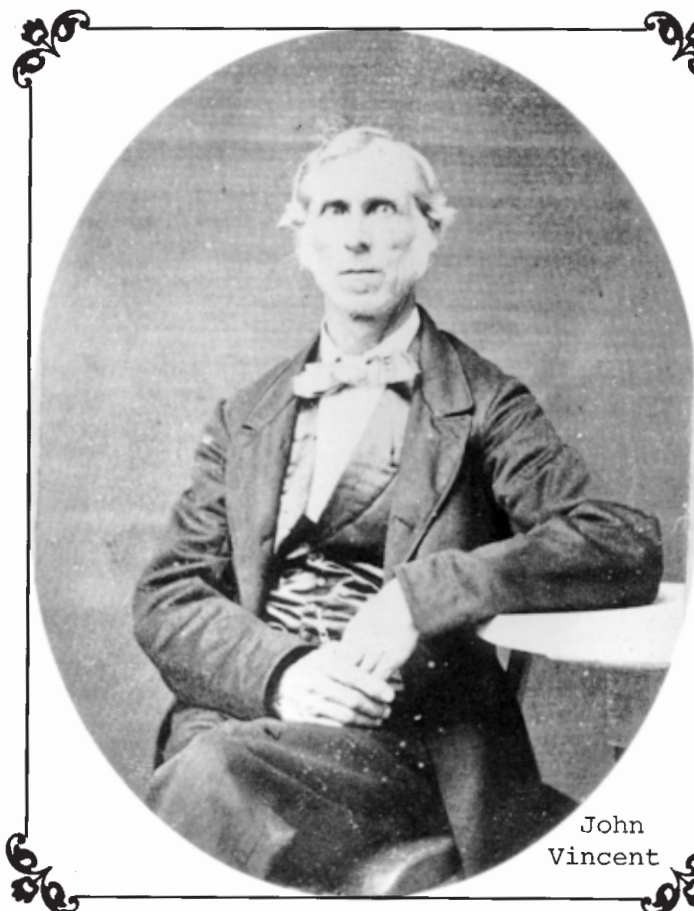


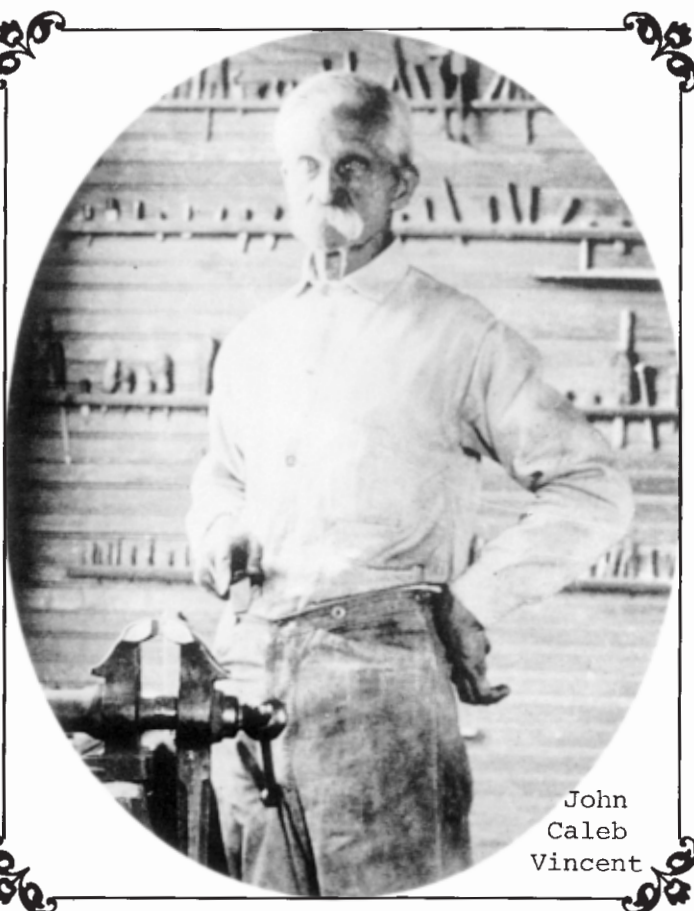
# THE VINCENT FAMILY

## Some Speculations on Production and Survival

By William Reynolds



John  
Vincent



John  
Caleb  
Vincent

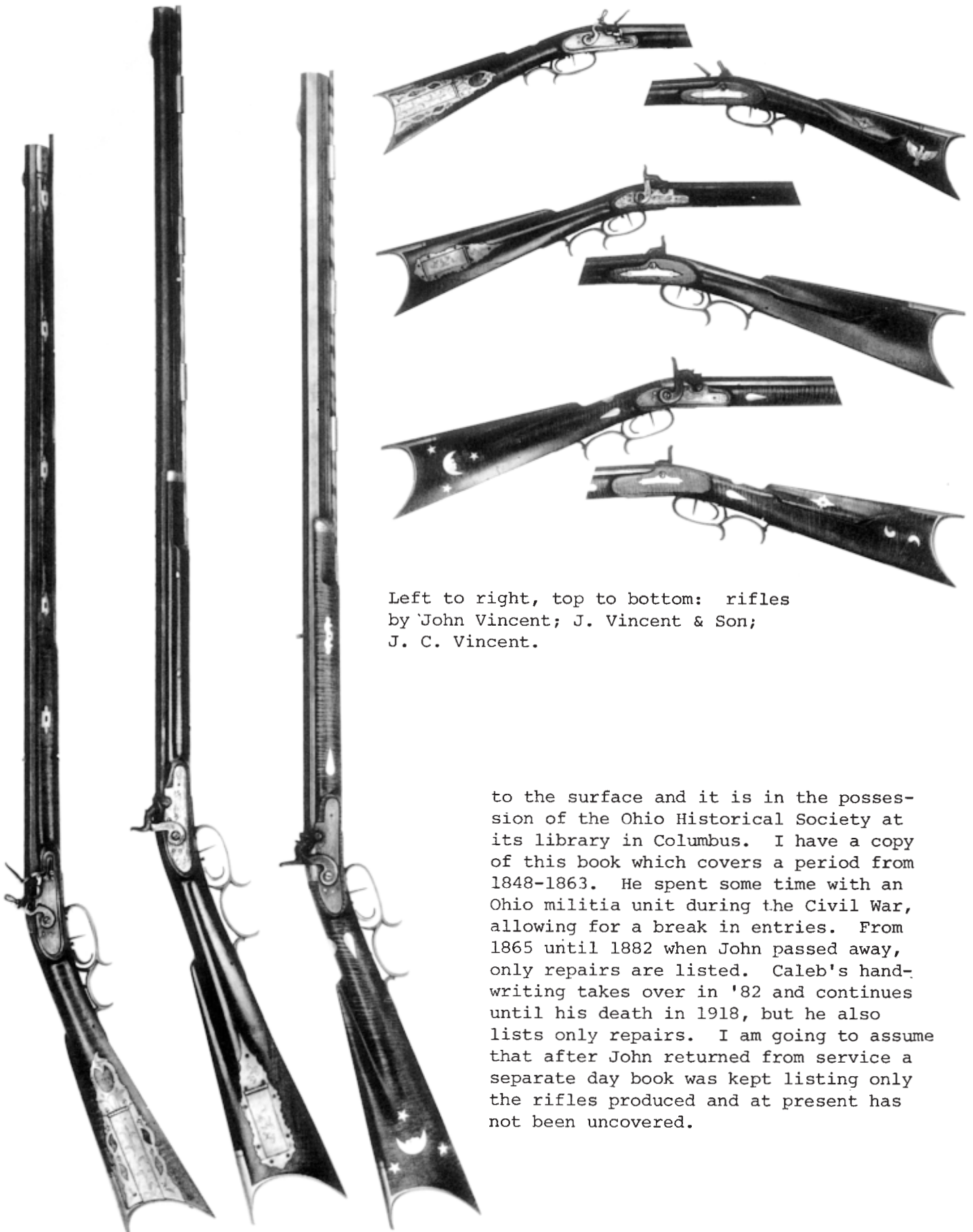
Two of the better known Southeastern Ohio gunsmiths would probably be John Vincent and his son, John Caleb Vincent. Both of these men's work are noted for their high degree of workmanship and simplicity of line and style. Together they spanned over seventy years, producing firearms from their modest shops.

John Vincent was born August 28, 1809, and was apprenticed to the cabinetmaker's trade at a very early age. With this background he built a very lucrative business in the manufacture of spinning wheels at his home on Rocky Point, just east of Vincent Station, where he also farmed a large tract of land. At the age of 38 he became attached to the shanty boat gunsmith Aman Ford at Watertown. Ford had many relatives living in the area, and after the raise

in the river left his boat high and dry, he decided to settle here for good. From Ford, Vincent would learn all he would need to know to become a very skilled gunsmith.

John Caleb Vincent was born March 21, 1841, and like his father who was attracted to the cabinetmaker's trade at an early age, he became interested in his father's gunsmithing work. In between farm chores Caleb would spend every free minute he could in the shop learning the skills he would need later in life when he would establish his own business at Vincent Station.

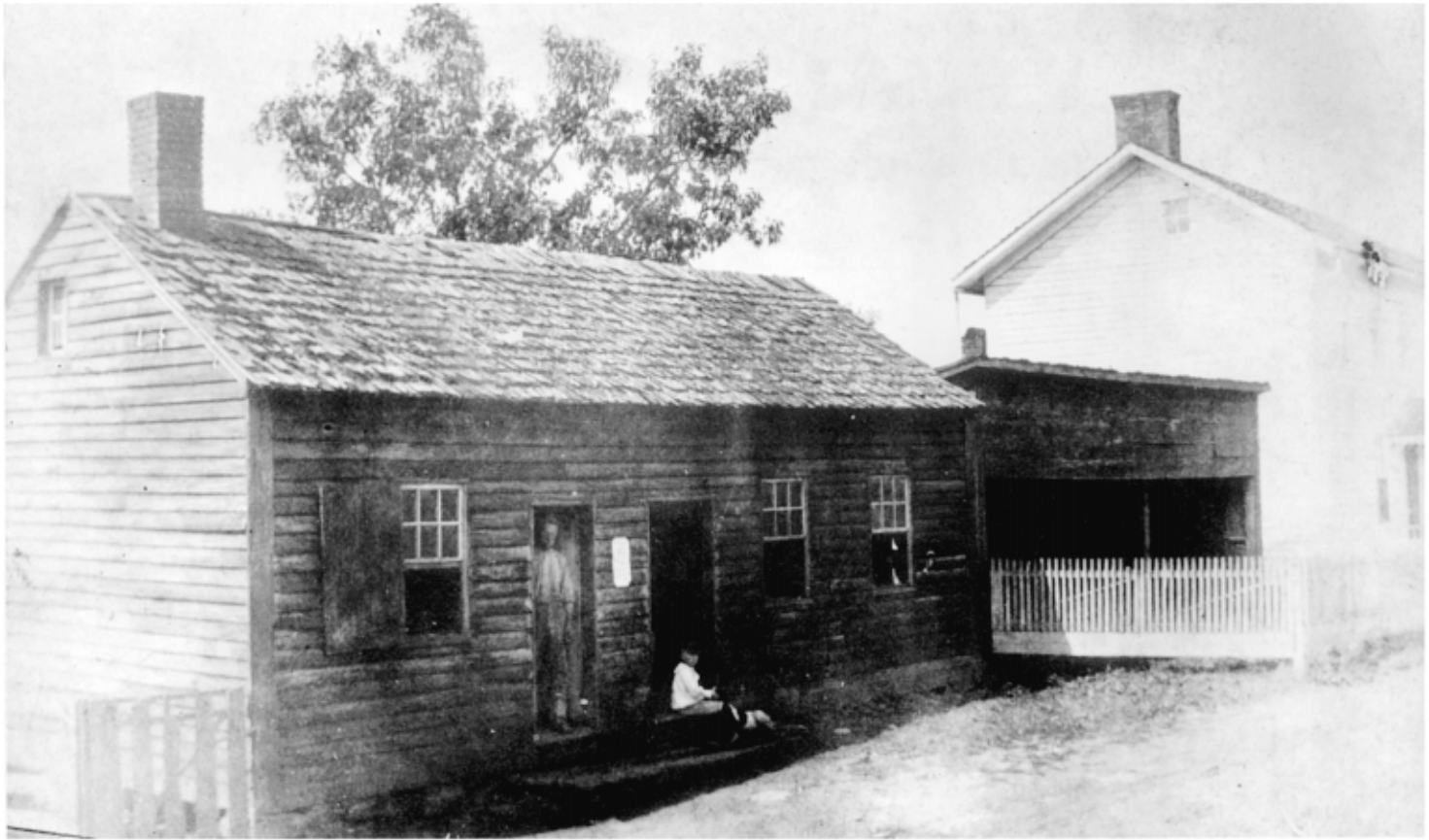
It would be interesting to speculate how many rifles were made by these two gentlemen. Our only real way of knowing the actual number would be by their day book entries. Only one book has come



Left to right, top to bottom: rifles  
by John Vincent; J. Vincent & Son;  
J. C. Vincent.

to the surface and it is in the possession of the Ohio Historical Society at its library in Columbus. I have a copy of this book which covers a period from 1848-1863. He spent some time with an Ohio militia unit during the Civil War, allowing for a break in entries. From 1865 until 1882 when John passed away, only repairs are listed. Caleb's handwriting takes over in '82 and continues until his death in 1918, but he also lists only repairs. I am going to assume that after John returned from service a separate day book was kept listing only the rifles produced and at present has not been uncovered.

photos by G. Shumway



Rocky Point shop of John Vincent

The surviving entries we are interested in are the following:

PRIOR TO AND INCLUDING:	#	PRICE RANGE
	1848	18
	1849	3
NOTE: the	1850	2
'48-'63 period	1851	---
accounts for	1852	7 \$9.50-12
numerous re-		1 pistol
pairs--20	1853	7 \$8-14.15
spinning wheels	1854	14 \$7.50-14
4 silver	1855	8 \$9.80-23
mounted rifles.	1856	11 \$9.50-16
	1857	8 \$13.65-23.50
	1858	10 \$11.50-15
	1859	13 \$13.50-20
	1860	1
	1861	5 \$13-14
	1862	5 \$12
	1863	4 \$10.75-15

(only repairs listed after this point)

Now on to our speculations.

John was a farmer by trade and secondly a gunsmith and cabinetmaker, so we must assume daily farm work accounted for most

of his time during planting and harvesting season especially. By this reasoning and the daybook entries already mentioned, John's yearly average production of rifles was rather low in comparison to someone pursuing gunsmithing full time. Most of his work is accounted for in repairs and manufacture of spinning wheels. I would venture to guess that after John's return from service his production of rifles didn't increase much over the four to five a year average that was already beginning to show. This speculation is based on a pretty thorough study of the Vincents and the fact that their cooperative attempts, the "J. Vincent and Son" period, never materialized into producing the large numbers of rifles they hoped it would.

Documentation of the number of rifles made by Caleb Vincent is on shakier ground due primarily to the lack of existing day book accounts. The main reason for Caleb's leaving his father's shop at Rocky Point was dislike for farming and a deep interest in making



Second from left, Caleb Vincent's gunsmith shop at Vincent Station



John Vincent's home on Rocky Point



Caleb Vincent's home at Vincent Station



Caleb Vincent poised at door of his shop. Photo taken in the early 1900's.

and repairing firearms. He acquired a lot in Vincent Station from his Uncle Henry Earl Vincent, built his home and for a short period of time had a shop in the back of a grocery store. Later he would build the shop we see pictured.

He was the more popular of the two and was fully involved in his business. But even with the demand for more rifles by his customers, as attested to in the Vincent letters, he would not sacrifice quality for speed, and worked at his own pace. I believe by this fact and by the numerous repair work entered into the day



Caleb sighting in a rifle at back door of shop. Notice forge in background.

book, it would keep the number of finished rifles down to approximately 10-15 per year.

How many Vincent rifles survived? A great deal of these rifles were sold to people in the west, from Caleb's times and his dealing with the Nicewongers in Iowa to the days when Red Farris would send a Vincent in that direction. How many have survived out there is anyone's guess, but the greater numbers have remained here in the possession of the families whose ancestors acquired the gun originally and in private collections.

I would guess that eighty to ninety examples of these men's work have survived out of a total production of between 300 to 360. This figure is extremely high in comparison to surviving examples of other Ohio gunsmiths' work, but more research needs to be done in this interesting area of production and survival. □

# JOHN M. YERIAN

## Gunsmith & Blacksmith

John M. Yerian was born 18 September 1813, in Adamsville, Muskingum County. The birthdate was taken from the Yerian Family Bible in the possession of Mrs. Vera Harmon who is the great-great-granddaughter of John Yerian. The birth place was taken from the Yerian Family History. He died 8 May 1890, and is buried in the Sharon Cemetery, Sharon, Noble County, Ohio. His death record in the Public Records of Noble County, Ohio confirms the date, and his occupation at the time of death is listed as "gunsmith". The Noble County Atlas of 1876 mentions him as being a blacksmith. The family History also states that he learned the gunsmith trade in or near Adamsville.

It is more than a coincidence that the pattern of his patchbox finial is very nearly identical to that of Thomas Birkhimer of Norwich-Adamsville, who is reportedly the teacher of Michael Hale. The similarity of the patch boxes of all three men is astounding. I firmly believe that John Yerian's teacher in the gunsmith trade was Thomas Birkhimer.

Yerian moved to Sharon approximately 1845 and was active until his death. One of the distinguishing features of his work was the use of a small silver fish, complete with engraved scales and a copper eye, which was used on nearly all of his fancier rifles. Another was the use of an exceptionally long barrel tang reaching almost to the comb of the stock. This feature contains three screws and provided extra support for the thin wrist of the stock. His rifles were neat and mostly long barrels and of a small caliber. His engraving was on the crude side, but tastefully executed. His guns were signed "J Y", "J M Y" and "John Yerian". At least one of his rifles has an unusual finial on the toe plate. Several of his rifles are inlaid with small pieces of silver but most are not engraved. Another feature of John Yerian is the practice of a combination of punch marks and a type of engraving called "chisel walk" along the top flat of his barrels, both



behind and in front of the rear sight and then again to the rear of the front sight. The muzzle of most of his guns are decorated with two or three rings around the bore and then dotted with small stars or circles and punch marks.

The photo shows him seated before his shop in Sharon, Ohio, holding a profusely decorated half stock rifle, complete with the fish on the forestock. Also very obvious is the index finger on his right hand that was broken in his youth, while working on his fathers saw mill and was not properly set and healed crooked.

He was married twice and the eldest son, Frederick, was born of the first union. The other gunsmith son, Thomas, was a result of his second marriage.

He taught both of these sons the gunsmith trade and at least one other man, also from the Sharon vicinity, D. Luther Ackley. □