

KENTUCKY RIFLE SILHOUETTES

A TALK BEFORE
THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF ARMS COLLECTORS

Spring Meeting — 1969
Washington, D. C.

By Albert M. Sullivan



ALBERT M. SULLIVAN

President Frost, Officers, Members of the Board — and fellow peons: —

I am very glad to be here with you this morning - and to have this opportunity to talk to you about the Silhouette of the Kentucky Rifle. And you'll probably be glad too, because this is going to be a very short talk.

I would like to tell you just one thing about the Silhouette of the Kentucky Rifle — something I have discovered — or rather a conclusion I have reached, which I believe might add some small interest to whatever Kentuckies you may own.

I am especially glad to be addressing these remarks to this particular group, because I know that most of you are not primarily Kentucky collectors — and I thank the good Lord for that — but I believe many of you do have some Kentuckies. And, this is just the type group this talk should be aimed at — General Collectors with a few Kentuckies — specialists in other fields who have picked up a Kentucky or two along the way. In other words, collectors of other arms who do not have a deep interest in Kentucky Rifles.

One of the few definitive statements that can safely be made about these old guns — and there are not many absolutes in the Kentucky world — is that no two of these rifles are alike. All are different from each other. This means that if you look at a large number of Kentucky Rifles,

that you will have seen a large number of different profiles. Now in considering the profile, we are going to look only at that portion from the lock panel to the butt-plate. The front part has so little change that it does not become a part of our problem. The rear part, on the other hand, is the very essence of change.

At first I found this very confusing. And to add to my bewilderment, I met quite a few advanced collectors who could look at an unsigned rifle and often come up with the name of the maker. If they could not spot the maker, then they could, at least, often tell where the gun was made. Because of the individuality of the rifle — and, therefore, the staggering magnitude of change — this ability seemed to me to be nothing less than magic. Certainly, it represented a feat far beyond my hope of accomplishment.

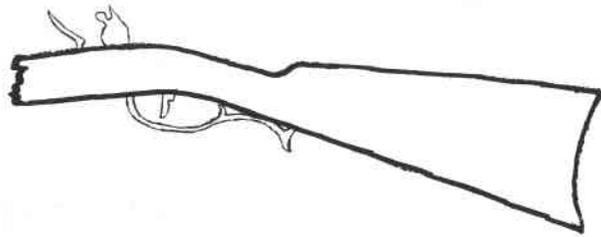
Of course, I knew the clues to identification lay in the architecture and in the details. But with such vast differences to remember, the task seemed far beyond my limited abilities. But I became keenly interested in Silhouettes. This is really the most important single feature of the Kentucky Rifle. It is the first thing you see. Instantly, it pleases the eye, or it does not. Silhouette turns me on — if it does not, then no amount of quality will overcome that one basic lack. My acquisitive juices just do not flow.

I made an intensive study of the Kentucky's profile, and after viewing and handling hundreds of rifles and photographs, I finally made a discovery, and I think I can now tell you how to become an instant expert on regional identification. And this is the thing I hope might increase your fun with Kentucky Rifles.

The whole point is that despite the vast differences, there are only five basic and original profiles! And, each of these five shapes originated in a different part of the country. Therefore, if you remember these shapes and the regions they represent, you can then tell a good deal about a Kentucky Rifle.

It would be nice at this point, if I could say "you can then tell where the gun was made." But this is not true. Silhouette alone will not identify a region. Even Silhouette with corroborating details will not positively pin

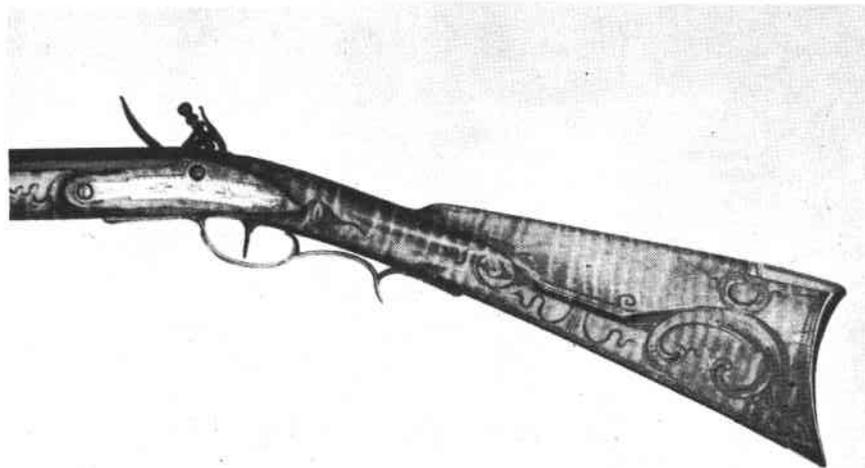
Lancaster
Profile c. 1750



LANCASTER PROFILE DRAWING



JOHN DREPPERD RIFLE



Lancaster

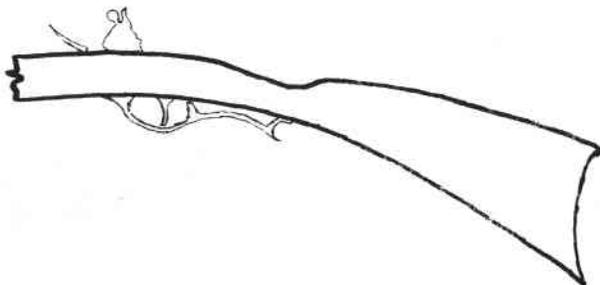
MELCHOR RIFLE



Lancaster

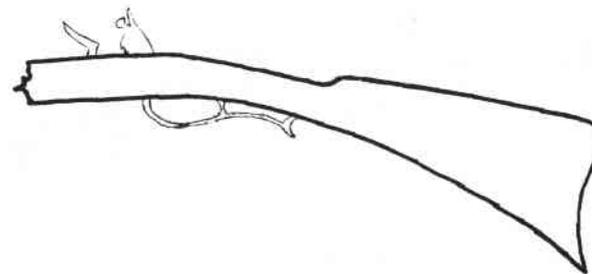
MICHAEL MARTIN RIFLE

Bethlehem
Profile c. 1750



BETHLEHEM PROFILE DRAWING

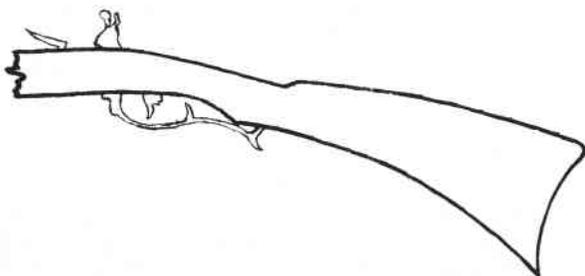
Bethlehem



BETHLEHEM PROFILE VERNER TYPE

20-4

Bethlehem



BETHLEHEM PROFILE COMPOUND CURVE



JOSEPH ANGSTADT RIFLE

down a locality. The only way this can be done is to know the maker and to know where he worked. Even then, the features should be compatible with the region. Sometimes they are not. But what the Silhouette will tell you, is the region where the shape originated, where it was popular for a long time, and where, by the laws of probability and chance, the gun should have been made. I know this is not giving you all you'd like to have, but it's the best I have to offer. The familiar half-loaf.

I must caution you that you can only spot these basic shapes if the gun has clean blood-lines. And, unfortunately, there are many more mongrels than there are thoroughbreds. If the rifle has too much alley-cat in it, the problem becomes hopeless.

Now let's examine these five shapes and see what we have been talking about.

#1 - LANCASTER PROFILE

The first is the Lancaster profile. Many researchers think this was the first shape that evolved - if it was not the first, it was certainly one of the very early basic shapes, and probably has more descendants - legitimate and bastard - than any of the others. We think it was fully developed by 1750.

As you can see, it is characterized by two straight lines - top and bottom - a distinct nose, and very little drop. The top line is noticeably shorter than the bottom. To me, this shape looks the most like a modern rifle.

#2 - JOHN DREPPERD RIFLE

#3 - MELCHOIR FORDNEY RIFLE

#4 - MICHAEL MARTIN RIFLE

#5 - BETHLEHEM PROFILE

The next shape is that of Bethlehem (and Allentown). This one is totally different from Lancaster, and was probably developed independently at about the same time. Possibly about 1750. It is dominated by two curved lines - top and bottom - a blending-style nose - and a rather sharp drop. The bottom curve changes more rapidly than the top. This is the standard Bethlehem - Allentown profile - and is the type you will usually see. However, there are two well established variants to this which are quite old - but they are seen so seldom that I have not considered them as basic shapes.

#6 - VERNER TYPE PROFILE

The first variant looks like this - the top line is almost straight - hardly curves at all. This is a very attractive outline, but there are not many of them around.

#7 - COMPOUND CURVE

The second variant occurs as you see here - there is a compound curve on the underside - the second curve usually starting at the grip rail of the trigger-guard. These too are not seen very often.

#8 - JOSEPH ANGSTADT

#9 - ADAM ANGSTADT

#10 - READING PROFILE

The next is Reading, which is located halfway between Lancaster and Allentown-Bethlehem, and as you might expect, has borrowed from each locality - the straight bottom from Lancaster and the curved top from Bethlehem. This is the shape which is commonly called the "Roman Nose."

#11 - ANDREW FIGTHORN RIFLE

#12 - CHRISTIAN BECK, JR. RIFLE

#13 - D. CHRIST RIFLE

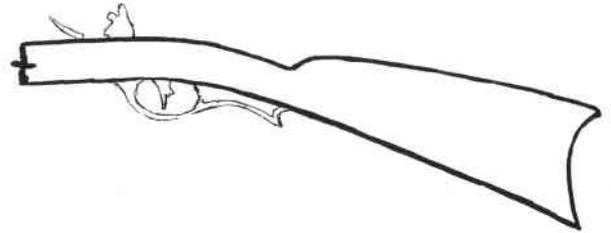
#14 - LANCASTER, BETHLEHEM, READING



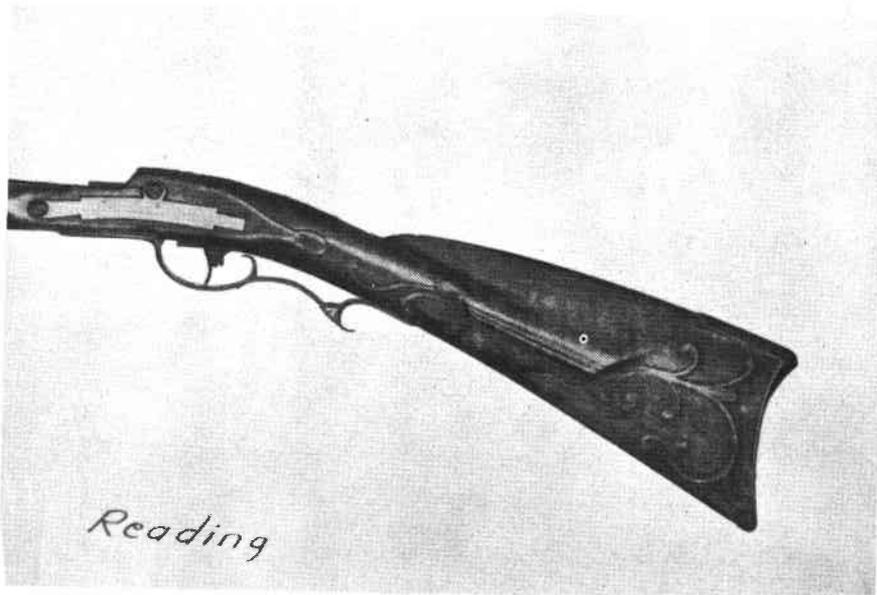
Bethlehem

ADAM ANGSTADT RIFLE

*Reading
Profile C. 1765*



READING PROFILE DRAWING



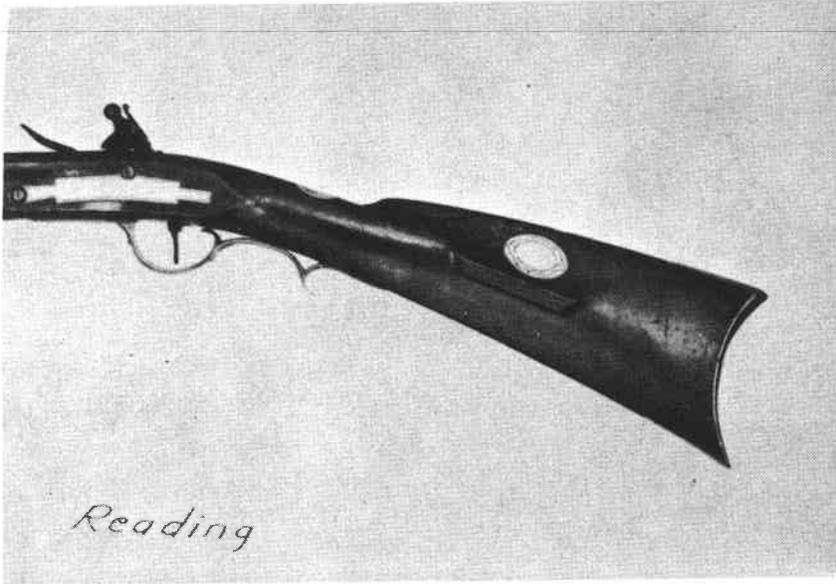
Reading

ANDREW FIGTHORN RIFLE



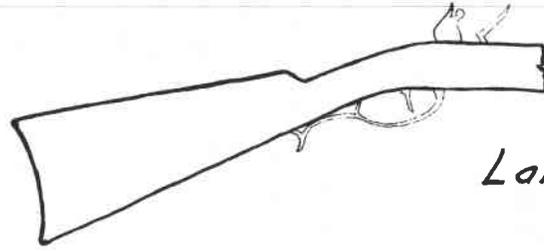
Reading

CHRISTIAN BECK, JR. RIFLE

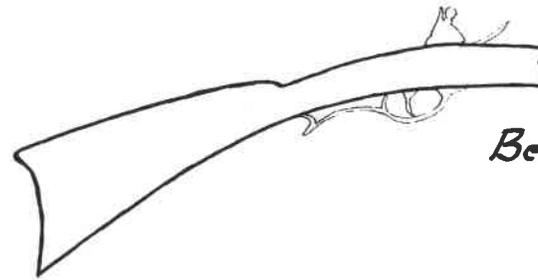


Reading

MAKER UNKNOWN

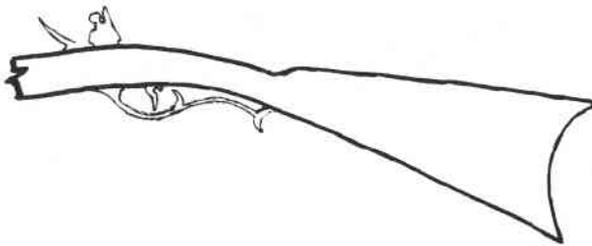


Lancaster

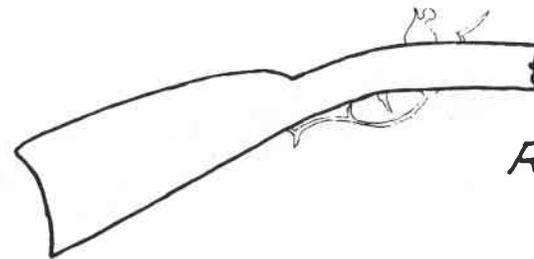


Bethlehem

*Maryland
Profile c.1800*

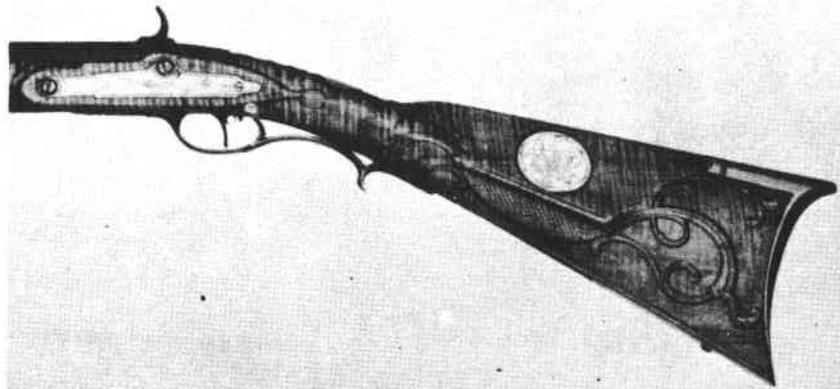


MARYLAND PROFILE DRAWING



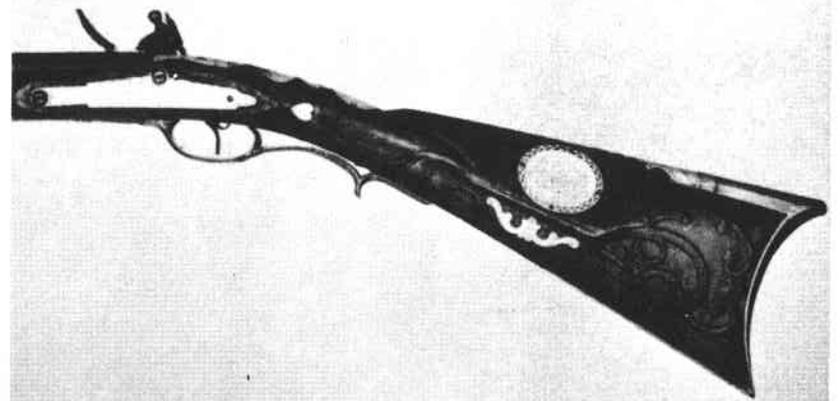
Reading

LANCASTER, BETHLEHEM & READING PROFILES



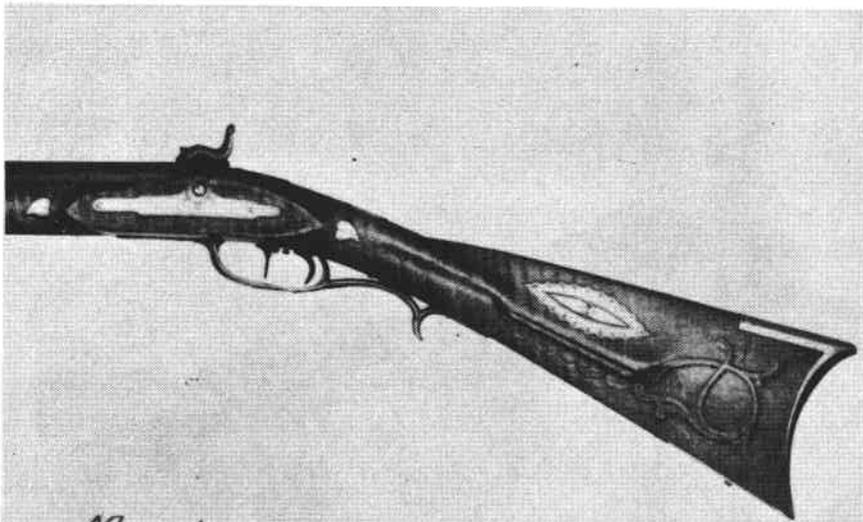
Maryland

JOHN ARMSTRONG RIFLE



Maryland

JOHN ARMSTRONG RIFLE



Maryland

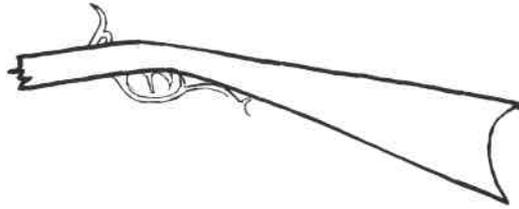
JACOB EARNEST RIFLE



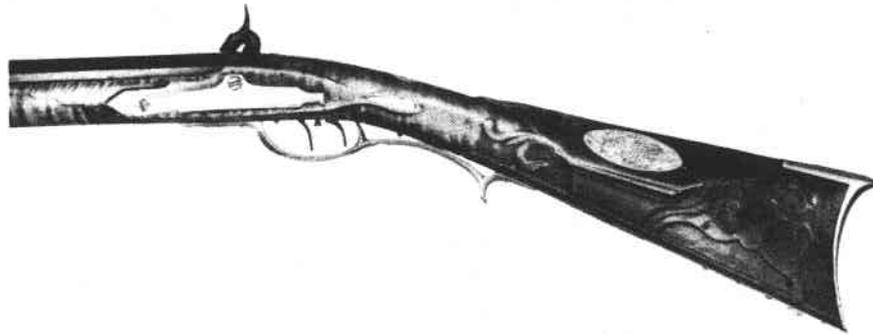
Maryland

NATHANIEL ROWE RIFLE

*Bedford
Profile* c. 1835

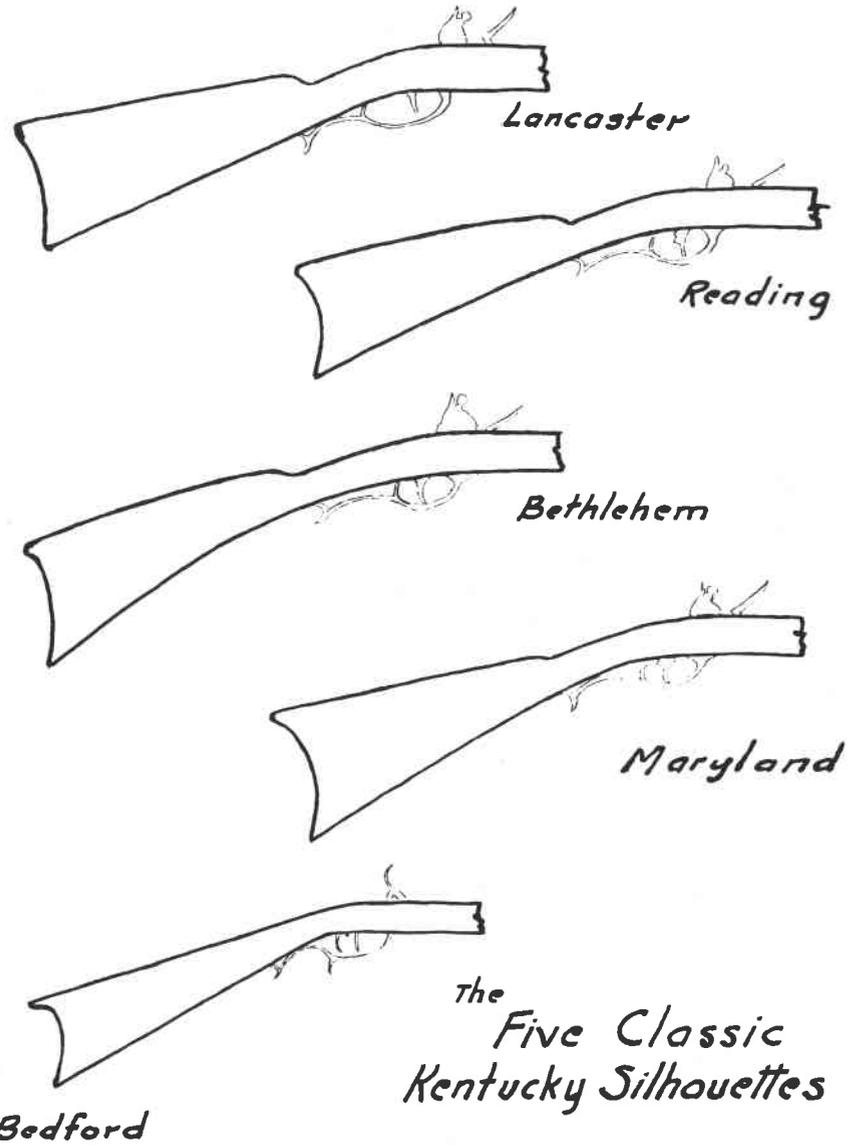


BEDFORD PROFILE



Bedford

THOMAS OLDHAM RIFLE



*The
Five Classic
Kentucky Silhouettes*

THE FINE CLASSIC

KENTUCKY RIFLE SILHOUETTES

While I have been talking about five basic shapes, there actually are only the three we have just described. The final two were really derived from the first shape - the straight line Lancaster shape - but through usage, the other two have won a starting position on the varsity team.

These three shapes - Lancaster, Bethlehem and Reading, were certainly the oldest forms, and are the ones that have been copied the most. You will see more derivatives from these three than from the others.

#15 - MARYLAND PROFILE

The next outline is that of Maryland. It is dominated by two straight lines - one on top and one on the bottom - an almost non-existent nose, a nearly symmetrical crescent at the butt and a sharper drop. The principal things that make this different from the straight-line shape from Lancaster, are the facts that the top line is about the same length as the bottom line - with Lancaster the top line is shorter - and the included angle between these lines is larger. This gives this shape greater depth at the butt - this spread is often called the "Maryland Flair."

This Silhouette is later than the first three, and begins to show up in the late 1700's in the products of Jacob Metzger and Christian Hawken. It reaches full development about 1800.

#16 - JOHN ARMSTRONG - (Big)

#17 - JOHN ARMSTRONG - (Silver)

#18 - JACOB EARNEST

#19 - NATHANIEL ROWE

#20 - BEDFORD PROFILE

Our last shape is Bedford. To me, the most remarkable thing about any Bedford is the place it occupies in the chronological order. Bedford makers were beginning about the time when all the rest of them were dying out. The Bedford profile was probably fully developed by about 1835. Up to this point, we have considered only the architectural profile - but now we must add a mechanical detail. No Bedford Silhouette would be complete without its distinctive hammer.

The Bedford profile is characterized by two straight lines - top and bottom, a small angle of inclusion which gives the butt-stock a narrow look, almost no nose and a sharper angle of break than any of the others - and, of course, its high-fashion hammer.

#21 - OLDHAM

#22 - CLASSIC SHAPES

Here then, is my point - of all the thousands of different profiles you see on Kentucky Rifles, there are only five basic shapes - and they each represent a geographic section. Learn these five, and you will become an instant expert on regional identification - almost!

In closing, I must tell you, since I am President of the Kentucky Rifle Association, that these ideas are mine personally, and do not represent an official view of the Association. Therefore, you are free to disagree, without feeling that you are bucking the august authority of the Establishment. However, I must warn you that if you do, I might very well challenge you to a duel.

Does anyone have any easy questions?