

Thoughts on Joe Kindig, Jr.

by: Dr. A. Lewis Katzowitz

present this talk not as an expert on Joe (there are some amongst you who probably knew him better than I) but as a friend who would like to share some knowledge and anecdotes with you. This paper is also dedicated to the memory of my Dad, who enjoyed meeting and hearing about Joe and with whom he had many similarities.

Did you know Joe Kindig, Jr., the yachtsman, the pilot who flew his own planes, the airport owner, the horseman, the dandy who bought his boots on Jermyn St., and had his suits tailored on Saville-Row. No? Then you met him after 1951, when he had retreated from the world and dedicated himself to living simply.

Joe Kindig, Jr., was a very complex individual, a study in contrasts, a dynamic and forceful man of strong opinions, who lived the way he believed. Joe was without doubt a leading, if not *the* leading, dealer in the finest American furniture of the 18th century. He was also one of the most successful dealers in fine arms and armor.

The stories about Joe were legend; they ranged from the truth to the ridiculous. One thing about which there was no question, Joe loved the arms and armor he had gathered, and if you were a buyer, you bought on his terms. If he felt you loved and appreciated his treasures, you were welcome without a concern of ever making a purchase. Should your desire be only to buy, perhaps just to turn a collar, it was just as well you never returned. In Joe's opinion, he owned nothing, he was merely the caretaker.

The Kindigs have been around Pennsylvania for a long time. In 1709, nine years before William Penn died, Joe's ancestor, Martin Kindig, and another Swiss by the name of Christian Herr, both Elders in the Mennonite Church, arrived in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. They had been appointed by the Congregation in Bern to come to America to examine Penn's offer of 10,000 acres of Pennsylvania land for the Swiss Protestants. After they saw the land, they were in favor of accepting the offer and Martin returned to describe the potential homesteads. The offer of 10,000 acres was a generous but also a business-like act. Penn had all of the colony of Pennsylvania by grant from the British Crown, and in return was supposed to produce revenue for the Crown. By giving portions of the land to industrious Swiss farmers, who were also Protestants, he was satisfying his conscience as well as providing a source for further taxes once the farms were hacked out of the virgin lands. The 10,000 acre plot, allocated to the Kindig-Herr Mennonites was part of a huge tract known as Chester County. At that time Chester County kept going west to no particular definable end. No one knew or cared about the western limits. The whole matter was academic, as



there were not farmers enough to fill out the eastern portion. Peace, industry, good soil and water, caused the land to fill up rapidly. In 1720, the western part of Chester County became Lancaster County. Twenty years later, the western part of Lancaster broke off to become York, and a few years after that, York's western neighbor, Adams County, was formed.

In 1770, Heinrich Kindig, the grandson of the original Mennonite settler, moved west from Lancaster to York. The Kindigs got no further. Heinrich was a farmer and a minister, as his ancestor had been, and as his children would be for two more generations. His grandson was still carrying on the family tradition when he was expelled from the congregation for worldliness. In addition to farming, Great-grandfather Kindig moonlighted in the horse and mule business. Horse traders were not held in high regard and Victorian Mennonites could not have one of their lay-preachers hustling cross-eyed mules. His son, Joe Sr., was born and eventually became one of the major horse and mule dealers in the United States. Kindig's York horse auction became an important regional event. Their horses were bought by high fashioned society in New York, although the mainstay continued to be work horses for the farm. A fine pair of Kindig's driving horses could bring up to 3,800 dollars, and this at a time when a cow pony could be had for ten dollars in Kansas. The horse and mule trade flourished into the 1920s.

Joe Kindig, Jr. was born in 1898. He attended Culver Military Academy near South Bend, Indiana and became a member of the famous Black Horse Troop. They were talented enough to precede the president of the United States of America at inauguration parades in Washington. From Culver and high school Joe went to Pennsylvania State College from which he graduated in 1921 with a degree in Agronomy.

Joe loved horses and kept five riding horses which he rode regularly until his 50's. Early in life, however, he decided he did not want to be in the horse business. As a boy, he was not allowed to have a gun which might kill someone. Ultimately, at the age of 13, he was permitted to buy an antique gun, provided it did not shoot. He continued this practice, buying American martial pistols, cased English pistols, Colts and Kentucky rifles. This continued through college.

Joe, Jr.'s job as a youth was to collect rent from his father's tenant farmers in surrounding York. In his travels he would come across some useless Kentucky Flintlock and trade a few dollars off the rent for the gun. Joe developed a mail order business for his guns and was able to accumulate enough money to repay his father all the money spent on his room, board, and tuition.

Following Joe's graduation from Penn State, it was expected that he would take over a large farm his father had given him. This, however, was not to be. Joe, Jr., had decided to go into the antique business. His dad was understandably upset over this turn of events. After all the education and effort, he was to be reduced to trading in junk. His boy could be pictured with a broken down old horse pulling a wagon selling and buying second hand furniture and mattresses.

Joe, Jr., worked hard at this new business. He knew enough to recognize that he was not yet a professional. He spent years in concentrated study and established himself as a dealer-supplier. Israel Sack and others combed the area to find "colony" furniture to replace their New York City stocks, and Joe catered to their needs. He established a network of runners to feather out the best pieces. They were amply rewarded for their efforts.

Joe, Jr., would shop for furniture in Virginia, North Carolina, Charleston, S.C., Boston and Philadelphia. In the early 30's, the depression kept the country in its icy fist. Wealthy people were going broke and selling off family heirlooms. When others were broke, Joe had money and with cash discreetly bought fine furniture in Philadelphia.



Where it all started: Joe's store.

In 1928, Joe had converted everything he owned into cash and was one of the lucky few who thrived during those very difficult depression years. On one occasion, he bought the huge inventory of arms and armor from Sumner Healy, a New York City dealer. In 1930, he felt he had served his apprenticeship and was ready to open his shop. He bought the present store on West Market Street in York, and announced he was in business. Ads were run in "Antique Magazine" and ultimately he could truthfully say, "One of the finest stocks in the United States". His customers included Henry Dupont, Wallace Nutting and Frances Garven.

Mr. Dupont would buy nothing without Joe's approval. As the extremely fine items came in, DuPont would be offered first refusal. In this manner the Winterthur Collection was assembled. Mr. Dupont hired Joe Downs from the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum to help convert his private collection into a public museum. Joe, never too happy with museums, was a little miffed and announced that no longer would Mr. DuPont be given first refusal on fine furniture. Joe himself was instrumental in supplying a good portion of the furnishings within the museum.

Joe worked hard and lived well, as becomes a man of means. In 1929, he joined the Maryland Yacht Club, and bought an ocean going 45 foot yawl. This necessitated the purchase of a book on how to sail small vessels. Following the yawl there was a ketch, then a schooner. Rarely was there an outing but that they didn't go aground or have some other near catastrophe occur. On one occasion young Joe was cracked on the head with a boom. It took several hours to get to a hospital for repairs. Another time the boat was wrecked with Joe returning to the club attired in a wet blanket. All sorts of indignities were suffered by the landlubber attempting to take to the sea. He eventually had enough of boats and in 1931 decided to take up flying.

His first plane was a Monocoupe. An airport was then started on the site of the old York fair grounds. Joe, Jr. owned seven different planes, all second hand, in the course of his four year flying career. He would fly to Teterboro Airport in New Jersey, when his business required him in New York. One day he swapped the plane he flew in from York for a Ford Tri-motor he found at Teterboro. It seemed like a good idea at the time. After all, he could transfer some of his fine furniture in that manner. The only problem was it would not fit in his small air field, and could only be landed at Harrisburg. With the help of a professional flyer, it was landed and flown out of York but only after a close call with telephone wires. The flying venture was abandoned in 1939, and the field sold thereafter. Joe Kindig, Sr., was very annoyed with his son when his granddaughter, Mary Josephine, related how difficult it was to hold 4 year old Stephen and try to keep the door shut while daddy flew the plane.

Through the years, the buying and selling of fine antique furniture was his basic business, buying and selling antique arms was his hobby . . . admittedly a profitable

one. The fruit of many years of effort was realized by the publication of his book, "Thoughts On The Kentucky Rifle In Its Golden Age". This did much to build the appreciation and value of the gun.

In 1923, Joe married a local beauty from York County, named Anna Boyd, and they had three children, Joe III, Mary Josephine and Stephen. His business flourished and was very profitable. He was a pillar of the community and a success in many ways. In spite of all this, Joe was not content. It was not a question of material things, he was not satisfied to merely fit into a slot and be a follower.

In 1951, at the age of 53, a change came about, his thinking following a new direction. For weeks at a time he left his home, family and business. With his dog, Surrey, he retreated to a solitary log cabin on the banks of the Susquahanna River. The furnishings were minimal and Spartan. He did have a pot and a ten-plate stove, made of ten rectangular plates of cast iron. Mice were his companions, pity the poor mice if they were dependent on his leftovers. For approximately six months Joe stuck to this regime of meditation and thought, then emerged with a new outlook and the philosophy of simplification that was to shape the remainder of his life. Frivolities were to be discarded. The basics were emphasized. No longer was he to be in a hurry. Clothes were of minimal importance; he threw away a fine watch Anna had given him. His beard and hair were to grow without trimming. Incidentally, he did break this rule on one occasion, when he was offered \$5,000.00 by a York businessman if he would submit to a shave and haircut. No one thought Joe would submit to the barber. However, there was no stipulation he could not grow another crop. After the haircut and shave, he donated the \$5,000.00 to charity and then back to his old ways. Joe wore no socks, his pants and shirt just kept him from being indecent. Until the change in his life, he had no real religious beliefs. He had never joined a church. For a period he became interested in Yoga, but then this was dropped. He did develop his own philosophies and powerful feelings about God and religion. Eventually he joined the Quakers and each Sunday went to meeting with his dog, Surrey, for quiet meditation and thought. Once, asked why he brought his dog to church, he replied it was better to have the dog go to church than have the church go to the dogs.

During the 1930's, 40's and 50's, Joe was well known at the sales rooms in New York and London. He made annual trips to Europe and bought countless numbers of fine arms and armor. He was a prominent buyer of the finer arms in the Hearst collection. People from all walks of life, including European royalty and government figures made pilgrimages to York. All were treated with the same courtesy, but his basic philosophies were never altered.

My first contact with Joe began in the days when I was a medical resident. One summer day I called and asked if I might come by and visit. Permission granted, my Dad and I drove from home to York, where we entered the antique shop of Joe Kindig, Jr. My knowledge of antique weapons

bordered on the ridiculous, and my ability to buy any, particularly Joe's, was equally ridiculous. A medical resident made approximately \$150.00 a month in those days. Joe was gracious and went so far as to invite us to come with him to his home and visit his gun room. I can easily recall climbing to the third floor and entering a room, which was like a flight into fantasy. Imagine a room with hundreds of Kentucky rifles lining the walls; shelves, tables and floor loaded with some of the finest and most exotic European firearms in existence. We took pictures, asked questions regarding some of the guns and spent considerable time in conversation. This particular instance demonstrates Joe's willingness to extend himself to those whom he considered interested, who were willing to learn and made no false pretense of knowledge. Nothing annoyed Joe more than people speaking "through their hats" or just to hear themselves talk.

Years later, when I once again traveled to York, Joe remembered nothing of ever having previously met me and for all practical purposes, this was our first meeting.

A tree grew across the entrance of his shop: to find the door knob one had to push the branches aside. Joe would not harm a living thing and so he would not harm a bush that desired to grow across his entrance way. Entering through the door, past the 17th century wedding armor, one came to a room cluttered with stacks of magazines, books and furniture of the finest type. Picture a magnificent 18th century Philadelphia highboy with a pile of books, ash trays and rifles resting against its sides; a magnificent Rittenhous grandfather clock in one corner, all surrounded by the accumulation of years. Climb the wooden stairs to the second floor, pass through the hall lined with Simon Willard clocks, or their equivalent and enter the "office". The filing cabinet consists of a long spike on which correspondence and papers are impaled. The adjacent room contains a rather worn sofa in front of a small fireplace with apple cores lining the front; the mice must also eat. In a corner, propping up a wobbly table, is a



Joe and me and the tree across the entrance.



The office and the "filing cabinets."

small wooden gun case containing a Baby Patterson Colt. All Colts were looked upon with disdain as having been mass produced in a "stove factory". Endless amounts of fine items were in all rooms, early American powder horns, fine furniture, a pair of tortoise shell stocked wheel-lock pistols in a drawer, all to be seen by the lucky on-looker. The third floor contained much of the same with barrels of swords, suits of armor and other treasures.

A real treat was to be invited to his and Anna Kindig's home with the furniture being of only the finest 18th century American. The third floor gun room, previously mentioned, had nothing but the best of Kentucky and European arms. Shelves were loaded with flint-locks, wheel-locks, snaphaunces, etc. In one section were Scottish pistols. It was to this area I devoted a considerable length of time. I examined pairs of Scottish pistols; one pair in particular interested me. The price was higher than others appearing to be somewhat similar. It was explained that this pair had solid silver stocks, while the others were steel with silver wire inlay. Since each pair was as black as the next the difference was not readily apparent. On rubbing the blackened surface the silver became obvious. The following day I had made my decision to take the plunge and buy. The price was considerably more than I could immediately pay, and I suggested perhaps I might send monthly payments, and when fully paid, Joe would send the pistols. The answer was short and to the point: "Absolutely not, you will take the guns and send the money as we decide."

I did take them, I signed no receipt, he knew not where I lived and I really doubt he knew my entire name at the time. I mention this experience as an indication of the man's character. Through the years, I got to know him better, I spent many, many hours in his third floor gun room with him and by myself. I was always accused of messing up the room so that everything was in disarray for days after my leaving. That was a joke in itself. The hours spent with him I was exposed to some of his philosophies of people, his foibles and his humor.

According to Joe, people were of four general types. There were the "Body people, Mind people, Heart people and Soul people". Let me explain . . . the Body person thinks only of satisfying the physical pleasures, his daily life is spent pursuing that goal. He has little concern for things of beauty. The vast majority of people, according to Joe, are in that category. The Mind person is precise, is calculating, and is a success in what he attempts, however, he lacks the inward warmth for things beautiful. There are significantly less people in that classification, perhaps 15%. Then come the Heart people, perhaps 5% of the population. They have an inner warmth and sensitivity, they recognize what to them is beautiful and pursue it to the best of their ability. Lastly, come the Soul people, he is next to God. The only one in that category by Joe's own admission was Joe.

Joe was not a person to be awed by position, money or power. He cared only for what he perceived you to be. I can recall a phone call one day while we were together. He left the room and I heard some heated words on his part. When he returned, I could see he was a bit ruffled and I asked him what the trouble was. It seemed the curator of a famous internationally known museum had been there a while before and had selected a chair and sofa for possible purchase, however, he asked for time to consult with the board governing these matters. It was agreed, and he gave them two weeks to make their decision. The phone call came from the curator stating they had agreed to the purchase of the chair, but he would like to have



Part of the gun room with a Henry VIII gun shield in the background.

additional time to decide on the sofa. "Absolutely not," he exclaimed, "I gave the two weeks that they requested and that is that."

I don't really know what Joe might be thinking, if he is watching us now. Don't think for one moment he'd be overwhelmed with pride and flattery by being presented to such an august body as the American Society of Arms Collectors. I can only recall what he said when I asked him why he didn't have a group of people from a very well known collectors organization in to visit when they were in town. "I will not cast pearls before swine." I just mention that to keep us in perspective.

Joe's prices sometimes seemed a bit high, but as he said, "Nowhere in the world can you see these things, handle and get a price on them as well." He did not take kindly to those who might question his figures. I recall one person who asked that perhaps Joe could do better in regard to the price of one particular gun. He pondered that a moment, and answered "Yes, he could do better, it will be \$500.00 more." Do you know that he had to pay that extra \$500.00. On one occasion, I asked about a pair of pistols, he gave me what I considered a rather heavy price. I asked how he arrived at that figure, after a moment's reflection, he replied, "The Lord told me." I could not let that get past me, so I asked him to go back and ask the Lord how he arrived at that figure. Joe roared with laughter, although he did not reduce the price. In looking back, I know of no one who regrets ever having bought anything from Joe.

On another occasion, arrangements were made with a Kentucky Rifle collector to purchase Joe's famous over and under rifle by Jacob Kuntz. The selling price was established at \$35,000.00, a world record at that time. The buyer noted and remarked that the wrist of the rifle was broken and slivers were missing. Joe replaced the gun on the rack and further talk went on. Eventually, the buyer stated he had best settle up. Joe replied it wasn't necessary, he didn't feel the man really would love or appreciate the gun. Flabbergasted, the collector replied that "Certainly he would, wasn't he paying more for the rifle than



Joe was always ready for a laugh and a pretty young visitor (Candy Chapolis).

had ever been paid before?" That settled it, he didn't get the rifle. When dealing for Joe's better things, if you did not appear to have that warmth and love for his possession, there was not money enough to buy it.

One of Joe's weaknesses was candy, and on one occasion I was away and sent him a type characteristic of the part of the country I was in. Never a stickler for etiquette, he wrote and told me he did not like it. My next move was to send him a standard 5 lb box of candy from which all the pieces had been removed but for one. To compensate for the removed weight, there were several pieces of lead taped to the bottom of the box. A letter accompanied the candy, explaining how everyone had enjoyed the candy and thanking him for his generosity. Not long after a letter returned, stating he had melted down the lead to musket balls and was deliberating with which gun to shoot me.

Through the years Joe seemed indestructible. Every evening at closing he would walk from the store to his home. This in spite of wind, rain, sleet or cold. He did not wear stockings and his clothes did not seem overly warm. On occasion, when I'd call and ask how he felt, he gave me a stock answer in that, when you live well and trust the Lord, you are well. On one occasion in December, 1970, I called, but there was not the old snap and he seemed tired. He did state he was not feeling well. I visited shortly thereafter, and was allowed to examine him.

Gradually, over the weeks, his condition became worse with more and more fatigue. He was cared for at home by



My dad, Sam Katzowitz, and a pistol by Michael Maucher — our first visit.

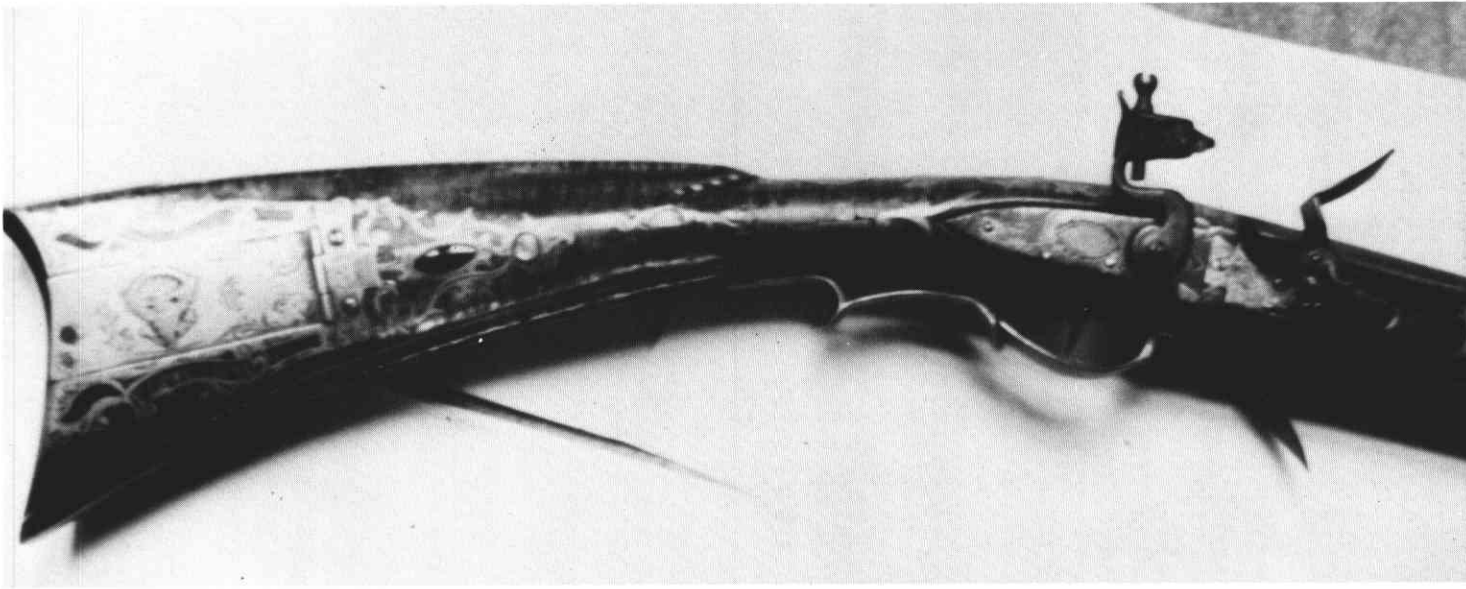
his fantastic and beautiful wife, Anna. Of course, he refused any suggestion of hospitalization. He was happy at home and continued his interests to the best of his ability.

On April 5, 1971, with Anna in attendance, he looked out the window and remarked about it snowing, she

looked out and then back to Joe. He had passed away.

In his last months, Joe had a dignity and courage with which most human beings are not blessed.

He was a legend in his own time. An era has passed and there will never be another like him.



Patch box of the Jacob Kuntz over and under Kentucky.



A pair of silver-stocked 18th Century Scottish pistols by Murdoch.