

the already established gunmaker James Teaff, while the young “Garman” Jordan bought only a few items (including a “pair of old pistols” for \$1.00) probably due to his limited means (Reynolds 1990:2). Most of the items James Teaff purchased were the essential tools and materials of the gunsmithing trade; the list is an excellent inventory of what was needed to make early 19th century Ohio rifles – and differs little from the tool kits assembled by more traditional makers today (for whom such a list in the sidebar is invaluable). It is interesting that while stock wood was cheap, metal of all kinds was relatively expensive. Other items in the sale were household and farm related.

The sale papers also lists creditors to the Ross estate, including debts for manufactured long guns, that ranged in price from \$14.75 to \$28 dollars (several at \$16.50), depending, it is assumed, on the level of decoration and quality of parts. A debt of \$45 was owed on a “pair of pistols.” In some cases, a certain amount (usually \$10.00) was owed on a gun. Gun repairs ranged from as little as \$.25 to the cost of (re) stocking a gun from between \$2.50 and \$3.00. In all, the estate information provides insight into the kind of work produced by Ross and into the popularity of his work up to his passing – which was firmly in the late flintlock era.

The “Foundling”

A rifle signed “James Ross” in flowing script was recently located. It is the result of a long quest first noted by Bill Reynolds in an article about Jerman Jordan of Chillicothe, Ross County. Comparing some stylistic points between Ross, Teaff, Sr., and Jordan rifles, Reynolds notes, “Surely if a James Ross rifle existed, there would be many similarities.” Readers are directed to Reynold’s 1990 article for pictures and a description of a Jerman Jordan rifle, and a 2005 article by Warren Offebeger for information on Teaff, Sr. rifles. Reynolds notes that, “All four makers [including the two Ross’s] used the National Road style patchbox, similar stock profiles, as in many cases identical inlays complete with the same engraving patterns” (1990:4). Many of the rifles also feature what some longtime collectors have called the “Ohio Valley-style” of sideplate, featuring to large, symmetrical brass plate with looping curls.

The flowing signature of the rifle marked “John Ross” is similar to those in paper records, includes

Items purchased by James Teaff from James Ross estate, 1816:

26 lbs. iron, \$3.25
 1 pair bellows, \$35
 11 crucibles, \$2.75
 2 gun barrels, \$11
 4 unfinished gun barrels, \$16
 1 lot flasks& clamp, \$5 (for casting gun parts?)
 14 sheets of brass, \$17.50
 8 1’2 pounds of old brass, \$4.25
 1 guide & rod, \$6
 17 chisels & gouges, \$4.25
 4 stocking augurs, \$2.00
 1 lot stocking tools, \$2.60
 3 small drawing knives, \$1.50
 9 plains, \$2
 Lots 2 & 3 of files, \$11.37
 9 rat-tail files, \$1.68
 5 flat files, \$2
 34 more files, 2 lots, \$11.27
 1 old vise, \$7
 4 ½ lbs zinc, \$1.87
 1 lot rubbing steel, \$1 (a sort of steel wool?)
 1 lot old saws, \$2
 2 soldering irons, \$1.25
 4 lbs. cast steel, \$2
 1 cast anvil, \$4.25
 2 sets screw cutting tools, \$18
 Shears, drills &c. \$7
 Brace, bits & chisels, \$6.50
 1 wooden vice, \$3
 39 gun stocks, \$9.75
 1 lot gear mounting patterns, \$7
 27 boring bits & float, \$8
 1 gun barrel & wire plate, \$2
 6 wood screws & square, \$.50
 192 ft plank for gunstocks, \$5
 70 ½ lbs old copper, \$14.10
 108 lbs old smith tools, \$21.60

the stylistic feature of the “long S” in “Ross,” a Latin calligraphy derived feature commonly used in the era (and appearing in the U.S. constitution). It is typically used at the beginning of a word, the middle of a word, and the first “s” in a series. (See the accompanying photos of the signatures with the descending “long s.”)

The overall lines of the rifle are suggestive of existing fullstocks by Elijah Ross, Jerman Jordan, and James Teaff, Sr. The overall lines and hardware are also quite similar to certain decorated rifles produced in the 1820s by the well-known gunmaking establishments of Tryon and Henry in Philadelphia, suggesting a possible early connection with the birthplace of the elder Ross – though at present this is speculation on the part of this author.

Some basic dimensions of the “James Ross” rifle:

Barrel: approx. 7/8" width x 44½" length

Caliber: approx. .42

Length from front set trigger to middle of buttplate: “right just shy of 13 inches”

Nosecap: 2½"

Patchbox cover: upper length, 4"; lower length, 4½"

Lockplate: 4½"

The simple rifle stock has nice lines, with a slight roman nose, nicely thinned forestock, and a tapering quadrangular cheekpiece with two lateral flutes. (See the accompanying photos of features of the rifle.) The brass buttplate is of late Golden Age style, with a slight incurve and flats on the side and top. The well-filed brass triggerguard, typical of late flintlock/early percussion guns of the tri-state Ohio Valley area, has one finger spur. Only one lock bolt attaches the lock; the sideplate is affixed with six brass pins. The 4½" lock has been converted to percussion from flintlock, probably after the maker’s demise in 1816 (still well within the flintlock era). Remains of a flintlock pan are on the upper lockplate, as well as filled-in flintlock spring holes. The style of lock is not unlike those common on many rifles, pistols, and militia muskets of the day. The present percussion hammer is massive and rather nicely forged from one piece of iron. The sheet brass sideplate is of the “Ohio Valley” style, with a feather like motif on each side. The back sight is a solid one piece and the front sight is a brass blade in an iron base. The well-filed triggerguard, ramrod pipes, and the longish nose cap are in brass. The double-set triggers feature a lightly sculpted post front trigger and

a c-curve rear trigger. The rifle has an iron triggerplate and an average sized barrel tang with a filed out extension. The rifling is rather deep. Overall, the stock styling is graceful, and the woodwork straightforward, with no lock mouldings, carvings, or incise lines on the forestock. The outstanding sheet-brass patchbox has three piercings and strongly suggests certain styles in western Pennsylvania/northern Virginia, the finial being a c-curve, echoing carving on earlier rifles, and simple curvi-linear engraving and hashmarks, bordered by rocker engraving on the patchbox lid and finial, and sideplates (see figures). The patchbox finial is held on with two screws and pins made of brass or iron (pins also used to attach the sideplates) – quite comparable to the patchboxes on two James Teaff, Sr. rifles illustrated in Offenberger 2005:3, 5. The engraved toeplate is held by three iron screws and features a round patchbox lid release button, and a bit of iron rod holding on the very tip of the bottom of the buttplate. The ramrod pipes are rounded (not fluted) with a simple line engraving on each end. Although a rather basic piece, stylistic elements of this “missing link” rifle echo in the works of the other related craftsmen in this cohort of early Ohio gunmakers, as well as the Ohio Valley area and beyond.

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Sources:

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Profile of James Ross signed rifle (photo by Mark Bender)