

U. S. 1798 CONTRACT MUSKETS

By Thomas E. Holt



PAST PRESIDENT THOMAS E. HOLT

The United States, with the Treaty of Peace ending the Revolutionary War, after a few years decided to take stock of available armaments. Matters were in a deplorable condition. Arms had been taken home by discharged soldiers, and those put into storage were allowed to deteriorate.

In April, 1794,¹ Congress authorized the purchase of arms and established two national armories — later located at Springfield and Harpers Ferry. Some arms were purchased abroad² but feeling it necessary to build up home industry, contracts were let for the manufacture of component parts. These parts were brought into public stores and sent out to other contractors for assembly into completed muskets, rifles and pistols. This custom was followed until Springfield reached better production figures, about 1800, with Harpers Ferry following in 1801.

In the early 1790 years, our relations with France were very cordial. They should have been because of the great help received from France during the Revolutionary War. We were very excited about the French Revolution — even going so far as to adopt the “Liberty Cap” emblem on some of our coins, and some muskets manufactured for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania bear the Liberty Cap proof mark.³ However, in 1797, relations between France and the United States became very strained. France and England were at war and France felt we were not living up to our treaty obligations. We almost came to open conflict on the high seas and Congress thought it advisable to let private contracts for the manufacture of muskets, since the National Armories could not produce the amount desired in a short time.

This brought about the series known as the 1798 Contracts. Some 27 different contractors, many with no previous experience in manufacturing arms, entered into contracts for some 40,000 muskets at a price of approximately \$13.50 each. The contracts were for varying amounts, from 200 by Cobb of Norwich, Conn. to 10,000 by Whitney of New Haven, Conn.

Following is a partial list of contractors who produced known specimens, with the amounts of their contracts.

Elisha Brown, Providence, R.I.	1000
Joseph Clark, Danbury, Conn.	500
Nathan & Henry Cobb, Norwich, Conn.	200
Matthew & Nathan Elliott, Kent, Conn.	500
Owen Evans, Montgomery Co., Penn.	1000
Richard Falley, Montgomery, Mass.	1000
Daniel Gilbert, Mansfield, Mass.	2000
William Henry II, Bethlehem, Penn.	500
Stephen Jenks, Pawtucket, R. I.	1500
Robert McCormick, Northern Liberties, Penn.	3000
Ard Welton, Waterbury, Conn.	1000
Eli Whitney, New Haven, Conn.	10000

In the picture section will be shown some specimens of 1798 type, but not identified with known contractors.

The contracts were based on 1795 muskets, (of the so-called Charleville type) to be used as patterns, with stocks of well seasoned black walnut or hard maple.⁴ The Government records of the period mention extremely poor workmanship. Many of these contract muskets were held in storage and it was later recommended, about 1810, they be sold for export.

- 1 Hicks “Notes on U. S. Ordnance” Vol. 1, pg. 16
- 2 Hicks “Notes on U. S. Ordnance” Vol. 1, pg. 14
- 3 ASAC “Bulletin” #2, Nov. 1956, C. P. Muskets
- 4 Hicks “Notes on U. S. Ordnance” Vol. 1, pg. 21

In the summer and fall of 1801, the contractors, due to slow delivery and poor workmanship, were advised that no more shipments would be accepted after November 30, 1801. Most of the contracts were uncompleted. Eli Whitney was allowed to complete his contract. A large sum of money had been advanced to him before he made any deliveries. His superior workmanship and machinery had convinced the Government officials that he would fulfill his contract. However, it was not completed until 1809. In 1801 Whitney suggested some changes in the model, based on the French model of 1777. These were accepted by the Government and the contract was completed in what is known as the "Improved Model of 1801."

Thus the manufacture of 1798 contract muskets, except by Whitney ceased in 1801 or possibly early in 1802. Poor workmanship and slow deliveries were the prime reasons for the discontinuance. The exact number delivered is unknown, but in June 1801, the records show 14,032 muskets, from 21 different contractors, not including Whitney, had been delivered.⁵

Probably no-one knows the survival figures — but you who collect muskets know they are very scarce. It was the United States Government's first attempt at private arms contracts — and not too successful. One might say, in sarcasm, their usefulness had been more in providing pleasure for gun collectors than in utility for the Government.

The following pictures show some specimens of 1798 contracts — with markings where intelligible.

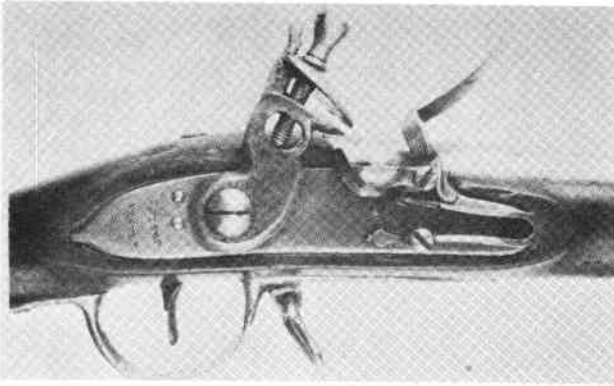
5 Gluckman "U. S. Muskets, Rifles & Carbines, pg. 69

REMEMBER THESE DATES - FUTURE MEETINGS

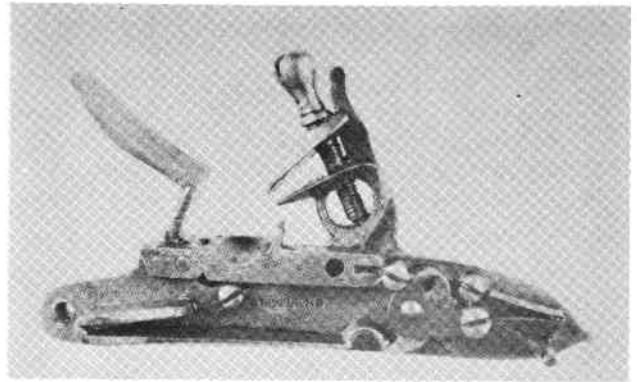
Spring	1970	April 1 - 3 New Orleans, Jung Hotel with NRA
Fall	1970	September 17 - 20 Houston, Texas, Shamrock Hotel
Spring	1971	March 31 - Apr. 2 Washington, D.C. Shoreham Hotel, NRA
Fall	1971	Sept. 23 - 26, Williamsburg, Virginia, Cascades Center
Spring	1972	Tentative Florida meeting.

Acknowledgements . . .Photographic assistance was given by Drs. Jim Lucie and Bob Moore. Thanks Amigos.

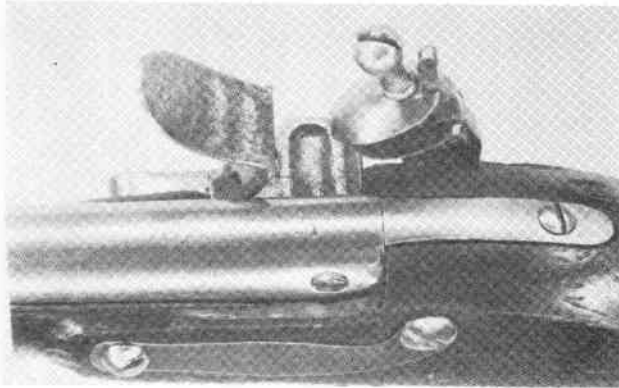
U. S. 1798 CONTRACT MUSKETS



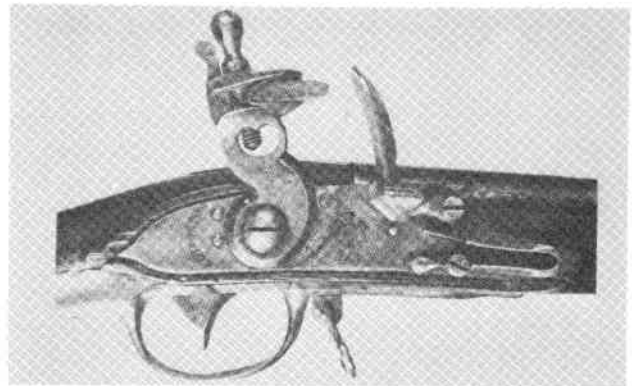
#1 TYPICAL ASSEMBLED MUSKET - PERIOD OF THE 1790's.



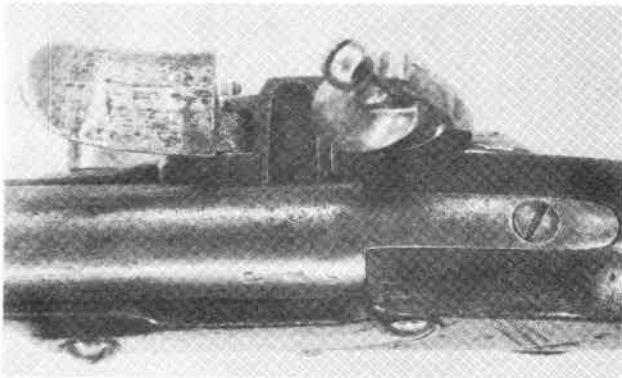
VIEW OF INSIDE OF LOCK PLATE OF #1.



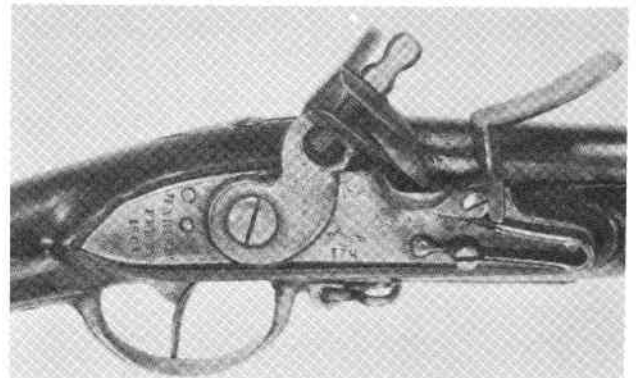
BARREL MARKINGS OF #1.



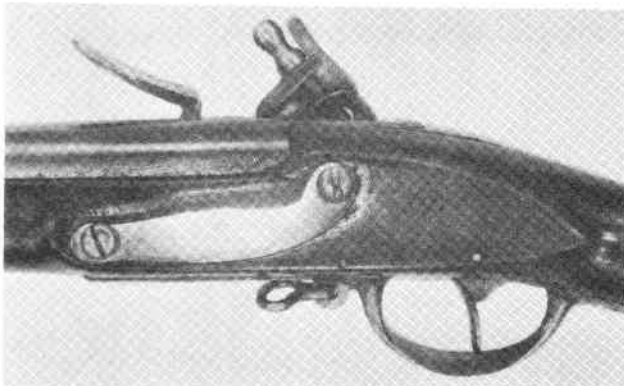
#4 SPRINGFIELD MODEL 1795 -- DATED 1800 ON BUTT PLATE.



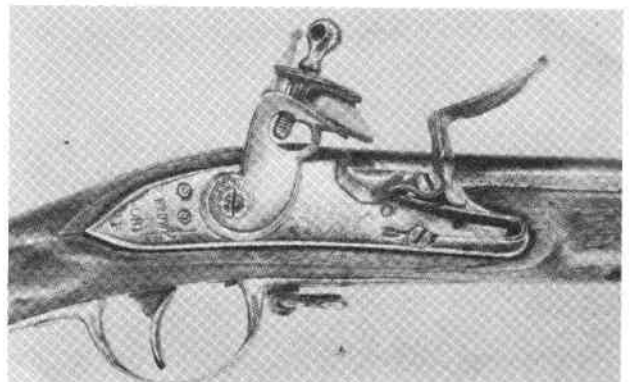
BARREL MARKINGS ON #4.



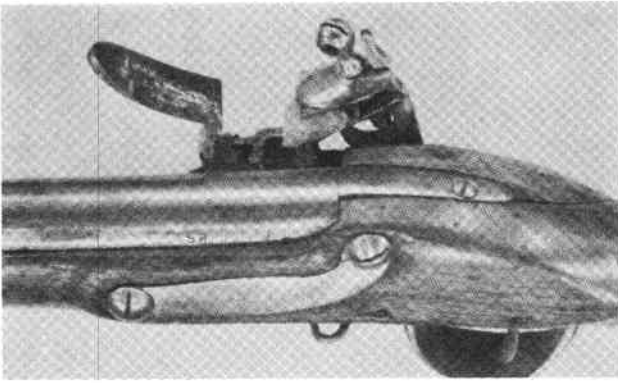
#6 HARPERS FERRY DATED 1801. FROM THE COLLECTION OF STEPHEN MARVIN.



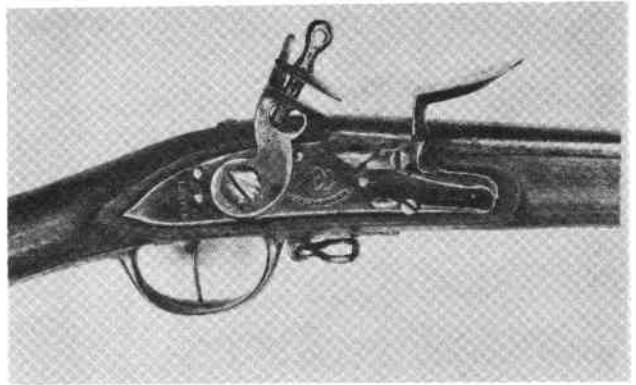
MARKINGS ON BARREL AND STOCK OF #6.



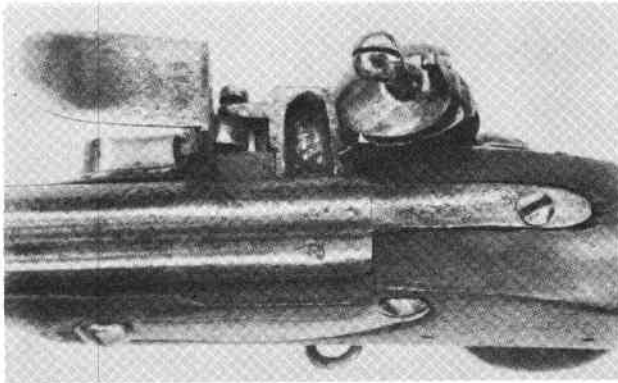
#8 MADE BY ELISHA BROWN, PROVIDENCE, R.I.



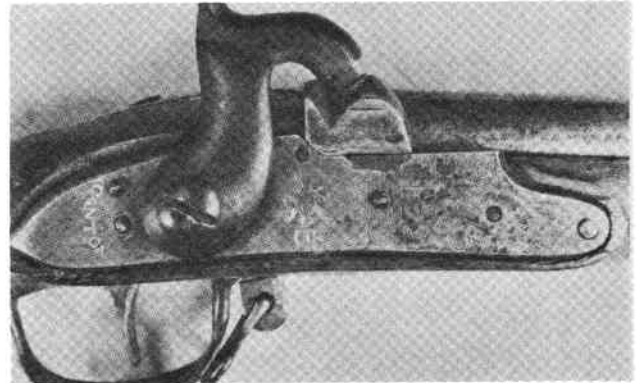
BARREL MARKING ON #8



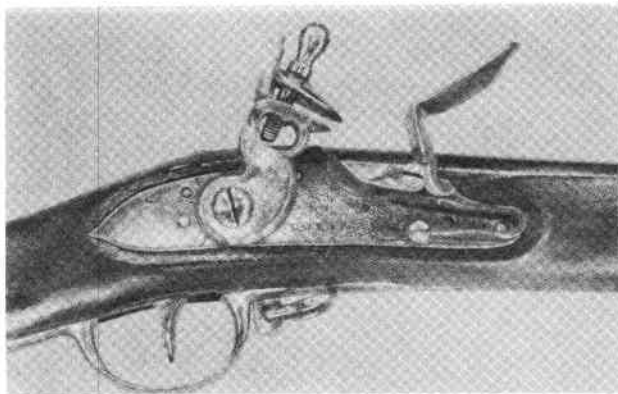
#10 MADE BY ELISHA BUELL, MARLBOROUGH, MASS. (THIS GUN HAS ALL THE EARMARKS OF A MODEL 1798 ALTHO BUELL IS NOT LISTED AS ONE OF THE CONTRACTORS.)



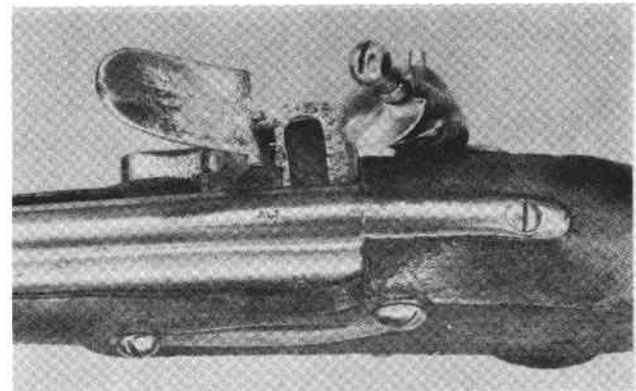
PROOF MARKS ON BARREL OF #10.



LOCK PLATE OF 1798 TYPE MUSKET. NO KNOWN MAKERS LISTED FROM CANTON. BARREL TANG MARKED 1800. BARREL MARKED V IN A SUNKEN RECTANGLE. FROM THE COLLECTION OF COLONEL BERKELEY LEWIS.



#13 MADE BY JOSEPH CLARK, DANBURY, CONN.



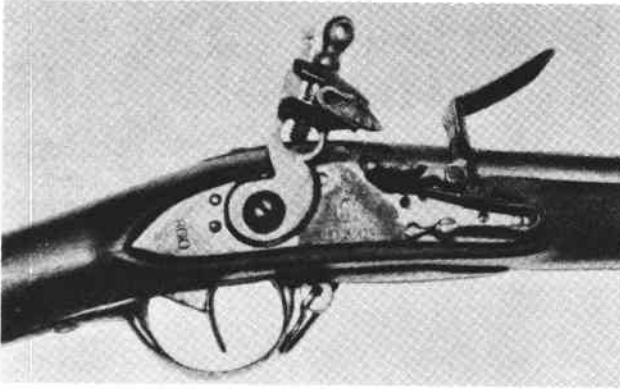
BARREL MARKINGS ON #13.



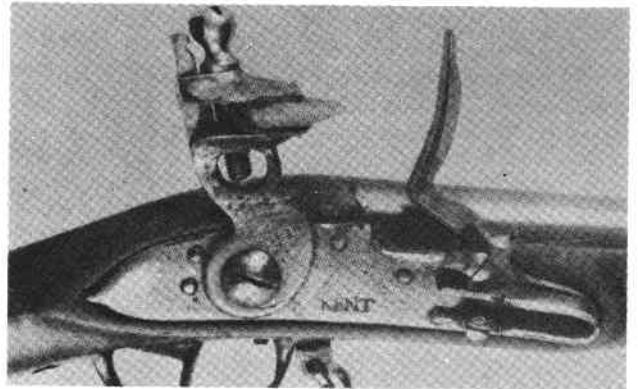
#15 MADE BY NATHAN AND HENRY COBB, NORWICH, CONN. FROM THE COLLECTION OF COLONEL BERKELEY LEWIS.



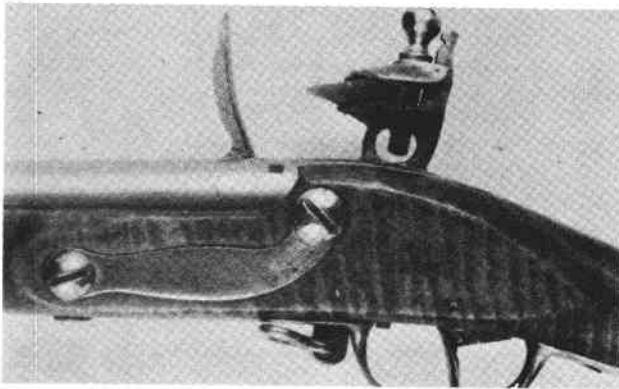
PROOF MARKS ON BARREL OF #15



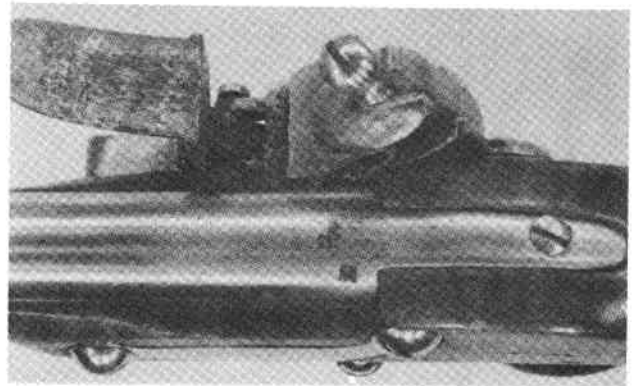
MADE BY E. D. & CO. UNIDENTIFIED AS TO MAKER OR LOCATION WHERE MADE. BARREL MARKED RW AND STOCK X ON SIDE OPPOSITE LOCK PLATE. FROM THE COLLECTION OF JAMES L. MITCHELL.



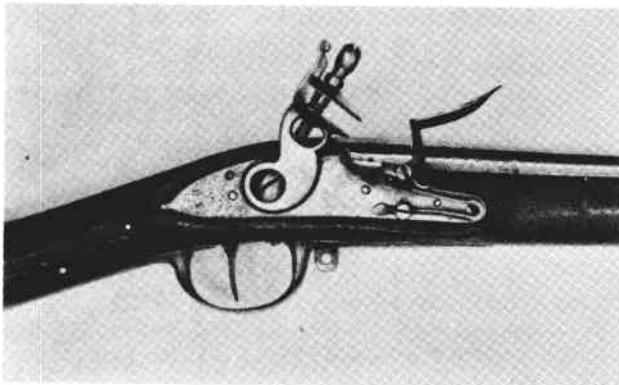
#18 MADE BY MATTHEW AND JAMES ELLIOTT, KENT, CONN. THIS GUN HAS A TIGER STRIPED MAPLE STOCK.



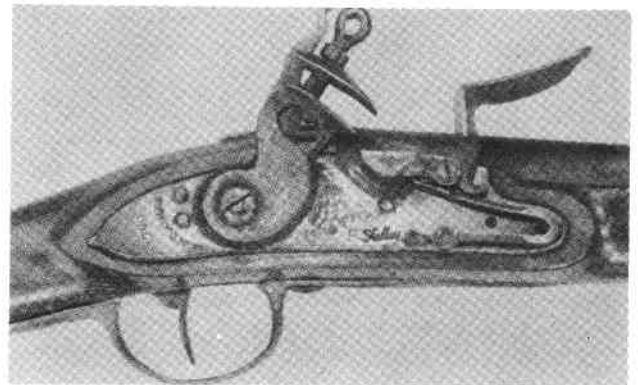
SIDE PLATE VIEW OF #18. NOTE (BRANDED)



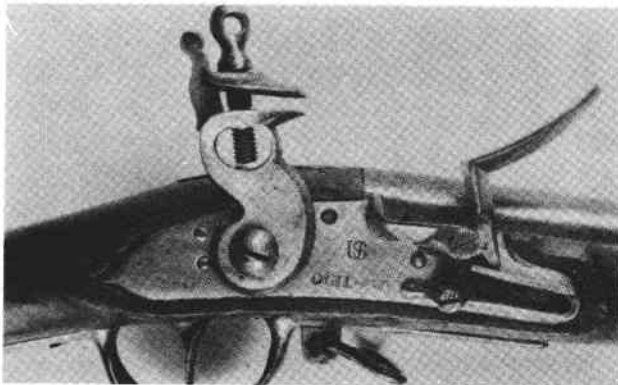
BARREL PROOFS OF #18.



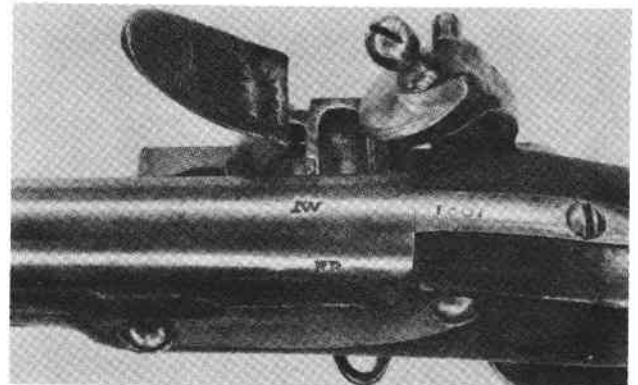
MADE BY OWEN EVANS, PROVIDENCE TOWNSHIP, MONTGOMERY COUNTY, PENN. NO INTELLIGIBLE MARKS ON BARREL.



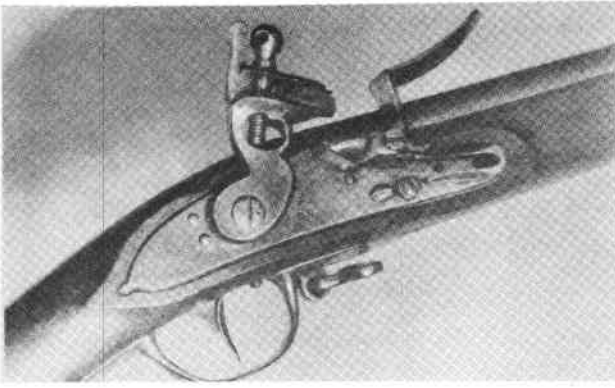
MADE BY RICHARD FALLEY, MONTGOMERY, MASS. NO INTELLIGIBLE MARKS ON BARREL.



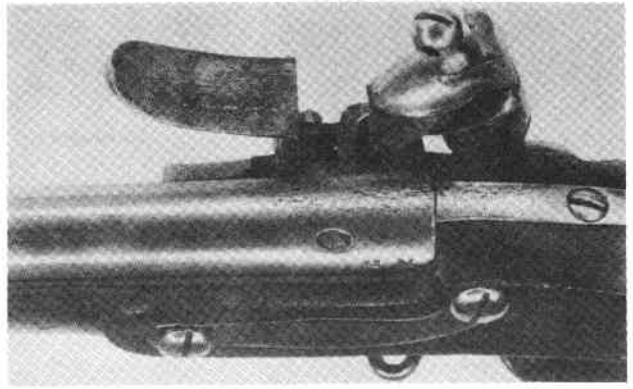
#23 MADE BY DANIEL GILBERT, MANSFIELD, MASS.



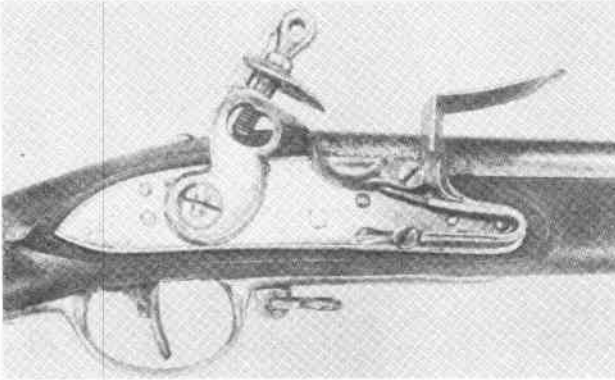
PROOF MARKS ON BARREL OF #23. THIS GUN ALSO HAS $\frac{1}{2}$ ON THE STOCK, TO THE RIGHT OF M T SHOWN.



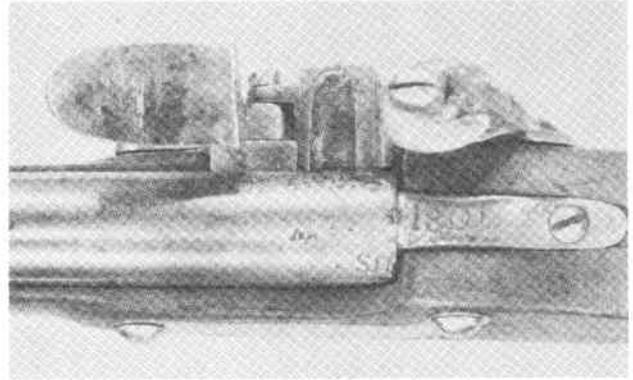
#25 MADE BY WILLIAM HENRY II, BETHLEHEM, PENN.



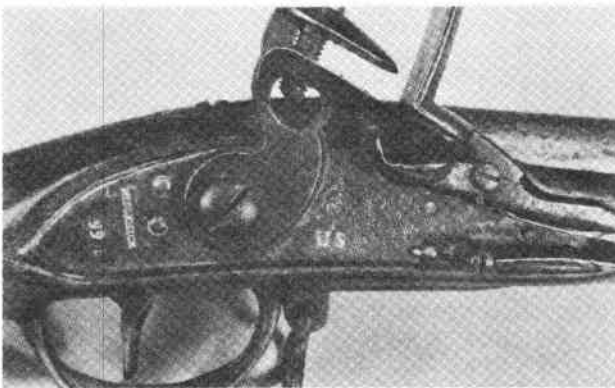
PROOF MARKS ON BARREL OF #25.



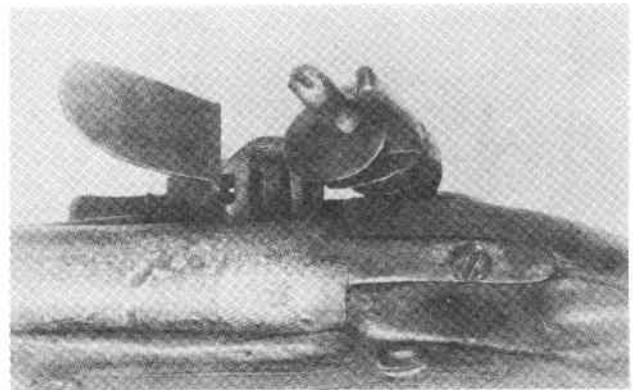
#27 STEPHEN JENKS AND HOSEA HUMPHRIES, PAWTUCKET, R. I.



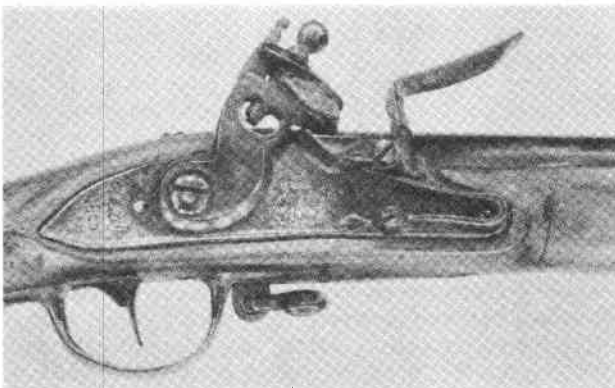
MARKS ON #27.



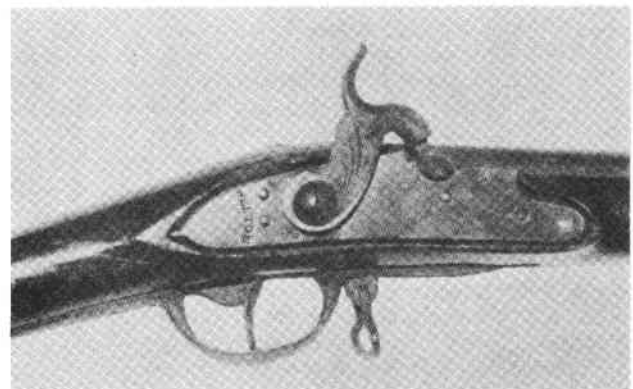
#29 MADE BY ROBERT McCORMICK, NORTHERN LIBERTIES, PENN. NOTE ROUND BOTTOM PAN, INDISTINCT EAGLE HEAD AND V ABOVE THE U.S.



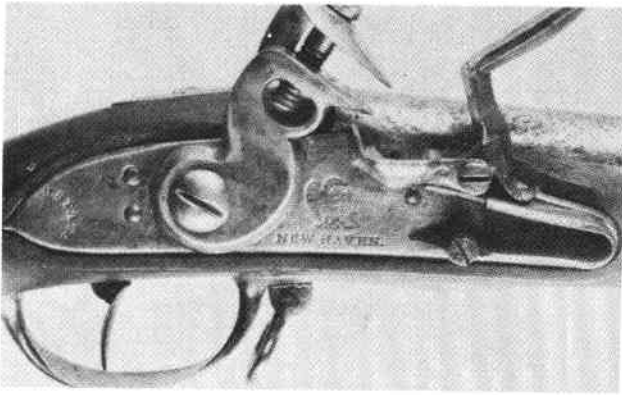
PROOF MARK ON BARREL OF #29.



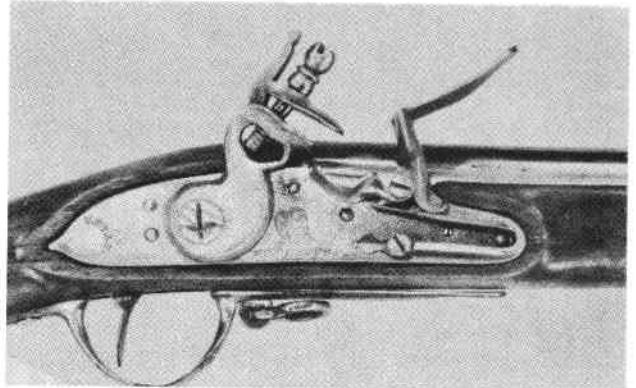
MARKED SCITUATE. IT IS THOUGHT THESE GUNS WERE MADE AT HOPE FURNACE, IN SCITUATE TOWNSHIP, NORTH OF PROVIDENCE, R.I.



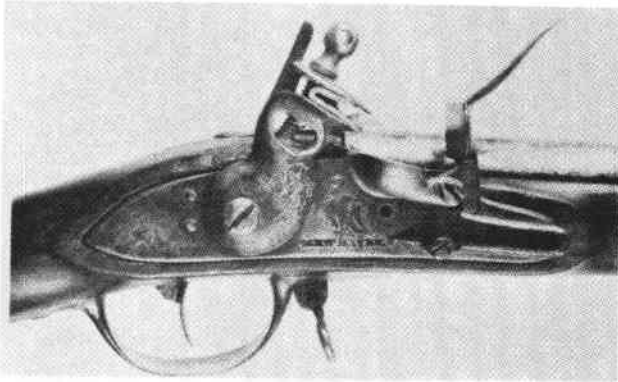
MADE BY ARD WELTON, WATERBURY, CONN. INSIDE LOCK PLATE MARKED T. W. BARREL MARKED I W (POSSIBLY T.W.) FROM THE COLLECTION OF JAMES L. MITCHELL.



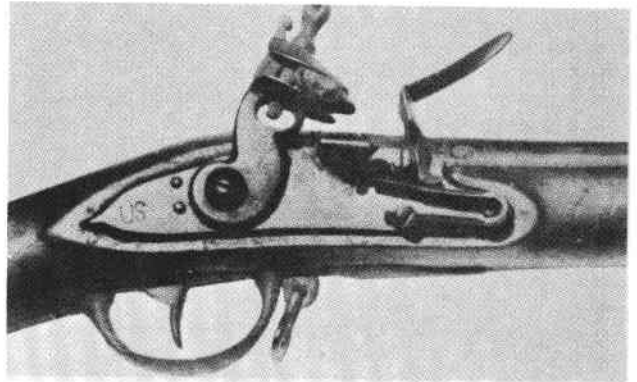
MADE BY ELI WHITNEY, NEW HAVEN, CONN. NOTE THE V BOTTOM PAN — ONE OF THE FIRST GROUP MADE. MARKS ON BARREL NOT INTEL-LIGIBLE.



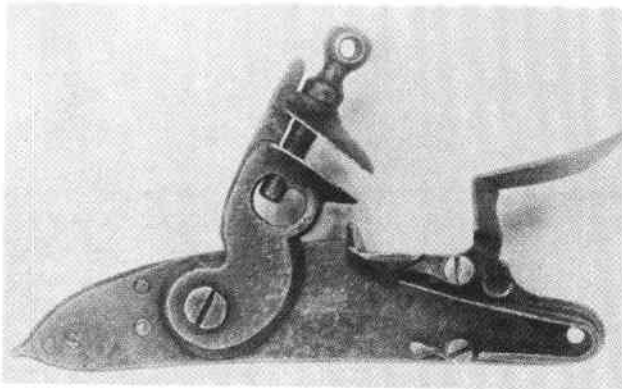
MADE BY ELI WHITNEY, NEW HAVEN, CONN. THIS IS A VARIETY OF #33 — THE ONLY DIFFERENCE BEING THAT THE PAN IS BRASS, WITH A FENCE. TWO OF THESE IN MY COLLECTION AND ANOTHER IN THE COLLECTION OF STEPHEN MARVIN. WHERE DOES THIS VARIETY FIT INTO THE WHITNEY SERIES?



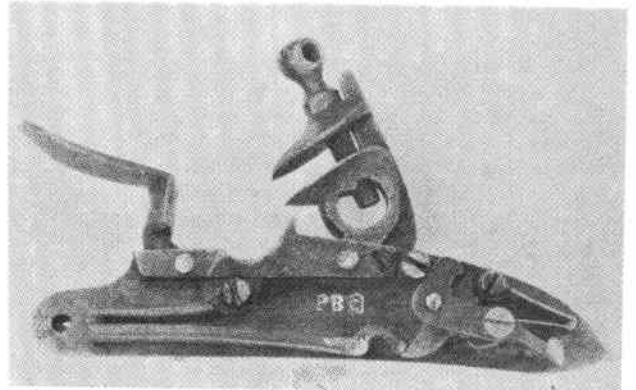
MADE BY ELI WHITNEY, NEW HAVEN, CONN. THE IMPROVED MODEL OF 1801. NOTE THE BRASS PAN, WITHOUT A FENCE, THE FRIZZEN AND THE HAMMER.



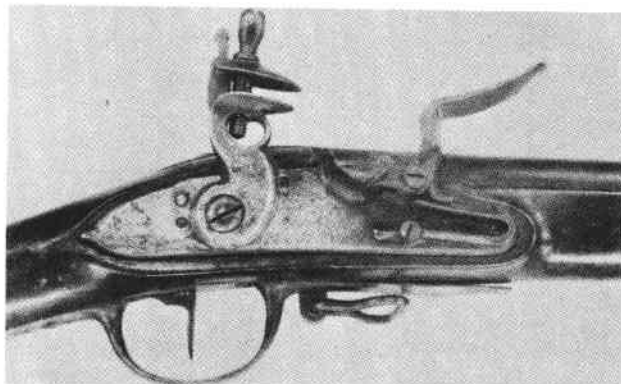
UNIDENTIFIED MAKER. LOCK MARKED U. S. BARREL MARKED EAGLE HEAD AND PINOVAL. FROM THE COLLECTION OF JAMES L. MITCHELL.



LOCK MARKED U. S.



INSIDE LOCK PLATE OF #37. THE INDIAN HEAD WITH P. B IS THE MARK OF PETER BRONG WELL KNOWN BY KENTUCKY RIFLE COL-LECTORS.



UNIDENTIFIED — NO MARKS ANY PLACE ON THE GUN.