

Illustration No. 4: "Checkerboarding" on the "James F. Van Trees" horn #MC-8 is typical of the unique shading method used by the Mercer County carver. The effect is created by staining alternating small squares within cross-hatched areas. This example encloses a bust that probably represents VanTrees himself, the horn's original owner, and includes the date "1855" along with Masonic emblems documenting his affiliation with the organization.

the Ohio/Indiana border region, and that some horns came from Indiana. The horn has a typical "rooster headed" eagle, stars with four points, and a number of Masonic symbols including a large arch representative of a Masonic temple that contains a Mason's compass & square. The arch is stained or polychromed in the "checkerboard" manner unique to Mercer County horns. A well-rounded walnut plug with incised lines and iron staple terminate the large end. The spout is finely shaped, but sports a rather roughly made more recent stopper.



Illustration No. 5: Note the row of Masonic tools on the "James F. VanTrees" horn # MC-8, including from right to left the ladder, plumb bob, ruler, hammer, trowel, and square, each with a Masonic meaning. Also note above the tools is a cross formed from stars, and a rooster thought to represent the trade of farming, or animal husbandry. It is interesting to note that both the rooster and the eagle figures share the same head, leading to the term "rooster headed eagle" on Mercer County horns.

Study horn #MC-4, only 4 ½ inches on the outside curve, slightly flattened, and is a shot or ball horn based on its large spout opening. This horn has a typical bust carving representing owner Jacob Iler. "Leafy vine" arches are carved on both sides, similar to those found on other earlier horns. The horn's small size precludes room for a date or location, but the horn probably dates to about 1850 based on details. The owner may have been the Jacob Iler born in Pickaway County, Ohio in 1811 to parents Jacob and Catherine Boon Iler. Jacob Jr. married Mary McClain on August 8,

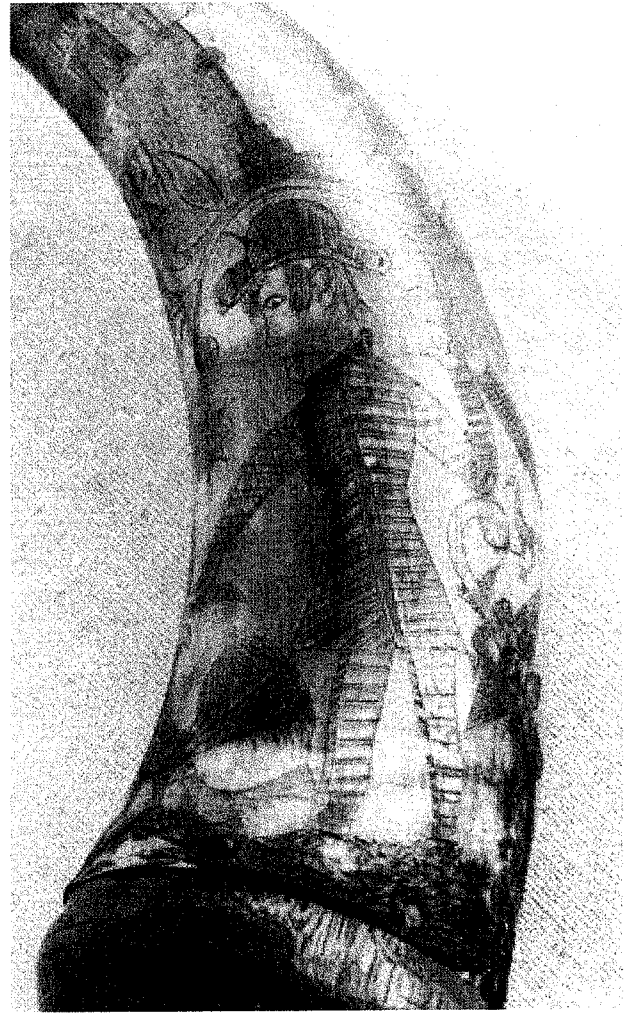
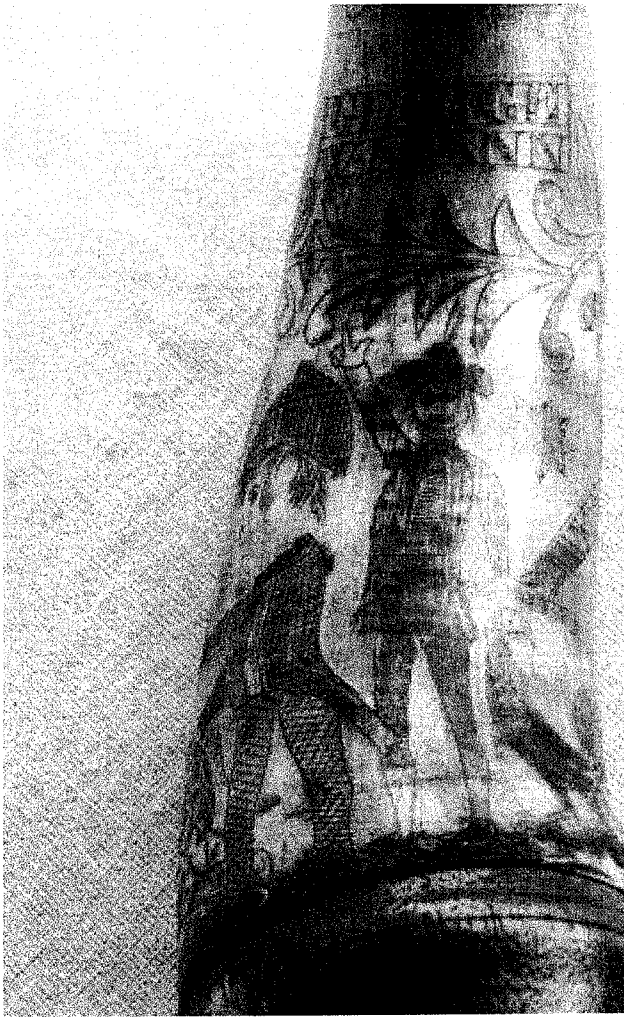
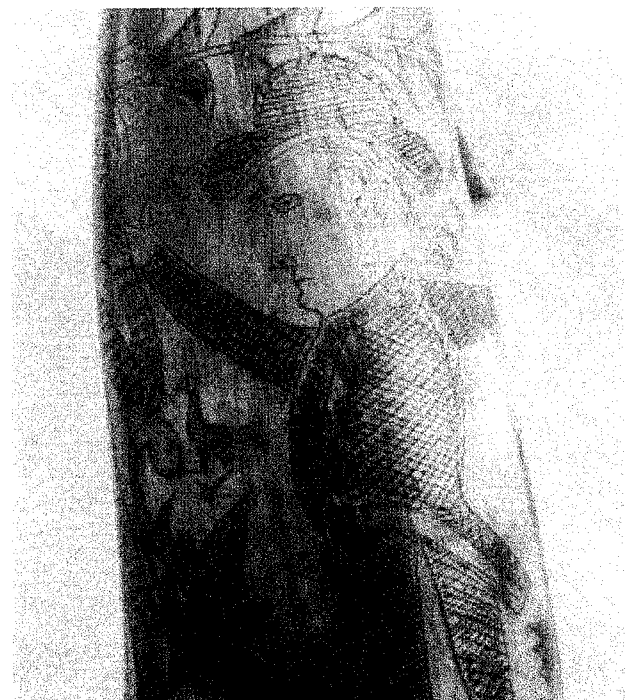


Illustration Nos. 6a, b, c: The "George W. Mann" horn MC-1, has an early date of "1847." The horn has four standing figures, one a hunter with dog, and three holding hands around the horn, undoubtedly representing unity among Masonics. Also present are a droopy winged eagle and number of birds. A Masonic temple is carved near the spout end, and one male figure, seen in No. 6b, points toward the name on the horn to indicate he is that person.

1833 in Hancock County, Ohio. Little else is known about Her.

One of the most important study horns is #MC-7, the "Phillip Alspaugh" horn, due to its documentation of Mercer County, Ohio as its place of origin in 1854, and "W. D." as the carver. It has a typical rooster headed eagle with four pointed stars and "E Pluribus Unum" overhead, leafy vines, and heavy polychroming. The date and owner's name appears within a compass-cut circular cartouche, and the bulbous walnut plug



has the expected finely incised parallel lines encircling it. Overall, the Alsbaugh horn is both beautiful and historically significant due to its documentation of Mercer County and carver "W. D."

Horn MC-8 is the "James F. VanTrees" horn, referred to several times previously. It is profusely carved and polychromed with many figures, including a hunter with rifle that perhaps represents VanTrees, a documented gunsmith. There is an antlered deer with turned head and a collared hunting dog, both near the hunter figure. Many Masonic tools and symbols cover the horn; a man's bust sits under a "checkerboard" arch, and a compass-cut round cartouche contains a Mason's square and dividers plus the name "James Mott" with large letters "J A B" above it. It is presumed from the relative sizes of the names and more pronounced location of the Vantrees name, that James F. VanTrees was the owner of the horn, and perhaps fellow Mason James Mott presented the horn to him in 1855. It is significant to note that the horn demonstrates a change in butt plug style for later horns. The bulbous walnut plug was replaced with a low domed walnut plug. A pair of parallel lines was incised into the horn just above the plug as a border device, and two parallel lines define the nose area of the plug. However, instead of a staple or large head wood screw in the plug for strap attachment, old scars indicate an eye-bolt was screwed into the exposed top edge of the butt plug to attach the strap. Later horns also show the change to a low domed type plug.

The final study horn, #MC-9, is dated 1856 but has no owner's name. It is a smaller horn, only 9 inches on the outside curve, and follows the later style of horn MC-8 with its lower domed plug, and

Illustration No. 7a, b: The "Hezek VanTrees" horn, #MC-2, is a finely carved early horn dated "1847," with strong ties to the Mexican War. Hezekiah VanTrees of Ft. Recovery, Ohio was the older brother of James F. VanTrees, owner of horn MC-8. Hezekiah's horn has figures of General Tayler, Chief Black Hawk, a typical "rooster headed" Mercer County eagle, and depiction of Mexico City. The horn shows the influence of the earlier Tansel carvers of Indiana, based on the similar list of figures and "fish mouth" treatment of the throat section seen on Tansel horns. The carver's initials "W. D." can barely be seen just below the fish mouth "V." carved in the dark area of the horn.

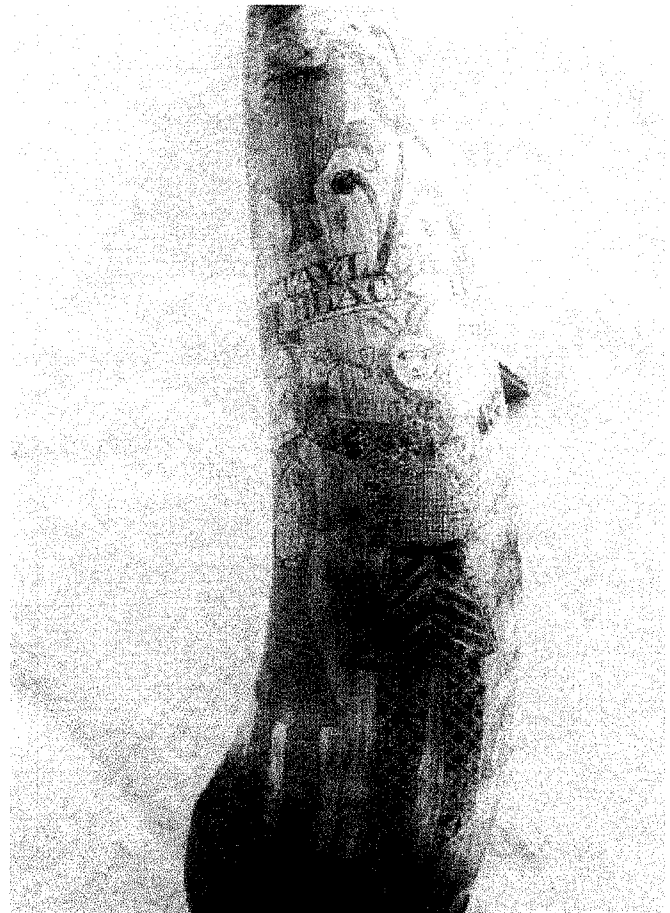




Illustration No. 8: Mercer County horn MC-8 came from Indiana, based its inscription of owner's name "William Halstead" And "Shelby County Indiana." The "1849" horn verifies that Mercer County horns were spread over an area along the Ohio/Indiana border, covering several counties in each state. This horn illustrates the typical deer with head turned back over its shoulder, a "rooster headed" eagle with droopy wings, Masonic symbols, and the usual bulbous walnut plug with pairs of finely incised rings and iron staple in the nose.

spout with two simple strap retaining rings. One side of the horn is completely covered by a large oval cartouche with the date "1856" and a hunting dog beneath it, while the opposite side has a rooster headed eagle and a man sitting on the ground smoking a long stemmed pipe. The lack of a name or Masonic symbolism perhaps indicates a declining interest in, and demand for, these horns. This is the latest date on a Mercer County horn known to the writer, and while perhaps a few more horns were made after this one, its smaller stature and shrinking artwork appear to give mute testimony to the last days of the Mercer County horn tradition.

The Elusive Carver "W. D.": Mercer County horns #MC-2 and #MC-6 are initialed "W. D.," undoubtedly indicating the carver, while a third horn dated 1834, probably an early prototype Mercer County horn, carries the initials "W. B. D." The Mercer County carver has not been identified, but several possibilities exist. Early records of Mercer County show a Wendle Doll at Ft. Recovery [possibly a jeweler], plus William Dixon and William Downing within Mercer County. The generally good quality of carving on

the horns suggests someone who was reasonably literate with an artistic bent, good lettering skills, and the hands of a craftsman. A jeweler would match such qualifications, and likely be a Mason in those days due to his skilled trade. However, there is no documentation yet found connecting any of these men to the powder horns or the Masons. The answer to the carver question may lie within Masonic records, if the horns were in fact made by a Mason to recognize fraternal achievement by other lodge members.

Masonic records for Ohio and Indiana during the 1847-1856 period have not been studied adequately to determine if a specific Mason was the elusive craftsman. However, one Mason offers a possibility. William B. Dodds was an active Mason in the town of Van Wert in Van Wert County, just north of Mercer County. Van Wert County was formed from a portion of Mercer County. Dodds' initials fit, down to the middle initial "B" if in fact the 1834 "prototype" horn is a Mercer County product. Dodds was heavily involved in regional Masonic organizations. When Van Wert Lodge No. 218 of Free and Accepted Masons was chartered by the R. W.