

The Bates Family

By Warren Offenberger

In 1982, my late friend and fellow collector, Forrest Tilton came to visit me one evening. He brought with him two rifles that he had borrowed and said that they were made in Noble Co. Ohio. Actually, they were Bates rifles made by Martin and brother Ezekiel. The only thing I could remember about the guns until recently was the handmade lock and trigger assembly on the rifle made by Martin.

That same week, Forrest and I traveled to the Kentucky Rifle Association annual meeting in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. At the show another of our fellow collectors Fred Beck brought in a fine halfstock rifle signed on the barrel Martin Bates. The rifle was so fine that it won a silver medal for best halfstock rifle at the show.

Several years ago AOLRC member Phil Brown bought the first two rifles and member Bob Bedilion purchased the third at the urging of Ted Dixon while we were attending the Baltimore Gun Show in Maryland on March 20, 1999. Then at the Newark show last year Anthony and John Morozowsky showed me a fine little shotgun made by Martin Bates.

Before we begin the study of the four Bates firearms a little history of the Bates family is in order. Ephraim Bates, the grandfather of our gunsmiths was born May 24, 1744 at Morristown, New Jersey. Sometime after 1767 he settled near the Pennsylvania and Virginia border. In 1774 he enlisted for service in the Revolutionary War at Catfish Camp, Va. (now Washington Co. PA.) in Cap't. Enochs Company under Major David Rogers. He re-enlisted June 1, 1778 as a sergeant in Cap't. Cross' Company under Col. Broadhead and served till the close of the war as a "Ranger on the Frontier" for which he drew "Depreciation Pay" and a warrant for 400 acres of land near Washington Co. PA.

The exact date of his migration to Ohio is not known but in 1809 he entered 160 acres of government land in the vicinity of Sarahsville, Noble Co. Ohio where some of his sons had



Martin Bates, Noble Co. Ohio Gunsmith.

preceeded him. He died in 1834 at Sarahsville, a village founded by his son Ezekiel. Ephraim and his wife Susana had ten children including a son named Ephraim Bates Jr.

Ephraim Bates Jr. and his wife Elsie entered land on Mud Run in Seneca Twp. Nobel Co. and built a large stone house. Here they raised seven children; Daniel, Martin, David, Edmond, Ezekiel, Betty and Harriet. David died as a young boy but the other four boys were all well known as expert gunsmiths and violin makers.

Daniel (1811-1887) and Edmond (1826-1887) moved to Guthrie Co. Iowa. AOLRC member John Shultz of Iowa found the obituary for Edmond who died in Guthrie Co. on June 27, 1887.

It is unknown if these two brothers continued to follow the gunsmith trade after moving west. I have never seen a gun by either man.

Martin (1816-1887) and Ezekiel (1824-1878) apparently worked at the trade at the farm on Mud Run. Martin never married and Ezekiel is listed later as working a short distance away at Mt. Ephriam, Seneca Twp. Noble Co. Ohio.

Martin Bates wrote his will March 28, 1879 and he died in 1887. The appraisal of his estate was taken on Feb. 14, 1887 and a sale was held on March 19, 1887. Total assets were \$6995.76. Included in the sale were musical instruments probably made by Martin; a dulcimer \$1.30, two violins with bows and boxes \$6.50, one rifle gun \$10.25, 1 double shotgun \$4.20, gunstocks and barrels \$5.65 and powder flask \$.65.

Martin states in his will that after all his debts have been settled that some of the money is to be used to erect a "good and substantial stone wall around the family grave yard" which is on the family farm at Mud Run. He also states that after the above is completed the balance of



Stone house built by Ephraim and Elsie Bates.



Phil Brown and Bob Bedilion look over the building which I believe to be the Bates Gunshop.

his estate be shared four ways equally to his brothers Daniel, Edmond, sister Elizabeth and to the heirs of his brother Ezekiel now deceased. Ezekiel Bates will was written on June 11, 1778. He died the same year. He gives all property and farm containing 60 acres to his wife Jane and to son Calvin Bates, one five year old horse, saddle and bridle.

Recently, Phil Brown, Bob Bedilion and I had the opportunity to tour what is left of the Bates property on Mud Run. The stone house is

still standing but in bad condition. The structure is so grown up with weeds and second growth that it is hard to find. Several out buildings still stand including a barn and a rather large building built on a slanted bank with windows all around the structure. I believe this was the Bates gun/violin shop. With all the windows one could follow the sun from east to west and all around the building while working with good natural light during the day.

When the Senecaville Lake was built

many years ago the majority of the Bates farm was purchased by the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District. Approximately 40 acres now remain in private ownership.

The small family cemetery is roughly two hundred yards from the house back in the woods. It is only a few yards from the lake. The cemetery contains the graves of Martin, his mother and father, two sisters, two brothers and other members of the Bates family.

Illustration No. 1 is a nice fullstock rifle made by Ezekiel Bates. The 36", .36 cal. barrel is signed in script "E. B. No. 14 1854". It has a curly maple stock with brass and silver mountings including 23 silver inlays consisting of deer, fish, moon, stars and hearts. There is a nice silver full patchbox behind the cheekpiece.

Illustration No. 2 is a very nice halfstock rifle made by Martin Bates. The 34", .28 cal. barrel and lock are both signed in script "M. Bates, 1855". Also, 1855 is carved in the stock under the cheekpiece. The rifle is stocked in curly maple with brass mounts and 40 silver inlays including a fancy pierced wearplate. The patchbox release is in the upper hinge segment. The unique feature of this rifle is the handmade box lock/trigger assembly built as one unit. Cocking the lock hammer sets the single set trigger. There are 7 moving parts including the 4 springs. The 34" barrel is $\frac{3}{4}$ " across the flats. The stock is incise and prick punch carved in a folk art design. The patchbox, wearplate, counter plate, lock plate and comb extension are all skillfully engraved.

Illustration No. 3 is the beautiful halfstock rifle by Martin Bates that won the silver medal in 1982. The 33 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", .34 cal. barrel is signed in script "Martin Bates". The stock is of fine curly maple and carries 30 + silver inlays. The full patchbox, trigger guard, nose cap, buttplate, lockplate and thimbles are all made of silver. The stock is lightly incised carved in the Bates style. The barrel rib is unusual as it is made of wood with brass cladding. This is a very delicate and beautiful halfstock rifle.

Illustration No. 4 is a .28 ga. double barrel shotgun made by Martin Bates. It is stocked in walnut and has some nice silver inlay work. The stock is carved in the simple Bates style and the handmade box lock is signed "M. B. 1867".

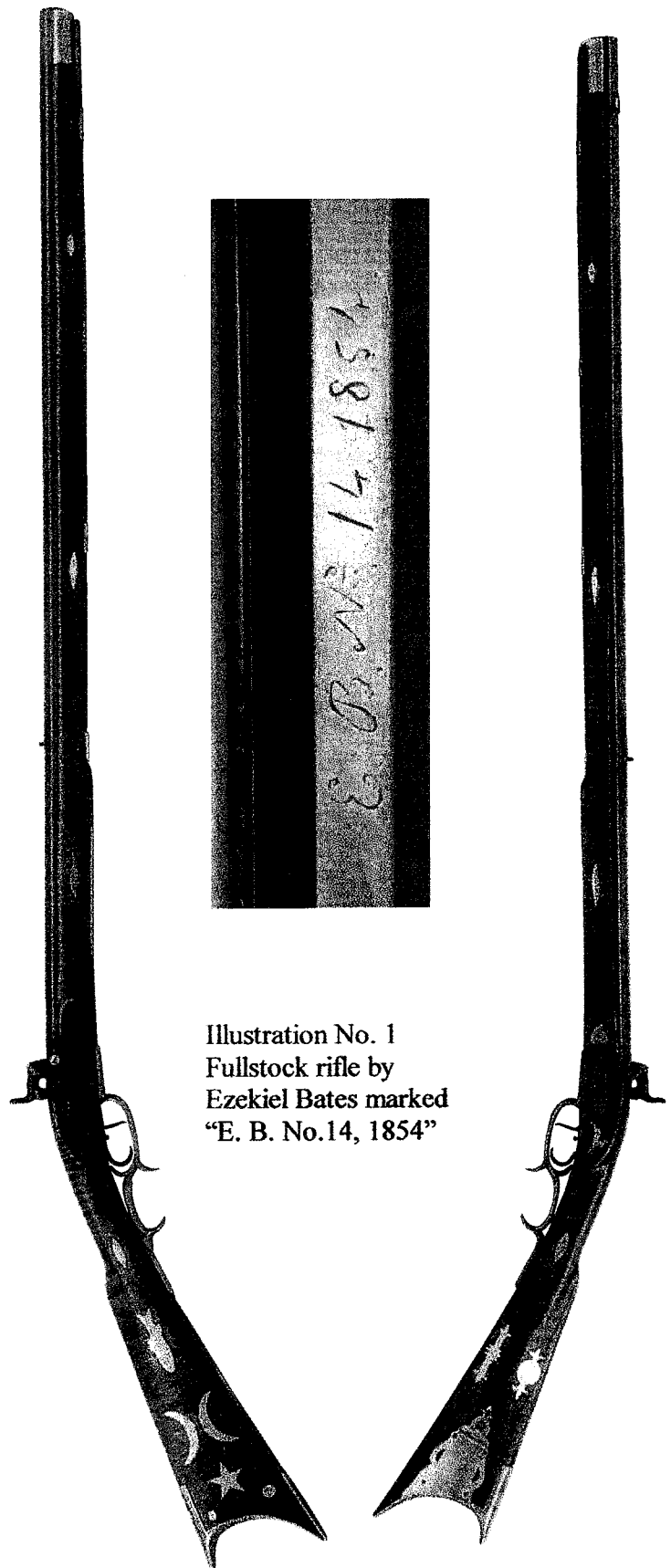


Illustration No. 1
Fullstock rifle by
Ezekiel Bates marked
"E. B. No.14, 1854"

The question of who taught the gunsmith trade to the Bates brothers will probably never be known. Maybe they were taught by Martin, apparently the most talented. He was born in 1816 and could have been making guns as early as 1830-35.

Noble County was separated from Morgan County in 1851 to form the last of the 88 Ohio counties. The earliest known gunsmith was John McKittrich who was reported by Reilly working at Berne in 1853. Two others, T. Roach and Jesse Welber were working at Williamsburg and South Olive. I have seen guns by all these men over the years and none will compare with the workmanship and skill of Martin Bates.

Although several rifles by Martin Bates exist, nothing verbally or written has been

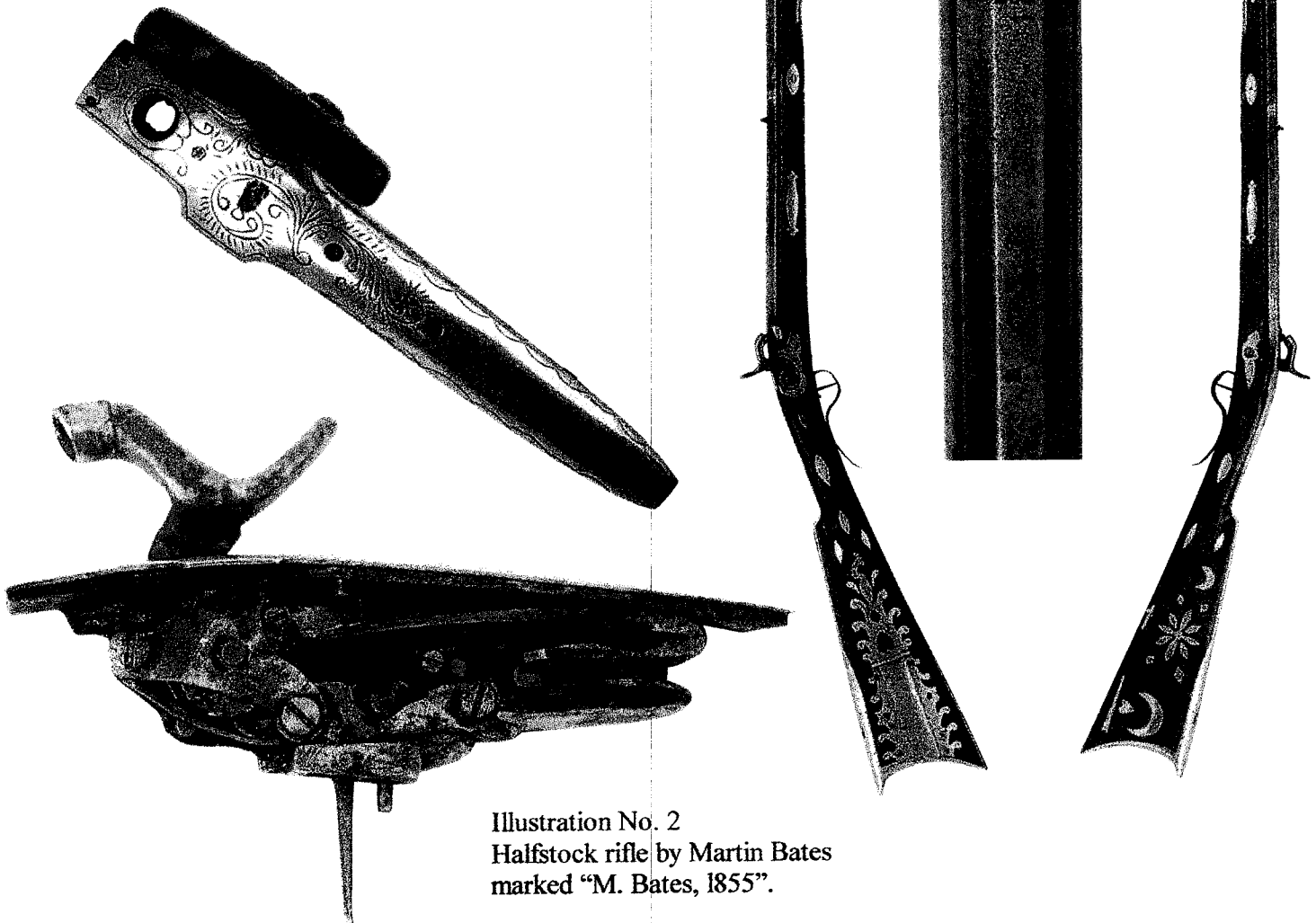


Illustration No. 2
Halfstock rifle by Martin Bates
marked "M. Bates, 1855".

confirmed about his life and work. He was an excellent gunsmith, artist and mechanical genius.

In closing, I doubt that the "E. Bates" listed in our books as working in Ashtabula Co. Ohio around 1860 is our subject Ezekiel Bates. I suggest that Ezekiel spent his entire life working in Noble County Ohio.

I would be pleased to see more specimens from the Bates Family of Gunsmiths who were backwoods artisans creating quality firearms while working in rural Ohio.

I wish to thank the following individuals for their help with this article. Phil Brown, Bob Bedilion, John Shultz, Gomer Clarkston, Larry Cordray and John and Anthony Morozowsky.

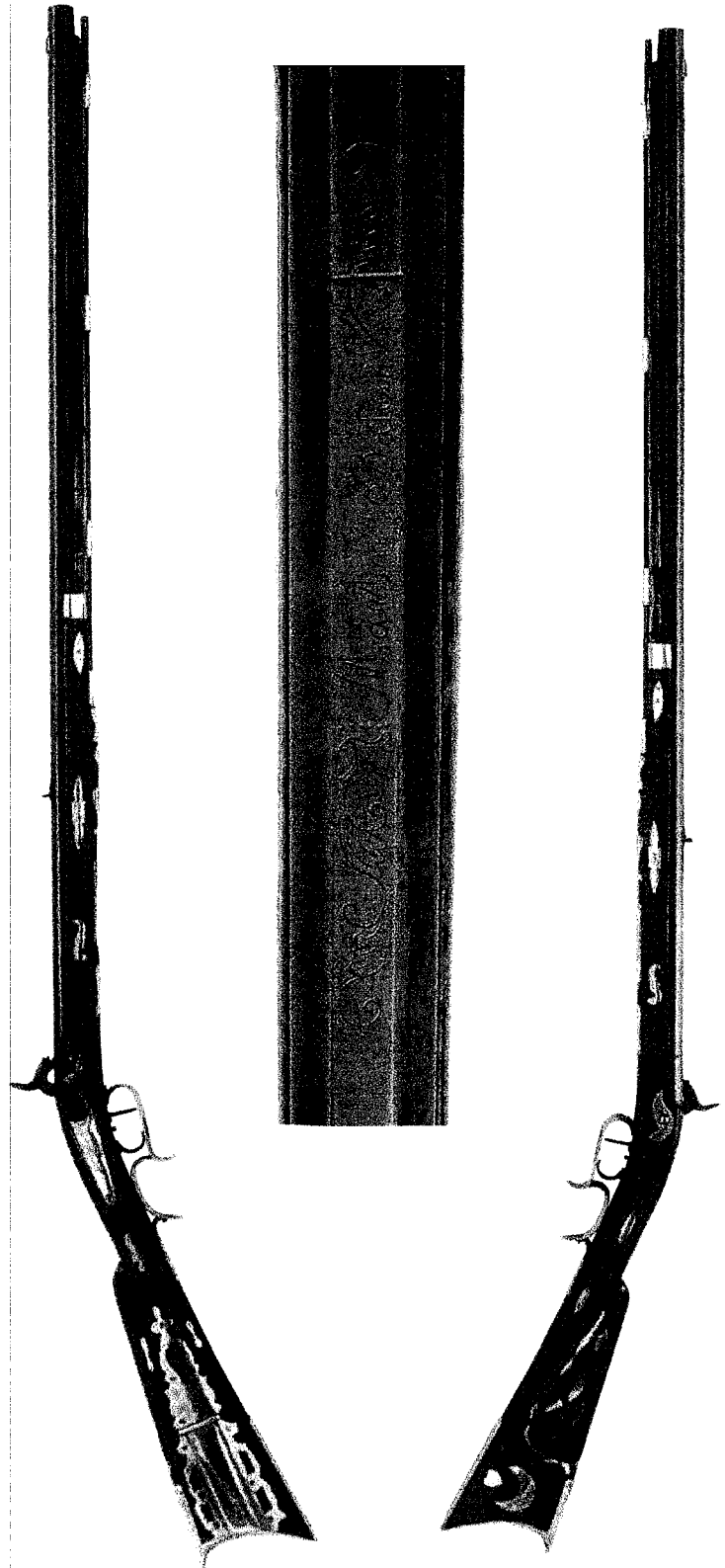
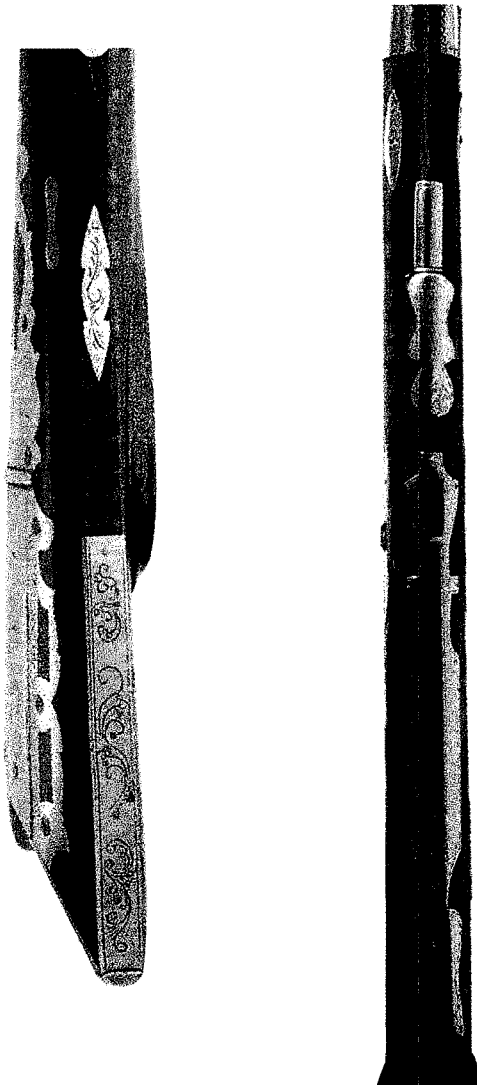


Illustration No.3
Halfstock rifle by Martin Bates
marked in script "Martin Bates".

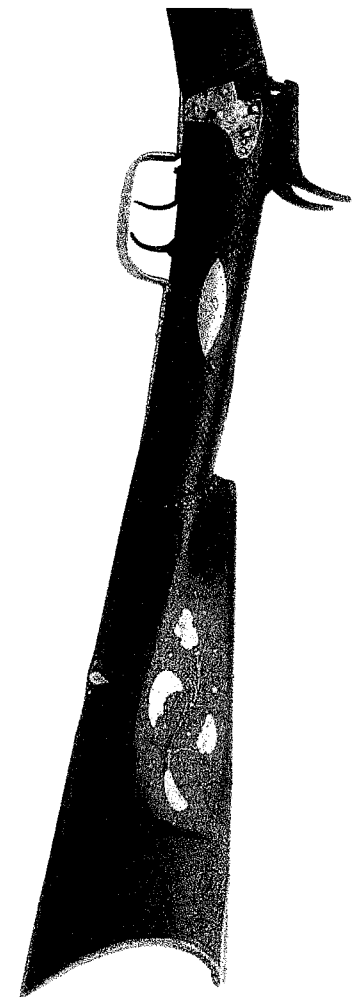
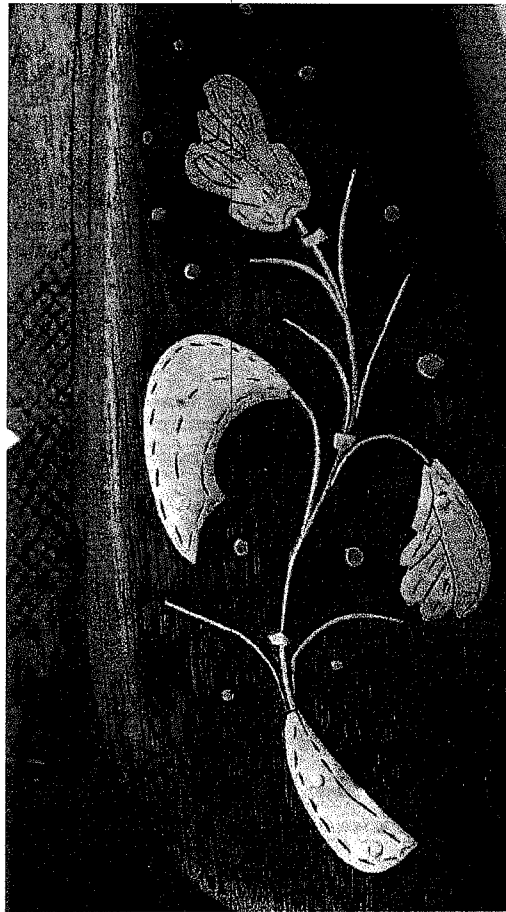
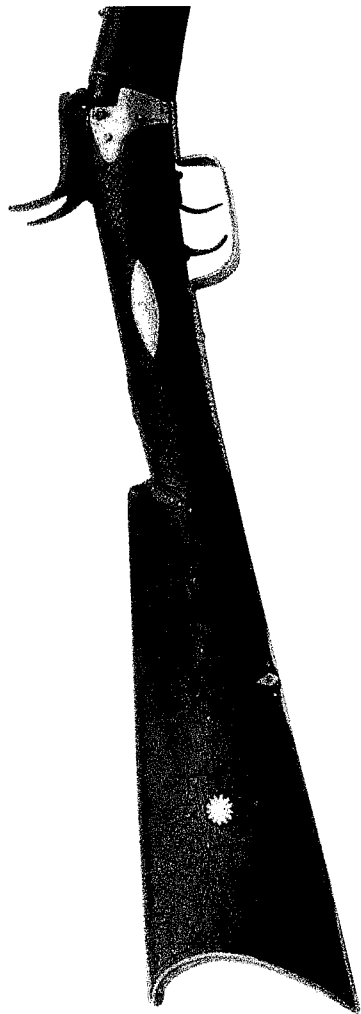


Illustration No.4
Double barrel shotgun by Martin Bates marked "M.B.1867".



The Bates Family Cemetery.



Phil and Bob flank Martin Bates gravestone.

William Bowman Shoots Himself in California May 1, 1903

The sad news was received last Thursday by the children here of Wm. Bowman from the family of California that the father had committed suicide by shooting himself. He lived in Crows Landing, a small village about sixty miles southwest of San Francisco in the beautiful San Joaquin valley.

He removed to that place from his old homestead west of Loudonville in April of last year at the age of sixty-seven and was at first very contented and happy. It finally became noticeable that he was getting homesick and would frequently talk of his old acquaintances, left behind expressing a desire to be again among the friends of his youth and visit the scenes associated with his three score years of active life. His letters home, and he was a fluent writer, having written to nearly all of his associates, seldom expressed in words that he was despondent, but it could be noticed that there was just a tinge of disappointment running through them. He always spoke very highly of the country but had no liking for the people as a class.

It is learned from the family since his death that in the recent past he has brooded over his troubles both real and imaginary, to a far greater degree than formerly, frequently expressing a fear that he was losing his mind and that he would be taken to an asylum.

During the two weeks preceding his death he read the Bible, passed his time in prayer, and when not thus engaged was fretting about his condition.

On May 1st his wife on arising that morning asked him if he was awake. He replied that he was and that he had passed a rather restless night. She asked him further if she

should call him for breakfast. This he did not want her to do. After the morning meal was finished he arose, dressed himself as usual, came into the kitchen, and inquired if a cow, which had been bawling belonged to them. He was informed that it did and then he started for the cow stable. In a few moments a pistol shot was heard and the old gentleman not being seen, his wife rushed to the stable and found him on his back with a bullet hole in his head and a huge revolver firmly grasped in his hand. The revolver had ordinarily been locked in a bureau drawer.

A large concourse of people accompanied the sorrowing widow and broken hearted family to the little churchyard two days afterward where the body was reverently laid away.

The deceased was the father of a very large family, there now being eight sons and four daughters living to mourn their loss. His entire life was spent on a fine farm about four miles west of town, having been born upon it and afterward inheriting it from his mother.

At an early age he learned the trade of gunsmith under the able instruction of the late P.A. Reinhardt in this city and followed the trade more in the line of a recreation during the latter part of his life and until the time he departed for California was known throughout this community as an honorable and exemplary citizen. The children who went with the parents to their western home were James, John, Mary and Benton, James going into business as a tinner after their arrival. The friends and acquaintances of the deceased extend to the sorrowing relatives their sympathies in their sad bereavement.