



# Benjamin Wright Gunsmith – Medical Doctor



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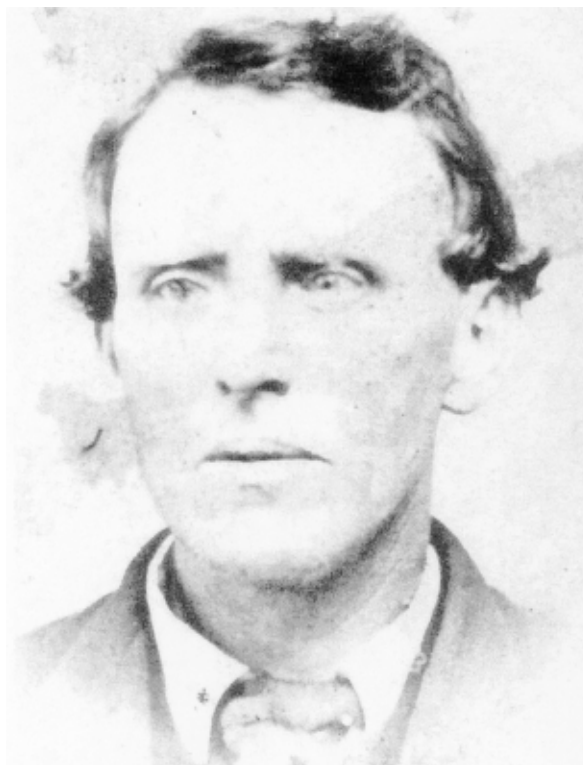
Benjamin Wright was the fourth child of Moses and Anna Lakin Wright. He was born on the family farm near Freeport, Harrison County, Ohio on August 11, 1820. He was a gunsmith, having learned the craft from his father and pursued a medical career.

Dr. Wright first practiced at Keene, Coshocton County, Ohio for several years before moving his practice to Ragersville, Aburn Township (the Bucks Township), Tuscarawas County, Ohio.

In Ragersville, Dr. Wright, in September, 1841, married Lucinda Rager, first child of Conrad and Catherine Swagler Rager. Conrad had been a native of Pennsylvania; Catherine, of Sharpsburg, Maryland. Lucinda was born in what was the Bucks Township, on February 28, 1825. In 1830 Conrad platted a village on his acreage and named it Ragersville. Benjamin and Lucinda were married by Rev. J. B. Reck, a very prominent pioneer Lutheran pastor, who in 1836 organized the Emmanuel Lutheran congregation in the village.

The Wrights lived in Ragersville for some years, then moved to Freeport Township, Harrison County, Ohio, where they were enumerated in the 1850 U. S. Federal Census as follows; Benjamin, age 29, a gunsmith; Lucinda, 25; John W., 8; Mary C., 4 ½; and in the household: Willimina Travis, 24, and John Martin, 20, gunsmith.

They later moved to Rockville, Perry Township, Tuscarawas County, Ohio, where Benjamin had purchased a half acre of ground with a cabin for \$300. The one room (with loft) log and clapboard cabin had been built in 1846



An Early Photo of Benjamin Wright,  
Gunsmith/Doctor

by Adam Timmerman. It was here that the Wrights came with their five children. Three more were born there. Three weeks after the birth of William, Benjamin and Lucinda conveyed the property to John M. Kemper on June 18, 1861.

Benjamin had moved to the newly platted village of Rockville because it had great promise of becoming a town of some size and would need medical services. That did not materialize. Becoming discouraged, the Wrights moved to Jacobsport (now named Plainfield) in Coshocton County. Here, according to the 1884 History of



Halfstock Rifle By Benjamin Wright

Photos By Jim Whisker





The Wright home in Ragersville, Ohio. Lucinda Rager Wright (seated)

Tuscarawas County, “the doctor (Wright) built up a large and prosperous practice. He was respected as a man of first-class scientific attainments.”

It was in Jacobsport that the ninth and last child of Benjamin and Lucinda’s was born. They lived there for some years. Family tradition says that in about 1869, when William was eight years old, the Wrights moved back to Ragersville. The July 1870 U. S. Federal Census of that village enumerated; Lucinda, age 45, keeping house; James L., 24; Mary C. 20; Thomas, 11; William, 8; Ida, 7. In the house next door was Lucinda’s mother, Catherine Rager, age 78.

Dr. Benjamin Wright had left Ragersville, and possibly remarried. He lived in Union County, Ohio where he died on March 20, 1874, at Richwood. He is buried in Claibourne Cemetery in Union County.

Lucinda died at the home of her youngest child, Ida Stingel, in Twinsburg, Summit County, Ohio, on February 12, 1907, at the age of 82. She had continued to live on the property platted by her father Conrad Rager, and named Ragersville, in the house on Main Street, built in

1854, until she left to live with her daughter in about 1902. Lucinda is buried in the Ragersville Cemetery.



William Wright, gunsmith brother of Benjamin Wright. Born 1822 – Died in 1917. He was 91 years old when photo was taken.



Heavy inlaid fullstock rifle by  
William Wright

Fullstock rifle by Benjamin Wright  
Photo by W. Dale Brown

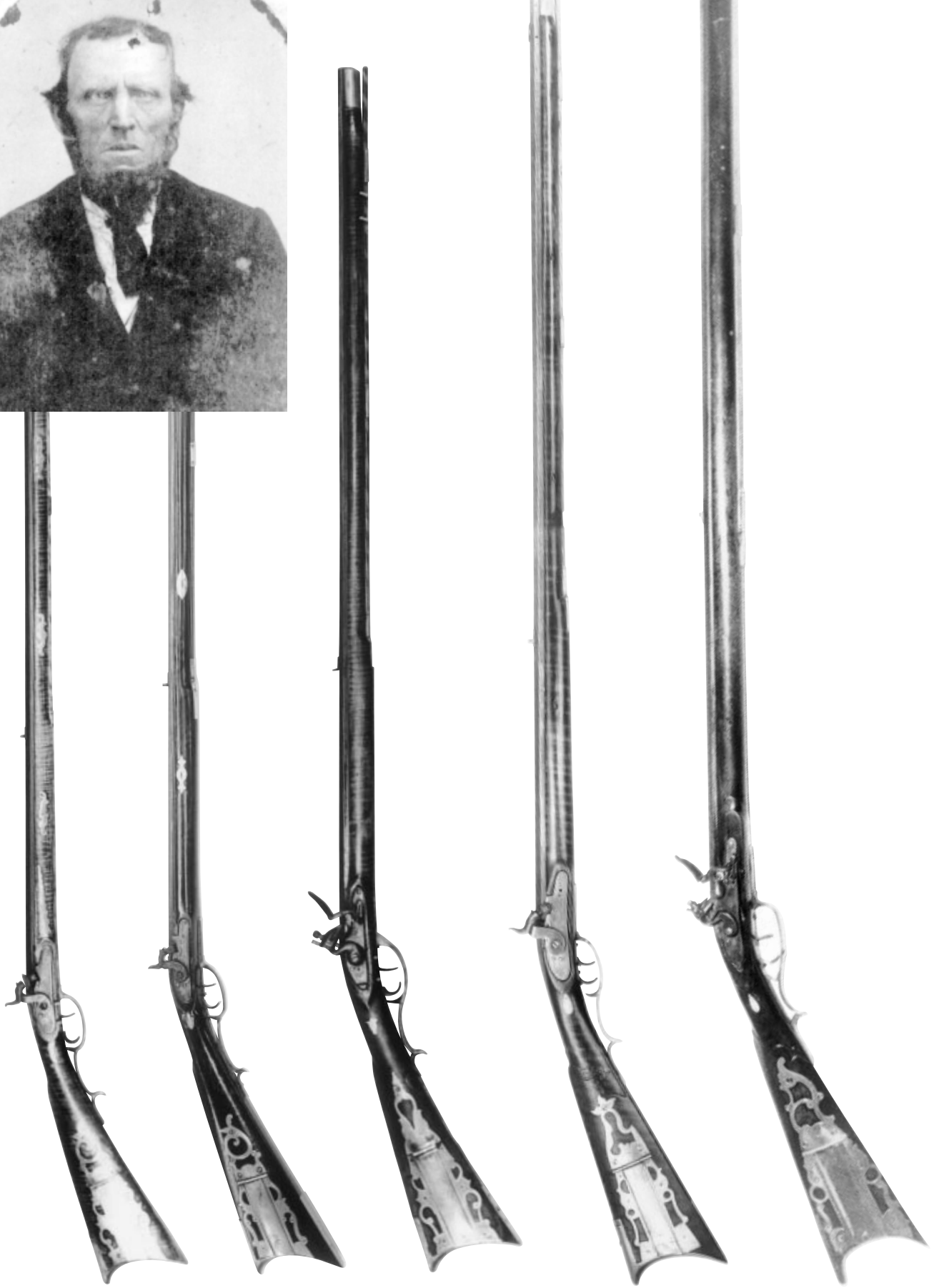


Photo of Moses Wright, Harrison County Ohio with five of his rifles. Moses taught the gunsmith trade to two of his sons, Benjamin and William. Rifle photos by Jim Whisker.





# Caleb Vincent Letters



Early Photo of John Caleb Vincent

Although Washington Co. Ohio gunsmith John Caleb Vincent had recently lost his wife and his health was failing, he continued to work at his trade until his death in 1918. Twenty-eight letters written in Caleb's hand to W. C. Niceswanger survive and give us an account of his work and activities. Thanks to Don Hutslar for providing typed copies for publication.

WEO



Early photo of W. C. Niceswanger

(continued from last issue)

Vincent O. Nov. 28, 1916

Mr W. C. Niceswanger,

Dear friend:--

Yours of 15. Nov. received. Taking a random guess that your hunting trip may be terminated about this time, or will be soon, have concluded it is high time to return thanks, also to express my surprise at the perfect and lifelike pictures. Every tool within scope of the Kodack is in its proper place, and my friends think they can almost see the "veteran smith" breathe. You certainly have a good Kodack and you know how to finish the work it does. All the snow we have had here barely showed in patches. Autos are on the move to day, but it looks rainy. Things are dull and lifeless here since trains have stopped, but we have something of a prospect of a traction line from Parkersburg through Vincent in the near future. It will hardly be worth while for one to worry very much, at my time of life, about what may, or what may not happend. I am interested in your hunting trip, and wish for, and hope you have had good luck.

As ever, your friend  
J. C. Vincent

Vincent O. Jan 8, 1917

Mr W. C. Niceswanger  
Climbing Hill  
Iowa.

Dear friend:--

Box and contents came safely. I spread and retempered the mainspring, also gave it, (the hammer,) more sweep, and in all probability it will do its duty from now on. The lock was faulty sure. I used steel for the piece in brazing breechpin, and it may be a little thick where brazed, if so cut the wood away where it goes in, No Charge. You know how to pick out a good job, and out of doors is the place for men and I realized that many years ago, but in my case fate willed otherwise. The Black Diamond Coal Company have bought 6 or seven miles of the west end of our defunct railroad, and the Cleveland Stone Company have bought the balance as far as Moore's Junction, three miles of Marietta, but just what they will haul besides grindstones we have not yet found out, but it will be some satisfaction to see them go by and to hear the whistle.

Yours respectfully

J. C. Vincent

Vincent, O. M'ch 7. 1917

Mr W. C. Niceswanger,

Dear friend,

I should have known better than to have put the tag on the wiping stick the way I did, there was room on the board to have tacked it on. If the stick doesn't reach your office, and you will let me know, I will surely send another one. Last Sunday morning there was 12 inches of snow on the ground, and under the snow about 6 inches of soft mud, and just now there is a moderate rain falling, and if it continues very long and hard it is fearful to contemplate what will happen to the Ohio river. I received a letter this morning from Pennsville notifying me that three rifles are headed for my shop. Well I don't want to get out of work for a while yet, but if it will begin to slack off during this year I will not complain.

As ever, your friend

J. C. Vincent

Vincent O. Mich 20, 1917  
Mr W. C. Niceswanger,  
Early, Iowa.

Dear friend:--If you have left out anything that could possibly add anything to my happiness I haven't a idea what it could be. I am glad you brothers had your inception in Ohio for the western people, wherever you chance to light will naturally suppose that all Ohio born people are of your stamp. I surely appreciate the pictures you have sent to me for they give me some idea of what a portion of the west looks like, as I have never been there. On the morning of the 4. of Mich there was twelve inches of snow and about the same depth of mud. The snow disappeared so gradually that the water barely got on the lower end of front street at Marietta. You have done me so many favors since we began our dealings I will take this occasion to extend my gratitude, and especial thanks for the pictures just received, the birthday card, the name you have given your rifle team and many others. Those recently sending rifles from Pennsville are C. H. Benjamin 1, Geo. D. Wagoner 1, and J. M. Davis 2. I have finished the little rifle for myself except varnishing, and that I will not do until my friend Hendershot and I have taken our week target practice, and one week groundhog hunting. Its shooting qualities are perfect. The barrel is  $29\frac{1}{2}$  inches, size 140, mounting small patch-box which I made of sheet brass and silver loop caps and thumb piece. One of my friends here has the first chance when I get ready to sell, a Barlow friend the next chance, and a Parkersburg doctor comes in third. So I wish I had three more like it. The Cleveland Stone Co. train stays in Vincent each night and makes one and often two trips to Moores Junc, each day. They haul sick people and others who happen to be in their good graces, and they recently sold quite a number of tons of coal to the high school in Vincent. It is the opinion here that they will become a common carrier in course of time. I have made another wiping stick which is now in the office and will leave here in the morning. It is not a perfect stick, but was the only one in the shop that was long enough. I have tacked three tags on the oak to which the stick is secured. Of course there is no charge. It was my fault that the other one failed to go through. You sure will be well equipped for your fishing excursions, for what a motorcycle lacks in size it fully makes up in speed. Now, concerning stocking the Winchester shotgun, I sincerely regret making excuses, but my age is telling on me quite rapidly, at least it seems so to me, and I realize that I am loosing confidence in my ability to do satisfactory work on a particular job like that. When I know awhile beforehand I worry to such an extent that I loose sleep and also my appetite, so I humbly ask your friend to excuse me from taking the job. I have made up my mind that one more year of shop work will be the extent, if I should live so long. I am getting along quite satisfactorily with such work as I have generally got, but it is the guns of the improved models that I am afraid of. I wish you the best of luck with your summers work, and that your health may be perfect. As ever, your friend



Vincent, O. Apr. 27. 1917

Mr W. C. Niceswanger,

Dear friend.

Yours of 22, Apr received.

I hardly know just how to start this letter for it will be unlike anything I have ever written to you. So far as I can remember, I have never before found it necessary to plead a lack of sufficient strength to work. My ailment commenced about three weeks ago when my strength and appetite gave out at the same time. If the doctor knows what is wrong he doesn't tell me. I am doing such light work as clock repairing. I am taking care of myself as there is very little work in preparing what I need, and besides I have an aversion to making trouble. I supposed at first I would be over this spell in a very few days as it usually is, but instead it seems to be the reverse. As soon as I get in working condition, if I do, I will surely write you, and will not delay either. Of course my age is against me, but I fully expected to work a few years more at least. The job you had done on your 22 rifle is something worth while, and it will be strange if that Dayton Co. doesn't get a lot of work from this neighborhood. There is no question but your 22 is reliable.

Very respectfully yours

J. C. Vincent

Vincent O. Feb 4, 1918

Mr W. C. Niceswanger,

Early,

Iowa,

Dear friend:-- That rabbit incident was certainly an odd one and a long shot for a .22 rifle but there was two very good reasons why the bullet caught the rabbit, it was a reliable rifle and a reliable marksman who pulled the trigger. Since today,--Monday,-- is a holiday for the reason my business is not a necessity so am not permitted to burn fuel of any kind and to not have the day seem quite so long, I will describe an incident which happened about 40 years ago that is somewhat similar to the rabbit case. A Mr Dunsmoor who lived about 3 miles away came to my fathers shop to have some work done, and told us a very large hawk flew over his head and lit on a tree but a little way from him, and he believed it would stay there until I could go there, about 500 yards away. I started immediately with my rifle, and while I was gone, Mr Dunsmoor told my father that about three weeks before that he shot at a large hawk which flew and made several attempts to light but failed each time. I found the hawk, shot it and it dropped very much like a parachute. On picking it up I was astonished that such a large hawk should be so light, then I saw that one foot was gone and the poor thing had not been able to catch anything to eat and was nearly starved. When I got back to the shop Mr Dunsmoor said there was no doubt whatever but that was the hawk he shot. The stump was nearly healed over. J. C. Vincent

Vincent O. Feb. 24, 1918

Mr W. C. Niceswanger,

Dear friend:--When boys take naturally to a gun, and are careful from the start, they are equipped for the best sport they will ever have in their whole life, and times they will remember the longest. This is my experience, and by the stories I have heard my father tell, his happy time must have been in his hunting days. I have heard him tell how he came to kill his first deer. When there was no one else in the house he took his fathers rifle, (flintlock lock of course,) and managed to get away without being seen, and within a half mile of home he saw a large buck and by keeping behind a tree he thought he would shoot and then go home as he had but the one load, and to his great astonishment the deer pitched off the bank headlong and failed to get up. He had shot it thru the spine near the shoulder. The buck had five prongs on the beam. My father was 15 years old at the time and that was the largest deer he ever killed of the great number he afterwards shot. I can make tubes any size required and why I didn't make different sizes of those sent to you I am at a loss to understand. I will send some tubes of different sizes, also a tool which with the aid of a hand saw file, so if neither happens to fit, the one a little large can be cut down very easily as the thread end is not tempered. A hand vise will be needed in the operation. If neither will answer a piece of lead screwed into the cylinder and sent to me I can make one that will fit I am sure. Now you will probably be somewhat surprised. Although I have nearly two maple planks it is going to be impossible to get even one stock for the reason they are full of windshakes. I have made a thorough examination and the shakes have spoiled them all. So even if it would be possible to find a good curled tree, before the plank could be seasoned I shall be off the list of stockmakers. I find my age has been telling on me quite noticeable in the last year. Stock making has been on my nerves more than any other repairs, and I may as well say I have quit that part of the business. I expect to continue other kinds of repairs as long as my present strength holds out. If I live one month longer, I shall round out 77 years. The weather here got so Spring like about a week ago I thought of tapping my sugar trees, (I have three,) and cutting down the high cost of living by making my own sugar, but just before it got warm enough down went the mercury nearly to zero. The water will come near getting on the streets in Marietta tomorrow. The railroad men are pretty sure they will put on a passenger train that will run from Vincent to West Marietta by the first of Apr. If they do it will take lots of cars to carry all that will want to go on the first trip. A Stockport undertaker has sent a rifle to be repaired. I will repair it of course, but I won't agree to take my pay in trade. My grandson, Lyle Dustin Vincent is in France. He enlisted the latter part of the summer. His branch is field artillery. No charge for tubes and file.

As ever, your friend,

J. C. Vincent