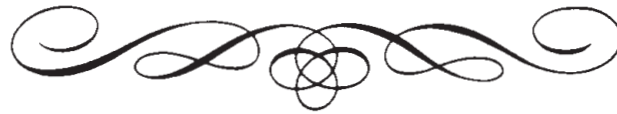




Joseph Mills

by James Whisker



Joseph Mills, Jr., was born in Providence Twp., Bedford Co., Pa., in 1790, the son of Joseph Sr. and Catherine Mills. His brother, Isaac, was the pioneer gunsmith of Brookville, Jefferson County, Pa. Joseph Sr's children were: George, Michael, Jacob, Joseph, Elizabeth, Abraham and Isaac. The others remained in Bedford County where their descendants remain, but the two gunsmithing brothers left Bedford County.

Isaac (1801-1836) was not listed on tax records in Bedford County, but he was cited in a fornication & bastardy case in 1822 in Bedford County Court. Isaac's son, later a physician, was born in Westmoreland County, Pa., about 1828. Isaac died shortly after he came to Brookville in 1831.

Joseph appears frequently on the Bedford County tax records and on several jury lists. In 1808 there was a Joseph Mills, single free man, in Woodbury Twp., who paid a tax of \$.50, with a trade/occupation. Since the trade was not specified we cannot state with confidence that this was the same man. However, no other man (other than his father who was in Providence Twp., and obviously married) fits the name at that time. This suggests that he was not the apprentice of Peter White who

was at that time seeking an apprentice in Cumberland Valley Twp., about 50 miles away.

In 1814 he acquired 100 acres by patent (Pa. Land Patent Office) in Southampton Twp., and, again, his single man's tax was \$.50. In 1815 he settled in Colerain Twp., Bedford Co., where he remained until he left for Ohio in 1823. Sample tax entries are these:

1815 gunsmith, 2 horses, tax \$.70

1817 gunsmith, 1 horse, 1 cow, value \$48, tax \$.25

1819 gunsmith, 1 house, tax \$.12

1821 gunsmith, value \$28, tax \$.12

1822 gunsmith, 1 house, tax \$.40

1823 gunsmith, value \$100, tax \$.40; 1824 name crossed out of records.

In the January term, 1821, Court of Oyer & Terminer, Bedford County, Joseph Mills was paid for 5 miles of travel. In 1822 it was 6 miles of travel to the Court of Quarter Sessions (receipts in Bedford Co. Court House). Thus, Mills was located quite close to Bedford when he lived in Colerain



Twp. Peter White was located about 12-15 miles away, across a large mountain, and had they been associated the journey would have required that one go north to Bedford boro and then south to the other's shop.

While he was in Bedford County Mills married a Miss Mary Exline, and she was evidently his only wife. They had at least two children who were involved in the gunsmithing trade: William and A. J. The second son, A. J. bought his father's gunsmithing tools at his sale. A half stock rifle has recently surfaced with the script sign-

Three views of a rifle by Joseph Mills.

ature "A.J. Mills" on the barrel. William Mills is twice listed in the Wheeling (West) Virginia Directory from about 1837- 1844. I assume the one listing was his home and the other his shop.

Hutslar lists Joheph Mills in Perry Twp., Coshocton County, Ohio. The confusion in Hutslar is over a subsequent listing in East Union. There was a map of Perry Twp., Coshocton County, from 1860, showing an East Union there, and the adjoining farms of Joseph and A. J. Mills. We believe that Mills came to Perry twp., and remained there the rest of his long life.

Mr. Tilton's article in the last newsletter notes the gun which is marked as being his 355th long rifle made in his 70th year. Like the gun shown in that issue, this one was a box lock mechanism. It is otherwise quite different: being decorated with Pennsylvania Dutch folk art designs, not the "National Road" patchbox.

Mills died September 8, 1876, in Perry Twp., Coshocton Co., of an "inflammation of the stomach." His listed birthdate was 1790. His obituary was carried in the Coshocton Democrat for September 26, 1876.

We believe that a grand case can be made for ranking Joseph Mills among the very best gunsmiths ever to work in Pennsylvania or Ohio. His engraving was fine and well and tastefully executed. He attempted many different styles, even in his early flint period in Bedford County. Joe Kindig Jr. (Thoughts on the Kentucky Rifle in its Golden Age) gave much credit for variety if well done. We submit that Mills showed more innovation and variety than any other gunsmith in his long and distinguished career. There are no poor Mills guns, for even his plain workaday rifles are well done. And at his best his work was magnificent. □

From the "Coshocton Democrat"
September 26, 1876

OBITUARIES

Died, September 8, 1876, Joseph Mills of Perry Township, Coshocton County, Ohio in the 87th year of his age. Father Mills was born on the 11th day of July, A.D. 1790, and came to Coshocton County with his wife and family in 1823, and settled in Perry township where he has lived for fifty-three years. He was a blacksmith by trade, at which he worked most of his time, although at one time owning a large body of land and farming extensively until he divided his land among his children, giving to each of the twelve children which he raised, 80 acres. All of his children are with him except one. Father Mills was strictly honest in all his dealings, always wanting that which justly belonged to him, and paying the last cent to those he had dealings with. His nature and disposition was plain, and was always cheerful and fond of company; free and sociable about his home, and taught his children to be strictly honest and religious. He had been a faithful member of the Church for about forty-five years, and during the last ten years of his life a member of the Christian Union Church - Although past his three-score years and ten, his seat was seldom vacant in the house of God; he stopped not for cold or rain; when the hour of service drew near you could see Father Mills cane in hand, making his way to the Church, and when at church he was always ready to bear testimony in behalf of Jesus.

He left a companion and a large circle of friends and relatives to mourn their loss, who will miss him from the family circle. His seat is left vacant, but they need not mourn as those that have no hope.

His funeral was preached on Sabbath the 10th by Rev. James Reed, from Revelations 3:75; He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment: and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but will confess his name before my Father, and before his Angels - to a large attentive congregation of neighbors, friends and relatives of the deceased, who all feel the loss of a dear father and brother in the church - one that has fought a good fight of faith - who in the

last hours of his life feared not death, and testified to those who stood by his side that he was ready and willing to go. His last hours were peace and full of triumph. Jesus had taken away the fear of death and given him the victory; died in peace without a struggle and as calm and peaceful as if he were going to sleep. Blessed are they that die in the Lord. Oh that our end may be as his.

I. D.

More Information On Sam Stull

By Dewey Stull

Sam Stull, one of our early gunsmiths, was born in Coshocton County, Ohio in 1807. No doubt his parents were among the flood of pioneers to move westward after the treaty of Greenville 13 years after the battle of Fallen Timbers. He was of Pennsylvania German ancestry and began at a very early age to show evidence of mechanical ingenuity, patience and skilled craftsmanship that was later to give him a place among the best of our early Ohio makers. He was a great hunter and fisherman and as a young lad was allowed to accompany his father in excursions into the virgin forests around his home. He was not permitted to take the family rifle however, so when 12 years of age (the story goes) he set about to provide himself with a gun of his own. Out of some scattered and broken odds and ends he was able to salvage, here and there, he fashioned a gun that would function. He kept this evidence of his first gunsmithing efforts hidden under a loose plank in the floor while awaiting an opportune time to venture forth to test its merits. One day during

his father's absence, Sam got his chance. On this first hunting trip alone he was able to bag a wild turkey and a deer. My informant is a little hazy here concerning the reception our young hunter received when he crossed the parental threshold that evening of long ago (about 1819), but we may surmise that this welcome addition to the family ladder was sufficient to cool the wrath of this pioneer father.

From the time he left his Coshocton County home until he arrived in little Knox County, Village of Millwood, Ohio in 1842, I have been unable to learn much of his activities. Since he would be 35 years old when arriving here, and also since he was known to have brought along a two horse wagon (hired) load of tools, parts and other equipment of the trade, he was no doubt engaged in business somewhere else. Up to the present writing, I have been unable to learn where he lived. However, this spring, I plan a trip to Stubenville in an effort to fill in some blank spots. I will check

a. source of information, not as yet investigated, only recently known to exist. I am, therefore, hopeful that some interesting information on Mr. Stull's first 35 years may be brought to light. It is known that he lived somewhere in Northern Ohio for a time and that he worked as a teamster on the construction of the Ohio Canal which was completed in 1835.

Mr. Stull states that upon his arrival in Millwood he had two silver dollars in money. He established a gun shop near the present location of Mitchell's general store on the west side of what is now U. S. Route 62 about 100 yards from where this route crosses the Kokosing River. At this shop he became known far and wide, not only for his excellence of his craftsmanship, but also for his diligent attention to his trade. Older residents have said that he started earlier and worked later than anyone else in the neighborhood. He could produce what he termed a plain rifle in three days. He sold these for \$12.00. For fancier guns he charged from \$75. up, depending on the amount of decoration and finish. He made both full and half stocks as well as some fancy bench models. I have never seen a slug rifle by Mr. Stull, but it is known that he made a few, one of which is in the possession of a gentleman in Lancaster, Ohio. His workmanship was very good and in later years his lock work excellent. Mr. Stull was a great story teller, and one of his favorite stories concerned a broken main spring. According to his own admission he used to have trouble tempering springs. One time shortly before a match he planned to attend, he broke a hammer spring. He went to a local blacksmith who had a considerable reputation to have one tempered. The smith declined the job on the excuse that he wanted to finish his corn husking. Mr. Stull said "you make the spring and I'll husk the corn." This arrangement being satisfactory to both, he went to

work, but Mr. Stull returned quietly and watched the tempering process without the knowledge of the smith, and from that time forward he always said that he had less trouble with broken springs and considered that he had played a huge joke on the blacksmith.

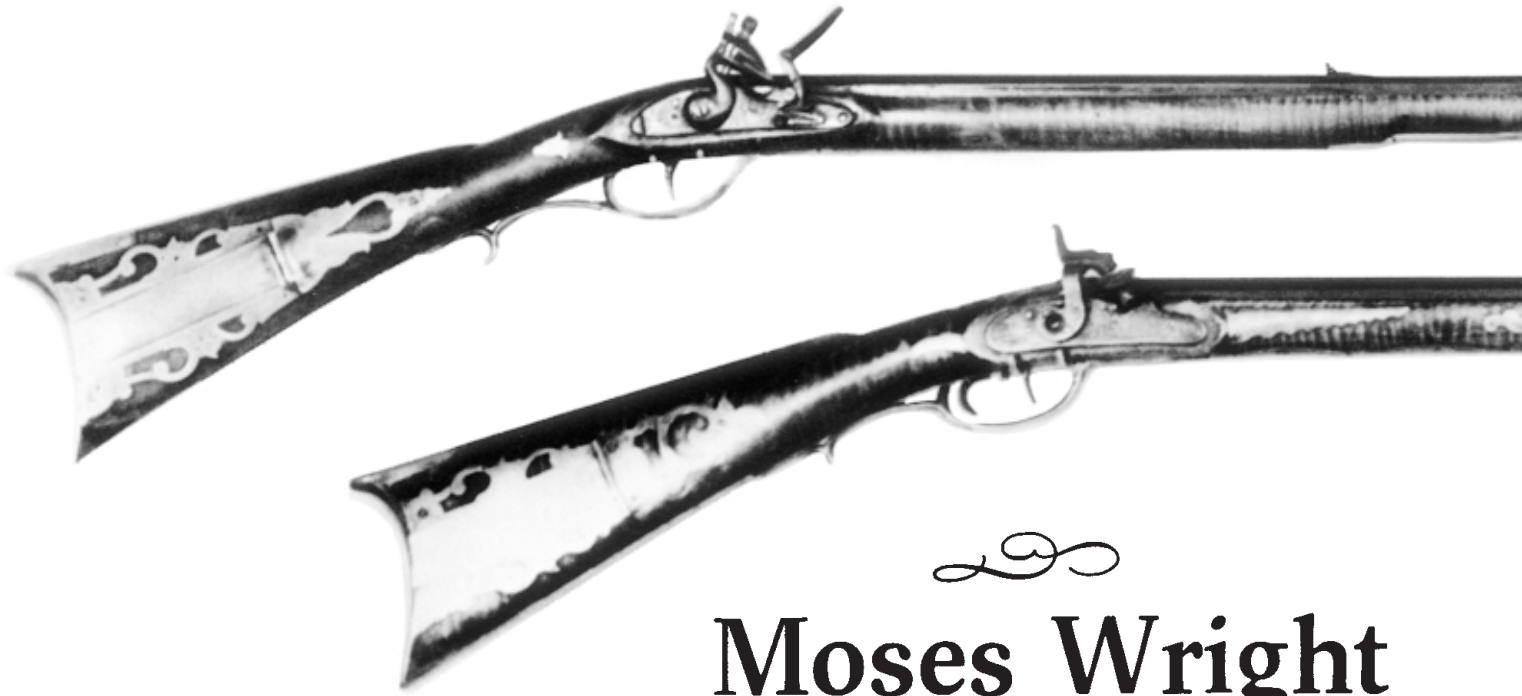
Some years after moving to Millwood, he purchased a small farm about two miles south and removed his shop to this location where he worked until past the age of 85 years, Stull himself a tough customer in match shooting and would accept a challenge anywhere and anytime. He had target butts at 25, 50, 100, and 200 yards where he tested his product. He would not release a rifle of his own make until he was satisfied with its accuracy. An extremely large maple stump was more than half shot away which he had used as a backstop. His shop was a meeting place for sportsmen and shooters for miles around. It is said that Mr. Stull would not work with others watching him, probably for two reasons. He did not want to reveal any short cuts or secrets of his trade or perhaps he may have been an exceedingly fast workman and did not want customers to know how quickly he could do certain jobs so they would not kick over the price. He would not lend tools or allow anyone to use his tools. There was one exception to this because he taught one person the trade. Cy Klutz became his apprentice. He later moved to Massilon and established his own shop. His workmanship was comparable and very similar to Stull's, in fact I once mistook one of his rifles for a Stull- until closer examination proved otherwise.

Mr. Stull was a small man, never reaching more than 130 lbs. in weight. He was married three times and had three sets of children. Two children yet survive, Win and a Mrs. Welker both of Millwood. (Both of these are deceased at this time--) Mr. Stull was a man of rather strong convictions. He was

not a tetotaler, but was seldom known to drink more than a glass or two of beer. He would not work on revolvers or pistols nor allow them in his shop. He was not given to talking much about himself and since he was 68 years old when his only surviving son was born, the son could not furnish to much information, not as much in fact as I was able to gather from some other residents who knew him. Mr. Stull died in 1907, age about 99 years 9 months and lies in the Millwood Cemetery.

Mr. Stull survived all his wives and children except the two mentioned. He had an older son, Philip, who was not a maker, but who repaired guns. In fact some of the people I have interviewed were confused and it was only with considerable difficulty that I could sometimes glean out facts on Sam the maker as compared to Philip the repairman.□

Information provided by Robert Stull.



Moses Wright Gunsmith

by James Whisker

In a recent (12-81) issue of Muzzle Blasts, Dr. George Shumway raised the interesting question of who had responded to Peter White's advertisement for an apprentice, and a journeyman in 1806. I believe one riddle, the apprentice, can be answered. It is my contention in this article that the apprentice was Moses Wright (1792-1854).

Donald A. Hutslar, Gunsmiths of Ohio (p. 201) listed a Moses Wright, born 1792 in Bedford County, Pennsylvania, who came to Freeport, Harrison County, Ohio, in 1816. He was a farmer and gunsmith whose son, a physician and gunsmith William R., was born in that location in 1822. The 1820 census noted that Moses Wright was working as a gunsmith by 1820, just four years after leaving Bedford County.

In 1806, when White ran his advertisement, Wright was 14, just the right age to have taken an apprenticeship outside his own family. No records of such obligation exist in Bedford County, so the best we can find to substantiate this theory is circumstantial evidence.

He first appeared on the census taken every three years for tax purposes in Cumberland Valley Township in 1814, as a single freeman. That would be reasonable as single freeman ordinarily appear at age 21. The earliest possible date he could have been added would have been 1813, and 1814 is highly likely.

However, Moses Wright, matching in age with him whom we seek, is not listed as engaged in gunsmithing; he is listed as a sicklesmith. I do not consider that at all disabling. First, a survey of all names on the Cumberland Valley Township list in the years with which we are concerned shows that the enumerator had a distinct preference for associating all inhabitants with farming. Only three persons are not listed in

Two Ohio fullstock rifles by Moses Wright.

such a way, one being a retired Revolutionary War soldier. Even the political and judicial officers are listed as farmers with a secondary interest in the other positions.

Second, there are no other Wrights in that time frame who can be matched in anyway. Third, in my research experience black, white, silver or copper smithing often take precedence over gunsmithing in the enumerations. Fourth, at that time occupations were listed only in the triennial census, not in the annual tax gathering. Thus, Moses Wright was bound in his first enumerated occupation trade for three years, the only three years in which we find him listed (1814, 1815, 1816, latter crossed out). Fifth, since many gunsmiths engaged in cutlery business in its broadest form, and since this census did not seek to expand on non-farming occupations, I can live with the occupational listing.

Vital to the idea that Wright apprenticed with White is being able to place them together geographically, since White noted his location, "Bedford Valley, about two miles south of Bedford," or some variation thereon, and working with the store listing "on Christman's land" we can place him close to the northwestern tip of Cumberland Valley. Even today there is confusion over the proper title of the

area (phones are Bedford Valley", it is "Cumberland Valley Township").

Moving out in 1816 along with Moses Wright was John Wright, whom I identify as most likely the father of Moses. He had long resided there and was evidently a Ranger during the Revolution, engaged in responding to the Tories-Amerindians on the frontier, before settling there. Thus, John Wright who had a son of approximately the age of Moses in earlier enumerations (before Moses was 21), and who left with him in 1816 lived in the correct area to have apprenticed his son to Peter White. John Wright cannot be located exactly as he was a tenant, not a freeholder, and we cannot establish whose land he rented.

Two rifles attributed to Moses Wright, probably made in Bedford County, are known. One, pictured in Dr. Roy Chandler's, Patchbox Book, carried a Peter White lock and the inscription "Moses Wright" on the barrel. Local collectors have assumed that White made it for Wright. Both of these guns were turned up in southwest Pennsylvania.

It is possible that Wright responded to White's advertisement in 1814, offering a "riflegun" in exchange for logsplitting, and that the gun carrying two signatures is White's payment to Wright. In that event I consider it unlikely

that Wright left his gun here before departing for Ohio. It also leaves unaccounted Wright's trades as sicklesmith in Bedford County and, more importantly, gunsmith in Ohio.

I consider it most likely that Wright made up one or more guns before leaving Bedford County, and that he might have bought one or more gun locks from Peter White wherewith to make the guns. White's locks would therefore have carried the "P.W." marking.

Wright may also have found, with White so close by, that his best opportunity for earning a living was as sicklesmith. He still made a rifle or two. But, his craft learned and mastered (as the attached photographs show mastery of gunsmithing), he sought the greener pastures of Ohio where, in 1816, gunsmiths were scarce and land (something his family lacked) was cheap.

His sons, Benjamin (born 1820/21) and William (born 1822) suggest that Moses Wright married about the time he left or shortly thereafter. □

A heavy inlaid silver mounted fullstock by William Wright, son of Moses Wright.

