

HOLMES COUNTY GUNSMITH

Adam Stilgenbauer

by James and Bernadine Mast



Holmes County, formed in 1824 from portions of adjoining Wayne, Coshocton, and Tuscarawas Counties, is approximately 80 miles north east of Columbus. General Anthony Wayne's Greenville Treaty Line passed through its northern townships, while the county is divided north to south by the Killbuck River. High ridges several miles either side of the river divide its waters into the Tuscarawas and Mohican Rivers.

The Stilgenbauer family was among a number of Bavarian families immigrating to the area in 1840. Adam Stilgenbauer was 12 years old when the family relocated. An accident of some kind left the youth with a crippled left arm.

Following their marriage in 1854, Adam and his wife Anna lived just west of Winesburg and here he continued his career as a gunsmith. The 1875 Atlas of Holmes County lists: "A. Stilgenbauer, Manufacturer of First Class Rifles and

Shot Guns. Specialty made of Repairing."¹ He was one of at least seven known gunsmiths to work in Holmes County and probably produced more guns than any other maker.

A grandson, Clyde Hostettler, age 86 and having spent many hours in his grandfather's shop recalls: "The gunshop was very small--perhaps 15 by 18 feet. A big stone forge stood just inside the door to the left, the rifling machine and glass display case on the right, and the work bench was along the back wall. A rifle range located in the apple orchard behind the shop was where he sighted in the rifles he made."² Guns were made with a minimum of tools and most of the equipment needed was made in the shop. A hand forged pliers and a small hammer are owned by the Hostettler family.

During the Civil War Adam Stilgenbauer walked approximately 27 miles from Winesburg to Wooster to enlist in the Union Army. But recruiting officers there refused to take him because of his disabled arm even though he told them he was a gunsmith and "could shoot with the best of them."³

Stilgenbauer's work varied from rifle to rifle as one studies those in existence today. The accompanying photographs show some variety even though the basic stock remains the same on the percussion rifles. The majority were of about .30 caliber and good for squirrels or butchering day. Some rifles were quite plain with only the small round cap box to enhance the rifle while others had a considerable number of well engraved silver inlays.

During the later years of his tenure he made several breech-loading rifles in both .22 and .32 caliber. These breech-loading rifles differed from each other and seemed to be modeled after those coming out of the larger assembly line factories.

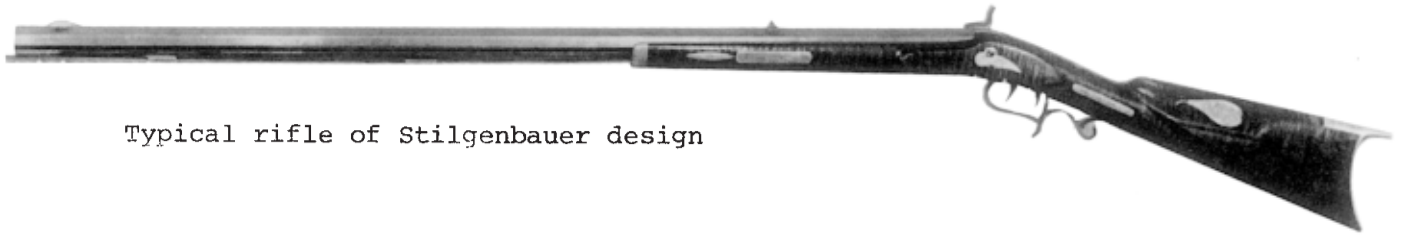
Stilgenbauer signed his work on the top flat of the barrel with A. S. either in small block print or in script. Occasionally a handmade lock or cap-box will also carry the A. S. signature. His grandson recalls a stamp with a small 3/4 inch hammer which decorated some of the guns though none of these have come to light in recent years.

Several rifles have survived which carry the mark of A. StB. and a number. While it is impossible to establish definite proof for the B on these rifles, it seems reasonable to assume that this was simply his early signature and not the work of an assistant in his shop.

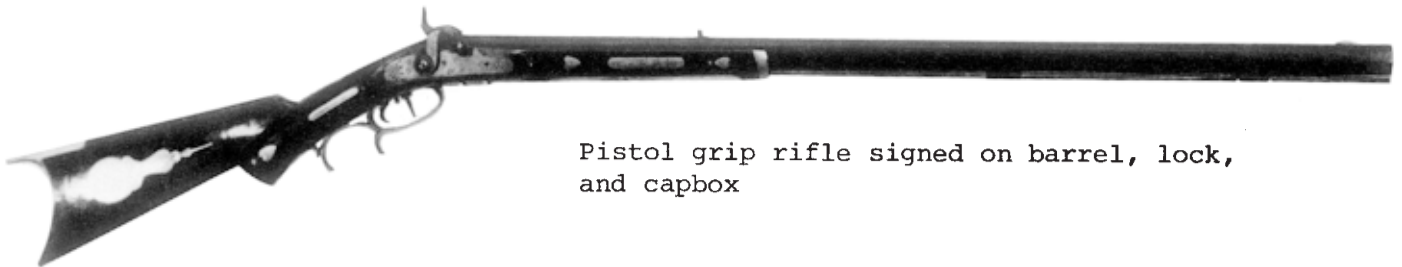
The A. StB. rifles carry many characteristics that must be attributed to Stilgenbauer including among other similarities, an identical lock mortise. It may be possible that Stilgenbauer was hyphenated when it was brought to America: Stilgen-Bauer. In spite of this mystery, there is no denying the fact that the A. S. rifles and the A. StB. rifles were made in the same shop.

Hostettler mentioned a heavy match rifle of large caliber on display in one of the cases in the shop which was referred to as "the Buffalo Gun" by his grandfather. This was a favorite of the gunmaker.

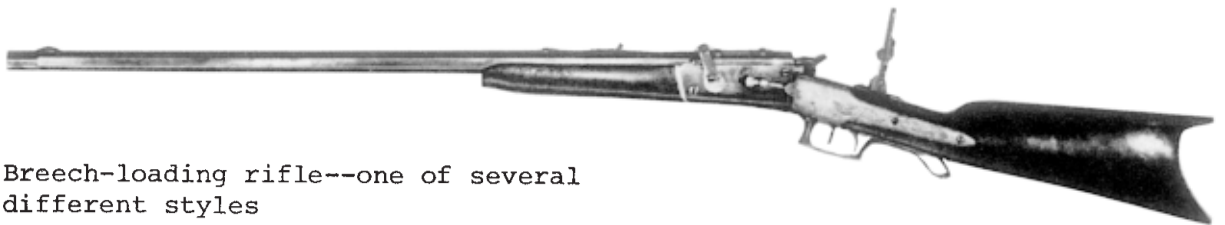
This notice appeared in the February



Typical rifle of Stilgenbauer design



Pistol grip rifle signed on barrel, lock, and capbox



Breech-loading rifle--one of several different styles

21, 1907 Holmes County Farmer: Adam Stilgenbauer, an old resident of Winesburg died February 15, 1907, at the advanced age of 78 years, 8 months, 27 days. He was born in Germany June 24, 1828. He came to this country with his parents in 1840, locating near Winesburg where he had resided ever since. He was married in 1854, and is survived by his wife and 7 children, 3 having preceded him in death. Interment at Winesburg, with services conducted by Rev. J. N. Shuck."⁴

Following his death a public auction was held to sell the remaining effects of his small business. The above mentioned "Buffalo Gun" and most of the other rifles in the shop were purchased by an agent of a large department store from the New England area. The rifles sold for approximately \$8.00 each at the sale. Where those rifles are today is mere

speculation. Perhaps one of the readers of this article has the "Buffalo Gun" in his collection.

Adam Stilgenbauer typifies the craftsman in most small Ohio communities during the 1800's. He "made do" with a very little and the end result was rather remarkable when the means is considered. Ingenuity and hard work went a long way for the pioneer craftsmen of Ohio, as students of primitive gunsmithing discover in their quest for fine examples of early Ohio work.

1. Caldwell, J. A., Atlas of Holmes County, Ohio (J. A. Caldwell Publisher, Condit, Ohio, 1875) p. 30.
2. Hostettler, Clyde, personal interview (Winesburg, Ohio, 10-13-80).
3. Ibid.
4. Holmes County Farmer

Nicholas Carpenter, Ohio Gunsmith?

by Wm. Reynolds

Since the time of the first checklist of Ohio gunsmiths, compiled by Knittle and Martin, for Antiques Magazine in 1943, Nicholas Carpenter has always been referred to as a Washington County, Ohio gunsmith. Whether or not he was, depends on one's interpretation of accounts of a final and very interesting incident in Carpenter's life. Several translations of the account have survived to present day, but undoubtedly the most accurate is the one presented in Dr. Samuel P. Hildreth's Pioneer History, published in 1848. The account in Dr. Hildreth's words is as follows:

The year 1791 was more fruitful in tragical events than any other during the war, in the vicinity of Marietta. After that period the attention of the Indians was more occupied with the troops assembled on the borders of their own country, or already penetrating to the vicinity of their villages. The United States troops stationed

at the posts within the new settlements, drew a considerable portion of their meat rations from branches of the Monongahela, about Clarksburgh, especially their fresh beef. Several droves had been brought from that region of country in 1790 and '91, and sold to Paul Fearing, Esq., who had been appointed commissary to the troops. a considerable number of cattle, especially milk cows, were also sold to the inhabitants of Marietta. Among those engaged in this employment was Nicholas Carpenter, a worthy pious man, who had lived many years on the frontiers and was well acquainted with a forest life. He left Clarksburgh the last of September, with a drove, accompanied by his little son of ten years old, and five other men, viz.: Jesse Hughes, George Legit, John Paul, Barns, and Ellis. On the evening of the 3d of October, they had reached a point six miles above Marietta

and encamped on a run half a mile from the Ohio, and since called "Carpenter's run." The cattle were suffered to range in the vicinity, feeding on the rich pea vines that then filled the woods, while the horses were hobbled, the leaves pulled out from around the clappers of their bells, and turned loose in the bottom. After eating their suppers, the party spread their blankets on the ground and lay down with their feet to the fire. No guard was set to watch the approach of an enemy. Their journey being so near finished, without discovering any signs of Indians, they thought all danger was past.

It so happened that not far from the time of their leaving home, a party of six Shawanese Indians, headed as was afterwards ascertained by Tecumseh, then quite a youth, but ultimately so celebrated for bravery and talents, had crossed the Ohio river near Bellville, on a marauding expedition in the vicinity of Clarksburgh. From this place they passed over the ridges to "Neil's Station," on the Little Kenawha, one mile from the mouth, where they took prisoner a colored boy of Mr. Neil, about twelve years old, as he was out looking for the horses early in the morning. It was done without alarming the garrison, and they quietly proceeded on their route, doing no other mischief; pursuing their way up the Kenawha to the mouth of Hughes's river, and following the north fork, fell on to the trail from Clarksburgh to Marietta. This took them about three days. There was no rain, and the leaves so dry that their rustling alarmed the deer, and they could kill no game for food. Their only nourishment for that period was a single tortoise, which they divided among them, giving Frank, the black boy, an equal share. As he was much exhausted and discouraged, they promised him a horse to ride on their return. These circumstances were related by Frank after his escape.

Soon after leaving the north fork of Hughes's river, they fell on to the trail of Carpenter's drove, and thinking it made by a caravan of settlers, on their way to the Ohio, they held a short council. Giving up any further

progress towards Clarksburgh, they turned with renewed energy and high spirits upon the fresh large trail, which they perceived had very recently been made. So broad was the track made by the cattle and four or five horses, that they followed it without difficulty, at a rapid pace all night, and came in sight of the camp fire a little before daylight. Previous to commencing the attack, they secured Frank with leather thongs to a stout sapling on the top of an adjacent ridge. The trampling of the cattle and the noise of the horse bells greatly favored the Indians in their approach, but as there was no sentinel there was little danger of discovery. Tecumseh, with the cautious cunning that ever after distinguished him, posted his men behind the trunk of a fallen tree, a few yards from the camp, where they could watch the movements of their enemies.

At the first dawn of day, Mr. Carpenter called up the men, saying they would commence the day with the accustomed acts of devotion which he had long practiced. As the men sat round the fire, and he had just commenced reading a hymn, the Indians rose and fired, following the discharge with a terrific yell, and rushed upon their astonished victims with the tomahawk. Their fire was not very well directed, as it killed only one man, Ellis from Greenbrier and wounded John Paul through the hand. Ellis instantly fell, exclaiming, "O Lord, I am killed!" The others sprang to their feet, and before they could all get their arms which were leaning against a tree, the Indians were among them. Hughes, who had been an old hunter and often in skirmishes with the savages, in his haste seized on two rifles, Carpenter's and his own, and pushed into the woods, with two Indians in pursuit. He fired one of the guns, but whether with effect is not known, and threw the other away. Being partly dressed at the time of the attack, his long leggings were only fastened to the belt round his waist and were loose below, entangling his legs, and greatly impeding his flight. To rid himself of this incumbrance he stopped for a moment, placed his foot on the lower end,

and tore them loose from the belt, leaving his legs bare from the hips downward. This delay nearly cost him his life. His pursuer, then within a few feet of him, threw his tomahawk so accurately as to graze his head. Freed from this impediment he soon left his foe far behind. Christopher Carpenter, the son of Nicholas, now living in Marietta, says he well remembers seeing the bullet holes in Hughes's hunting shirt after his return.

In the race the competitors passed near the spot where Frank was concealed, who described it as one of the swiftest he had ever seen. John Paul, who had been in many engagements with the Indians, escaped by his activity in running. Burns, a stout athletic man, but slow of foot, was slain near the camp after a stout resistance. When found a few days after, his jack knife was still clasped in his hand, and the weeds trampled down for a rod or more around him, showing he had resisted manfully for life. George Legit was pursued for nearly two miles, overtaken and killed. Mr. Carpenter, although a brave man, was without arms to defend himself, and being lame could not run rapidly; he therefore sought to conceal himself behind some willows in the bed of the run. He was soon discovered, with his little boy by his side. His captors conducted him to the spot where the black boy had been left, and killed both him and his son. What led to the slaughter, after they had surrendered, is not known. He was found wrapped up in his blanket, with a pair of new Indian moccasins on his feet, and his scalp not removed. It is supposed that these marks of respect were shown him at the request of one of the Indians, whose gun Carpenter had repaired at Marietta the year before, and had declined any compensation for the service. He was by trade a gunsmith.

This circumstance was told to C. Carpenter, many years after, by one of the Indians who was present, at Urbana, in Ohio. It is another proof of the fact, that an Indian never forgets an act of kindness, even in an enemy.

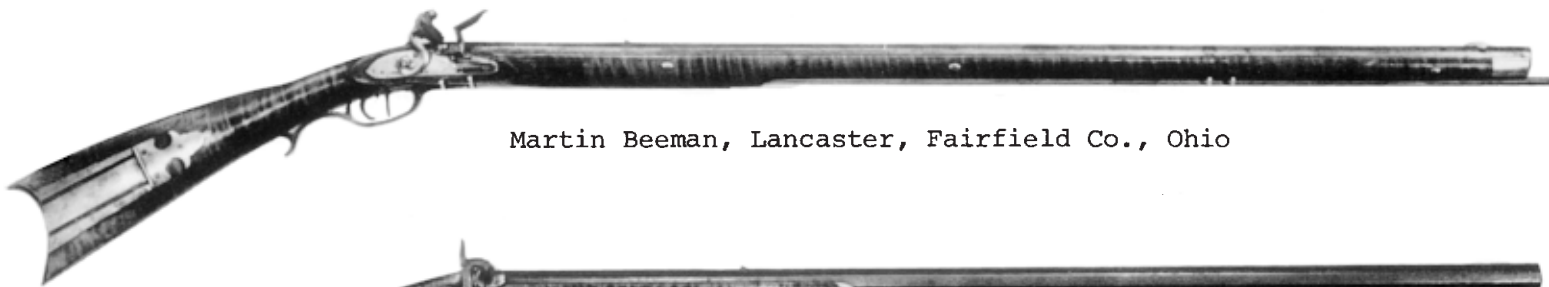
History would have been served well if this account was unaltered by later historians, but that was not the case. In 1881 H. Z. Williams and Brothers published the History of Washington County, Ohio, in which they repeat the same tale but changed some of the details important to us students of Ohio longrifles. To quote Williams account, an Indian, "whose gun had been repaired without charge by Carpenter, who was a gunsmith by trade, at Marietta, the year before." Here Williams implies with little doubt that Carpenter was established as a gunsmith at Marietta. Now looking back to Hildreth, we see Mr. Carpenter simply repairing a gun belonging to an Indian while at Marietta. A slight variance in words, but very important in establishing Carpenter's residence

I, along with everyone else, had little reason to doubt Carpenter's Marietta residence until recently. Uncovered in the Washington County Court records for 1788-1792, was a law suit between Ezra Limt of Marietta and a Nicholas Carpenter of Harrison County, Virginia for the spring term of 1791.

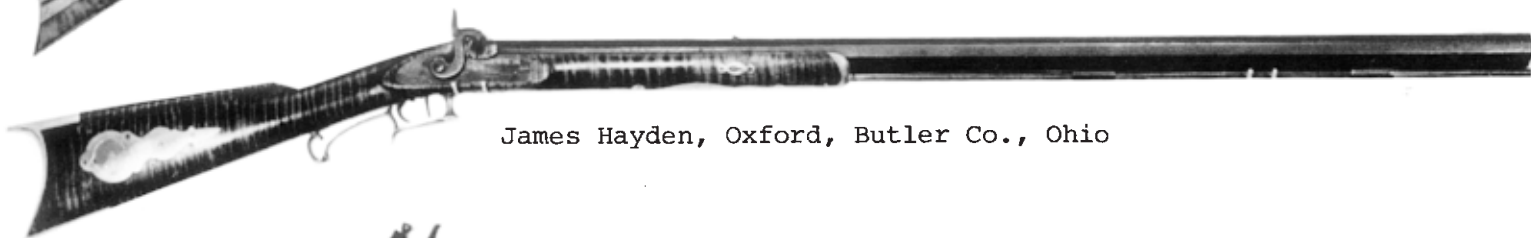
This is our same Nicholas Carpenter. Representing Carpenter in court was Attorney Paul Fearing, Esq., the same Fearing who was commissary for the troops at Fort Harmar and buying cattle from Carpenter.

In summation, I would say it is safe to assume that Carpenter did do some repair work while visiting Marietta, but I would place his residence near Clarksburg, Harrison County, in western Virginia.

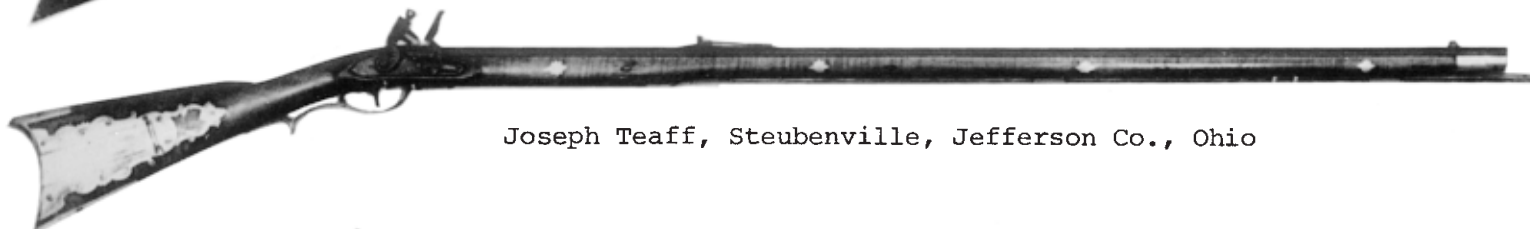
None of Carpenter's gunsmithing work is known today, but he is certainly an interesting character and worthy of more study. □



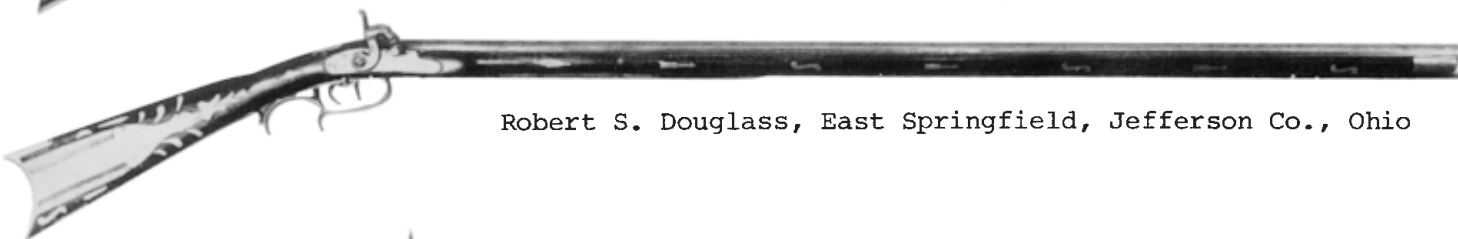
Martin Beeman, Lancaster, Fairfield Co., Ohio



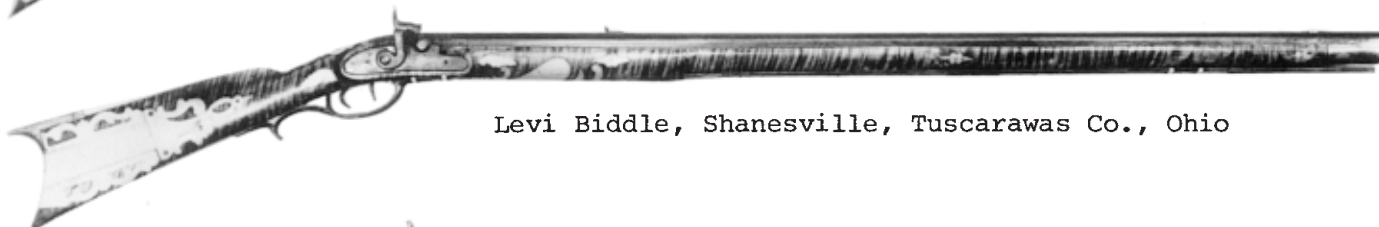
James Hayden, Oxford, Butler Co., Ohio



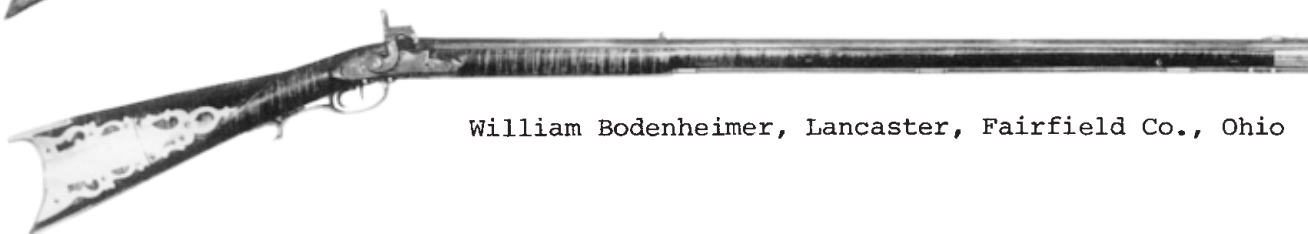
Joseph Teaff, Steubenville, Jefferson Co., Ohio



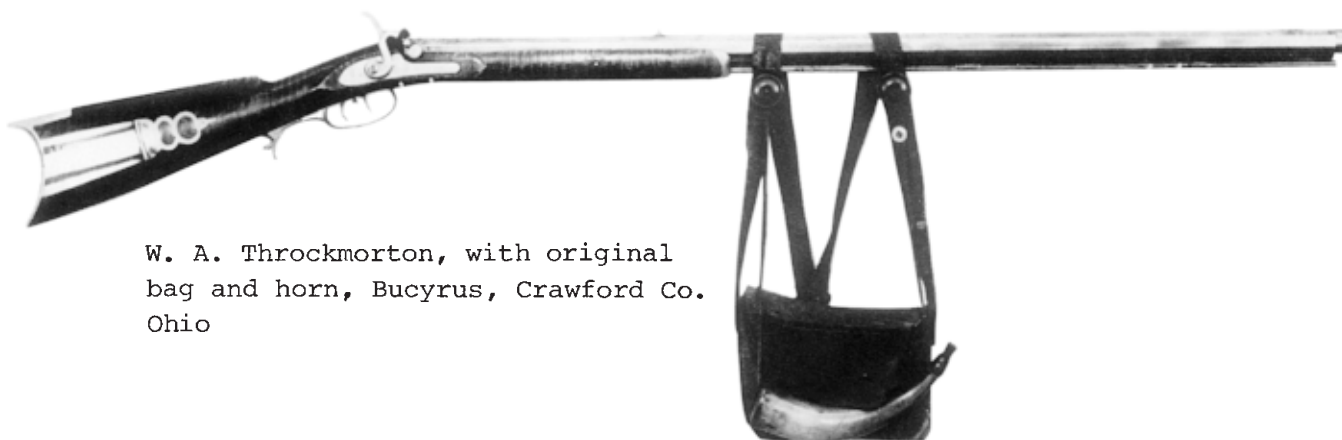
Robert S. Douglass, East Springfield, Jefferson Co., Ohio



Levi Biddle, Shanesville, Tuscarawas Co., Ohio



William Bodenheimer, Lancaster, Fairfield Co., Ohio



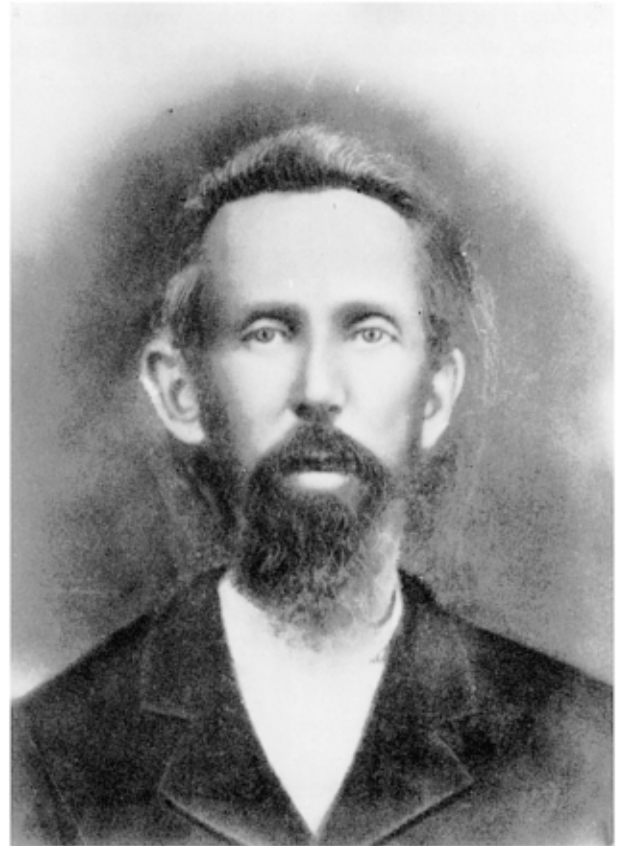
W. A. Throckmorton, with original bag and horn, Bucyrus, Crawford Co. Ohio

Thomas Madison Yerian

Guernsey Co., Ohio

Thomas Madison Yerian was born in Sharon, Ohio on 6 February 1845, and died 11 September 1928 in Cumberland, Guernsey Co., Ohio. He learned the blacksmith and gunsmith trades from his father, John Yerian. In 1873 he is listed along with John Yerian as blacksmith at Sharon. Sometime later, Thomas, or "Mad" as he was known, moved to Cumberland, Guernsey County and opened a blacksmith and wagon building shop. It seems that his main occupation was wagon making, and that his gunsmithing activities were mainly carried on when his main occupation was slack. His rifling guide is owned by a collector in Zanesville.

His rifles were principally half stocks and of a small caliber and long barrels. When I say "small caliber" I mean from .30 to .36. The majority had a "full" patchbox of 4 piece construction, with a small strip of wood between the "wings" and the lid. He built a nice, graceful rifle that was pleasing to the eye and undoubtedly ideally suited to the hunter and farmer. The large game was almost all gone this late in the century, and these rifles were mostly used for hunting small game and the killing of hogs and an occasional beef. His inlays consisted of small silver hearts, diamonds, acorns, etc. I have never observed any that were engraved; however, he did use a design known as a "chisel walk" on the top flat of the barrel similar to that of his father and half brother. I have observed rifles signed by "TMY" and "T. M. Yerian" and it is possible that he used other marks as well. A rifle made by any of



the three Yerians: John, Frederick, and Thomas, are so similar in shape and construction that at a distance they all look as if they were made by the same man. The pattern of the patchbox finial is from his father who acquired it from the "Old Master", Thomas Birkhimer. It is not known if Thomas taught anyone the trade, but his grandson Harold to this day carries on the welding, machinist and blacksmith trade in Cumberland