

Sorting Out The Ohio Shuler Gunsmiths

By Don Shuler

The article about the Shuler family that I authored (Newsletter, Vol. IV No.1, Feb. 1982) had some information that was not entirely accurate. Only time has allowed for clarification of facts not available to me in 1982.

When I was a young boy, my grandfather John Lafayette Shuler first showed me the "family gun." It is a beautiful, full stocked, brass mounted percussion cap long rifle, showing graceful southeastern "Pennsylvania" lines and style. Little did I know until I grew up to be a collector, that there were dozens of surviving "Shuler Rifles" in the market place, and most of them were not at all like the "family gun." In time it became clear to me that there are at least three different and distinct families of Shuler makers: one centered on Quakerstown, PA. one centered on Liverpool, PA. and one which started in Berks County, PA., moved to Northumberland County, PA. and then settled in the early 19th century in Licking County, OH. It is from this latter group of makers that I descend. Whether all these families have a common gunsmithing genealogy has remained an unanswered question after 40 years of research. What is certain is that all the Ohio makers are related.

The Ohio "Shuler" Gunsmiths

The known Ohio Shuler Gunsmiths are all descendants of Johann Valentin Schuller, who was born in 1759 in Pinegrove Township, Berks County, PA. and who died in Licking County, OH. in 1833. He was married to Eva Barbara Huber, daughter of Henry & Elizabeth Huber, and they had six surviving children, four of whom were boys, and the first three of whom all became gunsmiths. These three, Johannes (John), my great, great, great grandfather, Daniel, and Valentine, all practiced their trade in

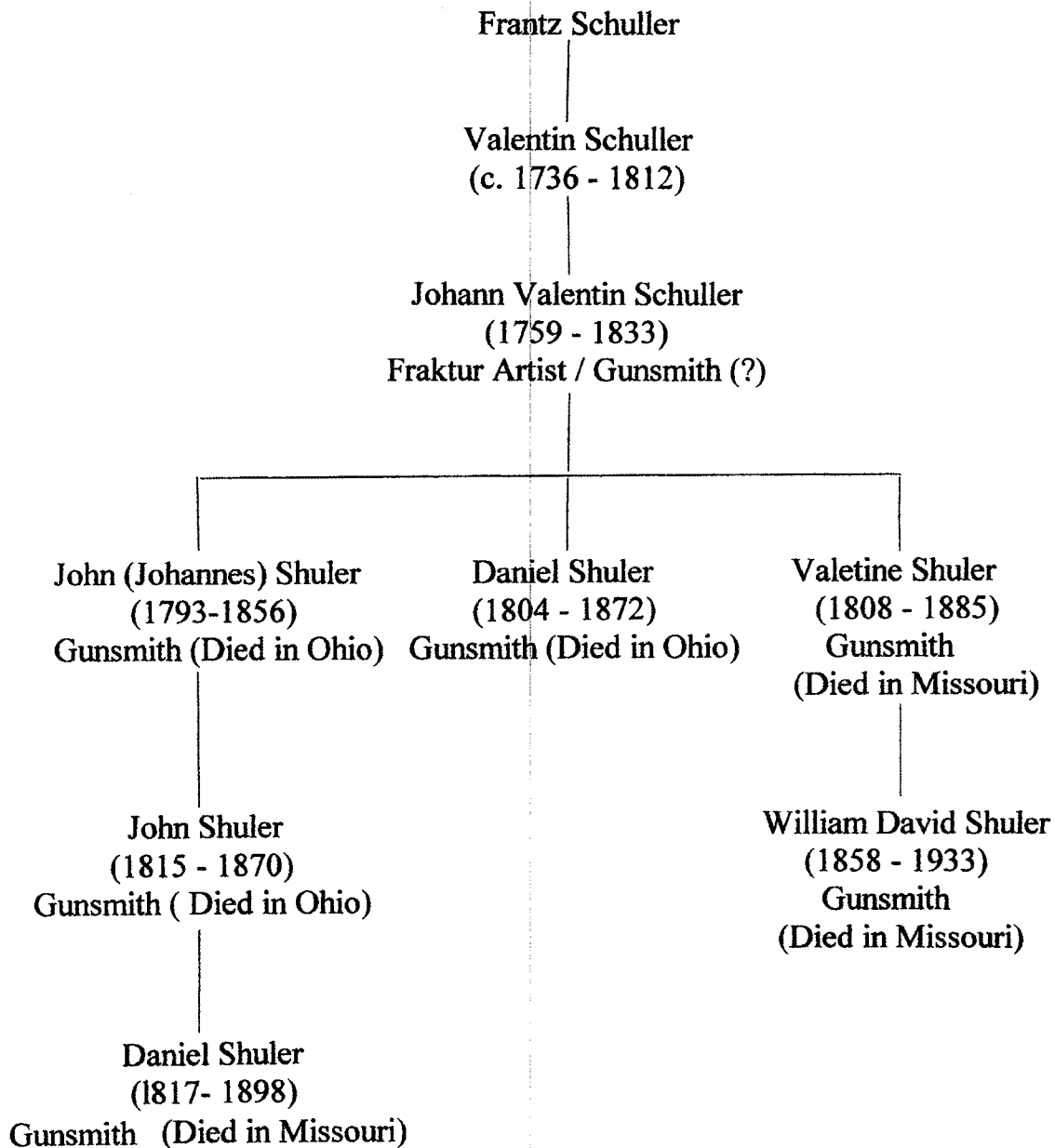
Ohio, beginning in Licking County where their father moved in about 1816.

Johann Valentin Schuller (1759 – 1833)

To date no documentary evidence has surfaced that proves that the father made guns, but one gun that I have handled bears the signature "Valetin Schuller." In the census of 1800 Johann Valentin is listed as "Valentine," as is his father, and it is believed this barrel was part of a gun made in Pennsylvania by one of them, probably the latter. The rifle was restocked c.1830-40, but is clearly much older. It is known that Johann Valentin Schuller made baptismal Taufschein (sometimes called Frakturs), many of which have survived. One early Taufschein housed in the Winturthor Museum bears a signature very similar to that upon this barrel. Twenty years ago this gun was in Connecticut, but its whereabouts today are unknown. I know of no other example.

Johannes Schuller (Shuler) (1793 – 1856)

The oldest son of Johann Valentin Schuller was born in Pinegrove Township, Berks County, PA. in 1793, and married one "Anna." He first appears in the Ohio census of Licking County in 1820 as "John Shuler" married with two sons, one born in PA. in 1815, and one born in OH. in 1817, and both of who later made guns. There are many surviving examples of his work, all of which are signed on the top of the barrel "John Shuler" to which he appended "Licking County" in later years. It was his custom to number his guns as well, on the side of the barrel just forward of the tang. I have owned # 's 13, 125, 128, and 136, and have handled # 169. A description of gun #136, a fine half stocked weapon made in 1851, will be found in the February 1982 newsletter. This man's tools and rifling lathe descended to the author's father,

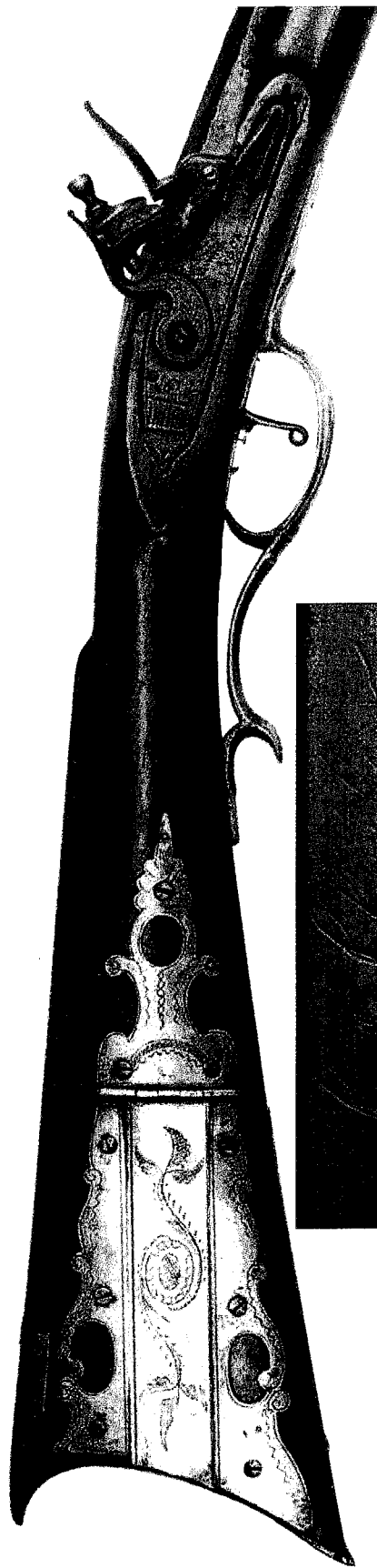


the late Harold Frances Shuler of Wapakoneta, OH. Also, gun #125 (the "family gun") has been handed down from father to oldest son for six generations. Johannes (John) died about 1856, in Auglaize County where he had moved from Licking County not long before.

Daniel Shuler (1804 – 1872)

The second son of Johann Valentin, Daniel, was born in Pinegrove Township, Berks County, PA. in 1804. He lived in Licking

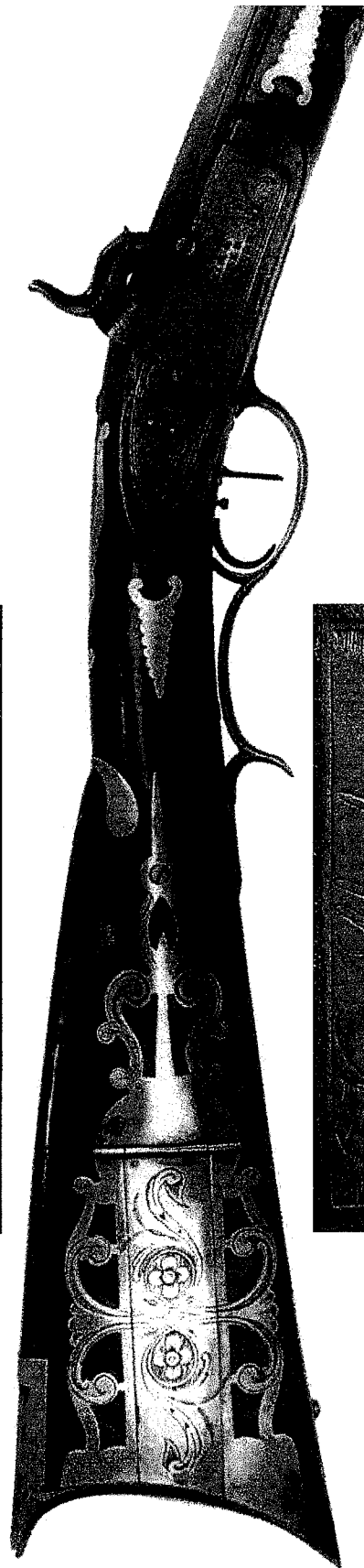
County from approximately 1816 until he married Hannah Canaday of Perry County, OH, where his first two children were born. In 1833, after the death of his father, he moved to Allen County, OH. where he lived until the end of his life. His work is very rare, perhaps because he did not continue in the trade after moving to Allen County. I have handled his work, and it resembles that of his older brother in style, with a script signature "Daniel Shuler" on the top of the barrel.



John (Johannes) Shuler
(1793 – 1856)



Daniel Shuler
(1804 – 1872)



Valentine Shuler
(1808 – 1885)

Valentine Shuler (1808-1885)

The third son was Valentine, bearing his father and grandfather's name, born in Pennsylvania in 1808. This prolific maker moved from Licking County, OH. to New Philadelphia, Tuscarawas County, OH, in 1833, again after his father's death. Some of the finest guns ever made in Ohio were from his hand, and four examples will be seen in the February 1983 newsletter. Three of those rifles were made in Ohio and one in Missouri, where he moved in 1861. A fifth example, also from the Missouri era, is pictured in the August 1999 edition. It is known that Valentine trained other makers, and led a shop in New Philadelphia with other makers. He died in 1885, and his tools and journal books have survived in his family.

John Shuler (1815 – 1870)

This John is the first-born son of Johannes (John), born in Northumberland County, PA. in 1815, but raised in Licking County, OH. Documentary evidence confirms that he was a gunsmith. The pictures accompanying this article are of a rifle I recently had access to. The gun is by the hand of young John and the script signature is very close to that of his fathers'. It is possible that he is the gunsmith who repaired the broken wrist on the stock of the "family gun". He married one Permelia Smith, of Licking County, and lived there on his father Johannes' (John) farm until 1857. In that year he moved to Auglaize County, OH. inheriting an undivided half of his father's 150 acre farm in that county. He died there in 1870.

Daniel Shuler (1817 – 1898)

This Daniel, the second and last child of Johannes (John), was born in Licking County, OH, in 1817, and also raised there. When his father's estate was settled, Daniel's wife was said to be "Julia Ann." He set up a shop in Round Head, Hardin County, OH, sometime after his father's death. After his uncle Valentine moved to Missouri in 1861, this younger Daniel followed him. Through the years this author has handled several of this makers guns, all solid and plain. He died in Oklahoma in 1898.

David Wills (1822 – 1909)

This man apprenticed under his uncle Valentine Shuler (b. 1808), and was the son of Catarina Shuler (sister of Johannes, Daniel (b. 1804), and Valentine) and David Wills Sr. He worked for many years in New Philadelphia, OH. The author has never seen any signed work, but includes him here as the son and student of the Shuler gunsmithing family of Ohio.

William David Shuler (1858 – 1933)

This man was named by his father Valentine (b. 1808) after his only non-gunsmithing brother, though born in Ohio, he was trained by his father and practiced gunsmithing in Missouri.

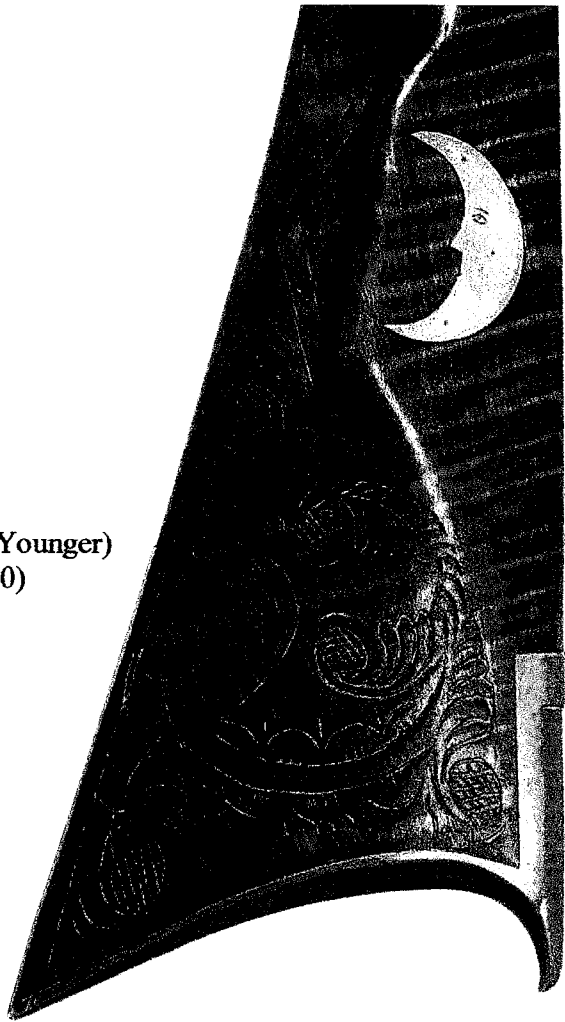
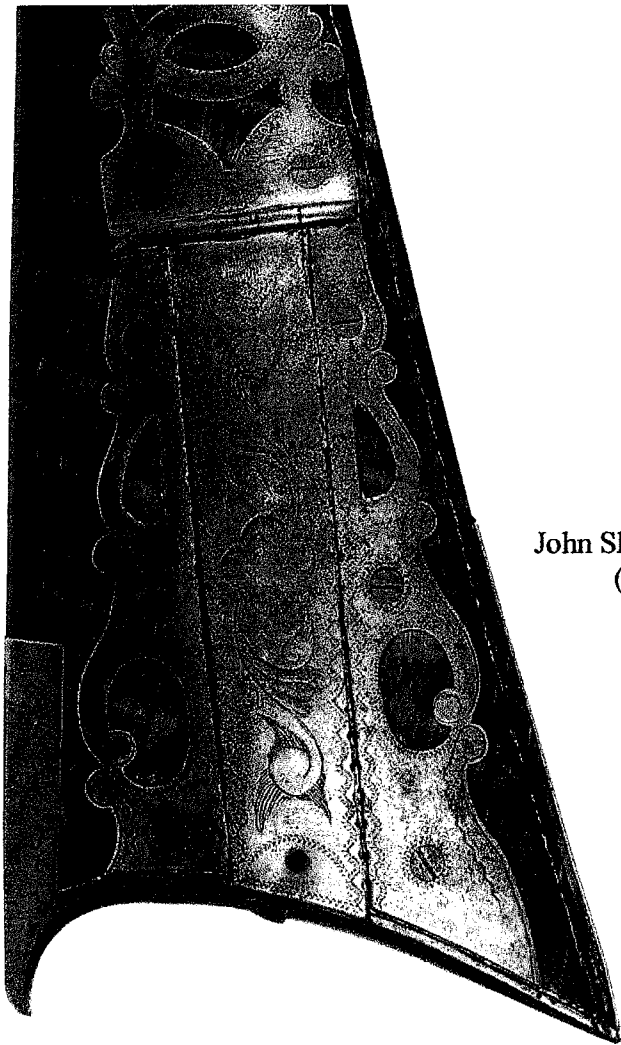
Who Taught Whom?

The succession the craft of the gunsmith through the generations is often a matter of speculation rather than fact, since surviving documentation is so rare. This is certainly true for the Ohio Shuler Gunsmiths. If, as the writer surmises, Johann Valentin Schuller was a maker it is reasonable to assume he trained Johannes (John) in Northumberland County, PA, before moving to Ohio. Johannes was approximately twenty-three and married with one son when he moved with his father to Licking County. If the old man did not do it, certainly Johannes was old enough to have trained his younger brothers Daniel and Valentine. He most certainly trained his two sons. Also, as has been stated, Valentine (b. 1808) passed the trade to at least two nephews and one son. What remains a mystery is who trained Johann Valentin Schuller in Berks County, PA? Or, if he was not a gunsmith, who trained Johannes? His grandfather Valentin?

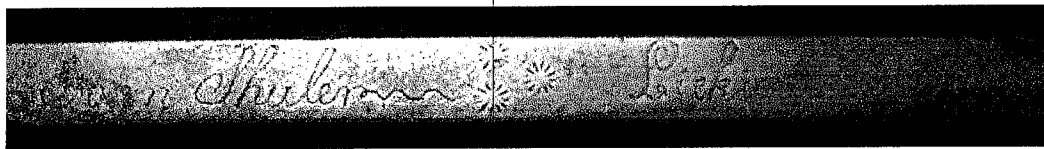
Number of Guns Made?

A fine small plane, marked "J. Shuler", has come down in the family. It has a numbering system of carefully inscribed grooves and hatches, and it stops at # "193." The writer assumes that this is the number of guns made by Johannes (John) over his lifetime.

I hope this effort clears up the history of the Shuler gunsmiths in Ohio. I would welcome any information on the Shulers of Pennsylvania and how they may have been related to the Shuler clan of Ohio.



John Shuler (The Younger)
(1815 - 1870)



Plane used by John (Johannes) Shuler

