



**Henry Humbarger
Gunmaker of Perry Co. Ohio
and Whitley Co. Indiana**

By Shelby Gallien

**PART ONE: Henry Humbarger and His
Gunsmithing Family**

The Humbarger family of gunsmiths from Perry County, Ohio, is well known among collectors, and a significant number of rifles have survived to provide evidence of their craftsmanship and close working relationships among family members. The three generations of "Peters" are the best known family members, but were not the most inventive or creative Humbargers; that honor must go to brothers Adam and Henry, and Henry was apparently the more mechanically gifted of the two. Unfortunately, minimal information has been available on Henry's life and gunmaking activities, but new documentation has been found on Henry Humbarger/Humbarger in Whitley County, Indiana, where he spent his last years between 1851 and his death in 1857. The Indiana records help fill gaps in his gunmaking career, as well as that of his gunsmithing assistant and nephew, Adam Humbarger II.

Henry Humbarger was born on August 29, 1811, to Peter Humbarger

Sr. and his wife Mary of Perry County, Ohio. Peter Sr., or I, had been a gunsmith in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania between 1774 and 1791; around 1802 Peter moved his family to Ohio, and was followed by brothers John and Henry. Peter purchased land in Thorn Township of Perry County in 1803, with the deed recorded in 1806. He built a house and then settled down to farm, make guns and raise a family.

It is not the intent of this article to clarify the Humbarger "family tree" for early generations; however, Indiana records provide new information on the Ohio Humbargers, and such information is included to expand the general knowledge of the Humbarger family. Of particular value are the estate papers of Jacob Humbarger, son of Peter Sr. and brother to Henry. Jacob died in Whitley County, Indiana, in 1859. The distribution of estate assets listed his brothers and sisters along with

the names of brother Henry's children. Jacob's estate papers are examined in PART TWO: The Humbarger Estate Papers of Whitley County, Indiana.

Henry Humbarger was one of twelve children born to Peter and Mary Humbarger; some sources give fewer children but are probably in error. Sons included Peter II (1795-1852) born in Pennsylvania, and John (1803-1846), Adam (1806-1865), Henry (1811-1857), Jacob (1812-1859), David and Benjamin all born in Perry County, Ohio. Daughters were Margaret, Mary, Katharine, Hannah and Susan. Three sons followed their father's profession of gunsmithing; they were Peter II, Adam and Henry. In early adulthood these three sons all lived in Perry County and often worked together on gun-related projects, in particular where innovation was required. A documented example was their joint effort in 1832 to design and build a revolving pistol with double action trigger mechanism. Henry was then only 20 years old but already considered the best mechanic among them by older brothers Peter II and Adam. On October 1, 1903, the Thornville News printed a story on the Humbergers; the following paragraphs are extracted from that article:

"Peter No.2 and his brother Adam who died in Somerset and Henry were gunsmiths. Peter 3rd, his son who died in recent years, gave me an interesting history of the revolving pistol. He told me that he well remembered when he was a young man that Adam, Henry and his father Peter II met in his father's shop on the Peter Humbarger Farm in Hope-well to hold a consultation about making a double-action trigger. He distinctly remembered that Adam and Peter appointed Henry for the task, as he in their estimation, was the finest workman of the three. This confer-

ence was held in the spring of 1832. Henry completed the double-action and made a great many of the so-called pepperbox revolvers the same year. Mike King told me the same thing, that Henry made the revolver, and the first time he ever heard one discharged was at a log raising at the old Mike King farm.

"After the raising was completed they hoisted Henry and while they had him up he raised both hands with a revolver in each, and fired them off alternately, now one and then the other. His friends urged him to apply for a patent for it. His reply was that it amounted to nothing except to shoot off New Years. When he was working on a gun anyone could visit his shop and watch the progress he was making. Colt, of New York, heard of the revolver Henry Humbarger had made and sent one of the workmen out of his shop to Somerset, who bought of Wm. Brown one of the original pepperboxes for Colt. He also visited the shop and watched the progress of the work, then almost completed. When this workman, who was very shrewd and a fine workman, returned to Colt it did not take them long to finish a gun on Henry's model and apply for a patent.

"Then the manufacture of the Colt revolver went on until some difficulty arose between Colt and his agent. The agent claimed one-half of the proceeds on the sale of these guns and Colt refused. The agent then quit Colt's shop and went to work for another gunsmith by the name of Allen. After he had told Allen how Colt had obtained his patent, Allen and he went to work manufacturing the same gun. This brought on a lawsuit between Colt and Allen for infringement. At the lawsuit both Henry and Adam were

witnesses. The result was, as Colt had first applied for the patent, it belonged to him although it was proven and Henry was honored as the true inventor."

Some sources claim that Adam Humberger, Henry's brother, was primarily responsible for the development of a double action revolving pistol. After examining all information and the sources for each, it is the author's opinion that the article in the Thornville News gives the most accurate and objective account of the matter. However, both Adam and Peter II were involved with Henry, and probably made revolving guns themselves after Henry's successful model.

Henry Humberger learned the trade of gunsmithing from his father, Peter Sr. or Peter I, and worked in his father's shop after reaching adulthood. He became an exceptionally skillful mechanic as evidenced by his double action pepper box revolver, and was accomplished as a blacksmith based on the extensive list of blacksmithing tools in his estate inventory of February 19, 1858. He also practiced cabinet making part time. The 1903 Thornville News article previously cited documented Henry as a cabinet maker, stating that he built a pipe organ for the Lutheran Church in Somerset, Ohio. But gunsmithing appeared to always be his primary occupation.

In the late 1830's Henry married Mary Magdalene King and they had a son, Reuben, born about 1838. Mary died in 1840, and was buried in Zion Ridge Cemetery in Thorn Township, Perry County. Her gravestone reads: "Mary Magdalene, consort of Henry Humberger, who departed this life aged 23 years 11 days, Feb. 19, 1840." On September 7, 1849, Henry purchased 160 acres of land in Whitley County,

Indiana, from Ohio neighbor and in-law Michael King. Later that year Henry caught gold rush fever as it swept the nation and headed west to California with thousands of others to make his fortune. Henry returned from the gold fields to Ohio in 1851, and soon after moved permanently to Whitley County, Indiana. Whitley County was heavily settled by Ohioians during the 1830's and 1840's, and Thorncreek Township was particularly preferred by citizens of Perry County, Ohio; one of the first settlers was an Isaac Hunbarger. Along with the Humbergers came the Kings, Egolfs and Hivelys. Thorncreek Township was apparently named to remind them of Thorn Township and Thornville back in Ohio. It must also be noted that when the Humbergers moved to Indiana, virtually all changed their name to Humberger, using an "a" instead of an "e", although from time to time they would use the spellings interchangeably. Indiana records reflect this change, and therefore the "Humberger" spelling will be used when Indiana family members are referred to.

Soon after settling in Indiana, Henry Humberger married Sara Hyre Imes, a widow. She was originally from Ohio, and her husband had gone to California during the 1849 gold rush and died of typhoid. Sara moved to Whitley County to live with relatives following her husband's death, and there she met and married Henry Humberger. They lived on Henry's 160 acres of rolling farm land, located several miles northeast of Columbia City, the county seat. Henry's son Reuben by his first marriage lived with them, and Sara apparently had two small children from her prior marriage as well, based on 1860 census listings for a nine year old boy, James, and a girl of eight, Almedia. Two

additional children were born to Henry and Sara, sons Loren/Lauren and Henry, Jr. Henry worked as a gunsmith in Whitley County, becoming the best known in the area. He also farmed and worked as a blacksmith and cabinet maker. A debtor's note signed by Henry just twenty days before he died is shown in Illustration No. 1; it carries the original signature of Henry Humbarger.

Henry prospered but unfortunately lived only six years in Indiana, dying on December 31, 1857. An estate document may explain Henry's somewhat premature death at age 46. A bill from Doctor D. G. Linville of Columbia City for services between April 11, 1856 and December 3, 1857 listed two entries for "digetallis & Pills," which were probably heart medications. He apparently died of a heart attack, as suggested by the description of his death in the previously cited 1903 Thornville News article:

"He (Henry) still worked at his trade, and one day he finished a gun and retired as usual for the night. Towards morning his wife found him cold in death, with his little boy resting on his arm."

His "little boy" was Lauren, who was an infant at the time of Henry's death.

*\$327 December the 11. A.D. 1857
 Thirty days after the date i do promise to pay Solomon
 waspack or Daniel Stinky in. to the sum of three
 dollars and 27. Cts for value Received of him
 Henry Humbarger*

Illustration No.1: Note signed by Henry Humbarger in the month before he died. It carries his original signature.



Illustration No.2: The Humbarger family plot in the old Egolf Cemetery in Whitley County, Indiana. The white marble monument marks the grave of Henry Humbarger; the grey monument to the rear marks that of his wife, Sara. Photo by writer.

Henry was buried in the Egolf Cemetery of Thorncreek Township, located about a mile and a half southwest of his farm. The cemetery and adjoining church were among the first in the county when established in 1847. The church remains in use as the Thorncreek Bethel Church of God, with the cemetery just to its south. It is located at the intersection of State Road 9 and County Road 250 N about two miles north of Columbia City. Henry's wife Sara and son Henry Jr., are buried in the same family plot. Sara remarried about ten years after Henry's death to a local widower, Abraham Pence, but upon her death was buried beside Henry. The family marker, pictured in Illustration No.2, carries the following inscription:

"Henry Humberger, Died Dec. 31, 1857, Aged 46 Ys. 4 M. 2 D.

Amiable and beloved husband farwell,
thy years were few, but thy virtues many they are now recorded on this perishing stone and on the book of life and in the hearts of thy afflicted friends."

On the marker's opposite side is the inscription of his son, Henry Jr.:

"Henry, Son of H. & S. Humberger
Died Jan. 10, 1875
Aged 16 Ys. 5 Mo. 1 D."

A bluish grey monument to the left of the Humberger monument marks Sara's grave. It's inscription reads:

"Sarah Pence
Born Dec. 27, 1826
Died Sep. 9, 1897"

She has gone to her home in heaven
And all her afflictions are oer"

Henry Humberger's working period in Indiana was the relatively short

six years between 1851 and 1857. But his death resulted in a substantial portfolio of estate papers being generated; among the many documents are inventory records, sale records of personal property, and claims for and against his estate. They provide unexpected insights into the life of a mid-nineteenth century gunsmith that not only help to understand Henry's life, but also the lives of most other gunsmiths of the same period.

PART TWO: The Henry Humberger Estate Papers

The estate papers from Henry Humberger's death contain many references to his gunsmithing activities. Of special interest are the administrator's advertisement for the sale of Henry's personal property, an inventory of personal property, records from the estate sale listing prices and purchasers, several outstanding bills against the estate itemizing gunsmithing materials purchased by Henry prior to his death, and a billing against the estate by nephew Adam Humberger II for journeyman work done in Henry's gun shop. There were also several accounts receivable, probably for new rifles, that indicate what a Humberger rifle sold for in the 1850's.

Two estate documents verify that Henry was actively working as a gunsmith and cabinet maker at the time of his death. Both were bills submitted to the estate for purchases made on credit prior to his death. The more significant bill was from Columbia City hardware merchant Peter Snider, who billed Henry's estate for unpaid items that included cupboard hinges, iron, boxes of percussion caps, metal working files, brass, and one gun lock. One entry appears to be "1 Pander .50," which may

be for one pound of gun powder for \$.50. This bill is reproduced in Illustration No. 3.

Columbia City Jan 31st 1857
Henry Humbarger Dr
J. B. Snider

1 sett Cupboard Knives	1, 88
" 5" Operating Scissors	6, 17
" 1 Pander	.57
" 6 3/4 # Iron	.39
" 3 boxes Caps	1, 73
" 4 # Wire	.54
" 2 files	1, 50
Dec. 12 th 7/8 # Brads	1, 12
" 26 5- Files	2, 31
" 1 gun Lock	1, 10
Co. by sundries	15, 69
Balance due	<u>\$15, 19</u>

Illustration No.3: Henry Humbarger's bill from Whitley County, Indiana, hardware dealer Peter Snider, documenting purchases of gunsmithing materials in 1857.

The second bill was from C. Kinderman & Co. of Columbia City, a dealer in medicines, paints and varnishes. Henry's purchases had included lamp-black, varnish, turpentine, putty, white lead (base for paint), oil, sulphur and borax. Most of these items were used in finishing wood, either furniture or gunstocks. The borax was a welding flux used in blacksmithing work. These purchases indicate that Henry was actively involved in gunsmithing, cabinet making and blacksmithing up until his death.

Perhaps the most important estate document relating to gunsmithing was a bill from Adam Humbarger, presumably the son of Henry's older brother, Adam Humberger. This bill documents work done by journeyman gunsmith Adam II for master gunsmith and shop owner Henry Humbarger; it shows that guns built in a particular shop were often the work of a journeyman, or the combination of a journeyman and his master. In this case Adam Humbarger billed Henry's estate for gunsmithing work done but not paid for, including: three instances of repairing guns in Henry's shop at \$1.50, \$1.68 and \$1.75; making one new rifle for Henry at \$5.00; labor spent working on a new gun at \$2.50; making a new gun at \$17.00; and a half days work at \$.31. Adam's invoice for journeyman work is reproduced in Illustration No. 4. The oath at the bottom of the bill was written by the court clerk but carries Adam Humbarger's original signature.

The three guns that Adam worked on prior to Henry's death are probably the same rifles sold during the estate auction. At the sale a new rifle sold for \$13.50, a "six shooting rifle" for \$29.25, and an unfinished rifle for \$3.50. Adam's charges were for labor only; the cost of materials and Henry's profit margin boosted the value to the sale price. The \$17.00 charge by Adam represented a labor-intensive gun, probably the revolving six shot rifle mentioned at the estate sale. The "new rifle" Adam charged \$5.00 for was probably the same "new rifle" sold, and Adam's "work upon a new gun" for \$2.50 probably represented the "unfinished rifle" at the sale. The reference to a "six shooting rifle" in Henry's estate is of major importance, since the Humbargers are credited by some experts as being the

Estate of Henry Humbarger Deceased		
1857	To Adam Humbarger Dr	
Dec	To repairing gun	\$1.50
"	" " " "	1.68
"	" " " "	1.75
Jan	Making New Rifle Gun	5.00
"	work upon New Gun	2.50
"	one half days work	.81
"	one Gun	17.00
		<hr/> 29.74

State of Indiana
 White County

Adam Humbarger on
 his oath upposes and says that the a-
 bove account is a right one and
 that the same is wholly true
 and that said work and personal
 property was done and directed to
 said Dec. amt prior to his death

Adam Humbarger
 Subscribed and sworn to before me this
 29th day of March 1858
 J. B. McDonald Clerk

Illustration No.4: Bill against Henry Humbarger's estate by gunsmith Adam Humbarger, Henry's nephew, for work done in Henry's gun shop. The oath statement at the bottom carries Adam Humbarger's original signature.

first gunsmiths in America to develop functional six shot rifles and pistols, models of which allegedly guided Samuel Colt in building his revolving pistols a few years later.

The Humbarger estate papers contain an inventory of personal property listing 114 items, with some of the items being "boxes of sundries" containing a number of smaller related items. There are extensive listings of gunsmithing, blacksmithing and woodworking tools and related items. The "Inventory of the personal estate of Henry Humbarger taken by Frederick Humbarger Administrator and appraised by Andrew Adams and Adam Egolf" contains the following list of items.

<u>No.</u>	<u>Description of Property</u>	<u>Value</u>
1	one Bay Mare	77.50
2	one Black milk cow	15.00
3	one Brindle heifer	17.00
4	one red heifer	9.00
5	one spring Calf	3.00
6	two sows	7.00
7	seven head of shoats	7.00
8	one two horse wageon	27.00
9	one log chain	2.50
10	two pair of harness	8.00
11	two head halters	1.50
12	one stack of hay	4.50
13	hay in the mow	4.00
14	hay ladders	1.50
15	ond dung fork	.75
16	two hay forks	1.00
17	one harrow	2.00
18	one shovel plow	2.00
19	one spade	.75
20	two iron kettles	2.50
21	one wheelbarrow	.50
22	one lot of fencing boards	2.50
23	one bridle and saddle	10.00
24	one sled and chain	.50
25	one chopping ax	.75
26	one cast plow	4.50
27	one grubbing how	1.00
28	one carpenter work bench	1.00
29	one lot of floring boards	1.00
30	one lot of Charcoal	1.50
31	one field of wheat in ground	4.00
32	second lot of wheat in ground	8.00
33	third lot of wheat in ground	5.00
34	one grindstone	2.50
35	one Blacksmith Bellows	15.00
36	one anvil	12.00
37	three Blacksmith vices	12.00
38	one lot of Blacksmith tongs	1.00
39	one lot of B'smith hammers	1.00
40	one lot of old files	1.00
41	one lot of swedges & sundries	1.25
42	one lot old brass	.50
43	lot of old sundries	1.00
44	Molding flasks and patern	1.00
45	one mowing sythe	.50
46	lot of sundries and brick	3.00
47	one lot of gun stalks	4.00
48	two sickels	.50
49	lot of carpenter plains	9.00
50	one lot of augers	2.25
51	one cross cut saw	3.50
52	three hand saws	3.00
53	one iron square	.50
54	six mechanic chizles	2.00
55	two drawing knives	5.00
56	one pair of screw plates	5.00
57	one lot of gunsmith tools	13.00
58	one brace and bit	1.50
59	balance of gunsmith tools	10.00
60	two kegs of white lead & oil	5.00
61	lot of sundries	2.00
62	one rifle guide	5.00
63	one hand ax	.75
64	one hatchet	.25
65	one new rifle	12.00
66	one six shooting rifle	30.00
67	one unfinished rifle	2.50
68	one foot atz	.75
69	two iron wedges	1.00
70	one shot pouch	.50
71	quantity of wheat by the ??	14.85

72	one shop stove	5.00	108	one feather tick	5.00
73	one washing tub 2 pails	.75	109	one coverlet	3.00
74	one churn	.50	111(sic)California gold		40.00
75	six grain bags	1.00	112	one set of dishes	2.00
76	cooking stove and ware	15.00	113	two barrels of bran	1.00
77	one dining table	3.00	114	Acct. against Sara Humbarger	\$272.71
78	cupboard ware	12.00			
79	one cupboard	12.00			
80	nine chairs	5.00			
81	one bedstid and bedding	20.00			
82	two bedstids and bedding	20.00			
83	one parlor stove	6.00			
84	one fine bureau	12.00			
85	one plain bureau	6.00			
86	one fine bedstid and bedding	20.00			
87	one common bedstid and bedding	12.00			
88	one small chest	1.00			
89	one lot of carpeting	4.00			
90	Note on Jonathan Dupler due December 12th 1854 Dated Dec. 12, 1854 with interest from date	20.44			
91	Note Jacob Javits Due December 15, 1853 Dated December 14th 1853 with interest	15.00			
92	Note on Solomon Miller Dated March 6th, 1854. ten months Credit, Credited Jan. 2nd 56 ten dollars and fifty six cent	4.25			
93	one grain cradle	3.00			
94	one revolver	6.00			
95	one logsled	.50			
96	one brass clock	2.00			
97	one brass clock	5.50			
98	one trunk	4.00			
99	one trunk	2.00			
100	one accordion	3.00			
101	one side saddle	10.00			
102	50 shock of corn fodder	1.00			
103	12 crocks	.25			
104	all 25 chickens	1.00			
105	one fine quilt	3.00			
106	one fine quilt	3.00			
107	one sheet	.50			
107(sic)	one feather tick	5.00			

From the extent of the inventory, it is clear that Henry Humbarger was relatively well-to-do, as was often the case with successful gunsmiths in the mid-1800's. The large number of gunsmithing, blacksmithing and woodworking items indicates he had a large shop and did blacksmithing and cabinet making as well as gunsmithing. Henry's early death was, in fact, a blessing for researchers of early gunmakers, because it froze in time his shop equipment, materials and financial dealings through his estate papers. The collection of estate documents provides a rich source of information concerning his life, his work, and the relationships among many of his Humberger/Humbarger relatives.

Frederick Humbarger, Henry's nephew, was appointed administrator of the estate and handled the personal property sale as well as other financial matters for Henry's widow, children and creditors. An estate document of interest is the "Administrator's Sale" notice, written out in Frederick's own handwriting and posted to publicize the upcoming sale of Henry's personal property. The notice specifically mentioned the "six shooter" rifle gun, implying it was a special attraction of the sale. The notice stated:

Administrators Sale,

Notice is hereby given that I will sell at Public auction on Friday the 19th day of February 1858 at the residence of Henry Humbarger late of Whitley county Deceased

all his personal property not taken By the widow Consisting of Cattle Hogs one Bay mare two milch Cows one two horse wagon and harness. A general assortment of Farming utensils household and kitchen Furniture together with a set of gunsmith tools and Blacksmith Tools two Rifle guns one a six shooter and various articles to numerous to mention. A credit of nine months will be given on all sums over three Dollars the purchaser giving his note with approved surety waving valuation and appraisement Laws.

January 26th 1858

Frederick Humbarger
Administrator

The sale bill from the auction followed the original inventory listing item for item, adding only the price paid and who purchased it. Most items sold close to the appraised value on the Inventory. Purchasers of Henry's gunsmithing tools and materials may help identify other area gunsmiths. Several Humbarger family members were present at the sale. Henry's younger brother, David B. Humbarger, purchased several farming items, but nothing to indicate involvement in gunsmithing. However, nephew Adam Humbarger purchased the majority of Henry's gunsmithing and blacksmithing tools. He was already identified as a gunsmith based on his charges to the estate for gunsmithing services rendered to Henry Humbarger. At the estate sale, Adam purchased lots #30, 34, 35, 36, 36, 38, 39, 41, 42, 44, 52, 56, 56, 58, 59, 61, 62, 69, and 72. From the extent and diversity of purchases, Adam undoubtedly planned to set up his own gunshop in Whitley County, since Henry's shop was now gone.

Two other Humbargers may have attempted limited gunsmithing in

Whitley County based on their purchases at the estate sale. Reuben Humbarger, Henry Humbarger's oldest son and about twenty at the time, purchased several items including lot #59 - Sundries (relating to gunsmithing tools), and lot #69 - an unfinished rifle. While Reuben's purchases don't prove him to be a gunsmith, he undoubtedly learned something about gunmaking from his father, and his purchase of an unfinished rifle plus related tools tends to indicate he was capable of working on a gun. Another Humbarger who may have worked on guns was Frederick, the estate administrator and Henry's nephew. During the sale Frederick purchased lots #37 - a blacksmiths vise, #47 - a lot of gunstocks, #49 - 2 small planes, and #54 - 6 chisels. Again, the purchases do not prove that Frederick was a gunsmith, but buying unfinished gunstocks along with several woodworking tools implies he may have done limited gunsmithing work, if only stocking.

Other people purchasing gunsmith-related tools included Solomon Summers a blacksmith vise, Cyrus Gnagy some blacksmith hammers, Miles Ritchie one lot of gunsmith tools, Terry Egolf one lot of gunsmith tools and a box of related sundries and one lot of handsaws, and Fred Brock one lot of gunsmithing tools, two lots of carpenter planes, one lot of chisels, a carpenter's work bench, and one lot of sundries. Some names were difficult to read and may be misspelled here. These men may have worked on guns at times, but perhaps only their own. Overall, the sale bill showed the extent of Henry Humbarger's gunmaking equipment, and gave the names of other local people who may have worked on guns.