

John Moll and Lydia Moll had a son born May 13, 1773, named John Moll, II. In March 1776, a second son, named John J. Moll, was born. A third son, Peter Moll, was born on November 26, 1779.

During the Revolutionary War, Northampton County exempted all her Gunsmiths from military service, provided they engaged in the manufacture of guns for the army during the war years. Some Gunsmiths, however, volunteered and served admirably with the troops as artificers and repairmen. At the outbreak of the Revolution, Allentown had only 350 inhabitants, the majority of which conformed with the Act of the Assembly of Pennsylvania regarding Oaths of Affirmation and Allegiance.

On June 8, 1778, John Moll, I, swore the Oath of Allegiance. It is interesting to note that prior to the time of John Moll's swearing the Oath of Allegiance, he was a member of Northampton County Militia, and on June 18, 1777, he was a member 8th Class, of the 3rd Company of the First Battalion. When a class was called out, many belonging to it could not or would not go. The deficiency was made up by the employment of substitutes, either taken from other classes, or from those not subject by law to the performance of military duty. John Moll, I, was never called to active duty because his services were utilized in the State Gun Factory in Allentown. This gun factory was under a John Tyler and Ebenezer Cowell, both Gunsmiths, and in charge of some sixteen Gunsmiths, of whom John Moll, I, was included. They worked hard and long for small compensation and meager rations. However, their accomplishments were great.

From October 15, 1777 to December 4, 1777, the factory received for repair: 7 pistols, 810 muskets, 847 bayonets, 360 scabbards, 36 rifles, 5 carbines and 25 gun barrels.

In the period October 15, 1777 to June 1779, the following repaired arms were shipped out of the Allentown factory: 7 pistols, 2 blunderbusses, 2961 muskets and barrels, 2522 bayonets, 685 scabbards, 83 rifles and 5 carbines. Further evidence of the vast scope of the activities of the gun factory in Allentown is revealed in the following letters:

"Allentown, May 9, 1778. Sir: In answer to your favour of the 28th ult., I have to inform you that since the return of Arms I made on the 21st of Jan. last, I have delivered to Col. Frederik Hagner, two hundred seventy-two stand of arms in repair, and now have on hand three hundred and fifty stand complete, except half the number of bayonets are yet to be ground, which I expect to finish by the 20th. The above 250 stand of arms are all I have upon hand worth repairing; except a few that want new stocks, some of which I expect to be done before that time. Signed Ebenezer Cowell. Col. Hagner goes on to praise the efficiency of Tyler and Cowell."

There is a personal incident in the life of John Moll, I, during the Revolutionary War. It is known that Moll had a large number of bee hives in his yard on North 7th Street. In his Estate Inventory, taken Feb. 6, 1795, is an item of "61 bee hives @ 30 pounds, 10 shillings." The incident is reported in the "Friedenbote" paper in 1886 as follows:

"In 1776, there were 54 dwellings in Allentown, and the number of inhabitants around 330. Among these was Boechsenschmidt Johannes Moll. (Gunsmith)

Hessian Prisoners of War were camped near the properties of John Moll and a baker named Mohr. The Hessian soldiers lusted after honey combs in Moll's garden, and often robbed the bee hives. Moll caught one of these Hessian prisoners in the act and shot him. Mohr and Moll buried the culprit Hessian

## The Moll Family of Gunsmiths 1764-1883

by Sam Dyke and Earl Heffner, Jr.



on the Moll property. Almost a hundred years later, when this article was written, a Charles More, living then on the property, discovered the skeleton of the long dead Hessian prisoner, identified by his metal trappings still surviving the long burial.

In spite of the tough economy that followed the war, Moll evidently prospered in his trade. His inventory exhibited in this article reveals a vast store of tools and personal property, totaling £ 407-4-0, or \$1,221.00, a lot of money in 1795. He died in 1794, intestate, and the court appointed Herman Rupp, Gunsmith, and Jacob Newhart, to appraise the inventory. It was always customary for a gunsmith to be appointed one of the appraisers for an estate of a gunsmith.

John Moll, I, was survived by his widow, Lydia Moll, and two sons, John Moll, II, and Peter Moll. There is no record of what happened to the other son, John J. Moll. This Peter Moll is not the one who came to Hellertown and started a gun shop, but the Uncle of the Peter Moll who was in Hellertown. There is a Tax record of a Peter Moll in Lower Saucon Township, Lehigh County, who paid taxes in 1835 as a "Gongsmith."

## JOHN MOLL, II

This Moll is the son of John Moll, I, and carried on his father's gunsmithing on North 7th Street. John Moll, II, stayed home during the War of 1812, producing guns. His brother, Peter Moll, answered the call to arms. He was assigned to Abraham Rinker's Company and was under Col. Thomas Humphrey's 18th Riflemen. The Muster Roll of Nov. 13, 1814 lists Private Peter Moll. Peter survived the war, came home and died a rich man years later.

John Moll, II, joined with one of the oldest families of Allentown, marrying Elizabeth Neihardt, eldest daughter of Lawrence Neihardt, who was a brother of Peter Neihardt, a great Allentown Gunsmith.

John Moll and Elizabeth Moll had the following children:

John, III—Born Nov. 13, 1796—Died 1883  
Jacob —Born 1803  
Peter (Later a Gunsmith at Hellertown)  
Born Oct. 13, 1799

## JOHN MOLL, III

Some Historians would have us believe that John Moll, III, was in partnership with his brother, Peter, in Hellertown about 1810. This contention is absurd when one realizes that John, III, would have been only 14 years of age and his brother Peter, 11 years. Yet one can see in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, a Kentucky Rifle labeled "American (Kentucky Rifle) Pennsylvania, Hellertown, John Moll 1810". The rifle referred to is only engraved with the name of John Moll behind the rear sight. John Moll, III, was never a partner of his brother Peter Moll. Peter Moll's partner in Hellertown was David Moll. It is a fact that

every rifle or pistol they made is plainly marked, either with a name, a date or a number, or all three. Most are marked "P. & D. Moll, Hellertown, Pa."

There is substantial evidence that John Moll, III, stayed in Allentown and worked with his father, John Moll, II. For some unknown reason, probably sickness, John Moll, II sold his business to John Moll, III, on April 11, 1820. A document of sale is recorded in Lehigh County deed book, Misc. Docket Vol. No. 1, Page 144.

It is interesting to note some of the items sold to John Moll, III, by his father, John Moll, II, were the same items as were listed in the Inventory of John Moll, I.

John Moll, III, managed the business he bought from his father until his death on August 24, 1883, age 87 years. The business as run by John Moll, II, was profitable, because we find in 1814 the amount of Tax he paid placed him 25th from the top of the list of 152 taxables. Also of interest, incidentally, his Tax was \$1.98.

It has been mentioned previously that John Moll, III, was never a partner in the Hellertown Gun firm. However, the observing scholar might ask how it can be explained that John Moll, III appeared at the Preparatory Services of Communion at the Lower Saucon Reformed Church on April 13, 1827, again on April 10, 1830 and November 19, 1831. If this is the same John Moll, it might be explained that he was visiting his brother Peter Moll in Hellertown. As far as can be determined, John Moll, III, never maintained a residence in either Lower Saucon Township or in Hellertown.

John Moll, III, married Elizabeth Eberroth on April 23, 1824. Of this marriage, the following children were born:

William Henry Moll —Born Nov. 1, 1825  
Sara Moll —Born Sept. 23, 1827  
Mari Ann Moll —Born Oct. 15, 1828  
Catherina Moll —Born Mar. 27, 1830  
Tilghman Carl Moll —Born Feb. 23, 1832  
Josiah David Moll —Born Mar. 30, 1838  
Franklin Enoch Moll—Born June 28, 1847

It is interesting to note that Josiah David was baptized on May 13, 1838, and his sponsors were the elusive Nathan Moll and wife, Rosanna Moll, of Hellertown.

It is not known how many rifles John Moll, III, produced, but the census of 1840 reports that 465 arms were produced in that year. We do not know how many of this County total were made by Moll.

## **WILLIAM HENRY MOLL**

In 1860, with the outbreak of the Civil War, we find the first definite proof that John Moll, III, took his son, William H. Moll, into the business with him. James Moll, a relative, also was employed at the factory, and lived in Allentown.

In 1873-74, the Tax Lists show that there were four Molls listed as being in this business. When John Moll, III, died, he left all his property to his wife, Elizabeth, and appointed his eldest son, William Henry Moll, as Executor. A defect in the Will failed to make provision for the payment of debts. When the Estate was settled, it showed that ½ interest in the John and William Henry Moll Gun business was valued at \$18.00.

On January 31, 1884, an Agreement between Elizabeth Moll and her children was made, which authorized William Henry Moll to advertise the properties for sale. He was to receive 5% of the sale price, and the balance to be divided equally among the children, after the death of the mother. Selling this property was a difficult decision to make, as it had been in the family since March 19, 1773, or 110 years.

## **THE HELLERTOWN MOLLS – PETER AND DAVID MOLL**

Peter Moll of Hellertown, as was mentioned before, was the son of John Moll, II, and a brother of John Moll, III. It is possible that Peter Moll was in Hellertown as early as 1820, when his brother John, III, bought his father's business.

First knowledge of his gunsmithing in Hellertown is found on the barrel of a rifle marked "Peter Moll, Hellertown, May 26, 1826".

In spite of the fact that Peter and David Moll made many fine rifles, they are most noted for their pistols, which are of the secondary martial type. A secondary martial pistol in one which can be made in several ways, namely:

- (A) An official contractor who strictly made federal pistols.
- (B) By private contractors, not being official contractors to the U.S. Government, but to a particular State.
- (C) By private gunsmiths for sale to individuals, or by private contracts with owners of vessels.

A search of the U.S. Ordinance files gives no official contract notices to the Molls, but they might have been contractors to the States and also sold to individuals.

One can distinguish at a glance the difference between the Moll contract pistol and one made for a private individual. The contract piece is a more rugged weapon and usually has a rifled barrel.

Peter Moll married Mary Shafer in 1830. A partnership had been formed with David Moll, who was either a cousin or nephew.

David Moll married Elizabeth Weber on December 10, 1835. David was born April 22, 1807, and it is assumed that he learned his trade from the family craftsmen in Allentown.

It is of interest to note the ages of Peter and David Moll at the time of the War of 1812. Peter was 13 years old and David was 5 years old.

Certain gun authors have said that the Molls of Hellertown were busy turning out secondary martial guns for the War of 1812. These errors are made due to the lack of documentation of the facts surrounding these two Gunsmiths.

A search of the records of the War Department in National Archives has not revealed information indicating that the Molls received any government contracts during the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 or the Civil War.

The P. & D. Moll Gun Shop specialized in brass barreled pistols. The sporting type had smooth bore, while the martial type was rifled. The stocks were made from plain maple, rather than the more highly desired curly or tiger maple. However, the Molls did artificially grain the plain maple to make it appear like curly maple. They used the same method as the Lehman Gunsmiths of Lancaster, of wrapping an oiled or tarred cord around the wood stock, then burning it off. This gave an appearance of curly maple when the stock was smoothed and rubbed down.

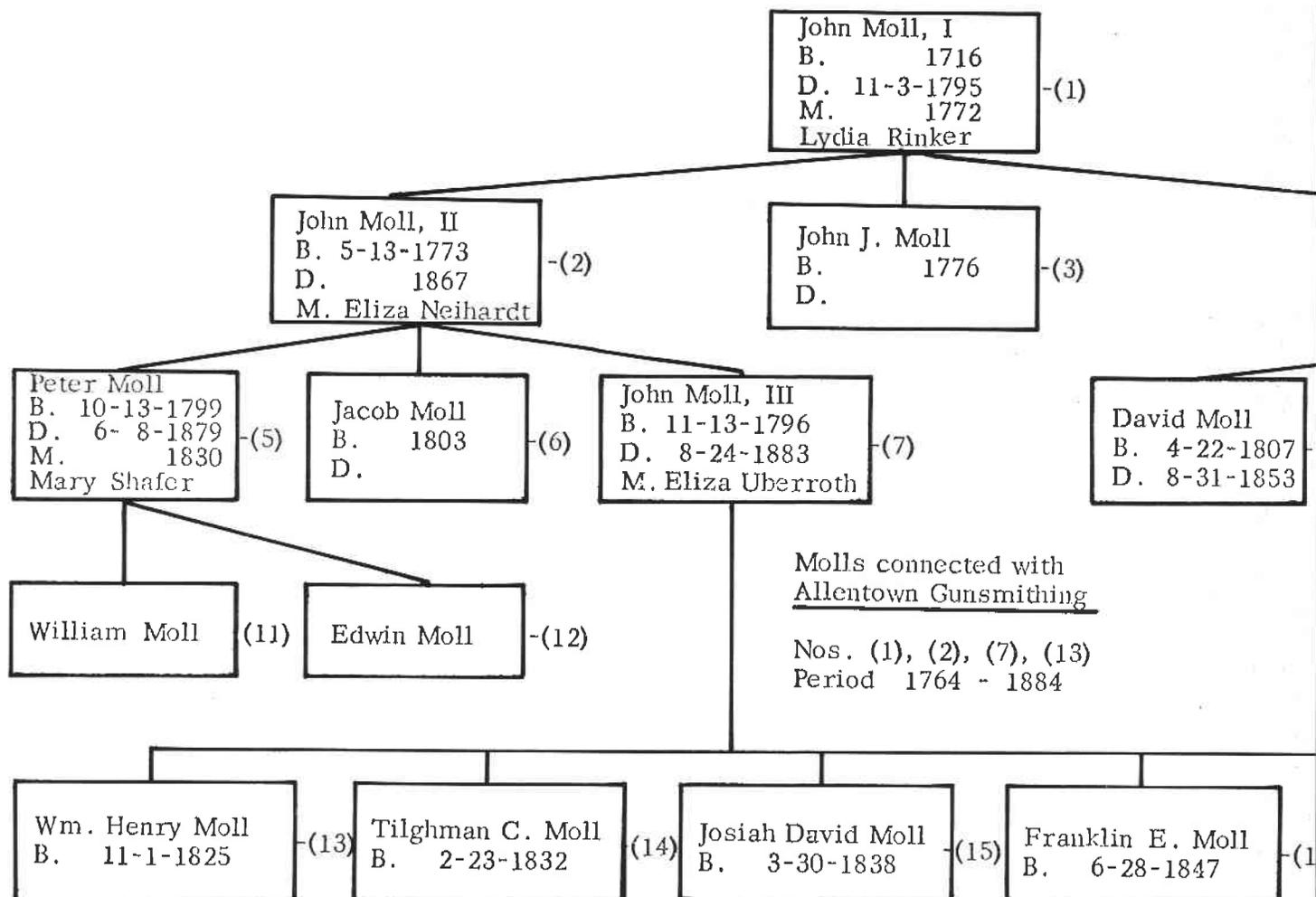
This Hellertown shop was kept quite busy making new rifles and pistols and repairing and converting flint locks to percussion locks. About 80-85% of all original flint locks were converted to percussion by gunsmiths in the period 1835-1855, at a cost of \$2.00 or \$3.00 per piece.

The partnership of Peter and David Moll was dissolved with the death of David Moll on August 31, 1853. John Weaver was appointed guardian of David's minor children, and he released Peter Moll of David's obligations when the guardian sold David's personal effects for \$115.00. Of this amount, David's tools accounted for one-half, or \$60.00. At David's death, the business had \$1,712.00 in outstanding credits. An inventory of the firm's goods showed a value of \$2,706.81. At this time, William and Edwin Moll, sons of Peter Moll, went into the business

# **1764-1883**

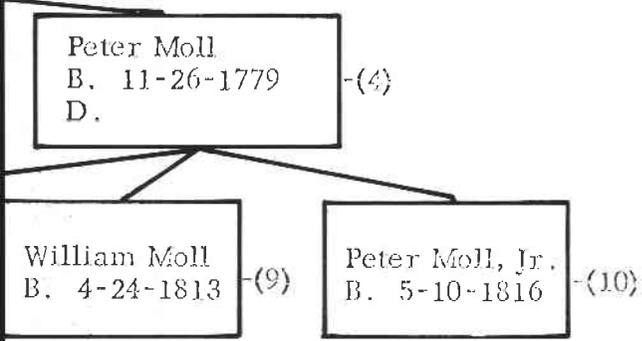
# Geneology of the Moll Family of Gunsmiths

1764 - 1883  
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**NOTES: -**

- (1) John Moll, I - Father not proved to be Wm. Moll of Allentown, as presumed.  
A John Moll arrived Phila. 9-11-1731, age 16, on ship from Rotterdam.
- (2) John Moll, II - Took over Allentown Gunshop
- (3) John J. Moll - Nothing is known of him.
- (4) Peter Moll - Father of David Moll who was with Peter Moll (5) at Hellertown.
- (5) Peter Moll - Hellertown Gunsmith
- (6) Jacob Moll - Nothing known about him.
- (7) John Moll, III - Took over Allentown Gunshop from his father.
- (8) David Moll - Partner to Peter at Hellertown.
- (9) Wm. Moll - Nothing known of him.
- (10) Peter Moll, Jr. - Nothing known of him.
- (11) Wm. Moll - Son of Peter, took over Hellertown
- (12) Edwin Moll - Son of Peter, took over Hellertown
- (13) Wm. Henry Moll - Went into Allentown shop 1860. Sold the shop in 1884, after 110 years of Moll Gunsmithing in Allentown.



Molls connected with  
Hellertown Gunsmithing

Nos. (5), (8), (11), (12)  
Period 1820 - 1879

vacated by David's death. Nathan Moll also was connected in the business, but in what interest or capacity is not known.

William Moll died, and the firm became known as Edwin and David Moll, and the gun making enterprise gave way to groceries and dry goods.

Nathan Moll had left for the West, and only John J. Moll, a grandson of Peter Moll, remained to carry on the tradition of the Molls; and he limited his talents to repair of guns until early 1900.

Peter Moll died June 8, 1879, from a lingering sickness, which must have reduced his Estate to the final settlement figure of \$216.98. The doctor attending him rendered a bill of \$98.00, which in those days was considerable.

In conclusion, we can truthfully say that the total affect of the activities of the Moll Gunsmiths on the History of our Country will never be fully known, since the records have been destroyed or lost and the average person or historian does not have the time to view the great picture in light of the relatively insignificant people doing the trade or work they knew best. No matter what this contribution was to the sum total, one can be readily certain that they met the challenges of their day and performed to the best of their ability.

A well preserved rifle or pistol hanging neatly in a shining gun case of a museum or home, is a monument to the makers like the Molls, for the gratitude we owe them, as well as a symbol of the age that has passed.

The ingenuity, resourcefulness and perseverance that the early smith displayed, was responsible, to a large degree, for the rise and development of our country. The Molls can proudly take their position along with the Henrys, Lehmans, and hundreds of other Pennsylvania Gunsmiths.

Earl S. Heffner, Jr.  
and  
Samuel E. Dyke

With the decision in 1840 to go to a percussion system of ignition for U.S. muskets, it became imperative to assay the situation as it existed at that time. In order to facilitate this, as you all know, muskets were broken down into four classes: the first class being those made since 1831, the second class being those from '21 to '31, the third class being those made from '12 to '20, and the fourth class being those made prior to 1812 and all unserviceable arms since then. Without going into detail with this inspection, it became obvious that the Federal Government had on hand in its armories in 1848, 586,513 muskets. Of these, 50% were the first class, 20% were the second class, and approximately 20% were third class, and approximately 10% were fourth class. On hand in private armories of contractors at that time were approximately 120,000 with the same percentages. It therefore becomes obvious when you review this situation, that the Federal Government was confronted with having approximately 300,000 first class completely serviceable flintlock muskets. This then is the background that militated for some system of converting these flintlock muskets to percussion.

These conversions may be grouped for discussion into two major categories, those being: (1) standard percussion cap conversions, and (2) mechanical primer systems. Of the standard percussion cap conversions, we see today three standard basic types. The first type conversion, which is seen on muskets, but more commonly on pistols, is the so-called "first method" or the French style in which a drum is inserted into the previous vent hole and a cone seat drilled into the drum with a new hammer fixed to the stripped off outside of the lock (Fig. 2). The "second method" or so-called Belgian type exhibits the same type external lock conversion, but the previous vent hole is filled with a brass plug and a new cone seat drilled into the top of the barrel with

a cone inserted (Fig. 3,4). The third type percussion cap conversion encountered is the application of a bolster to the side of the barrel above the lock plate (Fig. 5). This is seen in two types, either the flintlock barrel is removed in its lower portion and a new breech threaded into the barrel or in rarer instances, the bolster is brazed, or welded, onto the barrel covering the previous vent hole. The first and second methods of alteration were used primarily during the 1840's and early '50's. With the advent of the idea of rifling the barrel in these muskets and applying long range sites, the first and second methods became unserviceable due to the increased level of gas pressure and also due to the position of the cone on the barrel. These problems lead to the wide use of the third method or rebottomed barrels.

It should be pointed out that large numbers of class one and class two arms were converted by these several methods and proved to be very serviceable arms during the 1850's and the hostilities of the 1860's. There were many contractors for these conversions. It appears that a lot of this work was done in National Armories both at Harper's Ferry and Springfield, probably with Springfield leading in the volume produced. No exact figures of the numbers of muskets converted by the contractors or either the National Armories are available to me. It would appear that the most prodigious converter on a contract basis would be Mr. Hewes and Phillips who apparently converted something in the range of 20,000 class one 1816 muskets to the percussion system using the new breech method. There will be seen as you look over these muskets, many types of bolsters. Some of the bolsters have clean-out screws which probably indicate their confirmation to the types 1855-61. Others without the clean-out screw would lead us to believe that these conversions were accomplished during the early part of the Civil War probably prior to 1863.



E. V. Howell, Jr.

## The U.S. Flintlock Musket as It Is Converted for Use of the Percussion System

by Edgar V. Howell, Jr., MD.

Figure 3  
Cone conversion of  
an 1816 musket

Figure 5  
H & P conversion of  
an 1816 musket