



John Neill

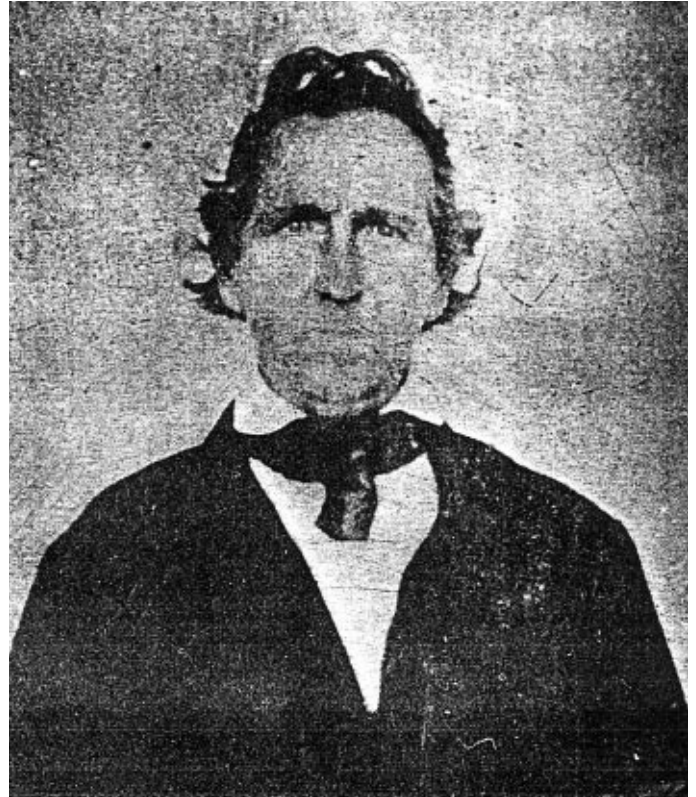
Putnam County's First Gunsmith



Compiled by
Tom McCullough

John Neill was born on Feb. 26, 1805 in North Hampton, Somerset County, Pa. He was the son of William and Susanna (Morton) Neill and grandson of John and Margaret (Thompson) Neill who came to America from Ireland in about 1790. He was the third of 9 children; Margaret, Samuel, John, William, Mary, Morton, Hannah, Joseph, and Sarah. Their great grandfather, Samuel Morton Sr., having arrived in Chester County, Pa. from Kilmore Parish, Ireland in February, 1728. In 1788, the Mortons immigrated to Somerset Co. from Chester County, Pa. As to the time when the Neills arrived in Somerset, we have no record. The records do show that William Neill and Susanna Morton were married there in 1801. The Neill's moved from Pennsylvania to Columbiana County, Ohio in about 1818 and in 1833 the elder John Neill died.

John Neill married Nancy Ann "Anna" Crow. Anna Crow, was the daughter of James Crow and Elizabeth Moreland and granddaughter of Abraham I Crow and Rachel Craven of Bucks and Washington Co. Pa., who in 1815 came to Columbiana Co., Ohio. Anna's uncle, Abraham II Crow and his wife Sarah Thompson, with their large family chose Putnam County, Ohio as their future home. John Neill was raised as a Quaker and was expelled from the Quaker church in 1830 for refusing to comply with their manner of dress. He was described by his descendants as a fastidious, neatly dressed man.



Neill, John - (1805-1863)

John Neill with a span of oxen, his wife and infant son Webster and his wife's brother Richison Crow set off from Lisbon, Ohio for Putnam County, Ohio in August, 1835 and arrived on October 8th. He there joined his wife's uncle Abraham II Crow who had arrived the previous year in 1834. John Neill and the Crows each purchased 160 acres of land from the government in section 11 and 12, respectfully, in Greensburg Township, Putnam County. Putnam County was organized on May 8, 1834 and Greensburg Twp. was organized in April of 1835. These farms were located on the Ottawa and Defiance Trail. The Defiance Trail is

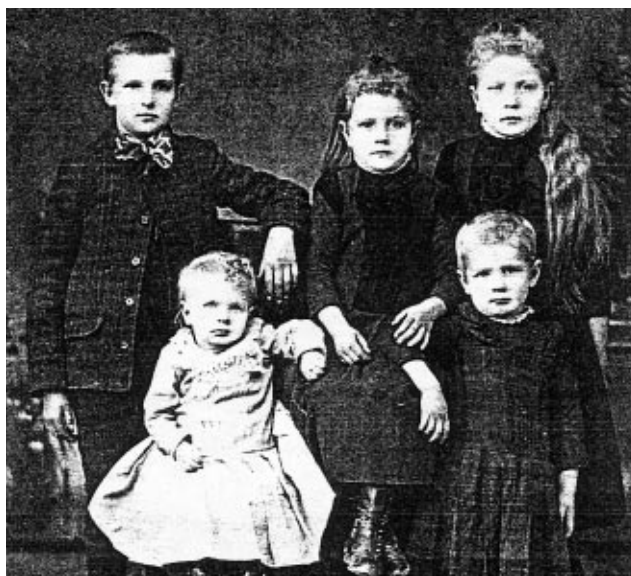
now State Route #15 and sections 11 and 12 are located 7 miles north west of Ottawa, Ohio.

Joining John Neill on the south was Henry Wing, a native of Rockingham, Vermont. Wing came to Northwestern Ohio as a American soldier in the war of 1812. Following the war he remained in this area as a surveyors assistant under the direction of Captain James Riley. Wing was Putnam County's first white settler.

The first home built by the Neills was believed to be a one room log structure. The second home built by John Neill was a one and one half story structure 34 feet x 36 feet square. It was a frame structure made of 6" x 6" timbers hewed by hand. The joists and angular pieces were secured by mortise and tenon joints pinned by wooden dowels. The siding was poplar wood and lapped. The windows were the 12 pane type. There was a split level porch to the front, 8 x 16 feet, that recessed into the main structure of the home, leaving small, 8 x 9 feet, square rooms at each corner. A door at each end of the porch gave entrance to a large, spacious living area and dining room. To the back of these two rooms were doors that gave entrance to a bedroom on one side and the kitchen and pantry on the other. The second floor consisted of 2 bedrooms 14 x 18 feet. The stairhead came full flush to the huge fireplace chimney that stood in the exact center of the house and from there, doors to the right and left gave entrance to these upstairs bedrooms. This house was replaced with a brick structure in about 1907, and part of the old house was left as a wing to this new structure. This house and farm were located where State Route #108 meets State Route #15. The home,

farm buildings, and gunshop no longer stand.

Following the construction of John Neill's first home, and clearing a few acres of land for farming, they were confronted with the near impossible task of transporting their produce to the nearest market at Fort Defiance - 25 miles away. John also needed supplies for his gunsmithing trade and would be able to obtain locks and barrels from Cincinnati, via the canal, to Delphos or Defiance. The waterways were the first transportation Neill would use to transport his produce and buy supplies.



Five of the seven children of Anna and John Neill.

Two of the largest poplar trees available were found, 12 miles away, and hauled to the home of John Neill where they were hewed, hollowed, and joined together to fashion a huge boat. This was used and manned by the young men of the area for more than 20 years to transport their farm produce to Fort Defiance, via the Blanchard River and Auglaize River. This boat was later immortalized in verse, "Romance of Bowman's Rock" by Everitt A. Budd.

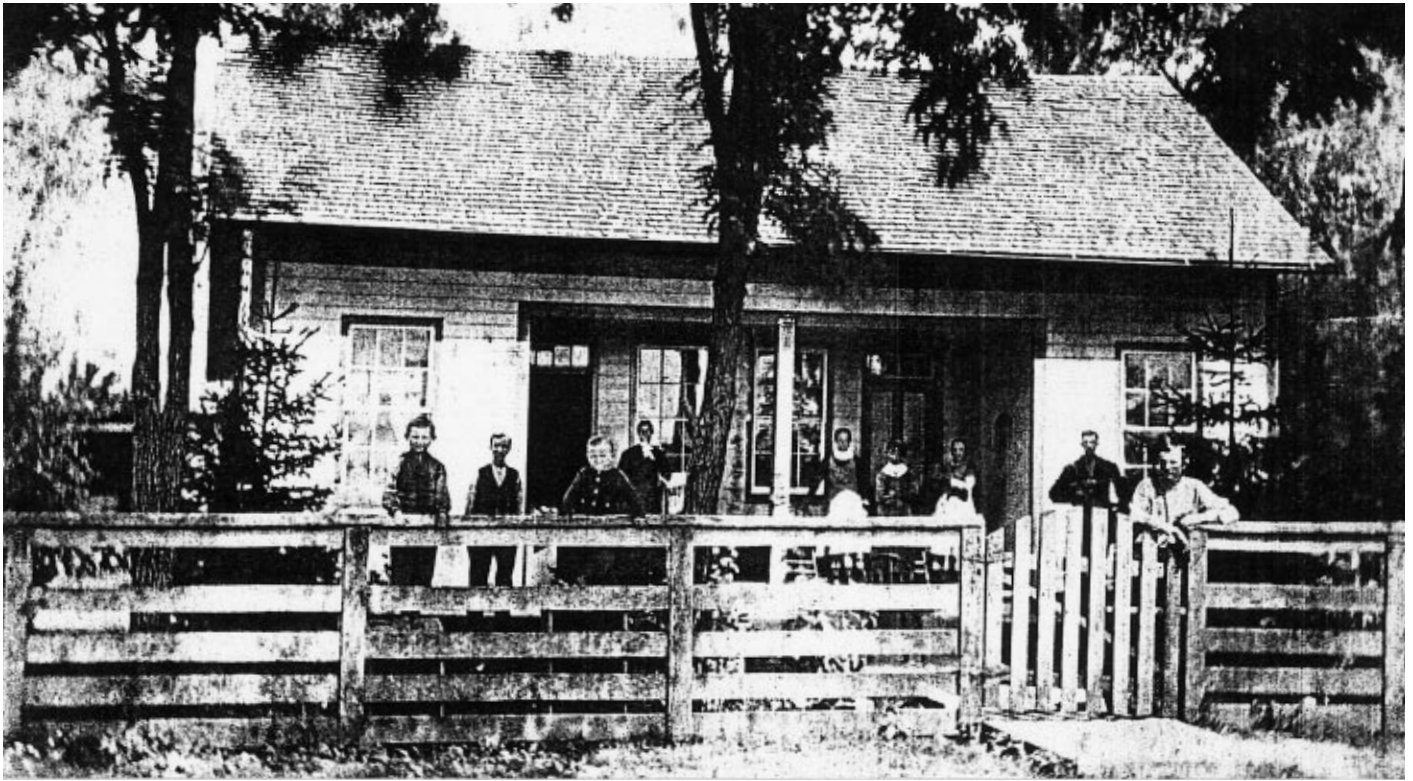


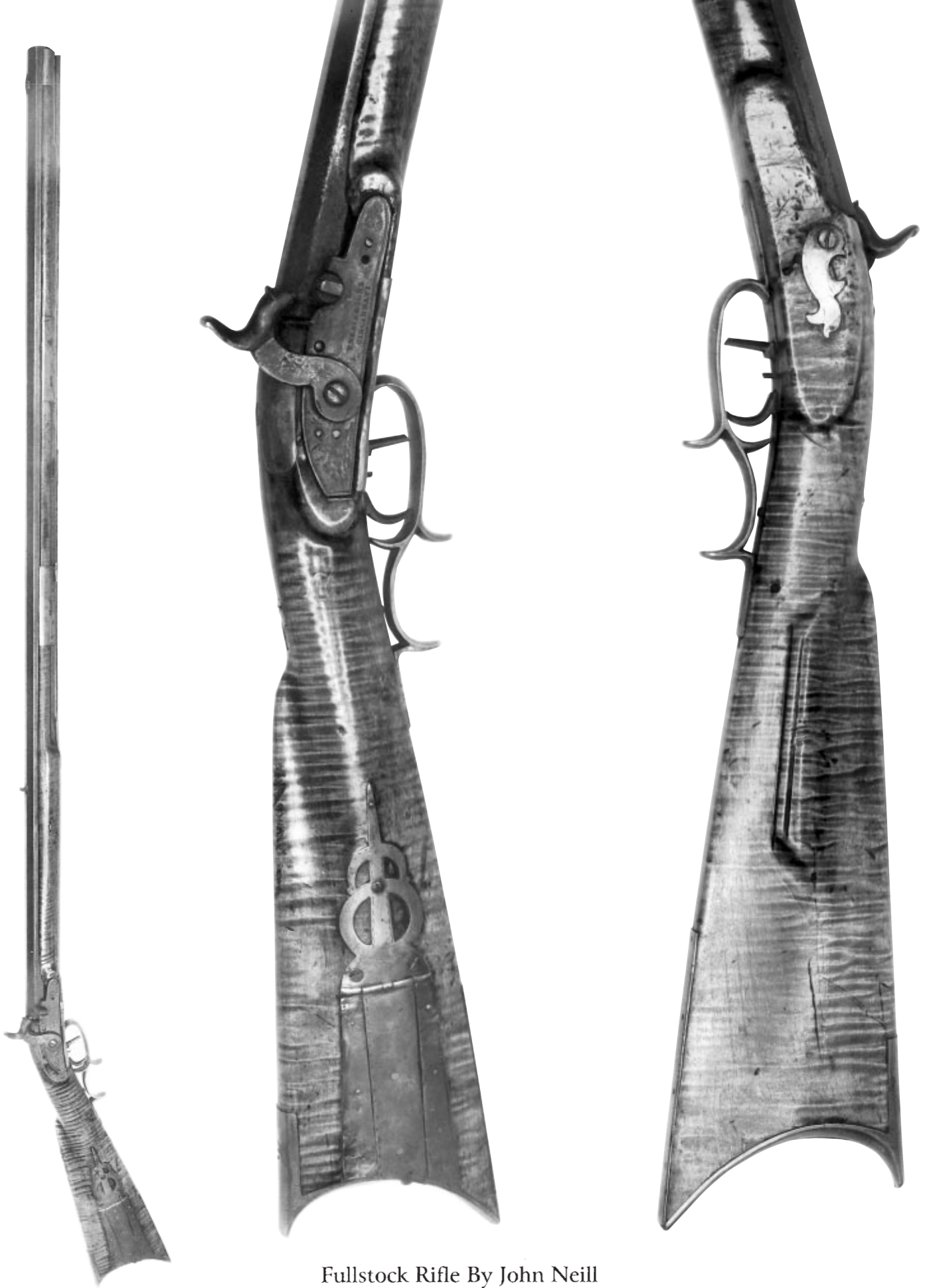
Photo of the Neill Homestead taken around 1881.

The roadways of Putnam County in 1835 were but wagon trails leading through the dense forests.. Time was frequently given by early settlers, felling trees to open new roads. On one such occasion, in September 1843, John Neill, Richison Crow, and Henry Wing were felling trees on the Defiance Trail when a large sycamore, felled by Crow, struck Wing and killed him instantly. Wings death was the first in the community - with the exception of one of the Brower children, that lived about two miles west of the Neills and Crows. Wings death, awakened everyone to the fact that there was no place for burial. It was at this time that James Crow arose to the occasion and remarked - "that this should never happen again and that he was giving a plot of ground to his neighbors for a cemetery, where every one could bury free of charge." To this day, it is known as the Crow Cemetery and there has never been

a grave lot sold. (The Crow Cemetery records/names, have been compiled and are recorded in the Seattle Genealogical Society Bulletins-1966).

The railroad fever, as it was known then, had hit the country at an early date and by 1850 several roads were being considered, but their location would be determined largely by the financial assistance given by the various counties through which they passed.

On March 1, 1851 a railroad meeting was held at Gilboa, Ohio. Among those attending was John Neill, who had traveled 15 miles to be present. It was there resolved to give their undivided support to the railroad venture - 75,000 dollars was to be raised through taxation to be subscribed to the stock of this railroad. This issue was to be decided at the ballot box on October 12, 1852. A



Fullstock Rifle By John Neill

committee was organized consisting of one man from each township, to enlighten the people on the issue and get them out to vote. John Neill was appointed as a committee of one - for Greensburg Township. The votes were tabulated as follows: Greensburg Twp., For-88 and against - 27. Putnam County, for - 955 and against - 391. On July 4, 1859 the first train passed through Putnam County and another of John Neill's dreams became reality. This road was then known as the Cincinnati, Hamilton, & Dayton, or C. H. & D. Later it became the Baltimore & Ohio, or B. & O. Railroad.

John and Anna Neill had 8 - children - (Webster, Seth, Susanna, Samantha, Morton, Elizabeth, John, and William). John Neill's second son, Seth, was born on March 1, 1836, five months after their arrival to Putnam County. Seth was married to Mary Ann Shank, a granddaughter of John Myers, on April 11, 1857. On February 15, 1858 John Neill placed 1,000 dollars in the crown of his high silk hat, drove to the county seat and purchased 80 acres of land joining his on the west. This place was immediately occupied by his son Seth and his new bride. On September 18, 1859 the deeds were transferred to his son Seth Neill.

Work was soon under way to replace an old log house, which was on this new farm, with a more modern structure. This building was to be, when completed, an exact replica of his fathers home. By spring of 1860, the house was completed and they had moved into the new home. It was there that they lived the rest of their life. Seth Neill passing away on Sept. 8, 1899; his wife Mary Ann, Nov. 18, 1914. The house was vacated from Nov. 1914 to Dec. 1922. It was then occupied by

John Neill's great grandson, Oro J. Neill. Oro Neill lived in this home up till the 1970's and was the researcher / historian for the Neill family history and renown Northwestern Ohio Archaeologist. This home was recently torn down, but the original barn and outbuildings still stand. This farm is located on road H-13 in section 11 of Greensburg Twp. and directly west of Crow Cemetery. The farm is owned by John Neill's, great great grandson, John Neill. The farm buildings are in good condition and some of the oldest structures in Putnam County.

By trade, John Neill was a Gunsmith, Locksmith, Cabinet Maker, and Farmer. He was Putnam County's first gunsmith. It is not known where John acquired his gunsmithing and cabinetmaking skills. His rifles were fullstock percussion rifles most generally in small calibers (32 caliber most common). His distinctive patchboxes had a round finial with a point. He used copper rivets to hold nose caps and the patchbox spring. The rear extension of the lower ramrod thimble was short. He did very little engraving and stamped his name on barrel - JOHN NEILL. His supply of barrels and locks came from Cincinnati, via the canal, to Delphos and Fort Defiance. John Neill built a rifle for his son, Seth, in 1856, and this rifle has been handed down through the Neill family. Powder horn, leather cap box belt pouch, and 2 - bullet molds owned by Seth Neill occupy this rifle. One of the bullet molds is engraved - S N (Seth Neill). John Neill built one left-handed or cross-fire rifle for his banker friend, Nutter Powell, and this rifle was displayed during the celebration of Putnam County's Centennial in 1934. In the early 1930's, 8-10 of John's rifles were stacked in a local news paper office in



Fullstock rifle and accessories made for Seth Neill by his father John.

response to an ad, for a gun made by John Neill. Two Neill rifles exist in the Putnam County area, at the present time. It is not known, how many rifles Neill built or how many still exist.

John Neill was extremely neat and precise in his habits and was a man of unusual ability. His workshop was a combination of gunsmithing, carpentry, cabinetmaking, and blacksmith shop and he made many guns for the pioneer settlers. He often repaired guns for the Indians and some times they came at night and he gave them food and lodging. He was the neighborhood adviser in administering to the sick, in fact, his care was considered the best available in the absence of a regular practicing physician, the nearest available physician being 25 miles away. As a cabinetmaker, John built furniture using local wood, primarily walnut. One corner walnut cabinet and a walnut drop leaf table still exist and have been passed down through the Neill family. John Neill did not sign or mark his furniture.

John Neill living with the Black Swamp at his back door would occasionally take time out from his busy schedule to go deer hunting. It was on one occasion that he wandered too great a distance from home and nightfall overtook him. He was being trailed by a pack of hungry wolves that eventually forced him to scale a tree, where he remained until day break. To get respite from the incessant howling that continued through the night, he would occasionally fire a cap in his rifle and this would cause the wolves to scurry away for a brief time. Later he had a horse die and dragged the carcass into the swamp. That night there was howling and feasting, by the wolves, that continued till daybreak.



Two pieces of furniture made by John Neill.



On the following day, he returned and thoroughly poisoned the carcass; on the second night the howling and feasting continued and on the third night, all was silent. These stories were told by Henry Wing, grandson of Henry Wing, to Oro J. Neill.

During the early history of Putnam County, many wolves infested the county and in the 1830's the state paid a bounty for the scalps of wolves. All scalps had to be presented to the clerk of courts, who issued an order on the county treasurer for the amount. The order called for four dollars and twenty-five cents for each scalp. Persons presenting scalps had to swear by affidavit that they killed the wolves. During the period from 1834 to 1836, many wolves were killed in this county ; and about one hundred were killed during the year 1834. County clerk records indicate the John Neill was paid \$9.25 for scalps during his first year living in the county.

After the railroad was established in 1859, John decided to build a brick workshop and general store in the village of Ottawa. In the autumn of 1862 the building was completed. It was the first brick building in Ottawa and was located at 225 West Main Street (The building was destroyed in 1978, to provide for a parking lot). John never established his workshop in this new building. John's son, Seth, had become ill with measles in December of 1862 while in an Army camp in Tennessee. Seth was a soldier in Company 1, 99th Ohio Volunteer Infantry. He was discharged in January, 1863 with a surgeons certificate of disability. John Neill traveled to Tenn. to arrange for Seth's transportation home.



John Neill's family Bible.

John Neill contracted Typhus Fever on his trip to Tennessee and after returning home, died on March 27, 1863. Then, just seven weeks later, on May 8th, his wife Anna Neill and their eight year old son William died of the fever. Also on the same day, Anna's sister Lydia (Crow) Brower died of the fever. Three months later, on August 7, 1863, James Crow, the father of Anna and Lydia, died and was placed with the rest of the family in Crow Cemetery on the Crow farm in Greensburg Twp., John and Anna Neill's gravestones are located in the Crow Cemetery (Section 12 in Greensburg Twp.) and are in good condition.

I have examined and photographed two of John Neill's furniture that have been passed down through the Neill family:

Large drop leaf walnut table with turned legs and one small drawer.

Large 7' tall walnut corner cupboard with some of its original glass.

I have examined and photographed 2 of John Neill's rifles:

One rifle was made for John Neill's son, Seth, in 1856. This rifle is a curly maple fullstock with a percussion back action lock. It has a 36" barrel in 32 caliber with name stamped on top flat of barrel - JOHN NEILL. Patchbox is brass with a round patchbox finial with a point. A silver inlay is mounted in round finial of patchbox. Two incised grooves are carved in forestock from lower ramrod thimble to the nose cap. This rifle has been passed down through the Neill family. Along with this rifle are three powder horns, leather belt pouch, and 2 - bullet molds. One bullet mold has the initials - S N engraved on it for Seth Neill. Also handed down through the Neill family are: John Neill's Bible from 1830 with his signature and a photo album with most of the 19th century family members pictures.

The other rifle is a curly maple fullstock with percussion lock stamped - T. Neave & Sons, Cincinnati. The stock has a copper sheet metal repair around lock and 2 - sheet brass repairs on forestock. The forestock repairs were made by John Neill and were fastened with copper rivets and steel screws. The 32 caliber barrel is 42" long with stamped name - JOHN..NEILL on top flat of barrel. The engraved patchbox has 2 round patchbox finial's with a point. The toe plate is also engraved. One incised groove is carved in forestock from rear ramrod thimble to nose cap. Nose cap end is made of copper and the rest of nosecap is brass and held in place by copper rivets.

Another John Neill rifle is owned by a Putnam County gun collector. I have not photographed or measured this rifle, but it is a curly maple fullstock with percussion lock. It has a typical Neill patchbox with round patchbox finial and a point. It is

stamped - JOHN NEILL on top flat of barrel.

Reference's:

Putnam County, Ohio Cemeteries
Greensburg Township 1991
- Crow Cemetery

The Neill Record Book by Ira J. Neill

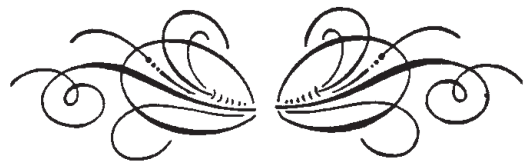
Peoples and Places
Putnam County, Ohio
1800-1900
by Marguerite Calvin
Copyright 1981

Interview with Great, Great, Grandson
John Neill (age 73) in April 1997.

History of Putnam County, Ohio
by George D. Kinder

B. F. Bowen & Co., Indianapolis, Indiana
Copyright 1915

Most of the research for this article, was originally researched, compiled, and written by John Neill's Great Grandson Oro J. Neill. Oro was a local Historian and Archaeologist of Putnam County, Ohio. Many thanks go to Oro J. Neill (deceased). Also a very special thanks to his son John Neill and wife Claire.





Double Horns



By Fred Flowers

The materials used in the construction of most powder horns usually consist of one horn and a piece of wood along with a few pins of wood, iron or brass to secure the two and make a water tight compartment. The architecture of the horn and butt plug is up to the maker.

Sometime in the first half of the 19th century, the idea came to mind to join two smaller horns at the big end to make a suitable size horn to serve the same purpose as one larger one.

For a good well balanced look, a pair of horns from the same animal was used and most had a common wooden donut plug at the junction to make the two rigid. Most examples I have seen have a collar applied over the seam to further support the joint and help seal it, some were turned from horn and very decorative. Others are made of iron or tin.

Madison Grant shows five examples in his book, "Powder Horns and Their Architecture" pages 90 - 91 & 92.

The double horns illustrated by Mr. Grant, and all other examples I have seen, have one blind end except for the two illustrated here.

As Mr. Grant states, double horns are rare and it's my opinion that double horns with double spouts are rarer still. They are classed the same but have different features.

The horn in illustration A has a very small hole in one tip used for dispensing powder and a larger hole in the other end makes for easier loading of the horn.

This horn was found at a gun show in Pennsylvania which means it cannot be placed in any specific location except that it is eastern. It is a very crude example, but nonetheless is a double spouted horn. Its maker was a non-professional which is evident by the workmanship. Its junction is different from any I have seen. There is no inner wooden spool to join the two halves. The horns were boiled to soften the fiber in both horns, and one was forced inside the other to form a lap splice. When cool and again hard, wooden pins were driven into pre-drilled holes through both horns to bond the two making one common body. This was done before scraping and shaping of the tips as can be detected by an unscraped ring, protruding at the splice, exposed by shrinkage of both horns over the years.

A flat spot worn on the rear, central portion of the body indicates it was attached to a bag and had much use in the woods.

The bag and horn were probably companions to a small bore squirrel rifle of the mid 19th century.

The horn in illustration B is another example of the double spout type. The



Illustration A: This little horn was the product of a back woods craftsman with few tools and little to work with. Nevertheless, his goal was met and its wear indicates it served well his intentions. The two horns used are a matching pair but have only one curve and are elliptical in shape at the joint. It measures 10 1/2" from spout to spout and is yellow to brown at the ends which are shouldered for support straps. The spouts are round.



Illustration B: A matching pair of horns with nice gentle double curves make this double spouted horn pleasing to the eye. Its color is translucent green with brown faceted tips. It measures 10 3/4" from spout to spout and its junction is covered with a brownish white band of horn tacked in place with brass pins. A well made horn with good craftsmanship.

uniqueness of this horn is the fact that two individual cavities were made by leaving the center intact without piercing the common plug. With this in mind one can only speculate on the makers reason for this feature in design.

Three specific uses come to mind for a possible explanation. The first and most likely to me is two grades of powder, one for charge and one for prime. Being used in this fashion brings about the question of how loading was achieved and which end for what! The most likely way would be to store charging powder in the rear compartment and which could be lifted to the front and fill the measure to be transferred to the rifle muzzle. This would leave the front compartment with easy access to the priming pan.

Another use would be for simply a back-up reserve of powder. This is not likely because of the unbalanced effect due to the absence of powder in the front half of the horn. The only advantage in this case would be that one compartment might remain dry if they were submerged in water or exposed to rain for a period of time.

The third reason could be the use of one section for shot. This would be fine but for one drawback, "NOISE". The sound of shot in a horn is much like that of a rattlesnake in the woods. Most shot was dispensed from a leather shot bag for silence.

This horn was purchased from a antique shop in California, but it too is most likely an eastern horn that migrated west over the years.

As stated before, double horns are rare and should be preserved and restored if at all possible.

Restoration work should be left to those who have the feel for tools and experience in the use of materials. A good example of this is the little horn pictured as illustration "A". This horn was abused by someone without the two ingredients listed above.

A previous owner, no doubt, had recently taken the edge of a fine file to almost the entire surface to remove years of dirt, patina and horn scales, thus leaving fine white grooves in their place. This is inexcusable and can only be deemed ignorance! With a few hours work it was made presentable again but will never be the same.