

IMAGERY ON A M. RONEY RIFLE

BY MARK BENDER WITH MARK HERMAN

Occasional one encounters a fancy rifle with inlays that invite speculation. A half-stock rifle signed "M. Roney" is such a rifle. Volume III of *Ohio Gunsmiths and Allied Tradesmen* lists a M. Roney as working in Miamisburg, Montgomery County, Ohio in the mid-19th century. Roney may have been born in Pennsylvania, and like several other Eastern gunsmiths of the era, moved to Ohio alone or with family to Ohio. The curly maple stock has 14 German silver inlays, including a magnificent patchbox, and a wear plate on the belly of the forestock. On close examination, it seems many of the inlays represent Masonic symbols and possibly some connection to Oddfellows symbolism. It is not yet known, however, if M. Roney had any affiliation with the fraternal order, which has its roots in 14th century stonemason guilds in Europe and gaining foothold then growth in the North America in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The Masons were expanding their influence during the 19th century. Given the flourishing of the Masonic movement in the latter 19th century, it is not surprising that some imagery of the organization would appear on prized objects such as a favorite rifle, much as Christian imagery, hex symbols, secret organizations, and imagery representing colonial powers (especially England) appeared on rifles and muskets in earlier periods. The most outstanding inlay is a large, intricate patchbox which may represent the Temple of Solomon, an important motif in Masonic iconography. In more recent times, symbols of the fraternal order of Masons are still being attached to longrifles. An outstanding example is the Masonic Kentucky Rifle project conducted by Peter A. Alexander (author of *The Gunsmith of Grenville County*) and the Pleasant Valley Masonic Center (see link below). The contemporary gun making company Henry has recently created a lever-action rifle as a commemorative "Freemason Tribute edition," that includes an image of George Washington in Masonic regalia, and symbols of a temple, staircase, and square and compass measuring tools. (See link below.)

The Roney rifle displays several shapes and patterns that appear to be Masonic symbols (see the link below): square and compass (representing treating of others as you would be treated by them [i.e. the "Golden Rule"]); the drawing of a boundary circle indicating "self-restraint and control"; and the "All-seeing eye" (a reminder of the "great architect of the universe"). There is also a fish, which may have Christian symbolism, though fish inlays are common on antique American muzzleloading rifles of the 18th and 19th centuries. Other inlays include a half moon, a hunter's star, a diamond, and a sort of abstract floral motif, such patterns also common on rifles of the muzzleloading era.

The most outstanding inlay, which forms the patchbox, seems to be a representation of Solomon's Temple built on Mount Moriah, a key symbol that links the founding of the Masonic order to the times of the building of the temple.

These are the obvious symbols. There may be other symbols among the remaining inlays, and those described may have deeper levels or meaning. Here are other details:

Overall length is - 46 1/2"

Lock is back action with a single trigger.

Barrel is straight octagon, 15/16 X 31.25. Caliber .36 - .38.

Weight of the rifle is +/- 8 pounds.

Sights have been changed to contemporary sometime in the past.

Excellent overall condition

Note: Thanks to AOLRC member Tom Moody for permission to feature this rifle.

Sources:

Hutslar, Donald A. (n.d.). *Ohio Gunsmiths and Allied Tradesmen, 1750-1950*, Vol III. State College, Pennsylvania: Josten's Printing (for the Association of Ohio Long Rifle Collectors), p. 234.

Links:

https://pvmcmasons.org/project_progress.html

<https://www.henryusa.com/rifles/golden-boy-freemasons-tribute-edition/>

<https://masonicfind.com/masonic-symbols>



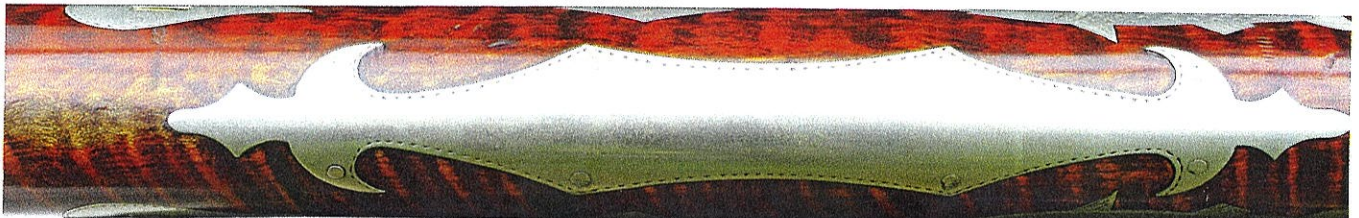
Patchbox in Masonic Design on M. Roney rifle. (Photograph by Mark Bender)



Masonic and folk art images on M. Roney rifle. (Photograph by Mark Bender)



Full-length view of M. Roney rifle. (Photograph by Mark Bender)



Wear plate on bottom of M. Roney rifle. (Photograph by Mark Bender)