ohio Gunsmiths and Allied Tradesmen, 1750-1950, has a short chapter listing about 16 gunsmiths working at various times in the mid-19th century Shelby County in western Ohio (Hutslar 1998). These listings, however, are not accompanied by photographs. Digging through the large box of black and white prints, most made by Dr. James Whisker, that constitute much of the AOLRC "archives," revealed unpublished pictures of three rifles attributed by penciled or typed captions to Shelby County makers: two half stock rifles by Robert T. Patton and one full stock by "Clark" -- who may be the John Clark listed as living in 1872 in Sydney (See also: Hutslar 1973:358). Patton was born in Miami Township, Logan County in 1833 and worked in Quincy; in 1875 he is recorded having a shop in Sydney on the corner of Main St. and Court St., though it is unclear when it was established. Hutslar notes that he may have had an apprentice named Albert W. Livingston, of Quincy, who also later in life was a gunsmith in Shelby; moreover, one of his rifles is featured in the August 1965 edition of Muzzle Blasts (1973, p. 238). Hutslar also notes the existence of a double-barrel shotgun marked "R.F. Patton/Quincy, O." that has a walnut stock "inlaid with maple stripes" (1998: 204).

The long rifle attributed to Clark is Lancaster-style in profile (that is, straight upper/comb and lower lines of the buttstock), sporting a tightly curled maple stock, modest rectangular cheekpiece, and basic, but nicely executed lock moldings. It has a longish straight wrist, and a rather sharp, but delicate, roman nose (Figs. 1, 2, 3). The brass hardware that includes a substantial, shallow curved butt plate (with one wider and three narrower lines filed on the top anterior end) and nicely finished set triggers (the front trigger is ornately filed). The side plate is a simple ring of brass and the simple trigger guard with one rear finger prong seems finely finished. The large patch box is very ornate, with three large cut outs and rococo style curves; the barrel seems to be at least 42 inches long and the brass nose cap

seems longish, along with a longish profiled front sight and proud rear sight; there appear to be three forward ramrod pipes and one rear entry pipe, all of brass, with no escutcheons or other inlays. The lock may be a percussion conversion, as the style seems early 19th century with vertical lines on the somewhat pointed anterior end. The quality of the two photos in the archive make details hard to distinguish. Overall, the Clark rifle is a nicely executed piece with near perfect lines.

The two R. F. Patton half stocks vary slightly in outline, both with a slight "fish belly" profile, and have similarities in craftsmanship, including what seems a somewhat unusual method of attachment of the ramrod pipes (see figs. 1-5 on p. 15). The stock of the rifle in Figure 4 seems to be carved in walnut and is appointed with a plain pewter nose cap, brass trigger guard with two finger rests, rather deeply curved brass butt plate, Leman-style percussion lock (no markings), and a very basic washer as a side plate. Most remarkable is the pronounced roman nose of the stock and a large curved cheekpiece with a stepped panel forming an outer edge, featuring a large oval silver inlay fastened by eleven small nails connected by a line of wriggling engraving, and engraved with a spread eagle. A triangular silver inlay seems to be embedded in comb just in front of the butt plate (which seems to be decorated with one file line), though the photos are unclear. The rifle also seems to have a long tang (not visible in the photos, though a screw head is discernable about 1 1/4" from the nose of the comb. The barrel has a metal rib and two ramrod pipes (attached with a rather thick bead of solder?) and seems about 34 inches long. Overall, the craftsmanship is careful and nicely executed.

The second Patton rifle has more of a drop in the stock and a sharper roman nose than the one just described but is overall similar in pattern. The brass butt plate has a deeper curve, and the trigger guard has one rear finger rest; the lock seems similar to that of the first rifle. What really distinguishes this second rifle are



the profuse inlays that appear to be silver or German silver, though several may be brass (or copper?), or possibly inlays of contrasting wood. The more ornate cheek piece features a more lozenge-like oval shape, a wavering second border with an edging pattern stamped or carved into the wood, and what appear to be some sort of inlays in a floral pattern – though the photo is not clear. The wrist and anterior of the cheek piece are checkered – a large diamond on each side of the wrist which merges with checkering on the nose of the comb. A checkered panel is also on each side of the fore stock, along with a pattern of triangular inlays that form a large triangle pointing towards the muzzle. Triangles of the same size as on other parts of the stock form the barrel escutcheons. The elaborate nose-cap is cast with wavy several prongs about an inch in length. The side plate (brass?) is a large diamond shape with curving edges with cross-hatching, attached by the lock bolt and two pins. Behind the cheek piece there is a Masonic compass, and six triangles (alternately brass? And silver? Or wood?) are placed along the edge of the butt plate curve – all positioned point forward. A similar string of triangles appears on the lock side of the rifle along the butt plate curve. The major feature of the lock side stock is a large and intricate floral pattern in the form of an oak tree with a narrow trunk, about a dozen branches about 30 delicately sculpted leaves and at least three large acorns hanging from the lower branches. The barrel seems to be at least 36" in length, featuring a metal rib, two brass ram rod pipes (as in rifle one there is no rear entry pipe, as the fore stock is uniformly straight) with seemingly pronounced lines of solder. The long tang seems to be held on with two screws (again judging from the pictures), and the basic sights are common in pattern of the day. The triggers are plain. In all the rifle has very unique decoration which may hold some sort of symbolism. The Masonic compass may give a clue, and the presence of oaks and acorns has deep meanings in Germanic/European folklore. A closer examination of the actual rifle would undoubtedly reveal more information, as would be the case with the other rifles discussed and illustrated in this article.

Sources:

Hutslar, Donald A. (1998). Ohio Gunsmiths and Allied Tradesman, Volume IV. Association of Ohio Longrifle Collectors.

Hutslar, Donald A. (1973). Gunsmiths of Ohio 18th and 19th Centuries, Volume I. York, Pa.: George Shumway Publisher.



*Long rifle attributed to John Clark discussed in article (James Whisker photos).*

