

Jacob S. Paulmer, Master of Relief Carved Rifles In The Percussion Era of Riflemaking

By Shelby Gallien

PART TWO: THE PAULMER LEGACY

Examples of Jacob S. Paulmer's Guns:

Eight rifles made by Paulmer are known to the writer; five of his guns are illustrated and described here, and represent the three locations and working periods in Paulmer's life. Those periods were: (1) Washington County, Pennsylvania between 1831 and 1833; (2) Ohio, probably in Starke County, between 1833 and 1850; and (3) DeKalb County, Indiana between 1850 and his death in 1892.

Paulmer's first period is represented by a single rifle that reportedly came out of a family in Washington County, Pennsylvania. Its relief carving is earlier in style than carving on any other Paulmer rifle, and its butt profile and heft indicate an earlier period. Paulmer's second period in Ohio is represented by two rifles, both relief carved fullstocks with patchboxes and a number of inlays. Paulmer's third period in Indiana is represented by two rifles, a fully relief carved halfstock and a fullstock with patchbox and some incised carving at the rear pipe, but no butt carving of any kind. It should be noted in passing that the writer has seen two additional relief carved fullstocks from Paulmer's Ohio period, both similar to the two rifles illustrated here, plus a plain but well made halfstock that most likely originated in Indiana.

The Washington County, Pennsylvania Period, 1831-1833:

Paulmer worked only briefly in Pennsylvania, and reportedly as a journeyman during that time. However, his earliest work, rifle No. 1 shown in Illustrations 8a and 8b, was reported to have come out of an old family from that area. There are two possibilities, first that he made the rifle there and despite working as a journeyman, signed the barrel as his own work, which the gun obviously is. If Paulmer worked for his grandfather, gunsmith Peter Swinehart, during those two years, it is likely that he would have been allowed to sign some of the work he produced. Another possibility is that he made the rifle soon after moving to Ohio, but it was for a family relative or friend which still lived in Washington County, Pennsylvania. However, the gun's relief carving is the earliest style used by Paulmer, the butt architecture the heaviest, and the barrel the only swamped one known.

Rifle No. 1:

The 1831-1833 period rifle is noteworthy for its silver mountings, including the butt plate, patchbox, trigger guard and thimbles. It carries the largest silver cheek inlay of any Paulmer rifle, engraved with a fine eagle and has several small silver heart inlays that Paulmer liked to use at both ends of his side plate

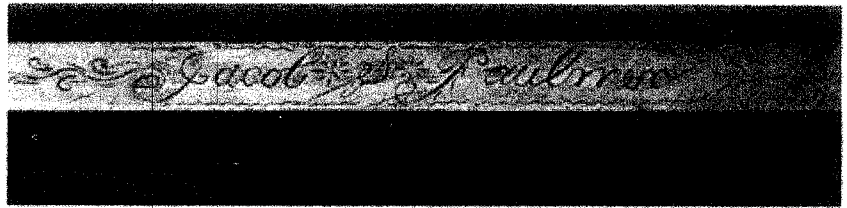


Illustration 2: The full script barrel signature on Rifle No. 5 shows Paulmer's distinctive capital letters, and gives an indication of the pride and workmanship that he put into his work, and in particular on this exceptional rifle.

Illustration 1: The "Jacob*S* Paulmer: relief carved half stock, Rifle No.5, found in Auburn, Indiana. The rifle is in "attic" condition and retains its original ramrod and powder horn.



Illustration 4: The Zion Sixteen Lutheran Church where the Paulmers attended during their later years. Both Jacob Paulmer and his second wife Abigail are buried in the church's small cemetery, which lies just behind where the photographer is standing. This view looks east.



Illustration 5: Jacob Paulmer's ornate gravestone and his wife Abigail's simpler marker in the small, heavily wooded Zion Sixteen Cemetery about a mile and a half south of Corunna, Indiana, along State Road 327.



Illustration 8a: Front view of flint period fullstock, Rifle No.1, made in Washington County, Pennsylvania or Stark County, Ohio, ca. 1831-1833. Paulmer's patchbox finial shape and engraved patterns were already established, as was his use of small heart inlays. Note, however, the not yet fully developed patch box side leaves and the full width hinge, both early features.

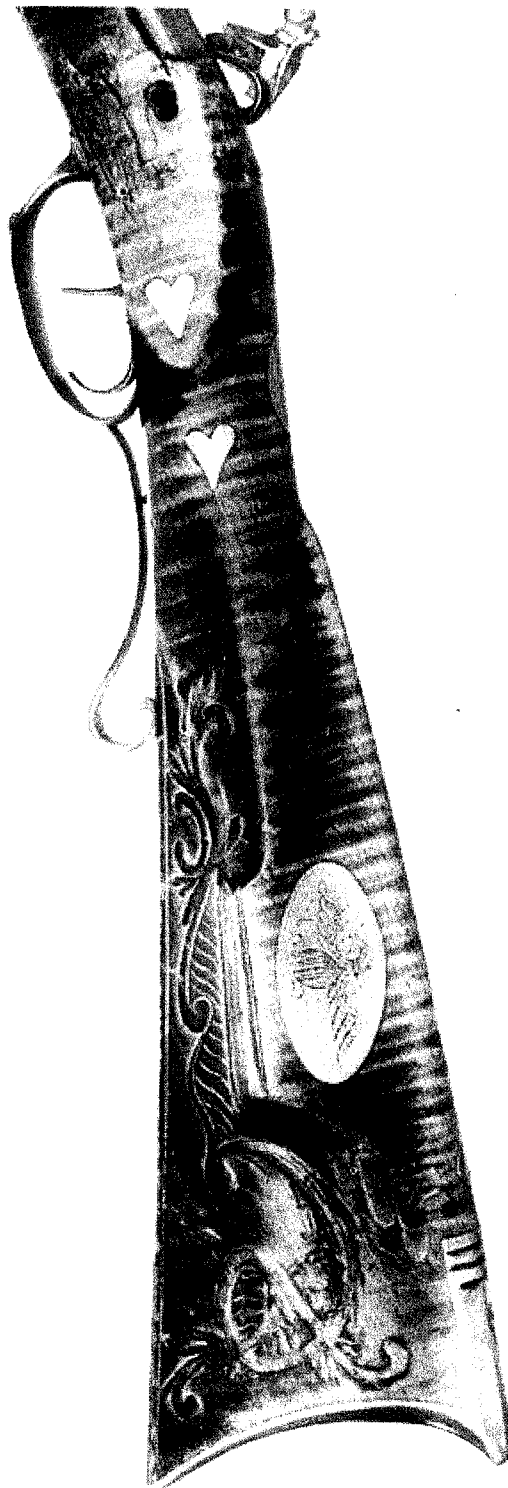


Illustration 8b: Rear view of Rifle No. 1. The relief carving is particularly noteworthy due to its similarities to work by Jacob Sell the younger, in particular under the cheek piece. The typical high, short Paulmer cheek piece is already developed, as are the filed ridges on the butt plate return.

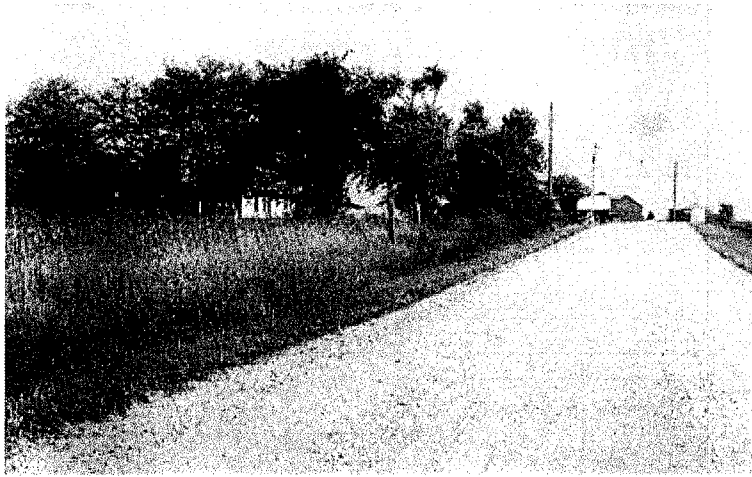


Illustration 7: View of Paulmer's fifty acre farm property, looking east along the road that divided the property when Paulmer lived there. The road rises to a small knoll; the Paulmer home sat on the north, or left, side of the road where a small grove of trees and a house trailer are now located. The gunshop sat across the road to the right at the crest in the road.

and in front of and behind his side facings. Note should be taken of the poorly developed side leaves pattern on the patchbox, indicative of Paulmer's early work before he developed his later, more elaborate side leaves. The lid hinge is the full width of the finial base, an early trait that was later reduced to the width of the lid itself. But the patchbox finial was fully developed, and by being so may hint at what Peter Swinehart's guns looked like. Flat headed screws were used to attach the patchbox, an early Paulmer characteristic that eventually gave way to round head screws. Already visible are Paulmer's pronounced filed bands on his butt plate return and trigger guard front extension, as well as his "signature" cheek piece of pronounced height, short length, and simple mold line with wide concave molding underneath and clean bottom edge line. The trigger guard style seems later than the gun itself, but appears to be original since it's made of silver and has Paulmer's front extension filings. This rifle carries the marking "J*S*P"; its barrel is 43 $\frac{1}{2}$ " , the longest known on a Paulmer rifle, and attaches with blind hooks.

A final note regarding this rifle is the evidence it offers of Paulmer's early admiration for the work of gunsmith Jacob Sell the younger of Adams County,

Pennsylvania. The treatment used below the cheek piece by Paulmer appears taken from Sell's work; rifles nos. 180 & 181 in Kindig's Thoughts On The Kentucky Rifle In Its Golden Age show the same detail. Additional similarities can be seen in Sell's short, well molded cheek pieces, the major "C" scroll behind the cheek piece with large, curled ends similar to Paulmer's later carving, and the segmented "collar" pattern engraved around the piercing in the patchbox finial on Sell's gun No. 181.

The Ohio Period, 1833-1850:

Paulmer's working location or locations while in Ohio are not yet documented, although several factors point toward Starke County. It's probable that most of his better work was done in Ohio, and two rifles are illustrated that represent such work. These two Ohio guns present a problem when determining which is the earlier of the two, due to conflicting characteristics. The writer is presenting them in the order he feels is correct, but realizes opinions may differ. Rifle No.2 appears earlier than No. 3 based on its superior stock architecture, reduced butt curvature, shorter butt plate heel, intermediate patchbox style with flat head instead of round head screws, smaller engraved inlays, and reduced amount of veining in the relief carved scrolls and incised

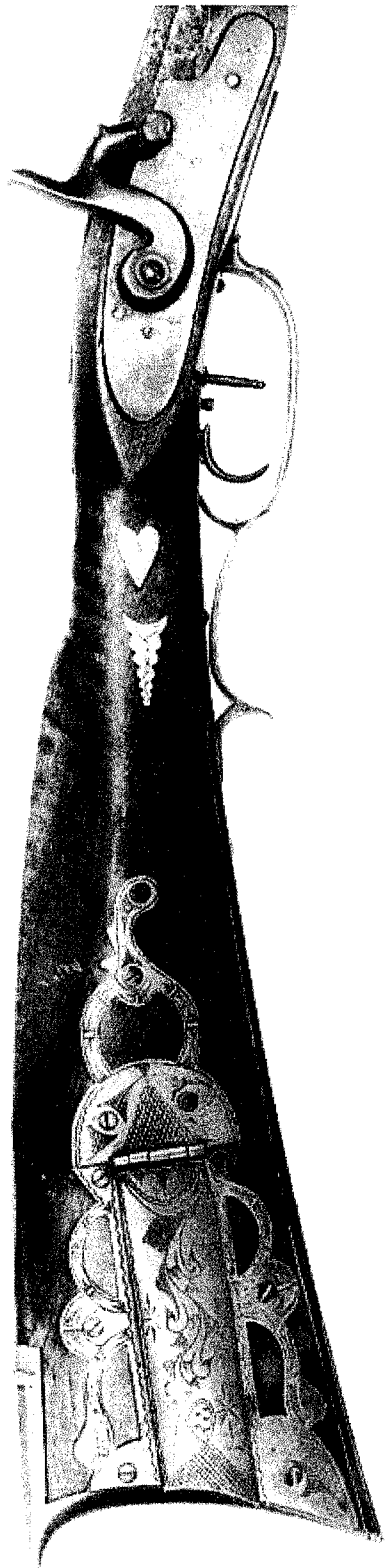


Illustration 9b: Front view of Rifle No. 2; the lock is a replacement. Note fully engraved patch-box with slightly different finial and side leaves, plus fine wiggle engraving on silver wrist inlays that was a Paulmer trademark. Rifle dates ca. 1840.

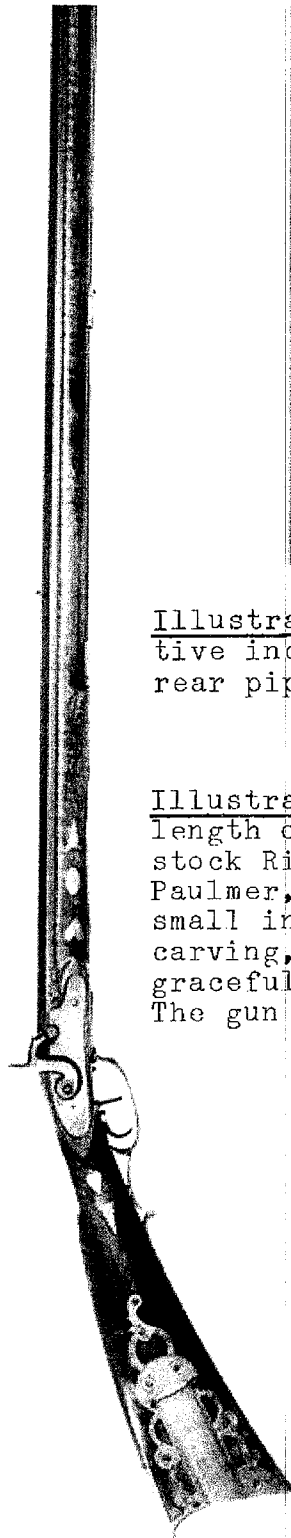


Illustration 9a: Full length of the Ohio full stock Rifle No. 2 by Paulmer, showing several small inlays, rear pipe carving, plus overall graceful architecture. The gun dates to ca. 1840.



Illustration 9d: Decorative incised carving at rear pipe on Rifle No. 2.



Illustration 9c: Rear view of Ohio Rifle No. 2, showing Paulmer's distinctive relief carving and expanded use of small silver inlays with fine wiggle lines making patterns and borders. Carving behind cheek piece has "squeezed" look due to cheek being located slightly toward rear of butt.

accent lines emerging from the relief carving. It also appears the Paulmer's earlier guns had slightly more curvature to the comb line, becoming straighter as his career progressed.

Rifle No.2:

The gun has a replaced lock and side plate washer, but otherwise is probably representative of Paulmer's work from about ca. 1835-1840. The gun carries a heavily engraved patch-box and relief carved butt as seen in Illustrations 9a through 9c, plus incised carving at the rear pipe as seen in Illustration 9d. The carving has evolved into a more flamboyant style with additional lobes and accent lines, but less preciseness and control. However, Paulmer is still restrained in the veining of the lobes and scrolls of his relief carving, as well as in the incised accent lines used so profusely in his later work. The butt remains relatively flat, and carries Paulmer's typical short, high check piece. It also illustrates a possible design weakness in Paulmer's rifles built for owners of smaller stature. On rifles with shorter trigger pull distances, it appears that Paulmer often shortened the butt without moving the cheek piece forward to compensate. The result was a cheek piece located more to the rear of the butt, and relief carving that appeared constricted, or "squeezed," between the cheek and butt plate. Overall, the gun is slender, graceful and attractively decorated.

Rifle No. 3:

This gun is an elaborate fullstock, mounted completely in silver and carrying a number of large inlays. The rifle has a somewhat thick, slightly heavy architecture with more drop to the butt and a shorter barrel, as seen in Illustration 10a, and is probably representative of Paulmer's work of about ca. 1840-1845. It carries a fully developed later Paulmer patchbox, nicely engraved and with reinforced

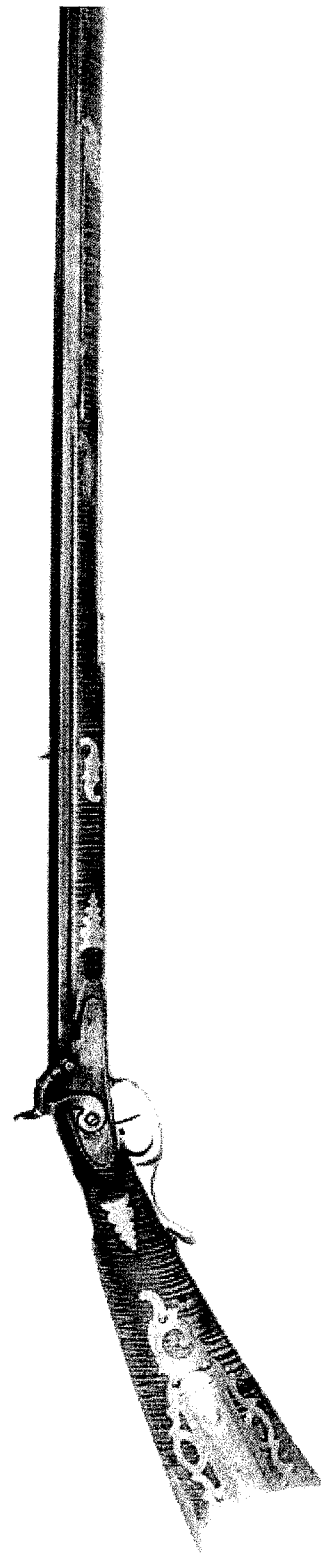


Illustration 10a: Full length view of Ohio fullstock No. 3 by Paulmer, ca. 1840-1845. The gun is silver mounted, has superb curly maple and is the most ornate Paulmer rifle known. Note the fancy forestock inlays, large wrist inlays and different rear spur on the trigger guard.