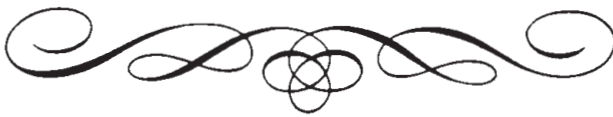




John Shuler Gunsmith

Born: Northumberland County, Pennsylvania in 1815. Lived and worked in Licking County 1835-1855. Died in Wapakoneta, Ohio in 1870.

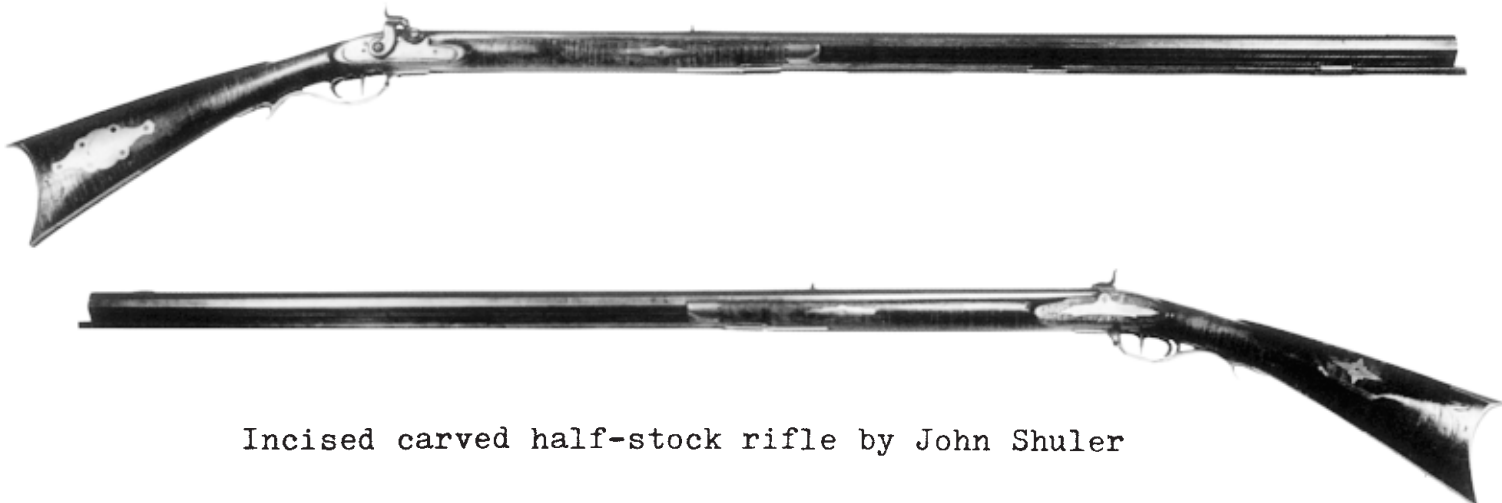
By Don Shuler



To write this article is in a sense premature in that I am working on a story that traces my ancestors from their arrival from Germany in 1732 and deals with all of the gunsmiths in my family until the trade died in the 1860's. Since some of the early Pennsylvania history is still to be completed, I'll only deal here with my great-great grandfather John Shuler who worked in Licking County Ohio.

I own three signed John Shuler rifles made by our subject. Additionally, I have many of his tools and writings wherein he deals with his knowledge of metalurgy as it applies to his trade. My research shows that he made over 190 rifles. Those that I own and others I have seen bear a fine signature on top of the barrel and are numbered on side of barrel just forward of the tang. (Note: Any of his guns that would have been re-breeched would eliminate the number, but barrel shortening would not effect signature.) I own Nos. 123, 128, and 136 and the highest number I have seen is No. 169. He made both full and half stock guns and I know of one under-striker by his hand.

There is more to tell about the Shuler gunsmiths in Ohio and if there is interest among our members I can share much more of my research. To help those who have had some exposure to Ohio Shulers I can offer the following information as it pertains to the subject. His father John was a gunsmith in Licking County. I have an example of his work in the form of a full stock flintlock bearing his name in script on the barrel. In addition to our subject (John) he had a second son Daniel, also a gunsmith. He also signed his guns in script and his work reflects the same stock architecture as his brother John's. Daniel worked in Licking County and moved to Roundhead, Ohio in Hardin County in 1856 where he established a shop. The brothers John and Daniel had an uncle Valentine Shuler who was the youngest brother of their father John. He made guns in Licking and moved to New Philadelphia in Tuscarawas County in the '30s. He left Ohio in the '50s and took his nephew Daniel along. They worked in Missouri until the trade as we know it gave way to mechanization I've studied two of Valentine's guns. They are both signed on barrel



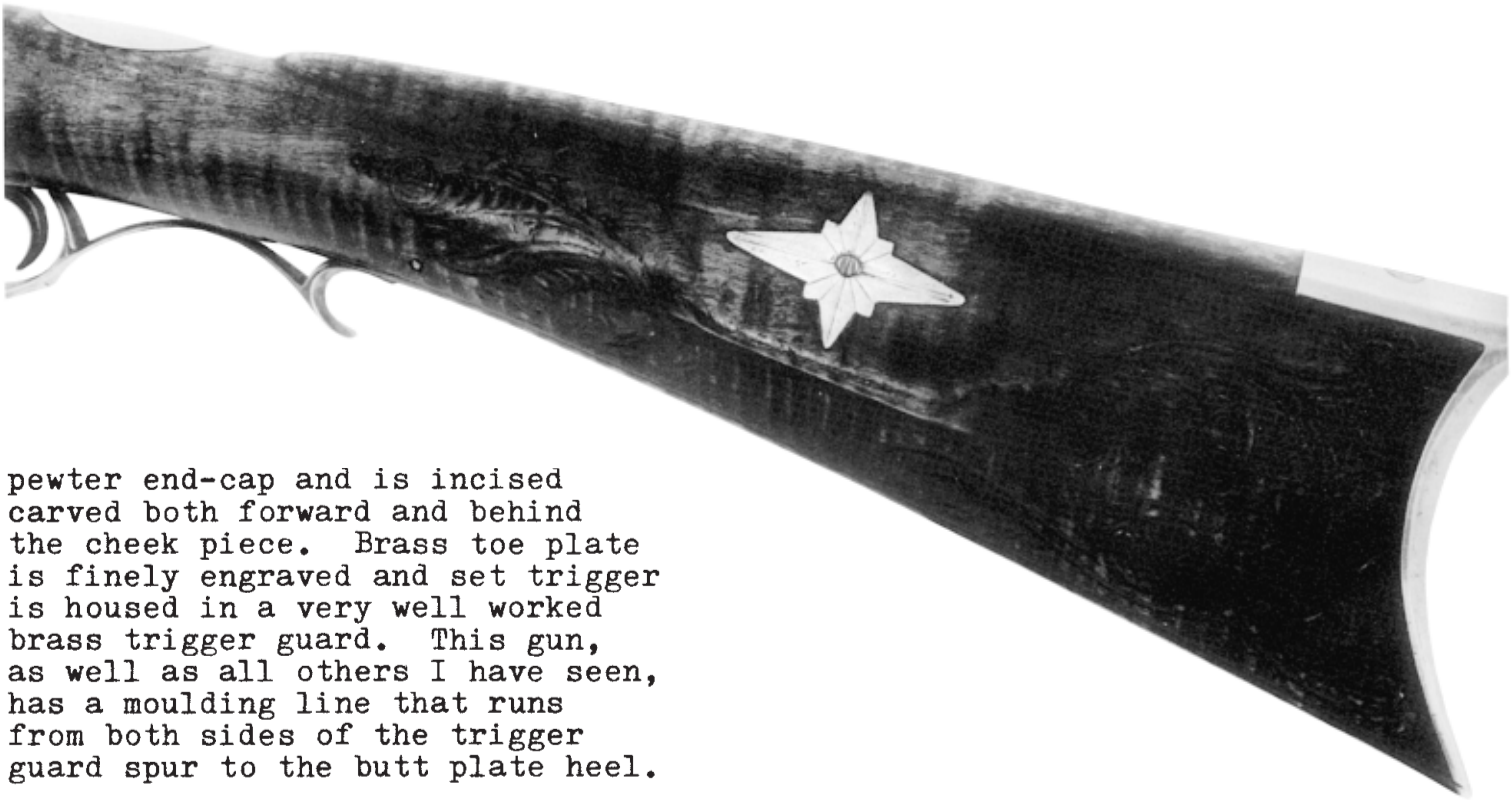
Incised carved half-stock rifle by John Shuler

and one is signed on both lock plates "Valentine Shuler - New Philadelphia, Ohio". The latter is a finely done boys rifle with the "Licking" look ala John and Daniel. The other one is a later half stock and shows that he adapted to a new market for it is completely different architecture. This rifle has his own patented lock and the other is a cut-down modified flint lock in percussion form. His guns are living evidence that he was a fine maker. Valentine deserves more coverage and I will contribute an article on him if our editor so desires.

Pennsylvania guns attributed to Shuler, Verner, Weiker. Being a prolific maker, his guns seem to reflect what his customers wanted in that they go from very plain functional guns to the more ornate. Although it's possible that he could have made flint locks, all that I have found are percussion. They all are brass mounted and the full stocks were made with and without patch boxes. Those with patch boxes are very well engraved with hinged lid, head, upper and lower plates ala earlier Pennsylvania guns. His most ornate gun is one I own. It is a half-stock, numbered 136 and top of barrel shows in script "John Shuler, Licking Co. Ohio Nov. 26, 1851" (gun pictured) It has a small silver patch box, silver thumb plate, silver hunters star at top of cheek, silver barrel key escutcheons, brass side plate,

All of John's guns are easily recognizable as his stock architecture has a very graceful line with a greater degree of drop than is common to most Ohio guns. Here I feel he is reflecting his ancestry and gives his work a look of the early Bucks County



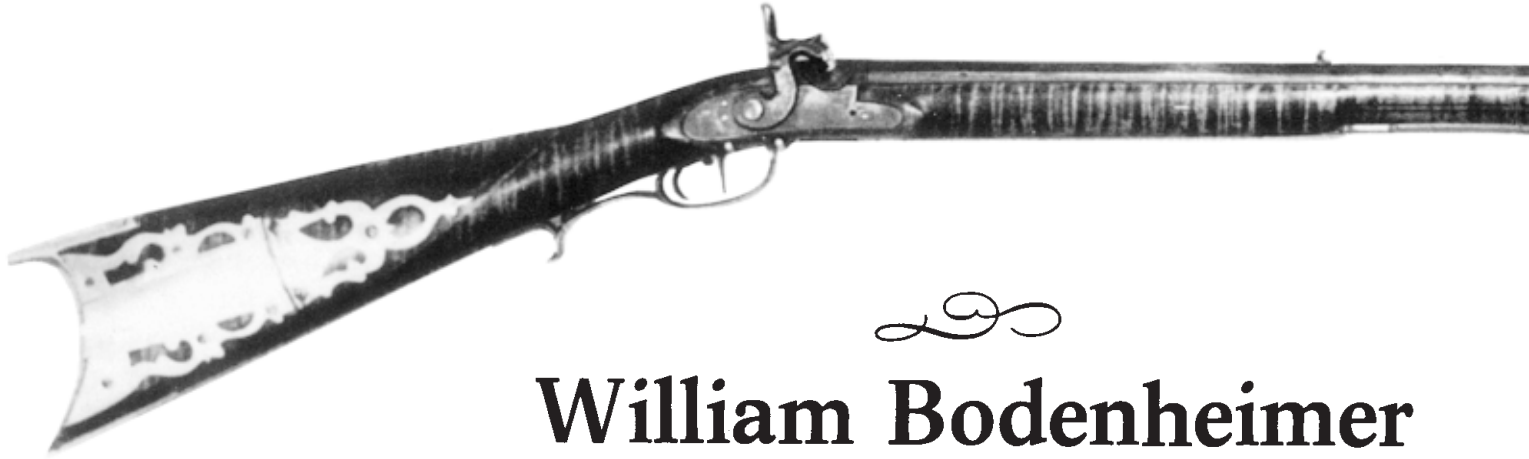


pewter end-cap and is incised carved both forward and behind the cheek piece. Brass toe plate is finely engraved and set trigger is housed in a very well worked brass trigger guard. This gun, as well as all others I have seen, has a moulding line that runs from both sides of the trigger guard spur to the butt plate heel.

Needless to say, as a student and collector of "Kentuckies," it is a real delight to be lucky enough to have had ancestors who plied the trade from its earliest beginning to the end of a wonderful era. It's a pleasure to share

with those who are students of this part of our history and I'd appreciate the chance to exchange more of my research with anyone interested in my "Shuler Clan." □

(continued next issue)



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William Bodenheimer Gunsmith

Written in 1945 by
Lt. Col. Clyde W. Everett, M.D.

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Lancaster is a name closely linked with the development of the muzzle loading rifles in this country. The first accurate long rifles were developed in or near Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and many fine gunmakers lived and worked in that area.

Lancaster, Ohio, has become known to gun collectors for the group of gunmakers who plied their trade there. Bodenheimer, Peters and John Gibbs are perhaps the most prominent of the group. Pete Kane made rifles of fine accuracy in a nearby township and at a little later date. George W. Claspill is also listed as a gunsmith in Lancaster in the 1850's, but I have never seen or heard of a gun by this maker. It may be that he did not mark his guns for identification, or that he was merely a gun repairman.

William Bodenheimer was perhaps the finest workman of this group and one of the best of the whole

group of Southern Ohio gunmakers. Even his plainest guns show a gracefulness of design and a fineness of detail that marks him as a master craftsman and some of his more elaborate guns are works of art. Very little is known of Bodenheimer or of his activities as a gunmaker. When he was born, where he came from and when he died are all shrouded in the mystery of the past. His guns remain as about the only tangible evidence of his activities and they exist as a lasting memorial to his fine workmanship.

The Centennial History of Lancaster, written in 1898, states "Wm. Bodenheimer came to Lancaster in 1817 as a wheelwright. In 1837 he changed to gunsmithing. He proved to be an accomplished gunsmith, having a genius for it. He introduced the first long range rifles and the first globe sights seen in Lancaster. He died long ago, sometime in the

fifties." The Williams City Guide and Business Index of Circleville and Lancaster of 1859 lists Bodenheimer as a gunsmith and gun manufacturer. It is probable that he died around 1860. It is also probable that he made a few guns before 1837, but his work was mostly within the percussion era.

Dillin in The Kentucky Rifle lists: "Bodenheimer, Pennsylvania. One specimen (flintlock Kentucky rifle) by this maker is known. It has a 43 inch barrel and shows good workmanship. Period of 1810." He does not give the first name but one can speculate that this may have been William Bodenheimer and that he made at least one flintlock rifle before migrating to Lancaster in 1817. It also appears that he comes from "Pennsylvania Dutch" and that he absorbed a knowledge of guns and gunsmithing during his childhood there.

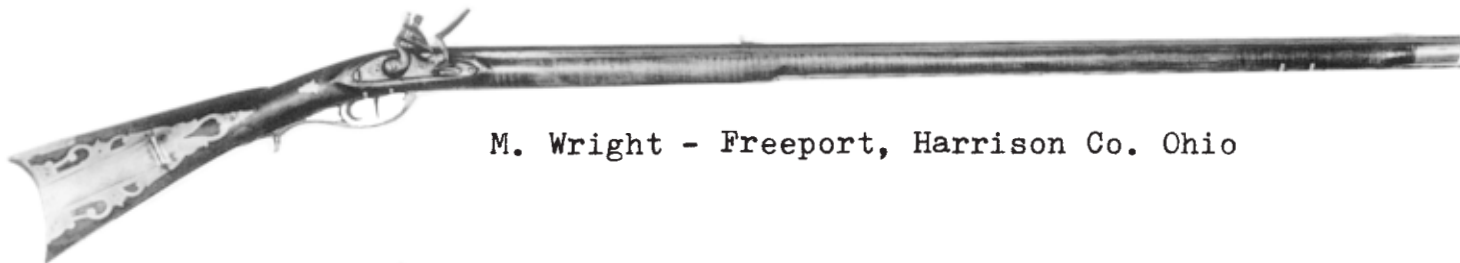
Most Bodenheimer rifles are marked with his characteristic small stamp "W. BODENHEIMER" on the top of the barrel; some also carry the name "Lancaster" below his name. However, some of his guns, particularly his earlier efforts, are not marked, but the general design of the stock with its scroll type cheek piece often on both sides, the patent breech and splash pan, the hammer design and the set triggers are all characteristic and not easily mistaken by those familiar with his work. His fine double set triggers have been sought after by target shooters.

He made several types of peep and globe sights, some of them quite ingenious in their operation. It does not appear that he thought much of open sights as the ones he made were non-adjustable and rather crude.

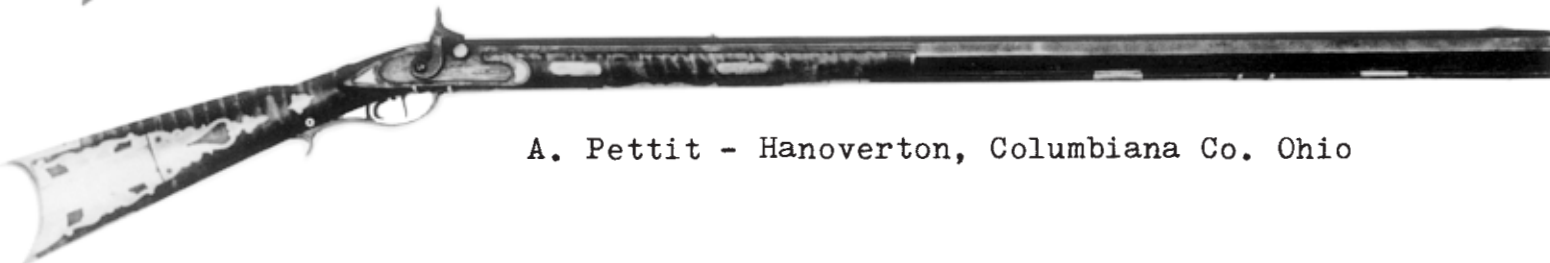
Although it is noted above that he introduced the first long range rifles into Lancaster, the guns I know of were made either for the round ball or the short picket type of bullet. Many of his rifles were furnished with moulds casting both types of bullets for use with the cloth patch and most guns are rifled with a slow twist of about one turn in four feet. I do not believe he made many, if any, true slug guns. He relied more on gracefulness of design and good workmanship than on inlay work to give beauty to his rifles, although a few guns are quite elaborately decorated with brass, German silver and mother-of-pearl.

The small cheek piece of scroll design is quite prevalent on his guns. He liked to duplicate the ornamentation so that both sides of the gun were decorated the same and the cheek piece is commonly placed on both sides of the buttstock, even on the plainer guns. Most of his guns weighed between 10 to 15 pounds and barrel lengths ran to 40 inches. Some guns came with false muzzles and starters. He seemed to prefer small calibre guns, as the majority of his guns were originally of .30 to .40 calibre. □

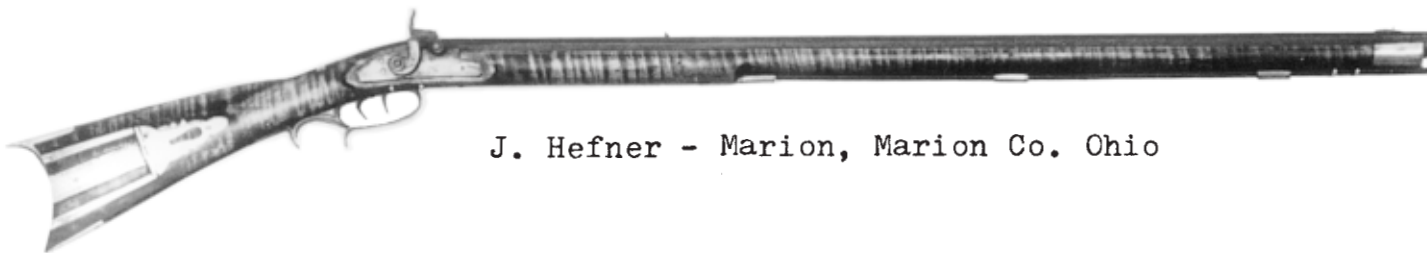
Illustrated are 18 fine Ohio rifles from
the AOLRC Research information/photo file.
We'll publish more as space permits.



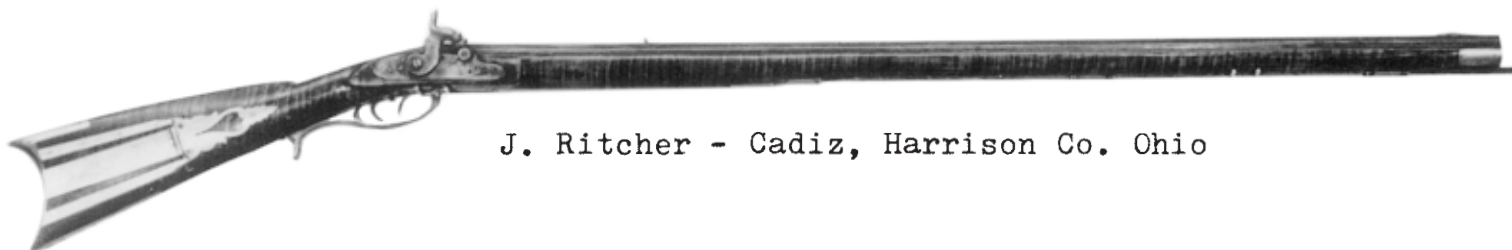
M. Wright - Freeport, Harrison Co. Ohio



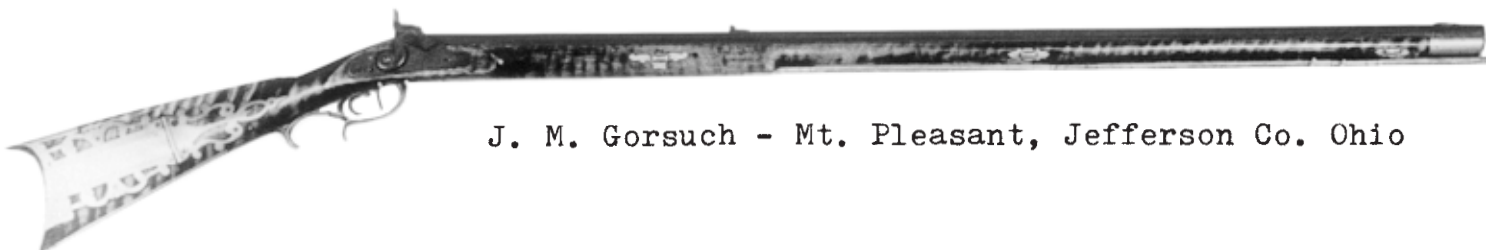
A. Pettit - Hanoverton, Columbiana Co. Ohio



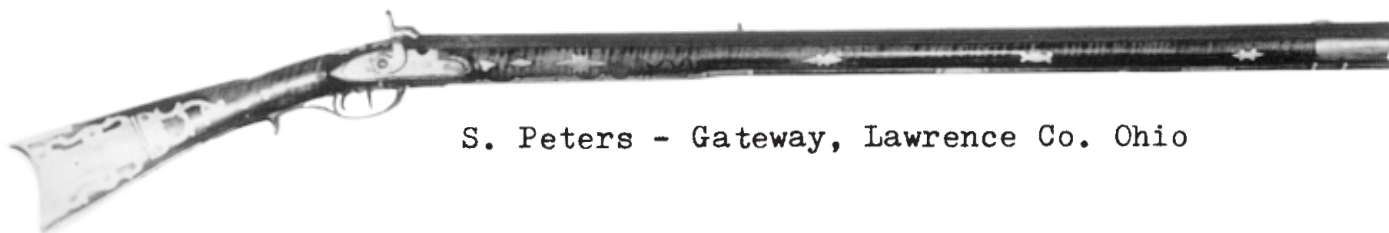
J. Hefner - Marion, Marion Co. Ohio



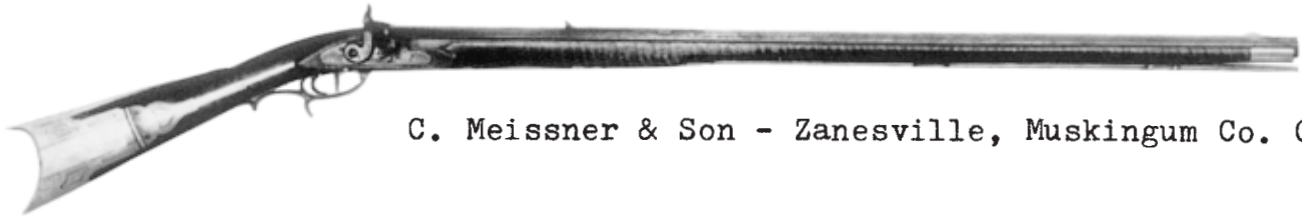
J. Ritcher - Cadiz, Harrison Co. Ohio



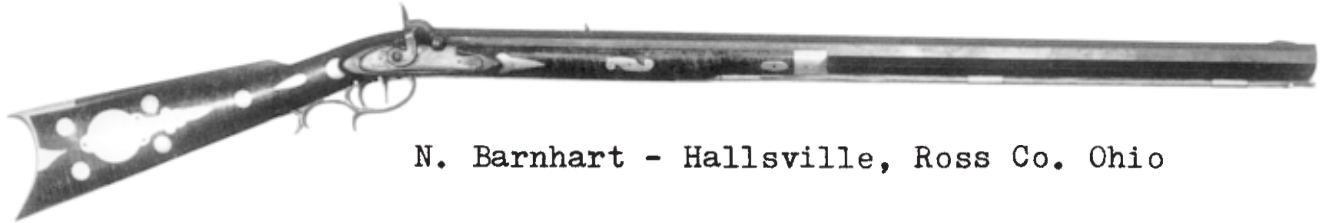
J. M. Gorsuch - Mt. Pleasant, Jefferson Co. Ohio



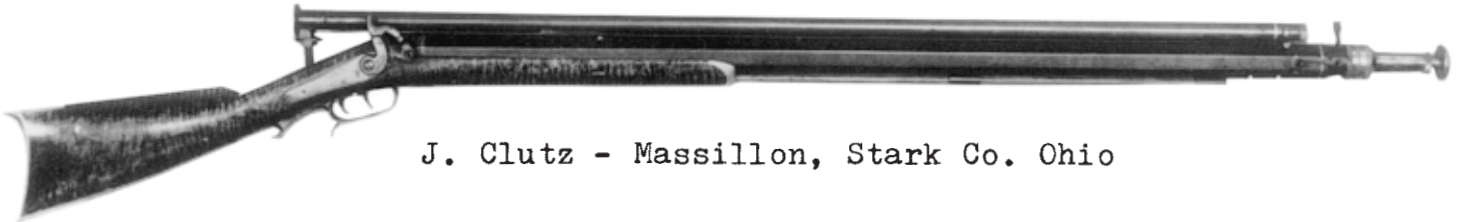
S. Peters - Gateway, Lawrence Co. Ohio



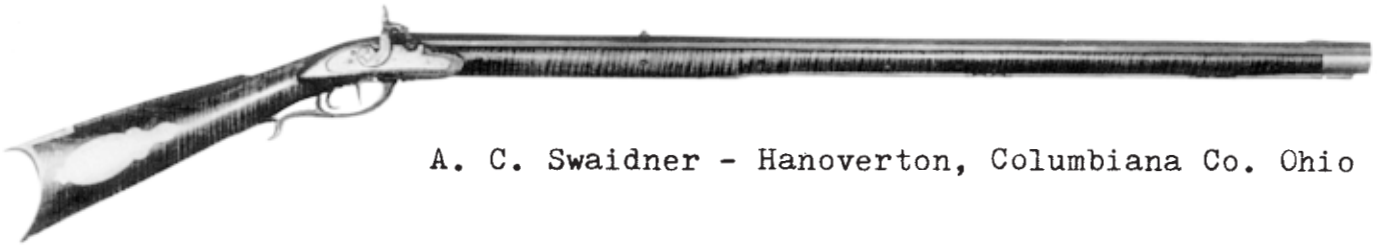
C. Meissner & Son - Zanesville, Muskingum Co. Ohio



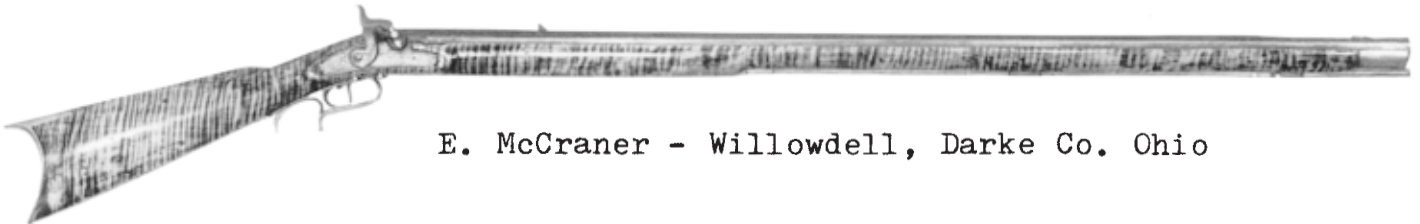
N. Barnhart - Hallsville, Ross Co. Ohio



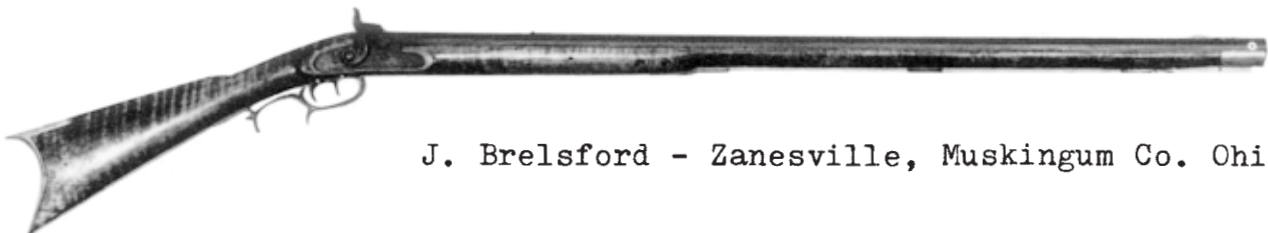
J. Clutz - Massillon, Stark Co. Ohio



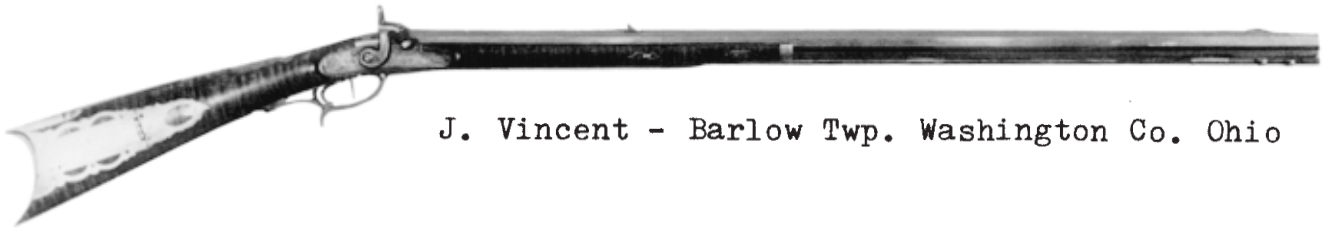
A. C. Swaidner - Hanoverton, Columbiana Co. Ohio



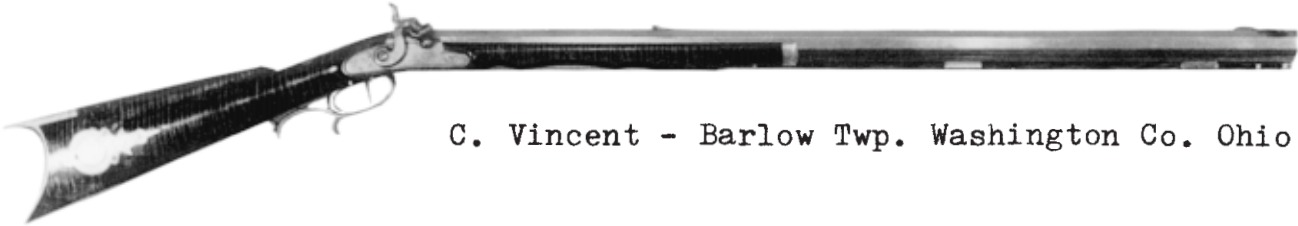
E. McCraner - Willowdell, Darke Co. Ohio



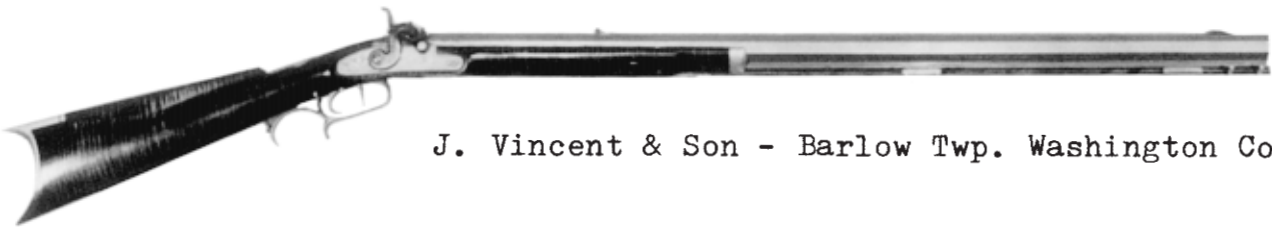
J. Brelsford - Zanesville, Muskingum Co. Ohio



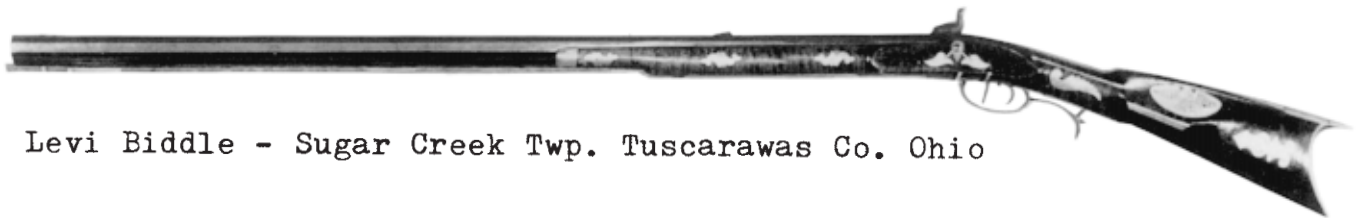
J. Vincent - Barlow Twp. Washington Co. Ohio



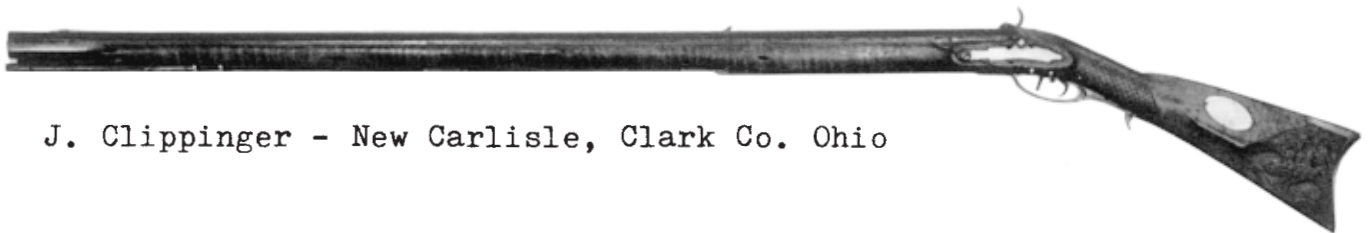
C. Vincent - Barlow Twp. Washington Co. Ohio



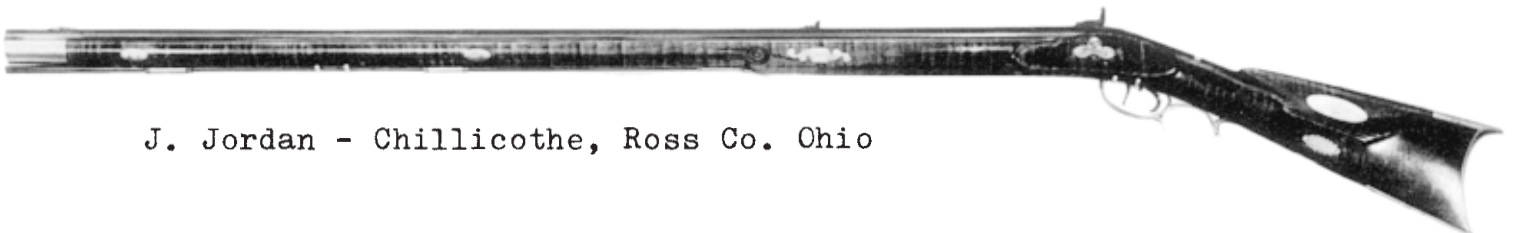
J. Vincent & Son - Barlow Twp. Washington Co. Ohio



Levi Biddle - Sugar Creek Twp. Tuscarawas Co. Ohio



J. Clippinger - New Carlisle, Clark Co. Ohio



J. Jordan - Chillicothe, Ross Co. Ohio