

work for their annual fund-raising events. Jeff's work has appeared in and on the cover of Muzzleloader, Muzzle Blasts, American Traditions and American Frontier magazines.

Moreover, for the past four years Jeff has taught shooting bag building classes at the NMLRA headquarters in Friendship Indiana and has written several tutorial articles for their website's "Craftsman's Corner" page. Jeff notes that, "My work has been displayed at the annual CLA show in Lexington Kentucky and I'm hoping to add additional show dates in 2023." The photographs that accompany this article illustrate some of the items this artist has produced.

*Note: Special thanks to Danny Coler for eliciting information and photographs for this article from Jeff Luke.*

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## TWO NAMES ON ONE TUSCARAWAS COUNTY RIFLE

BY MARK BENDER

Among the many outstanding Ohio rifles displayed at the recent AOLRC meeting in Marietta was an elaborately inlaid rifle with the names of two rifle makers working in the late 19th century in Shanesville (now part of Sugarcreek), Tuscarawas county, Ohio. The rifle is signed on the barrel in worn script what appears to be "Levi Biddle, O." Of great interest is that

"Levi Biddle, 1970," also in script, is inscribed on a silver inlay on the barrel forward of the original script signature. Farther up the barrel, well in advance of the rear site is another silver inlay with the name, in script, "John Gotchet." In the Vol. XLIV Number 1 issue (September 2021, pp. 8-9) of the AOLRC Newsletter is an article entitled "A 'J Gatschet' Rifle of Tuscarawas



*AOLRC member James Claggett holding the double-signed rifle at the Spring 2022 show in Marietta, Ohio. (photo by Mark Bender)*

County,” which speculates on the relationship between a maker named Gatchet (appearing in several spellings), whose work shares some features with Levi Biddle and other local makers. The present double signed rifle adds more to the mystery of what appears to be some sort of working relationship between the two makers. The existence of what seems to be the earlier Biddle signature directly on the barrel, as well as the two later signatures in the silver inlays (which given the similarity of the inlays may have been both added in 1870) would suggest that somehow the two makers contributed to making the rifle. It may be the case that Biddle originally made the rifle without much

decoration – which might explain the brass patchbox – and the profuse silver (or German silver) vine and leaf work, eagle inlay on cheekpiece, and other fancy inlays were added sometime later, possibly in a cooperative effort by Biddle and John Gotchet (listed in the 1870 census). What is even more interesting (and confusing) is that it appears that the same hand – probably Biddle’s – engraved the signatures, as the style of the letters is markedly different from the signature on p. 9 of the above-mentioned article. It may be that Biddle did the engraving and Gatchet helped with the creation of some of the inlays. (See the accompanying photos.)



*Detail of intricate silver inlay work on the double-signed Tuscarawas County rifle. (photo by Mark Bender)*



*A rifle with two signatures of known Tuscarawas County makers. Signed by Levi Biddle (1870) and John Gotchet. (photo by Mark Bender)*