



Golcher Gunsmiths



By Jim Whisker

In my experience about half of the guns made from 1840 onward are mounted with Golcher locks. All sorts of bizarre spelling variations are encountered, possibly because corroded locks made reading difficult. It is also possible that some enterprising Belgian or English arms manufactory created a trade name that appeared to be Golcher, with a clear intent to deceive.

It is almost standard to say that Golcher was an importer of English or Belgian made locks, with the added observation that Golcher may have placed contracts for bids, allowing small manufactories in all nations to bid competitively. Thus, some Golcher locks may have been made in each European nation. The evidence, especially from the U. S. Census of Industry, suggests that Golcher manufactured many, perhaps all, locks bearing his name.

The first mention we have of the Golcher name in the history of gunmaking in American is one **Thomas Golcher**, an arms contractor during the Revolutionary War era. His shop between 1774 and 1777 was located on Market St., Philadelphia. On 13 January 1776 Gunsmiths Golcher, Dunwick and Kinder approached the Committee of Safety, asking for advances each to set up gun manufacturing equipment. On 17 January 1776 the Committee of Safety awarded a contract for Firelocks to Golcher, advancing him £50, for which he was to supply, without additional cost, 35 stands of arms. By 27 February 1776 Golcher had completed the mandated 35 stands of muskets. On 25 June 1776 Thomas was paid £30 for disclosing to the Committee of Safety his art of grinding and boring gun barrels. On 22 February 1777 Golcher was awarded a contract for 300 gun barrels at 28 shillings each; and "while iron continues at £60 per ton" all future

deliveries of gun barrels would be made at 30 shillings each.

We know no more of this man, and his name does not appear in lists of gunsmiths and allied tradesmen in Philadelphia after the war. Neither is there any way to say if he was related to the better known gunmakers of this name.

James Golcher (I) (-1805) was noted as a gunsmith with a shop at 2nd and Poplar Sts., Philadelphia also during the First War for Independence. James Golcher came from New York about 1755 and worked until about 1774. He made a gun for George Washington, now in the Valley Forge Museum. Reportedly, James had a brother Joseph Golcher, also involved in the arms trade.

James Golcher (II) was noted in Philadelphia between 1844 and 1860 as the proprietor of the Eagle Gun Works, of which more later. The U. S. Census of 1850: showed James Golcher, 40, gunsmith; his wife Ann, 38; and these children: William, 16; Mary, 12; Ann, 10; Thomas, 8, all born in England; James, 6, Sarah, 2, born in U. S. Despite Colonel Gardner's listing of James Golcher in Philadelphia beginning in 1841, the Census clearly shows us that Golcher remained in the United Kingdom until at least 1842, based on the birth of a child there in that year. With a child born in the U.S.A. in 1844 we know that he had settled here by that year. It is possible, but I consider it highly improbable, that he commuted back and forth, with Ann remaining in the U.K. and James visiting obviously periodically.

In James' and Ann's household, we find living with the Golcher family three English born gunsmiths: Samuel Lingard, 24, gunsmith; William Dunn, 18, gunsmith; Harrison Slater,

30, gunsmith, all born in England. One guess is that one of these men might be Ann's brother, and perhaps the others were somehow related as well, but that is pure speculation.

What we do know is that these three gunsmiths were not James Golcher's only employees. The U.S. Census of Industry for 1850 shows us a medium size manufactory. In 1850 Golcher reported that he had a capital investment of \$2000. Over the previous 12 months he had bought 20 tons of iron for \$1600; 4000 pounds of steel for \$760 and miscellaneous parts for \$500; and they made 600 dozen gunlocks valued at \$3600 and made 500 guns valued at \$3500.

George W. Golcher was noted as a gunsmith between 1880 and 1882, at 1934 Frankford Ave.; and between 1882 and 1894 at 2032 Frankford Ave., Philadelphia. He may have been the third generation of his family to work at the gunsmith's trade although it is obvious that he was active before 1882. He was noted as a "Gun and Pistol Maker," but primarily was engaged in making gunlocks.

Thomas I. Golcher, probably the son Thomas whose age was given as 8 in 1850, was a noted gunsmith, between 1880 and 1886 116 W. Girard St., Philadelphia.

William Golcher (-1915) was an arms manufacturer in Philadelphia. William was a son of the younger James Golcher, noted as 16 years of age in the U.S. Census of 1850. Before 1890 he was a gunsmith at Girard St. near 4th St. After 1890 he was a superintendent at the Philadelphia Naval Yard.

Whether the other sons of James Golcher the Younger entered the trade is unknown. None appears in the Philadelphia directories as a gunsmith or arms maker.

The Eagle Rifle Works was active from about 1844 until at least 1851 as a major gun manufactory. It was owned and operated by James Golcher in the 2d Ward of the Kensington district of Philadelphia County. In 1850 Golcher reported a \$2000 capital investment. He employed 17 men with a monthly payroll of

\$350. In the past 12 months the plant made 500 guns valued at \$3500 and 600 dozen gun locks valued at \$3600. It bought 20 tons of iron at a cost of \$1600 and 400 pounds of steel at a cost of \$760; and various parts and other materials at a cost of \$500.

It is my belief that all, or nearly all, whole guns manufactured by the family and employees of James Golcher the Younger bear the Eagle stamping. Conversely, even guns otherwise unmarked bear only the Golcher name on the gunlocks were made by unknown cottage industry gunsmiths.

I have seen only a few Golcher flint locks. Certainly there was never a time after the introduction of the cap lock that someone somewhere in the United States was not making flintlock guns. The sales of flint locks after James Golcher arrived at Philadelphia would have been small, but still sufficient to warrant their manufacture.

Shelby Gallien has access to family records that suggest an earlier date for James Golcher (II)'s arrival in the United States, but an earlier date than 1842 is contradicted by the U.S. Census data. Mr. Gallien also suggested Golcher learned his trade in Birmingham. Some insist they possess guns made before 1842 that are mounted with Golcher locks. It is of course possible that Golcher arranged to sell Birmingham made locks through some U.S. supplier before 1842.

In Search of Asa McClelland



By Richard F. Rosenberger

Asa McClelland worked as a gunsmith in Waynesburg, Green County, Pa from 1798 until 1835. He was the son of William McClelland (1764-1833) who was a gunsmith in Uniontown, Fayette County, Pa from 1785 through 1798 and later owned and operated the "Spread Eagle" tavern on Lot No. 7 Uniontown.

Three other sons of William were also gunsmiths in the Monongahela Valley. Andrew worked from 1809 until 1825; Enos from 1802 until 1813 and in 1799 son David is listed in the tax lists in Waynesburg, probably with Asa. There are no guns known to the author signed by any member of the McClelland family. The best clue we have to Asa's work is through his apprentice James Teaff, who left Asa in 1814. Examples of Teaff's work are well known among Ohio longrifle collectors.

We see from newspaper advertisements that two years after leaving Asa, James Teaff took over the shop and tools of James Ross in Steubenville, Ohio. James Ross relocated to Steubenville from Fredericktown, Washington County, Pa in 1803. James Ross' brothers Elijah and William were also gunsmiths in the Monongahela Valley. Elijah moved to Zanesville, Ohio in 1813. Teaff may have worked with James Ross after leaving Asa McClelland. James Teaff was one of the finest of the early Ohio gunmakers. He preferred to use the elaborate "Monongahela Valley" patchbox which in a slightly simplified form, evolved into what is known today as the "National Road" box – the most popular box by far for top quality Ohio rifles. Teaff's architecture, engraving and overall quality place him among the best of the early western gunmakers.

Teaff's guns are signed in script, often on a silver inlay on the barrel. There exist several unsigned rifles attributed to Teaff based on their similarity to his work. Why would Teaff have signed some of his best guns but not others? Asa McClelland worked in Waynesburg, Pa for 37 years, yet we have never seen a gun signed by him. He probably did not sign his guns. It is very likely that the unsigned "Teaff" rifles are, in fact, the work of Asa McClelland.

Working in close proximity to the McClelland and Ross families was James McCammant and his son John. James is first taxed as a gunsmith in Washington, Pa in 1797 and from 1807 to 1825 in Wellsburg, Brooke County (West) Virginia. Brooke County is located in the northern panhandle of West Virginia between Washington Co. Pa and Ohio. About 1838 James McCammant moved from Wellsburg to Perry County Ohio and then to Coshocton County Ohio and back to Perry

Six Cents Reward.

I WILL give the above reward, but no charges, to any person, who will bring back to me in Waynesburgh, Greene county, (Penn.) a certain JAMES TAFF, an apprentice to the gun smith business, who ran away the beginning of the present month. All persons, are forbid harboring him at their peril.

ASSA M'CLELLAND,
Waynesburgh, (16) 22, Aug. 1814.

A newspaper ad from *The Reporter*
(Washington, Pa, August 22, 1814)
linking Asa McClelland to James Teaff.

County where he was located in the 1850 census. He gave his age as 73. We then lose James in public records. James's son John also worked in Wellsburg from 1833 through 1850. Their guns are of equally high quality and are similar to Teaff's.

The above mentioned gunsmiths, plus several more were located in close proximity to the National Road (present day U.S. 40) from the Monongahela River to the Ohio River at a time when it was the major highway west. It is unfortunate that many of these men did not sign their work. They were "Golden Age" gunsmiths and had a strong influence on the many Ohio and Western Pennsylvania gunmakers who followed.

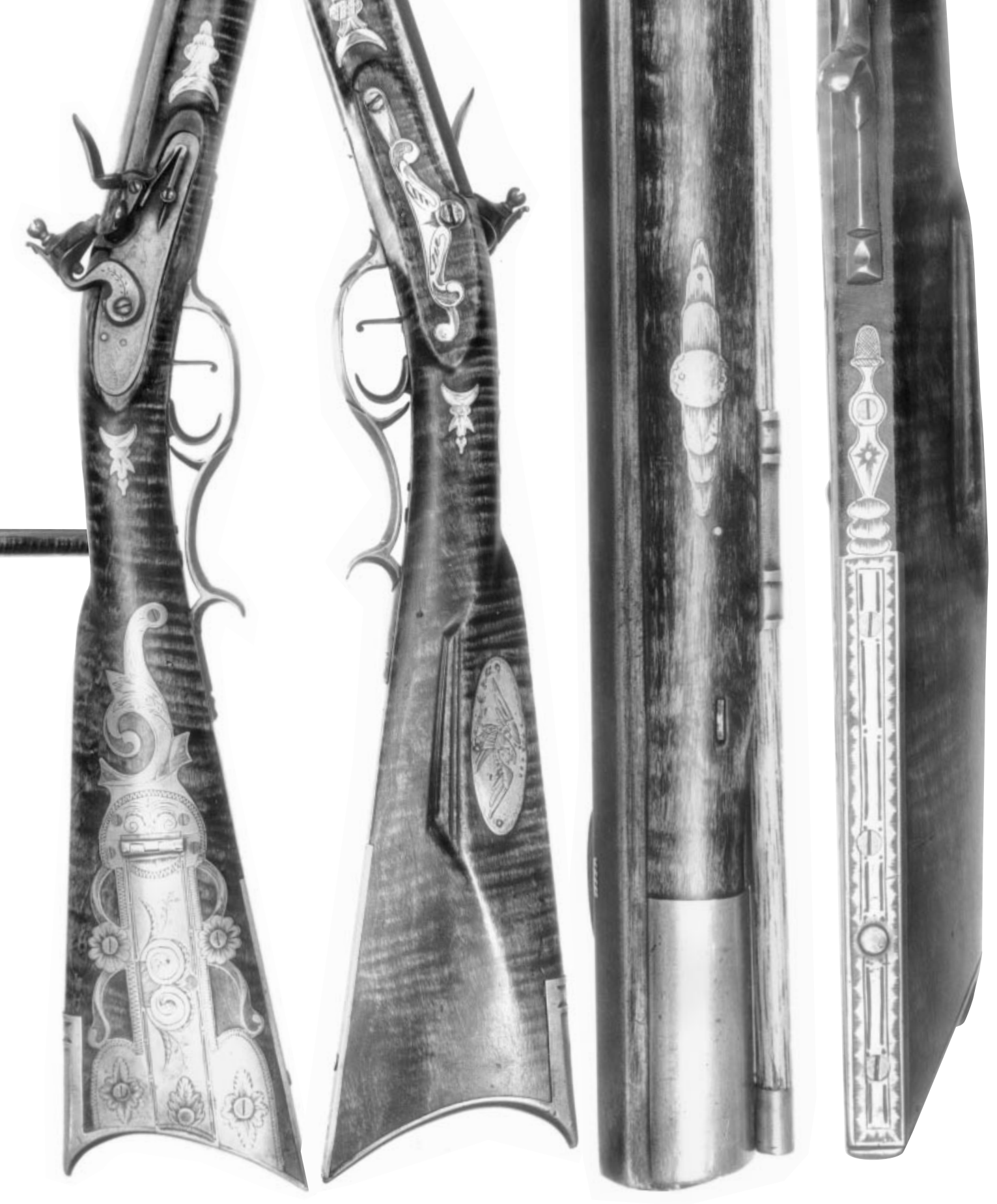


BRASS AND COPPER.
THE HIGHEST PRICE
IN CASH,
Will be given for old Brass and
Copper, by
JAMES TEAFF,
GUNSMITH,
THIRD STREET; STEUBENVILLE.
July, 25--18

A newspaper ad from *The Western Herald* and *Steubenville Gazette* (Steubenville, Oh, July 25, 1818) indicating Teaff's move from Greene County.

JAMES TEAFF,
GUNSMITH,
INFORMS the public, that he has purchased the Tools, and rented the Shop, late the property of James Ross, deceased, and has commenced the **GUN SMITH BUSINESS,**
In all its various Branches.
 He intends keeping for sale, an assortment of new Rifle Barrels, and will make Guns of every description, repair old ones, &c. upon reasonable terms.
 A generous price will be given for old Brass and Copper.
 Two Journeymen, of sober habits, would meet with employment at the above business, by applying soon.
 Steubenville, October 11 31.

A newspaper ad from *The Western Herald* (Steubenville, Oh, October, 11, 1816) linking James Teaff with James Ross.



A fine fullstock flintlock from the work bench of
Gunsmith James Teaff, Jefferson Co. Ohio



Jacob Saylor, 1737-1800 Pickaway County, Ohio Gunsmith

By Jim Whisker

There are many sources of information that the diligent researcher must consult in finding gunsmiths and filling in the details of their lives. One interesting source of information on early tradesmen is the records of the Daughters of the American Revolution. From these I have located one of Ohio's earliest gunsmiths.

Jacob Saylor, a son of Henry Saylor, was born in Berks County, Pennsylvania. He moved to Bedford County, Pennsylvania, about 1765. He purchased 100 acres of land about four miles north of Bedford Town by warrant in 1767. He operated a saw mill and a grist mill. He was also a harness maker.

Jacob Saylor was first located as a gunsmith in what is today Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. On 11 September 1775 Jacob Saylor, gunsmith, bought a parcel of land in Pittsburgh under a Virginia deed, from Andrew Robinson, a tailor, for 47/7/1. [R. W. Loveless, ed. *Records of the District of West Augusta, Virginia* [1970], pp. 313-14.] He may have been working as an armourer at Fort Pitt.

In 1776 he purchased lot 149 in Bedford. The lot had an excellent spring on it. During the Revolutionary War it is said that he supplied clean water from it to the troops that marched by. He was private first class in Captain Samuel Davidson's Company, Bedford County Associators, during the Revolution. His name appeared on a militia roster in Davidson's company dated 22 March 1776. He also served in Captain William McCall's company, Third Battalion, Bedford County Militia. Jacob and Elizabeth Saylor had issue: Jacob (1778-); John (1780-); Henry (1782-); Micah (1787-); David (1788); Elizaabeth Whetzel; Catherine Herring; Mary Lutz and Sarah Lutz.

At the opening of the Revolution, Saylor moved to Bedford boro. In 1776 he was taxed 6 cents as a gunsmith, with 1 lot and 1 cow. In 1779 he owned 4 cows, 1 house, 2 horses and 1 sheep and paid a county tax of ,0/2/6 and a state tax ,1/6/6. In 1785 he was appointed to serve as a county auditor and was called "Jacob Saylor, Esquire" on the tax list. He then owned 300 acres of land. In 1788, the last years he was listed on the tax roll of Bedford County, he owned a tract of 100 acres. On 21 May 1780 the state paid Saylor ,22/8/16 for repairing local militia arms [3 *Pa. Archives* 7 at 25].

We assume that Jacob Saylor is the unnamed gunsmith noted in the documents reproduced below.

Commissioners and Assessors of Bedford County to the Committee of Safety, Bedford, 9 February 1776. GENTLEMEN, we received your letter of the 12th December in which you called upon us to inform you what progress we had made in providing a number of firelocks, not less than one hundred, &c. In this very critical situation of affairs, we would give you a report of what has been done to the present. We have but one gunsmith in this area, and we have already engaged him to make 25 firelocks. He has been employed these past three or four months, but has not gotten any one of them completed. We are in hopes that he will soon have 25 finished. He has been very industrious to procure assistants or journeymen in order to undertake the whole, but cannot obtain any. And we have also endeavoured to obtain others in adjacent counties, but are informed they are already engaged. We have provided leather and have employed a saddle-maker to make cartridge boxes agreeable to the pattern sent us, and will take every necessary step in our power to have the whole order completed. By Order of the

Commissioners and Assessors, DAVID ESPY,
Clerk.

Pennsylvania Council of Safety, 1 April 1776,
Mr. Bernard Dougherty, having represented it as
impracticable for the Commissioners and
Assessors of Bedford County, from this great
distance to contract with workman, for making
the number of muskets as ordered by the
Assembly. Resolved that he be authorized to
contract with workmen in any of the back
Counties for completing the Number of arms.

[4 *American Archives* 5 at 733]

Pennsylvania Council of Safety, 3 June 1776
Upon application of Bernard Dougherty,
Esquire, for sum of money for the payment of
Firelocks engaged by him for the use of Bedford
County, agreeable to the Resolve of this Board,
of the first of April last, by the order of the
Board, an order was drawn in favour of Michael
Hillegass, Esquire, for, 150 for that purpose.

[*American Archives* 6 at 1278]

Jacob Saylor moved to Pickaway
Township, Pickaway County, Ohio, about 1788.
He died there on 21 September 1800. He was
buried at the Boggs Cemetery [Ohio D. A. R.
*Offical Roster of the Soldiers of the American
Revolution Buried in the State of Ohio* [1938, II,
p.305].

It may be noted that there was a Jacoab Saylor of
"Three Hills Farm," Summit Township,
Somerset County, and a War of 1812 veteran, a
tinsmith of Somerset boro.

Decades ago I saw a crude musket,
possibly dating to the Revolutionary War era,
signed on the lock J S that may have been
Saylor's work. I most seriously doubt that a
Jacob Saylor gun will ever be located, although
we cannot discount that possibility entirely.
Still, Saylor is among Ohio's earliest settled
gunsmiths, having migrated, lived, and died
there even before Ohio achieved statehood.

James B. Whisker