

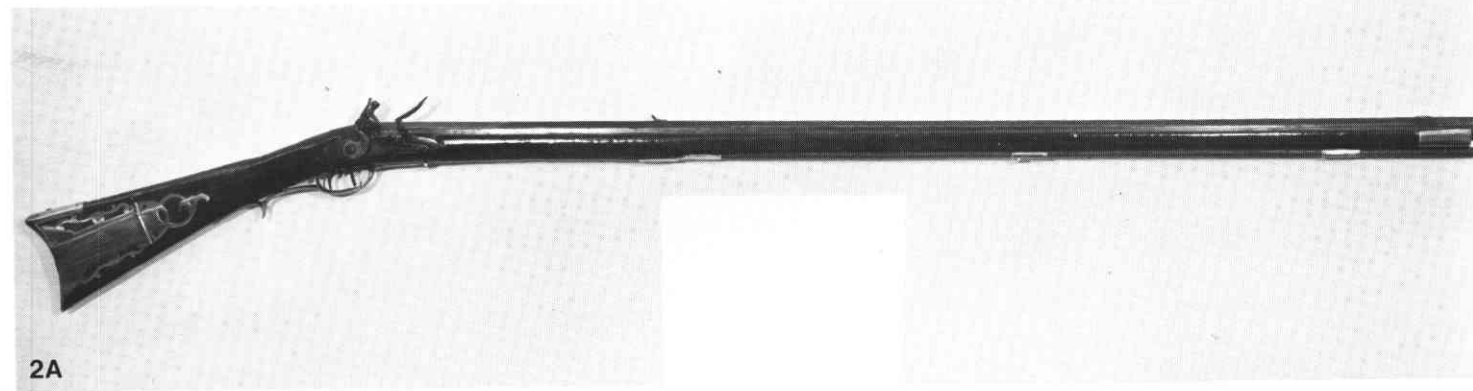
1A



1B



1C



2A



2B



2C

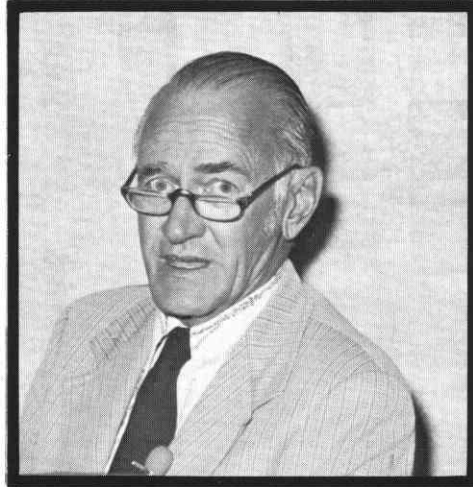
The Artistry of the Hawken Family

by William H. Reisner, Jr.

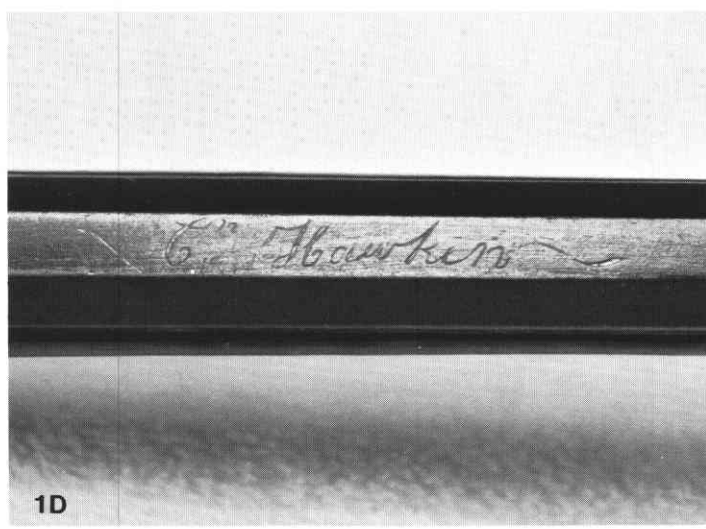
According to the program my talk this afternoon was on "The Kentucky Rifle". However, this subject has been most ably presented to the Society by my colleagues Crosby Milliman, Harm Leonard, and Al Sullivan, and what I could add would indeed be superfluous. Instead, I have chosen one facet of the history of the Pennsylvania or Kentucky Rifle to share with you and I sincerely hope that you will find it as fascinating and intriguing as I have. The title of my talk is "The Artistry of the Hawken Family," in which I will try to show you the influence that this one family, comprising three generations of gunsmiths, has contributed to the history of our country, especially the west. To most collectors and students of arms, other than the Kentucky collector, the term "Hawken Rifle" has assumed the generic meaning of "any half stock rifle that was carried by the fur trappers, mountain men, and pioneers of the old west." This misconception I hope we will be able to clarify for you this afternoon.

My interest in the Hawken family came early in my collecting career, as I was born and raised in Hagerstown, Maryland, the same as Christian Hawken, the patriarch of the Hawken family. Research has indicated, but not fully proven, that three brothers migrated to America prior to the Revolutionary War from Switzerland or perhaps just across the border in Germany. They settled in the area of Hagerstown, Maryland, and all three were alleged to be gunsmiths. We know for sure that Christian and Nicholas made guns, and were presumably brothers, and the third one could have been Henry, of which very little is known. This was the start of the Hawken lineage which was destined to produce at least fifteen gunsmiths, extending through three generations, and from them contribute more to the growth and development of our nation than any other family of gunsmiths.

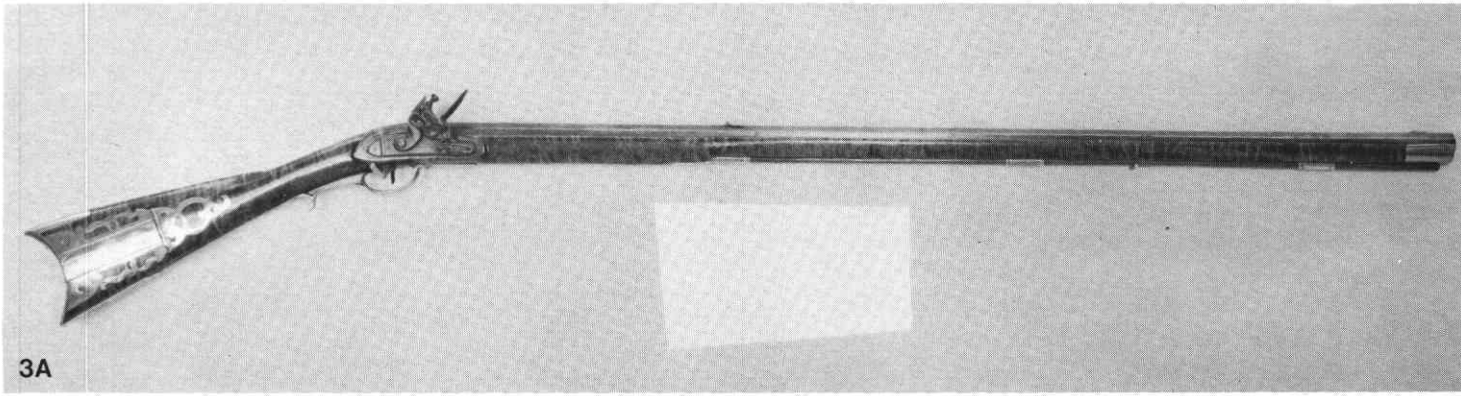
Now let us examine the work of the master craftsman, Christian Hawken, whose versatility produced beautiful



relief carved rifles (1a, 1b, 1c, 1d) to plainer pieces with no carving (2a, 2b, 2c). As a rule he made a long, slender (1c) gun with a thin wrist and with a rather flaring butt. He selected only the finest of curly maple for his stocks; his carving, although not as high in relief as some others, was indeed expertly executed in flowers and scrolls. He was an engraver par excellence, with the engraving on his patch boxes and other hardware being carried out with the same feeling and design as the carving on his stock (1b). Christian Hawken was born on May 15, 1756 and died on May 10, 1821, five days short of his 65th birthday, and was buried in the graveyard of St. John's Lutheran Church in Hagerstown, Maryland. It is presumed that he met and married a local girl from the Hagerstown area by the name of Juliann; from this union were born nine children, six sons and three daughters, of which three of the sons were destined to become famous gunsmiths in their own right. We will examine some of their guns in a few minutes. Christian for many years had his shop in the heart of Hagerstown on the southwest corner of what is now Franklin and Prospect Streets, and like other leading gunsmiths of his day, employed one or more apprentices to help him with his work. Speaking of apprentices, let me read to you one indenture, that of a David Miller, which I think you will find extremely interesting and will point out just how seriously this craft was taken in its day. "This indenture witnesseth that David Miller, son of John Miller, of Washington County and the State of Maryland, deceased, by and with the advice and approbation of John Fisher and Daniel Miller (each of the county and state aforesaid, guardians of said David Miller) hath put himself, and by these present, doth voluntarily and of his own free will and accord, put himself apprentice to Christian Hawken, of the county and state aforesaid gunsmith, with him after the manner of an apprentice — to serve from the day of the date hereof,



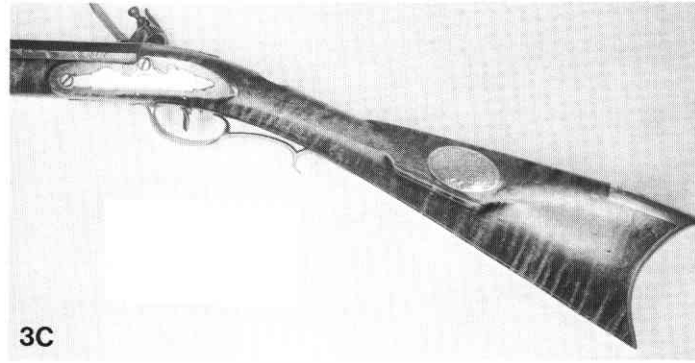
1D



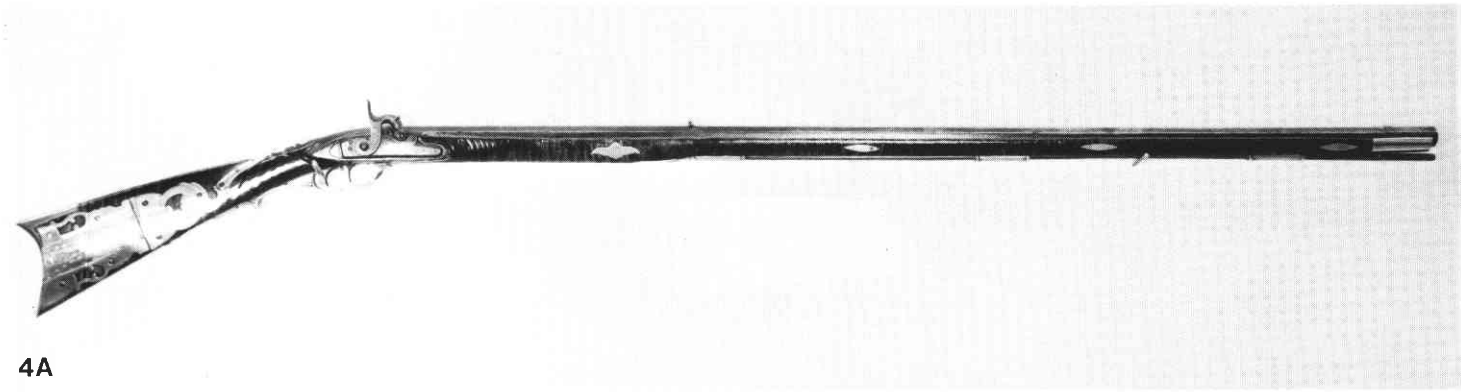
3A



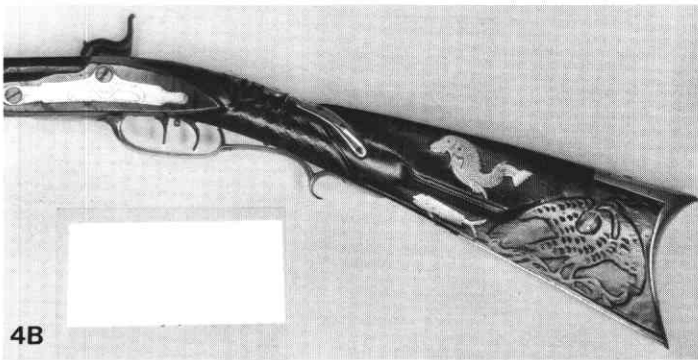
3B



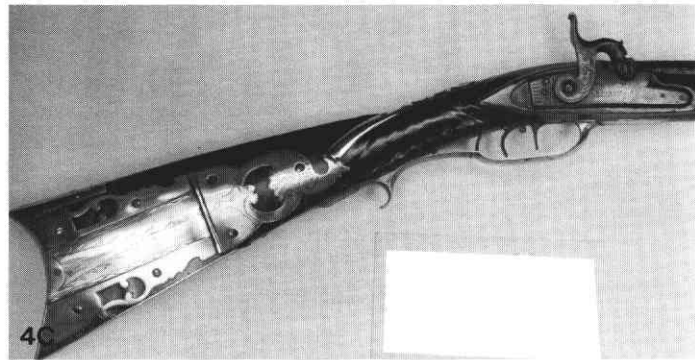
3C



4A



4B



4C



3D



4D

until he arrives at or attains the age of twenty-one years, he the said apprentice being fifteen years old, the first day of March last, during all of which term, the said apprentice, his said master faithfully shall serve, his secrets keep, his lawful commands everywhere gladly obey, he shall do no damage to his said master, nor suffer it to be done by others, without letting or giving notice thereof to his master. He shall not waste his said masters goods, nor lend them unlawfully to any, he shall not commit fornication, or contract matrimony within said term, at cards, dice, or any other unlawful game he shall not play, whereby his said master may have damage, with his own goods or the goods of others, during said term, without license from his said master. He shall neither buy nor sell, nor haunt ale houses, taverns, nor play houses, but in all things as a faithfull apprentice he shall behave himself toward his said master, and all his during said term, and the said master, and all during said term, shall by the best manner or methods he can teach, or cause to be taught the said apprentice, the art and mystery of a gunsmith, and also to provide for the said apprentice sufficient meat, drink, apparel, and lodging, and washing fitting for an apprentice during said term, and also to send said apprentice to school until he be able to read the Bible in the German language, and write and cast accounts, and at the expiration of said term, he the said master is to give unto him, the said apprentice, one full suit of apparel, worth ten pounds current money, or ten pounds in current money, at the option of said apprentice, and for the true performance of all and singular, the said covenants and agreements either of the said parties bind themselves unto the other by these presents. In witness, whereof, they have hereunto interchangeably set their hands and seals this Fifteenth Day of April 1796. Gentlemen, from this indenture we can readily see why today apprenticeships have passed from the American scene, but it also shows the importance placed on the proper training necessary to learn the skills of a gunsmith during the "Golden Age" of the Kentucky rifle.

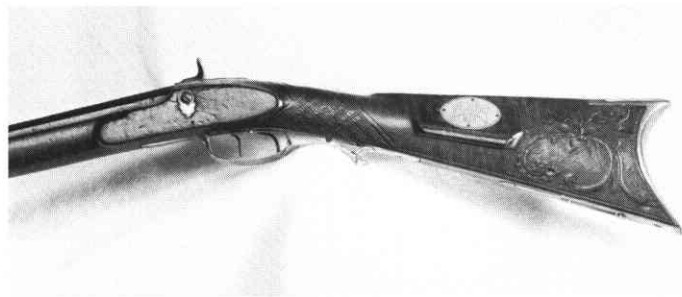
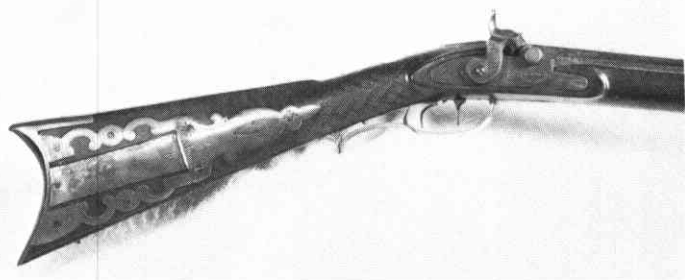
We know that Christian had six sons, five of them known to be gunsmiths, all of whom doubtlessly learned their trade from their father. The oldest was George, born February 19, 1781; the next was John, born March 19, 1784; he was followed by Jacob and Samuel, of St. Louis fame, born in 1785 and 1792 respectively. The youngest of the five gunsmith sons of Christian was William, who was born May 20, 1798. There was another son, Christian, Jr., but up till now the date of his birth has not been found and there

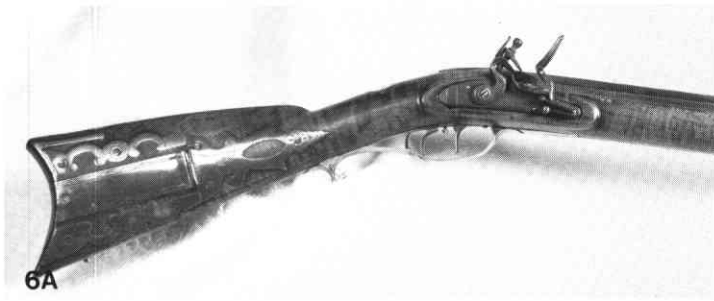
is some speculation that he may not be the oldest son as his name would logically indicate. We do know, however, that he died in 1822, shortly after his father. Very little is known about George and John but there are said to be a few surviving flintlock rifles bearing the signature "G. Hawken"; however, I have never had the privilege of examining one these rifles. There is also very little known at this time about John but it is said that he moved to Virginia, but just where, we do not know for sure. Jake was the third son and was born in 1785 and passed away in St. Louis on May 8, 1849. He, like his other brothers, learned his trade and worked in his father's shop and I have seen one rifle signed "C. & J. Hawken" which was undoubtedly made by Jake and his father while Jake still lived in Hagerstown. Jake lived and worked there with his father and brothers until 1815 when the wanderlust struck him and he packed up his tools and headed west. The first record of Jake's presence in St. Louis, where he set up his shop, was in a deed dated there on October 2, 1818.

Sam, the fourth son, was also born in Hagerstown on October 26, 1792, and like his other brothers learned his trade from his father. He, too, lived and worked in Hagerstown until 1816, when he and his new bride moved to Xenia, Ohio. Sam learned the art early and well as exemplified by this (3a, 3b, 3c, 3d) elegant and well-proportioned rifle, signed in script, "S. Hawken", which I believe he made while he still lived in Maryland; however, it is entirely possible that it could have been one he made during his short stay in Ohio. In June of 1822 Sam joined his brother Jake in St. Louis and then formed the now famous J & S Hawken Rifle Shop, guns made there up till 1849, the time of Jake's death, were so marked.

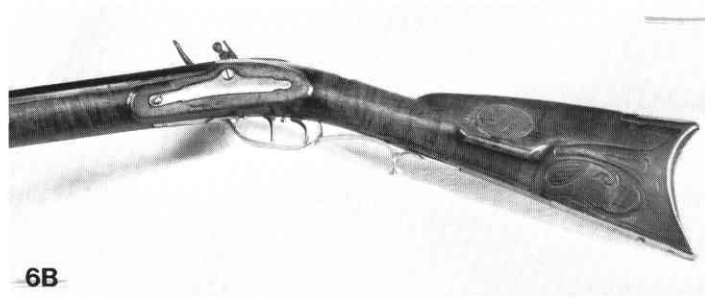
We will now leave Sam for a minute and go on to William, the fifth of Christian's talented sons. William Hawken was born May 20, 1798 and died on February 25, 1885. He elected to stay and to work in Maryland and eventually took over his father's shop after his death. He made many fine rifles during his lifetime, both in flint and percussion, examples of which we will now look at. (4a, 4b, 4c, 4d) (5a, 5b) (6a, 6b, 6c) (7a, 7b, 7c, 7d) (8a, 8b, 8c) (9a, 9b, 9c).

Now, I am going to stick my neck out and propose a fact that has puzzled me for many years regarding the works of Hawken and I hope that I can show you what I mean. Question: "Were there two William Hawkens who lived and worked very close to each other?" I base my reasoning on the differences in the signatures on the rifles, one signed in script, the other stamped. Here is a group of rifles that are signed in script (10a, 10b) and here is another with the

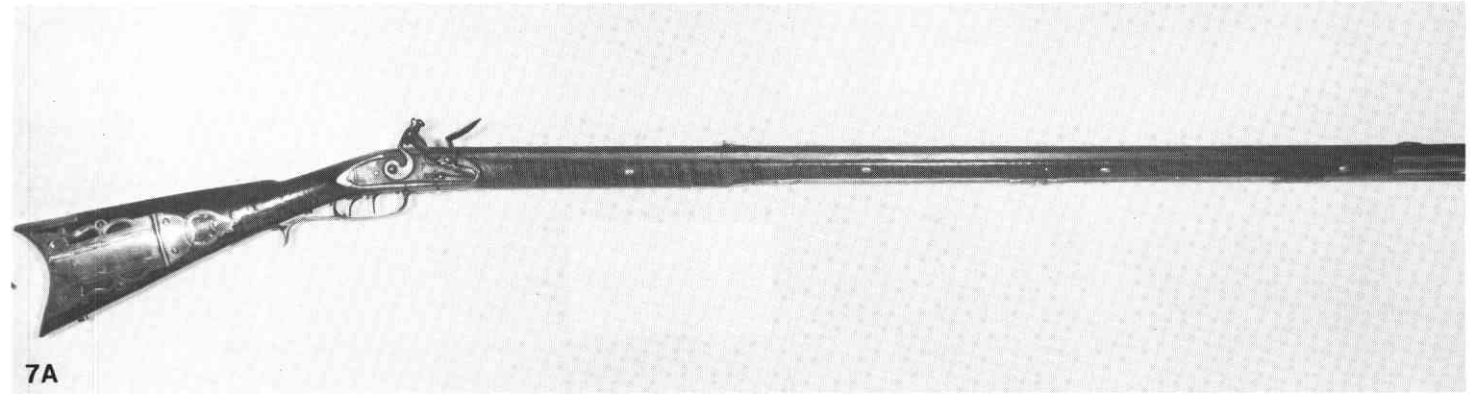




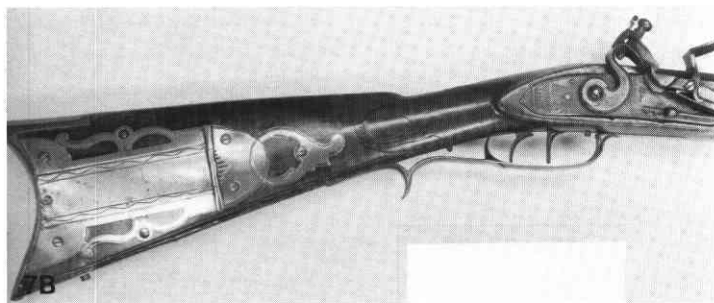
6A



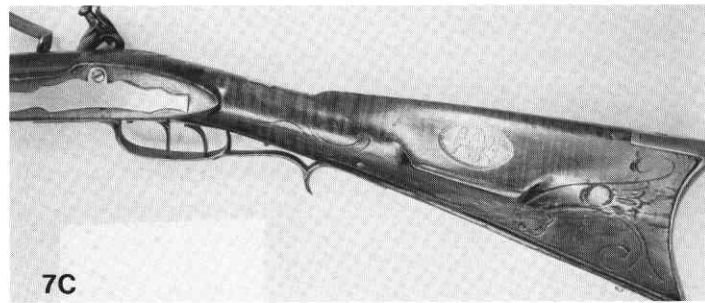
6B



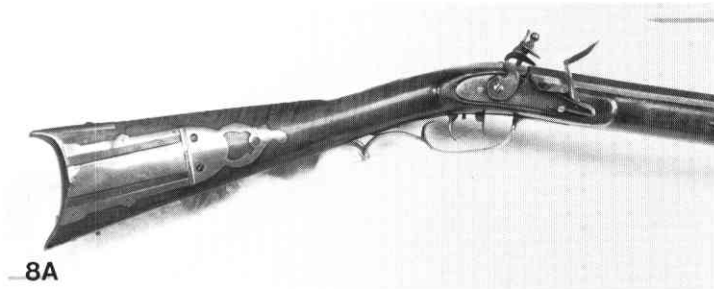
7A



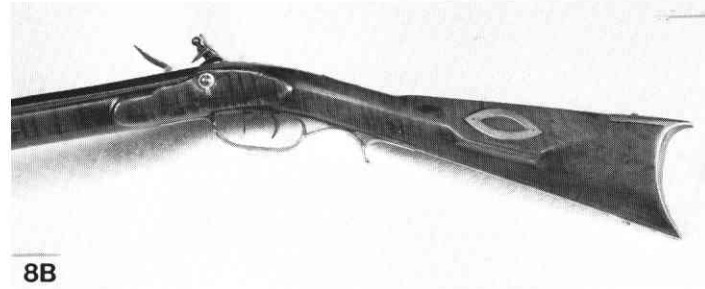
7B



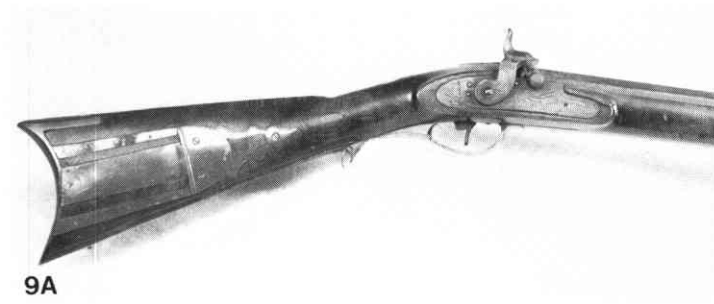
7C



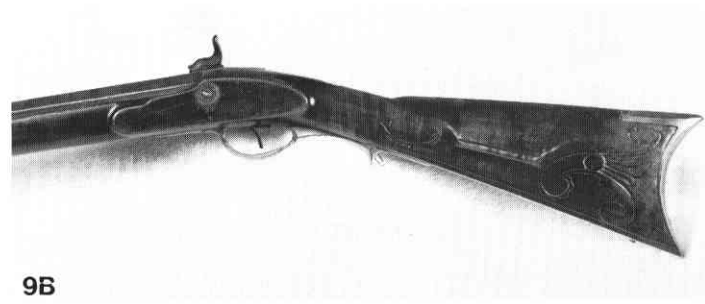
8A



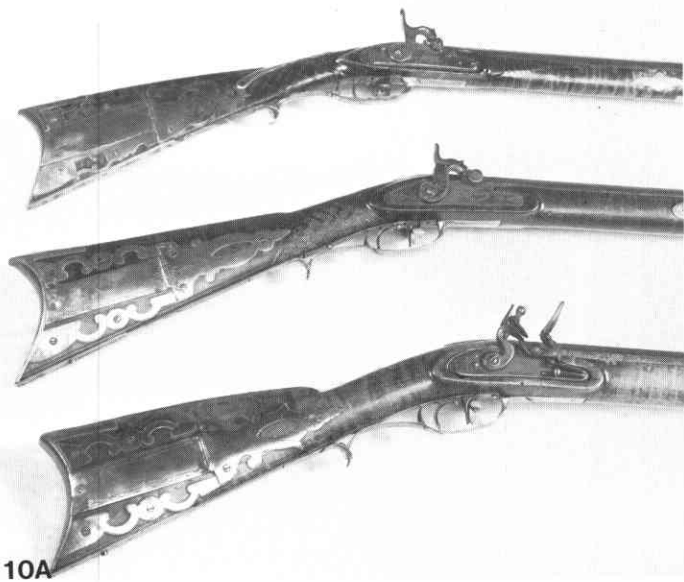
8B



9A



9B



10A



10B



6C



7D



8C

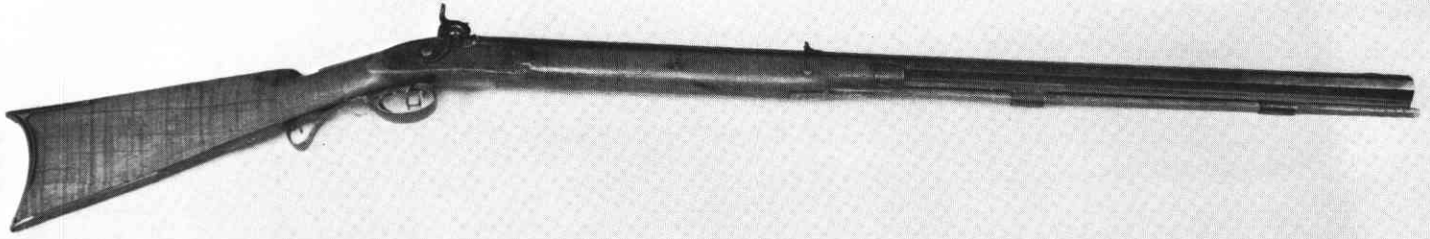


11A

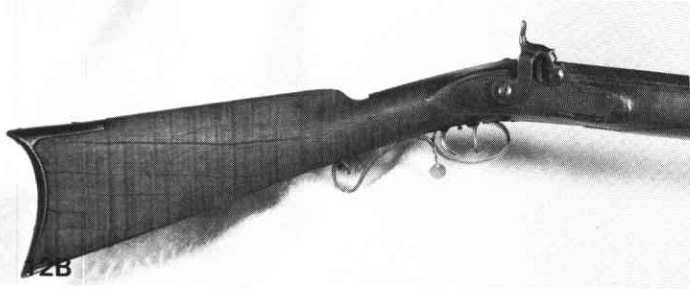


11B

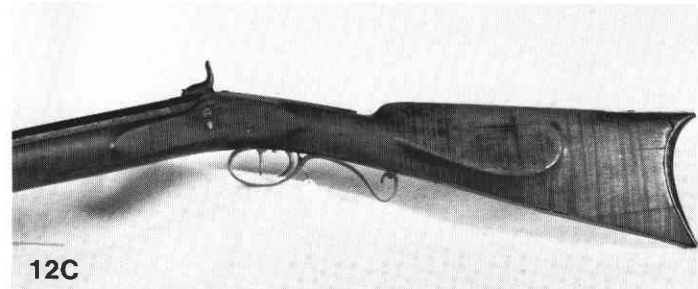
name stamped (11a, 11b). Note the singular similarity in the styles of the “script” rifles and the corresponding features of the “stamped” group. In my mind these rifles were not the work of the same hand, as the ones signed in script appear to me to be of a higher caliber of workmanship than the ones that were stamped. The only shred of evidence that I have found that would lead to any credence to my theory was in Scharf’s *History of Western Maryland*, Vol. 2, page 1062, which mentions that a “William Hawken”, gunsmith, was among the residents of Hagerstown and its immediate vicinity from 1800 to 1805 inclusive. If this is true, then William, the son of Christian, would have been only two to seven years old at that time and would therefore indicate the existence of another and, up until now, an unidentified William Hawken. I bring this theory out as my observation only, with the hope that future generations may find out the right.



12A



12B



12C

Let us now return to Jake and Sam and the significant contributions that they made to the development of the west. When they established their shop in St. Louis, they soon realized that a new weapon was needed to arm the fur trappers, mountain men, and pioneers which were moving into the west. Conditions there and then were far different than were known anywhere before, as the men who needed these arms were far from any source of repairs or supplies, in hostile country, where nature was an even greater danger and threat than the Indian. The trapper's rifle had to be dependable, powerful enough to drop the buffalo and to stop the charge of the deadly grizzly, accurate at long distances against a ceaseless wind, sturdy enough to withstand the rigors of mountain life, yet be economical to buy and to shoot. The Hawken brother's efforts and skills soon produced a new style of rifle, the kind demanded of by these conditions, which was destined to become known as the "Ne Plus Ultra" of all muzzle loading rifles: the now famous "Hawken Rocky Mountain or Plains Rifle" (12a, 12b, 12c, 12d) (13a, 13b, 13c).

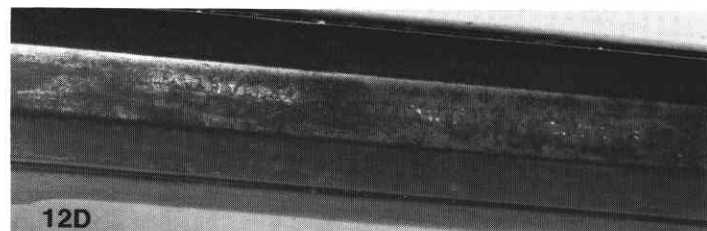
This new rifle evolved from the fact that the Kentucky fullstock rifle proved to be too fragile, too cumbersome, for the long horse mounted journeys through the mountains, and the rough life to be found there. The Hawken

rifle, of St. Louis, incorporated changes and improvements as fast as they proved worthwhile. The barrels were made shorter than the Kentucky, with heavier dimensions, in order to handle the heavier powder charges which were found to be necessary. The stocks were also modified, the better to handle the heavier recoil of the larger charges and also to provide more strength and durability in the critical areas. This rifle was developed from the butt to the muzzle to be purely functional: it was strong but not bulky, moderately heavy, but well balanced and exceedingly compact, usually weighing about 10½ pounds and bored for a 50 to 58 caliber round ball. The rifle when charged with an average load of 120 grains of 2F black powder, would shoot practically flat up to 150 yards and with a bit of elevation could be accurate and deadly at 200 yards and, in the right hands, perhaps a bit more. These Hawken rifles were preferred and carried by such famous men as Jim Bridger, Jim Clyman, Kit Carson, Joe Meek, Mariana Modena, and George Jackson, to name a few. From this list of names alone one can get an idea of the significant and vital role this new rifle, designed and perfected by Jake and Sam Hawken, played in the opening and the development of the west.

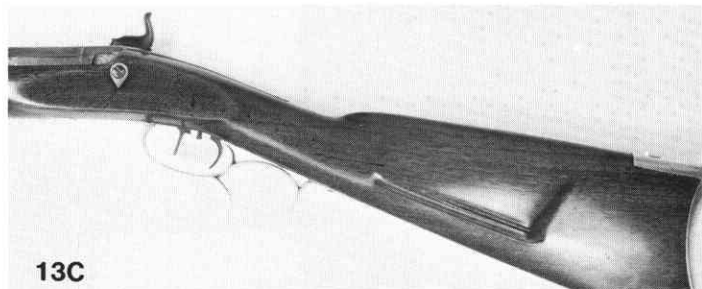
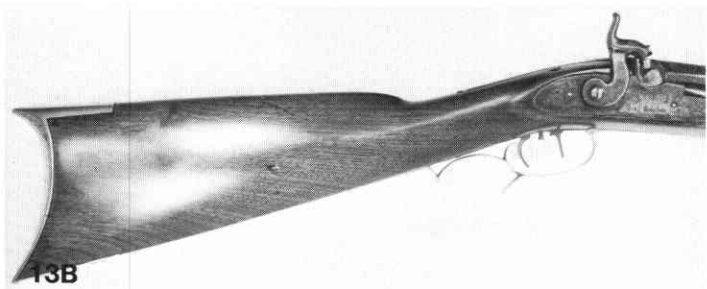
Only one of Sam's sons followed in his father's footsteps, he being the first, William Stewart Hawken, born of Sam's



9C



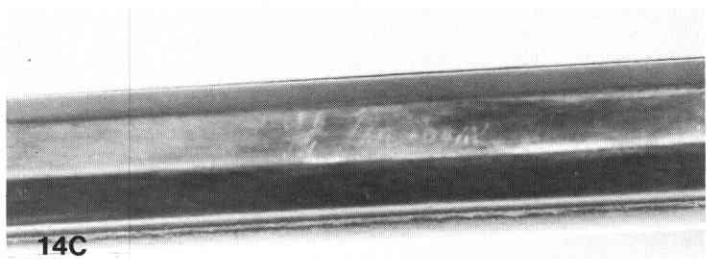
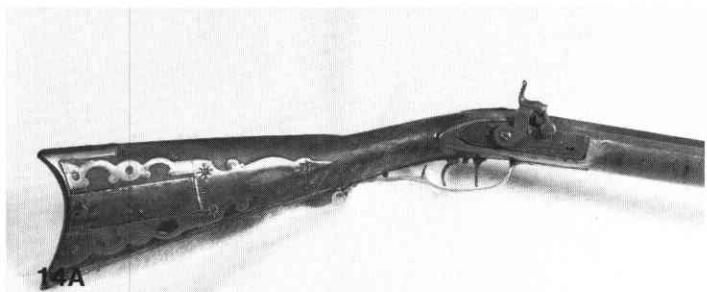
12D

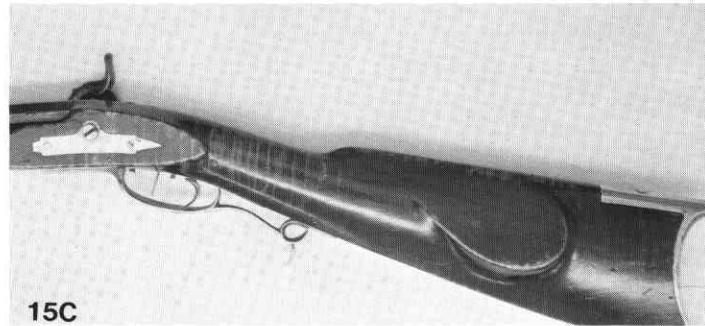
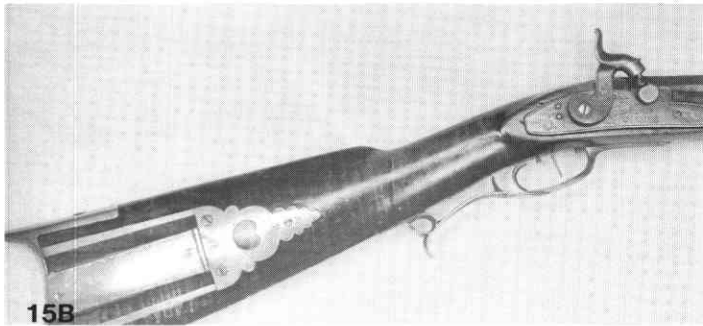
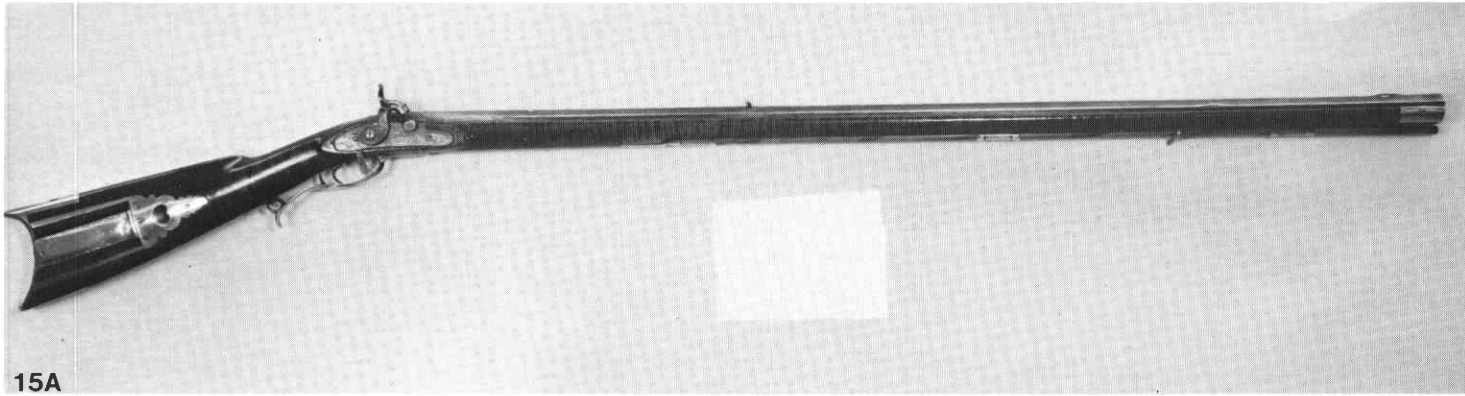


second marriage on June 15, 1825. He, too, learned his trade from his father, and took over his shop in St. Louis for a short time, when Sam decided to walk to Denver, a distance of some six hundred miles. However, Sam did not stay long in Denver as he missed his friends and family in St. Louis, to which he soon returned. William Stewart apparently followed his dad to Denver where again he took over his father's business and built rifles there on his own. These rifles were stamped "W. S. Hawken, Denver, C.T." and today are extremely rare and quite desirable in any Hawken collection.

Let us now go back to the first generation and take a look at the other brother, Nichlos. We know from existing records that he was listed as a gunsmith in the Hagerstown

area between 1790 and 1800. There has been no absolute proof that Nichlos and Christian were brothers but it is logical, from the evidence, to assume so. To my knowledge none of Nichlos's work has survived, but maybe someday one of his rifles will surface. Nichlos had three children and one of them, Henry, was a gunsmith who lived and worked in the Greensburg, Pennsylvania area for awhile before moving to Springfield, Ohio. Henry was born prior to 1775 and died on April 15, 1835. Looking at this rifle signed "H. Hawken" (14a, 14b, 14c), one can readily see the family resemblance to the work of his cousin William, so there is no doubt in my mind that he, too, learned his trade from the same master as the other second generation Hawken gunsmiths did.





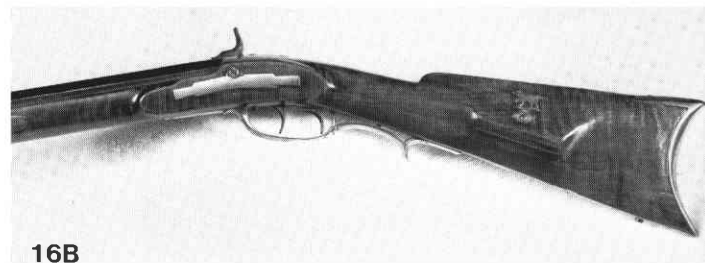
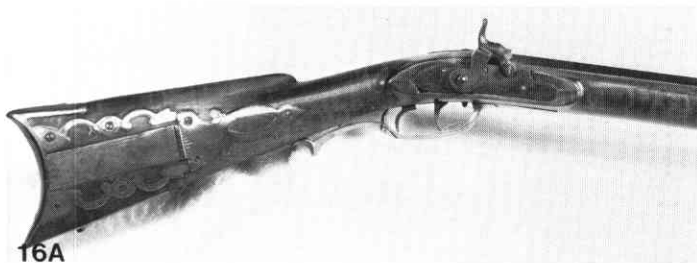
Henry Hawken had three sons, two of them known gunsmiths, both living and working in Springfield, Ohio. This rifle (15a, 15b, 15c, 15d) was made by his second son, Daniel Turney Hawken (or, as he signed his rifles, "D. T. Hawken") and is representative of the work of the third generation of Hawken gunsmiths, and which I feel still retains a strong likeness to the works of the first and second generations.

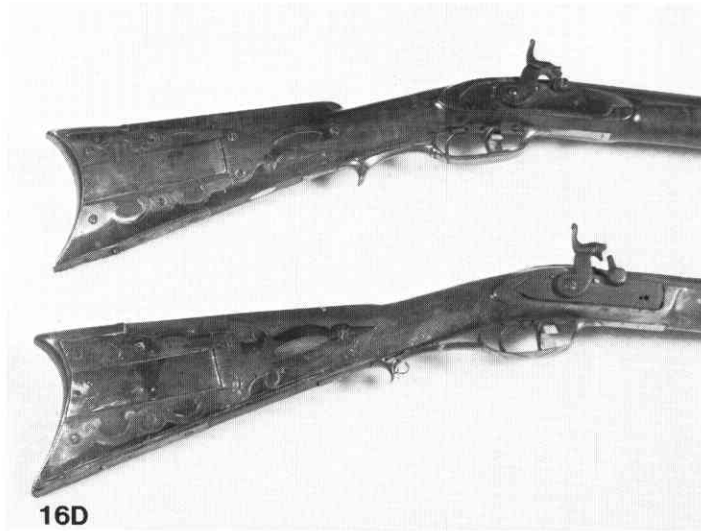
In order to cloud the issue a bit more let us look at this rifle signed "P. Snider" (16a, 16b, 16c, 16d) which in my mind certainly reflects his apprenticeship to the Hawken family somewhere along the line, for if it were not for the signature this rifle could easily pass for the work of one of the Hawkens.

Gentlemen, let me close on a note of caution regarding the existing rifles that are offered for sale today bearing the signature "Hawken". Through the decades from its conception in St. Louis up until today its popularity has never waned, and like so many other rare works of art has been the object of fakers and counterfeiters throughout

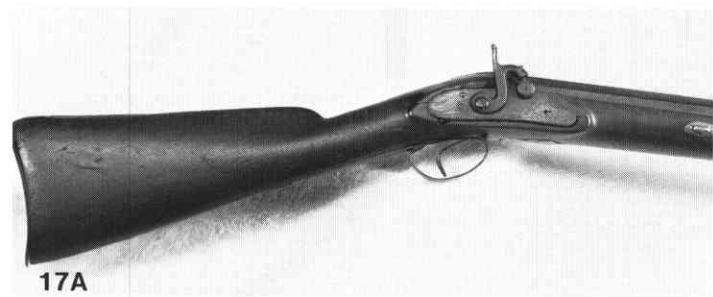
the years. No other gun has been copied, altered, and misrepresented more than the "Hawken". This next series of pictures illustrates what I mean (17a, 17b, 17c). The signature which appears to be compatible with the age of the gun has been judged by various Hawken experts not to be that of Sam Hawken, but remember that in this study there is no gospel and the signature could be correct. However, if any of you are contemplating adding a "Hawken" to your collection, exercise extreme care before you buy because the "phonies" are out there. Excellent reproductions are being turned out today, as illustrated by the fine contemporary rifle that I have on my table, which was made and signed by David Casey of Big Timber, Montana.

In conclusion, let me state that there is still much to be learned and compiled on this fascinating and historic family which has not as yet been documented, but with the present day interest in the "Hawken", additional facts are bound to be brought to light, and someday maybe all the pieces will fall into place.

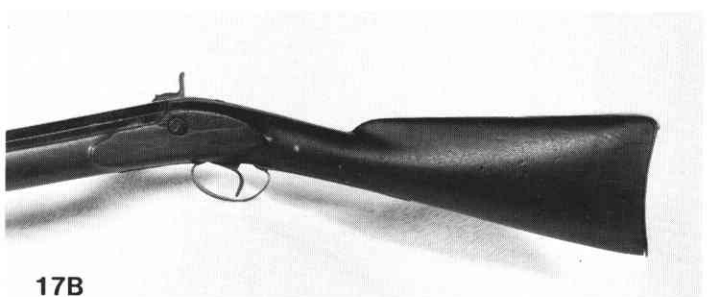




16D



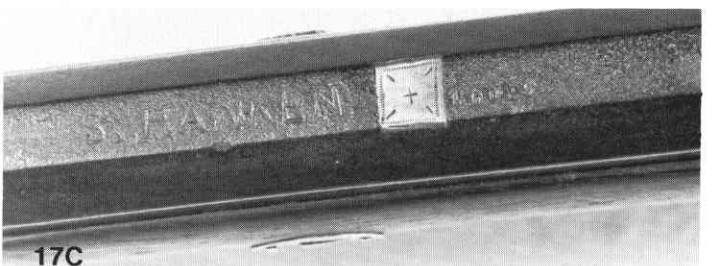
17A



17B



16C



17C