

DAN HUMPFREY: KNOX COUNTY OHIO GUNSMITH

BY BOB STATLER

Dan Humpfrey was born in Berlin Township, Knox County, Ohio on May 24th, 1839 to Thomas and Sophia DeHaven Humpfrey. Dan had 2 brothers, George and Joseph, and a sister Sarah.

The Humpfrey farm, consisting of 50 acres, was located northwest of the village of Ankneytown, Ohio, west of present Old Mansfield Road, between Gregg and Leedy roads.

The biographical information we have comes mainly from the Ohio census records of 1850 through 1880. In 1860 and 1870, his occupation is listed as a laborer and farm laborer respectively. His father passed away in 1877. He is then listed as a gunsmith in the 1880 census.

Dan remained living on the family farm until his death from cancer on November 3rd, 1884. His death certificate lists his occupation as a gunsmith as well. It appears he was a successful and prominent gunsmith in the area given the fact several rifles have survived to date. Passing away at the age of 45 definitely limited the number of rifles produced in his career.

As with many 19th century gunsmiths, the question of how and from who did Dan learn the trade of a gunsmith is not specifically spelled out for us. When pondering this question, the most common place to start investigating is searching out other local gunsmiths to the same area.

I published an article to this newsletter in the fall issue of 2022 (Vol. XLV. No. 2. Aug. 2022) about an unlisted gunsmith located in 1860 Berlin Township, Knox County, Ohio named Stephen Prescott Dyer. Retrieving that newsletter from my "archives" and comparing the Dyer rifle pictured to several Humphrey rifles. Similarities between the work of these two men became apparent. These include the shape and drop of the stock, brass inlays around and below the drum, back

action locks, rectangular inlays around the barrel pin. The rifles may not be considered identical and having only pictures of one Dyer rifle for comparison, a claim of 100% certainty may not be warranted. But it does make a collaboration between these two gunsmiths possible given their location.

Dan is buried in Owl Creek Church of the Brethren Cemetery, beside his parents, located just east of Ankneytown on Toms Road.

All Humpfrey rifles viewed and studied by this author are of similar design and construction. Half stocked, back action locks, medium to heavy barrels, curly maple stocks, and most have cap boxes. Some are known to have many inlays and engraving. His guns are normally block stamped " DAN HUMPFREY", but one is known to be hand engraved with name and "Ankneytown". See Hutslar's Volume III of the Ohio Gunsmith & Allied Tradesmen pictures of another rifles, page 69 also. (See Figs. 1-5)

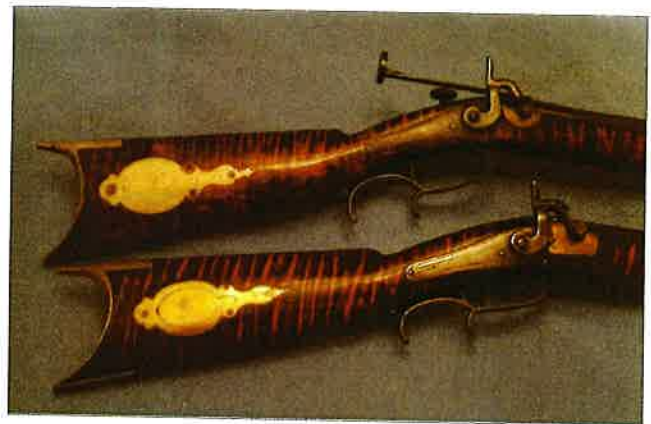


Fig. 1. Buttstocks of two Dan Humpfrey rifles.



Fig. 2. Back-action percussion locks on two Dan Humpfrey rifles. (Bob Statler photo)



Fig. 4. Comparison of two Dan Humpfrey rifles, fore stock inlays, lower one engraved.

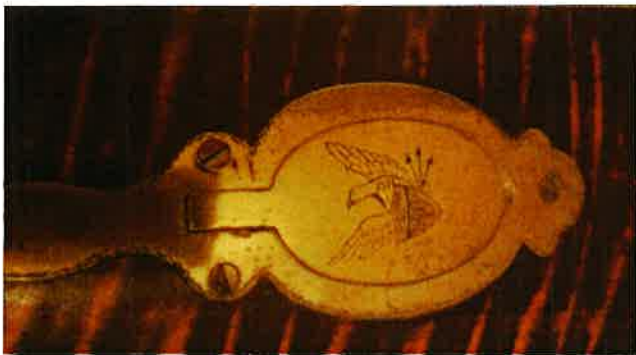


Fig. 3. Detail of patch box with eagle on Dan Humpfrey rifle. (Bob Statler photo)



Fig. 5. "D. Humpfrey" stamp on barrel. (Bob Statler photo)