

Rifle Making In Antebellum Georgia

Richard N. Kennedy, Jr.

Firearms were probably first introduced into the land area now known as the state of Georgia when the Spanish came through under the leadership of Hernando DeSoto in 1540. By the time General James Oglethorpe landed in North America in 1733 and established the Colony of Georgia and the city of Savannah, flintlock fire arms were being traded with the Indians of this region. Trade routes were established by the English, French, and Spanish. The coastal plains and marsh lands of the new colony abounded with game and although the smoothbore military musket sufficed, the demand for sporting arms increased. To meet this demand, merchants in the city began to import fowling pieces from Europe and rifles from the northern states where rifle making had already been well established. This could be done fairly inexpensively and in good quantity. The early need for gun makers in this coastal city was therefore not of great importance but the need for gunsmiths was most important.

Savannah, like Charleston, South Carolina, became famous as a dueling city, which also created the demand for fine quality European pistols. In the early 1800s dueling was outlawed but duels continued; the dueling grounds were established across the Savannah River on one of the islands belonging to South Carolina.

Georgia as a colony or a state has never had a chronicle or documentary work done on its material culture, be it furniture, ironwork, silversmithing, masonry, or architecture. Spain used its settlements in this region to export foodstuffs to the Empire. When Oglethorpe settled the Colony of Georgia, the Trustees would hold the expansion of the colony back for thirty years or more. Slaves were forbidden at that time in Georgia. Many artisans fled the colony because of the oppressive rule by the Trustees. In 1752 slavery was permitted and Georgia became a Royal Province. Augusta became an important center of trade. By 1751 Georgia and its culture had five libraries. Had the American Revolution not occurred, Savannah may well have become another Charleston, South Carolina.

Augusta began to assume prominence in the upcountry after 1783. By the 1820s Savannah and Augusta had become major trade centers and the middle class structure became supportive of local craftsmen. Two fires in Savannah and a flood in Augusta destroyed many examples of early Georgia artistry. Silversmiths and other artisans in 1830 Georgia produced few examples that were of a quality to compare with the New York - New England trade, so they turned to clock repair, watches, and guns, as well as forge work. By the 1830s the wealthy planter class who could afford fine silver or furniture preferred American-made goods. Let us now see this all came about.

In the December 10, 1766, issue of the *Georgia Gazette*, John Richards advertised: "JOHN RICHARDS,



BLACKSMITH, CARRIES ON HIS BUSINESS AT MR GOTIER'S OPPOSITE THE BURYING GROUND WHERE HE WILL DO SHIP, PLANTATION, AND GUN WORK.'" He states that he is a young beginner willing to satisfy all who will please to favor him. Richards was successful in his efforts, as he advertised in 1784 that he had in stock "---GUN AND PISTOL LOCKS - SMITH'S FILES - BEST GERMAN STEEL AND AN ASSORTMENT OF READY MADE GUN WORK AND BRASS MOUNTING, VERY HANDY FOR COUNTRY SMITHS.'" Richards moved several times and is listed as Armorer and Gunsmith in 1796 and 1799. Richards is the earliest recorded Georgia gunsmith that I have located to date.

An interesting ad appears in the *Georgia Gazette* on February 7, 1787, which states, "FROM PHILADELPHIA THE BRIG PHOEBE, DAVID MC CALLOUGH MASTER, WHO HAS FOR SALE ON BOARD SAID BRIG SUPERFINE AND COMMON FLOUR, SHIP BREAD AND THE USUAL PHILADELPHIA TYPE GOODS AND LANCASTER MADE RIFLE GUNS."

Anthony Imfeld is listed as gunsmith and brazier in Savannah on Bay Lane in 1811. There is no reason to assume that these early gunsmiths should not have made or assembled complete firearms but I have not been able to locate a signed example of their work.

The migration of settlers into the new colony of Georgia took a north-westward direction rather than a direct westward movement. There was some migration to the south along the coast but little directly to the west or southwest. The settlers followed the Savannah River northward and began establishing towns along the natural waterway which divides Georgia and South Carolina. The gunsmiths probably went north along these trade routes and some may have come west from South Carolina and southwest from North Carolina and Tennessee. Raimond Toulouse is listed as a gunsmith in Augusta in 1811. In the manufacturer's census

GEORGIA GUN MAKERS WORKING BEFORE 1860

Abbey, Robert	Augusta	1842
Allen, Richard	Jones County	1820
Bowen, William D.	Augusta	1840
Camp, W. J.	Covington	1855
Carruthers, John	Savannah	1847
Cowan, W H C	Atlanta	
Elder, W. J.	Watkinsville	
Esper, John	Griffin	
Finch, John	Hall County	1820
Green, -	Red Clay	1800
Higgins, D.	Indian Springs	
Higgins, H. H.	Indian Springs	
Higgins, James M.	Atlanta	
Higgins, Wiley G.	Monroe County	1830
Hodgkins, Walter C.	Macon	1858
Hughes, R. J.	Monroe	
Imfeld, Anthony	Savannah	1846
Jones, John T.	Savannah	1846
Lovell, Edward (Lovell & Latimore)	Savannah	
Loyer, Adrian	Savannah	
Marston, George T.	Newnan	
Murden, Henning Daniel	Crawfordville	1840
Peck, John C. (Peck & Bowman)	Atlanta	
Porter, Archibald A.	Griffin	
Reid, Templeton	Milledgeville	1824
Richards, John (Russell & Richards)	Savannah	1796
Rogers, Elisha H. (Rogers & Abbey, Rogers & Cone, Rogers & Bowen)	Augusta	1840
Roach & Marsh	Monroe County	1824
Rogers, C. W.	Savannah	1846
Shelton, David	Talbuton	1838
Stewart, Josiah	Hall County	1820
Stephens, H. G.	Savannah	
Sumner, Thomas	Augusta	
Thomas, James R.	Collingsworth	1840
Toulouse, Raimond	Augusta	1811
Trumpler, Jacob T.	Madison	1840
Walker, E. H.	Monroe	
Watkins, William M.	Monroe	
Williams, George	Jackson County	1820

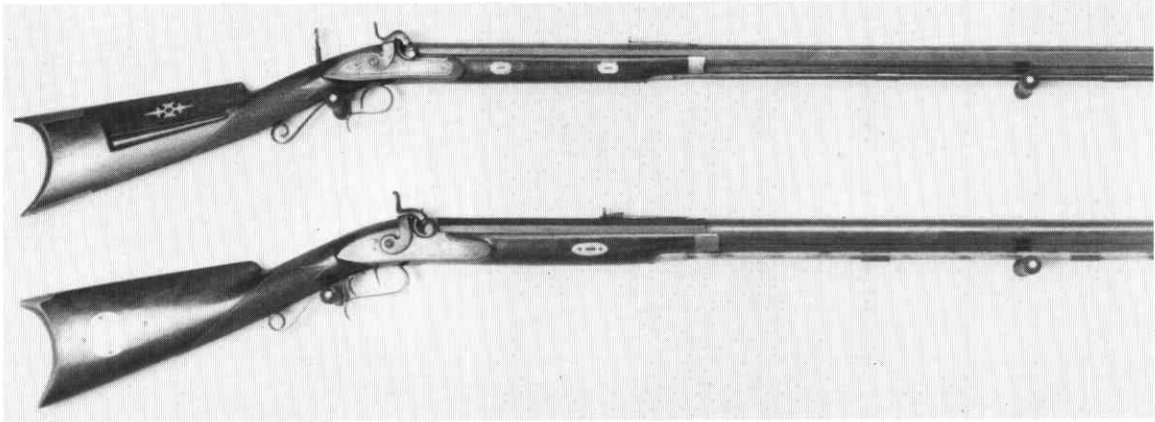
of 1820 we begin to find a list of gun makers in the northeast and north central part of the state. Some interesting insights are gained from this census. For instance, Josiah Stewart of Hall County is listed as "making use of brass and iron to the amount of \$240.00 annually and employing two hands, making rifle guns at \$20.00 each for \$1,000.00 value." John Finch of Hall County: "\$120.00 capital, 2 hands making rifle guns at \$25.00 each to a total of \$875.00 per year to a \$605.00 profit." George Williams of Jackson County, which lies east of Hall County, which lies north of Macon, Georgia, and Bibb County, in the middle of the state, is listed as a "Rifle Maker using annually 700 pounds of iron, 20 pounds of steel, 1 cord of wood at a cost of \$76.21, employing two men, with \$100.00 capital, \$180.00 wages and \$20.00 other expenses to make rifles at a value of \$500.00 annually in tolerable good demand at present." Obviously these were all flintlock rifles, yet none of their rifles have been identified to my knowledge. These \$20.00 rifles were, I suppose, fairly plain basic hunting pieces, but I wonder what the \$40.00 rifle must have looked like. Georgia was fortunate to have some very fine craftsmen working in wood and metal from the last half of the eighteenth century through the eighteen sixty period. Owen Strange made a fine secretary desk and bookcase in Savannah between 1801 and 1812. The wood work and inlay is very high quality.

With the affluence of merchants and plantation owners increasing in numbers across the state, certainly the demand for fine rifles and pistols would naturally follow. By the 1840s gunsmiths quite capable of producing fine quality firearms were scattered over most of the middle and northern half of Georgia. Augusta had become one of the important centers for gun making. Elisha H. Rogers established a large sporting goods business and made fairly large numbers of fine quality sporting rifles. He formed a number of partnerships with other gun makers, such as Robert Abbey and William D. Bowen. Henning D. Murden was producing rifles in Crawfordville near Athens. J. P. Murray was well established in Columbus and Jacob Trumpler was making fine rifles in Madison Georgia. On the coast, John Carruthers, J. T. Jones, C. W. Rogers, and Edward Lovell were producing fine long arms. Interestingly enough, no examples of pistols have surfaced to date.

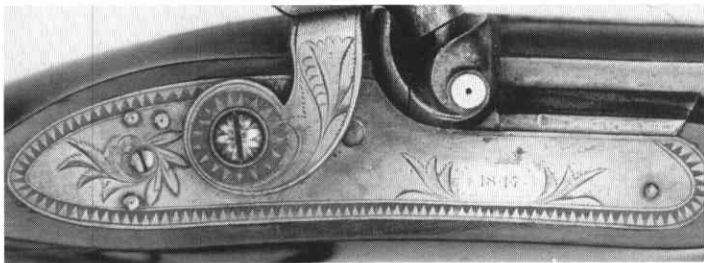
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I wish to acknowledge the following people and organizations and give them my gratitude for their help:

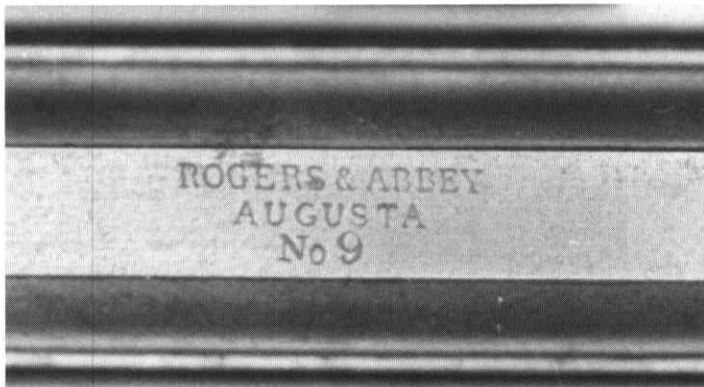
Bill Adams	Conrad Smith
Cecil Anderson	Columbus Museum
Bob Bostwick	Frank Sellers
Dan Wallace	Doug Eberhart
Robert Berryman	Atlanta Historical Society
Jane Smith	University of Georgia Museum
Paul Blatner	Beverly M. DuBose III



A Rogers and Abbey rifle (top) and one by E. A. Rogers, showing similar trigger guards, fore end caps, lower ramrod pipes. Note double cheek piece and peep sight on upper rifle. Rogers also made a cane gun with detachable stock of which I don't have a photo. Remington barrels seem to have been the choice of Rogers and several other makers.



The Rogers and Abbey rifle is of exceptional quality with fine engraving and is finished in gold. It is one of the few dated rifles: the lock is marked "1847." As the little plate on the left side shows, it was to George G. McWhorter by his father. Courtesy Bob Berryman.

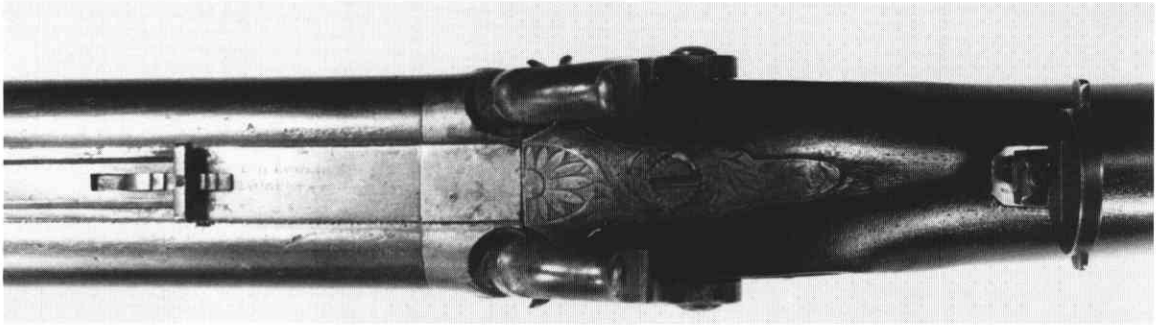


The barrel marking on the McWhorter rifle - it is the only numbered Rogers rifle I have seen. Note also the alternate flat and round barrel "flats;" it has a peep sight, false muzzle, and set trigger.

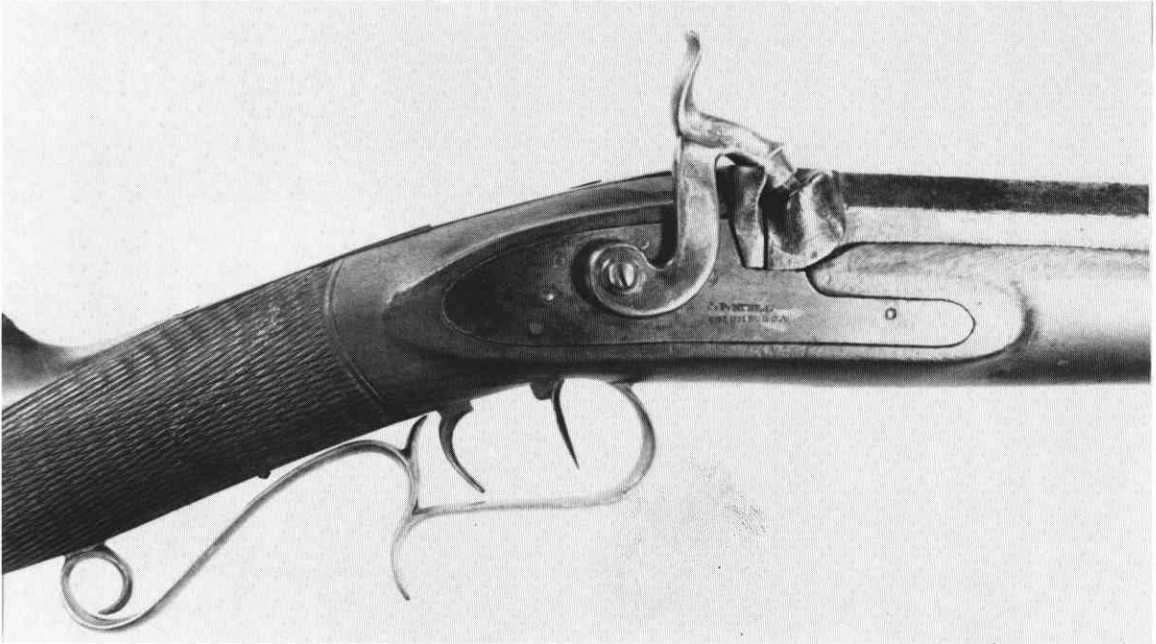
Fighting lions on the patchbox of an E. H. Rogers, Augusta, rifle.



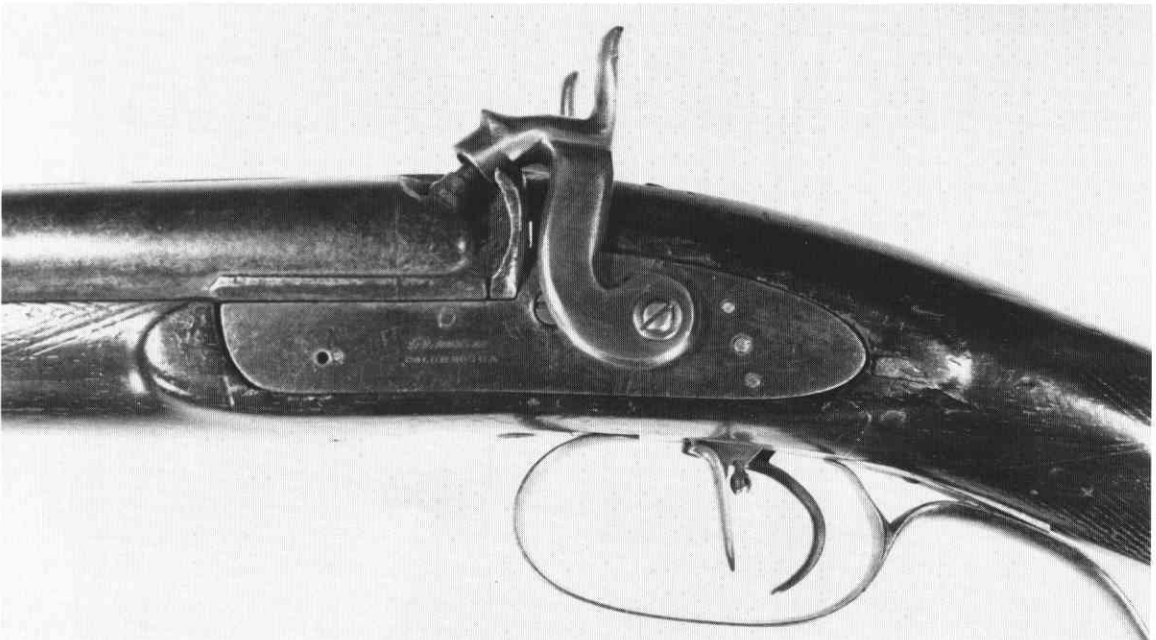
The lock, peep sight, and trigger guard of the Rogers rifle . . .



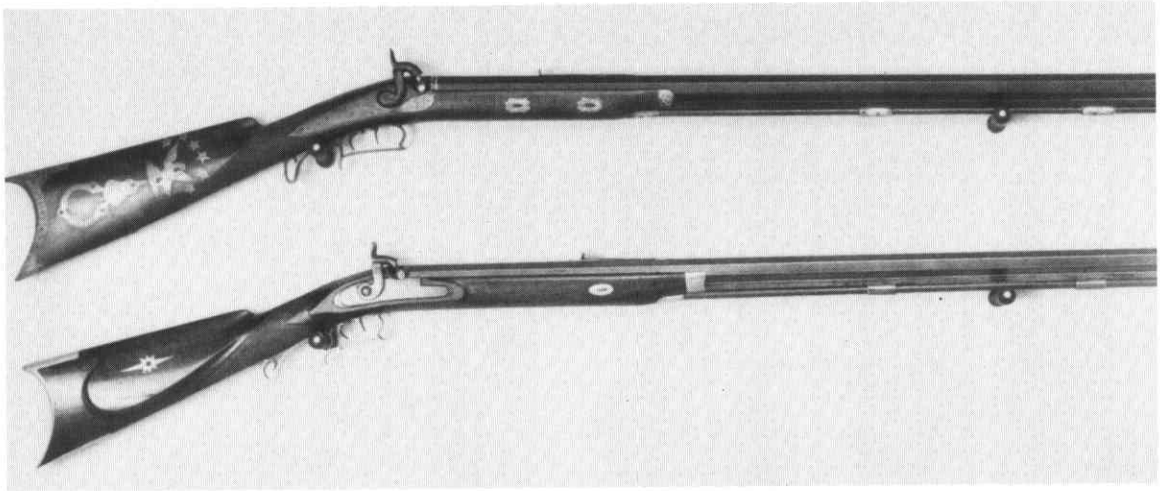
...and the top of the Rogers rifle, showing elaborate engraving on the tang.



The lock area of a rifle by J. P. Murray of Columbus, GA.



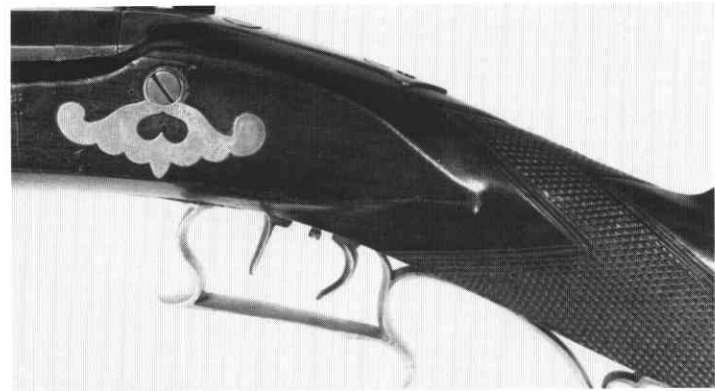
This J. P. Murray firearm is a different type of Southern gun: a combination, side-by-side, rifle-shotgun. The rifle barrel has a set trigger.



Rifles by Jacob Trumpler, Madison, Georgia (top), and J. T. Jones of Savannah, the former fitted with gold, the latter with peep sight and double cheek piece.



Lock area of a rifle marked J. T. JONES. S A V. GA.



Decorative backplate of the J. T. Jones rifle. Note the well-done checkering.



Henning D. Murdan, Crawfordsville, GA., a prominent gunsmith in the 1840's



Edward Lovell, a Savannah gunsmith.