

Henry Gross Sr.

By Jim Whisker

Henry Gross, Sr., was born in Juniata County, Pennsylvania, on 21 July 1783. The name was originally spelled *Groce* and this spelling is found in script on the barrel flat on some of his early long rifles. He was noted on the 1820 tax list of Union Township, Union County, Pennsylvania, with the occupation of gunsmith. In 1831 the family, including Charles and Henry, Jr., moved to Tiffin, Ohio. Lang left us with his impression of Henry Gross, Sr.

Henry Gross put up a 2 story hewed log house on the north side of Perry St., where he lived with his family and carried on the gunsmith business, together with the repairing of clocks and watches . . . Coming along Perry St. from the east, on the 18th of August 1833, in the afternoon, ahead of the wagon, I saw a man standing in front of a log house, dressed in a long, homespun, brown cloth overcoat, buttoned up to the chin, a cloth cap with a ring of fur around it on his head, and both hands in his pockets. His hair was already turning grey. He had a prominent nose, regular, manly features, large blue eyes, and an expressive but pale countenance. The afternoon was very hot, and this man, attired in that way, so riveted the attention of the writer that it was hard to turn his eyes from him. Approaching and saluting him {he spoke German}, the writer enjoyed the first conversation he had in Tiffin. This was Mr. Henry Gross . . . The old gentleman was shaking with the ague while we talked – the first case I ever saw.

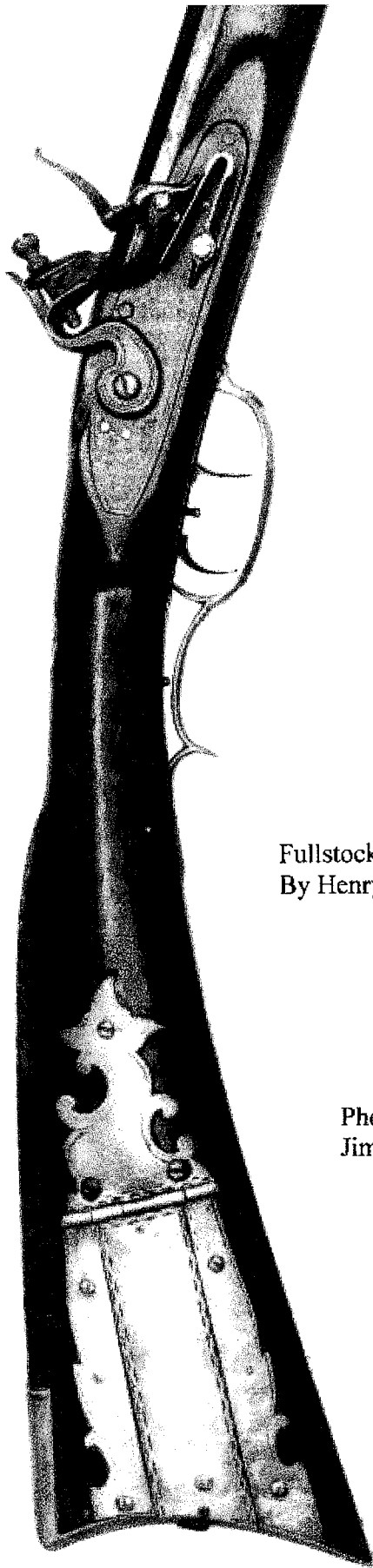
In 1834 Henry Gross Sr., died in Tiffin. Jane Hunter Gross, his wife, had been born in Pennsylvania, in February 1781. She died in Tiffin on 16 January 1866. They had been married on 7 February 1809. There is an account of Henry Gross Sr., in William Lang's *History of Seneca County* [p. 247].

Henry's sons were Charles B. Gross (1810-); and Henry Gross Jr. (1813-1892); Samuel Gross (1810-1894). Myron Bruce Barnes, writing in *Seneca Sentinel* [1976] gave Henry Sr.'s sons' names as Samuel, John, Bovard, and Henry, Jr. Between 1838 and 1841 Samuel Gross served as trustee of Bloom Township, Seneca County. Samuel married in 1830.

According to Lang's county history, Henry Jr., was born on 21 July 1813, probably either in Juniata or Union Co., Pa. "When a boy he made himself busy in his father's gun shop and learned the use of tools. As he grew up he formed a great taste for music and the fine arts, and while he acquired and mastered the gunsmith's trade, he became also an inventor." In 1850, Henry Gross Jr., received an award at the Ohio State Fair for a "repeating slide shooting rifle." [*Cincinnati Cultivator*, 1 November 1850]. On 20 January 1852 Henry Jr., married Elizabeth McConaghy. She died in 1911 in Chicago.

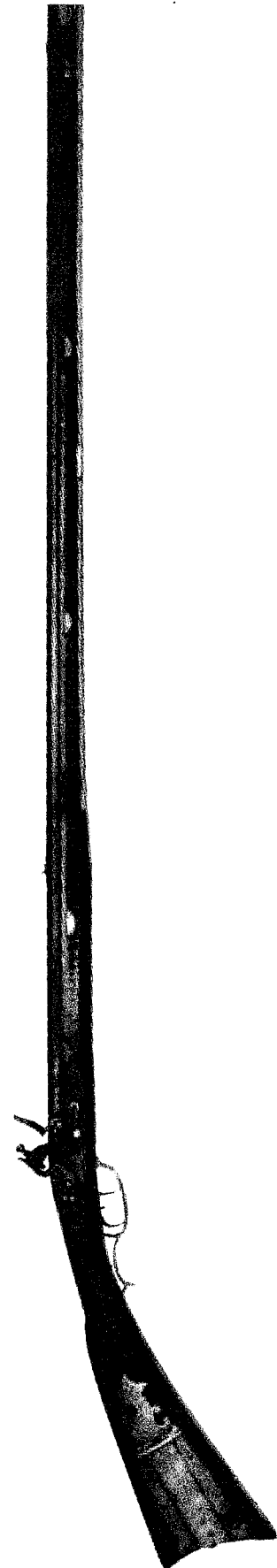
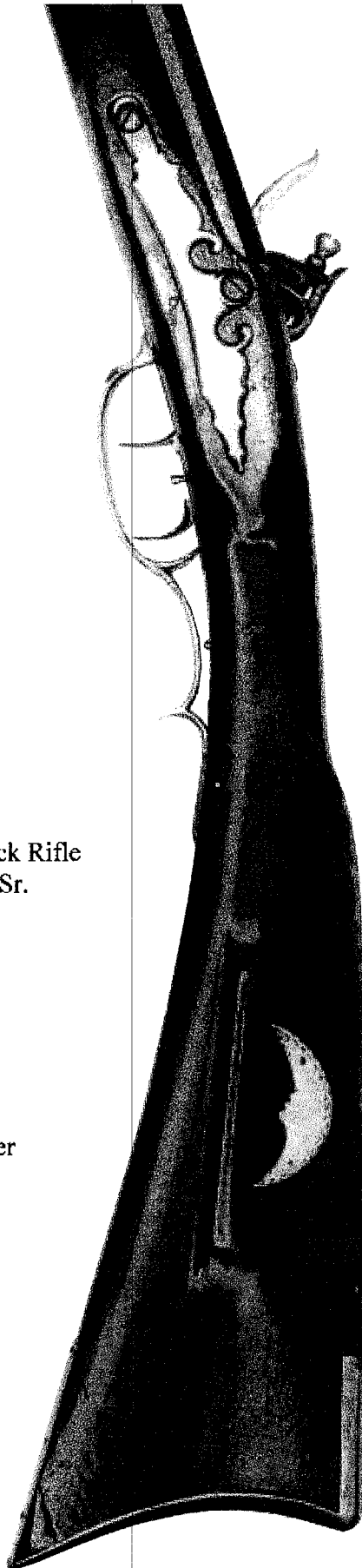
The U.S. Census of 1850 showed Charles B. Gross, 40, gunsmith, born in Pennsylvania, in the household of Jane Gross, 63, with Henry Gross, gunsmith, 43, and 2 sisters, all living in Tiffin, Seneca County, Ohio. The same census showed Samuel Gross, 40, gunsmith, and his wife Ann 42, both born in Pennsylvania; Martha, 12, and 2 other children, born in Ohio, living in Bloom Township, Seneca County. Samuel was another son of Henry Gross Sr., and learned his trade from his father. He was born on 6 January 1810, in Union Co., Pa., and died in Seneca Co. on 26 March 1894. He and Ann (1807-1890) were married in Union County, before the family left for Ohio. They are buried in Woodlawn Cemetery, northwest of Bloomville.

In 1849 Charles and Henry Gross formed the Gross Arms Company. A few older books gave 1841 as the date the Gross Arms Co. was founded; later works use 1849 as the founding date. Gardner, *Small Arms Makers* [1960], gave 1849 as the year Henry Jr., joined the firm. Presumably founded by Charles. The *Tiffin City Directory of 1859-1860* listed "H. & C.B. Gross, Gun Makers & Machinists" north side of Perry between Washington & Jefferson Sts. According to Gardner, Charles and Henry continued to work together until 1875. Henry had left the firm by 1877 for he was in Cincinnati by that date.



Fullstock Flintlock Rifle
By Henry Gross Sr.

Photos by
Jim Whisker



Charles continued to use the company name until 1886. Lang's history gave a long account of the work Henry Jr., did with safes and locks in Cincinnati while employed by the Hall Company.

The Gross Arms Company assembled a number of harmonic actions, multiple loads in a horizontally sliding bar. We have seen a 3 shot rifle marked *H. Gross*. There is a shotgun with a single block or chamber that was probably made by Gross; it was either intended to be a harmonica action or to be a form of breech-loader with single reloadable cartridges.

According to the U.S. Census of Industry for 1850, Henry and Charles B. Gross had a capital investment of \$2,000 in their business and employed 3 hands, with a monthly payroll of \$100. During the year ending 30 June 1850, they had purchased 48 gun barrels for \$144; 72 gunlocks for \$72; and other articles for \$300, bringing the total outlay to \$516. They had manufactured 50 rifles valued at \$1,000, 10 pistols worth \$50, and done repair work worth \$1,050.

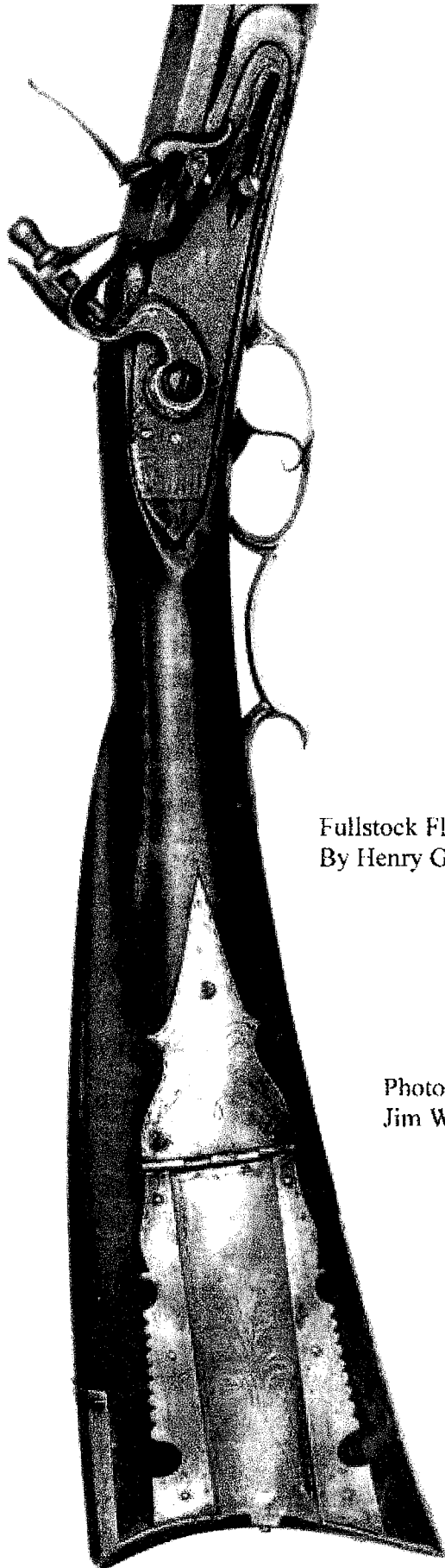
A.F. Hammond produced burglar alarm pistols, which were made on contract by the Gross Arms Company about 1866. Quantity unknown, but severely limited. These devices had brass octagonal barrels 2.75" long, cast with an integral brass frame; overall length 3.5" and in .25 caliber. They were to be attached to a door, window, mantle, etc., and an attached string or wire would trip them. There was a small hole in the left side of the barrel to hold a thin wire rod or fixture that held a common wooden match over the muzzle. When the device was tripped, the device was designed to light a match thus exposing the intruder; and the discharge of the .25 cartridge would supposedly awaken the household. They are marked *A.F. Hammond/ patented 1866/ Gross Arms Co./ Tiffin, Ohio*.

City directories for Tiffin for 1853 and 1859 list Henry and Charles Gross, gun makers and machinists in Tiffin. The U.S. Census of 1860 showed Henry Gross, master gunsmith, born in Pennsylvania, his wife Elisabeth, born in Delaware, and Mary, 7, and 2 other children, born in Ohio. His real estate was valued at \$12,000 and his personal property was worth \$2,000. Elisabeth may have been Henry's second wife. Jacob Gross who worked for Hall's Safe and Lock Company in Cincinnati may have been his son by a first wife.

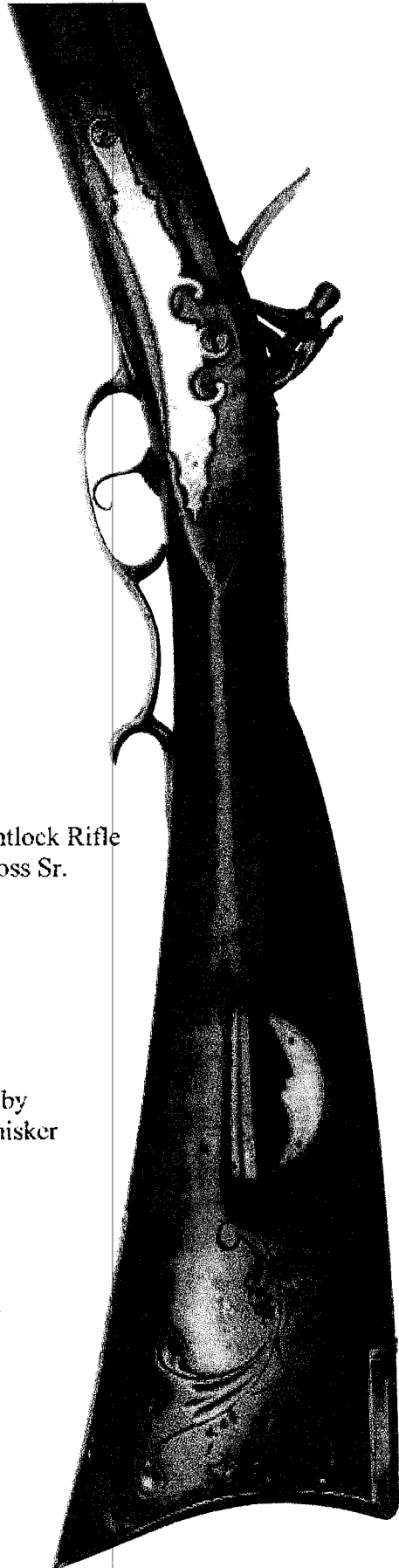
The same census showed Samuel Gross, age 50, a farmer and mechanic; wife, Ann, both born in Pennsylvania; with 3 females born in Ohio, all living in Bloomville, Bloom Township, Seneca County. Apparently, Samuel was not involved with Gross Arms Company, at least at this time. He was noted as a practical mechanic who could repair clocks, watches, and other mechanical devices, as well as firearms.

Directories for 1861 through 1865, that is, during the Civil War, showed both the Gross Arms Company and Charles B. Gross in Tiffin. His manufactory manufactured small cartridge pistols in .22, .25, .30, and .32 rimfire. These were probably an infringement on the Rolin White patent owned by Smith & Wesson. Only a few hundred were manufactured. Some are marked on the frame, *Gross Patent/ 1861/ Tiffin, Ohio*. Others are marked *Henry Gross patent May 22, 1855*. These 7 shot revolvers had octagon barrels of various lengths. They are hinged so that they may be tipped up for loading, a system very similar to Smith & Wesson. Workmanship was crude but they are effective.

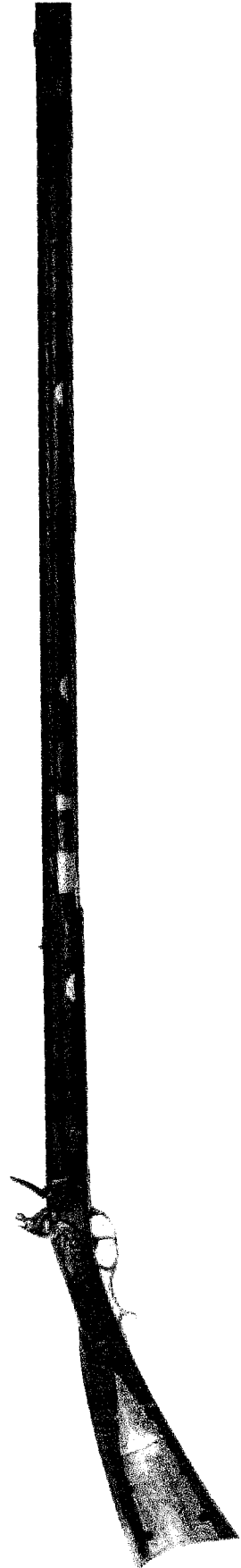
By 1872 Charles B. Gross, gunsmith, was noted in Bowling Green. In 1874 Samuel was noted in the county atlas in section 15, Bloom Township. Gardener said that Henry, Jr., left Gross Arms Company in 1875. In 1879 Henry Gross Jr., was noted in a city directory as an inventor in Cincinnati. Henry appears hereafter in Hamilton County, Ohio. In 1886 there was a comment in Lang's county history that Samuel Gross was still living in original log house. Samuel was a practical mechanic who repaired guns, pistols, clocks, watches, etc.



Fullstock Flintlock Rifle
By Henry Gross Sr.



Photos by
Jim Whisker



Pistol By William Kail



William Kail lived near the southern edge of Tuscarawas County close to the small village of Gilmore. Known to this time are a number of half-stock rifles and Hutsler¹ lists a signed full-stock rifle. Several rifles vary somewhat in style with at least one having interesting carving involved in the cheek piece. One small boy's rifle, heavily inlaid, has also survived.

Recently a "Kentucky Style" pistol has surfaced which is signed in small block print on the top of the barrel—Wm. Kail. This pistol has survived the years in very good overall condition. It is stocked in curly maple, has a barrel length of 12 ¼ inches and is approximately .38 caliber.

The horseman's pistol, described in the Whisker and Chandler book The Kentucky Pistol, in a commentary by Ray A. McKnight: "...pistols were at least .40 caliber and measured approximately 15 inches overall in length."² This "Kentucky Horse Pistol" made in Tuscarawas County fits this description very well.

An interesting aspect of collecting the firearms made during the early settlement of Ohio is finding the unexpected. Just when a maker's products are studied and a pattern begins to develop, a surprise turns up and this time it happens to be a fairly good example of American history known as the "Kentucky Horse Pistol."

¹ Hutsler, Donald A., GUNSMITHS of OHIO, 18th and 19th CENTURIES, Volume I, p. 381.

² Chandler, Roy F. and Whisker, James B., THE KENTUCKY PISTOL, p.155.

Photos by Jim Whisker

Carved Powder Horns of Mercer Co. Ohio



By Shelby Gallien

Introduction: Carved powder horns are a significant American folk art form. Horn carving first gained recognition during the French and Indian War in the mid-1700's. Soldiers began taking a fancy to horns decorated with more than just their names or dates. During idle periods of military campaigns some soldiers passed the time by carving their horns with decorative figures of soldiers, Indians, animals, flowers, military forts, or more whimsical creations. Over time a few horn "artisans" emerged as their work gained recognition among the soldiers, and their carving abilities became sought out. Soldiers began taking their horns to the more talented carvers, and over time their collective works became sufficiently proliferate to be recognized as a style or "school" of powder horn carving. The Revolutionary War two decades later promulgated the continuing development of carved powder horns. The French and Indian and Revolutionary Wars were the "golden age" of carved powder horns. Following this period of finely carved horns with military influences, the tradition of American carved powder horns continued into the 19th century, moving slowly west with the frontier. Several new schools of horn carving emerged, replete with their own identifying characteristics, regional affiliations, and strong local support.

Perhaps the purest form of American folk art to grace a powder horn was done by the Tansel family, working first in Kentucky and then Indiana during the first half of the 19th century. But as the frontier slowly disappeared, the demand for fancy

powder horns and rifles waned. Just as the Tansel carvers were ending their horn work around 1850, another small but significant school of carved horns was reaching its artistic peak. This group of horns, distinctive in style and regional in nature, was centered around Mercer County, Ohio, on the state's western edge bordering Indiana. These colorful, highly decorated horns have slowly gained recognition as a distinctive group of horns, with strong similarities in decoration, workmanship, and regional affiliation. Mercer County horns lacked the multiple carvers that worked in the French and Indian War or Revolutionary War periods, or the several family members working over 50 years as the Tansels did. In fact, Mercer County horns were probably made by a single carver, known only by his initials "W. D." The carver, or at most perhaps two carvers, account for the fewer known examples and longer time needed to identify Mercer County as a school in its own right. While referred to as Mercer County horns, several fully developed horns carry names and/or locations in eastern Indiana, indicating the carver moved around within the regional area, or perhaps his reputation brought Hoosiers to him in Ohio. But Mercer County, Ohio appears to be the center of production, and an appropriate description for these noteworthy carved horns.

Identifying Characteristics: Mercer County carved horns are distinctive and easily recognizable, although early ones were influenced by the Tansel carvers of nearby Indiana. The most

obvious detail on these horns are figures of standing men with a brimmed hats, often holding or shooting a hunting rifle. Some horns have multiple hunters or male figures. Large compass-cut cartouches with names, dates and often profiles, or busts, of the owners are usually present. Names and dates are very prominent, and cut in large, neatly shaped letters and numbers. Dates range from 1845 to 1856 on known horns. Most Mercer County horns have an American eagle with droopy outstretched wings, a shield on its breast, and three arrows in the eagle's right [viewer's left] talons. The eagles tend to mimic earlier, more sophisticated Tansel-style eagles, and often have overhead arches with "E Pluribus Unum" and a field of stars. The Mercer County eagle is unique; rather than the normal tuft on the back of the head, it has a rooster's comb on top the head. Several horns also have chickens carved on them, and the two bird figures are amazingly similar in head shape. Also distinctive is the eagle's lack of detail in the shield. Shields have no stars or strips, only cross-hatched shading, and are larger in comparison to the eagle's body than on Tansel-style horns.

Men's busts, or profiles, found in circular cartouches are thought to represent the horns' owners, due to the usual close proximity of the owners' names. The "Phillip Alspaugh" horn #MC-7 provides a good example of a bust, or profile, carving thought to represent the owner. Most busts appear very similar, with only hairlines or sideburns changing to indicate a different person being depicted. Most horns have the owner's name prominently displayed, while several horns have two names, or additional initials. Other Mercer County details include non-typical four (4) pointed stars, hunting dogs, birds, and deer that often have their heads turned back over their shoulder. "Checkerboard" shading is found on most Mercer County horns in the borders of cartouches, banners and arches, and as shading on human figures. The carver used either fine parallel lines or cross-hatching to darken his figures. But at times he cut much courser, wider cross-hatching lines, then stained alternate squares to create his "checkerboard" visual effect. This type of shading appears unique to the Mercer County horns, and is clearly seen on the "James F.

VanTrees" horn #MC-8, and others. Major figures were often stained or polychromed with a reddish brown dye to give greater depth and appeal to the decoration. The spout was more finely carved on earlier horns, but always had a strongly carved strap-retaining ring. In general the horn bodies were well shaped and finished, and the surface heavily decorated. Butt plugs were walnut, turned bulbous in shape, with one or more sets of fine parallel lines encircling them. The plug's nose was flattened slightly for an iron strap staple.

Masonic Influences: When two names appear on a horn, they are thought to indicate the owner and the person who presented the horn to him. Most Mercer County horns have strong Masonic imagery in the decoration. An Ohio Mason told the author that when important milestones occur in a Mason's fraternal life, such as reaching the 32nd degree, recognition ceremonies usually involve a gift or memento being presented by fellow Masons to recognize the occasion. Masons were traditionally tradesmen, craftsmen and businessmen, and a hand crafted item by a fellow Mason was an ideal memento. A well-made powder horn carved with appropriate names, dates and Masonic imagery fulfilled the recognition requirement nicely. While not proven, the strong Masonic symbolism on most Mercer County horns, multiple figures and names present, and many owners being known Masons in the Ohio-Indiana border area, combine to give evidence the horns and their owners were directly related to the local fraternal organization.

Masonic imagery on Mercer County horns includes a wide range of symbols. The "James F. Vantrees" horn #MC-8 shows Masonic tools including a trowel, hammer, ruler, plumb bob and ladder, each having a special meaning to a Mason. Also present on the horn are the moon and stars, and a group of stars that form a cross. Other horns display the Masonic sun, moon and stars, the all-seeing-eye, and several have the overlaid framing-square & compass, or dividers, which is the best known Masonic symbol. Many owner's names found on horns were early Masons of Western Ohio or Eastern Indiana; research is incomplete in this important area of the horns' historical

significance to both the Masonic order and their owners. Two horns have "checkerboard" arches that appear to represent Masonic temples, with Masonic emblems underneath the arches. Each arch has a large set of initials, "J G B" or "J A B," within their borders. At first these letters appear to be initials of a person, but they may have a Masonic meaning, perhaps indicating the Masonic rank of the horn owner, or perhaps the horn giver. It is the author's hope this article will spark the interest of a Mason with a love of Masonic history and good research capabilities, so that the Masonic symbolism and ties to original horn owners in Ohio and Indiana can be clarified. However, the intent of this article is not to determine the history of individual horns, but rather to describe, identify and establish Mercer County horns as a recognized school of American carved horns.

Period of Manufacture: The time period during which Mercer County horns were carved can be established by the dates they carry. Eleven positively identified Mercer County horns have dates ranging from 1847 to 1856; one small horn is undated and another excessively cleaned to where neither date nor name is readable. Additional horns will undoubtedly appear to extend manufacturing dates a few years in each direction. Three earlier horns from the Ohio/Indiana area appear to be transitional Mercer County work, with dates of 1834 and 1835. These horns are not proven to be prototype Mercer County horns, but do show similarities in some carved details, neatly shaped spouts, and bulbous walnut plugs with fine incised rings. The 1834 horn is perhaps the most important, not because of its good surface carving, but rather its initials "W. D. B." in the original carver's hand. Several later signed Mercer County horns carry the carver's initials "W. B." The similarity in initials is too coincidental to overlook. The 1834 horn does not have an owner's name spelled out. Rather, it has the possible owner's initials "W. C." and a large date to relate it to later horns. A secondary date, "1854," is carved on the horn by a later hand. These early horns appear to be closely related to later Mercer County horns, but the large time gap between 1835 and 1847 without additional developmental or prototype examples to verify the transition, or connection, makes it best to consider

them as similar to, but not proven to be, early Mercer County horns.

Origins of Known Horns: Some Mercer County horns have changed hands enough times to lose any history of where they were originally found. Fortunately, several other horns have limited histories behind them. One fine Mercer County horn is still among descendants of the original owner, just north of Mercer County in Van Wert County. Another small, badly damaged Mercer County horn was found several years ago in Van Wert County [originally part of Mercer County], Ohio. The "James F. VanTrees" horn came out of an old family in St. Louis, Missouri, who reportedly migrated to Missouri from Ohio, despite James VanTrees living in Jay County, Indiana just across the state line from Ft. Recovery, Ohio. The small "Jacob Iler" horn came out of Indianapolis, Indiana. Two horns, the "Phillip Alspaugh" horn and a reported horn with two names, "Samuel Dunwoody" and "William Dunwoody," both have "Mercer County, Ohio" carved on them. One of the finer Mercer County horns came from Shelbyville in Shelby County, Indiana, 70 miles southwest of Mercer County. This well carved horn carries the name "William Halstead" and "Shelby County, Indiana 1849" in typical large block letters found on Mercer County horns. The fine "Hezek [sic] VanTrees" horn most probably came from the Ft. Recovery area of western Mercer County, where Hezekiah VanTress, brother of horn owner James F. VanTrees, lived and worked. An old VanTrees family story of a third Mercer County-type horn in the family, destroyed by children playing with it near an open fire, will be presented later. Thus several Mercer County horns retain a family history indicating they were made in or near Mercer County, Ohio, making the "Mercer County" designation appropriate for this distinctive group of horns. But it is also clear that some horn owners were originally from near-by counties in both Ohio and Indiana; whether these horns were carved there, or delivered there through Masonic inter-actions, is unknown.

Catalog of Known Horns: The best way to gain proficiency in identifying Mercer County horns is by examining them, noting similarities and

specific Mercer County-style characteristics. The author has documented eleven (11) Mercer County horns, and three additional horns with earlier dates as possible developmental or prototype examples. The focus of this study are identified Mercer County horns personally inspected by the author; the objective is to visually present the primary Mercer County characteristics to the reader. Seven (7) Mercer County horns are illustrated and discussed, beginning with earliest and running sequentially to the latest. Not all documented horns are discussed here, due to lack of personal inspection by the author. Reports on non-inspected horns by people unfamiliar with Mercer County characteristics can suffice to identify and assign the horn to the school, but details are always overlooked or miss-described in such reports, causing potential misrepresentations in subsequent discussions, until the horn is actually seen. The study begins with an inventory of all Mercer County horns known to the writer, with identification numbers provided for ease of cross-referencing.

The Lost Horn: An amusing incident involving a Mercer County horn has passed down in the VanTrees family of Mercer County, Ohio. The story was documented by descendent Robert VanTrees in the March, 1986 issue of the *Association of Ohio Longrifle Collectors Newsletter*. The name should be familiar to readers by now, since two known Mercer County horns belonged to brothers Hezekiah and James F. VanTrees. James, the younger brother, was born near Ft. Recovery, Mercer County, Ohio in 1838; he later worked as a gunsmith in nearby Jay County, Indiana, just across the state line from Ft. Recovery. James' oldest son, Daniel VanTrees, was born in Mercer County in 1865. James made a halfstock rifle for Daniel on his eighth birthday in 1873. James also gave Daniel a "handsomely engraved powder horn," undoubtedly a Mercer County type horn since it was the preferred horn among the VanTrees. Years later when Daniel had a family, he and his wife went to Ft. Recovery shopping and left oldest son Floyd in care of the younger children. Floyd decided to "entertain"



Inventory Of Known Mercer County, Ohio Horns

<u>Horn I.D. No.</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Owner's Name & Inscriptions</u>
MC-1	1847	GEORGE W. MANN
MC-2	1848	HEZEK VANTREES; W. D.; JEN. TAYLOR; CITY OF MEXICO; BLACKHAWK; E PLURIBUS UNUM.
MC-3	1849	WILLIAM HALSTEAD; J*G*B, SHELBY COUNTY, INDIANA.
MC-4	n/a	JACOB ILER [dates ca. 1850].
MC-5	1852	SAMUEL DUNWOODY, WILLIAM DUNWOODY, MERCER COUNTY, OHIO. Horn may have other inscriptions not reported.
MC-6	1853	EPHRIM GRANT
MC-7	1854	PHILLIP ALSPAUGH; W. D. (in script); MERCER COUNTY OHIO; E PLURIBUS UNUM.
MC-8	1855	JAMES F. VANTREES; JAMES MOTT; J*A*B;
MC-9	1856	Large date; no name or inscription.
MC-10	?	Large, profusely decorated horn, names and date present but not reported; large eagle, house with furniture inside; in original family in NW Ohio.
MC-11	?	Small, damaged horn with replace plug; rooster-headed eagle visible, name and date scrapped over and not readable.



his younger brothers by throwing pinches of gun powder from his father's "handsomely engraved powder horn" into the kitchen stove to watch it sputter and flash. One attempt "sputtered and flashed" too much, throwing a spark near the opened powder horn. The spark instantly caused the horn to ignite. The resulting black powder explosion "blew the horn into a million pieces" and blistered the face of younger brother John who was standing nearby, according to Floyd, who "enjoyed telling the story in later years." As an aside, the writer wonders just how "enjoyable" the story was for Floyd the first time he told it, when his father got home and found out his powder horn was destroyed.

The Study Horns: The earliest study horn is dated 1847 and belonged to George W. Mann; it is identified as #MC-1. The smallish horn, about 9 5/8 inches along the outside curve and 2 1/8 inches in diameter at the plug end, has typical Mercer County hunter figures, several with brimmed hats. The figures are noteworthy due to the large number, four, and the fact that three of them are holding hands, undoubtedly representing a mutual friendship or Masonic brotherhood. No eagle is present, but a Masonic temple is carved above the men's heads just below the spout. The owner's name and date of presentation or manufacture are present. One standing figure points toward the name as if to indicate it referred to him. No other inscriptions are present. The horn has a bulbous walnut plug that differs slightly from later plugs by not having an iron staple for strap attachment. Rather, it has an integrally turned nose button on the plug, the only Mercer County horn known to have such an attachment. However, the plug does have the expected fine incised lines encircling it. Research indicates the owner was probably George W. Mann of Randolph County, Indiana. He was born October 15, 1827 in Butler County, Ohio to father Thomas Allen Mann. George married Lucinda L. Parker in Randolph County on January 23, 1853, and presumably remained there until he died sometime after 1880. The horn's 1847 date is about the time of his "coming of age" or reaching maturity. Whether still in Butler, or in Mercer or Randolph County by then, is unknown. The horn's



Illustration No. 1: Typical Mercer County carved powder horn, #MC-8. This horn belonged to Ohio and Indiana gunsmith James F. VanTrees of eastern Jay County, Indiana, just across the state line from Ft. Recovery in Mercer County, Ohio. The horn is a later example dated "1855," but exhibits many Mercer County characteristics, including owner's name, large date, Masonic symbols, "checkerboard" shading of figures and borders, and on the reverse side a figure of a standing man with a rifle and dog.

decoration is nicely done, and fully representative of Mercer County horns.

The next study horn, #MC-2, is dated 1848, and is one of most highly decorated Mercer County horns. Its owner's name is "Hezek Vantrees," short for Hezekiah VanTrees of Ft. Recovery in western Mercer County. The horn is a representative size, measuring 13 3/4 inches on the outside curve with a 2 9/16th inches diameter at the plug. Of major importance are the initials "W.



Illustration No. 2: The unique “rooster headed” eagle with droopy wings is a key characteristic of Mercer County horns. Also note the four pointed stars, three clutched arrows pointing upward, large shield on chest without stars & stripes, polychroming, and the “E Pluribus Unum” banner overhead. This rooster is from the “Phillip Alspaugh” horn MC-7 dated “1854.”

D.” near the throat end in neat block letters, indicating the carver. Its figures include General Taylor of Mexican War fame and Chief Black Hawk, the Sac Indian that threatened Illinois and Indiana in 1832. Both figures often appear on Tansel horns. The horn also has a rendering of Mexico City, “E Pluribus Unum” banner, and a “rooster headed” American eagle typical of Mercer County work. This horn most clearly shows the Tansel influences on the carver in his early days. Particularly significant is the recess carved “fish mouth” treatment on the throat section, taken straight from the earlier Tansel horns, along with other figures. The Hezek Vantrees horn demonstrates some of the finer Mercer County horn work, in particular in shaping the horn body, throat section and strap retaining

Illustration No. 3: Cartouches with the bust of a man are thought to depict owners of Mercer County horns. The profiled carvings are usually found in a round compass-cut frame. This one probably represents Phillip Alspaugh, horn #MC-7’s original owner. Masonic symbols appear in the cartouche, indicating Alspaugh’s fraternal affiliation. Such symbols appear on most Mercer County horns, indicating the horns had ties to the Masonic organization, and perhaps were used to recognize members’ achievements within the Masonic organization.



ring. The nicely turned walnut plug is typical of the school’s horn work.

Study piece #MC-3 is dated 1849, and represents the finest level of Mercer County carving with well laid out and precisely carved details. Owner William Halstead was from Shelby County, Indiana, almost 70 miles southwest of Mercer County, and the horn proudly announces both his name and location. This horn helps documents the extended range of Mercer County horns along