

Ferdinand Benroth

Machinist and Gunsmith, Bluffton, Allen County, Ohio

COMPILED BY TOM McCULLOUGH, PANDORA, OHIO

Ferdinand Benroth was born on September 11, 1869 in Bluffton, Allen County, Ohio. His parents were George Benroth (1843-1937) and Anna Steiner (1849-1916). George Benroth was from Hesse-Darmstadt, Germany and arrived in America in 1865. He married Anna Steiner of Bluffton, Allen County, Ohio in 1866. George and Anna had 10 children (Edward, Ferdinand, Rosie, Mary, Pauline, Lena, Albert, Emma, Minnie, and Julius). George Benroth son's had a natural inclination for mechanics, so he built them a shop called Cherry Street Foundry at 140 Cherry Street in Bluffton. Ferdinand, a machinist, was most interested in the shop, but Albert and Julius also developed a number of interesting products, which they never took the trouble to patent. They made windmills for local farmers and in their spare time tinkered in building rifles. In later years, Albert and Julius built a number of tools and parts for the early automobile. Ferdinand obtained a job for the Electric Light Company in Ft. Wayne, Indiana and in April 1892 moved to Pittsburgh, PA for a job with Westinghouse. He was in Pittsburgh just a

few weeks when he became ill from typhoid fever. He became delirious from the illness and either jumped or fell out of the 3rd floor window at the hospital.

Ferdinand's tragic death was on March 8 , 1892 at St. Vincent Hospital in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania at the age of 22. He was buried in Maple Grove Cemetery in Bluffton, Ohio.

Rifle located: Percussion red stained curly maple half stock. Brass mounted 36 caliber with no cap box or cheekpiece. Top flat of barrel is engraved : F. B. 1889.

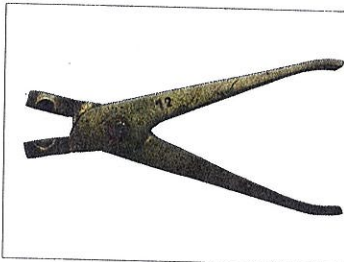
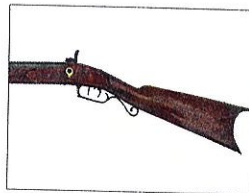
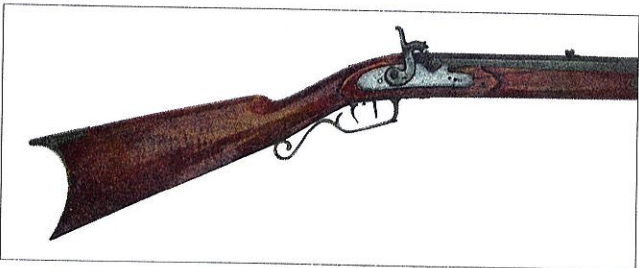
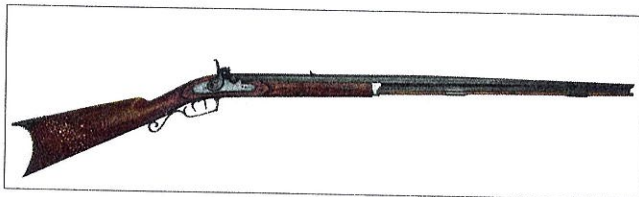
Note : Stock shape and side plate is same as Bluffton gunsmith Andrew Klay rifles.

This rifle and the following are Benroth family heirlooms:

Brass 45 caliber round ball mold with engraved initials F.B. and 72

Original powder horn w/rifle

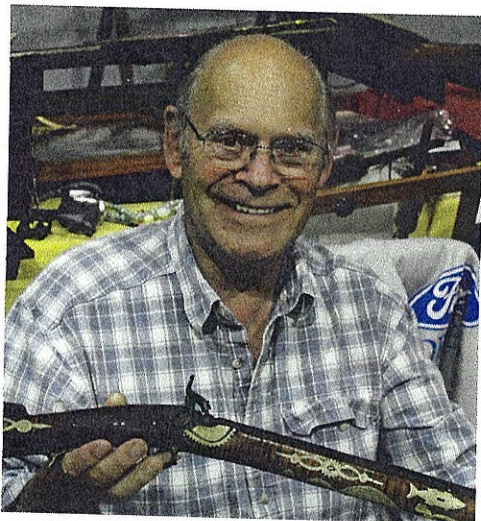
References: Ancestry.com, Rootsweb.com, 1870, 1880 United States Federal Census, The Lima News newspaper -March 11,1892, Findagrave.com, History of Allen County, Ohio -Published by Wamer, Beers, & Company , Chicago, Illinois 1885, A Brief History of Bluffton's Industrial Developments - May 1959



Golden Age Arms Co., Inc. and James R. Johnston

BY MARK BENDER

Between the mid-1960s and early 2000s Golden Age Arms Co., Inc. (or simply Golden Age Arms Co.) was a supplier of high-quality parts, kits, and literature in the revival of early 18th – mid 19th century frontier lifestyles in which black powder muzzle loading firearms were a central item of interest. Its proprietor, James R. Johnston (figure 1), became well-known not only for his company, but for his line of books, and his interests in collecting early American firearms and accoutrements. This article charts the founding and development of Golden Age Arms Company, Inc. and introduces several facets of Johnston's contributions to contemporary long rifle and frontier revival culture. The information is drawn mostly from an interview with Johnston in his home on July 9, 2019 and previous informal conversations (some held during the final years of operation of Golden Age Arms in Ashley, Ohio), his catalogs and books, and a few online sources.



1. James R. Johnston at the 2018 AOLRC Newark Show.

The story of Golden Age Arms Co., Inc. begins in the 1950s with a married couple, Trudy and Joe Bagby, who had regularly had a booth at the national Muzzleloading Rifle Association (NMLRA) shoots at Friendship Indiana. In the early 1950s, they started a small shop on High street in Worthington Ohio

called Golden Age Arms which sold parts for building muzzleloaders and old guns, and parts. The name of the shop seems to have been derived from a line of muzzleloader barrels being produced by the Douglas Barrel Company, which was a top manufacturer of muzzleloader barrels in that era. (Of course, the name likely ultimately derives from what Joe Kindig termed the “golden age” of the Kentucky/Pennsylvania rifle, ranging from approximately 1780-1820, in his groundbreaking *Thoughts on the Kentucky Rifle in Its Golden Age*).

Two years later, the shop was offered to “Jim” Johnston, who had befriended the couple at their booth in Friendship and was a regular customer in the Worthington shop. Johnston, born on Toledo, Ohio in 1940, had a passion for material objects and culture of the frontier era that had developed as a child, making him a natural for taking over the business. In the process of gaining ownership, his father LaDow Johnston (a well-known collector, shooter, and early secretary of the NMLRA) offered legal advice to the younger Johnston. After acquiring the shop in March 1966, Johnston revamped the operation by August, busy with buying inventory, creating a catalog, advertising, and registering the name of the corporation.



2. Front cover of Catalog 5, with iconic image of kneeling frontiersman in buckskins shooting a longrifle, drawn by Tom White, c. late 1960s.

The logo (figure 2) of a kneeling frontiersman in buckskins sighting down the barrel of a long rifle soon became associated with the company and graced the front covers of early catalogs, with the title, Golden Age Arms, Inc., Muzzleloaders, Supplies, and Books, Box 82, Worthington, Ohio, 43065. Tom White, a gun builder and collector, drew the iconic image which, over the years, Johnston advertised in up