

Published by A. Finley, Philad^a

Map of Virginia published in 1829 by A. Finley, Philadelphia, showing the counties and mountains.

Long Rifles of the Valley of Virginia

Edwin N. Gewirz

The beautiful valley of the Shenandoah had early beckoned the settlers of Virginia. It was a wild region, long the battle ground of the Northern and Southern tribes. Its mild climate, rich soil and magnificent scenery could not be resisted.

The first attempts to explore the country were the Batte expedition in 1670, and the march of Spotswood in 1716. After these initial probes, the wave of population advanced up the lowland rivers, reached the mountains and flowed over into the Valley of Virginia.¹

The immigration was into the Potomac region in the northern part of the Valley. It began about 1732 when the Scotch-Irish and Germans who had come to Pennsylvania were attracted by rumors of its fertility. The Scotch-Irish, good Presbyterians, were the pioneers and established homesteads along the Opequon from the Potomac to above what is now Winchester. They built their houses and then their churches. The "Tuscarora Meeting House" near Martinsburg, and the Opequon Church a little south of Winchester, are the oldest churches in the Valley of Virginia.²

The Germans followed closely. Joist Hite obtained forty thousand acres of land near Winchester and the Germans built Strasburg and other towns along the Massanutton Mountains. They were an excellent class of immigrants with well kept fields, fat cattle and high red barns. The early historian, Kercheval, said, "The Dutchman's barn was usually the best building on his farm. He was sure to erect a fine large barn before he built any other dwelling-house than his rude log cabin."³

These thrifty Germans were of three religious sects, Lutherans, Mennonites and Calvinists, with a few Tunkers or Dippers, who believed that immersion was the true form of Baptism. Both the German and Irish Presbyterians were merry people who loved to celebrate; weddings were their major excuse. The only exceptions to the border hilarity were the few Quakers who conducted their weddings with solemnity and decorum.⁴

Winchester had two log cabins in 1738 and the town was established in 1752. Andrew Jackson was supposed to have been born sometime after 1767 at the house of Mr. Strode on the lower Opequon, but the family went south to North Carolina where the boy grew up. A spring near the Strode house is still called "Jackson's Spring."⁵

While the Germans and Irish were settling on the banks of the Potomac and the Opequon, the upper waters of the Shenandoah became home to explorers from tide-water Virginia. They were nearly all Scotch-Irish Presbyterians. John Lewis was the pioneer. He belonged to a Huguenot family which had taken refuge in Ireland. Lewis obtained a huge grant of land, half of what is now Rockbridge County, and settled one family on every thousand acres. He



brought over from Ireland and Scotland about a hundred families in 1737. These pious Scotch-Irish were hard working and grave of demeanor, not at all like the tidewater Virginians who liked fox hunting and horse racing. They built the "Stone Meeting House" or Augusta Church near Staunton, one of the first in the valley. When war came they provided some of the best soldiers and leaders for the Commonwealth.⁶

Thus we see that the upper and lower valley were settled at nearly the same time.

A small colony of English families from tide-water Virginia settled around Greenway Court, the home of Lord Fairfax. He conveyed to Col. Robert Carter, in 1730, sixty three thousand acres of land near the village of Millwood, where numerous friends and relatives were settled. They brought with them the traits of the lowlands: cordiality, love of social intercourse and attachment to the English Church. They erected their "Old Chapel Church."⁷

All of these groups on the Virginia border were at war with the Indians until nearly the end of the century. Cabins were burned, wives and children tomahawked or carried off to be tortured and travelers were ambushed. With these conditions and the need to harvest the deer and bear to feed his family, the frontiersman's most important implement was his rifle. Without it he might not survive.

Competitive shooting was one of the most important recreations on the border and gathering for a shooting contest was a welcome break from the harsh realities of life there.

The upper valley had a great many gunsmiths; as we move south, fewer gunsmiths are found.

Berkeley County

At the northern end of the valley is Berkeley County, which was formed in 1772 from Frederick County. It is 22 1/2 miles long and 13 wide and very mountainous. Back and

Opequon creeks run through the county into the Potomac and the lands bordering these waters are often very fertile; there is anthracite coal in the western area. In 1840 the population consisted of 8,760 whites, 1,919 slaves and 293 free colored. The county seat is Martinsburg, 20 miles from Harpers Ferry.⁸

I have listed 17 gunsmiths in Berkeley County, but many of the makers I have listed in Jefferson County, just to the east, are usually listed in Berkeley County. Jefferson County was formed from Berkeley in 1801. The Sheetz family is usually listed in Berkeley, but most of them worked after 1801 when Shepherdstown became Jefferson County.⁹

Shepherdstown was established in 1762 by Captain Thomas Shepherd and named Mecklenburg. The first settlers were German mechanics. The town is situated on the Potomac, twelve miles above Harpers Ferry. There is an inlet lock here to the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. The first steamboat was invented, constructed and navigated here: although the idea was not new and there had been several attempts to propel a ship by steam engine, James Rumsey of Shepherdstown propelled his boat by steam alone, against the current of the Potomac, at four to five miles an hour in 1807. Rumsey's fifty foot boat was propelled by a jet of water forced through pipes by steam pressure. He died in Liverpool, England, on the verge of receiving the necessary funds for his project.

Of the gunsmiths of Berkeley County centered around

Martinsburg, nearly all worked in the 18th century and examples of their work are hard to find. Undoubtedly some of the unsigned rifles that appear in the upper valley style were made by these men.

The Marker family provided five gunsmiths to Berkeley County. Daniel Marker, Sr., born in 1774, arrived at Martinsburg by 1823. He became a major gunsmith. Daniel Marker, Jr. opened his own shop in 1831 on Queen Street. George Marker, born in 1782, was a gunsmith in the Martinsburg area before 1823; he was born in Frederick County, Maryland. James Marker, a son of Daniel, Sr., was born in 1810 and was a gunsmith in the Martinsburg area. Paul Marker, another son of Daniel, Sr., was born in 1811 and was active in the Martinsburg area until 1840 when he moved to Ohio.¹¹

The stock of a beautiful rifle by Daniel Marker is shown in Figure 1. It has a very interesting patch box with an eagle or bird finial. The rifle is not carved.

Figure 2, an example of a later Martinsburg rifle, is by John Whetstone, who arrived from Pennsylvania and Hagerstown in 1806. He is well documented and advertised extensively, but examples of his work are very scarce. This rifle, figure 2, has a signed 47 inch barrel of .41 caliber. The raised carving is well done with a dental motif at the butt and scroll carving carried under the cheekpiece over the comb and back behind the wrist on the right side. There is no patch box. He is listed in Martinsburg until 1824.



Figure 1

Jefferson County

Jefferson County, centered around Shepherdstown and Charlestown, was a hotbed of rifle making. I have listed 21 gunsmiths, 9 of whom were the generations of the Sheetz family. Beginning with Henry and Philip in 1776-1777, the Sheetz family of Shepherdstown and Charlestown were the major factors of riflemaking in the area. There were other fine makers, beginning with Robert Avis in 1755, but examples of their work are seldom, if ever, seen.

Most of the early Sheetz rifles were carved, usually incised. Their patch boxes were large, pierced and engraved. They were innovative and often used decorative metal inlays around the cheekpiece area of the stock. The early Sheetz rifles had silhouettes with rounded combs that gently curved into the wrist. An early, Revolutionary, iron mounted rifle by Philip Sheetz, figure 3, is a classic example of the period. Philip was born in 1738 and finished his apprenticeship in York County, Pennsylvania in 1764. By 1772 Philip was living in Shepherdstown and in 1775 he was in partnership with his brother Henry. In 1776 they provided the Virginia Militia with muskets. Philip died in 1793, leaving his tools to his son Martin.¹²

Figure 4 is an exceptionally fine Henry Sheetz rifle. It is beautifully incise carved with back-to-back C scrolls, has a pierced, engraved patch box, an engraved two-piece side plate of interesting form, and inlays on, above and below the cheekpiece. There is a metal extension to the top of the buttplate. Henry had his own shop by 1810 and died in 1817. His son sold his tools.¹³



Figure 2a

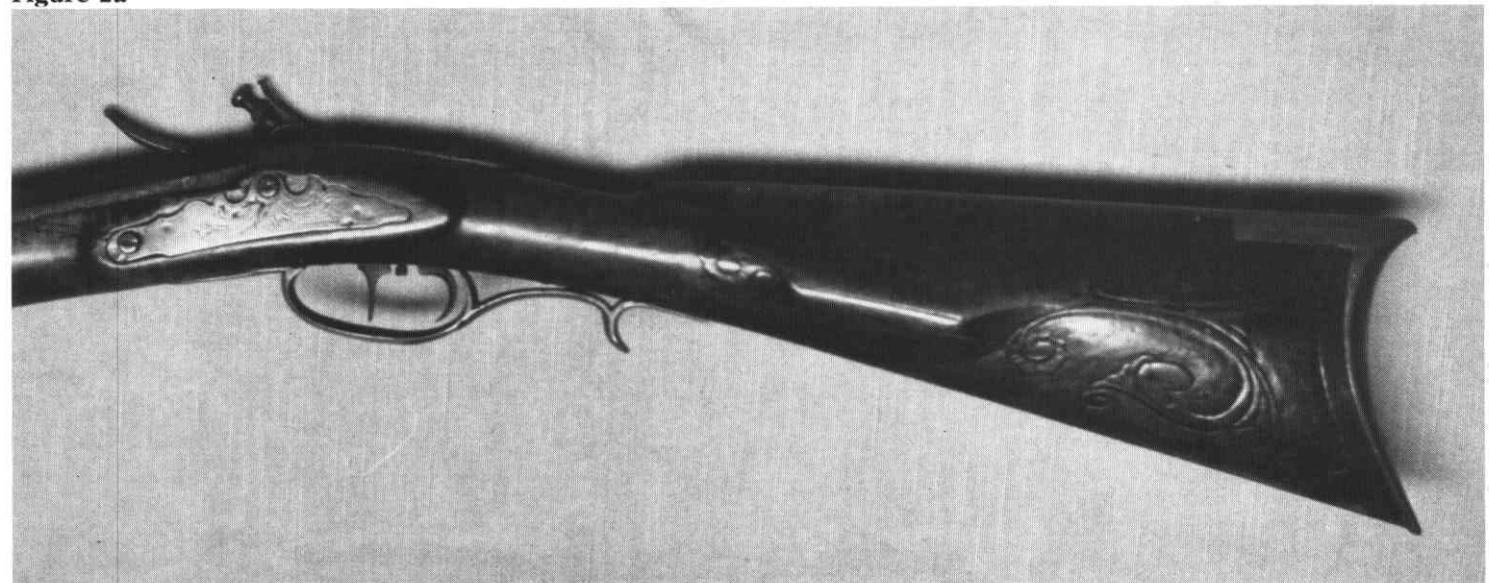


Figure 2b

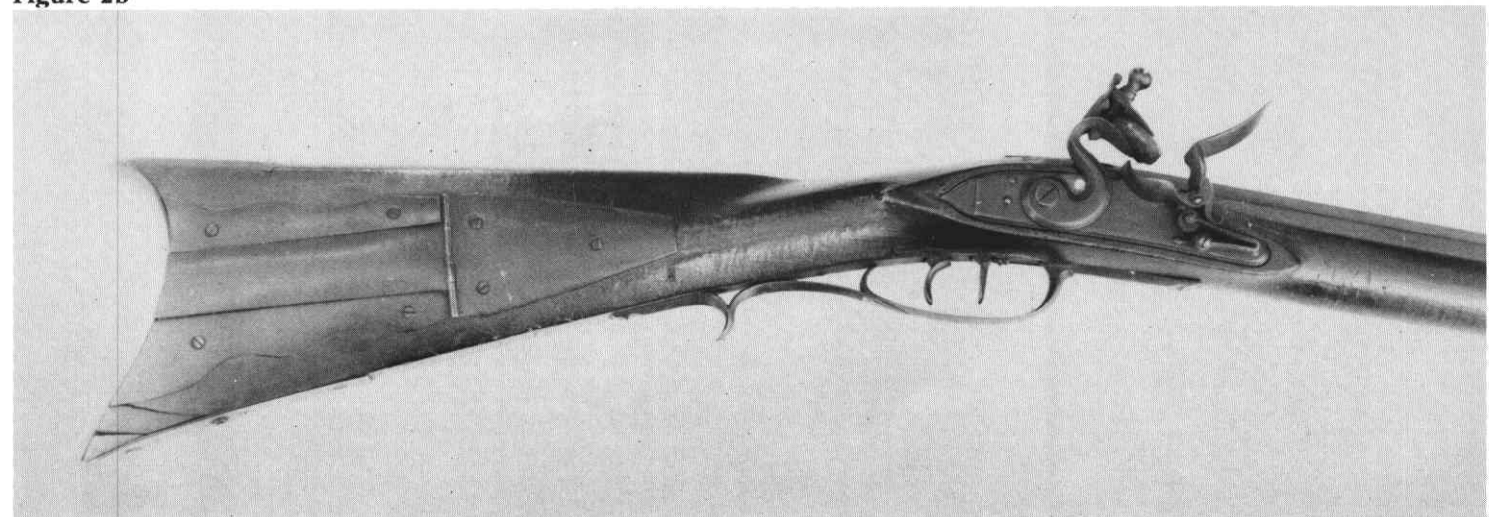


Figure 3

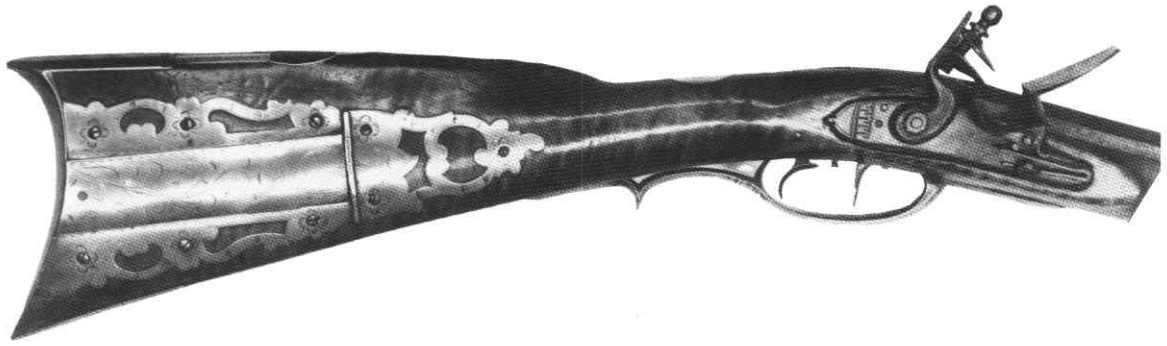


Figure 4a

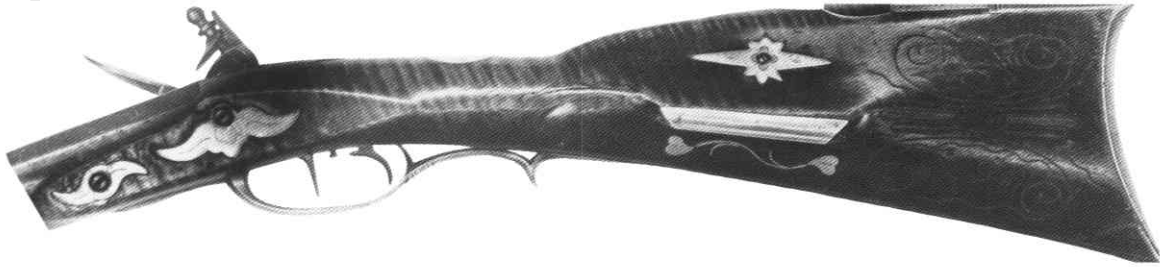


Figure 4b

A rifle by Philip's son, Martin, is shown in figure 5. It is raised carved, has an intricately engraved patch box, and silver wire inlay at rear of bottom ramrod pipe.

As time elapsed the combs of the Sheetz rifles and other rifles of the upper valley became more of a straight line with an abrupt drop to the wrist. This is easily seen in figure 6, an example by William Miller Sheetz circa 1835. All of his guns were numbered: this is number 64. On the bottom flat of the barrel is the name H. Shepherd. Henry Shepherd was the son of the founder of Shepherdstown, Thomas Shepherd.

Rifles of the lower valley seemed usually to have had a straight stock silhouette with a pronounced comb. Valley rifles in general seem to have a buttstock silhouette that appears to be longer and slimmer than the Pennsylvania rifle. The stocks are straighter, giving the illusion that the rifles are longer and slimmer. The distance from trigger to butt is usually a little greater than a Pennsylvania rifle. Perhaps the men bred in the valley of Virginia were larger or had long arms.

Jefferson County is 22 miles long and 12 wide. The Potomac forms its northeastern border and the Shenandoah enters the county near the southeastern border, flowing in a northeast direction, parallel with the Blue Ridge, entering the Potomac at Harpers Ferry. The country is rolling and the soil very fertile. Jefferson was settled chiefly by old eastern Virginia families and retained its traditional chivalry and hospitality from the prosperous early days. The population by 1840 was 9,323 whites, 4,157 slaves and 602 free colored.¹⁴

Charlestown is the county seat, but just to the east of the junction of the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers was the thriving manufacturing village of Harpers Ferry, the site of a National Armory, a National Arsenal, and the Hall Rifle Works. It was reported in 1840 that between 80,000 and 90,000 muskets were stored here.¹⁵ The Potomac breaks through the Blue Ridge here and the heights above the village rise to about 1200 feet. The scenery here is spectacular. The name of the place was originally Shenandoah Falls.



Figure 5



Figure 6

Frederick County

Frederick County, just to the south of Berkeley, with Winchester as its county seat, was formed in 1738. It is 25 miles long and 18 wide. The topography is diversified and the soil highly productive. Opequon, Sleepy and Back Creeks rise in this county and flow back into the Potomac. By 1840 the population was 11,119 whites, 2,302 slaves and 821 free colored.¹⁶

I have listed 31 gunsmiths working in Frederick County, beginning with Joshua Baker, William Bowen, Thomas Campbell, Stephen Emery, Adam Haymaker, Daniel, James and Peter Lauck in the 1750s. The rifles of Frederick County resemble the work of the Pennsylvania makers and rival or surpass them in quality and beauty.

The rifles of the Lauck family (Peter, 1753; Simon, 1795; Jacob, 1816; John, 1820; William, 1840; and William P., 1850) are particularly attractive. They had large, often pierced, patch boxes, usually with the 4 petal finial. A dogwood blossom? Ed. Wood was selected carefully and their rifles had a graceful silhouette and well executed carving, using C scrolls. The acorn was a popular inlay.

A fine example of a Lauck rifle, figure 7 is one signed

J. Lauck. It is incised carved with back-to-back C scrolls joined by a checkered oval. Part of the lower C scroll is scalloped in a manner found on many Virginia rifles. There is carving in front of the cheekpiece which is carried over the comb by way of a lip and down the right side. The pierced patch box has a four-petaled finial.

An unsigned rifle with similar characteristics, but much more decoration, is pictured in figure 8. It has raised C scrolls with even more scalloping, many figural and wire inlays, a patch box that is more intricately pierced, and a wavy or scalloped line incised along the forestock. The silhouette is typical upper valley.

The town of Winchester, started in 1738, was established by law in 1752. It was well planned and its streets were paved at an early date. A macadam road ran from Winchester to Staunton early in the 19th century. By 1840 there were 3,454 persons in residence, with twelve churches, including the first Episcopal Church in the Valley of Virginia. During the French and Indian War, Washington's headquarters and storage were at Winchester. The area had long been the home of the Shawnee Indians.¹⁷

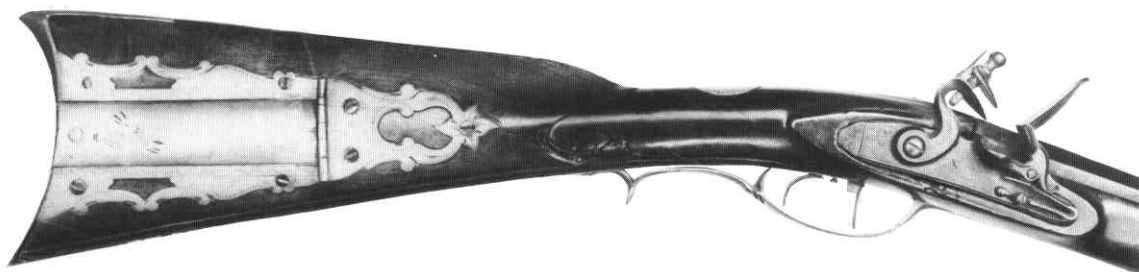


Figure 7a

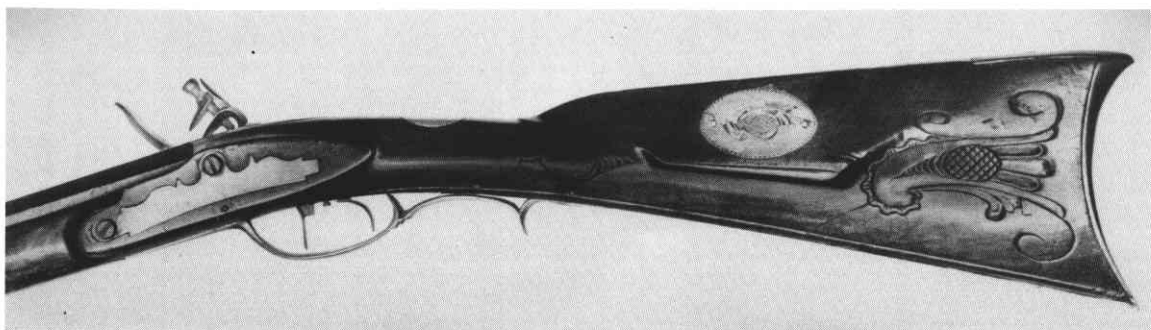


Figure 7b

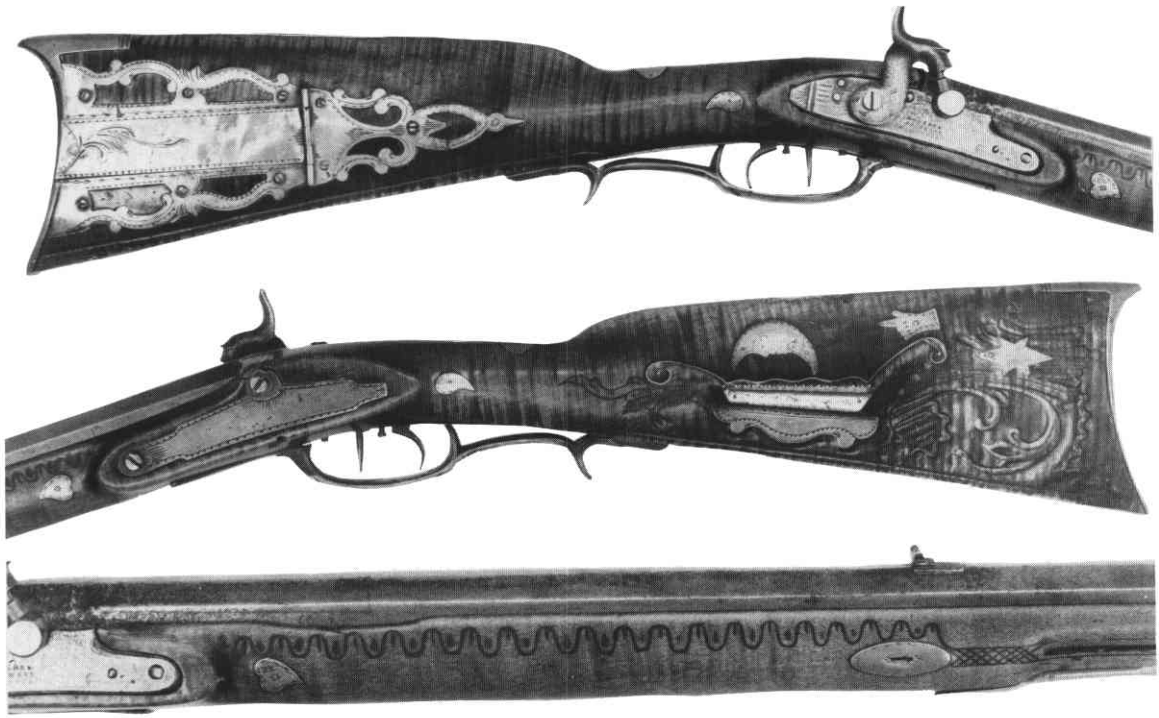


Figure 8

Hampshire County

To the west of Frederick County lies Hampshire County, established in 1754. It is 33 miles by 30 miles, mostly mountainous and untillable, except for very fertile lands bordering the Potomac and Great Cacapon Rivers. There are large coal fields near the Maryland line and iron ore deposits are scattered throughout the county. Population of the county in 1840 was 10,703 whites, 1,403 slaves and 189 free colored. Romney, the county seat, is on the South Branch of the Potomac, 39 miles from Winchester. It was established by law in 1762.¹⁸

There is a natural wonder in Hampshire called Ice Mountain. The west side of the mountain, rising from the North River, a branch of the Capon, is a 500 foot pile of rocks for a distance of a quarter of a mile. There is always ice under the rocks and standing in front of the cliffs, one feels like one is in air conditioning. The sun shines on this rock wall all day, but does not melt the ice: the porous rock acts like a sandstone refrigerator.¹⁹

Hampshire County produced many fine gunsmiths, including a branch of the Sheetz family. Frederick was the first to reach Hampshire County: he settled in Frankfort in 1792 and had a son, also Frederick, who may have made some of the F. Sheetz rifles. At about the same time, Henry Sheetz moved to Hampshire from Shepherdstown. Otho Sheetz was

listed as a gunsmith in 1820 and may have been Henry's son. He was a full-time riflemaker, but in 1824 he moved to Ohio.²⁰

Zebulon Sheetz is listed near Capon Bridge in 1819 and Jacob Sheetz was making rifles east of Romney from this period well into the century. Thomas Sheetz was a riflemaker from 1810 to 1850 and employed helpers, as did Otho.

The Sheetz family established a reputation for quality and beauty that was shared by the other makers of the region. The stocks had a low comb, short, sometimes checkered wrists and a graceful curve. They used silver wire inlays and acorn inlays in silver and brass. This motif was also used in carving and engraving. The most distinctive feature of Hampshire County rifles and of the other northern counties was the four petal flower of the patch box finial.

A good example of this finial is a rifle by William Hollenback, figure 9. It is not carved; the comb is the very low one of Hampshire County. The large side plate is marked with the name of the owner of this rifle, Lafayette Nutter. His father, Christopher Thomas Nutter, born in Sussex County, Delaware, January 21, 1716, moved to Augusta County, then Western Augusta, and in 1774 established Nutters Fort, two miles from Clarksburg on the Buckhannon Pike. This was one of the string of border forts.²¹

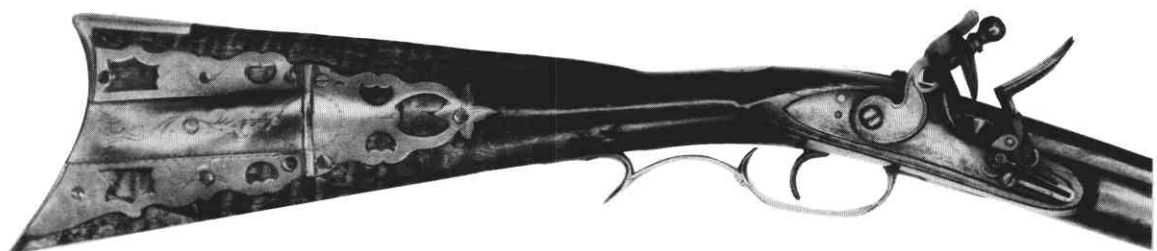


Figure 9

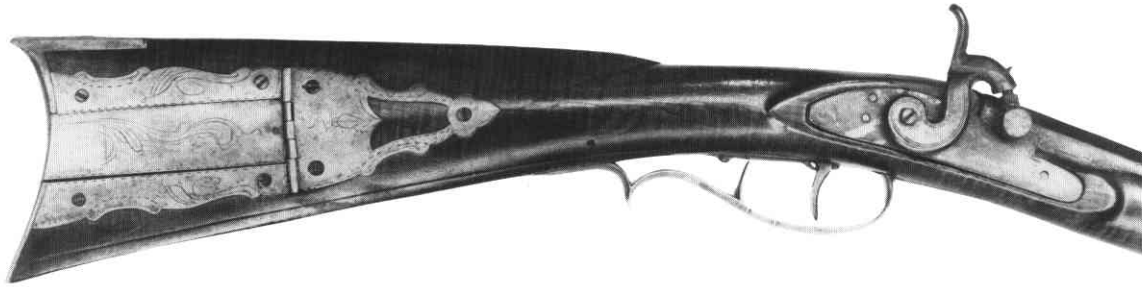


Figure 10

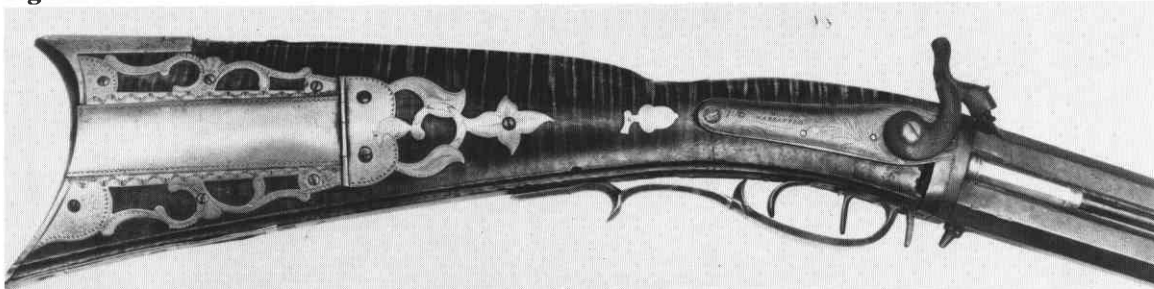


Figure 11a

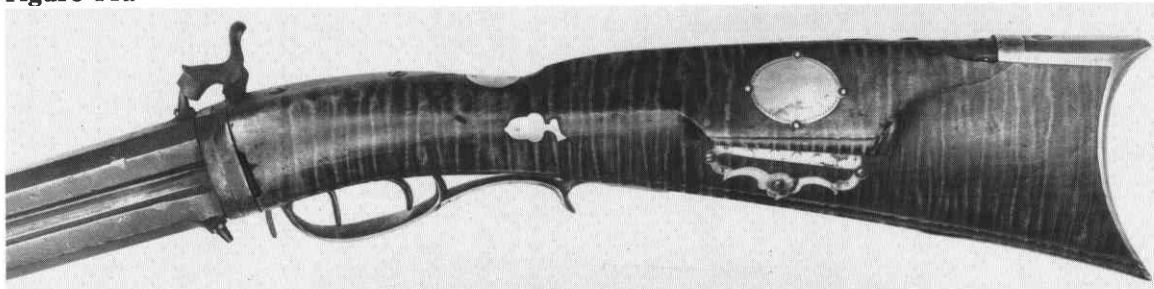


Figure 11b

The rifle by William Britton, figure 10, has an acorn finial and is uncarved.

Jacob Kline lived on the east side of the North Branch, in the Dillon Run area, Park Hollow, Hampshire County.²² A fine over-and-under double rifle by Kline, figure 11, has an exceptional pierced patch box with a large four petalled finial and acorns inlaid on either side of the wrist.

Figure 12 is a graceful rifle by James Rinehart, a prolific maker, has a very long and graceful patch box and acorns inlaid on either side of the wrist. The raised carving is in-

tricate and there are large inlays above and below the cheekpiece.

George Young of Romney made beautiful inlaid rifles; figure 13 is an excellent example, showing great skill and imagination. The pierced patch box is a work of art and has a most graceful four petal finial. The cheek-piece side has several inlays, some joined by inlaid wire vines. There is a decorative extension of the butt along the comb and a graceful pierced sideplate. There are 23 inlays and incised carving. The barrel is .30 caliber, 44 inches in length.

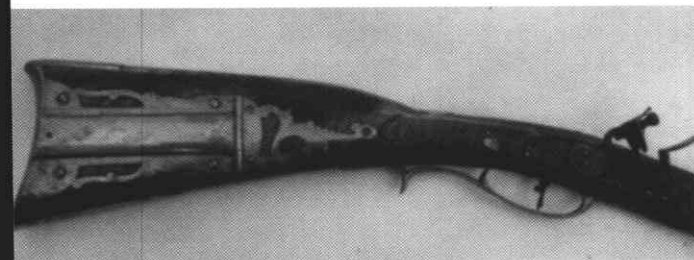


Figure 12a

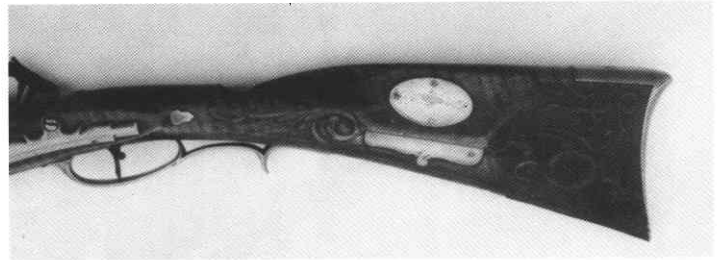


Figure 12b

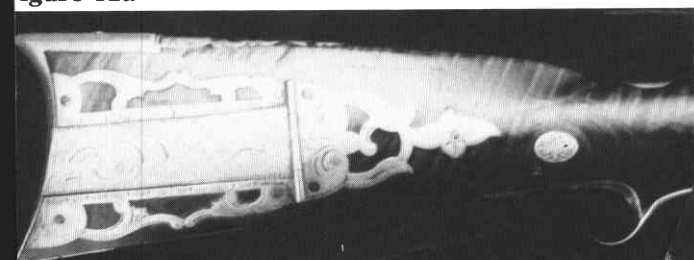


Figure 13a

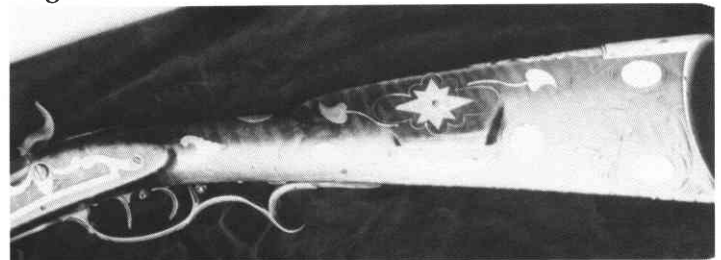


Figure 13b

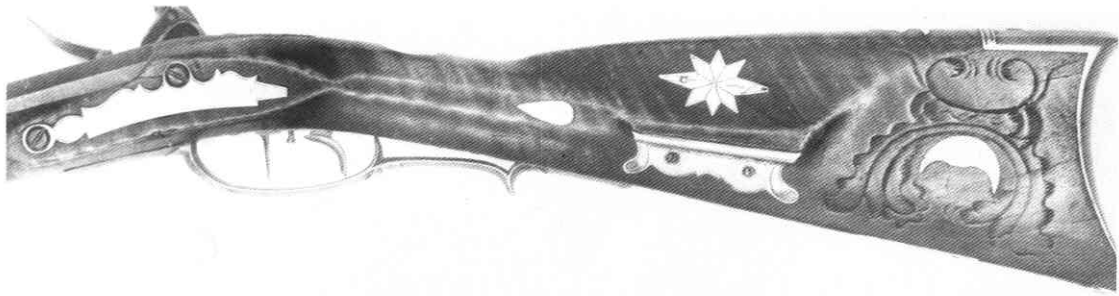


Figure 14a

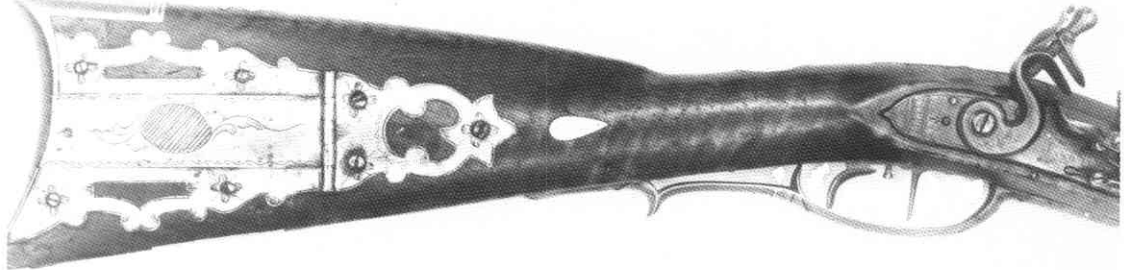


Figure 14b

Shenandoah County

Moving south we encounter Shenandoah County, another hot-bed of rifle making. It was established in 1772 from Frederick and originally called Dunmore, but after Lord Dunmore took a stand against the colonists in 1777, it was changed to Shenandoah after the beautiful river passing through it. It is 32 miles long and 15 wide. The soil is very fertile. The population in 1840 was 10,320 whites, 1,033 slaves and 265 free colored.²³

Woodstock, the county seat, was established in March, 1761, a mile from the north fork of the Shenandoah and 32 miles south of Winchester on the road to Staunton. New Market, established in 1784, was another major town in the county, 20 miles south of Woodstock. Strasburg, 12 miles north of Woodstock on the main turnpike, was the other major village. They are all on the Shenandoah River.

Shenandoah was settled by Germans from Pennsylvania. They were a hard working, frugal people, living in surroundings that were a delight to the eye and senses. In the 1750s through the 1770s they did have problems with the Indians and their French leaders, and there are numerous stories of murder, torture and heroism. In 1776 the 8th Virginia or German Regiment was raised in this part of the Valley by Colonel Peter Muhlenburg. They served with distinction at Brandywine, Monmouth and Germantown and in the southern campaigns.²⁴



Figure 15a

Riflemaking started here in the 1780s and 1790s with Christian Hoffman of Woodstock, Henry Hardin, George Cooper, George Grandstaff and Jacob Cook. I have found 22 riflemakers in Shenandoah County. The rifles here resemble the Hampshire County rifles with their low comb and four petal finial on patch boxes. They, too, achieve a slim, graceful look.

This is well illustrated by figure 14, a rifle signed J. Grandstaff. It is a finely-incised carved curly maple full stock with a 45 inch barrel of .46 caliber. It has back-to-back C scrolls and the bottom one is expanded with scalloping. There are several inlays. The patch box with its four petalled finial has floral engraving around all screws, a design seen only on Maryland and Virginia rifles.

Rockingham County

Moving south we enter Rockingham County, formed in 1778 from Augusta. It is 38 miles long and 23 wide. The main Shenandoah runs through the eastern side; the North River drains the southern part; the north fork of the Shenandoah runs through the northwest area and a branch, Smiths Creek, runs through the central portion. The western part of the county is very mountainous, but much of it is extremely fertile farm land.

A large part of the population was German in origin and the population in 1840 was 14,944 whites, 1,899 slaves and 501 free colored.²⁵

Harrisonburg is the county seat, established in May, 1780, and named for Thomas Harrison, who laid out its streets from 50 acres of his land.

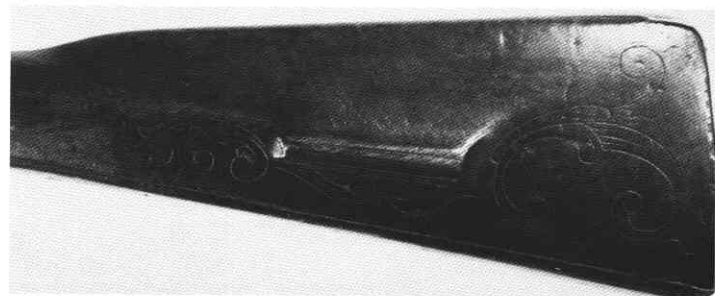


Figure 15b

Large quantities of tobacco were raised in this part of the valley from well before the revolution, but in 1789 the French revolution broke out and wheat and flour prices soared. Consequently the tobacco farmers switched to grain and never went back to raising tobacco in any quantity.²⁶

Harrisonburg was the center of rifle making here and in this county the silhouette of the rifle begins to change. The graceful curve of the northern valley becomes a straight line and the gentle fairing-in of the comb becomes an abrupt drop. Alexander McGilvary was a prolific maker in Harrisonburg and his rifles are a fine example of the change in style. Patch boxes change from here south and show a great deal of imagination. The rifles of the southern valley are usually long and sturdy with diverse patch boxes and less carving.

Figure 15, a most interesting rifle that appears to be a central valley gun, is an early iron mounted rifle. The octagon to round barrel is rifled, caliber .48, and is 48 1/2 inches long. The thick butt stock has a flat butt plate and incised C scroll carried under the cheekpiece to another smaller C scroll in front of the cheekpiece. All hardware is iron except the copper colored brass nose cap.

I have found ten makers in Rockingham, all after 1800.

Page County

Just to the east is Page County, formed in 1831 from Rockingham and Shenandoah, consisting of an entire valley, 34 miles long and 12 wide between the Blue Ridge and the Massanutten Mountains. It is beautiful, has good soil and abounds in iron, copper, lead, magnesium and marble. The Shenandoah runs its entire length. The county seat is Luray, famous for its caverns, and 95 miles from Washington. It was first settled in 1814. I have found no rifle makers listed here, but there may have been some, even though the population was a total of only 6,194 in 1840.²⁷

Augusta County

Twenty-five miles south of Harrisonburg on the paved turnpike is Staunton, the county seat of Augusta County. Augusta was formed from Orange in 1738. Originally Orange included all the lands west of the Blue Ridge, but in the fall of 1738 it was divided into Frederick and Augusta Counties. Frederick was bounded by the Potomac on the north, the Blue Ridge on the east and a line from the head spring of Hedgeman to the head spring of the Potomac on the south and west. The remainder of Virginia west of the Blue Ridge was Augusta County. It was divided until it reached the present boundaries in 1790. It is now 35 miles long and 30 wide, mountainous, but fertile in the bottom lands. It is drained by tributaries of the James and Shenandoah Rivers.²⁸

In 1840 the population was 15,072 whites, 4,145 slaves and 421 free colored. Waynesboro, 12 miles east of Staunton on the state road from Charlottesville, was the other major town in the area.²⁹

I have found only seven names of rifle makers in Augusta County, including a John Sheetz, 1796. The earliest was William Alexander, 1775-1801.

Rockbridge County

South of Augusta is Rockbridge County. It was named for its celebrated Natural Bridge, 14 miles southwest of Lexington. It was formed in 1778 from Augusta and Botetourt. It is 31 miles long and 22 wide, watered by the North River, a branch of the James River, which flows diagonally through the county. It is a rich, highly cultivated area. In 1840, there were 10,448 whites, 3,510 slaves and 326 free colored.³⁰

Lexington, 35 miles south of Staunton, is the county seat. It is 188 miles from Washington, located on the west bank of the North River. It was established in 1778, but most of the original town was destroyed by fire in 1794. It was quickly rebuilt, mostly of brick. Washington college, 1776; Virginia Military Institute, 1838, and the Ann Smith Academy for Females were established here at the beginning of the 19th century. There were 1,200 inhabitants by 1840 and four churches. Some traffic was generated here by people passing through to the hot springs of Bath County, west of Lexington.³¹

The first settlement in this part of the valley was made up of Scotch-Irish and some original Scots. Rockbridge and Augusta were the strongholds of Scotch-Irish and Presbyterianism. They were so deeply steeped in religious principle and constant attendance on religious exercises that they developed a puritanical morality. They were virtuous, but not a charming people. Most social intercourse was religious. Schools were established here as soon as population permitted and the first academy in the valley of Virginia was located on Timber Ridge, near the present town of Fairfield in 1776.³²

Samuel Houston was born six miles northeast of Lexington. He was the son of a farmer of Scotch-Irish descent and received an ordinary school education before moving to Nashville to study law.³³

The citizens of this area were among the bravest and most effective militia. George Washington, in the darkest day of the Revolution, said, "if all other resources should fail, he might yet repair with a single standard to West Augusta, there rally a band of patriots who would meet the enemy at the Blue Ridge and there establish the boundary of a free empire in the West."³⁴

The rifles of Rockbridge County are sturdy, have a pronounced stock comb and imaginative patch boxes unlike the northern valley rifle. Scrap brass for casting may have been hard to find in the southern valley, since we begin to find iron mounted rifles of good quality. This iron furniture is finished like the conventional brass fittings with facets and detail work. An example of this is the William Bogan rifle from the Natural Bridge area, figure 16. The nose cap on this rifle is pewter.

I have found only 6 names of rifle makers in Rockbridge County, starting with Alexander Walker (1727-1782) of Walker Creek. Figure 17 is a fine example of the curly maple fullstock with wooden patch box cover and no carving, signed Alex Walker: the cheek piece is stepped and the butt has the broad profile of the southern counties. The barrel is marked in script, Alex Walker. During the War, Alex Walker's brother went to the army in his place.



Figure 16a

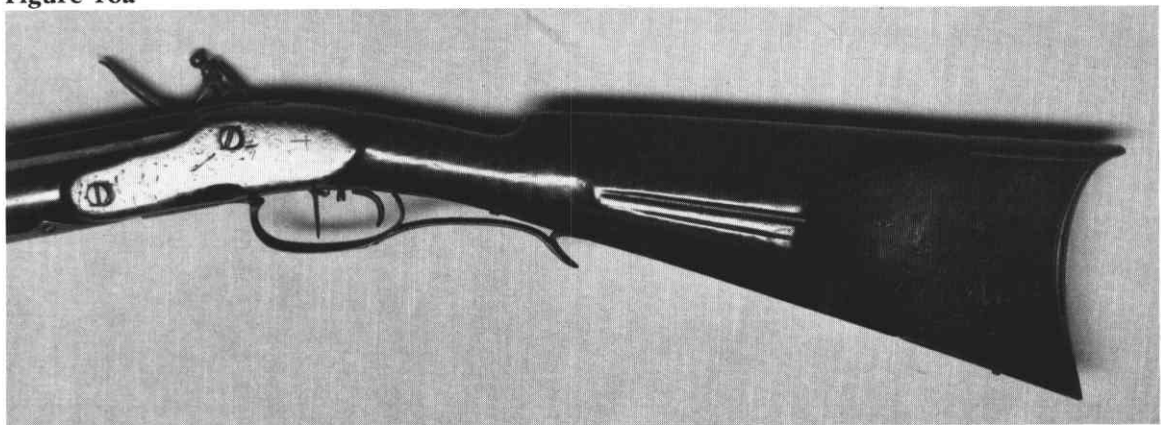


Figure 16b
Botetourt County

Just to the south of Natural Bridge we enter Botetourt County. It was named for Governor Botetourt and was formed in 1769 from Augusta. It is 44 miles long and 18 wide. The Blue Ridge forms its eastern boundary and the James River runs through its northern area. The county seat is Fincastle, established in 1772 on 40 acres given by Israel Christian. By 1840 there were 700 people here.³⁵

Dogger's Springs, 18 miles north of Fincastle, were frequented by persons with stomach trouble and accommodations were built for guests.

Five miles south of Fincastle is a large brick church built by the Dunkards at Amsterdam. They are descendants of Ger-

mans who emigrated to Pennsylvania, settled a little colony at Ephrata and later sent colonists to the western valley. Before the Revolution, this area suffered greatly from Indian raids. This mountainous area was the home of the Shawnee.

Only four names of rifle makers have come to my attention: Jonn P. Sites, 1784-1853; John Painter, born 1814; Madison Riddleburger, born 1807, and Jennings Pollard, born 1813. A rifle by P. Sites, figure 18, with a typical four petal finial of Virginia, shows the change in silhouette in the southern or lower valley. The butt is broader with a more pronounced point at the toe of the butt. The top line of the stock is straight with a low comb gently curving to the wrist which is rather long. There is no carving, but the metal is nicely engraved.

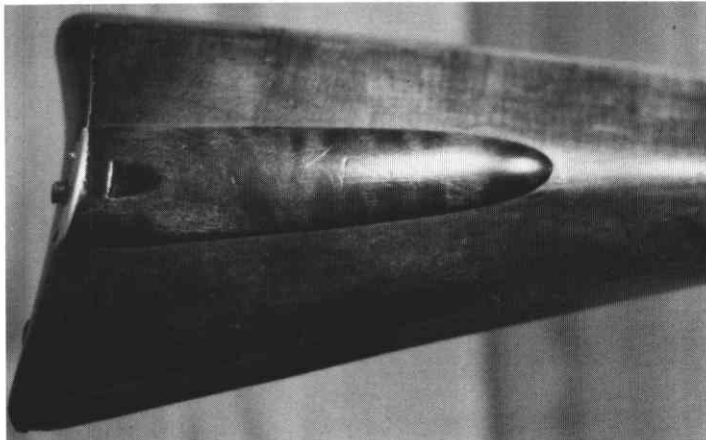


Figure 17a

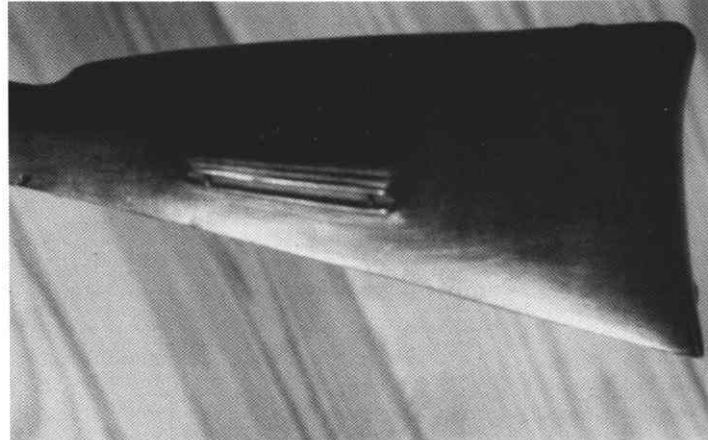


Figure 17b

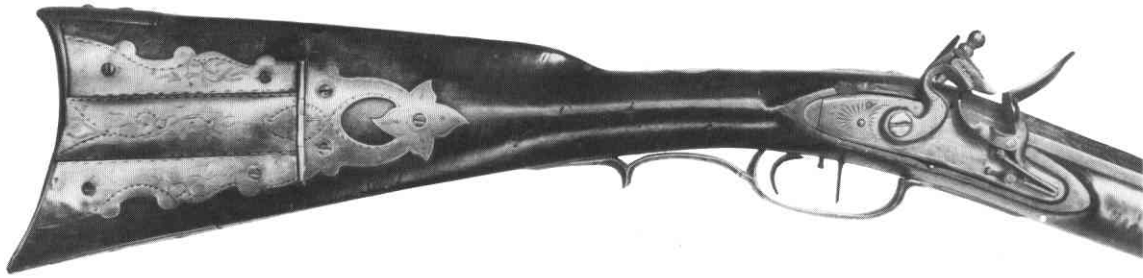


Figure 18a

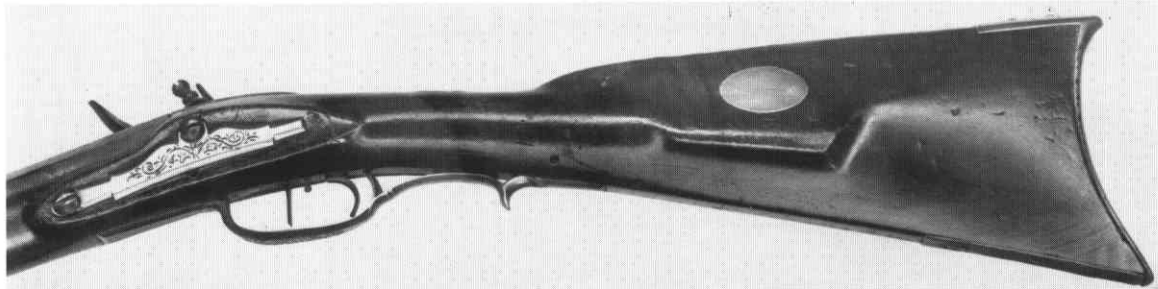


Figure 18b

A rifle signed J. Painter, pictured in *Kentucky Rifles and Pistols 1750-1850* by the Kentucky Rifle Association, is a work of art. The stock is fine but uncarved curly maple, 59 ½ inches overall. The wrist is checkered and the cheekpiece is rounded and stepped. There are 16 silver inlays and wire inlays on cheekpiece and butt stock, the latter an eagle. The patch box is pierced and engraved. The unusual barrel-key plates are also engraved and of great beauty. The stock silhouette is a straight line with a low comb gently curving to the wrist.

It is plainly seen that as we move down the valley, the quality of the rifles has not diminished, although their form is subtly changing.

Roanoke County

South of Botetourt we enter the small county of Roanoke, 20 by 18 miles in size. The name was derived from the Indian word Roenoke for shell money. The Blue Ridge is the eastern boundary and the western parts are mountainous. The soil along the Roanoke River is exceptionally fertile; hemp, wheat, and tobacco were grown. The total population was only 5,499 in 1840. The county seat is Salem on the west bank of the Roanoke River, with 450 residents in 1840. The county was formed in 1838 from Botetourt. I found no rifle makers in Roanoke County.³⁶

A rifle that fits the criteria of this southern area, figure 19, is an unmarked large rifle of fine curly maple. It has a well executed patch box, a pronounced drop at the comb and a broad butt silhouette with a long drop at the toe. The .40 caliber barrel is 46 inches long and overall length is 63 inches.

Montgomery County

Turning southwest with the valley, we enter Montgomery County, a broken, mountainous area 23 by 22 miles in size. The New River runs on its southwestern border, and there is excellent soil along the streams. Montgomery was formed in 1776 from Fincastle, which was broken up to form Washington, Montgomery and Kentucky Counties. There were only 7,405 total population in 1840. Christiansburg, the county seat, was established in 1792 on the Richmond

to Nashville stage road. There were only 250 people here in 1840. I have found no rifle makers here.³⁷

Pulaski County

To the west we find Pulaski County, named for Count Pulaski and formed in 1839. It is 23 by 18 miles in size and in 1840 had a total population of 3,739. The new River passes through the eastern part and there are large fertile areas suitable for grain and grazing. The county seat was Newbern, later changed to Pulaski. In 1840 it was the only town in the county, with a population of 300. There is an abundance of iron ore nearby.³⁸

I have found two rifle makers here, John B. Honaker, 1848, and E. Wyatt.

A rifle signed E. Wyatt, pictured in *Kentucky Rifles and Pistols 1750-1850*, typifies the southwestern Virginia school. It is very long, 65 inches, with a 48 inch barrel, has a broad butt stock and long wrist. The patch box is like many unsigned rifles I have seen from the southwest counties. It starts at the butt, covering the entire width, and narrows in a series of curves to a circular finial. The stock is uncarved curly maple with 11 inlays.

Wythe County

Just to the west is Wythe County, established in 1790 and named for George Wythe, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. The county is a 24 by 20 mile valley at an altitude of 2200 feet. It is drained by the New River and the soil is good. It is rich in iron, coal, and lead. The population in 1840 was 7,632 whites, 1,618 slaves and 125 free colored. Wytheville, the county seat, was on the main turnpike from Harpers Ferry to Knoxville. It was established in 1792, and bore the name "Evanshaw" until 1838.³⁹

I have the name of but one rifle maker in Wythe, Joseph A. Honaker, 1820. The rifle illustrated, figure 20, is attributed to Joseph Honaker. It has a 45 inch, 50 caliber octagonal barrel with an exaggerated swamp. The stock is very broad, beginning to widen at the rear of the trigger guard. The patch box is of wood, and the furniture, well made iron. There is a rail line on the forestock terminating in a wavy line



Figure 19a

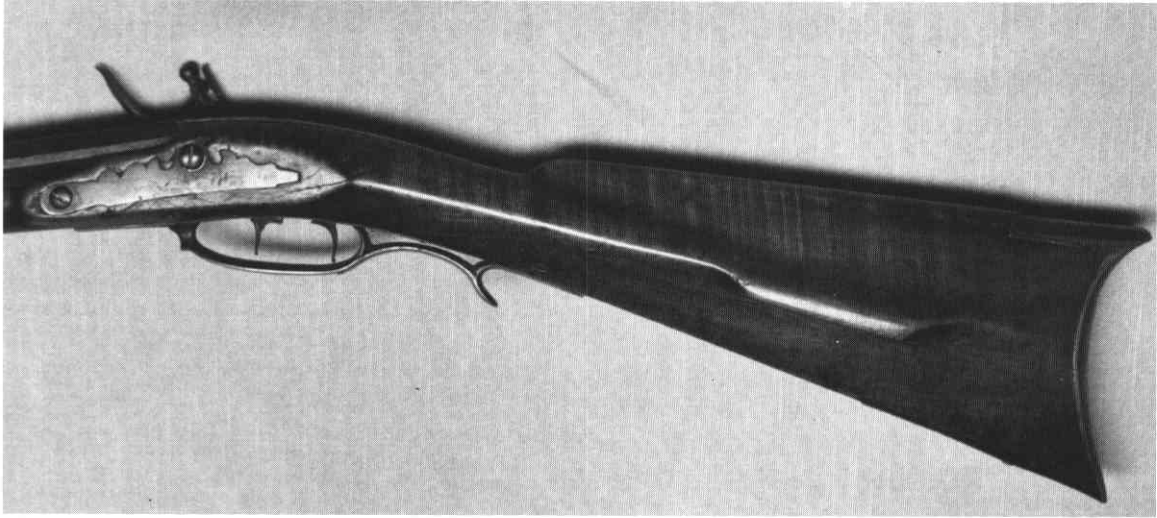


Figure 19b

behind the rear thimble. A rifle with the same stock shape and incised curly line, signed Joseph Honaker, is pictured in *Kentucky Rifles and Pistols 1750-1850*. It has a large brass patch box with a hawk and fish finial. The straight octagon barrel is 45 1/4 inches long.

Smyth County

Further west down the valley is Smyth County, formed in 1831 from Washington and Wythe. It is 30 by 22 miles and consists of three valleys with the north, south and middle forks of the Holston River running parallel to each. The bottom lands are rich and there are several gypsum quarries; a large amount of maple sugar was also produced here. The population was 5,539 whites, 838 slaves and 145 free colored in 1840. Marion is the county seat. I found no rifle makers here.⁴⁰

Washington County

At the bottom of the valley and farthest west we find Washington County, formed in 1776 from Fincastle. It is 40 by 18 miles, occupying part of the valley between the Blue Ridge and Clinch Mountains. It is watered by the three forks of the Holston. There are three fertile valleys. A superior quality of gypsum is found here and maple sugar is produced. In 1840 the population was 11,731 whites, 2,058 slaves and 212 free colored.⁴¹

Abingdon is the county seat, established in 1778, the largest town in southwest Virginia. There were over 1000 people here in 1840. The Cherokee Indians were nearby.

I have found only one rifle maker in Washington County, although other unsigned rifles are undoubtedly from this region. A handsome rifle signed J. Thomas is pictured in *Kentucky Rifles and Pistols 1750-1850*. It is 60 1/4 inches overall with a 44 inch, .44 caliber rifled barrel. The fine uncarved curly maple stock has 33 silver and mother of pearl inlays. The patch box lid has a sailing ship motif. The butt stock has a thick wrist and very low comb.

Figure 21, a rifle that is perhaps the most beautiful early classic Virginia rifle, was made not in the Valley, but within sight of the Blue Ridge on the eastern slopes. The rifle is signed F. Klette - Sevensburg. Sevensburg is a few miles south of Culpepper. It has a .52 caliber rifled barrel, 43 1/2 inches long. The overall length is 59 1/2 inches and the thick butt stock is 2 1/8 inches. The curly maple stock has fine raised carving. There is a scalloped shell lip, carved around the tang in the British manner and beaver tails behind the lock. The patch box is short and wide and of great beauty. The handsome silhouette has a sharp drop at the comb to the narrow wrist. I include this rifle to show the contrast between a rifle made on the eastern slopes of the mountains, that is formal and almost English in appearance, to those made in the valley where men let their imaginations run.

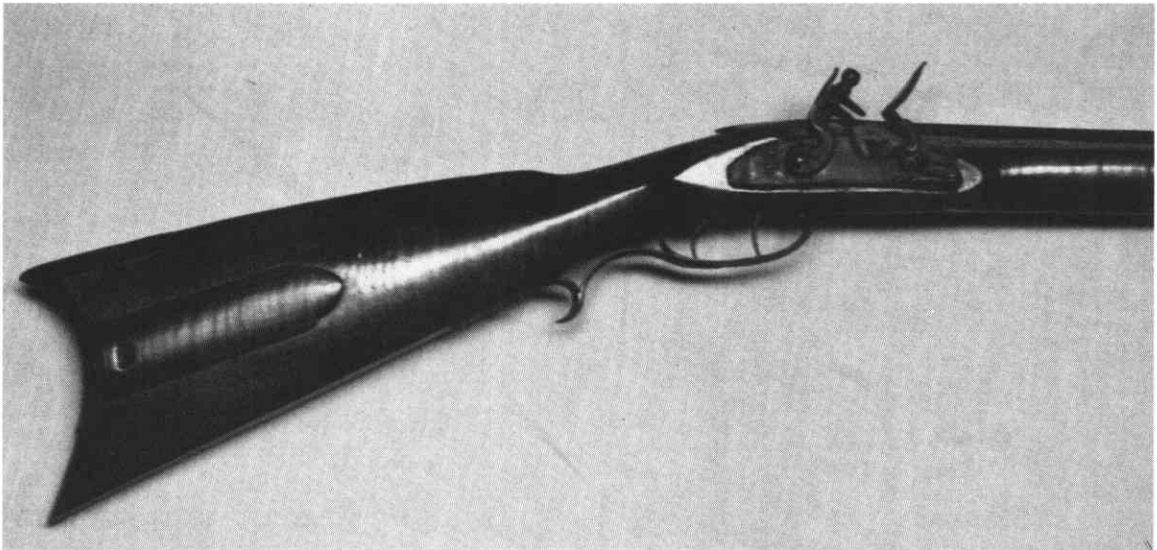


Figure 20a

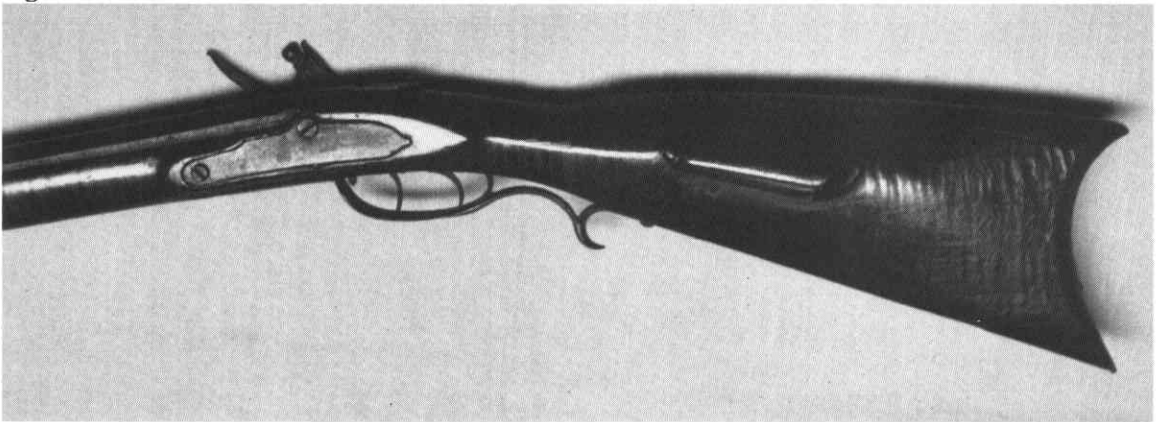


Figure 20b

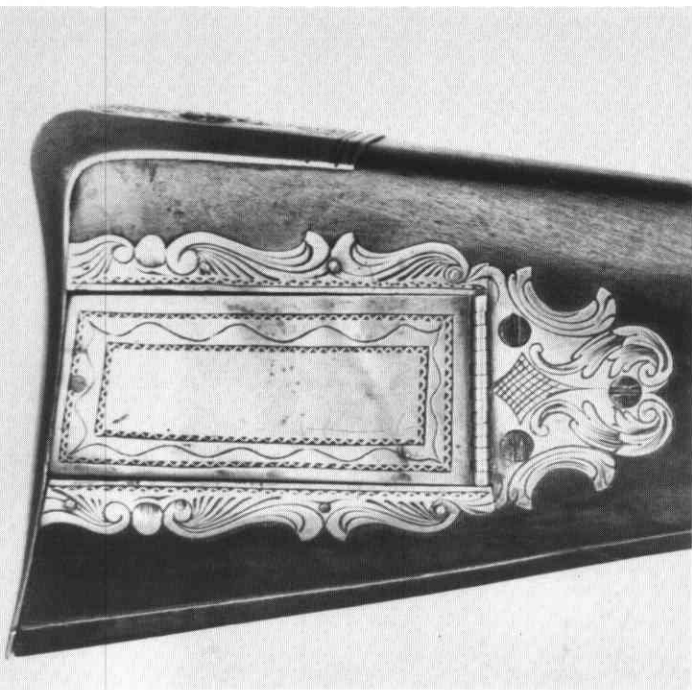


Figure 21a

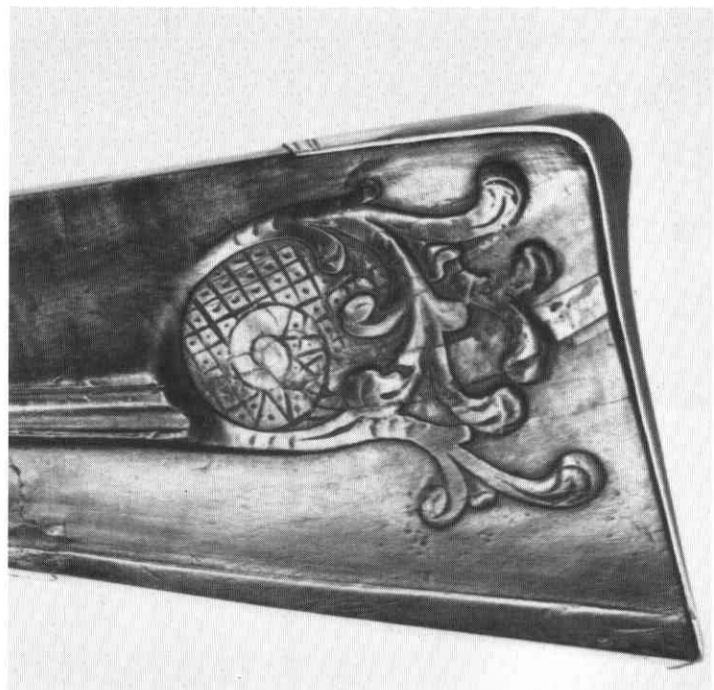


Figure 21b

As we traveled down the magnificent valley of Virginia we found that a rather small population scattered along its length provided a good market for a number of rifle makers. In the earliest period and in areas adjacent to Pennsylvania, the rifles resembled those of Pennsylvania makers. They soon took on characteristics of their own, which enable us to identify them, in most cases, as Virginia rifles: the early low combs and slim appearance; the patch box lids with four petalled flower finials; the generous use of inlays and wire decorations; acorn inlays; C scroll carving; cheekpieces that are rounded; cheekpieces that have angles carried well back and up into the butt stock; a straightening of the top curve of the butt stock; the change to an abrupt drop to the comb as time went by; very new and imaginative patch box lids; and a broadening of the butt stock until the southwest rifle did not resemble those of counties to the north.

As we study these fascinating arms I am sure more makers will turn up and more rifles will be identified. The history of this frontier and its unique geography provide a background of such interest that more long rifle collectors and scholars are sure to be attracted to it.



NOTES

1. John Esten Cooke, *Virginia a History of the People*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1884.), 322
2. *ibid.*, 323
3. *ibid.*, 323
4. *ibid.*, 324
5. *ibid.*, 325
6. *ibid.*, 325
7. *ibid.*, 326
8. Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of Virginia*. (Charleston, S.C.: Babcock & Co., 1845.) 192
9. *ibid.*, 340
10. *ibid.*, 340
11. James B. Whisker, *Gunsmiths of West Virginia*. 2nd ed. (Bedford, PA: Old Bedford Village Press, 1987.) ,69
12. *ibid.*, 89-91
13. *ibid.*, 89
14. Howe, *Historical Collections of Virginia*. 334
15. *ibid.*, 336
16. *ibid.*, 272
17. *ibid.*, 273
18. *ibid.*, 290
19. *ibid.*, 291
20. William S. Bowers, *Gunsmiths of Pen-Mar-Va 1790-1840*. (Mercersburg, PA.: Irwinton Publishers, 1979.), 200
21. Lucullus McWhorter, *The Border Settlers of Northwestern Virginia 1768-1795*. (Richwood, West Virginia: Jim Comstock 1974.), 258-262
22. Whisker, *Gunsmiths of West Virginia*. 57
23. Howe, *Historical Collections of Virginia*. 467
24. *ibid.*, 469
25. *ibid.*, 460
26. *ibid.*, 463
27. *ibid.*, 424-425
28. *ibid.*, 177
29. *ibid.*, 177
30. *ibid.*, 448
31. *ibid.*, 449-450
32. *ibid.*, 454
33. *ibid.*, 456
34. *ibid.*, 454
35. *ibid.*, 202
36. *ibid.*, 447
37. *ibid.*, 385
38. *ibid.*, 443
39. *ibid.*, 469
41. *ibid.*, 497

Rifle Makers of the Valley of Virginia

(approximate years worked)

Berkeley County

Abraham Guseman	1779-1801	
David Hunter	1774-1820	
Henry Laverston	1797	Martinsburg
Peter Light	1773-1806	
Daniel Marker	1822-1824	1833-1855 Martinsburg
Daniel Marker Jr.	1831	
Jacob Marker	(b1803)*	
George Marker	(b1782)	
James Marker	1810-1883	
Paul Marker	(b1811)	
Charles Mason	1777	
Richard Meanly	1781	Martinsburg
Anthony Nobel	1777-1785	Martinsburg
Levan Phillips	1780	
Hugh Reppy	1780	
John Shough	1797	Martinsburg
John Whetstone	1806-1824	Martinsburg

Jefferson County

Robert Avis	1755-1769	
Dennis Byrne	1804	
James Clark	1804-1820	
Jacob Entler	1797-1822	
Bishop Henderson	(b1822)	
William McClure	1816	
John Merrick	1810	
William Morgan	1806-1809	Shepherdstown
Joseph Munson	1811	
John Roman	1818	Charlestown
Thomas Rutherford	1743-1804	
Henry Sheetz	1776-1787	Shepherdstown
John Jacob Sheetz	1807-1828	Shepherdstown
Jacob Sheetz	1838-1840	Charlestown
Martin Sheetz	1793-1808	Shepherdstown
Michael Sheetz	1817-1820	Shepherdstown
Michael Sheetz	1781-1836	Charlestown
Philip Sheetz	1777-1794	Shepherdstown
Wm Miller Sheetz	1800-1866	Shepherdstown
Wm Miller Sheetz (son)	1830	Shepherdstown
James Stubblefield	1810-1819	
Thomas Worley	1776	Shepherdstown

Hampshire County

John G. Brant	(b1809) 1832	Keyser
William Britton	(b1794)	
Y. Butt	(b1803)	
Conrad Glaze	1780-1820	Springfield
George W. Glaze	(b1780)	Springfield
William Hollenback	(b1818) 1840	
Henry Jopper	1820	
Jacob Kline	1820	
Nathaniel Offutt	1830-1850	Capon Bridge
James Rinehart	1830	
J.W. Rinehart	1840	
John Rinehart	(b1826)	
Rudolph Rinehart	1785	
Benjamin F. Shane	1840-52	Springfield
Fredrick Sheetz	1792	Frankfort
Fredrick Sheetz-son	1800-1841	Frankfort
Jacob Sheetz	(b1812) 1858	
Otho Sheetz	1811-1820	Frankfort
Thomas Sheetz	1810-1850	
William Sheetz	(b1820)	
Zebulon Sheetz	1819-1835	Capon Bridge
Peter Thiesh	(b1824)	Romney
George Young	1830	
Simon Ward	(b1804)	

Frederick County

Joshua Baker	1755-1769	Winchester
William Bowen	1753	
George Brinker	1771-1785	
Henry Brinker	1765	
Thomas Campbell	1755-1811	
Moses Cherry	1765	
Walter Denny	1796-1811	
Stephen Emery	1750-1753	
Amos Fisher	1820	Winchester
Amos R. Fisher	1850	Winchester
Philip Graham	1776	
Joseph Hawkins	1762-1770	
Joseph Hawlins II	1770-1774	
Adam Haymaker	1753-1804	Winchester
John Haymaker	1800	Winchester
Benjamin Heckley		
Daniel James	1753-1755	
Isaac Kline	(b1806)	
George Kreps	1819-1826	Winchester
Jacob Lauck	1816-1826	Winchester
John Lauck	1820-1826	Winchester
Peter Lauck	(b1753) 1774-1826	Winchester
Simon Lauck	1795-1815	Winchester
William Lauck	1840	Winchester
William P. Lauck	(b1818) 1850-1897	Winchester
John Montaque	1850	
Joshua Painter	1820	Winchester
Samuel Price	1767-1784	
Issac Richard	1772	
Joseph Robinson	1765-1785	
Frederick Short	1763-1766	
Jacob Sperry	1770	
Richard Williams	1765	

Shenandoah County

Israel Budd	1803	
Jacob Cook	1798	
George Cooper	1792-1822	
George Fisher	1812	
Uriah Fisher	1825-1850	
D. Funk	1810-1820	Woodstock
Jacob Funk	1810	
Arbaham Grabill	1806-1815	
George Grandstaff	1796	Edinburg
John Grandstaff	1820-30	Edinburg
Philip Grandstaff	1820	
Henry Hardin	1787-1812	
Christian Hoffman	1785	Woodstock
William Ligget	1826	Edinburg
Charles Spitzer	1835	New Market
Henry Spitzer	1800	New Market
Moses Spitzer	1835	
William Spitzer	1830	New Market
Godfrey Wilkin	1801-1812	
John Wilkin	1812-1828	
William Will	1830	

Rockingham County

John Crummey	1805-1832	
Jacob Custer	1830-1845	
William Gibbs	(b1810)	
George S. Logan	1825-1835	Harrisonburg
George L. Logan	1830-1840	Harrisonburg
Henry Mace	(b1816)	
Alexander McGilvary	1812-1854	Harrisonburg
Archibald Rutherford	1809-1815	Harrisonburg
Daniel Shaver	(b1820)	
George Sites	1793-1813	Harrisonburg
Herman Wells	(b1825)	

Augusta County

William Alexander	1775-1801	
Wilson Harlow	(b1829)	
Jacob Shaffer	(b1820)	
William Shannon	1805	Staunton
William Shaver	(b1802)	
John Sheetz	1796	Staunton
William Suthards	(b1804)	

Rockbridge County

W. Bogan		Natural Bridge
John Davidson	1790	
Samuel Elliott	(b1802)	
Alexander Tedford	1781	
Alexander Walker	1727-1782	Walker Creek
John Walker	1794	
William Walker	1779	

Botetourt County

J. Painter	(b1814)	
Jennings Pollard	(b1813)	
Madison Riddleburger	(b1807)	
John P. Sites	(b1784-d1853) 1804	Fincastle
Andrew Telford	1780	

Pulaski County

John B. Honaker	1848
E. Wyatt	

Wythe County

Joseph A. Honaker	1820
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Washington County

J. Thomas	
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* (b1806) = born in 1806. (b1806-d1856) = born 1806, died 1856

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Figure 3



Figure 8

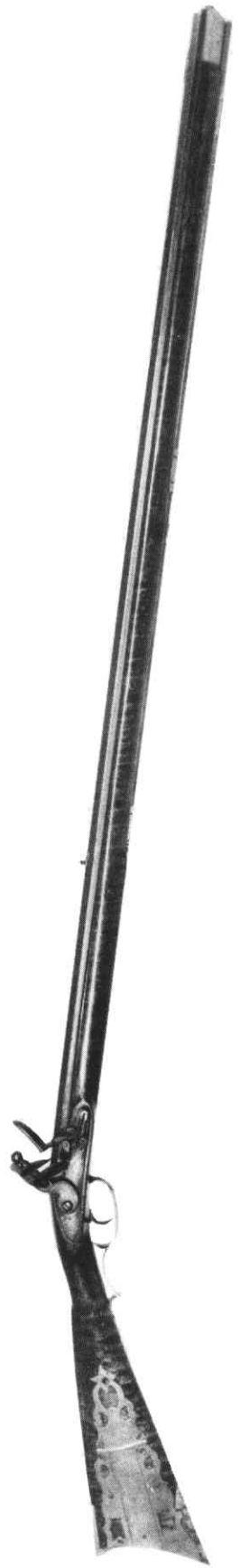


Figure 9

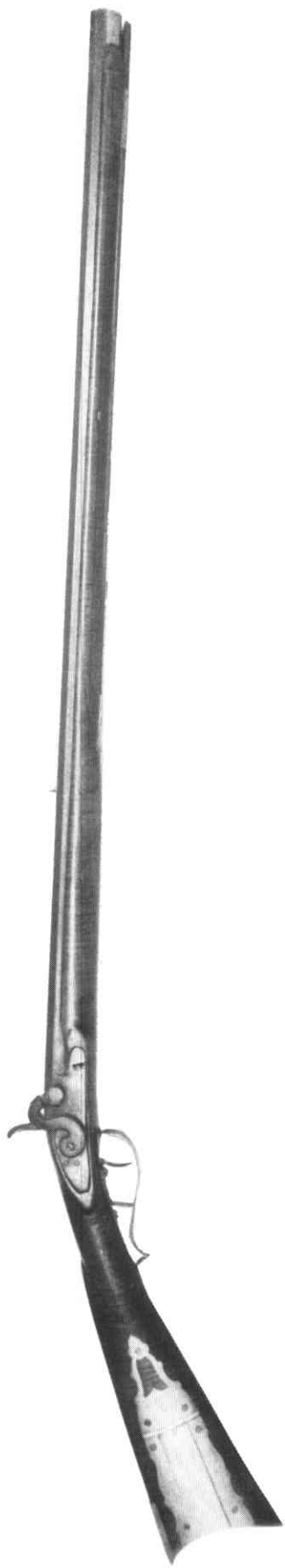


Figure 10

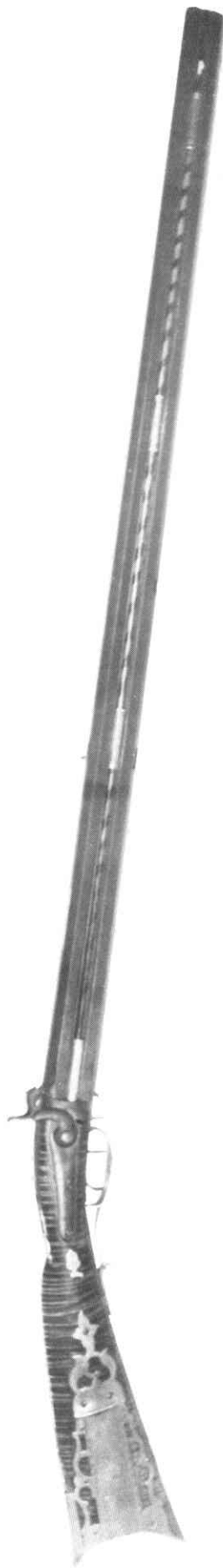


Figure 11

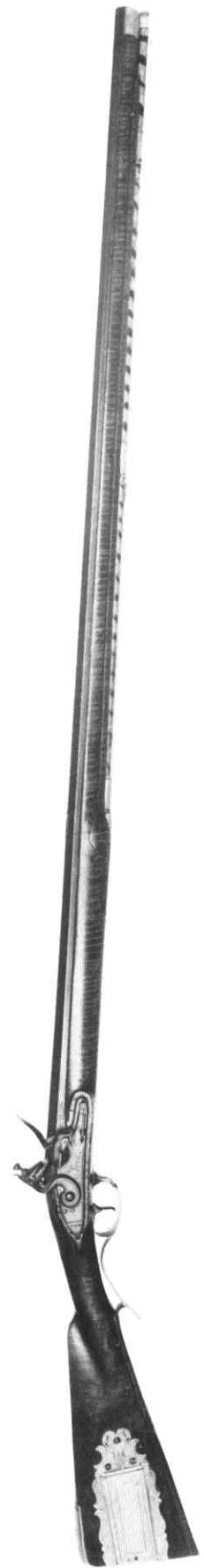


Figure 21