

Thomas Cellar Gunsmith 1740-1816



The following article was first published in the SELLERS LETTERS, a geneological publication of SIMS PUBLISHING, Box 9576, Sacramento, California. It was an old manuscript, written in the late 1800's by Sarah Cellar Wilson, and later discovered in an old trunk by a great-grand daughter of Jane Cellar. It was furnished to J. R. Sims by the late Mrs. E. E. Clark of Pasadena, California.

Hans Kellar (Celler) was a native of Germany. He was one of the King's hunters. Relics of his occupation were handed down from one generation to another: A cutlass used in killing wild hogs; a horseman's sword; and a curious fox trap.

He and a cousin of the same name emigrated to America early in the eighteenth century.

He married a lady of Scotch-Irish descent, and settled on a farm of four hundred acres near Hagerstown, Maryland. His children were named respectively: John, Joseph, Thomas, George, Hollie, Rebecca, Hannah, and Susan.

The eldest son John, married and settled in one of the southern states.

Joseph married and reared a large family. He was a famous hunter and trapper and would take his gun and traps and be gone for weeks together, hunting game in the mountains of Pennsylvania.

George married and settled on a portion of the old homestead and reared a family of sons.

The daughters married and settled in the southern states.

Thomas Cellar, the third son, was born in Washington County, Maryland in the year 1740. His boyhood was spent with his father, laboring on the farm, while a boy, a friend of his father, Jacob Hager, of Hagerstown, who was a gunsmith, gave him a gun barrel and lock. He made a stock and rigged up a gun with the material given him.

One morning he saw the sheep running in from the woods. He took his gun and went out to a thicket from whence they emerged. He found the carcass of a sheep. He imitated the bleating of a sheep so well that the wolf soon made his appearance. He shot and killed it, securing the scalp, which he sold and bought with the price a new lock for his gun.

The neighborhood soon learned of his skill in fixing up guns, and by fixing up theirs just to accommodate them, he eventually became a good gunsmith. His knowledge of this business he considered a great blessing to him years afterward when living among the Indians.

When about thirty years of age, he purchased a valley farm in Franklin County, Pennsylvania, and erected a house and mill on his place.

Soon after, he married Miss Martha McCoy a sister of Col. McCoy who was killed in the Revolutionary War.

In a few years his wife died, leaving three daughters: Margaret, Jane and Hannah. He buried his wife in the graveyard near the Presbyterian Church of Mercersburg, Pennsylvania. A few years later, he married Miss Sarah Flannegan, a cousin of Col. Crawford, who was massacred by the Indians.

By this marriage there were seven sons, one of whom died in infancy. The six remaining were named: Thomas, Robert McCoy, John Flannegan, George, James and Joseph.

As his children grew around him (Thomas Cellar), a desire to settle them as near to him as possible prompted him to sell the valley farm and buy a larger tract of land. Previous to selling, he made a journey through Ohio and Kentucky, but did not then decide where he would locate.

In the year 1800, Thomas Cellar sold his farm of 240 acres and on the twenty-first of March, he with his family and household goods started from their old home in Franklin County, Penn., and the next day while they were stopping at a tavern on Bloody Run, two land agents, Israel Ludlow and Benjamin Chambers, learning of Cellar's intention, met him there and sold to him a tract of land containing 4000 acres for \$1.30 per acre, in the North West Territory, as the State of Ohio was then called.

At Pittsburg, he put his family and household goods on board a boat and sent the horses

overland. They went down the Ohio as far as Portsmouth, and up the Scioto to Chillicothe, arriving on the twentieth of April. His son-in-law, Josiah McKinnie, and his wife were living then at Chillicothe. Here Cellar with his family remained for a short time and helped his son-in-law to plant corn.

Finding there was no settlement near his land he built a cabin on Congress land just south of the present site of Columbus, and moved into it in June. The nearest neighbors were two families living in the lower edge of Pickaway Plains, and one family below Franklinton.

He liked the location so well he thought he would buy a small tract for a homestead. (At that time the whole site of Columbus could have been purchased for two dollars an acres.)

But very soon the entire family, with the exception of John and black Joe, were sick with the ague, and continued to have it that year and the next. When they abandoned all notions of remaining longer than necessary.

In the spring of 1802 a cabin was built near the spring on what is now known as the Taggart farm (editors note: "now" meaning in 1890 when this history was written.)

They found an Indian village of seventeen huts, built on the flat at the mouth of the run on which is found the 'dripping rock'. The huts were built of small Linwood logs split in two, the bark carefully peeled off, the logs notched, and built like a cabin, with the south end open, across which they built a fire. They were

roofed with the Linwood bark, the first tier inside up, the second inverted, which covered the seams and when sundried made a tight roof. The cracks were chinked with moss. Judging by the sugar trees which had been worked, the village was built in 1799.

Shortly afterwards, the Indians removed to Sandusky, and years later returned to get the remains of a child. Thomas Cellar made them a light box in which to carry the remains away.

The Indians came from far and near to have their guns repaired, and Cellar thought their depending on him for gunsmithing was one reason why he had no serious trouble with them, aside from being obliged to give them food and lodging.

Thomas Cellar died in the year 1816. By will he had located his daughters and sons upon farms of equal size with the Olentangy flowing between them. He had seen his sons-in-law with their families established in homes of their own. (Editors Note: This probably meant he bequested the land in his will.)

This information on Thomas Cellar in Ohio is new. The only previously printed information on his gunsmithing activities is in Frank Sellers' AMERICAN GUNSMITHS, which places him in Franklin Co. Pennsylvania as a maker of rifles and muskets.□

History Of The Barnhart Rifle

By Harold A. Barnhart



In the year 1783 Matthias Barnhart, a veteran of the Northumberland County Militia during the Revolutionary War, was granted a tract of 200 acres in Buffalo Township, Northumberland County, Pennsylvania.

He had three sons, Wm. Henry Barnhart, Mattias Barnhart Jr., and Lorenzo Barnhart. After the death of their father in 1794 the oldest son, Wm. Henry Barnhart served as administrator of the estate of his father and remained in Pennsylvania to take care of his mother.

The other two brothers Matthias Jr. and Lorenzo disposed of their property in 1810 and on September 25th, 1810 started the journey overland to Ohio. They had, according to their old diary, 8,066 pounds of freight and the cost of transportation was \$10.00 per hundred pounds.

Upon arriving in Ohio Matthias settled in Springfield Township, Ross County and his brother Lorenzo settled in Green Township near Kinnikinnick.

Two of Lorenzo's sons, William and George, feeling the need of a rifle, went to Jackson County and watched an old Gunsmith, through the cracks between the logs of his shop, making a rifle. He finally noticed the boys watching him and brought them into the shop to question them. He then instructed them in making a rifle and they purchased a keg of soft iron and brought it to their home and built the first Barnhart rifle. It was not a beautiful weapon but it was very accurate and a good job considering their home-made tools.

William Barnhart placed his name on his rifles in script. He was born in 1801 and died in 1867. His son, Nehemiah Barnhart, was born in 1831 and died in 1888. He also placed his name in script on his rifles using abbreviation "N. Barnhart." At one time he traveled to Columbus, Nebraska when it was only a frontier post and made rifles there, later his shop was at Hallsville, Ohio.

George Barnhart, an elder brother of William Barnhart, was

born in 1797 and died in 1844. His name was placed on his rifle by means of a steel die, abbreviated as follows: "G. Barnhart." His son, W. Barnhart, the last of the riflemakers, was born in 1825 and died in 1891. His other son, Simon Barnhart, also made a few very nice rifles. I have seen only one, that in my collection.

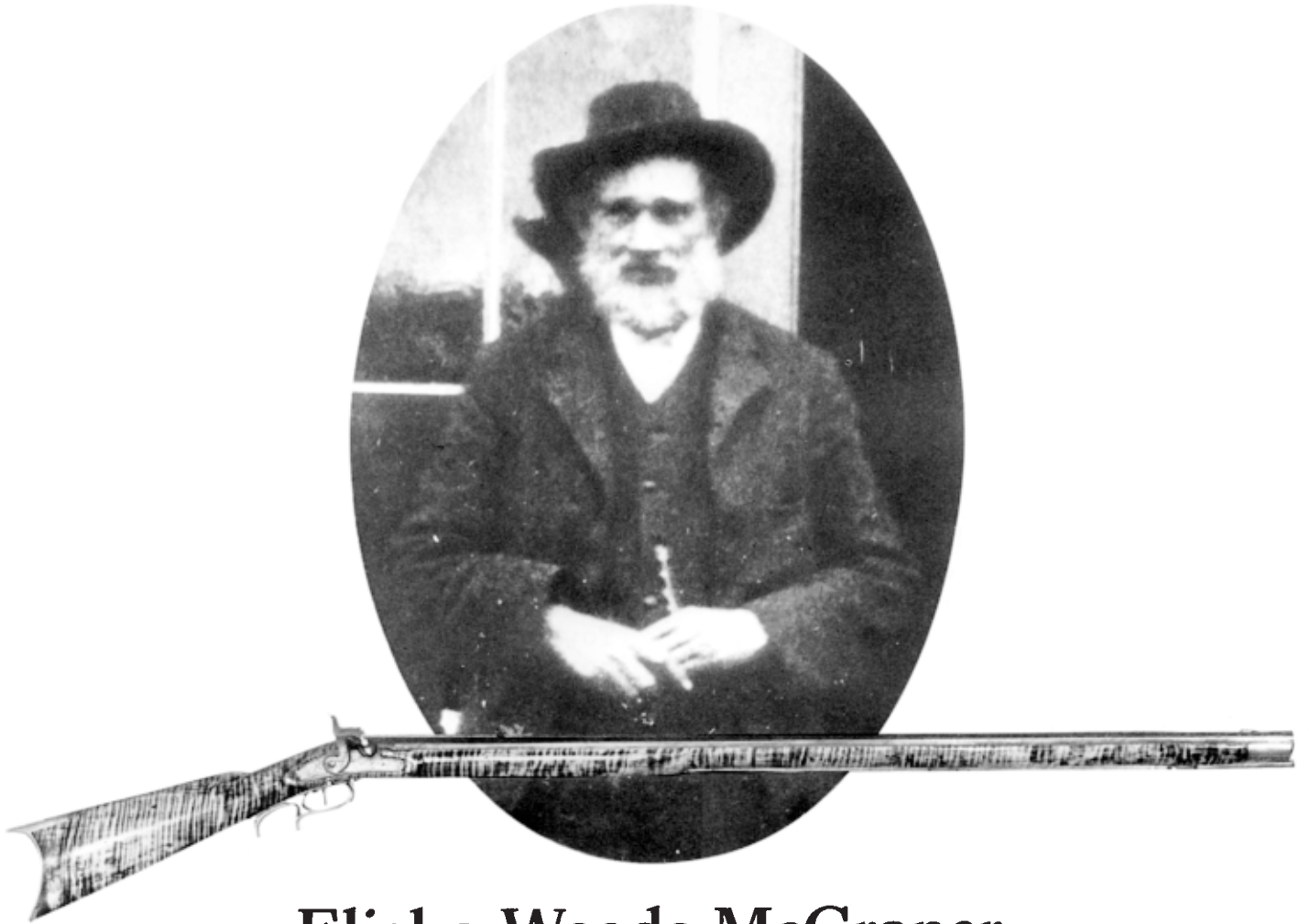
There are likely other Barnhart rifle makers but these are the only ones who made a real business of it.

A full stock rifle of each make is owned by the State Museum at Columbus, Ohio, together with the original stock pattern of old George Barnhart. Two of these rifles have been converted from flint to percussion and the others were made as percussion originally.

An almost complete set of their tools and two of the guns are on display at the Ross County Historical Society on West 5th Street, Chillicothe, Ohio.

Pictures of two of William Barnhart's rifles are listed in Captain J. G. W. Dillin's book, "The Kentucky Rifle." I do not believe that they were of Pennsylvania origin. I feel safe in stating the first of these rifles were made around 1812 and they bear a very great resemblance to the rifles made by Nathan Kile on Raccoon Creek, Jackson County, Ohio. One of his rifles is on display at the Smithsonian and is dated around 1815. It has so many of the Barnhart characteristics that I feel he must have been the old Gunsmith who instructed them in making rifles. □





Elisha Woods McCraner 1824-1903

Prepared by John C. Beirise,
Grandson and James F. Beirise,
Great Grandson

Elisha Woods McCraner, son of James H. McCraner (Carpenter, Barney & Smith Car Works) was born in Harrison County, Ohio on October 10, 1824. In early life he came to Montgomery County, Ohio. At the beginning of the Mexican War, he enlisted in the U.S. Army on the 27th of August, 1845, at Newport Barracks, Ky. According to U.S. Army records, he had the following physical description: 21 years of age, blue eyes, black hair, fair complexion, and 5 feet, 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches in height. His

trade was given as "Gunsmith". He served in the 5th Regiment of the Infantry, commanded by Col. Mackintosh and Major Scott. He engaged in the battles of Palo Alto and Resacadelapalma, the capture of Mactamaras, the battle of Monterey, the capture of Saltilo. He was in the hospital at Vera Cruz where he was discharged for disability, April 6, 1847.

He returned to Montgomery County, Ohio, where he married Miss Araminta Hager on Feb. 6, 1849. They were blessed with seven children. The family moved to Darke County, Ohio, about 1864 and in 1870 moved

with his half brother Nathan Johnson and other families to Butler County, Kansas, in pursuit of a government land grant. Their transportation was covered wagons with horses or oxen. Elisha McCraner and a portion of the family returned to Patterson Township, Darke County, Ohio, in 1878. They resided on Althoff Road south of Willowdell, Ohio. Their home was the first house on the south side off the Willowdell-Versailles Rd. (It was replaced by a modern home in 1960.) Their daughter Emma Cecilia married George Knight of Kansas and remained in Kansas.

In his early years, Elisha acquired the mechanical skill for the making of muzzle-loading rifles (powder and ball type). It is believed that many of his rifles were used in the Civil War. How many of these guns were made during his lifetime is unknown. However, several are in the possession of the Beirise family. He was considered an excellent gunsmith and marksman.

John C. Beirise remembers his mother, Amanda C. McCraner Beirise, telling about Annie Oakley's father bringing Annie to her father's (Elisha McCraner) house and asking Elisha to make a rifle for Annie. This happened when Amanda was a young girl and still living with her parents. Amanda was a few years younger than Annie. Annie Oakley and her father made several visits to check on the progress of her rifle. During these visits Amanda became well acquainted with Annie. This, of course, was prior to Annie's great fame as one of the world's greatest markswomen. When Annie retired, she came to Dayton and stayed at

the Biltmore Hotel. Henry Beirise, John's brother, took Amanda to visit Annie at the Biltmore.

Elisha Woods McCraner was also known as "Squire McCraner". He was elected Justice of the Peace in Montgomery County, Ohio, shortly after his marriage. He was also elected to this office while living in Kansas. He was elected to the same office when he returned to Patterson Township, Darke County, Ohio. He retained this office for over 25 years.

Squire McCraner lived his later years in Patterson Township. He received \$12 a month from the U.S. Government as a disability benefit from his injuries during the Mexican War and \$50 to \$70 per year from his justice of the peace position. His home and three acres of land were unincumbered, and he had a horse and a cow. In the latter portion of the 19th century this income was considered "comfortable".

After the death of his wife, Araminta Hager McCraner, on June 10, 1902, Elisha had a sale and sold all his possessions including his gunmaking equipment. A blacksmith by the name of William F. Day bought all his gunsmith tools. Day's blacksmith shop was located on East Ward St. in Versailles, Ohio. "Squire" spent his last few remaining days with his eldest daughter and son-in-law, Elizabeth and John Ringlespaugh, near Newport, Ohio.

Elisha Woods McCraner died February 4, 1903, and is buried beside his wife at the English family cemetery north of Versailles on State Route 47. □