

The Baker/Baesel Rifle

By Dale Lothes

This rifle was made by two people. One is Seth Baker who lived in Adams Township, Washington Co. near Lowell, Ohio. He made the barrel and assembled the lock, barrel and metal work. In the 1860 Census, he is shown as being 38 years old and born in New York state. He had a wife Mary Ann and five children.

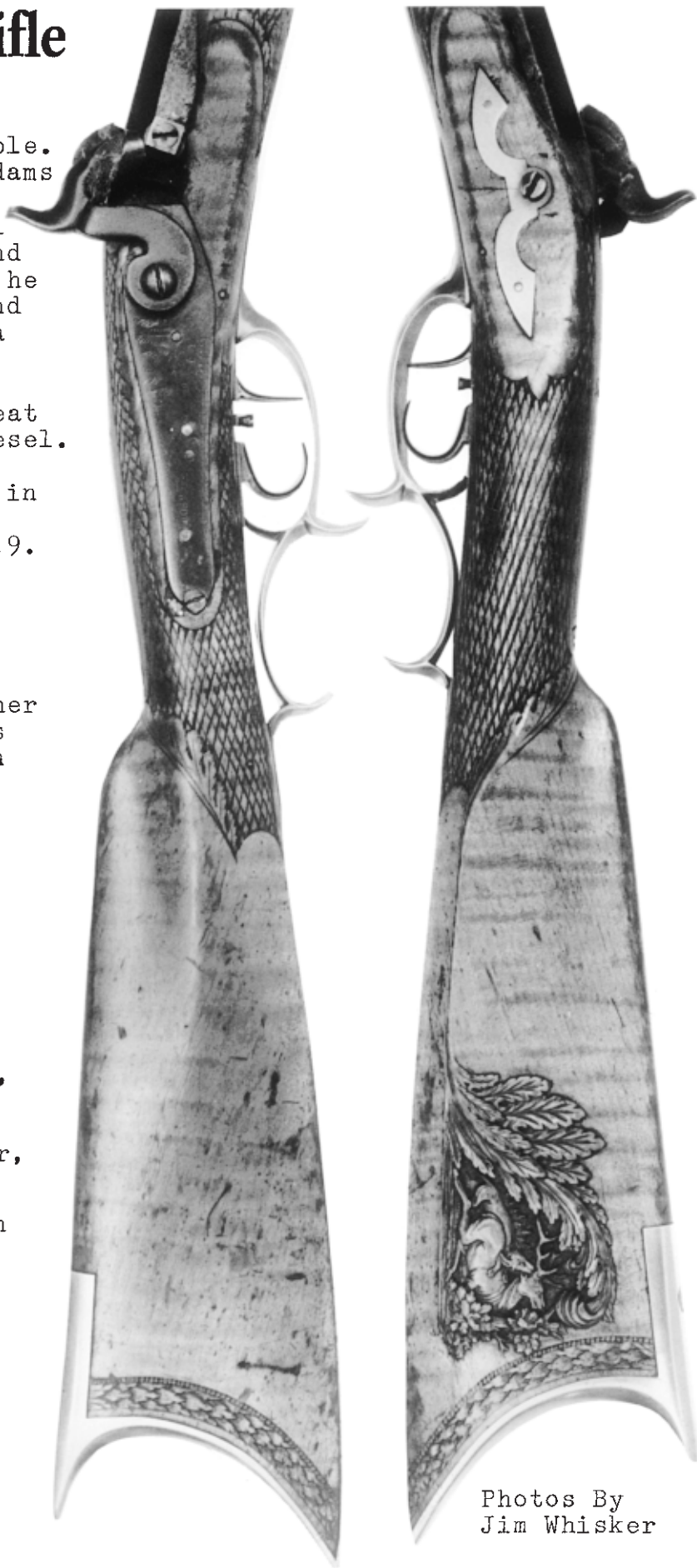
The rifle was stocked by my great great grandfather Johan Nicol Baesel. He was born 26 Sept. 1797 at Grosswenden, Bavaria. He served in the Bavarian Kings 13th Infantry Regiment beginning 16 January 1819. He served six years as a private, and received a statement of good character during his service.

His father was Nichol Baesel born 9 May 1767 and his grandfather was Johan Baesel. His mother was Margaretha Katharina Reichel born 5 Feb. 1772 at Grobwenden. Her father was Nikolous Reichel born 12 Jan. 1740 at Grobwenden and married on 3 May 1773 Anna Dorothea Baumgartel born at Weibenback.

I have Johan Nicol Baesel's discharge from the German army and it states he was height 5' 10", hair light brown, brow-high, eyebrows brown, eyes brown, nose pointed, beard brown, chin round, face oval, face color pale, body fat, employment taylor, not married.

He came to America in 1844 with six children, three sons and three daughters and settled in Adam's township, Washington Co., Ohio about three miles from Lowell, Ohio.

He was a wood carver by the time he came to this country but made his living here by farming. He died 24 March 1870 and is buried in the German Cemetery at Lowell, Ohio. □



Photos By
Jim Whisker



Abraham Johnson 1793-1866

Joel M. Johnson 1822-1882



by James B. Whisker, Ph.D.

There are several superb guns known marked, "A. Johnson," including a box-lock, pill-lock gun. One truly fine relief carved gun was shown in my first volume of Ohio Long Rifles. The 1850 Census showed Abram Johnson in Nottingham Township, Harrison County, Ohio, age 57, born in Maryland, gunsmith, with real estate valued at \$3000.

Many gun collectors are familiar with one or more of the fine, relief carved guns marked modestly, "A. Johnson." The box-lock arm is dated along with the signature on the gun barrel "December 1833." Some writers and collectors have suggested that Johnson was a western Pennsylvania craftsman. No A. Johnson, gunsmith, has yet been located in the counties of Western Pennsylvania where his style suggests his name should have been located. Others felt that his style was that of north-west Virginia, perhaps around the northern end of the Shenandoah Valley. What we may forget is that there is no such thing as an "Ohio style." Each of the earlier craftsmen who migrated to Ohio reflected the prevalent style of his training.

Since Abram Johnson of Ohio had been born in Maryland, we have a place to begin our search. I believe that A. Johnson was associated with John or James Clark in the Hagerstown, Maryland, and Berkeley County, West Virginia area. His carving reflects the

style of the high art "Sheetz & Clark" rifle made in that area. Johnson's patchboxes show typical better "National Road" engraving, which developed from styles used in and around Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, as in Joseph Clippinger's work. The ball in the center of the patchbox lid with the cross engraving is typical of engraving seen on Clippinger's work and also of the Mewhirter family of Chambersburg. Occasional Hagerstown-Berkeley County guns are located with the "checkered ball" engraving pattern. That style moved west, and earlier guns made in center-eastern Ohio frequently show that engraving pattern.

American made box lock guns are rare. Johnson's 1833 dated gun comes at the very end of the traditional American box lock period. Joseph Mills of Coshocton County, Ohio, used this lock form on a few of his later guns.

The estate of "Abiram Johnson, dec'd" was appraised on 25 June 1866 by James Ross, a gunsmith, and others. Inventory Book J, p.13. It showed these items of interest to us:

- 1 Draw knife & Auger, \$1.25
- 1 Hand saw & Square, 50¢
- 1 Anvil, \$2.00
- 2 carpenter's planes, 40¢
- 1 Force drill & bits, 50¢
- 2 blacksmith's hammers, \$1.00
- 1 Hand Vice & Compasses, \$1.00
- 7 large Chisels, 50¢
- 2 iron saws, 1 screwdriver,



Fullstock Rifle By A. Johnson

Photos By Jim Whisker

2 awls, 25¢
 1 hand guide & brace bit, 10¢
 2 chisels, 37¢; 2 augers, 50¢
 1 screwplate & wrench, \$2.00
 1 blacksmith vice, \$5.00
 1 smoothing plane, 10¢
 pair pincers, chisel, scribe
 awl, 40¢

According to the Census of 1850, Joel was a son of Abram Johnson, and was a gunsmith in Nottingham Township, Harrison County, Ohio. He purchased many of the items of the gunsmith's trade from his father's estate.

We have never seen any of Joel's products. The existence of the shoemaker's tools suggest, of course, that at the time of Joel's death, he was practicing a secondary trade. The relative scarcity of items definitely associated with the gunsmith's trade also suggests the Joel may have been a general smith, repairing guns rather than making them. Of course, there was only minimal demand for any gun maker's skill in many areas after 1870.

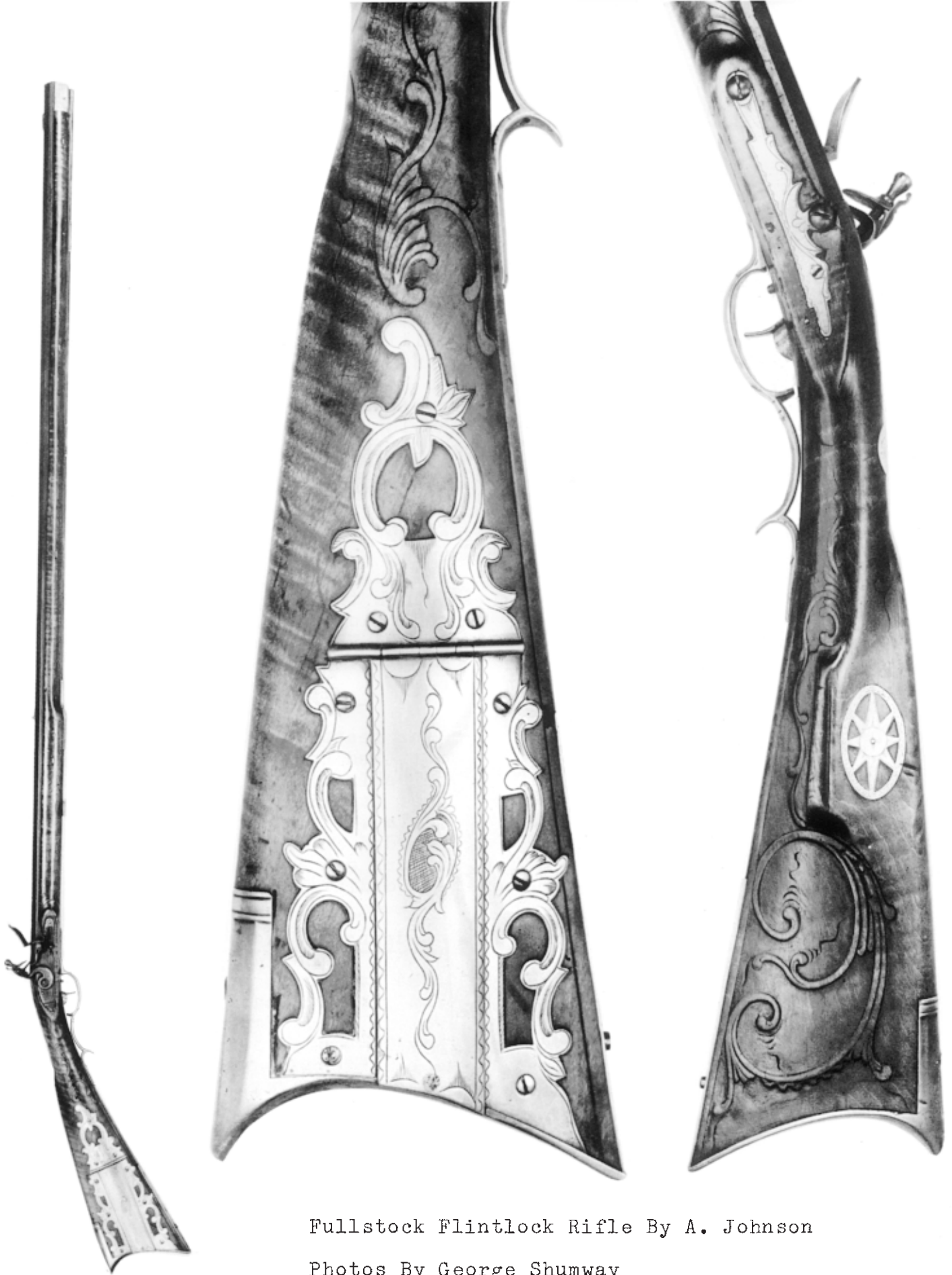
Joel's estate was appraised on 19 May 1882. It contained these items of interest to us:

rasp, 15¢; 16 files, 40¢
 drawing knife, 10; hand vise, 25¢
 lot of shoemaker's tools, 10¢
 3 small screw plates, 35¢; large screw plate, 40¢
 anvil, \$1; vise & bench, \$1;
 bellows, 10¢
 chisels & punches, 5¢; large shears, 10¢ □



Photos By Jim Whisker





Fullstock Flintlock Rifle By A. Johnson

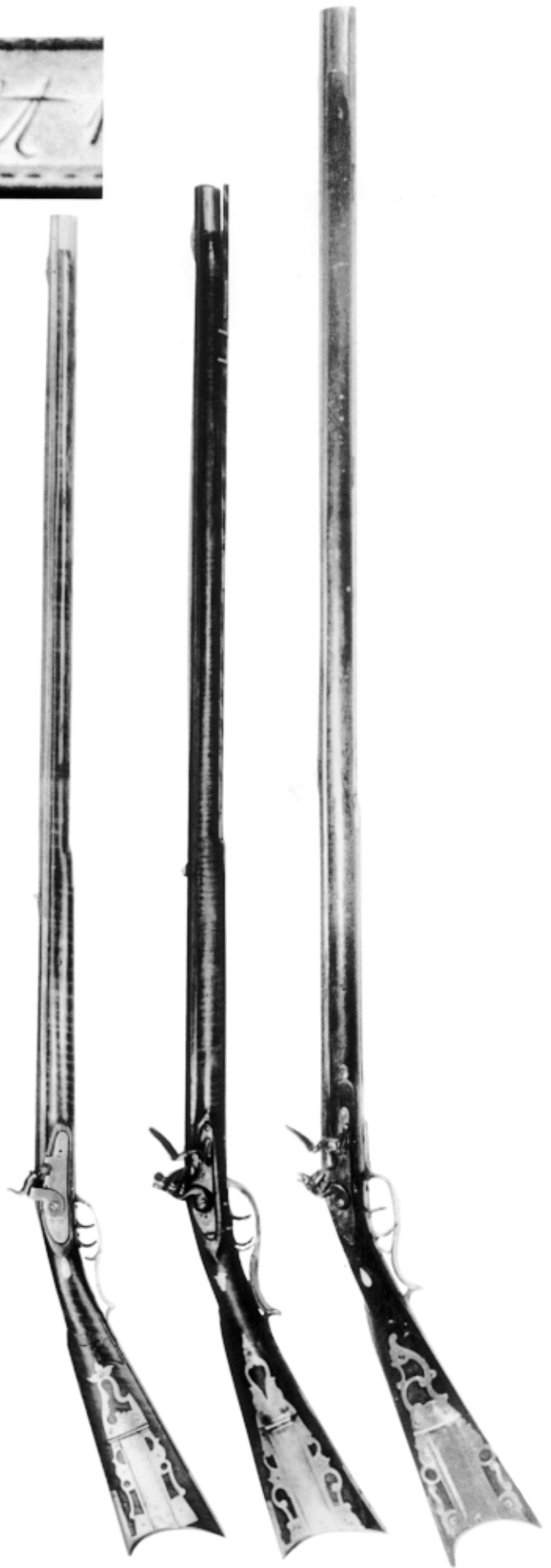
Photos By George Shumway

Moses Wright

Moses Wright (1792-1854). Moses Wright was the son of Nathan Wright and his wife Hannah, daughter of Achor and Judith Harris Worley. In 1806 when master gunsmith Peter White of Cumberland Valley Township, Bedford County, Pennsylvania, ran an advertisement in the Bedford True American seeking an apprentice to the gunsmithing trade Moses Wright was 14 years of age, just the right age to begin such an apprenticeship. Moses Wright was listed as a sickle smith in the tax lists of Cumberland Valley Township, Bedford County, in 1814, 1815 and 1816. A gun, the patchbox of which was shown in Roy Chandler's Kentucky Rifle Patchboxes and Barrel Markings has Moses Wright's name on the barrel and is mounted with a gun lock signed by Peter White.

In 1814 Nathan and Hannah Wright moved from Bedford County to Freeport, Harrison County, Ohio, and Moses joined them in 1817. I believe that Wright knew Joseph Mills (1790-1876) from his apprenticeship days back in Bedford County and invited him to join Wright in Ohio.

Moses Wright worked in Freeport until his death. He had two sons, Benjamin and William, who became gunsmiths. Benjamin later became a physician. The estate inventory of the goods of Moses Wright, deceased, showed a set of gunsmith's tools valued at \$10 and a lot of blacksmith's tools valued at \$4.





The Freeport Press of 29 March 1934 carried an article, "My Grandfather's Gunshop," which gives us a vivid picture of the life and work of Moses Wright. "My great-grandfather Nathan Wright was born in Virginia on Sept. 30, 1762. At the age of 14 he enlisted in the Revolution. After the war he married Hannah Worley of Colerain Township, Bedford County, Pa. My grandfather, Moses Wright, was the fourth child. Moses Wright was born Oct. 5th, 1792. Anna Lakin, his wife was born Aug. 24, 1792. Thomas, my father, their first child was born in 1815. In 1817 they moved from Pennsylvania to a large farm two miles west of Freeport, O. Here, he erected a cabin, and a one story gunsmith shop and planted an orchard. The shop had a forge, hand bellows and anvil. He made work benches, tool racks and nearly all tools he used. He made gun barrels and did much repairing. Almost every rural householder had one of Mr. Wright's rifles and reaping sickles. When and after I knew him, he made no kind of guns except rifles. He made bullet molds in sizes marked 60, 80 and 100, meaning round bullets. 60 meant that many bullets to a pound of lead. Most of the rifles ran 80 and 100 per pound. Most game were squirrels and rabbits. Black squirrels were quite common. Hawks, owls and crows were common farm enemies."

"As most cutlery was imported from Sheffield, England, it was

expensive. Granddad made table knives and two tine forks, scissors, razors, spades shovels, mattocks, chopping axes, broad axes, froes for splitting blocks for shingles, and drawing knives for shaving them. He did not charge for pulling teeth. He did quick work with that. The joists in the gunshop were covered with gun stocks in the rough. Most were curly maple, beautiful when finished. The stock extended to the muzzle end of the barrel. A cavity in the breech was covered by a brass spring joint, in which was tallow and bullet patches. On the top of the barrel near the hind sight was engraved the name, M. Wright."

"In testing a rifle he would give me a patch about one-half inch square, and a carpet tack to fasten into a block with a blackened face. He would stand in the shop door and shoot. I would mark the place with a small white stick. He would generally cut the patch. The gun was not considered true until he drove the tack into the block."

"One day 3 men, nearly as dark as Indians, from exposure, came into the shop. Granddad shook hands with them and gave them a hearty welcome. They were trappers from the upper waters of the Missouri River, where they spent the winter in getting furs and trading with the Indians for their furs. In the early spring they would make a raft, pack their furs and other

pelts, float down the Missouri to St. Louis, where they sold their furs for cash, silver and gold, bring their boat down to Cairo, then up the Ohio River to Wheeling, where they would debark and trudge to Freeport and get the rooms at the tavern. After breakfast, they came to the gun shop to have their guns repaired and order 5 or more new guns. They were profitable customers and paid cash. I would listen with open eye, mouth and ears, to their relating of killing bears, panthers and fights with other dangerous animals. They would leave in the fall to get back for another winter's hunt. They would get supplies that the Indians needed."

"It was a delight for me to spend a week or 2 with Grandpa Wright. I felt free to ask questions, which he encouraged, and, when possible, would answer to the understanding of a child's intellect. I once saw a large red spot on the shop door. I asked what made it. Oh, he replied, one morning I shot a bear up the ravine and dragged it to the shop, took the door

off its wooden hinges, laid it on the ground and skinned and dressed the bear on the door. That is bear blood."

"On rainy or disagreeable days, the gun shop was a rendez-vous for young men of the community and the Wright boys, to joke, banter and witty exchange of repartee. But they were careful not to bother Moses Wright nor get in his way. He made a beautiful picture in his usual habit after eating his supper. He would take some bread out in front, under an apple tree and sit down. The little brown sparrows would swarm down and almost cover him, while he fed them crumbs. That was before the introduction of English sparrows and Norway rats. Only two of his sons, Benjamin and William, learned the gun making trade."

"In 1828 Moses Wright built a buried log house on a steep hill side at the foot of his orchard. There were 3 stories facing south and 2 facing north. Whoever conceived such a structure does not deserve a monument nor medal for architecture."