

From a bar of iron, and stock from the tree...

# Masterpiece Rifles of the Cumberland

by Mel Stewart Hankla



Figure 1. Above are two masterpiece rifles by Jacob Young. Top rifle was made for William Waid Woodfork, bottom for William Whitley

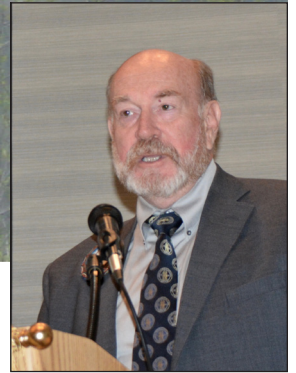
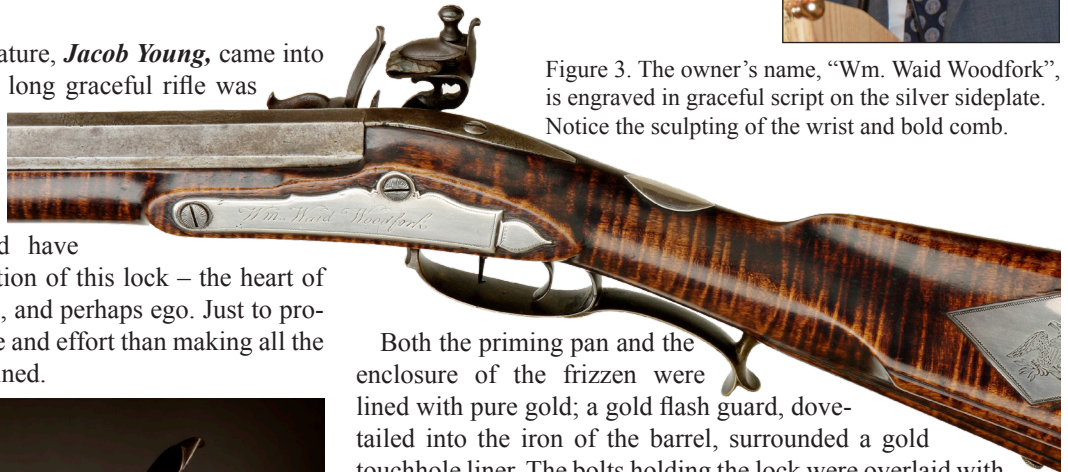


Figure 3. The owner's name, "Wm. Waid Woodfork", is engraved in graceful script on the silver sideplate. Notice the sculpting of the wrist and bold comb.

Carefully rolling it over, the signature, *Jacob Young*, came into view. Elegant in its simplicity, the long graceful rifle was built around an exquisite hand-made flintlock. This lock, also signed by the maker, was painstakingly wrought at a time when high-quality English locks would have been readily available. The production of this lock – the heart of the rifle – showed conviction, pride, and perhaps ego. Just to produce this lock surely took more time and effort than making all the other components of the rifle combined.



Both the priming pan and the enclosure of the frizzen were lined with pure gold; a gold flash guard, dovetailed into the iron of the barrel, surrounded a gold touchhole liner. The bolts holding the lock were overlaid with silver and rested upon a silver sideplate designed with a heart-shaped finial. Upon this sideplate, proudly engraved in beautiful script, was the owner's name - *Wm. Waid Woodfork*. The patch-box was fashioned from a single piece of cast brass and expertly fitted with a "captured" lid, completely encircled by a delicately engraved brass surround.



Figure 2. Jacob Young produced this exquisite handmade lock at a time that English flintlocks would have been readily available. Its waterproof flashpan and inset frizzen cover is lined with pure gold. Note the gold flash guard dovetailed into the barrel surrounding a gold touch hole liner.

The trigger guard was also unique, constructed with a reverse curve at the termination of the grip rail kissing the rear support of the guard. The cheekpiece held the largest of a dozen silver inlays, a large elongated diamond decorated with an elegantly engraved Federal eagle. No screws or pins visibly attached this inlay, and upon perusal one finds that it is held in place with a pin inserted from under the cheekpiece, an arduous task, but one obviously important to the maker so that nothing distracted, or would dislodge his decoration.





Figure 4. The large, diamond shaped, coin silver cheek piece inlay exhibits the engraving talent of Jacob Young.

This impressive rifle was the beginning of a lifelong quest. Relentless pursuit for knowledge regarding this rifle and others associated with it lifted a veil of misunderstanding from an early American region known as the *Cumberland*. Tennessee Judge John Haywood, whose books were ground-breaking works in preserving and interpreting the state's history, wrote in his 1891 *Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee*, "The Cumberland, it is not just the famous river; it's not Tennessee nor Kentucky; however each and all help make up this unique place." Harriette Simpson Arnow, a novelist and social historian born in Wayne County, Kentucky, is chiefly known for her novels portraying the people of Appalachia; they are noted works of the Southern Renaissance. Her 1962 history book *Seedtime on the Cumberland* describes the beginnings of the Appalachian region of her youth through its pioneer days. She titled the first chapter, "*The Old Boot*", and wrote,

*"The drainage basin of the Cumberland River forms a curious, shoe-like shape, something like an old-time buskin, badly worn and wrinkled, with a gob of mud caught in the instep, blurring the heel, yet with all the parts of a foot covering. The long and narrow toe, lifted as if for kicking, touches the Ohio, the wrinkled heel goes southward onto the high tableland of the Cumberland Plateau and is shaped by the Caney Fork river and its tributaries. The top of the shoe is formed by the Rockcastle and its many crooked creeks, a rough country the old ones found as they went through it on their way to the Kentucky Bluegrass. The Rockcastle region is still less rough and wild than the country of the upper Cumberland; here the river flows for sixty miles or so in the narrow valley, often scarcely ten miles wide, between Pine and Cumberland mountains."*



Figure 5. This map of the Cumberland shows the boot-shaped area of the region.

Both Haywood and Arnow found it important to identify this unique place in their landmark publications. These authors realized that the Cumberland had lost its identity when Kentucky and Tennessee were formed and felt it necessary to distinguish this region and point out its historical significance.

### Essential for Survival

Both Jacob Young and William Waid Woodfork lived in the Cumberland, as did each of the other four men introduced in this article, but it is their artistic rifles and accompanying engraved powder horns that brought attention to their pioneer lives. The iconic longrifle was the very center of frontier life, the number one tool of the day. Men lived with their rifles in their hand, ready to ride to the aid of a distant station or to pursue an Indian war party making off with prisoners and/or stolen horses. A man often stood guard with a rifle while others milked the cows or plowed the fields. It was unusual to see a man without a rifle and it was always "loaded and primed". Ready! A man caught with an empty rifle might easily pay for his negligence with his life. A good rifle was respected and carried with great pride. The quality, beauty or artistic merit of one's rifle was somewhat of a status symbol. Often men gave them pet names, usually that of a lady. Early Longhunter and Cumberland settler Gaspar Mansker called his rifle "Nancy," stating, "My Nancy always spoke with fatal effect!"

The gunsmith Jacob Young, second child of William Young and Elizabeth Huff, was born May 8, 1774, on the southwest frontier of Virginia. Jacob's father, William, was also a gunsmith and in 1776 was living in Rowan County, North Carolina. William Young was an armorer under the command of General Griffith Rutherford during the Cherokee campaigns. In 1779 he moved his family to the Cumberland, settling on Indian Creek near modern-day Boma, Tennessee. It was then Sumner County, North Carolina.

William Waid Woodfork, (also spelled Woodfolk, Woolfork, Woolfolk) for whom Jacob Young made the earlier described rifle (circa 1815), was an early pioneer in Jackson County, Tennessee, a large planter and a very influential man. Woodfork was a surveyor and in 1806 was paid by the state of Tennessee to separate White County out of Jackson County. William H. Speer, in *Sketches of Prominent Tennesseans* writes that Woodfork "was a man of fine ability and large fortune, being one of the richest men in Tennessee..." He was also a noted horseman, with Speer's stating,

*"Tennessee was far in advance of Kentucky prior to the war [1812] in thoroughbred horses, the development of this animal dating back to 1808 in the vicinity of Nashville and the breed improved by the judicious expenditures of money by such men as the immortal Andrew Jackson... and William Waid Woolfolk, of Davidson county."*

Jacob Young also made a fine rifle for early Kentucky frontiersman **William Whitley**. Whitley was born in Virginia in 1749 and moved to Kentucky in 1775. Whitley served under George Rogers Clark during the Revolutionary War, was a state legislator, and fought multiple campaigns against several Native American tribes. He was also famous as a horseman, a commonality between him and William Waid Woodfork. (Figure 7 and 8)

Built between 1787 and 1794, Whitley called his Cumberland home "Sportsmans Hill". An unexpected expression of artistry, it is an architectural masterpiece of the early Kentucky frontier. Upon first view, the initials, "W.W." formed with glazed headers





Figure 7. Jacob Young also made a rifle for early Kentucky frontiersman William Whitley.

set the ambiance of the brick fortress. Circling the mansion, bricks laid in Flemish bond make a diamond pattern decorating each gable end of the house. The initials of his wife, Ester, “E.W.” are found on the backside, equally as bold as Williams on the front. Coming inside, the main part of the house contains three rooms. Just to the left of the front door is the high-ceilinged drawing room with its thirteen S shaped woodcarvings adorning the walnut block paneling of the fireplace. The main stairway, connecting the lower and upper halls, is also beautifully carved, decorated on the end of each step with an Eagle holding an olive branch.



Figure 10. The main stairway, connecting the lower and upper halls, is also beautifully carved, decorated on the end of each step with an Eagle holding an olive branch.



Figure 8. The William Whitley House, was one of the first brick homes west of the Alleghenies.

Sportmans Hill was one of the first brick houses built west of the Allegheny Mountains, but more importantly it was home to the first circular racetrack for horses. In defiance to British norm, Whitley arrogantly raced horses “counter-clockwise”, which America still does today. Whitley’s estate was dubbed, “Guardian of Wilderness Road” and was a gathering place for early frontiersmen including Gaspar Mansker, Isaac Shelby, John Sevier, William Fleming, John Floyd, William Christian, James Hankla, William Bryan, James Harrod, Benjamin Logan, George Rogers Clark, Simon Kenton and Daniel Boone.



Figure 9. Just to the left of the front door is the high-ceilinged drawing room with its thirteen “S” shaped woodcarvings adorning the walnut block paneling of the fireplace.



Figure 11. The initials “W.W.” and “E.W.” are both engraved on the cheek inlay. Whitley’s wife Esther, was famous for her marksmanship! As on the Woodfork rifle, the coin silver cheek inlay is also kept by a keeper pin from under the cheekpiece, a very unique application.

Stylistically, William Whitley’s Jacob Young rifle appears to have been made several years earlier than the Woodfork rifle, probably around 1800. The butt is considerably wider (1 ¾ inches) and it is designed with a stepped wrist. It has been broken through the wrist and carries a neat brass repair. The “H.Deringer-Philad” flintlock is a “period of use” replacement. Although not as elegant as Woodfork’s rifle, it is decorated with bold relief rococo carving, blatantly showing another facet of Jacob Young’s talent and artistry.





Figure 12. Jacob Young's signature engraving adorns the brass side plate..

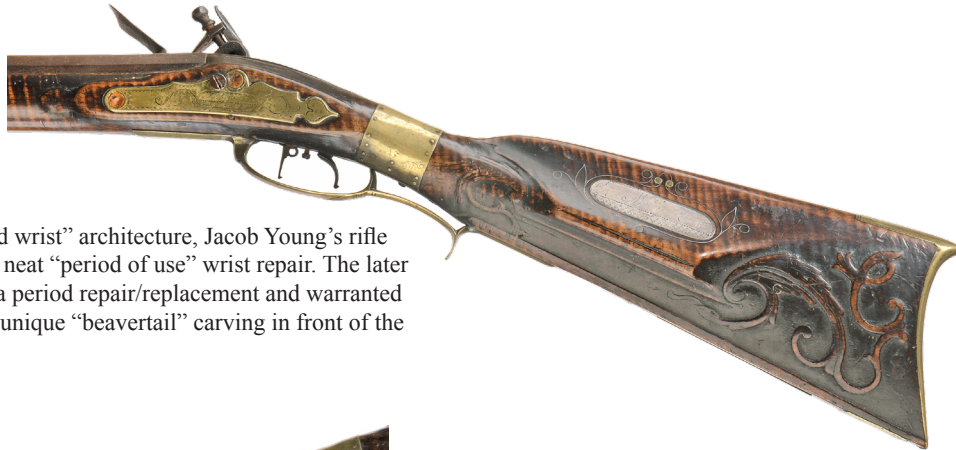


Figure 13. Built with "stepped wrist" architecture, Jacob Young's rifle for William Whitley carries a neat "period of use" wrist repair. The later "one-screw" flintlock is also a period repair/replacement and warranted a new bolt location. Note the unique "beavertail" carving in front of the lock/sideplate mortise.



Figure 14. Notice that the patchbox is very similar to the box on William Waid Woodfork's rifle. It also is designed with a solid one-piece surround "capturing" the delightfully engraved lid, although features a heart shaped piercing of the finial.



Figure 15. Considerably more elaborate than the Woodfork rifle, Wm. Whitley's rifle is relief carved and has both silver and brass wire inlay.

The script engraved on Whitley's rifle mirrors the large gracefully-curved powder horn that Jacob Young made to accompany it. It is inscribed as indicated in Figure 16.

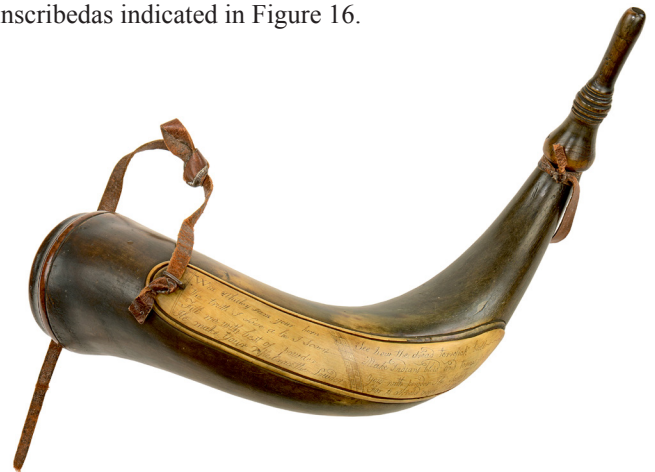


Figure 16. The inscription reads:

"Wm. Whitley I am your horn The truth I love, A lie I scorn  
 Fill me with the best of powder Ile make your rifle crack the louder  
 See how the dread terriffick ball Make Indians bleed and Tories fall  
 You with powder Ile supply For to defend your Liberty"

Passed down with Whitley's rifle and powder horn is an extremely rare elaborate beaded strap. Finger woven from spun wool, it was originally longer and appears to have been cut down in length and used to carry the rather enormous powder horn. Research suggests that it is probably a "bandolier sash" and the spiraling beaded designs are Chickasaw in origin. This would make sense, as Whitley was one of the commanding officers in the 1794 Nickajack Campaign against the Chickamauga, serving alongside Chickasaw Chief Piomingo, an early Native American diplomat honored by George Washington for his unyielding peace initiatives.





Figure 17. Above, this elaborate beaded strap descended with William Whitley's rifle and powder horn.

Figure 18 - 20. Right, close-up details of the Chickasaw beaded designs on Wm. Whitley's powder horn strap.



Family legend is that William Whitley carried this rifle and powder horn to the Battle of the Thames, where he lost his life on October 5, 1813. Although he was in his sixty-fourth year, he enlisted as a private in John Davidson's company that formed a part of Richard Mentor Johnson's Kentucky Mounted Infantry. In all of his campaigns he had been wounded only once, but he had often said that, "the death I crave is to die in my country's defense." The night before the Battle of the Thames, Whitley is said to have expressed the belief to his friend, John Preston that he would die on the following day. At the onset of the battle, to avoid sending the entire regiment into an ambush, Commander Johnson called for twenty volunteers to draw fire from Tecumseh and his warriors. The group riding out to almost certain death has been called by many historians, "The Forlorn Hope." Johnson himself rode beside the little band, but at its head rode William Whitley. At the first volley, nineteen of the group was unhorsed and fifteen were mortally wounded. When the skirmish ended, both Tecumseh and William Whitley were dead. Richard Spurr of Fayette County, a private in Samuel Comb's company, was one of the twenty members of the Forlorn Hope. He stated in later life that he had seen Whitley and an Indian fire at one another and that each was killed and that he carried both Whitley's and the Indian's bodies into camp with General Harrison, recognizing the Indian as the Shawnee leader Tecumseh. John Preston survived the conflict and returned Whitley's horse, his gun, and powder horn to his wife Ester.



Figure 21. This engraving depicts the Battle of the Thames, a decisive victory for the United States over the British and the Shawnee lead by Tecumseh. Both William Whitley and Tecumseh lost their lives in this battle. It took place on October 5, 1813 in Upper Canada, near present-day Chatham, Ontario.

### Together at Watauga

As previously discussed, in 1776 Jacob Young's father, William Young, was in the Watauga region and an armorer under Gen. Griffith Rutherford. Also in the Watauga in 1776 was **Thomas Simpson**. The pension application for Joseph Luske reveals that both he and Simpson were in Captain John Sevier's company on William Christian's campaign against the Cherokee. Luske declared that his messmates were, "Thomas Simpson - armorer, Felix Walker, Julius Robinson and William Dodd." All of these men were signers of the July 5, 1776 "Watauga Petition" for annexation of the region into North Carolina. In May of 1772, for the mutual protection of the settlements along the Watauga, Holston, and Nolichucky rivers, the frontier settlers had created a semi-autonomous government called the Watauga Association. President Theodore Roosevelt wrote:

*"the Watauga settlers were the first men of American birth to establish a free and independent community on the continent."*

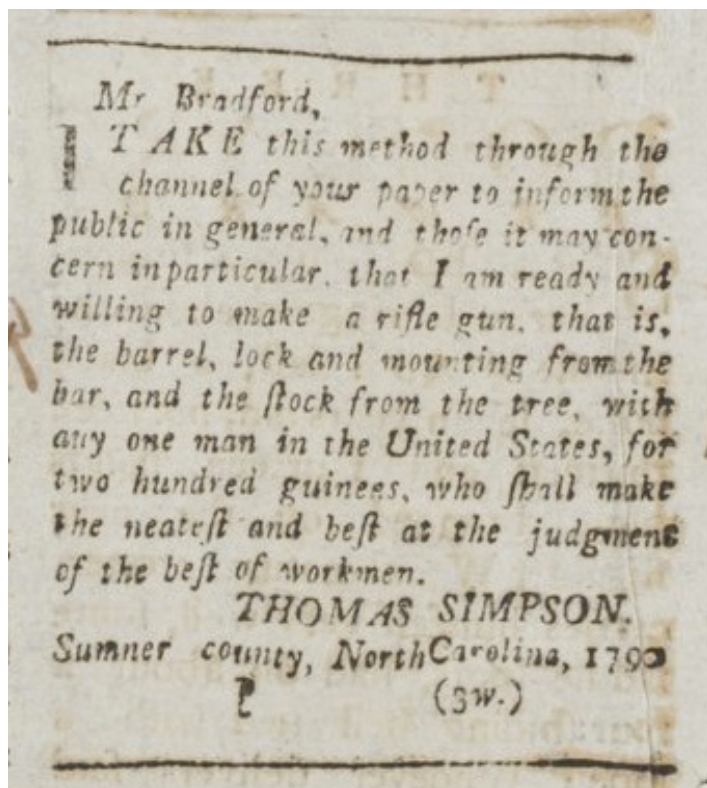


Figure 22. Thomas Simpson offers 200 guineas and a challenge that he can build the "neatest and best" rifle in the United States. The Kentucky Gazette—July 26th, 1790



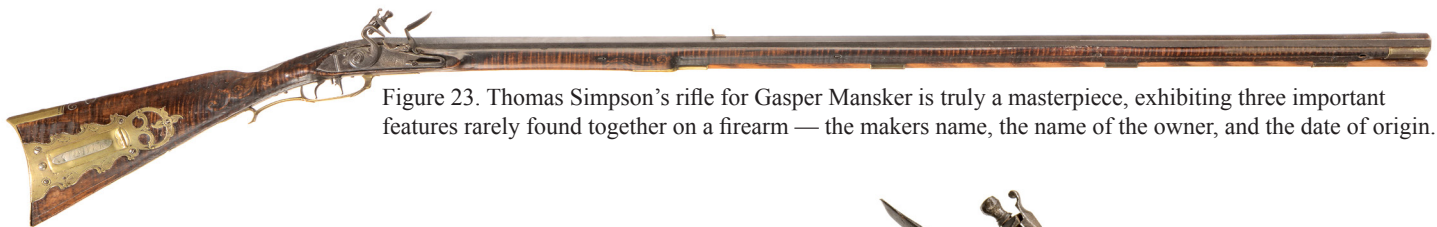


Figure 23. Thomas Simpson's rifle for Gasper Mansker is truly a masterpiece, exhibiting three important features rarely found together on a firearm — the makers name, the name of the owner, and the date of origin.

Although only lasting a few years, the Watauga Association provided a firm foundation for what later developed into the state of Tennessee.

The geographic association of these “armorers” is mentioned to bring attention to the regional origin of both gunsmiths. Stylistic similarities exist between the work of Jacob Young and that of Thomas Simpson, although we must keep in mind their age difference. Jacob would have only been two years old when his father was serving alongside Thomas Simpson in 1776. Some scholars of the American Longrifle feel that perhaps Jacob Young apprenticed to Simpson. However, no documentation has been found to support this theory, but they did live in close proximity and have early roots in the Watauga region of North Carolina. Whatever their relationship, to use the words of noted rifle authority and author, Joe Kindig, “They slept in the same bed!”

Thomas Simpson and William Young moved to the Cumberland region by 1787 and are found on the tax rolls there. Jacob, born in 1774, would have been 13 years old. In the July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1790 issue of the Kentucky Gazette, Simpson makes a challenge, “I am ready and willing to make a rifle gun, that is the barrel, lock and mounting from the bar, and the stock from the tree, with any one man in the United States...” listing his address as Sumner County, North Carolina. Sumner County was formed in 1786 and encompassed what today is eastern Davidson and most all of Robertson, Wilson, Macon, Smith, and Trousdale counties of Tennessee.

A year later, in 1791, Simpson made a masterpiece rifle for Colonel Gasper Mansker. (also spelled, Gaspar, Kasper, Kaspar, Casper, Caspar) So elaborate as to take months to build, it was most likely the next rifle he produced after his publicized boast. The style and lines are sleek and graceful, shaped around a hand forged .50 caliber barrel just shy of four feet in length. The stock is fashioned from exceptional maple wood with brilliant curly grain, and bold relief carving flows from butt to muzzle. Sand-cast brass mountings are artistically sculpted and expertly engraved. Silver accents adorn the wrist, toe, cheek, and heel. Obviously made with great pride, Simpson and Mansker were comrades, and on February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1789 they carried chain on a 640 acre North Carolina sanctioned survey on Maddison's Creek. Later, the Commissioners of North Carolina deeded this “salt lick” tract to Thomas Simpson on April 28, 1792, for 100 pounds. Simpson's property is within a mile of Mansker's second Station, the first being abandoned in 1780 following a devastating Indian attack. In 1784, the North Carolina government passed an act of legislation granting preemption rights to those men who had come into and settled the Middle Cumberland Valley prior to 1780. “The Immortal Seventy” were those who were still alive or the heirs of those who had been killed defending their homes and land during Indian conflicts. Gasper Mansker received one of these 640 acre Preemptive Land Grants and it is the location of his second Station.

Thomas Simpson wanted there to be no doubt that “he” built this exceptional rifle, and used the Latin term “fecit” meaning, *he*



Figure 24. Dated 1791 on the silver oval inlay into the sideplate, this rifle was produced within a year of Simpson's boast in the July 26, 1790 issue of the Kentucky Gazette.

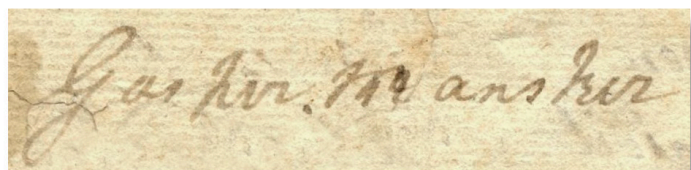


Figure 25. Signature of Gasper Mansker from the 1784 Cumberland Compact.



Figure 26. The “captured lid” of the patchbox has a silver overlay engraved with G. Mansker. The circular flower final of the box is associated with many later rifles made in Kentucky.



Figure 27. Thomas Simpson wanted there to be no doubt that he was the maker of this rifle and used the Latin term “fecit” meaning he did it, adjacent to his signature.

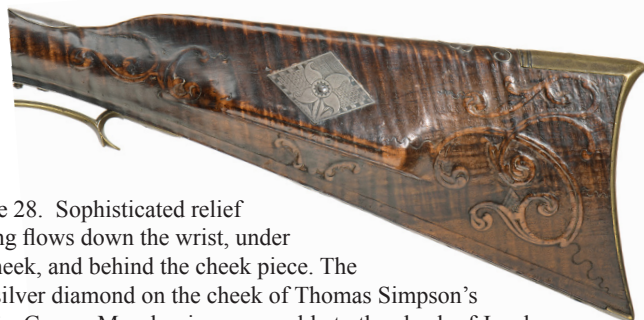


Figure 28. Sophisticated relief carving flows down the wrist, under the cheek, and behind the cheek piece. The coin silver diamond on the cheek of Thomas Simpson's rifle for Gasper Mansker is comparable to the cheek of Jacob Young's rifle for Wm. Waid Woodfork.





Figure 29. The bold architecture flows from the worn relief carving at the tang, down into a slim and dainty wrist, back into the sculpted butt-stock that is a full 2 inches wide.



Figure 30. Mansker's rifle has a broad trigger guard with touches of his signature engraving.

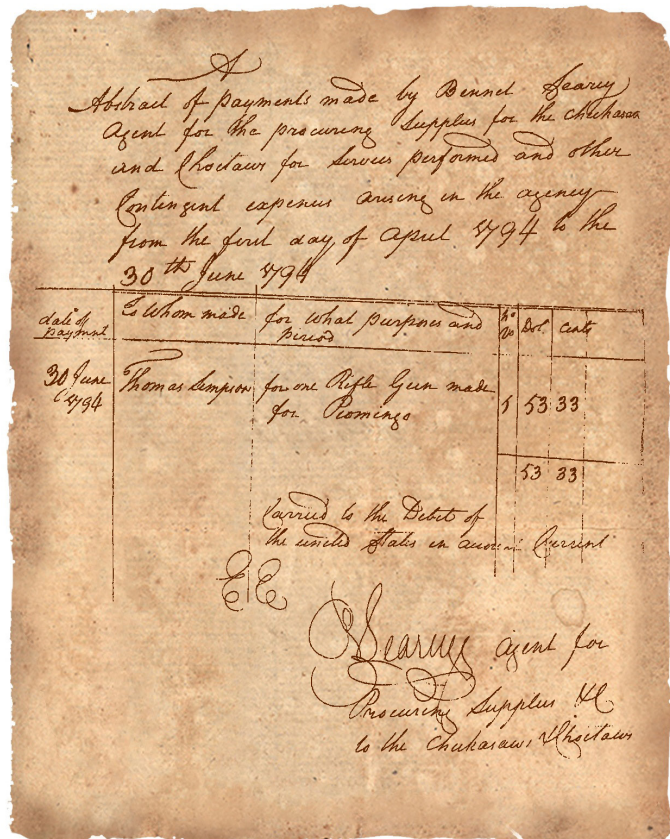


Figure 31. The toe is equipped with a coin silver inlaid "feather hole." Traditionally a blue-jay feather was used to either clean the touchhole, or act as a plug at night or during bad weather. Several period journals speak of the blue-jay's squawking alarming the Indians to one's whereabouts.

did it, adjacent to his signature engraved elegantly in a silver plate on the top flat of the barrel. G. Mansker is inscribed on a silver overlay on the patchbox door. Mansker's ownership is further documented by a rare document, a letter from **Chickasaw Chief Piomingo** to Indian Agent General James Robertson dated June 17, 1793, stating, "I want you to get Simson [sic] to make me a gun like Col. [Gasper] Mansker's."

By June 30, 1794, Thomas Simpson had completed construction of this rifle, submitting his invoice to Bennet Searcy, agent for procuring supplies. The invoice states: "Thomas Simpson for one Rifle gun made for Piomingo - \$53.33." This cost is unusually high as a typical rifle at the time sold for no more than about \$13. Perhaps part of this cost was that Simpson had agreed to build the rifle quickly but would also indicate that the rifle was of a much better quality than average, as is the rifle he made for Gasper Mansker. It is interesting to note that William Whitley, Gasper Mansker, and Piomingo served side by side in the fall of 1794 on the Nickajack Campaign. It is quite possible that Piomingo was toting his new rifle.

Simpson's rifle also has an accompanying powder horn. Uniquely designed, it is decorated with fine floral polychromed engraving that matches both the carved and engraved designs on Mansker's rifle. It is obvious that this horn or others like it inspired Jacob Young when he made William Whitley's horn. The style of construction and turned butts of the two horns are very similar, each with a silver inlay surrounded with a turned cow horn decorative band. Simpson's initials, "T.S." are engraved on the butt of this horn, once again leaving little doubt that he was the maker.



32. In a letter dated June 17, 1793, Chickasaw Chief Piomingo wrote to Indian Agent James Robertson requesting, "I want you to get Simson [sic] to make me a gun like Col. Mansker's." This receipt found in the National Archives, clearly states that Thomas Simpson was paid \$53.33 for "one rifle gun made for Piomingo." It is dated June 30, 1794.



Figure 33. Butt of Gasper Mansker's powder horn made by Thomas Simpson. It is signed with Simpson's initials in a silver inlay and shares engraved and carved decorations with Mansker's fine rifle.



Figure 34. Notice the similarities of the turned butts of William Whitley's and Gasper Mansker's powder horns. Both have silver inlays surrounded with a unique decorative black cow horn band or bezel. Simpson signed his horn with his initials, "T.S."

Figure 35. Simpson made a companion powder horn engraved with polychromed decoration matching the engraving and carving on Mansker's rifle.

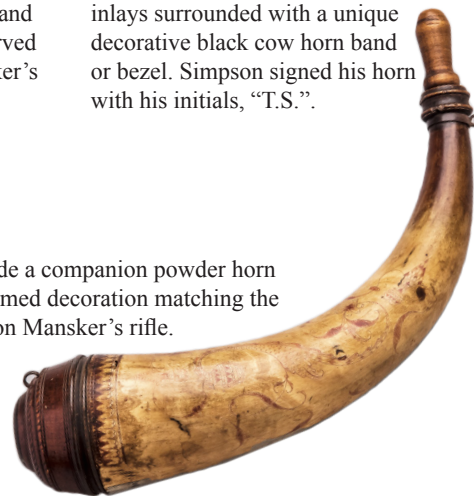






Figure 36. Details of the polychromed engraving on Gasper Mansker's powder horn by gunsmith Thomas Simpson.

### Frontiersmen

Gasper Mansker was one of the earliest explorers of the Cumberland. In June 1769, he and a company of long-hunters set off for the western wilderness. From Abingdon, Virginia, they went to the north fork of the Holston River, crossed to Moccasin Gap and traveled on to the Clinch River. Traveling through Powell's Valley and the Cumberland Gap, they reached the Cumberland River. They crossed into Kentucky at "a remarkable fish dam, which had been made in very ancient times." The hunters headed south and soon found the south fork of the Cumberland River and followed it to Price's Meadow that is in modern-day Wayne County, Kentucky. Here they made their first base camp, hunting and exploring the surrounding territory for eight or nine months.

In the fall of 1771, Mansker set out again for the western wilderness, this time in the company of Isaac Bledsoe, Joseph Drake, John Montgomery, Henry Skaggs, James Knox, and others, including an old man by the name of Russell, so "dim sighted" that he tied a white rag on the muzzle of his rifle to direct his sight towards game and "thus killed a number of deer." The group encamped on what they named "Russell's Creek" in what is now Adair County, Kentucky. They built a "skin-house" to store the pelts and hunted in the surrounding country until February 1772, when they were raided by Indians. Most of the men were out hunting; however three had been left behind to tend camp and salt down hides. Two of the three were captured by the Indians and never heard from again; the third managed to escape and met the rest of the company as they were returning to camp.



Figure 37. This painting by David Wright titled "The Station Camp ~ Dogs and Deerskins" depicts a typical half-faced station camp as described by the writings about longhunters in the Cumberland region.

In embittered commemoration of the plunder of their camp and the destruction of the peltries, they inscribed upon a beech tree the emphatic record, "2300 Deer Skins lost Ruination by God". Mansker and the hunters pushed further west, arriving in the middle Cumberland late in May. A station camp was established on a northern tributary of the Cumberland River at a point near Pilot Knob in Sumner County, known today as Station Camp Creek.

Gasper Mansker fell in love with the Cumberland region, and in the early fall of 1779 he and his wife Elizabeth moved there from Fincastle County, Virginia. With a small company of emigrants they left the Holston settlements, followed the Kentucky Trail, and arrived in the middle Cumberland Valley mid-winter of 1779-1780. The Mansker party settled on a tributary of the Cumberland River. Today it's called Mansker's Creek, and the Mansker party is considered the founders and first citizens of Goodlettsville, Tennessee.

### Confounding Issues

Rifles built by Jacob Young and Thomas Simpson and the whereabouts of these gunsmiths have been controversial topics for the last several years. Jacob Young is a rather common name and as many as four different "Jacob Young's" were encountered while doing research. Genealogy reveals that the "gunmaker" married twice, thus separating him from the others. His first wife was Mary Boren, and they settled (by 1796) in Springfield, Robertson County, Tennessee. However, they divorced in 1808. Three years later, on August 16, 1811, Jacob purchased a 640-acre Revolutionary War Grant on Huchin's Creek in Jackson County, Tennessee. He then married Mary (Polly) Huff and their first child, Jacob Young Jr., was born in 1813. This tract of property places Jacob Young within 10 miles of Thomas Simpson's Mill near present-day Sparta, in White county, Tennessee. Westin A. Goodspeed, in his *History of White County*, states,

*"The Calf Killer Valley was the scene of the first settlements in the county, the neighborhood of what is now Sparta being in all probability the first, though Thomas Simpson settled on the Calf Killer River four miles below Sparta."*

White County court minutes report that Simpson's mill was built in 1808. In 1810, Simpson sold his Sumner county, Maddison Creek property, with the deed stating, "Thomas Simpson, of the county of White and state of Tennessee," verifying that he had moved from Sumner to White County where he lived the rest of his life. Although his gravesite has not been located, a family account reports he is buried on the hill above the mill.

The name Thomas Simpson is also common and a second "Thomas Simpson" who by 1790 had settled in Nelson County, Kentucky, creates confusion. This Kentucky "Thomas" had a son named Jonathan, a well-documented 19<sup>th</sup> century Bardstown, Kentucky silversmith known for his high quality and extremely artistic surveying compasses. Genealogy has yet to prove a kinship between the Kentucky and Tennessee "Thomas Simpsons"; however, when studying the fine engraving style used on Jonathan Simpson's compasses, it would be easy to assume a working relationship between Jonathan Simpson, Jacob Young, and/or Tennessee's Thomas Simpson.





Figure 38. When studying the fine engraving style used on Jonathan Simpson's compasses, it would be easy to assume a working relationship between Jonathan Simpson, Jacob Young, and/or Tennessee's Thomas Simpson.



Figure 39. The signature and date found on the compass made by noted Bardstown, Kentucky silversmith, Jonathan Simpson – 1819. COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF EARLY SOUTHERN DECORATIVE ARTS

Another confusing issue is that the unique design elements described at the beginning of this article are also found on many rifles built 200 miles away in the Bluegrass Region of Kentucky throughout the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It has been theorized that the work of Jacob Young and/or Thomas Simpson was the basis for these artistic commonalities, but recent research has revealed that William Bryan, (brother-in-law to Daniel Boone) the patriarch of one of Kentucky's predominant gunbuilding families and his son Daniel, were also armorers and served alongside William Young and Thomas Simpson in the 1776 Cherokee campaigns. Thus, a good case can be made that this artistic association goes back to the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in North Carolina and was inspired by gun-building trends shared by William Young, Thomas Simpson, and William and Daniel Bryan.

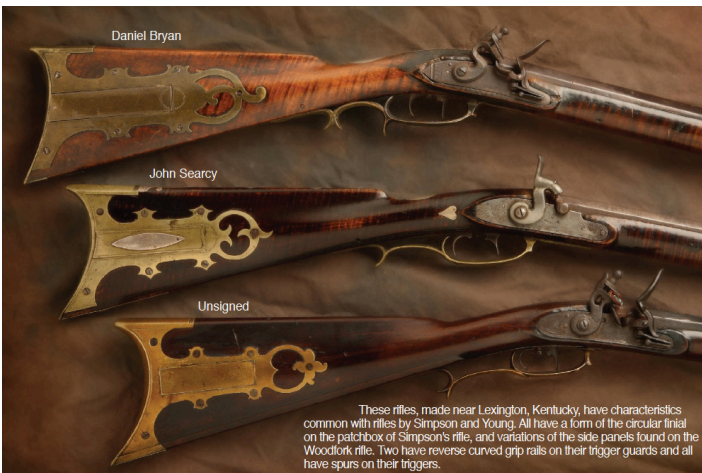


Figure 43. These rifles, made near Lexington, Kentucky, have characteristics common with rifles by Simpson and Young. All have a form of the circular finial on the patchbox of Simpson's rifle, and variations of the side panels found on the Woodfork rifle. Two have reverse curved grip rails on their trigger guards and all have spurs on their triggers.

### In Essence

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Cumberland was a region sought by many pioneers for its rich resources and easily traveled water thoroughfares. It spanned from modern day southwest Virginia westward to the southeast tip of Illinois, encompassing all of the Cumber-

land River, its tributaries, and drainage basin. Jacob Young, William Waid Woodfork, William Whitley, Thomas Simpson, Gaspar Mansker and Chickasaw Chief Piomingo, all lived in the Cumberland. Rare artistic rifles made by two of these men stand as historic icons for a misunderstood region that today is split in half by the boundary separating Kentucky and Tennessee. The other four men owned masterpiece rifles built by Thomas Simpson and Jacob Young and no doubt carried them with great pride. Each used his rifle to bravely fight for personal beliefs; consequentially, each has gone down in history as a hero. These riflemen were integral to the development and evolution of the iconic Kentucky Rifle and fearless pioneers in the westward expansion of the United States of America.

*Mel Stewart Hankla ~ Kentucky*

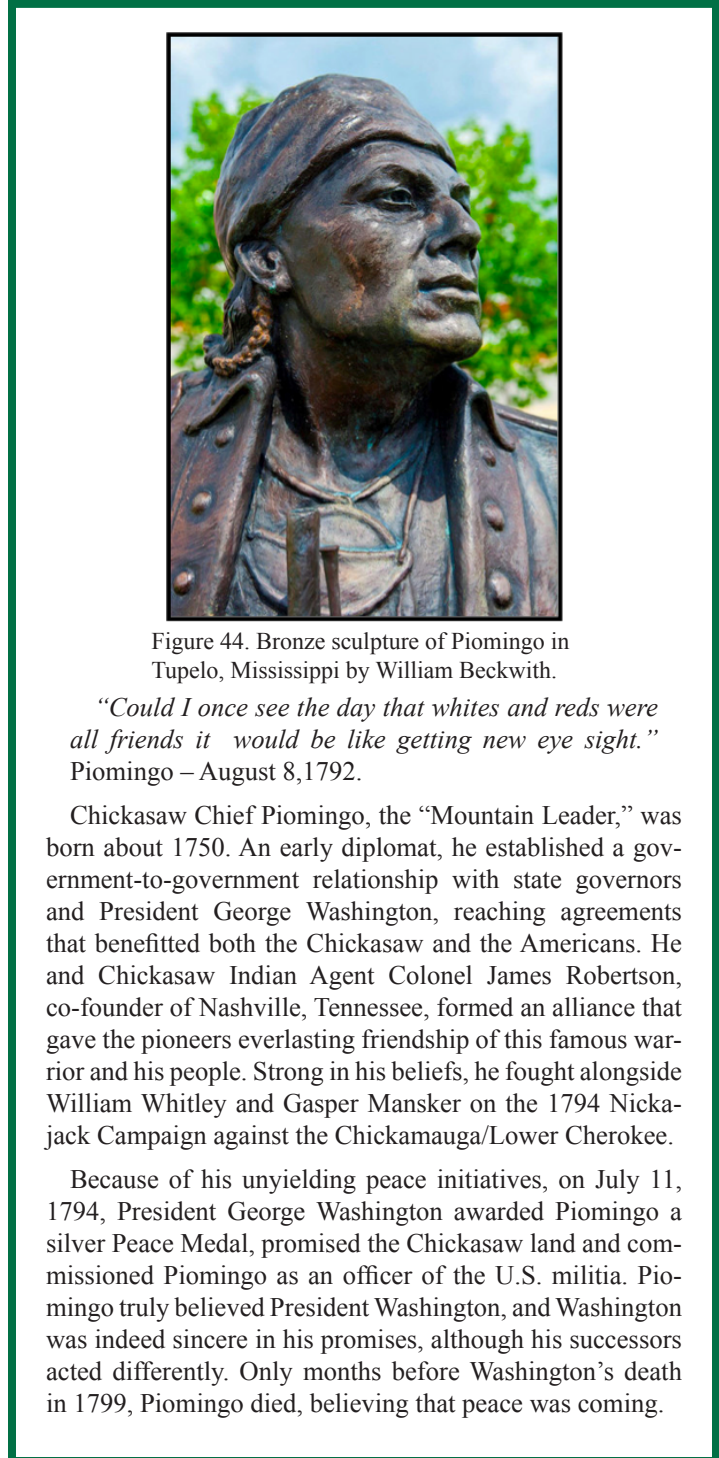


Figure 44. Bronze sculpture of Piomingo in Tupelo, Mississippi by William Beckwith.

*"Could I once see the day that whites and reds were all friends it would be like getting new eye sight."*  
Piomingo – August 8, 1792.

Chickasaw Chief Piomingo, the "Mountain Leader," was born about 1750. An early diplomat, he established a government-to-government relationship with state governors and President George Washington, reaching agreements that benefitted both the Chickasaw and the Americans. He and Chickasaw Indian Agent Colonel James Robertson, co-founder of Nashville, Tennessee, formed an alliance that gave the pioneers everlasting friendship of this famous warrior and his people. Strong in his beliefs, he fought alongside William Whitley and Gaspar Mansker on the 1794 Nica-jack Campaign against the Chickamauga/Lower Cherokee.

Because of his unyielding peace initiatives, on July 11, 1794, President George Washington awarded Piomingo a silver Peace Medal, promised the Chickasaw land and commissioned Piomingo as an officer of the U.S. militia. Piomingo truly believed President Washington, and Washington was indeed sincere in his promises, although his successors acted differently. Only months before Washington's death in 1799, Piomingo died, believing that peace was coming.



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