

THE HAWKEN DYNASTY (PART 1): PENNSYLVANIA, MARYLAND, VIRGINIA, OHIO, AND MISSOURI

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In the lore of the early American West, Jacob and Samuel Hawken's "Mountain rifle" has been given pride of place as the ultimate firearm of the mountain men, plainsmen, scouts, and trappers in the Rocky Mountains and along the Santa Fe Trail. By 1825 brothers Jake and Sam Hawken had established their gun making partnership in St. Louis, Missouri, gaining a reputation as producers of well-made rifles up to the tasks of life on the rugged western frontier. But the story of the Hawken gunmakers does not begin in the West, but rather in Pennsylvania and Maryland in the 1700s, then spreading into Virginia, Ohio, and Missouri in the nineteenth century. A lot of speculations about family relations have been published on the Hawken gunsmith clans of Hagerstown, MD and Southwestern Ohio. In this article, we are using the Hawken family history as published by Donald Hutslar (1973), Daniel Hartzler (1977), and George Shumway (Kindig 2017: 199).

Pennsylvania

The Hawken gunmaker family in America began with three brothers, Niclaus Hachen, (1718-1758), Wolfgang Hachen/Haga (1721-1796), and Christian Hachen (1730-?), all of whom emigrated from Kirchdorf, Bern, Switzerland to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1750 (Scott and Scott, 1989: abstract; Shumway in Joe Kindig, Jr. 2017: 199). Wolfgang Haga became a very successful gunsmith in Reading, Berks County, and is credited by Joe Kindig as being one of the earliest makers of "Kentucky rifles," though his rifles are unsigned and attributed to him by collectors (2017: 198). His daughter married gunmaker Peter Gonter, Jr. (1751-1818), of later Lancaster County fame, who apparently apprenticed under Wolfgang (Wood and Whisker 1991: 24). Niclaus Hachen worked as a gunsmith in York County, though he also apparently did not sign his work. However, unlike his brother Wolfgang, no known rifles have been attributed to him (Whisker 1995: 15). He married Catherine Kuntz in 1753 (Ibid: 15), and was buried in Hanover, York County in March, 1758 (Shumway, in Kindig 2017: 199). In his will he left his gunsmithing tools to his sons, Nicholas Hawken (1755-

1800) and Christian Hawken (1756-1821).

Maryland and Virginia

Nicholas and Christian Hawken moved to Hagerstown, Maryland, in 1775, just as the Revolutionary War was brewing (Hartzler 1977: 184). Maryland was home to many well-known gunsmiths, such as John Armstrong, in late 18th and early 19th centuries. Christian Hawken, Sr., is the best known of the brothers, being a superb gunsmith of Golden Age Kentucky rifles in his own right, but also as patriarch of generations of Hawken gunsmiths from Hagerstown. His sons known as Hagerstown gunmakers include (John) George Hawken (1781-c.1828), John Hawken (1784-c.1820), Jacob Hawken (c. 1786-1849), Samuel T. Hawken (1792-1884), and William Hawken (1798-1885). One rifle attributed to William Hawken of Hagerstown is a .42 Pennsylvania style long rifle with an engraved patchbox, held at the NRA Museums (Wicklund 2017). The Harper's Ferry Arsenal in Virginia/West Virginia, only 29 miles from Hagerstown, started musket production in 1801 (Hartzler and Whisker 1996: 9). Sons of Christian Hawken, Sr. known to have worked at the arsenal include (John) George, John, and Jacob (Hanson 1979:85).

Ohio

Nicholas Hawken, brother of Christian, also built guns in Hagerstown, but his work is not nearly as well known. Perhaps, like his father and uncle he may not have signed his work, and/or he may have done more of the gun repairing side of the business. However, it was Nicholas' son Henry Hawken/Hawkey (c. 1774-1835) who first moved west and established the Ohio line of Hawken gunmakers. Henry is first listed as a gunsmith in Greensburg, Westmoreland County, in western Pennsylvania, where he is also reported to have run an inn (Rosenberger and Kaufman, 1993: 130). Henry married Susannah Turney of Greensburg in 1796. He is listed in the local tax records as an armorer and gunsmith from 1805-1815, and served in the War of 1812 as part of

the Pennsylvania Militia (Hartzler 1977: 182-183; Spiker and Whisker n.d.: 98). Henry moved to Columbus, Ohio in about 1816, where he stayed until at least 1828, then relocated to Springfield, Clark County, Ohio where he worked as a gunsmith until his death in 1835. From his estate two guns and his gunmaking tools were purchased by his sons, John Hawken (c. 1805-c.1846) and Daniel Turney Hawken (1814-1851). The brothers John and Daniel are known to have been in business together, starting in 1838 in Piqua, Miami County, Ohio until 1842, then returned to Springfield to work together for their remaining years (Streeter 2008: 154-155). They are best known for their full-stock percussion rifles, from light rifles up to a .50 heavy Plains style with an oval cheek piece (Hanson 1960: 31; Hutslar 1973: 66-67). Daniel T. Hawken has at times been confused with his cousin David Hawken (1812-1891), son of John Hawken (1784-1821). Henry Clay Hawken (1829-1905), son of John Hawken (c. 1805-c.1846), continued gunsmithing in Springfield, though was also a noted musician (Spiker and Whisker n.d.: 98-99). (see Figures 1 and 2)

It may be worth mentioning that southwestern Ohio was an area with connections to other Maryland gunsmiths, particularly the Marker family. Samuel T. Hawken moved from Maryland to work in Xenia, Greene County, Ohio in 1816, at about the same time as his cousin Henry moved to Columbus. Samuel likely produced Kentucky style full-stocks and the usual needed gun repair work (Hanson 1960: 31). His wife in Ohio was Rosanna Oster, with whom he had two daughters and a son. Samuel experienced a heavy family loss in 1821-22, with the death of his father Christian Hawken, Sr., his brother John, and his wife Rosanna. Samuel left Xenia at this time, placing his children with his remaining family in Hagerstown, then moving west to follow his brother Jacob, who had previously moved to Missouri in 1819 (NRA Museums: e-caption for Samuel Hawken Plains Rifle). None of Samuel's Ohio born children are listed as pursuing the gun trade. Samuel's adjoining properties in Xenia on East Main St. and East Market St. he retained until their sale in 1839 (Baxter 2015).

St. Louis, Missouri

Jacob Hawken first arrived in Missouri at New Madrid, then moved to St. Louis in 1820. There he partnered with James Lakenan, previously of the Virginia Manufactory of Arms, until his death in 1825.

At that time Samuel T. Hawken joined his brother in their joint gunmaking business (NRA Museums: NRA Museums: e-caption for Samuel Hawken Plains Rifle). Jacob married in 1822 to Catherine Allison, and Samuel remarried the same year to Martha Richey. Jacob fathered four children, and Sam had eight more children, several of whom continued the family gun trade for years to come. As the St. Louis story of the Hawken business and the western fur trade is well known, the reader is referred to standard texts for further information, such as Charles E. Hanson, Jr., *The Hawken Rifle: Its Place in History* (1979). (see Figures 3-5)

Summary

From the above, it is notable that the Hawken family of gunmakers was directly involved in English colonial/American long rifle styles from the early Kentucky rifle designs in the 1700s, to Midwestern Ohio and Plains styles in the early 1800s, to the now classic mid-19th century Hawken Mountain rifle style of St. Louis, Missouri. Quality workmanship has been a hallmark for generations of this gunsmithing family that descended from three brothers who emigrated from Switzerland to Pennsylvania in 1750. There remain many blank spaces in the history of relations between members of the Hawken family of gunsmiths. But one question rises above all others: How do the earlier rifles produced in Maryland and Ohio relate stylistically and functionally to the western Hawken rifles? Is there a continuity in style? Is there any evidence of direct or indirect influence of the eastern rifles on the western—or vice-versa? Part II will compare several rifles from Maryland, Ohio, and St. Louis that are products of the Hawken dynasty of gunsmiths.

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Sources:

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