



# Tansel Powder Horns From Ohio



Article and Drawings By Shelby Gallien

**Forward:** Finely carved powder horns were made by the Tansel family of horn carvers while in Kentucky between ca. 1795 and 1829, and after 1829 in Indiana following their migration to that state. Most collectors of Tansel horns have heard the often repeated old speculation that some Tansel horns must have been made in Ohio, based on the significant number of horns found there over the years. Those speculations are now known to have a degree of truth to them; in fact several Tansel horns were made in Ohio, and the possibility exists that even more were made there.

**History of the Tansel Family:** Francis Tansel was born near the southern coast of France around 1760, and when he reached maturity he became a sea captain. Family legend say he migrated to America during the infancy of the French Revolution, perhaps in the late 1780's. He first settled in Virginia, most likely Spotsylvania County based on several indirect links, although no official records document his location or stay in Virginia. He may have started carving horns while in Virginia, based on one very early horn signed "F\*T" that appears to date ca. 1790-1795 and is pictured in Illustration No. 1. A few years later he joined the migration of Virginians to the Bluegrass area of Kentucky, settling in Scott County just west of Fayette County where the city of Lexington is located. There he married and raised a family. His three oldest sons were John born in 1800, Stark in 1807 and Timothy in 1810; they all followed their father's example and became horn carvers.

Francis carved fine horns while in Kentucky, a number of which are dated and signed; several carry the original owners' names, all noteworthy early Kentuckians, John carved some of the finest Tansel-style horns in Kentucky with the earliest dated one being April of 1819. It is pictured later in the article due to its date relating to a possible Ohio period for the Tansels. Stark undoubtedly carved horns in Kentucky despite the lack of signed and dated examples, and Timothy may have carved some early horns there, but signed & dated examples are all from his early Indiana days.

In 1829 John Tansel sold his Kentucky property and moved to Indiana where he bought land; later that year the rest of the family followed. The majority of Tansel horns were made in Hendricks County, Indiana during the years 1829 and 1850, with many being dated during the presidential campaign years of 1836, 1840 and 1844 and 1848, although other dates appear as well. These are the well-known and somewhat standardized Tansel horns decorated with fish-mouthed throat sections, polychroming, large federal eagles with shielded chests, hunting dogs chasing deer, full figured soldiers and statesmen (Washington, LaFayette, Harrison, Tyler, Cass, etc.), along with frontier hunters and often chief Blackhawk. The latest known dated horn is marked "1850," although a few later ones were undoubtedly made despite the demand for horns rapidly declining due to the growing use of metal flasks and cans. Timothy was the most prolific family carver, and his high volume

may be the reason his work did not always match the quality of his father and older brothers' best efforts. When Timothy died in 1852, the Tansel horn tradition had come to an end.

**The Tansel in Ohio:** Kentucky tax records clearly identify the Tansels' time in Kentucky starting with Francis' first entry in 1799 when he owned 40 acres of "2nd rate" land on Dry Run watercourse in Scott County. The sale of their properties and departure for Indiana in 1829 can be tracked through combined tax and land records. But one period of existing Kentucky records does not list any Tansels, and creates questions about where they were. That period of absence was from 1815 until 1821 in Tax records, although by 1820 Francis was listed in the Federal Census for Scott County, Kentucky. When the Tansels show up again in Tax records in 1822, they are located in Scott County, but on different properties than in 1814. Another factor, Francis' War of 1812 military record, adds to the possibility of their, or at least his, being out of Kentucky for part of that period.

**Francis Tansel's War of 1812 Fort Meigs Horns:** During the War of 1812 Francis Tansel enlisted as a private in Boswell's 10th Regiment of the Kentucky Militia from Scott County. He entered service May 29th, 1813 and marched to Fort Meigs in Ohio. He was present at the second or lesser siege, and by August 31st was listed on payroll records as "present but sick." Later payroll records indicate he was released early from his six month enlistment due to illness, being absent from the final muster roll of September 28th, 1813. Two important factors

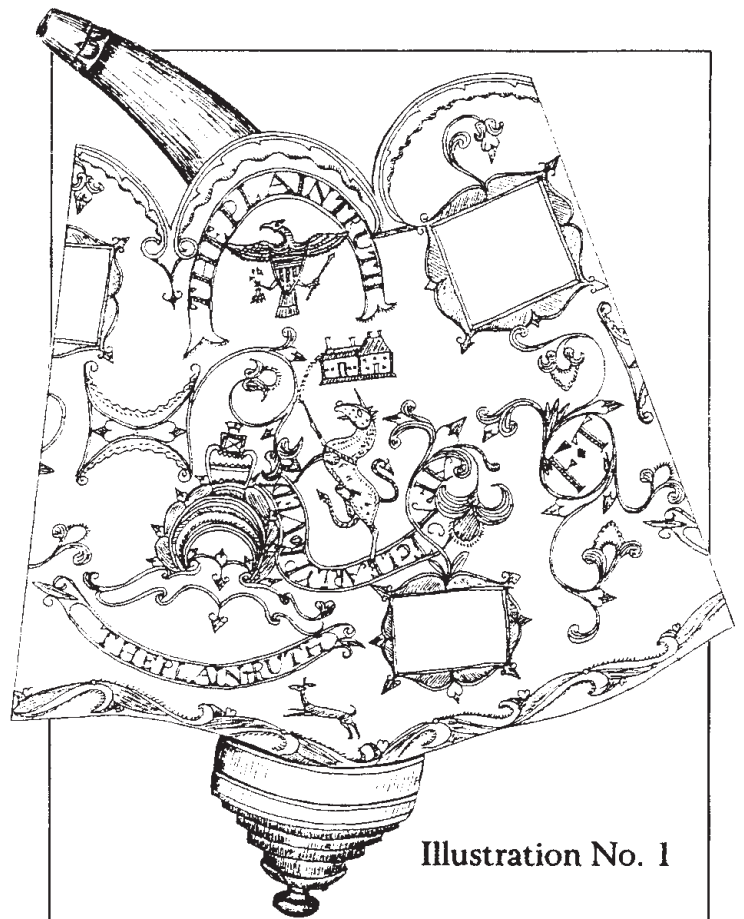


Illustration No. 1

'THE PLAIN TRUTH' horn is signed "F\*T" for Francis Tansel, and is the earliest known Tansel horn, probably carved in Virginia ca. 1790-1795. Originally it had an attached spout extension about two inches in length. A number of details on this horn can be found on later horns, including the eagle, small deer, border style on the rectangular cartouche, polychroming and fancy basal border carving. Two horn rings cover the pug nails. The plug has a typical early Tansel-style horn button inserted for strap attachment.

occurred while he was at Fort Meigs; first, he carved several Tansel-style horns for Kentucky soldiers while stationed at the fort; second, his illness is thought by some

researchers to have caused a temporary removal from Kentucky and stay in Ohio. It is these factors that created the Tansel horns of Ohio origin.

There are two documented Fort Meigs horns carved by Francis Tansel, and reports of a possible third one. One of the two known horns is on display at Fort Meigs and pictured in Illustration No 2; the second is privately owned, and is shown in Illustration No. 3. The horns are very similar in design, the second being an almost identical copy of the first. The Fort Meigs museum horn has "JAS. ARNOLD SEPT. THE 12th 1813" cut in Tansel's hand (except possibly for the "12th 1813" in lower case at the end). The other horn has "SAM'L ARNOLD Sept. the 15th 1813 with the "Sept. the 15th 1813 in small case and possibly not in Tansel's hand, although the lettering difference may be due to his infrequent use of lower case letters and their smaller physical size. Both men are listed in War of 1812 records as being stationed at Fort Meigs while Francis Tansel was there, and both were from Kentucky. The horns have very similar eagles with a sun overhead, antlered deer in an oval cartouche, a sea horse and alligator that represent the half horse-half alligator claim of most fighting Kentuckians, a fancy blank cartouche in rectangular form apparently for a name or date, a sail boat that may relate to a small military vessel on the Maumee River, and most importantly a detailed drawing of Fort Meigs, labeled "FT MEIGS," and showing its numbered block houses gates battery locations, and earth works with surprising accuracy. The two Fort Meigs horns were made on Ohio soil during one of the War of 1812's most important campaigns. A third Tansel horn from Fort Meigs may

also exist based on sketchy reports, and perhaps others will be discovered. These horns, based on where they were made and the fort they document, are truly Ohio Tansel horns.

#### **Possible Ohio Period For The Tansels:**

The previously mentioned illness of Francis Tansel while at Fort Meigs coupled with other facts and a few hearsay "could be" facts, build a circumstantial case for the Tansels being in Ohio for several years between 1815 and 1819. If so, then some standard style Tansel horns may also have been made in Ohio during that period. However, while possible, it has not been proven, and cannot be accepted as true until more concrete evidence is uncovered. But there are fascinating possibilities, and reviewing the facts and near facts presents us with these possibilities.

Several Ohio powder horn and longrifle collectors have felt for years that one or more Tansels must have lived and worked in Ohio at some time, based on the significant number of Tansel horns found in "central Ohio," according to them. While the author cannot attest to how many of the known horns first surfaced in central Ohio, obviously some have. How much this number differs from the number found in Kentucky, Illinois or Wisconsin and presumed carried there, remains unclear as well. But some collectors claim Ohio has had an unusually high number, so their opinion will be accepted as having some merit.

A documented fact is that Francis Tansel became ill while at Fort Meigs and left service prematurely. One school of thought feels that returning to Kentucky may have been too difficult for him, so he stayed in Ohio to recuperate. Another



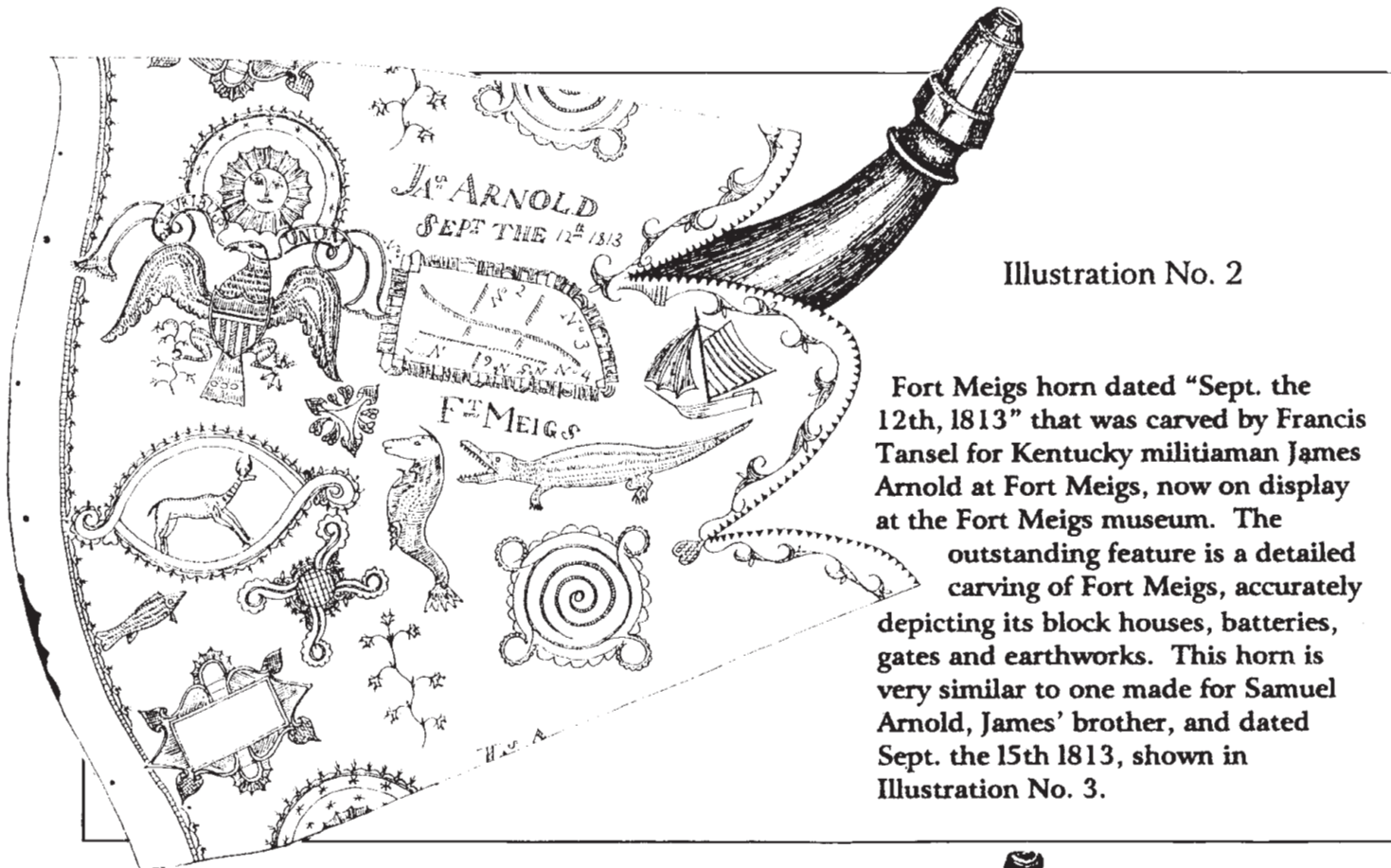


Illustration No. 2

Fort Meigs horn dated "Sept. the 12th, 1813" that was carved by Francis Tansel for Kentucky militiaman James Arnold at Fort Meigs, now on display at the Fort Meigs museum. The outstanding feature is a detailed carving of Fort Meigs, accurately depicting its block houses, batteries, gates and earthworks. This horn is very similar to one made for Samuel Arnold, James' brother, and dated Sept. the 15th 1813, shown in Illustration No. 3.

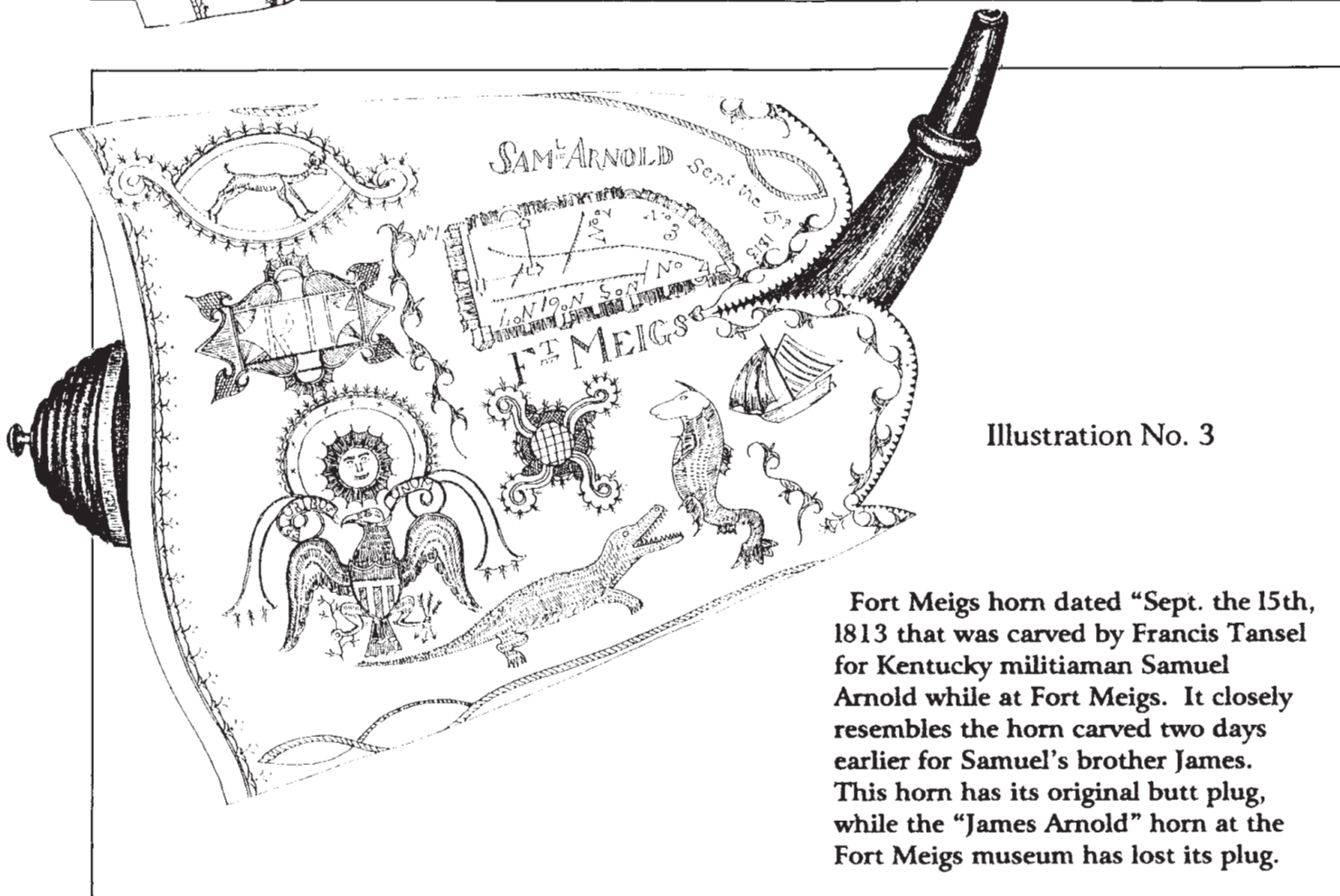


Illustration No. 3

Fort Meigs horn dated "Sept. the 15th, 1813" that was carved by Francis Tansel for Kentucky militiaman Samuel Arnold while at Fort Meigs. It closely resembles the horn carved two days earlier for Samuel's brother James. This horn has its original butt plug, while the "James Arnold" horn at the Fort Meigs museum has lost its plug.

fact is that all Tansels of age showed up in Kentucky property tax records in 1814, but between 1815 and 1820 no Tansels were listed despite the records being preserved and complete. The Federal Census of 1820 listed Francis Tansel back in Kentucky, but it was not until 1821 that they were listed as taxable land owners again, and while in Scott County, they apparently did not have the same properties they held in 1814. So what happened to the Tansel clan during those 1815 to 1819 years, and where were they? The author has reviewed tax records from most Kentucky counties for that period seeking any Tansel residents, and found none. Perhaps they were in Ohio, drawn there by Francis' inability to return home due to illness after leaving Fort Meigs.

The most fascinating piece of "almost documented" evidence pointing toward the Tansels living in Ohio after the War of 1812 comes from a knowledgeable Ohio gun collector and historic researcher. He told the author of seeing an early newspaper advertisement while researching Kentucky historical collections for gunsmiths at either the Filson Club in Louisville or Kentucky Historical Society in Frankfort, but which collection was not recalled. The ad was in a Kentucky newspaper from around 1817 or 1818, and stated in part:

"Francis Tansel, Hornsmith and Mercantiler, North Bend, Ohio."

Unfortunately, a xeroxed copy of the ad has been lost, and no one has revisited the major Kentucky collections in an effort to re-locate this important piece of Tansel information. But the author feels the integrity of the researcher gives his claim credibility in its basic facts. Review of

early records of Hamilton County in Ohio where North Bend is located (just west of Cincinnati where the Ohio River reaches its farthest point north and bends back south) and Boone and Kenton Counties in Kentucky across the river from North Bend have yielded no evidence of a Tansel living in the immediate area. However, if no land was purchased an individual could escape notice in both land and tax records, so failure to locate Tansel records does not necessarily prove he was not there at least briefly. It is also reasonable to assume that if Francis Tansel was in North Bend working as mercantiler, he would have sold his Kentucky property to get funds for stocking his business, thereby explaining why his property disappeared from Kentucky tax records between 1815 and 1820, and different lands were listed upon his return in 1821. Unfortunately the Scott Co. Courthouse burned down in the mid-1800's and many of its early records were lost or severely damaged, making verification of some Tansel land transactions impossible.

North Bend was also the home of General William Henry Harrison, hero of the War of 1812 and the commanding officer at Fort Meigs during the summer of 1813 while Francis Tansel was there. It would be exciting but unrealistic, to imagine a connection somehow at North Bend, between the General and one of his old soldiers from Fort Meigs. But it is also interesting to note the frequent depiction of General Harrison on later Indiana Tansel horns, in particular during the 1840 presidential election when Harrison ran on the Whig ticket. A Tansel cup signed by Timothy Tansel and dated 1841 appears to illustrate a meeting between General Harrison and Timothy and his wife. The cup is seen in Illustration No. 4 While purely speculative, it raises the possibility of some familiarity between the Tansels

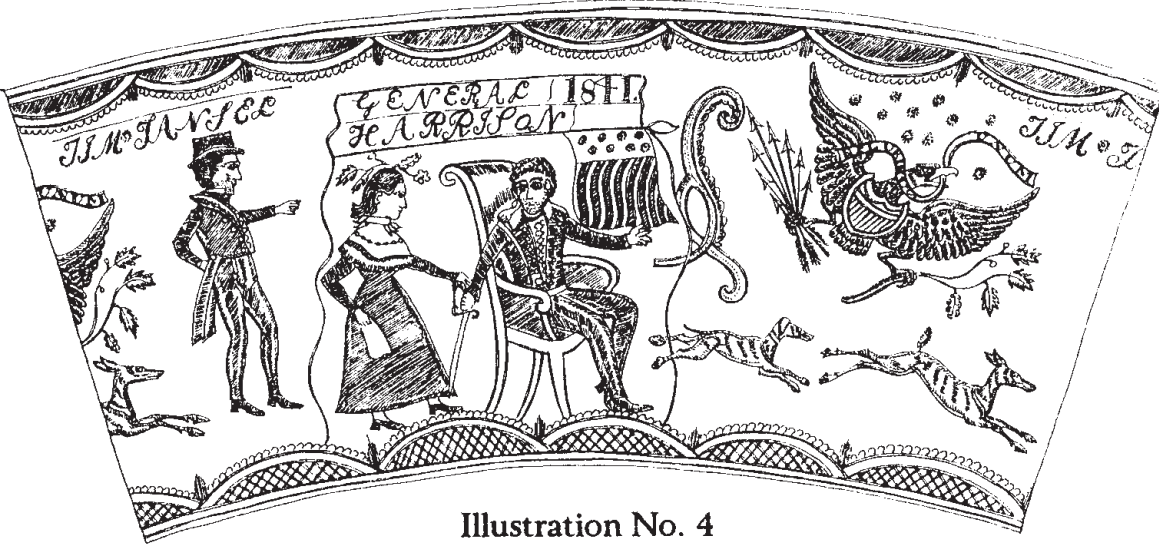


Illustration No. 4

A horn cup carved by Timothy Tansel in 1841 appears to depict a meeting between President William H., Harrison and Timothy Tansel and his wife Martha. When the Tansels carved a name just above or below a figure, it normally indicated who the figure was; the location of the name on the cup

appears to indicate the standing figure is Timothy himself. This scene may document a meeting that took place between the Tansels and President Harrison in 1841, giving support to the possibility of a North Bend, Ohio connection.

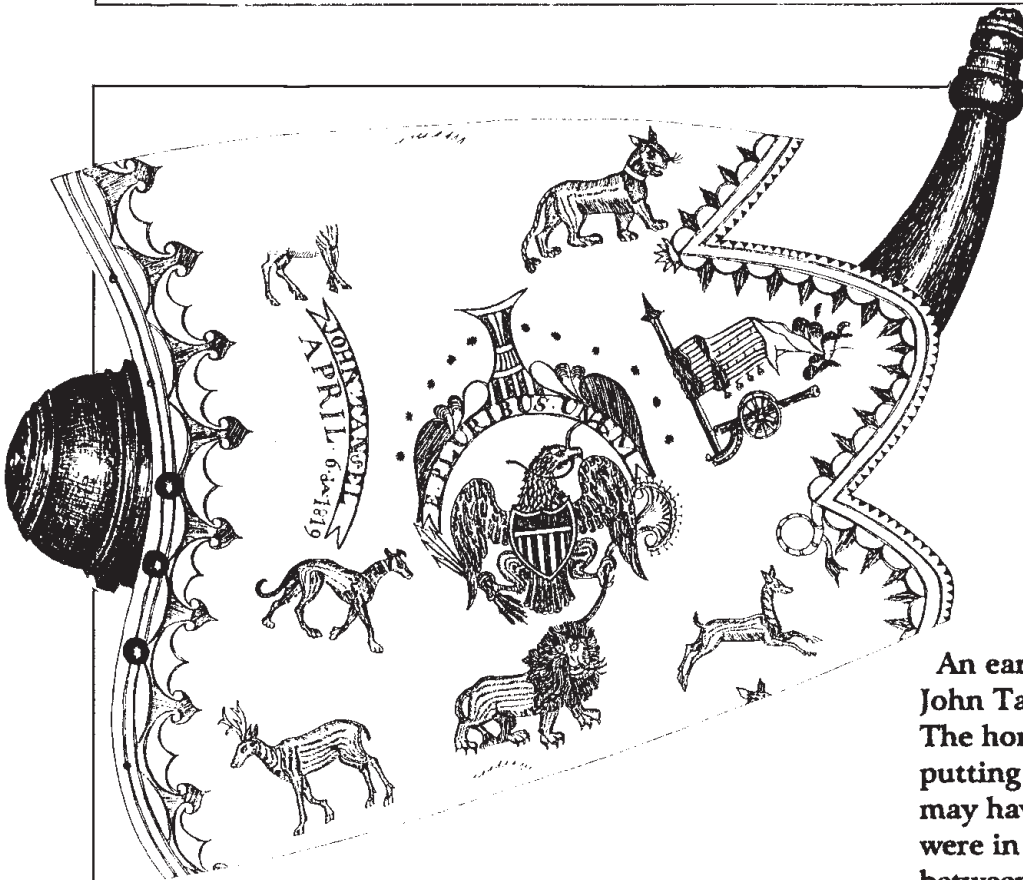


Illustration No. 5

An early horn carved by oldest son John Tansel when nineteen years old. The horn is dated "April 6 day 1819," putting it near the time the Tansels may have been in Ohio. If in fact they were in North Bend, Ohio sometime between 1815 and 1819, this horn is representative of what a Tansel product of that period would look like.



and Harrison. It should be noted that General Harrison was known for his concern for and familiarity with his troops, often eating with them and sharing hardships in the field rather than using privileges of rank to avoid such discomforts. Such actions made him loved and respected by his men beyond the feelings for most officers of the day. The Tansels' strong support for Harrison in the 1840 election, as evidenced by their carved horns of the period, tends to support a possible North Bend period with proximity to Harrison that helped build their later support for him.

The above mixture of facts, almost-facts, speculation and applied logic build a circumstantial case for Francis Tansel, if not his entire family, living in Ohio at North Bend for several years after his release from service in the War of 1812. Thus in addition to his Fort Meigs horns, if he worked as a hornsmith and mercantiler in North Bend, he undoubtedly made carved horns while there, making him truly an Ohio horn carver rather than an itinerant, if only for a brief period. The only known dated Tansel horn from in or near that period is by oldest son John Tansel. If civilian Tansel horns were being carved in Ohio at that time, they would probably be similar in appearance to John's work pictured in Illustration No 5, dated "April 6 day 1819." One last possible Tansel connection to Ohio is totally unproved but fun to speculate about, and involves the small group of well carved and polychromed Mercer County, Ohio horns. The Mercer County horns appear to be directly descended from, or heavily influenced by, the Tansel horn. The earliest dated Mercer County horn was made in 1848 and has Mexican War details, an

unmistakable Tansel-style fish-mouth throat section, a federal eagle with "E PLURIBUS UNUM" banner above its head and the resemblance of a shielded chest, a full figure of Chief Blackhawk, and polychroming. Later Mercer County horns didn't use the fish mouthed throat detail, but were even more heavily polychromed, had deer and hunting dogs, frequently hunters with rifles, other full figures and busts of men, dates, and block lettering of names, all resembling details found on earlier Tansel horns. The similarities are unmistakable. Why do the Mercer County, Ohio horns appear to follow the Tansel tradition so closely? The easiest answer is that the carver, or carvers, lived close to Indiana and therefore saw and were heavily influenced by good examples of Tansel work. But another fact puts a different twist on the answer. Francis Tansel was at Fort Meigs in 1813, and perhaps later at North Bend, close to the Indiana border. If one makes the reasonable assumption that he would travel in a relatively straight line from Fort Meigs to North Bend, Ohio, the line of travel would take him directly through Mercer County, as well as its north and south neighboring counties. Did he show off his wares or perhaps carve a few horns for the locals while traveling through? It's probably just a coincidence, but interesting nonetheless as one last bit of circumstantial information supporting a possible Tansel presence in the State of Ohio beyond the documented Fort Meigs period.

**Note:** For readers unfamiliar with Mercer County, Ohio carved horns, an article describing them, their artwork, original owners and the Masonic connection behind them will follow in a later issue of the "AOLRC Bulletin."



## Ohio, Indiana and the Kincaid Connection

Article and Photos By Jeff Yaeger

His legacy still thrives in Boone County, Indiana. He was among the prominent citizens of his day and his descendents are among the business and judicial leaders of the county today. One need only open a Lebanon (the Boone County Seat) phone directory to see that the family lineage has prospered and proliferated. In Lebanon alone, there are no fewer than eighteen heads of households with the last name of "Kincaid". A close examination of these Kincaids reveals persons in "high" places. For example: Anthony Kincaid is owner of Kincaid Dodge, Chrysler, and Plymouth Auto sales; the honorable A. O. Kincaid resides over a court room in the Boone County Court House; and Mike Kincaid, a black belt in Karate, is proprietor, manager, and trainer at Karate USA.

This long line of successful individuals in Boone County begins in Washington County, Pennsylvania on March 16, 1795. It was then that John Kincaid was born to his Irish immigrant father John and his Virginia-born mother, Martha. He was the youngest of 9 children.

While still a teen, John Kincaid served an apprenticeship to a cabinet maker and served three months in the War of 1812 as a substitute for Robert Carr. Shortly after completing his apprenticeship and duty to country, he married Christina Pope. Christina would be his wife for the rest of her life--over seventy years! Yes, count the years! Christina and John were married

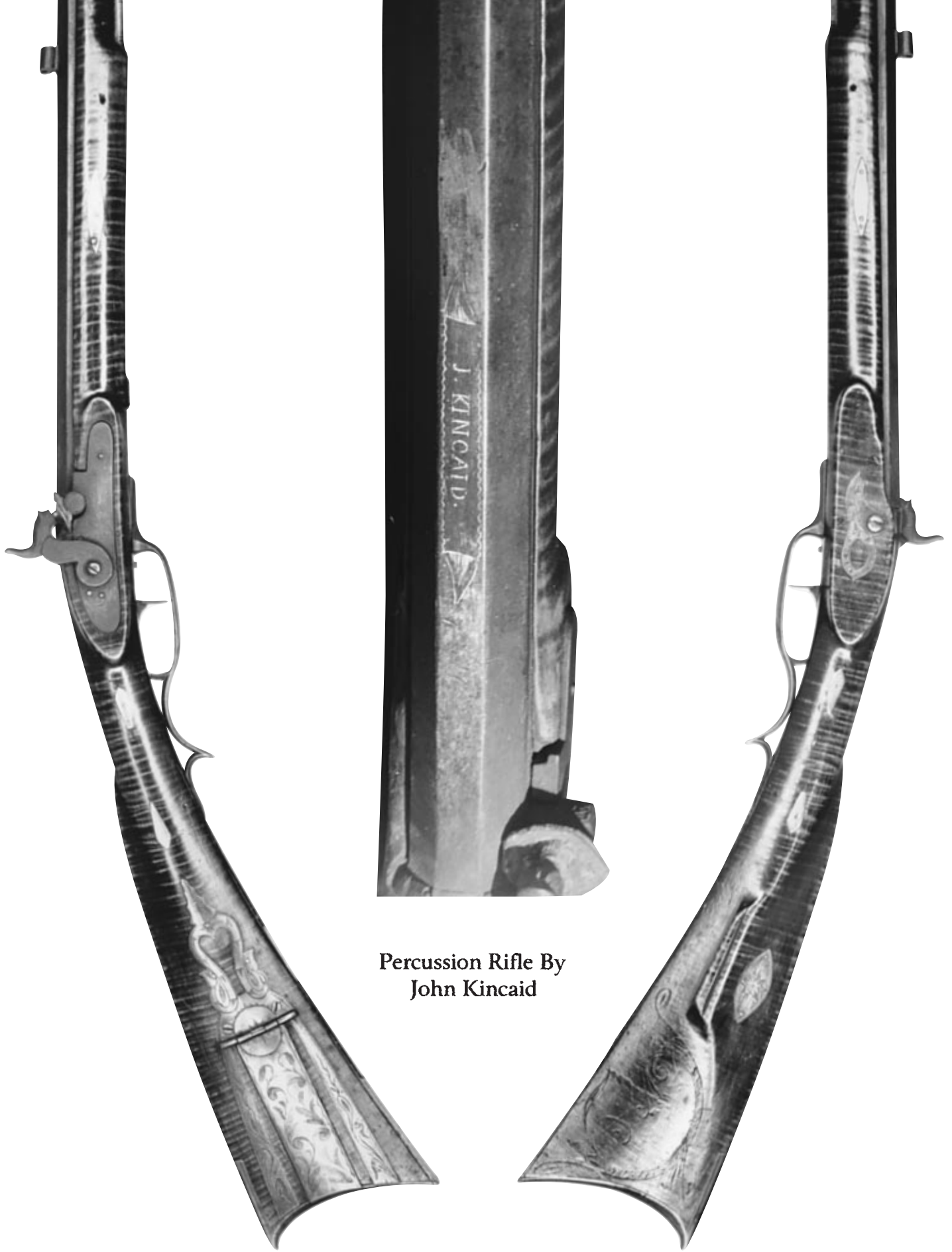
on February 2, 1815 and Christina died on July 10, 1885. A marriage of seventy years today is a very rare occurrence indeed. In the 1800's, it was unheard of!

John and Christina lived in Trumbal County, Ohio for about thirty-three years. During those years John made a living as a cabinet maker and gunsmith. It is uncertain when he began making guns, but it is highly probable that prior to 1850, he made the transition to "gunmaker".

During their Ohio years Christina gave birth to six children. Their names and years of birth are: Frederick 1815, Sarah 1818, Lucinda 1821, John 1822, Calvin 1826, and Mandy 1829. Their religious ties in Ohio were with the Methodist Episcopal Church--a denomination they found and reconnected with at their new home in Boone County, Indiana.

John and Christina's eldest son, Frederick, preceded them to Boone County by about one year. Frederick's family arrived in the spring of 1847 and purchased a farm from Thomas Osborn, the pioneer who entered the land. The Farm was near two main thoroughfares (Noblesville Trace and Michigan Road) and was comprised of mostly productive soils. The towns of Rosston and Eagle Village were within walking distance on Michigan Road which was the primary north-south road in Central Indiana. A





Percussion Rifle By  
John Kincaid

northbound, four-horse stage coach left Eagle Village and headed for Logansport on a daily basis. Good transportation routes were important for a farmer (and a gunmaker) to get his products to market.

“Gunsmith” was John’s primary occupation as listed in the Federal census records of Boone County, Indiana.

It is uncertain as to why John and Christina joined their son in Indiana. One can only speculate. It was not uncommon for the oldest son to inherit their parents entire estate, but also to have the responsibility of caring for aging parents. Perhaps Frederick and his wife, Rachael, knew this would be a better place for John to market his craft--the Kentucky long rifle. Perhaps Frederick’s enterprise was growing and he needed his father’s help in the summer time. Whatever the reason, John and Christina left their home county in Ohio and went to live the rest of their lives in Boone County, Indiana.

According to Boone Co. census records, John Kincaid was not a wealthy man. In 1850 he listed a personal estate valued at \$600 and in 1870 an estate of \$300. In contrast, his son Frederick was well-to-do. In 1870, at age 54, Frederick reported a real estate value at \$8000 and personal goods worth \$1600--well above the average for his age in Boone County, In.

John Kincaid lived to the old age of 96 years (died 10/22/1891). He was preceded in death by his wife Christina (died 1885), his son Frederick (died 1888) and his daughter-in-law Rachel (died 1890). He lived with his son Frederick at least until Frederick’s death and was well cared for in his old age. He and his wife

are buried seven and three-quarters miles east of Lebanon in Mts. Runn Cemetery.

The photos exhibit the only “Kincaid” rifle I’ve had the privilege to examine. The overall style is common for an Ohio or Indiana rifle made in the 1830’s or 1840’s. The patch-box and inlay engraving are handsome, but not elaborate. The overall lines are sleek and proportional. The single trigger is protected by a simple, brass shallow profile guard, while the incised carving behind the cheekpiece is almost crude. One could speculate that this might be one of his earliest attempts at carving or that it might be the product of a hastened job due to competitive pressures. I hope to study and photograph more “Kincaids” in the future. It would also be interesting to compare John Kincaids work with his son’s, John A. Kincaid, who was a gunmaker and remained in Trumbal County, Ohio.

#### About the Author...

Jeff Jaeger is a researcher of Indiana gunmakers and amateur photographer of Indiana guns. His ambition is to publish a quality book on the subject. If you have biographical information or Indiana guns available to photograph, please contact Jeff at 765-482-7089.

