



*Dyer rifle and mold (lock side) (photo by Mark Bender)*



*Dyer rifle and mold (sideplate) (photo by Mark Bender)*



*Dyer lock and patchbox (photo by Mark Bender)*



*S. F. Dyer signature (photo by Mark Bender)*



*Detail of Dyer fore end (photo by Mark Bender)*



*Detail of Dyer patchbox with rocker engraving (photo by Mark Bender)*

# FOUND! A JAMES ROSS RIFLE

BY MARK BENDER

One of the intriguing things about studying early Ohio rifles is the rather common phenomenon that written records exist for a maker, but few if any guns have been identified. In some cases, collectors spend years or decades searching for a gun that goes with a name, in some cases a name that appears in multiple records and in connection with other documented makers. This article examines a newly found rifle associated with an influential maker listed in several records, including Donald Hutslar's landmark *Gunsmiths of Ohio, 18th and 19th Centuries* (1973:219) – but for whom previously no known examples have been uncovered. The rifle in question was located west of Ohio by a longtime and knowledgeable collector of Ohio rifles. The maker's name on the rifle is James Ross, who can be considered as a foundational figure in early Ohio gunmaking, the evidence suggesting he directly influenced several well-known makers, including Elijah Ross, Jerman Jordan, and James Teaff, the elder. All of these makers have been treated in earlier issues of this newsletter (Reynolds 1990; Offenberger 2005:2). This article will provide more background on James Ross, attempt to explain his relation to and influence upon other makers, and provide an examination of the long sought example of his work, which is a fullstock rifle converted from flint to percussion.

## Background on James Ross

Based on research conducted by Rick Rosenberg in the *OWR-CSA Newsletter* (2016:3-5), and other sources, including those supplied by a longtime collector of Ohio rifles, James Ross was born in 1754 – probably in what would become the state of Pennsylvania, and passed away on August 24, 1816 in Steubenville, Jefferson County, Ohio (Hutslar 1973:219). One source indicates James Ross was born in Philadelphia, then in 1792 moved with his little son William (who is said to have ridden in a “pannier on a pack horse”), and wife Ruth across the Alleghany mountains to Laurel Hill in western Pennsylvania in what would become Washington County. The Ross family of gunsmiths, which included James (the patriarch), son William, and son Elijah are all said to have worked for some

time in the town of Fredericktown, founded in 1790, in Bethlehem township, on the west banks of the Monongahela River. The area produced a number of gunsmiths.

James is recorded in 1803 as working in Steubenville (Hutslar 1973:219). Elijah became the first established gunsmith in Zanesville, with a record dating to 1804 (Hutslar 1973: 301). William set up in New Richmond, Clermont County (Hutslar 1973). Some unsourced information I was given indicates that Elijah was the first family member to settle in Ohio and that he and others in his party made the journey by flatboat along the river systems. That said, it is not wholly clear to this author when and how each member arrived in Ohio. It should be noted that the National Road ran through Washington County, Pennsylvania, and could have also been a transport route. William arrived in New Richmond, Ohio by 1816 (Hutslar 1873: 72). Elijah Ross (1786-1864) is recorded as working in Zanesville, Muskingum County, Ohio in 1804 (Hutslar 1973:301). Records indicate that William sold property in Fredericktown in 1808 (purchased in 1800) and 1819, indicating there was still some connection with the east, after moving to Ohio. It is unclear when James Ross moved to Ohio, though as noted, records in Hutslar (1973) list him as working in Steubenville in 1803. James Teaff, who is said to be a runaway apprentice of Asa McClelland of Waynesburg, Greene County, Pennsylvania later appears in connection with James Ross near Steubenville, Ohio. As explained below, Teaff purchased a large portion of the elder Ross's gunmaking tools in 1816 and later is said to have purchased his shop “on Third street in Steubenville, Ohio for \$800” (Rosenburg 2016:4).

## Auction of Sept. 19, 1816

An official appraisal of James Ross's effects, dated as executed in Jefferson County, Ohio, Sept. 19. 1816, is signed by Jerman Jordan and two other witnesses (Reynolds 1990:2). Jordan was only 19 at the time and was almost certainly an apprentice of Ross and may have lived in his household. Most of the items in the sale that related to gunmaking were purchased by