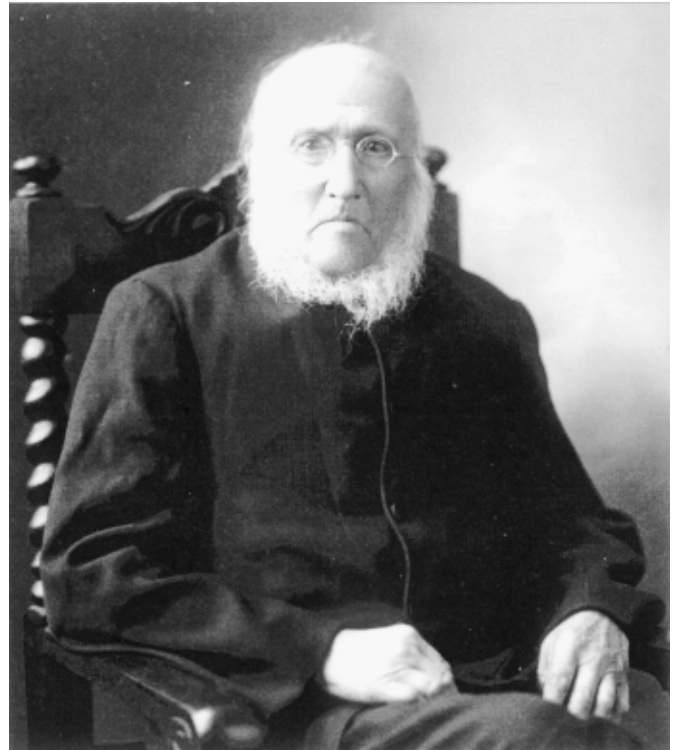


  
**John Moser**  
**Mennonite Minister, Farmer & Gunsmith**  
**Wayne Co. & Putnam Co.**

Compiled by Tom McCullough

John Moser was born August 2, 1826 in Wayne County, Ohio, the oldest son and 4th child of Jacob Moser (1793-1870) and Barbara Wahli (1802-1889), who had immigrated among the early settlers to the Sonnenberg Swiss settlement in Ohio in 1821 from Am Stalden, Jura, Switzerland. John was the grandson of Peter and Barbara (Ramseyer) Moser of the Congregation of Ruderswil, Oberamt Signau, Canton Bern, Switzerland and later of the region of Grosshochstetten. On the maternal side, he was grandson of Ulrich Wahli of Bolligen, Canton Bern and Elizabeth (Ramseyer) Wahli of Eggiwil.

Jacob and Barbara Moser, with their daughter Marian, were among the 2nd group of emigrants from the Bern Jura region of Switzerland to travel to America. This group consisted of the following families, many of which were single: Hans Lehmann, Abraham Lehmann, Hans and Christian Lehmann, Abraham Zuercher, Peter Hofstetter, David Zuercher, and the Mosers. They left the port of Le Havre, France on April 10, 1821 and arrived in New York harbor on July 4th, 1821. On their way to Ohio, in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, their second daughter Elizabeth, was born on Aug. 9, 1821. The Mosers settled and farmed the land they purchased 2 1/2 miles south of Dalton, on the higher ground which is separated by Sugar Creek valley from the flatter area where most of the first families settled in Wayne County, Ohio. Jacob and Barbara Moser had 10 children: Marian, Elizabeth, Anna, John, Abraham, Katharina, Elizabeth II, David, Jacob J., and Abraham J.



John Moser

Many of the Bernese Anabaptist of Sonnenberg, moved to the Swiss settlement in Putnam County, to purchase good inexpensive land for farming. Land records show that on Oct. 30, 1843, Jacob Moser purchased 80 acres of land from Peter Hilty in section 25, Riley Twp. Putnam County. An adjacent 80 acres, were purchased from Christian Rupp in 1852. But during this time, Jacob and his family remained in Wayne County and had not yet moved to Putnam County.

The first record of John Moser as a gunsmith, was in the 1850 U.S. census. It lists



John Moser's Gunshop.



Original homestead of John Moser.

John Moser, gunsmith, in the household of Jacob and Barbara Moser, Sugar Creek Twp., Wayne County, Ohio.

John married Anna Lehman on Jan. 15, 1852, along Zuercher Creek in the Sonnenberg settlement. They moved to Riley Twp., Putnam County, Ohio in the spring of 1852. John purchased the 160 acres from his father on May 17, 1853. John and Anna had 10 children: Daniel, Lizzie, Sarah, Barbara, Verena, Noah, Jacob, John, Anna, and Samuel.

John Moser was a farmer by occupation and had learned the gunsmith trade and supplied rifles for the Swiss settlement. This settlement was near the present day villages of Bluffton (Allen County) and Pandora (Putnam County), Ohio. His early rifles were plain percussion fullstocks. The later rifles had engraved patchboxes, sometimes with a fish finale. Another characteristic was the crescent shaped cheekpiece. These features were also prevalent on rifles built by Swiss Mennonite gunsmith, Peter Geiger, of the settlement.

John joined the Sonnenberg church on April 10, 1846 and was chosen minister of the Putnam County congregation on Oct. 9, 1853. On Jan. 24, 1864 he was chosen bishop of this congregation, which office he carried out with zeal and fidelity during a period when many changes were introduced into the congregation. During his pastorate of over 50 years, he baptized nearly 1000 persons, married over 200 couples and, besides his regular sermons nearly every Sunday, officiated at several hundred funerals. He took great interest in the church organizations, such as Sunday schools, young people societies, missions, and evangelistic endeavors, all of which were begun during his ministry. He participated in the ministers' meetings of the Swiss congregations. During his ministry the Swiss congregations of Allen and Putnam counties joined the General Conference Mennonite Church.

Moser compiled the letters of the Amish

schism and had them published in 1876 as an answer to the strict avoidance practiced by the Reformed Mennonites and defended in the writings of Daniel Musser.

On May 20, 1878, Anna Moser died and was laid to rest at the Old Cemetery near the Egli church.

In 1898, the Middle District Conference proposed to establish a college in Bluffton, Ohio. The Swiss church of Bluffton, contributed liberally to the building and current expenses funds of the school, and on June 9, 1900, it was Father Moser who laid the corner stone of Central Mennonite College (now known as Bluffton College).

In early 1903, Elder John Moser wished to be excused from his arduous duties as elder, because of the infirmities of age, though he declared his willingness to continue preaching as far as his strength permitted.

John Moser died on July 10, 1908 from bronchial infection. The funeral was the largest in the settlement with 385 conveyances within the large St. Johns church and another 500 persons were outside the church, unable to gain admittance. Revs. J. B. Baer, Christian Hege, and Benjamin Diller officiated the services. He was buried in the cemetery at St. Johns Mennonite Church, Pandora, Ohio. In Sept. of the same year, the remains of Anna Moser were moved from Old Cemetery and laid to rest beside those of her husband in the St. Johns cemetery.

The home of John and Anna Moser still stands on section 25, Riley Twp. Putnam County and the land is farmed by his great great grandson. John Mosers handmade treadle lathe, work bench, numerous gun making tools, blacksmith tools, cabinet making tools, a "cherry" for making round ball molds, and a halfstock percussion rifle have been passed down through the Moser family. the gunshop no longer stands, but when dismantled, it had these tools and blacksmith forge within.

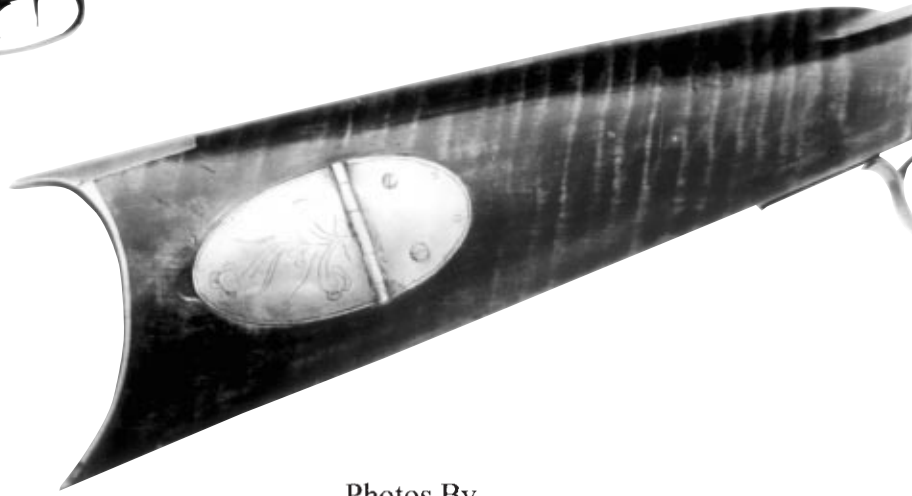


Photos By  
Jim Whisker.

Halfstock Rifle by John Moser.



Fullstock Rifle by John Moser.



Photos By  
Tom McCullough.



Halfstock Rifle by John Moser.



I have examined and photographed 3 - Moser rifles:

Percussion Half Stock Rifle with 15/16" x 38 1/2" long - 36 caliber barrel, curly maple stock with brass hardware, patchbox with fish finial, and silver star inlay on crescent cheekpiece. Silver engraved oval inlay on wrist. Barrel is engraved - John Moser.

Fullstock percussion rifle with curly maple stock. 15/16" x 36 5/8" barrel in 32 caliber. Brass mounted with engraved oblong patchbox. Brass side plate repair. Set triggers. John Moser engraved on barrel.

Fullstock percussion rifle with curly maple stock. 39" barrel in 36 caliber. Brass mounted with no patchbox. Crescent shaped cheek piece with 3 silver inlays. J Moser engraved on barrel.

Reference's:

The Mennonite Encyclopedia Vol. 3 Mean Publishing House - Scottdale, PA-1957

Centenary History of the Swiss Mennonite Churches of Putnam and Allen Counties, Ohio by E. J. Hirscher-1937

150 Years Along The Riley (1832-1982) by Don Schneck - August 1982

Life in the Bluffton and Pandora, Ohio, Community, 1877 - 1910: Excerpts from The Bluffton News (Compiled by Edgar L. Schumacher)

On Lonely Paths / Remembrances of the Past 1894 written in German by Abraham J. Moser (youngest brother of John Moser)

Moser Family Tree compiled by David C. Moser

Interview with Great Grandson, John Moser, in April 1997

Portrait of Elder John Moser was furnished by



Handmade tools used by John Moser.

the Swiss Community Historical Society, Bluffton, Ohio. Portrait was taken by Will Triplett.

I would like to give my thanks to the John Moser family for their help with research and the photographs of the Moser homestead and gunshop!



# Moses Wright Homestead

By Warren Offenberger

Several years ago I journeyed to Freeport in Harrison Co. Ohio in search of Moses Wrights' homestead. On arriving at the little town I asked numerous people if they knew of Moses Wright and if so where did he live. Not one person could help me. However, one gentleman pointed me to the spot where the gunsmith shop of William and Newton Wright was located. William was the son of Moses and Newton was Williams' son. Thus, we had three generations of Wrights plying the trade of gunsmith in Freeport.

A couple years ago, Michael Puskarich was hunting in Iowa with AOLRC member John Shultz. John owns a fine Moses Wright rifle that is dated 1848. Since Michael was raised in Freeport the conversation naturally turned to Moses Wright. Michael returned home and immediately located the old homestead through some local assistance.

This past summer John and Hazel Shultz, Ron and Judy Yerian, Michael Puskarich and myself took a short trip out of Freeport to the farm of Moses Wright. The farm is still in the family having been passed down through the generations.

I already knew somethings about the farm as Moses' grandson wrote an article in the Freeport Press newspaper in 1934 detailing Moses arrival in Freeport.

According to the article Moses was born in 1792. After serving the gunsmith apprenticeship in Bedford, Pennsylvania he located in Freeport in 1817. Here he erected a log cabin, and a one story gunsmith shop. In 1828 he built a "buried" log house on a steep hillside at the foot of his orchard. Here he lived and worked until his death in 1854. The article also states that almost every household in Freeport had a rifle and sickle made by Moses.

His rifles are now very rare and I've never seen a marked sickle.

Upon arriving at the farm, it was like taking a step back in time. The house has deteriorated beyond repair. However, it is just as described in 1934, a four story set into the bank with an old orchard behind the house on the hill. The Wright cemetery is located on the hill also near the orchard. Here is buried Moses Wright. Only one headstone remains due to vandalism; it is that of Lydia and Thomas Davidson, possibly the daughter and son-in-law of Moses. The stone of Moses and Hannah as well as other family members have long been destroyed.

With the help of Moses' great, great, grandson Glenn Shugart, the site of the gun shop was located. Several foundation stones are still in the ground. It was an honor for me to stand on this site where so many works of art were produced.

Please refer to AOLRC Newsletters Vol. V Number 2 Sept. 1983 and Vol. XII Number 1 Feb. 1990 for more information of the life and work of Moses Wright.



Glenn Shugart, great, great grandson of Moses Wright.



Moses Wright homestead. The orchard and cemetery are on the hill behind the house.



John Shultz and Warren Offenberger, standing on site of gunshop, holding Moses Wright rifle dated 1848.



Cemetery overlooking Wright farm.



A view from the hill. Gunshop stood between the two buildings on the right.





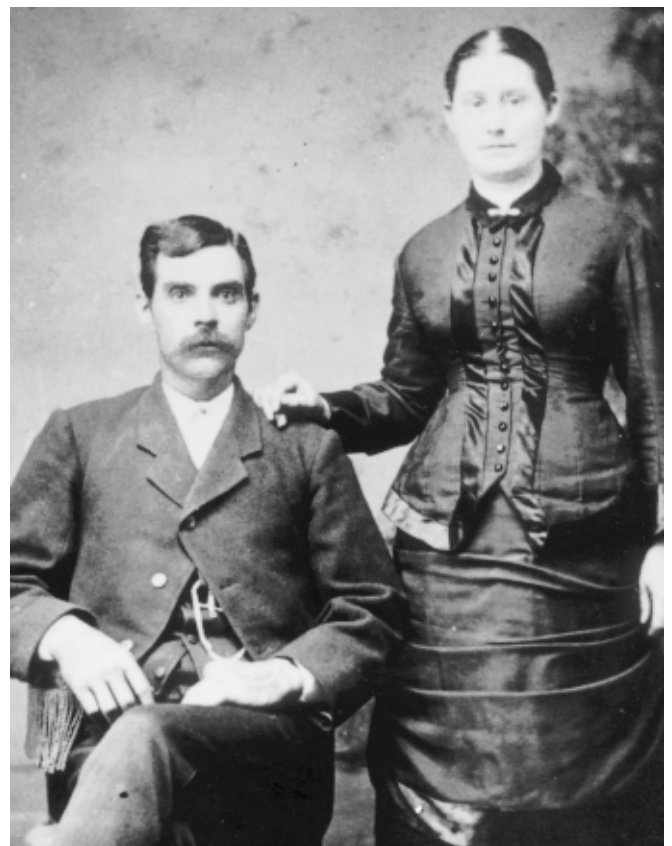
## Finley Caple Keith 1849 - 1930



By Ted Dixon and Dale Lothes.

Finley Keith marked his guns "F.C.K." on the top facet, of the barrel. His masterpiece, a curly maple halfstock, with 20 engraved silver inlays, is signed "F. C. Keith Crooked Tree, Ohio" on a six inch long silver inlay, inlayed in the top facet of the barrel. On the cheater plate is engraved "Made January 7, 1880". The author has one with 14 grooves and lands in the riflings in the barrel. He was an experimenter, with some patents, one being a rotary engine he named after his wife and called it "the Armenia Atherton Rotary Engine." Finley married Armenia Atherton February 14, 1872. Eighteen years later in 1890 he left Jackson Township Noble County, Ohio moving to Cambridge in Guernsey County. With horses and wagons the trip took three days to make the 50 mile. Finley Caple Keith usually marked his guns "F.C.K." ( and I repeat and stress this) so future gun collectors will be able to identify his guns, was a Scotch descendent.

Peter P. Keith, born in Huntington Co. Pennsylvania 6 May 1765 of immigrant Scotch. Father Lewis Keith, was a blacksmith and bellmaker. He served as a blacksmith during the Revolutionary War. Around 1817, he along with his wife Maria Heade and his brother Benjamin came to what is now Jackson Twp. Noble Co. Ohio. He settled at a place later called Keiths or Keithstown. He carried on his blacksmith trade with his brother Benjamin also making farm dinner bells and selling them all over Ohio. They also took up farming. Peter Keith Jr. was



Finley and Armenia Keith.

born 31 October 1792, married Mary Dickey. He to was a blacksmith and had a son John Keith 5 March 1821. John married Eliza McGarry, moved a little farther south in the township, and took up a farm and residence 13 March 1865. Peter Keith Jr. had a son Philip listed in 1850 Census as a gunsmith, but no more about him has been learned and none of his guns have surfaced.