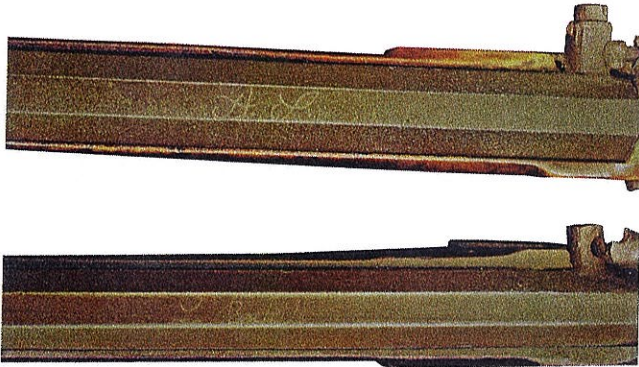




Rifle signed "L. Biddle" (top) and rifle signed "A.S" (bottom); note the similarity in the cut of the anterior moulding on lock side. Photo by Mark Bender



Well-worn .50 J. & S. Hawken rifle, made in St. Louis, Missouri; held in Montana Historical Society, Helena (#1959.06 177a-b). Note the lock marked "Tryon, Phila." Photo by Robert Tetro, Bozeman, Montana



Signatures: "A.S." (top); "L. Biddle" (bottom). Photo by Mark Bender



Profiles of the "A.S." (top); "L. Biddle" (bottom) marked rifles. Photo by Mark Bender

THREE FRONTIER AXES RECOVERED IN HOLMES COUNTY

BY MARK BENDER

Grubbing around a small antique store not far from Charm, in Holmes County, Ohio, I discovered three small axes in the antique tool section. As far as anyone in the store knew, they were local finds. In terms of crafting and styling they may date to the late 18th or early 19th century.

One is a small, eared axe with a triangular eye. It could have served many tasks as a small hatchet on the Ohio frontier. The surface of the ax is heavily pitted, suggesting it may have spent time in the ground. The axe has the suggestion of a poll—it is not clear if the back of the axe was flattened to some degree by pounding.

The two other axes—which might be described as, small, round-eyed trade axes—appear to be of the type made for trade with Native American groups in the greater Great Lakes area, and were in use by people of other backgrounds on the frontier. Sites of cultural interface, such as the Delaware settlements at Schoenbrunn and Gnadenhutten (the site of the infamous execution of 96 Christian Delaware/Lenape in March, 1782), and Coshocton, are among the area sites where trade goods were available to Native customers. Such small axes were used on the frontier

for processing wild game, making kindling, basket making, maple sugaring, and other tasks.

The two round-eyed trade axes are in good condition. The smaller one may have been sharpened many times and has a fairly good edge; the large one has a dull edge. Both are clearly hand-forged, showing distinct seams left from forge welding. Neither axe has touch marks. The wear marks on the upper edges of the bit and on the rear of the collar suggest the axes had been pounded on in the process of wood splitting, or due to pounding ash trunks when making splints in the basket-making process—though that is speculation.

Some members of the AOLRC may have similar axes in their collections of frontier Ohio material culture. For those interested in forging such frontier axes, here are approximate measurements (length is end of poll to center of blade) (see Figures 1-2):

Early hatchet, triangular eye: 5½" length; 3" blade width; 1¼" poll height; 2" height at ear

Small-size round-eye trade axe: 4" length; 2¾" blade width; 1⅝" eye height

Medium-size round-eye trade axe: 5⅝" length; 3¼" blade width; 1⅞" eye height (outer eye 2", inner width 1½"; .685" blade width in front of eye



Side view of three axes found in Holmes county; note the forge welds. Photo by Mark Bender



Bottom view of three axes found in Holmes county; note dimensions. Photo by Mark Bender