

# Rifles At Fort Pitt

By Richard F. Rosenberger

Collectors of the American long-rifle have long been intrigued with its place on the frontier in the 18th century. Since it is the nature of the frontier to quickly consume itself and its participants, we are fortunate to have several documents survive for us to study. One such document, in the Library of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, is the Fort Pitt Day Book for 1765 - 1767 kept by the trading firm of Baynton, Wharton & Morgan. Its precisely-entered accounts tell us much about those times.

Gunsmiths Moses Henry and Thomas Butler, with Butler's sons Richard and William, were working in Pittsburgh then. The accounts list numerous transactions by these men for repair work they did and household items and clothing they purchased. Moses Henry relocated to what is now Ross County, Ohio in 1769. This entry was made in November, 1767.

This suggests that Henry manufactured the rifle, which is contrary to the long held theory that gunsmithing in the West at this time was limited to repair work. Moses Henry and the Butlers, perhaps working in partnership,, surely did a great deal of work on their own which would not be recorded in the Day Book. A count of all guns recorded as sold by Baynton, Wharton & Morgan shows only 17 rifles and two smoothbores including "9 rifles with moulds" at £42.15.0 for Captain Wm. Long. These nine guns and other equipment, including saddles, were for an "adventure to Illinois" with George Croghan, who was then the Indian Agent for Pennsylvania. Croghan had recently returned from England where he had succeeded in overturning the restrictive Indian

policy of General Amherst. He had met with the Board of Trade and received their blessing on his plan to extend English trade and influence into the Illinois country. He arrived at Fort Pitt with £1200 worth of gifts and £ 2,000 cash which he used to reopen commerce with the Western Indians.

The following entries are the only instances of guns traded directly to the Indians:

October 24, 1767

Merchandise for 1 Rifle Gun which Thomas McKee got for an Indian who paid for it in peltries to the store.

£ 12.0.0

October 29, 1767

A gun for Kyashula charged to the Crown

£ 6.5.0

This was surely Kyasuta (Guyasuta), the respected and influential Seneca who represented Iroquois authority among the local Indians.

The usual price for a rifle was £ 7.10.0. The price for a brass barrel rifle of £11.5.0 indicates that it was probably of better quality. Pictured on page 452 of "Rifles of Colonial America" by Shumway is a brass barrelled rifle of such construction. A brass gun barrel had to be cast with a cored hole, slightly smaller than the finished bore, through its full 45" length. The difficulty encountered and skill required to cast such a shape accounts for its extreme rarity. One other frontier reference to a brass barrel rifle is contained

149	The Crown Dr. To Mores, Henry		
111	for a Rifle Gun Rec <sup>d</sup> . L <sup>o</sup> for the use of the Crown in May 1767, & Charg <sup>d</sup> in that acc <sup>t</sup> . but not carried to the credit of said. Firm's place.	8	

	Fort Pitt	Aug <sup>r</sup> 20 <sup>th</sup> 1765	11
3	George Croghan Esq <sup>r</sup> Dr to Sold Merch <sup>ts</sup>		
20	Defender's and Corpse sent by him from the Indians for the use of the Crown	10 <sup>00</sup>	
	1 French Matchcoat	18 <sup>00</sup> 9	
	1 Brass Barrel Rifle	11 <sup>00</sup> 5	
	1/2 doz Muskets w <sup>th</sup> 1 lb paint 20 <sup>00</sup>	1 <sup>00</sup> 5	
	1 Puffed Shirt	1 <sup>00</sup>	
	21 <sup>00</sup>		14 <sup>00</sup> 8 <sup>00</sup> 9

130	Shannon's Town Store for a Rifle	£9.7.6
	Gun Sold Mr Kennedy 25 Bucks	
30	Merchandise for a Gun	1.10
1	Cash Paid of him	15
		11.12.6

in Jones "History of the Juniata Valley". In August, 1778, William Moor and Geo. McCartney, a boy of about 14, were searching for two lost horses when Moor was shot dead by an Indian who then chased young McCartney. McCartney had his rifle with him and turned and fired at his pursuer, wounding him. "The body of the Indian

was found some time afterward, up Kittaning Run. His rifle, which was kept at Fetter's (Fort) as a trophy was a brass-barreled smooth-bore with the British coat of arms stamped upon it."

The Day Book also listed transactions by the firm at other locations.

This entry gives us a good idea of the price structure. Elsewhere we find that a pound of tobacco sold for two shillings, and a gallon of rum for ten. Rum was far and away the most popular item. The firm charged four shillings per man per day to transport freight by Batteau. They purchased 20 turkeys for two pounds and a carcass of venison for six shillings.

The Day Book entries show extensive Indian trade for the period from March, 1765, through August, 1765. During these six months the Indians and Indian traders purchased 293 pints of gunpowder, 577 bars of lead, 132 gun flints and five gun locks. The following Spring, King Beaver of the Delaware traded deer skins and furs for goods including 164 pints of gunpowder, 210 bars of lead, 500 gun flints, 6 dozen and three large cuttoes, 8 dozen pen knives and one tomahawk pipe among other items. Later book entries deal chiefly with the garrison and civilian employees showing only occasional Indian trade. The firm of Baynton Wharton & Morgan remained in business until about 1771 when they sold out to the Lancaster firm of Franks & Company.

A companion ledger to the Day Book is in the Darlington Memorial Library at the University of Pittsburgh. Known as "The Waste Book", it is a detailed account of Indian trade at Fort Pitt for the period from June, 1759, through May, 1760. It was November, 1758, when the French forces burned Fort Duquesne and withdrew leaving the Ohio to General Forbes army. Even though construction of Fort Pitt was not completed until 1761, and the treaty ending the French and Indian war was

not signed until 1763, Indian trading at "the Forks of the Ohio" was brisk. The Delaware, Shawnee, Mingo and Wyandot traded over £4,290 worth of skins in this twelve-month period. They included 10,352 deer skins, 633 beaver, 278 bear and 3,902 raccoons, plus numerous other species. It is interesting to note that they received lead and gun flints among the trade goods but no guns or gunpowder, which were forbidden at that time.

Also in the Darlington Library is a vendue list for an auction held in Philadelphia August 4, 1764 for the Pennsylvania Department of Indian Affairs. This list of goods matched very closely the items mentioned in the trade ledgers but also includes such articles as powder canisters, scales and weights, and an inkstand. These latter items suggest that the auction liquidated the complete stock of a trader or trading post. Perhaps the Department of Indian Affairs had confiscated the stock of a trader who had gotten into legal or financial trouble.

The first items on the list are of special interest to collectors.

Note that the most expensive rifle sold for £2.3.0 in Philadelphia, while the average price in Pittsburgh was £7.10.0.

The complete sale grossed £124.12.3 from which the auctioneers, E.E. Magee and Sanderson took £3.1.0 commission.

The freight receipt indicates that the currency medium was that of the State of Pennsylvania, not the British Pound. □

Sales & H. Proceeds & Vendue of Goods for Indian Affairs Sept. 1764

1	Rifl Gun		Henry Debinger	1	14	v
1	d°		d°	1	17	v
1	d°		d°	2	3	v
8	Prind Gun Lockes	@ 2 <sup>s</sup>	Rev. Parker		15	4
8	d°	2/7	W <sup>m</sup> Carr	1		8
4	d°	7 <sup>s</sup>	W <sup>m</sup> Humble		2	v
4	Indian Shirts	8/9	Rev Parker	1	15	v
1130 Gun Flint & 1. P. 300. Prophire			Bitte	1	1	v
8	Doz: & 8 Blk: Spring Knives	3/9	W <sup>m</sup> Carr	1	12	4
6	Doz:	5/5	Ben Shippard	1	12	6
No. 11	1 Doz: & 10	d°	5/8 James Hunter		9	16
12	1 Doz: & 3	d°	5/6 Cash		6	10
13	6 Doz: Sagg Cutters	3/9	Fred Ludwick	1	9	6
	7 Doz: & 5	d°	3/11 To Coffman	1	9	5
	1 Doz: Large d°	10	Willm Appalby		7	v

This is to Certifie that we are indebted to Mr Robert Culbertson in the Sum of  
 Thirty Pounds Pennsylvania Currency it being for the Carriage of a Waggon load  
 of Goods from hence to Fort Pitt Wighing <sup>10 or 11</sup> 30.0.0 a 40/ per which Goods he  
 Received from us the 20<sup>th</sup> September 1764

Raynton Wharton Morgan  
 Philad June 1<sup>st</sup> 1768

£30.0.0

# John Owens

In 1747 and 1748 John Owens was listed as an unlicensed trader from Chester County. On 28 May 1751 he was reported to be an Indian trader operating in the Ohio territory in or near Logstown. In 1754 he was a guide to George Croghan at Aughwick. In 1758 he was a guide and interpreter in the army of General Forbes, moving on Ft. Duquesne. (Bausman, History of Beaver County II, 978; 5 Col Rec 532 & 536; 6 Col Rec 160; 1 Pa Arch 2 at 14).

John was a brother and sometimes partner of David Owens. The latter is infamous for having killed and scalped his Indian wife, his brothers-in-law and even his own small children to sell their scalps after Pennsylvania enacted the infamous bounty on Indian scalps. Both brothers were notorious for having deserted from William Johnson's militia in New York, and for having cheated the Indians, sold them whiskey in contravention of the law, and debauched the

women after the men were intoxicated with overpriced, watered down rum. (see Francis Parkman, Conspiracy of Pontiac, II, 2147; Loudon, Indian Wars, II, 177)

Most frontier traders were gun smiths at least to the extent that they could repair the cheap trade guns they sold at highly inflated prices to the Indians. That John Owens was a trader, and perhaps somewhat more skilled and better equipped than most traders is shown by the losses of equipment in the French and Indian Wars. Owens reported that he had smith tools and iron and steel "which I was obliged to leave behind when they (French) came down and took possession of the Ohio River." Owens valued his tools and iron and steel lost at 30 British pounds. His total losses, mostly in horses, came to 1040 pounds, 6 shillings and 9 pence. (see S.K. Bailey (ed.) The Ohio Company Papers, pp. 150-51) □

Jim Whisker

# Nathan Downey

By William Courtney Martin II

Nathan Downey, born in Beaver County, Pennsylvania, December 18, 1833, was the son of an Irish immigrant, probably also a gunsmith, for this art was one which required a long period as apprentice, and was more often than not handed down from father to son. As a young man, Nathan Downey went West settling first in Scioto County, Ohio, where he carried on his trade and in 1859 married Elizabeth Dewey. After her death a year later, he moved to Jackson and set up what became the town's most celebrated gunsmith's shop. Here he married Sidney Stephenson, member of a well known Jackson County family. Two of their six children are still living; John, an attorney of Washington, D.C., and Bessie who lives in Columbus, Ohio. Of the six, but one son, Will, followed his father's profession, working in the Downey shop until his death.

Nathan Downey was accounted quite a character. He was very religious, and for years was a "pillar" of the Methodist Church. As a teetotaler in an age when whiskey was an almost universal drink, Nathan Downey carried a small cask of water to work with him every morning. Numerous stories are told of his independence in dealing with customers, and of his reserve and dignity. He tolerated no roughness or horseplay about his shop. During the Civil War Nathan Downey served with the 2nd Ohio Heavy Field Artillery for a period of two years and nine months.

The first Downey shop was located back of the Court House, behind the old Methodist Church on Portsmouth Street (called "Rat Row" in the early Salt

Boiling Days of Jackson). This shop was small and cluttered with guns left to be repaired, rebored or rebuilt. Next, the shop was moved to Main Street in the building next to the Iron Bank. Later it was located farther up Main Street on the present site of Summers & Son Music Store. After Downey's health started to break, he moved to a shop on Church Street back of the present Ford Building on the lot now occupied by the L. W. Dever home.

The characteristic Downey muzzle loading rifle was a half stock, 30 calibre gun, 54½ inches over all, weighing 9½ pounds, and carrying an octagon Remington barrel 38 inches long. The gun was furnished with double-set triggers, a walnut or curly maple stock, with brass butt plate, trigger guard and front sight, and an iron open rear sight. Some of the locks he purchased from a man named Willis of Pittsburg. Downey also made all kinds of fire-arms. The average gun required two weeks to complete. The Downey tools used were mostly of his own manufacture, for he was a skilled metal worker and mechanic. On his work bench were handmade bow drills, vises, hammers, dies and wood working tools. Ed Kellar, a Jackson mechanic, tells a story of how he, as a boy, used to hang out at the Downey gunsmithy and tried to hire the old man to teach him his secret process of metal fusion which Downey refused to reveal. The boy finally learned what he sought, coming into the shop unexpectedly and witnessing the process while Downey was working. Mr. Kellar has kept his secret to himself. Another story is told of a

circus showing in Jackson in which one of the clowns, using a handcuff trick, was unable to unlock the jammed cuffs, whereupon Downey was called in and easily removed them.

Most of the Downey guns now in shooting condition have been re-bored to .32 or to a .38 calibre. Specimens owned in Jackson at the present are in the collections of J. J. McKitterick, Dr. Harrison Shumate (who owns a rare, full length Downey stock), Harry Johnson, and others. The Downey rifle is eagerly sought by collectors of muzzle loaders, and in every way reflects credit on this fine artisan.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR . . .

William Courtney Martin II is a life-long resident of Jackson, Ohio, and is a direct descendant of "Salt Boiler" John Martin who was the first permanent white resident of the Scioto Salt Works, which is now the city of Jackson, Ohio. John Martin located there in 1796, thus establishing the oldest family in Jackson County.

The article, Nathan Downey, was written for and first published in "MUZZLE BLASTS" the

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Respectfully submitted with Mr. Martin's approval,

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