

engraving and chasing. The center of the cap box lid features two rococo-esque floral tendril designs. The space of the cap box surface has been fully utilized in the designs that feature small clusters of parallel engraved lines, which are patterned within the rounded features of the cap box, including the front and rear finials. The larger curvy lines defining parts on the anterior neck of the finial seem to have been done free hand, as they are uneven, though to no real detrimental effect – imperfect, like the composition of a human face. The dark lines of engraving contrast well with the yellow brass. Certain treatment of the engraving is quite similar to that on Levi Biddle rifles.

Along with the cap box, the most outstanding engraving appears on a silver (German silver?) wear plate on the underside of the fore stock. The plate is symmetrical along the x-y axis and the origin point (center) with rounded ends of the major lobes and rounded ends of the short center lobes. Could it be described as a two-blade propeller shape? However it might be described, the pattern falls easily within the curvaceous silver inlays common in the percussion period. The engraving shows more wear than that on the cap box, but is executed in a similar rococo-esque style, with floral curves on each large lobe and a four petaled floral motif in the middle. The similarity of the large symmetrically lobed inlays and the rococo-esque engraving on some existing Levi Biddle rifles is almost shocking. Which raises questions of who may have executed the engraving on the “J. Gotschet” rifle. (See accompanying Biddle wear plate photo essay.)

Is “J. Gatschet” a heretofore unlisted latter 19th gun maker from Tuscarawas county? The style of the rifle and the closeness of the engraving and inlay patterns to guns by residents of that county points in that direction, supporting the oral tradition. There are also records of similar names, such as Gatchell, Getchell, Gatchel, Gotchel, and Yotchel. But I will leave further inquiries into those names to the historians of 19th century Ohio guns. That said, the possible Missouri connection is also interesting, as it may add further clues as to why a number of known Ohio gunsmiths moved to that state – such as members of the Hawken clan (discussed in the last two issues) and Martin Beeman (discussed elsewhere in this issue).

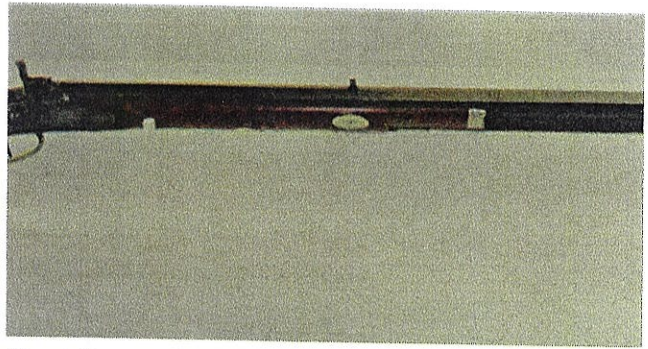


Fig. 1. Fore-stock profile, J. Gatschet marked rifle. (Guns International website)

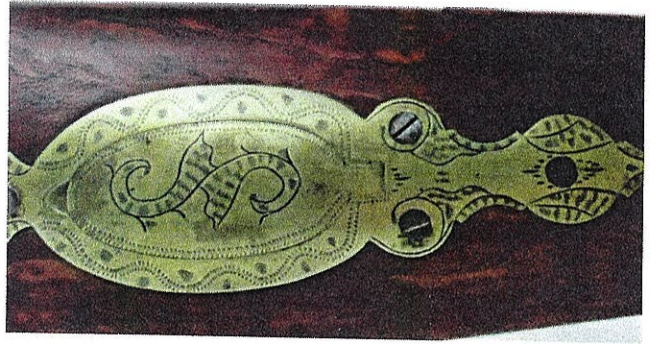


Fig. 2. Close-up of engraved cap box. J. Gatschet marked rifle. (Guns International website)

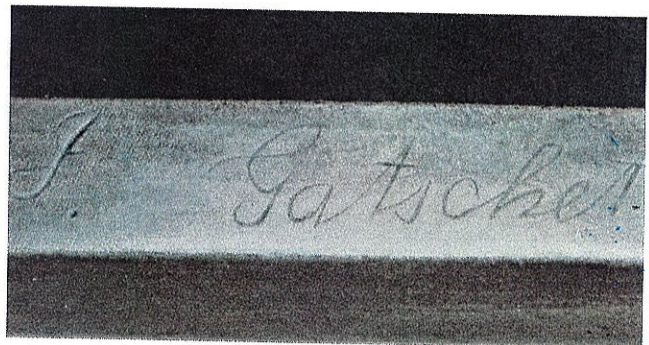


Fig. 3. Close-up of signature, J. Gatschet marked rifle. (Guns International website)

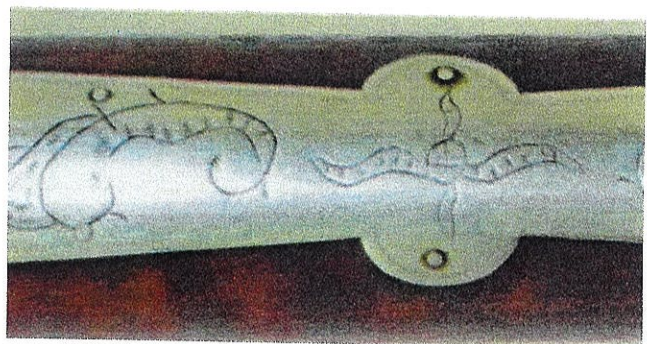


Fig. 4. Close-up of engraved wear plate on J. Gatschet marked rifle. (Guns International website)

A "FLOWER FORM" POWDER HORN

BY MARK BENDER

At the 2021 Civil War Show in Mansfield, Ohio, I came across an interesting large powder horn on the table of a seller from Pennsylvania. In chatting up the seller it was revealed that the horn had been purchased some years ago from another seller in Ohio. Though the origins of the horn are speculative, it has enough character for closer examination. Such horns were certainly used in Ohio from the late 18th up to and including the Civil War era. Whether a musket horn for a militiaman, a long hunter horn, or a "mother horn" used to store powder for smaller "day" horns in rifles, it could have served various masters during its time of use. The horn is a greenish "butternut hue" with blond streaks throughout, and black hue near the tip. The surface of the horn is very smooth, but there is a noticeable "grain" that can be felt and that runs the length with the right-twisting horn. Such greenish horns – this one probably an ox horn -- with the rather pronounced, twisting grain seem to have been quite common in the 19th century (Fig 1).

The smooth finished base plug seems to have been made on a lathe, and a tiny dimple is present in the end of the knob where it was held in place as the lathe turned (Fig. 2). Foot or water powered lathes, of course, were well-known to 19th century gunsmiths. Larger factory enterprises in the East made guns for the Western trade and often supplied basic shop-made powder horns. Local makers such as the Vincents of Washington county, Ohio, made spinning wheels, which required lathed parts. It would not be a stretch to imagine local gunsmiths with the skill and equipment lathing out powder horn base plugs. The wooden plug in this particular horn, which may have once had a chestnut brown finish, has one decorative line incised around the edge and a lip extending about ½ inch out from the base of the knob. The base is held in place with 8 handmade pins, spaced about (not exactly) an inch apart, and either flush or slightly proud with the surface of the horn – which is about 1/16 inch thick at

the base (as revealed by a slight chip).

Of greatest artistic interest, aside from the overall pleasing appearance and feel of the horn, is the rather complex spout area (Fig. 3,4). (The photos and measurements convey the exact details.) The overall shape is similar in form to the stigma, style, ovary and receptacle of a flower (Fig. 5) – thus the title of this article. Whether or not the maker had this pattern in mind, it none the less follows a flower's reproductive form. This "reproductive" model of a flower, features a series of carefully executed panels and planes. Moreover, the "vascular bundles" (xylem, phloem, and cambium) in the stem and receptacle when cut in cross-section reveal eight triangular facets used for moving liquids in the plant. In fact, the major spout area of the horn has eight flats around the circumference of the portion sitting above a ring. Even the tip of the spout has very subtle faceting. The spout, with its faceting, also resembles an okra pod.

An experienced horn-maker could probably supply insight into how the flats were cut and/or filed into the spout. In all, such horns, which rely only on form, structure, and patina – without the added element of engraving -- are worth contemplating if one is seeking to better appreciate the artistic range of antique powder horns or reproduce a useful, but aesthetically pleasing period powder container.

Some dimensions for makers and collectors:

Length: 15 ½ inches, outside curve

½ inch at spout tip

3/8 inch spout hole

3 ½ inch around at base of decorative spout ring

3 5/8 inch around at center ridge of decorative spout ring

flats area (8 flats) about ½ inch from top of ring

flats area (8 flats) of spout 2 inches in length

lathed end cap 8 ¾" around

lathed end cap about 1 ½ inch high

knob about ¾ inch high