

Illustration 10b: Front view of butt on rifle No. 3 with silver mountings, showing fancy patchbox and applied lid hinge. The hinge first appears to be a repair, but upon closer inspection may be original since it carries Paulmer's fine wiggle engraving along its borders. This is also his earliest rifle with round headed screws in the patchbox.



Illustration 10d: Silver toe plate and trigger guard on rifle No. 3, showing Paulmer's fine wiggle engraving on borders and scroll motif on trigger guard bow. The typical small, high cheek piece used by Paulmer can also be clearly seen.

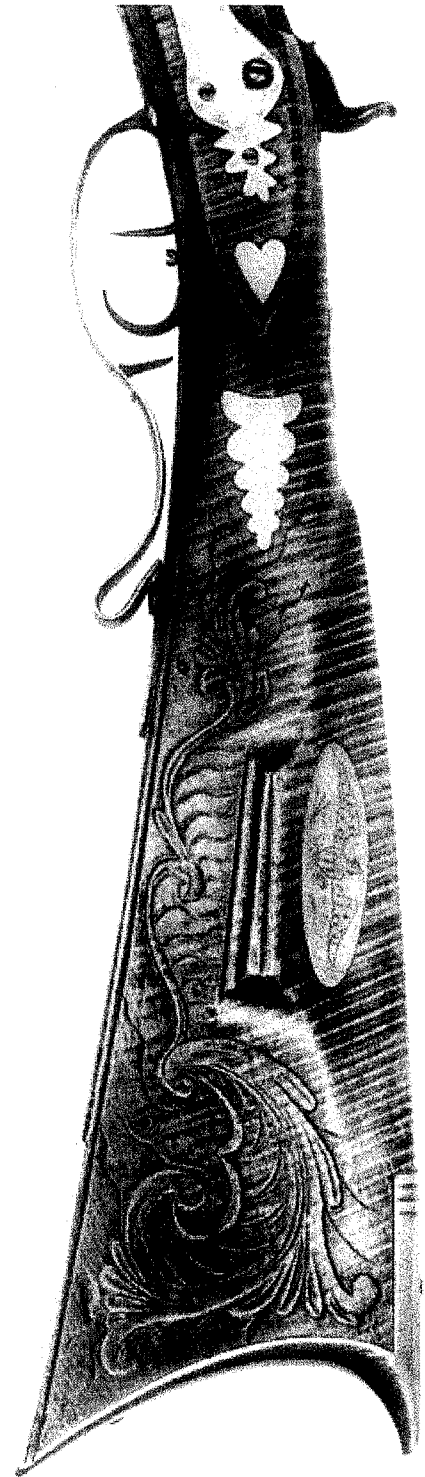


Illustration 10c: Rear view of rifle No. 3, showing fine carving with increased use of veining lines to give depth and texture to carving. Also note odd side plate with engraved border matching patchbox borders.

hinge as seen in Illustration 10b. While the hinge at first appears to be a repair, it was done by Paulmer based on the very fine wobble engraved border, another of Paulmer's trademarks. The toe plate and trigger guard are also engraved in matching style, as seen in Illustration 10d. The gun has a superbly curled maple stock and is nicely relief carved on the butt's reverse side as shown in Illustration 10c. The carving is more elaborate than on gun No.2, with additional veining and incised accent lines. The engraved eagle in the cheek inlay and the larger side plate might tend to imply an earlier gun than No.2, but the butt curvature, patchbox style, enhanced carving and shorter, heftier architecture indicate this rifle is somewhat later. In addition, this rifle marks Paulmer's switch to round head screws on his patchbox, whereas on earlier rifles he preferred flat heads. Rifle No.3 probably represents the peak artistic period in Jacob Paulmer's gunmaking career.

The DeKalb County, Indiana Period, 1850-1892:

Two rifles are illustrated from Jacob Paulmer's Indiana period, and both provide additional insight into Paulmer's personal life. Rifle No.4 is a small, well made fullstock with full patchbox but lacking any butt carving. It probably represents Paulmer's Indiana years between 1855-1860, at a time when one or more of his sons may have worked in his shop. The second Indiana rifle, gun No. 5, is the most elaborately carved gun known by Paulmer, despite being an original halfstock. The gun carries a family history that helps date it as well as identify its first owner and a possible personal relationship with Jacob Paulmer in DeKalb County, Indiana. The gun probably dates to just before the Civil War, ca. 1860-1865.

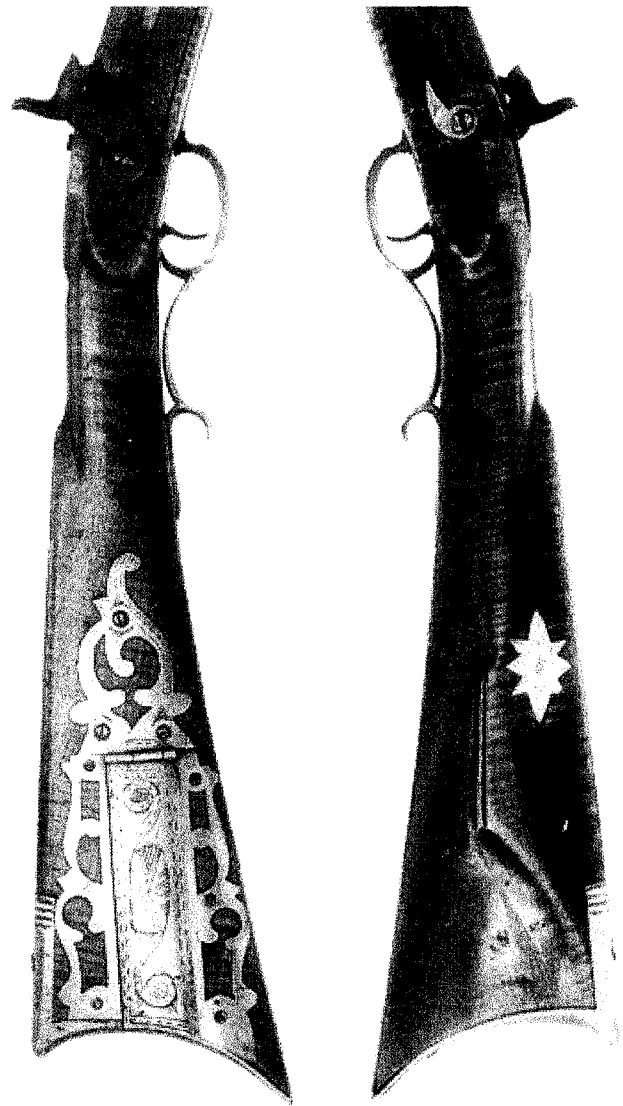


Illustration 11a: Front view of rifle No. 4, a small percussion fullstock rifle made by Paulmer ca. 1855-1860. Note straight butt lines of later rifles, different patchbox outline and engraving style. The gun appears stocked by Paulmer, but the patchbox and engraving were probably done by his son. Eli Paulmer, who was working in his shop at the time.

Illustration 11b: Rear view of Percussion rifle No. 4 by Paulmer, ca. 1855-1860. Note the typical Paulmer horn shaped lock bolt washer, cheek piece slightly back on butt and filed bands on butt plate return. Butt plate is relatively flat for a late rifle. There is a slight cameo out where wrist meets comb; this detail is also found on the later halfstock.

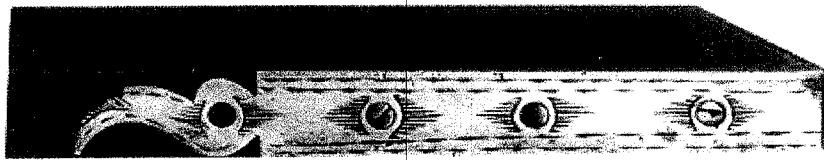


Illustration 11c: Toe plate on rifle No. 4 with fancy finial and engraving. Paulmer was still the master of artistic details even as late as 1855-1860.

Rifle No.4:

No. 4 is a slender little full-stock with fancy patchbox and incised carving at the rear pipe, but no relief carving on its fine curly maple stock. The gun is shown in Illustrations 11a through 11c. The gun was acquired many years ago by a Ft. Wayne, Indiana man who took it as payment for services during the depression. Ft. Wayne is about ten miles south of DeKalb County, so the rifle has always stayed within a short distance of where it was made. The signature and stocking are definitely Jacob Paulmer's work, but the patchbox and engraving differ from his normal work in that, while related to Paulmer's work, they are less sophisticated. The patchbox probably represents the hand of one of his sons, either John or Eli. Oldest son John is assumed to have been trained as a gunsmith by Jacob, based on his receiving Jacob's tools in his will, plus an 1860 directory listing for a "John Paulmer, gunsmith," in nearby Manchester, possibly referring to this son. The 1860 census listed John as a farmer, twenty-nine years old and married, and residing in Richland Township. His age probably precluded him from assisting on this gun. The same census also listed Jacob S. Palmer, occupation gunsmith, and in his household was son Eli Palmer, twenty-one years old, and listed as a gunsmith. This tends to suggest that the engraving on gun No.4 was done by Jacob's son, Eli Paulmer.

Rifle No. 4 probably dates to 1855-1860, although its butt plate has less curvature and a shorter heel than expected. Conversely, the lines of its comb and toe have become straighter, indicating a later Paulmer product. Noteworthy details include the signature "J:S:P," a muzzle decoration comprised of two concentric circles and a ring of punched dots, toe plate with fancy "flame" finial (see Illustration 11c), neat little trigger guard with single trigger, and silver star cheek inlay with shaded points. (see Illustrations 11a and 11b) The rifle is small and light with only a 12 3/8" trigger pull, undoubtedly made for a person of small stature.

Rifle No.5:

This gun is an exceptionally fine halfstock marked with the full script signature "Jacob*S* Paulmer" as shown in Illustration 2. The gun carries a fancy, well engraved patchbox and wear plate, and is relief carved on the butt, comb/wrist interface, around the tang, around and under the side facings and for several inches forward along the stock. There are small beaver tails at the rear of the side facings, a detail not seen on other Paulmer guns and definitely a vestige of an earlier age. Carved details are shown in Illustrations 12a through 12e. The style and engraving of the patchbox and wear plate, plus carving around and behind the cheek piece, are all very similar to that found on gun No.3. How-

ever, the double spurred trigger guard and heavily curved butt plate indicate a later gun. Based on such details, plus family tradition that gives the purchase date as just prior to the Civil War, the gun was probably made around 1860.

This gun demonstrates Paulmer's finest workmanship, despite being from a time period when relief carving was out of vogue. The rifle descended through the Lawrence and Graham families of DeKalb County, which were interrelated by marriage. An old Richland Township plat map shows the David Lawrence farm adjoining the Paulmer farm along its southern line and the J.S. Graham farm along its western line. The Paulmers,

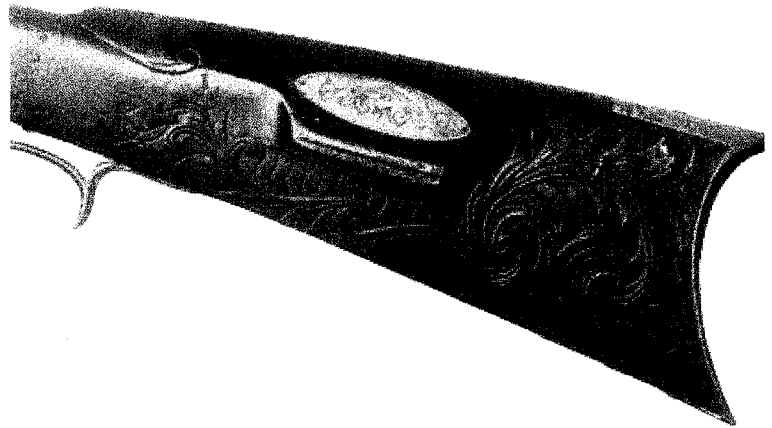


Illustration 12b: Rear view of butt on Rifle No. 5, showing fancy relief carving, cameoed wrist treatment and typical Paulmer cheek piece. Cheek piece is centered well in butt, allowing more room for carving to flow unhindered.



Illustration 12a: Front view showing patchbox and relief carving at wrist on Rifle No. 5, a late Paulmer halfstock made ca. 1860 in DeKalb County, Indiana. Note use of round headed screws, ridges on butt plate return, and curvature in butt plate with long heel.



Illustration 12c: View of side facings on Rifle No. 5 shows exceptional carved details for a late percussion halfstock, including beaver tails at rear, tang carving and feathered carving out along the barrel.

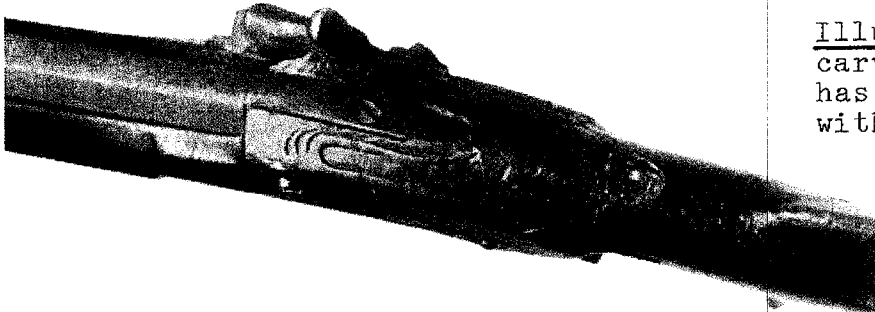


Illustration 12d: View of tang carving on Rifle No. 5. Wrist has been broken and repaired with glue and nails.

Lawrences and Grahams were all neighbors and probably friends, and the elaborate carving on rifle No.5 was surely the result of Paulmer providing a friend with the finest gun he could make. The elaborate signature supports this contention. It also stands to reason that the closer a gunsmith's product stayed to his own home, the more care he took with it. If well done it was a constant source of local advertisement and pride; if less than a good effort, it might embarrass the maker and dampen his business. The elaborate halfstock is the final Paulmer rifle illustrated, and must have been one of the last decorated guns made by Paulmer before he succumbed to the trend toward plainer work. One additional halfstock rifle marked "J.S. Paulmer" is known to the writer, and while well made has no decoration other than a good piece of curly maple in the stock. This plain halfstock appears to date from after the Civil War, and gives quiet testimony to the final demise of Paulmer's longstanding devotion to fine relief carved rifles during the percussion era of rifle making.

Conclusion:

Jacob S. Paulmer left a valuable legacy for today's students of the American longrifle. Despite tantalizing collectors by his high quality work that could not be documented for a number of years, his story can now be told with reasonable accuracy and completeness. It spans a substantial time period, starting with the last years of flint riflemaking and continuing until the advent of the breechloader. Paulmer was a special man, becoming more deeply ingrained with the finer points of artistic riflemaking than most gunsmiths as he learned the trade from his grandfather, early Washington County, Pennsylvania gunmaker Peter Swinehart. Paulmer's career tracked across the expanding American frontier, from Pennsylvania to Ohio to Indiana, and during most of those years he carried a love for



Illustration 12e: Wear plate inlay on Rifle No. 5, showing typical central pattern and border engraving. This inlay is illustrated because most of Jacob Paulmer's rifles carry an identical inlay in shape and engraving in this area. Among the five guns illustrated, all but Rifle No. 4 carry this inlay, which is another Paulmer trademark.

relief carving, fancy patchboxes and quality engraving that makes his work stand out today as perhaps the finest of the mid-percussion period. While the Bedford, Pennsylvania school of gunmakers produced quality carved guns until late in the percussion period, their stock architecture, butt carving and patchboxes had degenerated artistically to a level below that of Paulmer's work. Jacob Paulmer steadfastly clung to the older vestiges of Pennsylvania gunmaking in his carving and other decorative details. As more of his work comes to light, greater appreciation for his devotion to higher art guns during the percussion period will naturally follow. From being an unknown gunsmith only a few years ago, Jacob S. Paulmer is now becoming identified with perhaps the finest mid-percussion period rifles known today. His work is attractive and distinctive in style, stands on its own merits by any comparison, and makes most other gunmakers from the same time period look more like blacksmiths. Not a bad legacy for old Jacob...even if it did take a lot of years to finally figure him out. □