TENNESSEE RIFLES

By Robin C. Hale
A paper presented at the Fall, 1970 meeting of the American Society of Arms Collectors at Houston, Texas

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Mr. President, members of the Board, fellow members, and guests: it is a pleasure to be able to present this paper to you on one of my favorite subjects — the Tennessee Rifle. When I first considered giving this paper, I thought that it would be appropriate to present it at one of the Society's meetings in the east, where the majority of the Kentucky rifles were made. However, a large number of Kentuckies, including the Tennessee variety, were brought out here during the western migration and still turn up in the west from time to time. Because of this, and because what I say here may facilitate recognition of Tennessee rifles on the part of those who have not had the opportunity to delve into the subject, I think it most fitting that I give this paper in a city named for one of Tennessee's most famous heroes, who came west with many other Tennesseans to help the Texans win their independence from the Mexicans.

I hope that my talk will be of interest to you, and I will gratefully acknowledge any help which the membership can provide in my research on Tennessee weapons, particularly bringing to my attention examples of rifles which you think may be Southern in origin.

Until relatively recent years, very little had been published on Southern Kentucky rifles. Occasionally there would be a statement to the effect that Southern rifles tended to be unornamentative and iron-mounted, with a grease- or tallow-hole in the buttstock instead of a patchbox. Those familiar with Southern rifles made by Bitterlich, Gross, Vogler, Trumpler, Hoffman, or Haymaker, to name a few, realize that such a statement is incorrect regarding Southern rifles as a whole. If we qualify the initial statement by considering it applicable to many of the rifles made in the Southern Appalachians, then we'll have much less argument from students of the Southern rifle.

Many collectors think of the typical Tennessee rifle as one which is relatively plain, is iron-mounted, and has a banana-shaped patchbox or sometimes a grease-hole in the buttstock. This is true regarding many of the rifles made in the upper East Tennessee counties and to a lesser extent, or rifles made elsewhere in East Tennessee. To consider this style of rifle as typical of all Tennessee rifles, however, would be like considering the distinctive Bedford County rifles as typical examples of Pennsylvania "Kentuckies." Later on, we will look at photographs of a number of rifles from East and Middle Tennessee, including some which vary from the style common to the upper East Tennessee region.

In studying the Tennessee rifle, collectors should be familiar with characteristics of rifles made in adjacent states, particularly those states to the east and northeast. Tennessee's early gunsmiths, and many of those to follow, migrated from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas, and it is logical to assume that these early Tennessee gunsmiths made rifles which more-closely resembled rifles of their home states than rifles made in Tennessee after 1815. Prior to becoming a state in 1796, Tennessee was a part of North Carolina, but I think it's permissible to refer to the early gunsmiths in the subject area as Tennessee gunsmiths.

To date, I have obtained documented information on more than 500 Tennessee gunsmiths, and found reference to approximately 50 gunsmiths who made, or could have made rifles prior to 1800 in what is now Tennessee. Although a large number of the early rifles have been lost through fire, battle, abuse, or simply worn-out, I believe that there are surviving examples of early Tennessee rifles which have not been recognized as such because they resemble the rifles of states to the east and northeast, and because the men whose names may appear on some of these guns are not identified as ever having been residents of Tennessee. Consequently, a general lack of information precludes my saying much at this time regarding Tennessee's earliest rifles.

The salient characteristic of the rifles of East Tennessee is the use of iron instead of brass for mountings. Although brass, and to a lesser extent German silver, copper, and pewter mountings are observed, iron

predominates. We also find iron mountings on many rifles from southwest Virginia, western North Carolina, and from the Appalachian region in other states to the northeast and southwest. The reason for this is that deposits of iron minerals occur at numerous localities along certain geologic formations which trend northeast-southwest throughout the Appalachians. Although these deposits are of insufficient size and grade to be economic in today's markets, they were extremely important to the economy of the region in the past. There was little significant mining of copper and zinc — the principal components of brass — in the region prior to the mid-1850's, and it would have been costly and impractical to import brass stock or gun parts in quantity over the mountains from the east, considering the relative abundance of locally available iron. The masterful forgework of the men who made much of the iron hardware is evidenced on many of Tennessee's rifles. Indeed, the marked similarity of lower thimbles, butt plates, and particularly triggerguards and double set trigger assemblies suggests that there were men who forged iron mountings for the gunsmith trade in or near the iron-mining districts such as that at Bumpas Cove in Washington and Unicoi Counties. This is not to imply that gunsmiths such as the Beans, Bulls, Gross's, Clements, etc. were incapable of making their own gun parts — many of them did. But I would not discount their buying iron parts from various suppliers. These men were not "sot in thar ways," because signed rifles by them and others have been observed which bear brass mountings.

The use of copper is uncommon, and when used, it was generally in the manufacture of thimbles or dovetails for sights.

German silver usually makes its appearance on the later rifles. Sterling, or more likely — coin silver, was sometimes used for inlays. Particularly fine examples have been observed where silver was overlaid on the iron mountings or inlaid flush into the mountings or the barrel.

Although pewter or a metal similar in composition to pewter was sometimes used for inlays, its most common usage was in the manufacture of fore end caps. These were cast in place on the stock. Occasionally, raised portions of wood were left in the shape of squares, diamonds, or rectangles to give the appearance of openwork in the fore end cap. Rarely, the pewter fore end caps were engraved.

Although cherry, apple, pear, ash, red oak, and butternut were sometimes used for gun stocks, such utilization was not as common as the literature would have you believe. Walnut was a favorite of Tennessee gunsmiths, and it ranked second only to maple as gunstock material. Certainly, walnut was used to a greater extent in Tennessee for gunstocks than in Pennsylvania or Virginia.

In connection with the use of iron for gun parts is the style of patchbox referred to as the banana patchbox, so-named because of its shape. Its origin has been the subject of many a discussion by students of the Tennessee rifle, and my opinion is that it is an adaptation of the sliding-wood patchbox found on early or less-expensive rifles of Pennsylvania and adjacent states. I have had the good fortune to examine an unsigned sliding iron patchbox on a Southern-style rifle, and I know of an original flintlock Tennessee rifle with a wooden banana-shaped patchbox which pivots sideways on a pin.

Occasionally, brass banana patchboxes are found, and once in a great while a rifle will turn up with a banana patchbox on each side of the buttstock.

Capboxes of iron, German silver, and brass were used, and the unique design of some of these capboxes suggests that the gunsmiths made their own. Samuel and William Keller of Blount County and Elisha Bull of Grainger County were among those who sometimes used distinctive capboxes.

Another characteristic of Tennessee rifles, and of rifles of the Southern Appalachians in general, is the use of long barrels. I have the impression that the use of barrels in excess of 44 inches in length continued in this region long after shorter barrels became the vogue further to the northeast. As a matter of fact, barrels on rifles of the Soddy-Daisy school in southeast Tennessee frequently exceeded 48 inches, and I know of full-stocked rifles from this area in Hamilton County which have barrels ranging as much as six feet in length. I suspect that to load these guns, you'd have to stand on a stump or dig a hole.

I may be proven wrong as a result of future research on the part of myself or others, but my current belief is that features characteristic of early rifles, such as wide butt plates, wide triggerguards, and long barrels, to name a few, prevailed longer on rifles made in the Southern Appalachians than on rifles made in Pennsylvania, east Virginia, and the eastern Carolinas. My reasoning is that when the early gunsmiths migrated to the southwest into the rugged mountain regions of East Tennessee and western North Carolina, they left the gun-making centers where competition was keen and where new ideas were constantly affecting changes in the continuing evolution of the Kentucky rifle. Working in relative isolation for a while, old styles would prevail in an atmosphere of little competition until a continuing influx of new settlers forced the old-timers to become more-competitive and adapt their products to satisfy popular demand. Along this general line of thought, I believe we will eventually turn up some nicely-carved and engraved rifles with openwork patchboxes which were made in Tennessee. After all, a lot of settlers, including gunsmiths, moved into

Tennessee during the Golden Age of the Kentucky Rifle in Pennsylvania, and I think it's logical to assume that at least a few rifles with relief carving on the stock and engraved mountings were made in Tennessee. I heard of a flintlock rifle with a fine, engraved brass patchbox whose barrel was signed "A. Arhart," a gunsmith of Davidson County who was born in Tennessee during 1783. I am anxious to locate this rifle, which probably looks nothing at all like the rifles we will study directly.

It's noteworthy that the first permanent white settler in what is now Tennessee was gunsmith William Bean, who settled in the Watauga Valley in northeast Tennessee during 1769. So, Tennessee wasn't permanently settled until rather late in the game, at a time when some of our towns along the Atlantic coast were ready for a dose of urban renewal. Many of William Bean's sons — William Jr., Russell, George, Jesse, Robert, John, and Edmund made guns, and many of their sons were also riflemakers. I don't know of any rifles by William Bean, and I would be very interested in learning of at least one signed gun by this maker.

I think it's time that we looked at some Tennessee rifles, and I will point out various typical characteristics as we come to them in the pictures. At this time, I'd like to express my appreciation to the collectors who allowed me to photograph their rifles, and unless stated otherwise, the guns illustrated are from my collection.

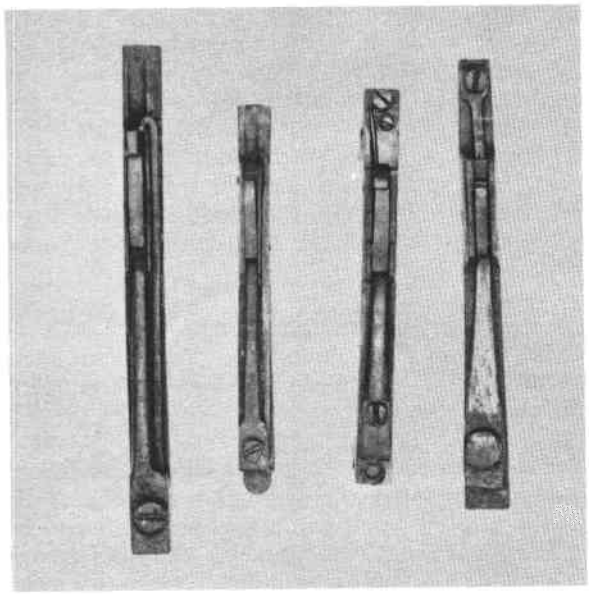


FIGURE 1

May we have the first illustration please. I have had the opportunity to partially dismantle numerous rifles, and noted that many of the rifles from the subject area bear double set triggers which differ from the standard type. Unlike the "garden variety" in which the front trigger spring is affixed to the forward part of the base plate, shown by the pair on the right (fig. 1), many Tennessee rifles bear trigger assemblies in which the fornt trigger spring is affixed at the rear portion of the base plate as shown by the pair on the left. The spring extends nearly the full length of the base plate, hooking around and under the notch on the front trigger. Although this arrangement appears on many rifles throughout East Tennessee, it seems to be most common on rifles from the upper East Tennessee school. Incidentally, the rear trigger is commonly curved to the extent of nearly being a semi-circle. A considerable number of Ohio-made rifles also have the deeply-curved rear trigger on double set trigger assemblies.

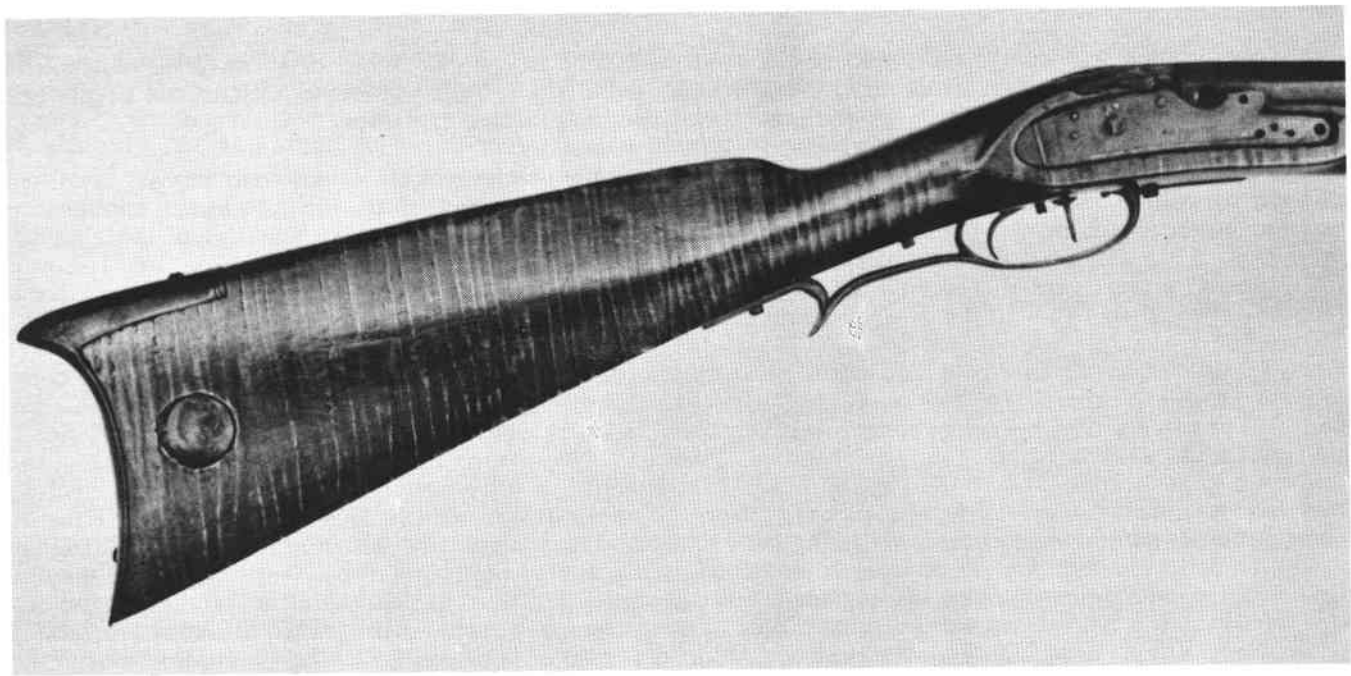


FIGURE 2

I have not had time to restore this rifle (fig. 2), but it is shown here because it shows a number of early features, and is one of the earliest Southern iron-mounted rifles which I've encountered. The gun is full-stocked with a tapering octagonal barrel. The iron thimbles, which are semi-octagonal with round ends, are well-made. The tang is short, tapers to a point, and is held by one screw which screws into the set trigger base. The wide triggerguard with its high grip is faintly engraved, the extensions are nicely beveled, and unlike many later guards, the extensions are squared instead of rounded. The front triggerguard extension is fastened by a screw into the set trigger base. Incidentally, the trigger assembly is like those on the left in figure 1. The wider-than-average iron butt plate is faceted on the heel, and the leading edge of the heel bears fine diagonal slash marks — not visible on the photograph, but a feature common to rifles of East Tennessee.

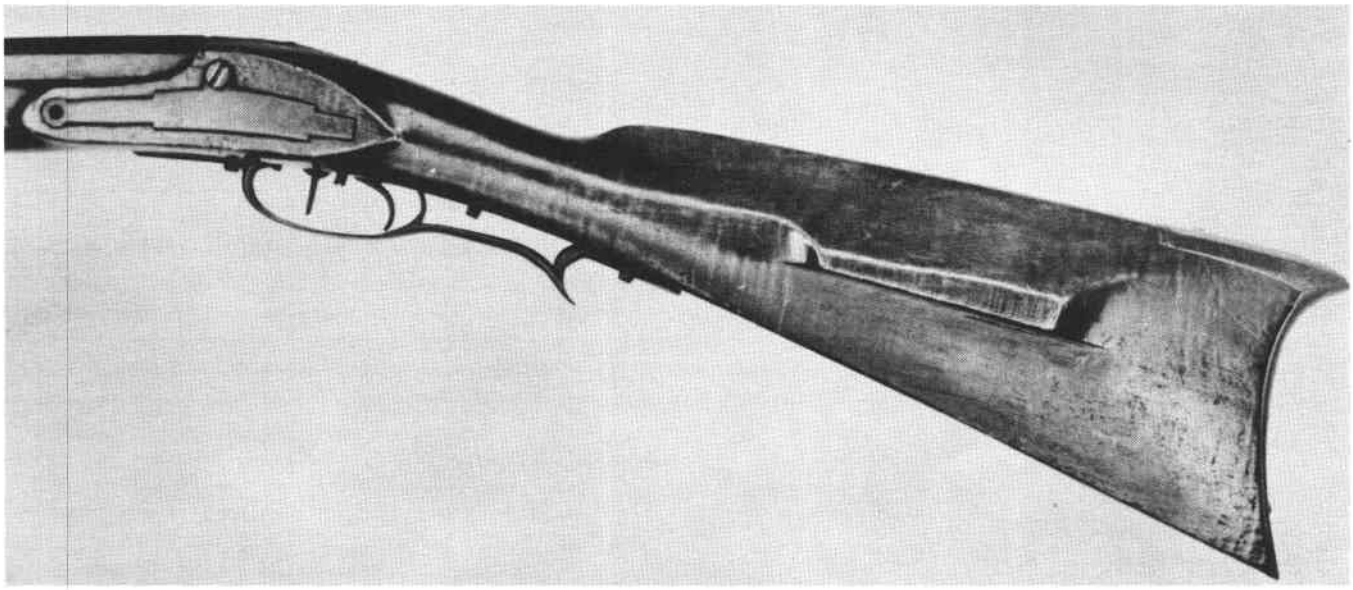


FIGURE 3

Careful inspection of figure 3 will give you some idea as to the shortness of the tang on this rifle. Notice the round profile of the base of the front trigger where it enters the base plate. This is a common feature of front triggers on rifles from the Southwest Virginia-East Tennessee region. Although the faintly-engraved iron side plate is drilled for two lock screws, the lock is held by the rear screw only. The stock was never drilled for the front screw. Incidentally, it's seldom that you encounter a Tennessee rifle whose lock plate is held by two screws. It's possible that the gun could have been restocked during the flintlock period in the subject area, and if so, the design of the stock is well-matched to the parts. I don't know who "C. B." was, but his initials on the barrel certainly stand for a name which I would like very much to know. I believe that this gun did originate in the Southwest Virginia or upper East Tennessee area, and may be an important example of a transitional style between the Pennsylvania and Tennessee rifles.

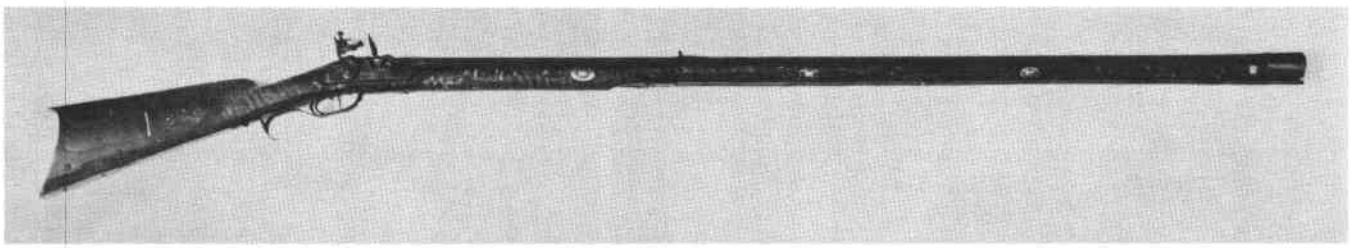


FIGURE 4

The next picture (fig. 4) is a full-length view of a very fine rifle by John Bull, who moved to Tennessee from Pennsylvania about 1794 and settled near the present community of Bulls Gap in Greene County. This rifle, from a private collection which I was asked not to identify, spent some time in a hollow log during the Civil War, which accounts for its rough appearance. Note the silver esctucheons and barrel key heads.

The next picture (fig. 5) does not show the silver oval overlaid on the triggerguard bow, inscribed "Death or Victory," nor does it show the concealed patchbox release hidden in a diamond pattern on the toe plate.

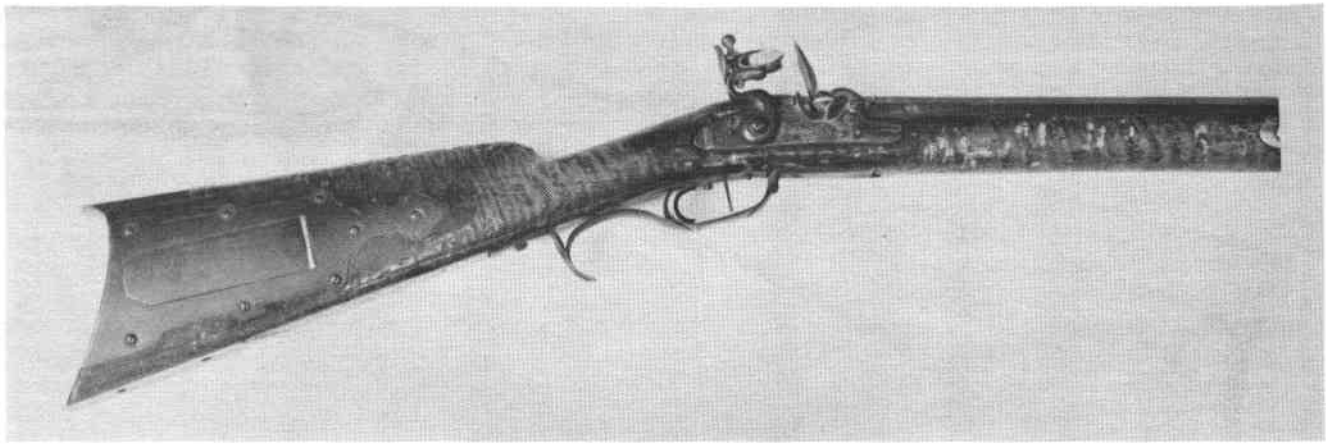


FIGURE 5

The patchbox is reminiscent of those found on early Pennsylvania and southwest Virginia rifles. Note the incised line along the lower buttstock.

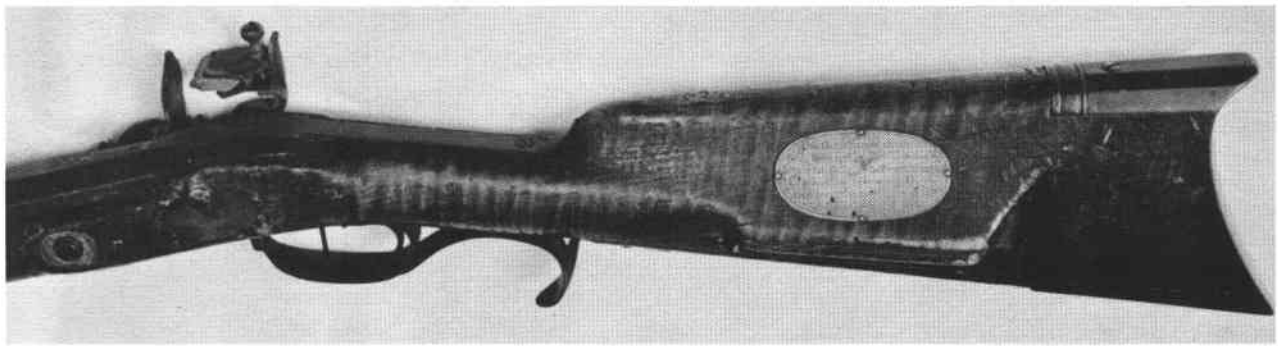


FIGURE 6

The next picture (fig. 6) gives a better idea as to the way the triggerguard was forge-welded from three straps of iron. Note the accentuated concave surface of the stock above the checkpiece, and the long tang which extends to and up the face of the comb of the stock. Long tangs are common on Tennessee guns was well as those from parts of North Carolina. The tangs vary in length from those which extend to a point halfway between the barrel and the comb, to the extreme — nearly touching the buttplate. The inscription on the silver cheekpiece is worth repeating here:

"ANN
This Gun is named, charlotte,
from hills and mountains Came,
Made to delight the heart of man,
With Joy, the labouring Swain,
And from the sportsmen of the day
Victorious bear the prife,
A WAY"

This exceptional rifle is inscribed on a silver plate let into the barrel "John Bull for David Smith, Warrior Mountain, 1829."

This rifle (fig. 7) from the Nance collection, has been reconverted to flint and has a replaced barrel and forearm. I chanced to see the original barrel which had been bored out for shot, shortened to 30 inches, and it was unsigned. I think that this rifle is a very early example of the type typical of the upper East Tennessee area. It has a two-screw squared tang extending halfway down the wrist. Note the long heel of the buttplate, the incised lines along the upper and lower buttstock (a feature also present on some Carolina rifles), the notching of the stock along the edge of the buttplate, and the button release for the banana patchbox. This is

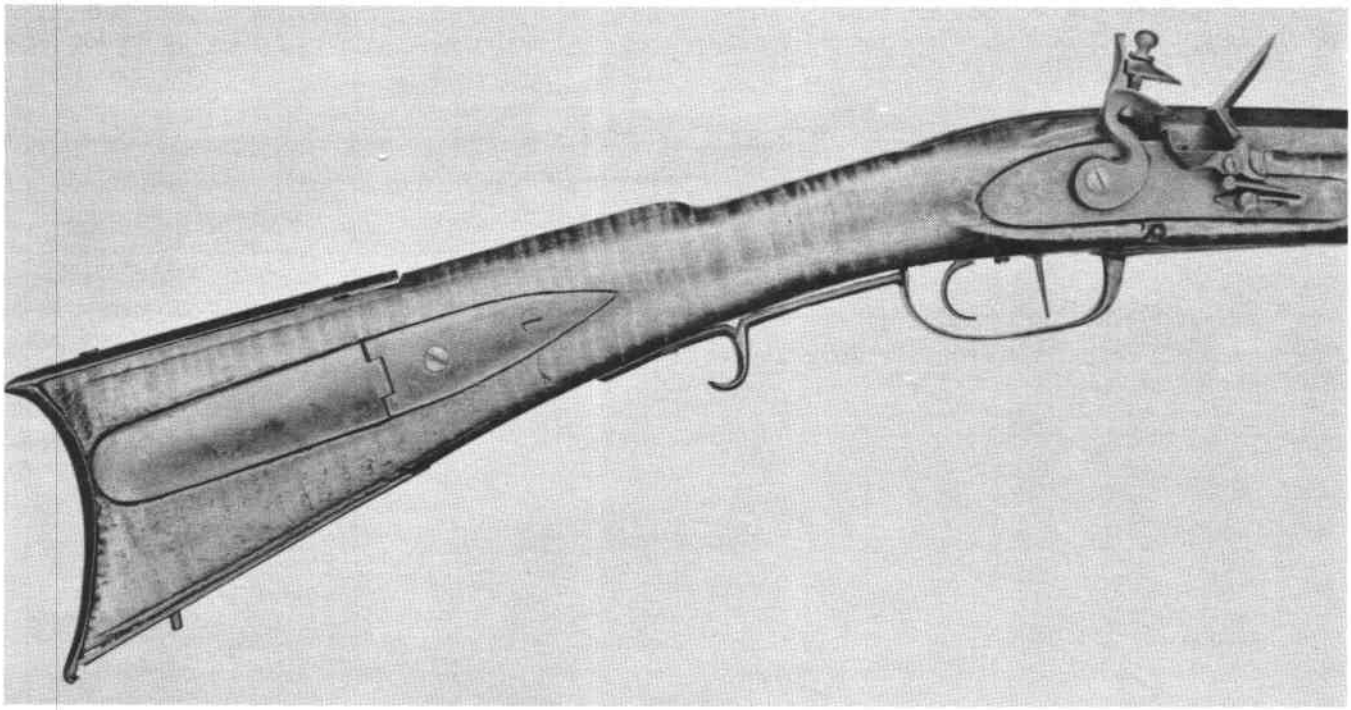


FIGURE 7

the only example of this type of banana patchbox release of which I am aware, although it employs the same basic principal as that on the John Bull rifle.

FIGURE 8

The left side of the stock (fig. 8) is nicely concave above the cheekpiece, which is unusually high, and this gun has another unusual feature for a Tennessee rifle; it has an iron touchhole-pick holder under the cheekpiece instead of the usual wire loops.

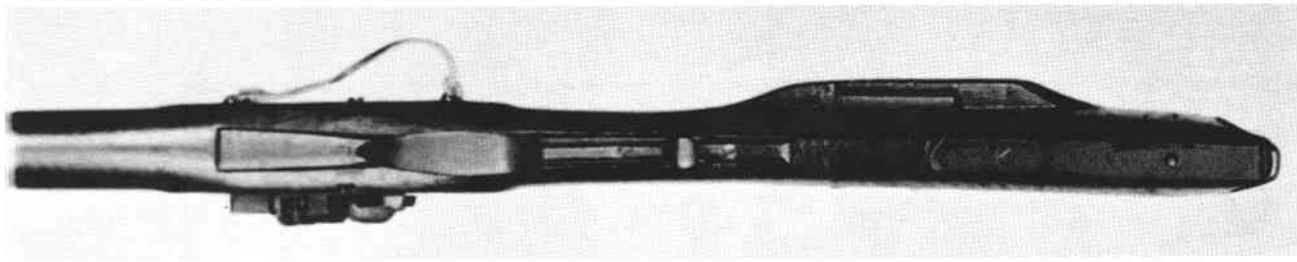


FIGURE 9

This view (fig. 9) of the bottom of the rifle shows the squared triggerguard extensions and the button release in the pointed toe plate.

FIGURE 10

Elisha Bull, related to John Bull and residing in Grainger County, west of Morristown, Tennessee, was the maker of this iron-mounted rifle (fig. 10), which is inscribed "E. Bull" on the barrel. The flint lock is a poor replacement, and I suspect that the gun was originally percussion. This rifle, which has been one of my favorites for many years, has a very rakish stock of walnut. Double grease holes such as shown here were also used by William Douglas.

The left side of the stock, shown here (fig. 11) clearly shows the diagonal slash marks commonly found on the leading edge of the heel of the buttplate on rifles of the region. The front lock screw, which is incorrect and not original to the gun, is courtesy of a prior owner who should have known better. Also note the round profile of the front trigger base and the deeply-curved rear trigger.

A view (fig. 12) of the top of this rifle needs no further comment, other than to note the similarity between this tang and that on the John Bull rifle.

The bottom view of the Elisha Bull rifle (fig. 13) shows the flare of the triggerguard spur, the hole for a pick between the guard and toe plate, and the pointed toe plate. This pointed termination is as common as a lobate variety, to be discussed later.

We now come to the style of rifle which many collectors refer to as the typical Tennessee rifle. A number of gunsmiths produced rifles with characteristics similar to this rifle (fig. 14) in Sullivan, Greene, Washington, Carter, Unicoi, and Johnson Counties, or what I am tentatively referring to as the upper East Tennessee School. This rifle, signed "J. Gross for A.B." in a silver plate on the 48 inch barrel, is an original flintlock in excellent condition. Unlike so many Southern rifles, which because of the economy of the region were

FIGURE 11

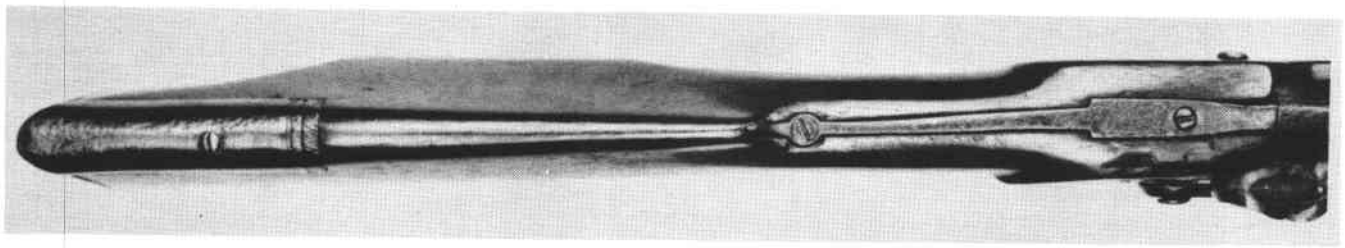


FIGURE 12

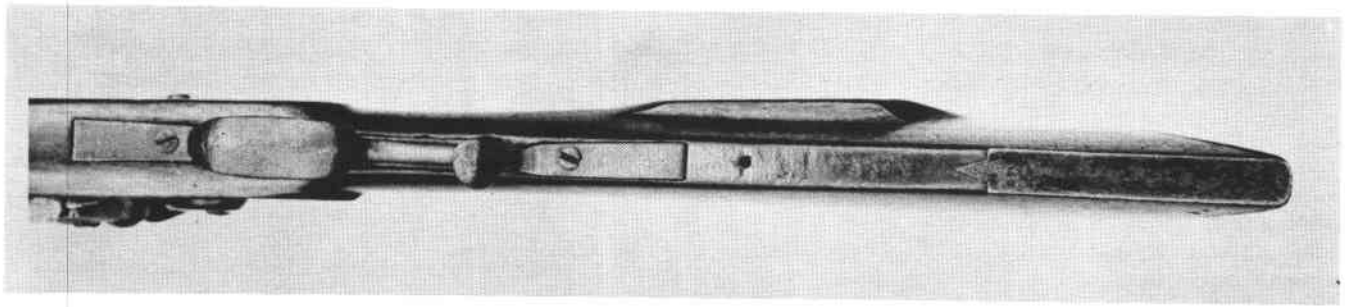


FIGURE 13

used and abused to the point of being worn out, this rifle has been well taken-care of, remaining in the Blevins family until the 1940's. Jacob Gross, born in Sullivan County during 1797, was one of many gunsmiths of that name in the region, who became famous in that trade. The next picture (fig. 15) illustrates trigger details discussed earlier. I regret that I don't have a photograph of the bottom of this rifle, but the bow of the triggerguard is nicely faceted; the guard is forge-welded, and has rounded instead of squared extensions. Round triggerguard estensions are very common on rifles of the Southwest Virginia — upper East Tennessee region, much more so than on Pennsylvania rifles. The toe plate has the frequently-encountered lobate termination, which will be illustrated subsequently.

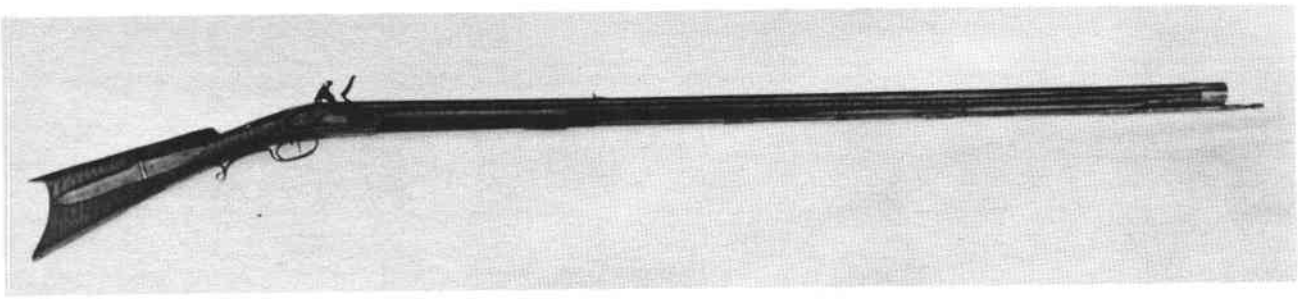


FIGURE 14

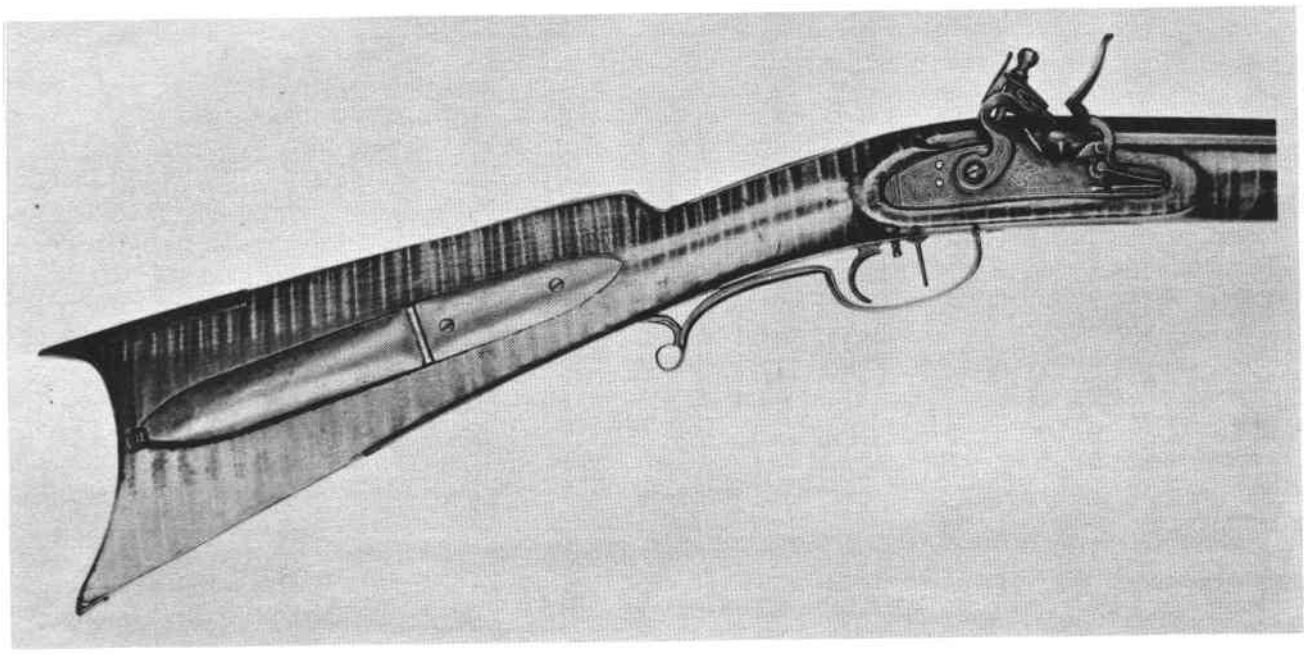


FIGURE 15

This view (fig. 16) of the left side of the buttstock gives a better impression of the fine architecture of the stock, which is nicely concave on either side of the comb. The use of two lock screws instead of one is unusual and the front lock screw is original to the gun. The shape of the iron inlay or side plate at the rear lock screw is a design frequently met with on Tennessee rifles.

This view (fig. 17) of the top of the rifle shows the extremely long tang, which extends up and over the comb, to within a couple of inches of the buttplate. Long tangs of this type were at one time thought by others to be used exclusively by the Bean and Bull families of gunsmiths. Although they are sometimes found on rifles bearing Bean and Bull signatures, I have seen as many or more rifles by these men which had tangs that didn't extend beyond the comb. Willhelms, Lawing, and the Gross's also utilized the extremely long tangs. I speak from personal experience when I say that they are the "very devil" to inlet into the stock, and I can't imagine them being put on rifles simply because they look good on the guns. I think that the principal reason for these long tangs was that they were intended to impart strength to the wrist of the stock. Some tangs are fastened between the comb and butt plate with screws or pins and tenons as well as along the wrist. Note the nice "fluting" or concave surfaces on either side of the front triggerguard extension. This fluting appears on some of the better rifles of this region.

The next rifle (fig. 18) is one of the most ornate Tennessee rifles I've ever seen, and member Gene Miller is most fortunate to own it. All the hardware and inlays appear to be German silver except the triggerguard, which is iron with German silver overlay. Note the silver band around the muzzle of the barrel.

The next picture (fig. 19) of this fine rifle by Alfred Farrington Gross, who was born in Sullivan County in 1823, shows many details common to Tennessee rifles which have been discussed earlier. The patchbox is an interesting variation of the banana shape, and the heart motif was apparently a favorite of Alfred's because he used it on a brass-mounted rifle which I have studied.

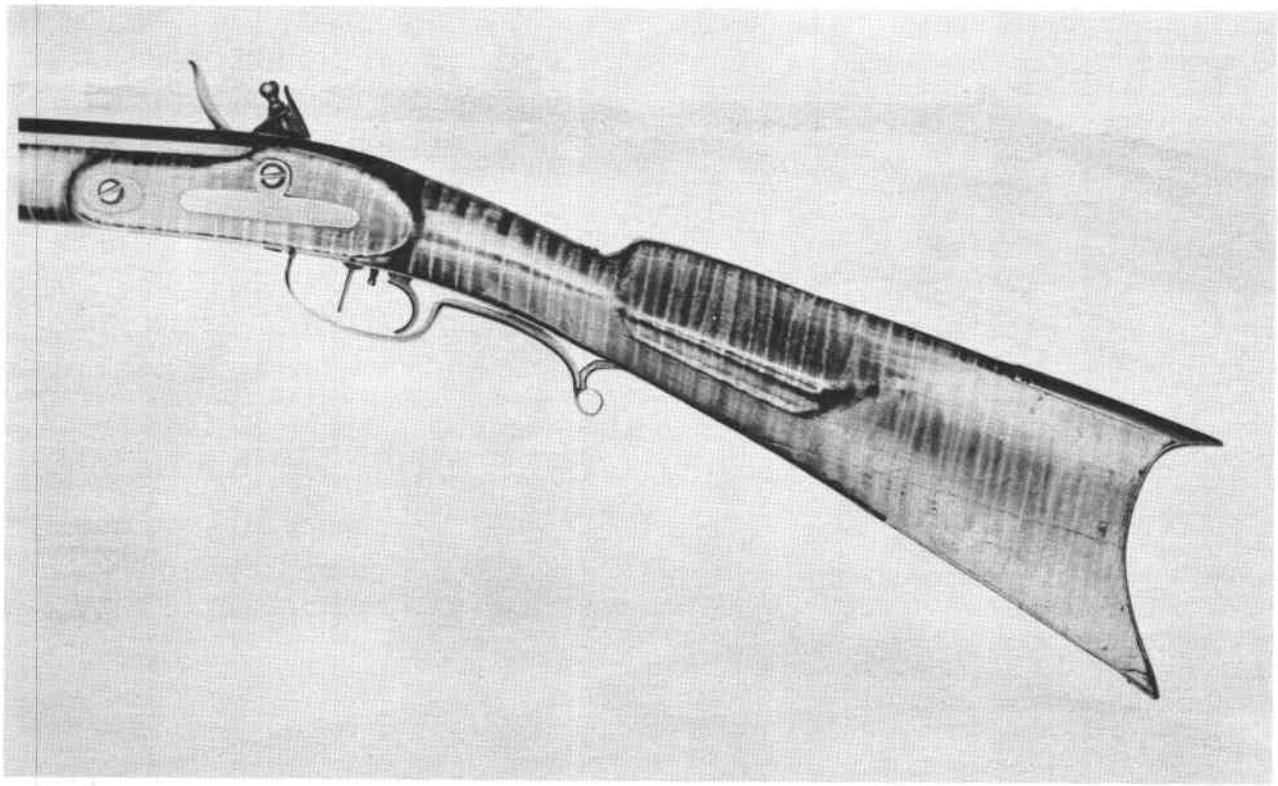


FIGURE 16

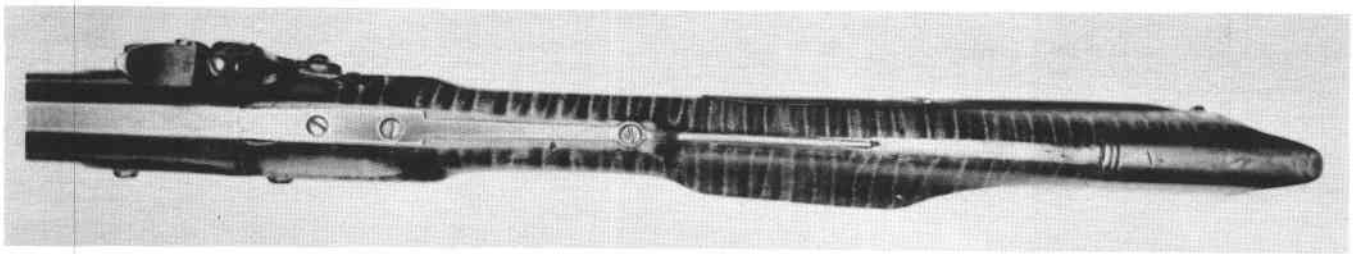


FIGURE 17

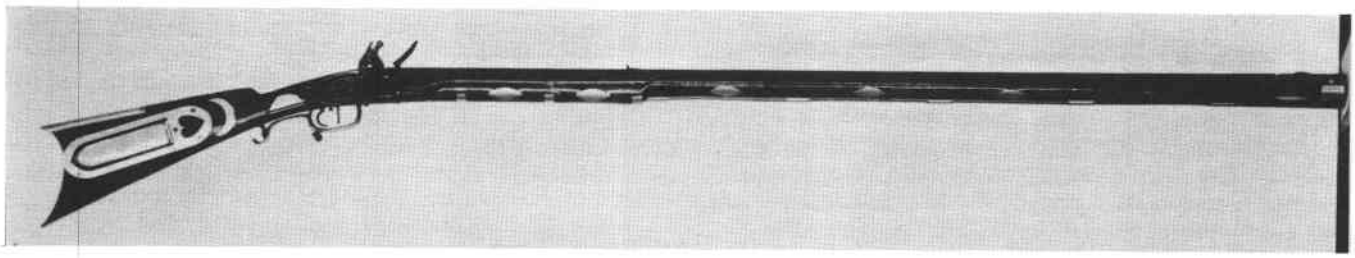


FIGURE 18

The left side of the buttstock (fig. 20) shows the sparse but uncommon engraving of a few of the inlays, and the cheekpiece departs from the norm in that it is rounded. Note the face on the stylized man below the crescent moon.

The bottom view. (fig. 21) shows the rounded triggerguard extensions and the narrow, lobate termination of the toe plate. The nicely-faceted bow of the triggerguard and the flare of the spur are evident. The often-extreme width of the spur and the way is commonly forged into a loop or scroll, as shown on the Jacob Gross rifle (fig. 15) is commonly on many Tennessee rifles. I think that the design of these guards, particularly that of the spur, may have had its origin in Southwest Virginia. Rifles by gunsmiths of that region may have had some influence on upper East Tennessee's makers in that regard. I'd rather not mention the names of the Southwest Virginia gunsmiths because they will be discussed in a book on Virginia gunmakers, currently in preparation by Williamsburg's master gunsmith and most-competent researcher, Wallace Gusler. At any rate, triggerguards of this design or variations of them were common throughout East Tennessee.

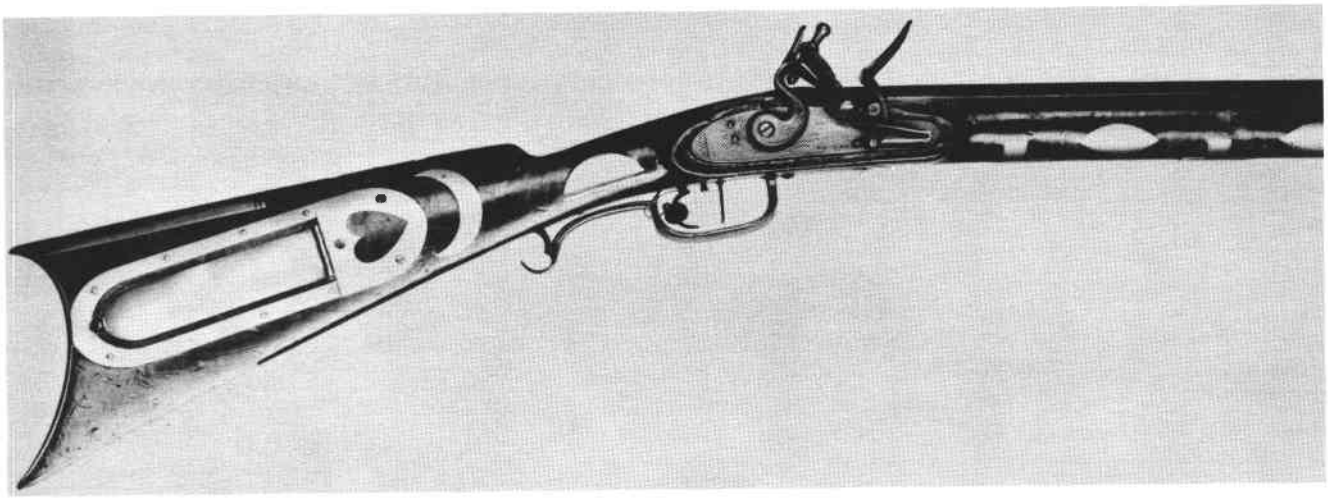


FIGURE 19

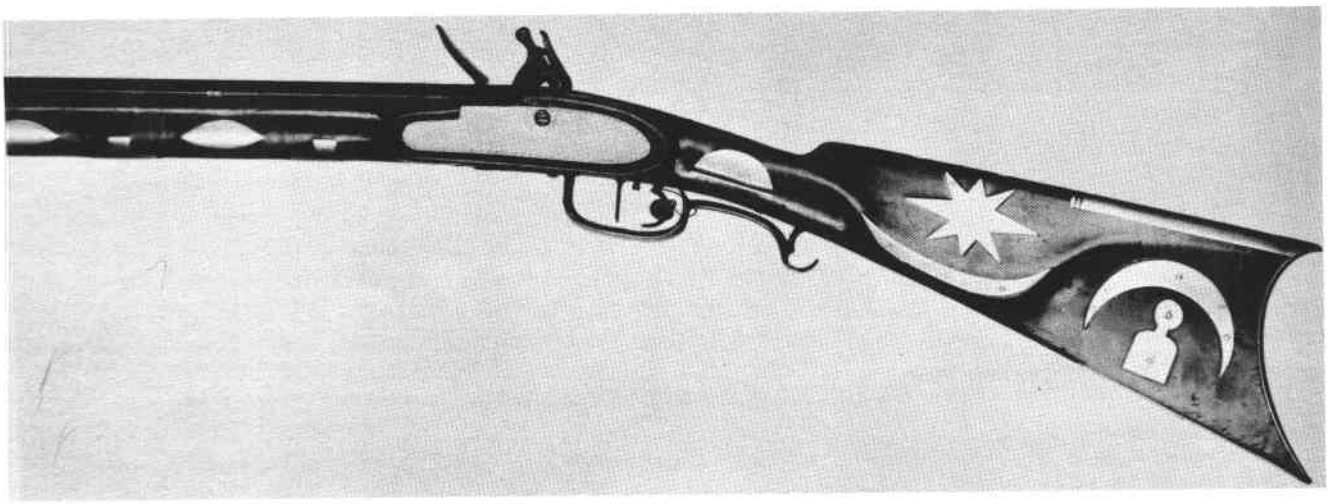


FIGURE 20

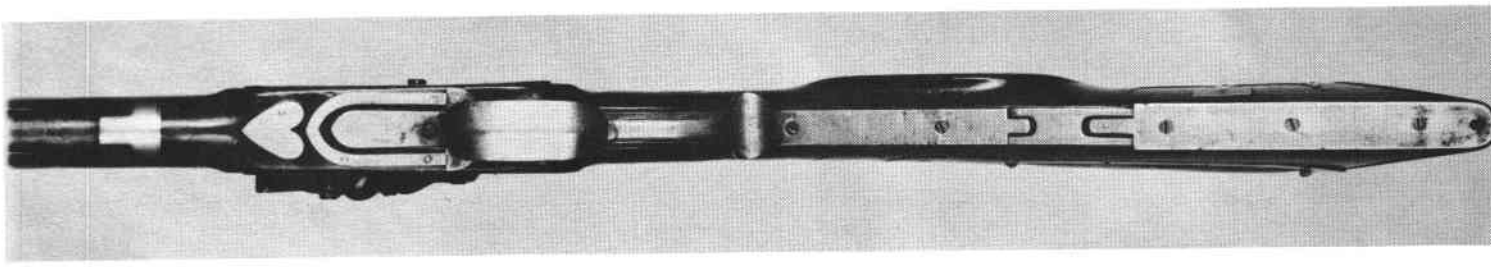


FIGURE 21

I regret that I cannot illustrate the top view of this rifle, but its tang extends to within an inch of the butt plate and contains six silver inlays. The stock is nicely-fluted on either side of the comb, and the barrel bears an unusually-long silver plate inscribed in block letters "Made by Alfred F. Gross Warranted If Well Used."

I would issue this word of caution regarding rifles of the type illustrated by the Jacob and Alfred Gross rifles: be suspicious of them if they bear the name of any one of the Bean family of gunsmiths. I've seen a number of unsigned rifles of this type, which are quite similar in some respects to Bean guns (no pun intended). I have it on good authority that such rifles have been altered by men in the Johnson City, Tennessee area to carry Bean signatures, such alterations having been made during the past 20 years. So be careful; such a rifle signed "Bean" could be genuine, or it could be a forgery. The novice collector of Tennessee rifles should beware.

A number of gunsmiths in East Tennessee, such as both John and Elisha Bull, most of the Beans, and the Gross's, commonly engraved or stamped their names on silver plates inlet flush with the top flat of the

barrel behind the rear sight. Moreover, these men and others (who are not known to have used silver plates) would often include the name of the man for whom the gun was made. Some gunsmiths also dated their guns after their signatures. One of my favorite signatures is that on a barrel of a gun from Knox County, which reads (from breech to muzzle) "Warranted $11 F. 10 1887 Wm. P. Patterson Dutch Valley P.O. Tenn." He certainly was persistent with his cold chisel when it came to signing a barrel.

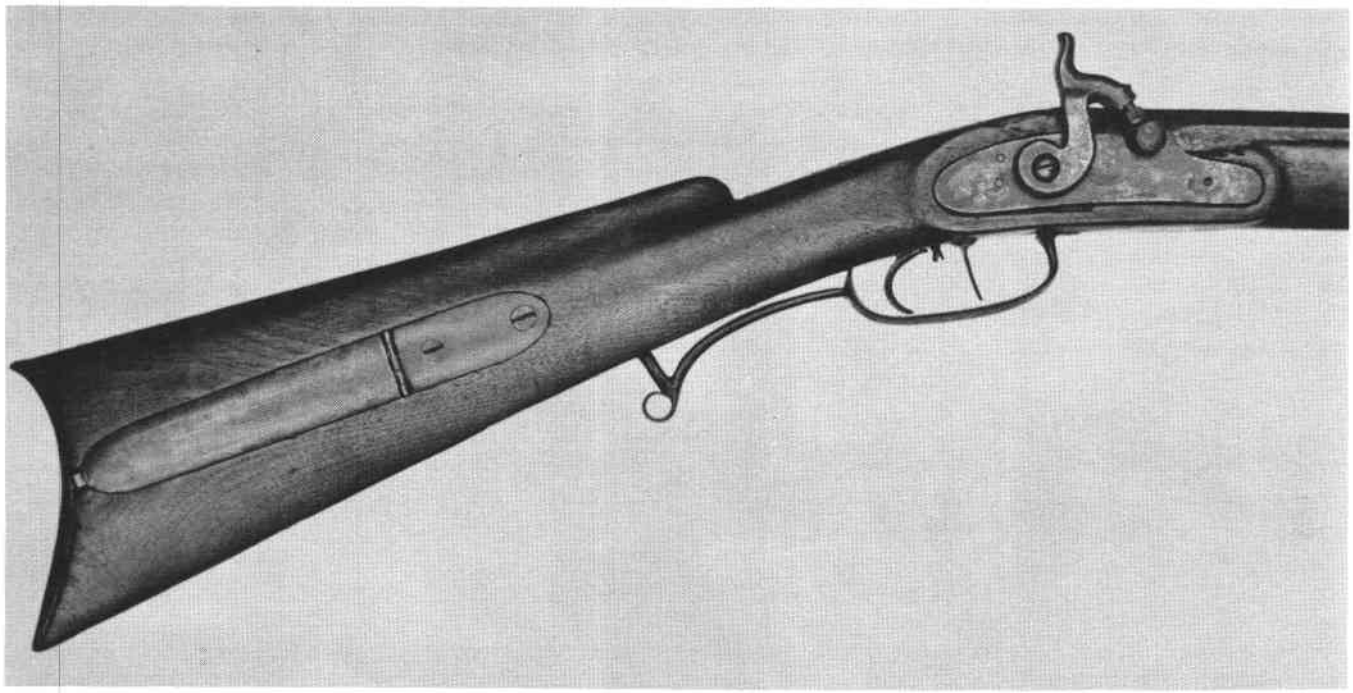


FIGURE 22

The next rifle (fig. 22) is by one of the most famous of the Beans — Baxter Bean — and is signed on a silver plate in the barrel "B. Bean for W. Brown." This rifle, owned by member Clarence Runtsch, is stocked in walnut. Note the similarity of the triggerguard to that of the Jacob Gross rifle. The straight tang extends to the comb of the stock.

Baxter worked with his father in Jonesboro in 1812 for a while, and later moved to Cherokee Creek in Washington County. He met his untimely end at Nashville when he was stabbed in the back and killed in a tavern brawl. I would like to go into some of the numerous anecdotes regarding the Beans, but time does not permit it.

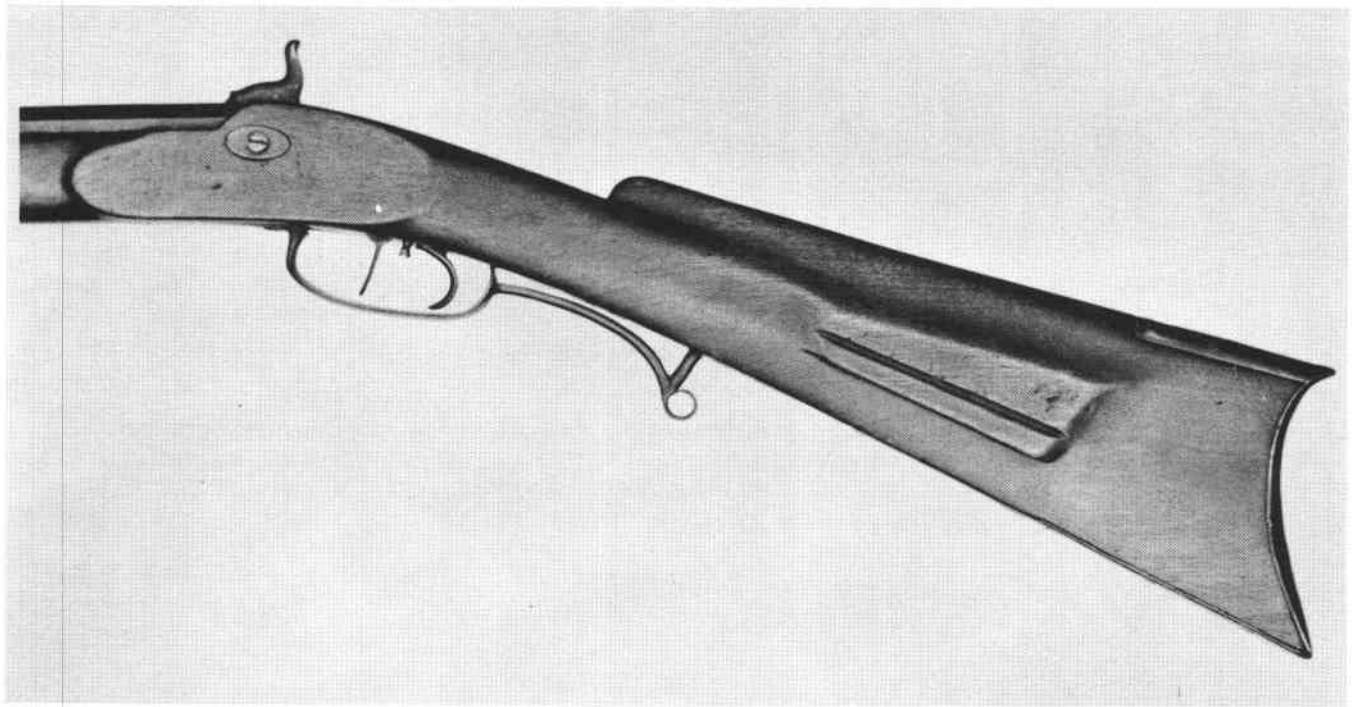


FIGURE 23

The left side of the buttstock (fig. 23) requires no further discussion, other than to say that broad, flat cheekpieces are relatively common on East Tennessee rifles. This rifle does not have the slash marks on the heel of the butt plate, although I have seen a Bean rifle which did have that feature.

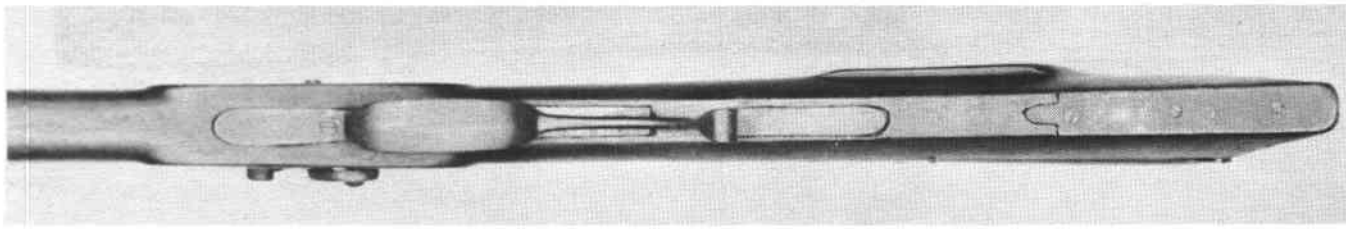


FIGURE 24

The bottom view (fig. 24) of this Baxter Bean rifle shows the lobate termination of the toe plate and the rounded triggerguard extensions.

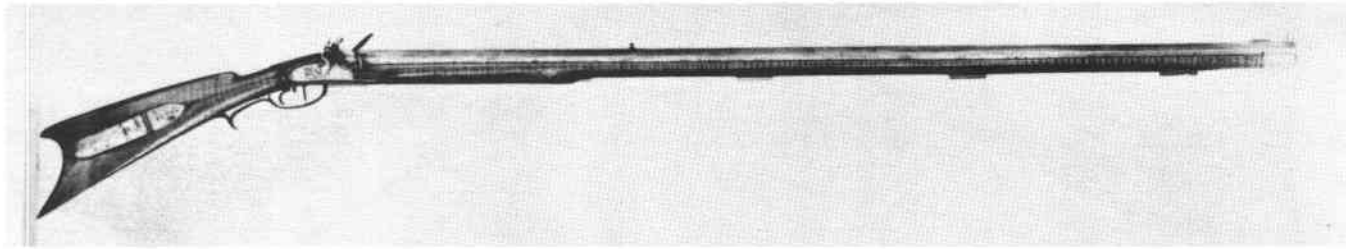


FIGURE 25

The next rifle (fig. 25) has been my pride and joy for nearly 15 years. Although unsigned, this 16-pound rifle with a 50-inch barrel was reputed to have been made by gunsmiths Clark and Horne on Waldens Ridge, just north of Chattanooga. I've been unable to find anything about these men to date. The rifle is iron mounted except for brass thimbles, side plate, and an engraved pewter fore end cap and pewter escutcheons behind the lower thimble. Although not clearly shown in this photograph, the lower thimble goes directly into the stock and has no tang or outer extension. This is a common feature on many rifles from southeast Tennessee, and from what I refer to as the Soddy-Daisy School, a community about 20 miles north of Chattanooga. This is the region where, to name a few, Enoch Hardin, Johnny Fritts, John Clements, Sr. and Jr., H. Gardner, and John Selvridge (of Birchwood just across the Tennessee river) worked. Although this rifle is not like those of the Soddy-Daisy School, it supposedly came from that general region of Tennessee. This rifle, which is an original flintlock, bears nice forestock molding, the barrel is flared and engraved at the breech and muzzle, and a Masonic emblem is engraved at the left side at the breech. The front sight is held by two separate dovetails — a feature which rarely appears on some Tennessee and North Carolina rifles. The lock is stamped with the name of a long-lived hardware company, "H & J Kirkman, Nashville."

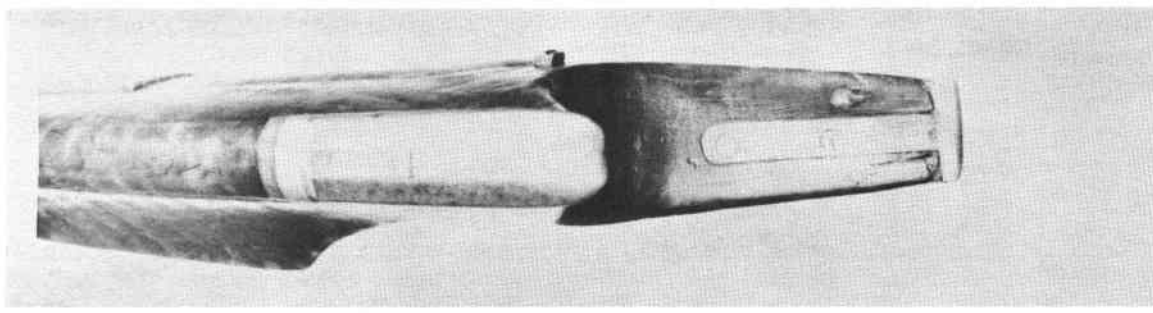


FIGURE 26

The butt of the rifle (fig. 26) is the most unusual part of the gun. This rifle and a broken buttstock, which I also own, bear the only examples of a two-piece buttplate which I have ever seen or heard of. I would be very interested in learning of a signed gun with a two-piece butt plate, regardless of where or by whom it was made.

The bottom view (fig. 27) of the rifle shows a relatively narrow iron triggerguard with nice molding, and the lobate termination of the toe plate.

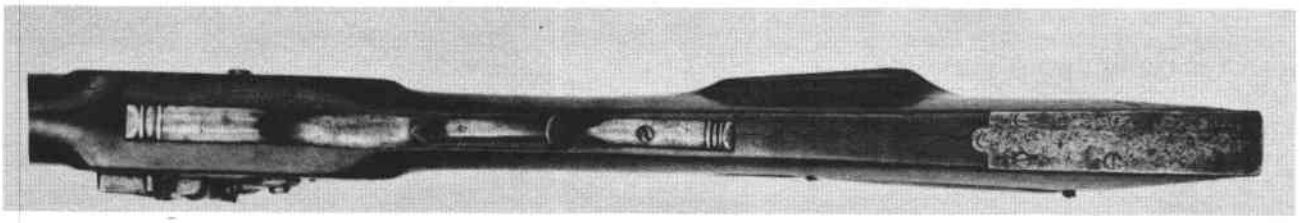


FIGURE 27

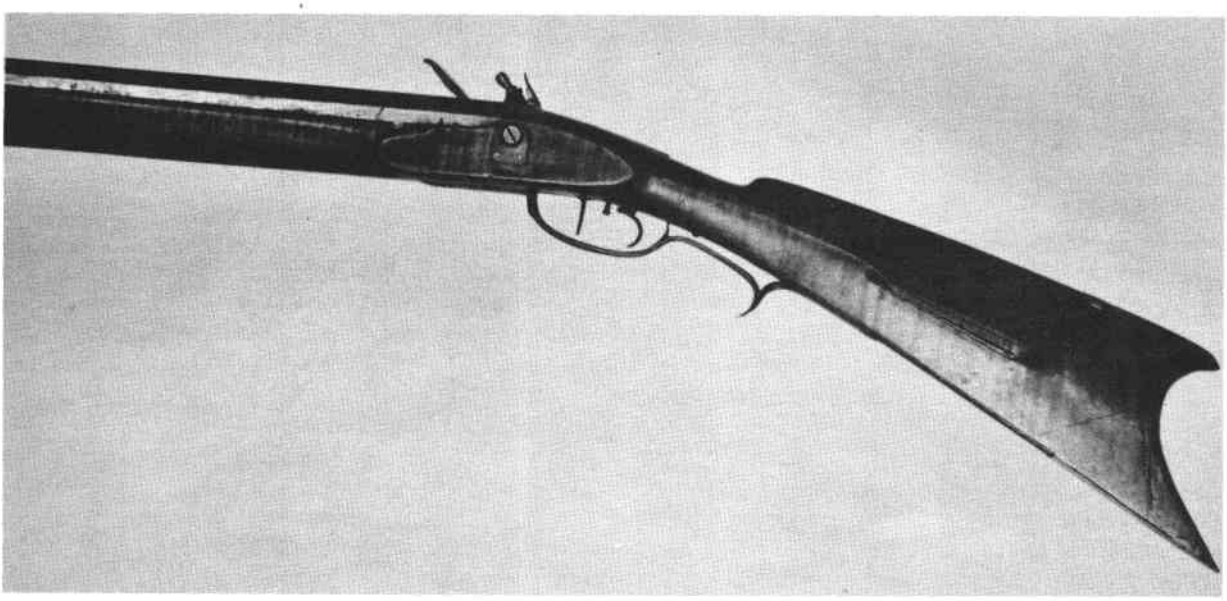


FIGURE 28

The left view of the buttstock (fig. 28) illustrates a nicely-designed but plain piece of workmanship. Close inspection of this photograph reveals the unengraved silver strap across the heel of the deeply curved butt, and the extent of the tang down the wrist.

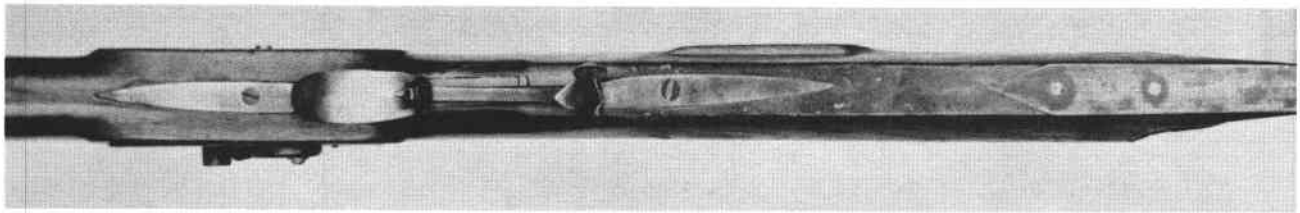


FIGURE 29

While I'm discussing atypical features, I would like to show a view (fig. 29) of the triggerguard on an unsigned William Douglas rifle from the Turner Kirkland collection. Douglas favored iron triggerguards which had unusually long extensions, which tapered to a point. I know of no other Tennessee gunsmith who used this detail. In fact, I've seen triggerguards on guns by this maker who signed his guns "W.D.," which were much longer than on this rifle. The pointed toe plate is common on Tennessee guns. If my memory serves me correctly, squared terminations on toe plates of Tennessee guns are in the minority, in contrast to their Pennsylvania counterparts. So double dove-tailed front sights, two-piece buttplates, button patchbox releases, Douglas-type triggerguards, iron touchhole pick holders, and lower thimbles which extend to the triggerguard are rare but interesting features which, among others, appear so as to relieve the monotony of otherwise relatively plain, unornamentative rifles.

This rifle (fig. 30) from the Turner Kirkland collection is typical of guns from the Soddy-Daisy School. The deeply curved buttplate has a heel which is exaggerated in depth and is almost always V-shaped in cross section. The stock is usually concave on either side of the comb. Tangs are the same width as the top flat of the barrel, have parallel sides like a strap, and extend to but not up the face of the comb. The forearm of the stock is generally diamond-shaped in cross-section, as opposed to the "apple-cheeked" cross section common to the fore arms of many Tennessee guns. Note the very tight scroll of the triggerguard spur.

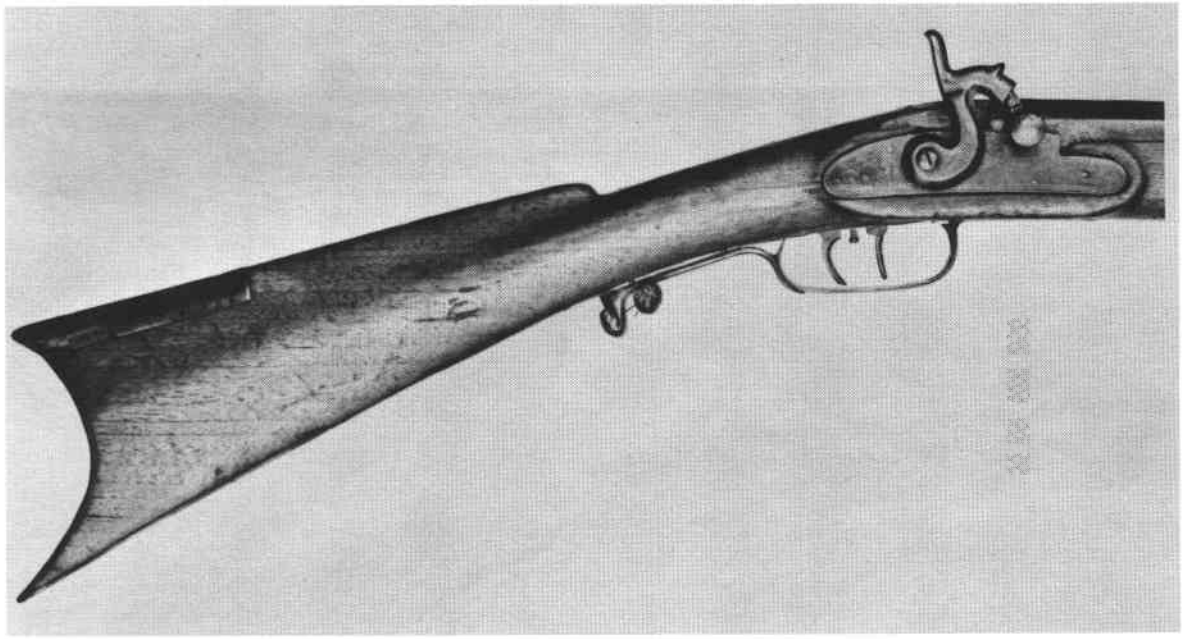


FIGURE 30

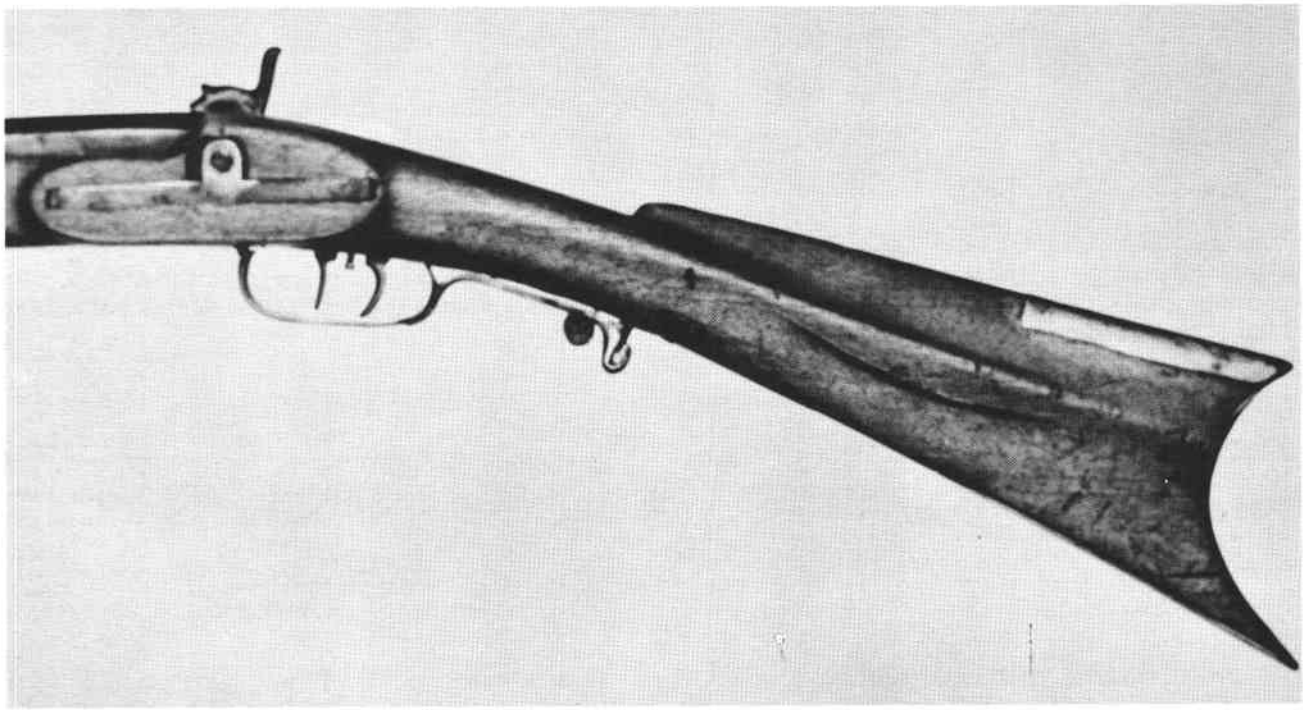


FIGURE 31

The left side of the buttstock (fig. 31) shows the style of cheekpiece typical of this school. Note the basic similarity of the sideplate to that on the Jacob Gross rifle (fig. 16). Incidentally, Johnny Clements, who I believe was the maker of this rifle, is the only member of the Soddy-Daisy school that I know of who occasionally used the banana-shaped patchbox. His guns are signed "J.C.," and he even went so far as to so-identify his bullet moulds. For a poor but serviceable photograph of one of Johnny Clements rifles, I refer you to plate 66, #1 of Dillin's Kentucky Rifle.

The next rifle (fig. 32) from the Jimmy Guion collection is unsigned, regretfully. It displays fine architecture, excellent ironwork, and in addition to the unusual pewter inlays on either side of the banana patchbox, it bears a buttplate with an unusually long heel, a feature which appears on a few East Tennessee rifles, including the specimen with the iron touchhole pick holder shown earlier in figure 7. The stock of this rifle appears to be red oak.

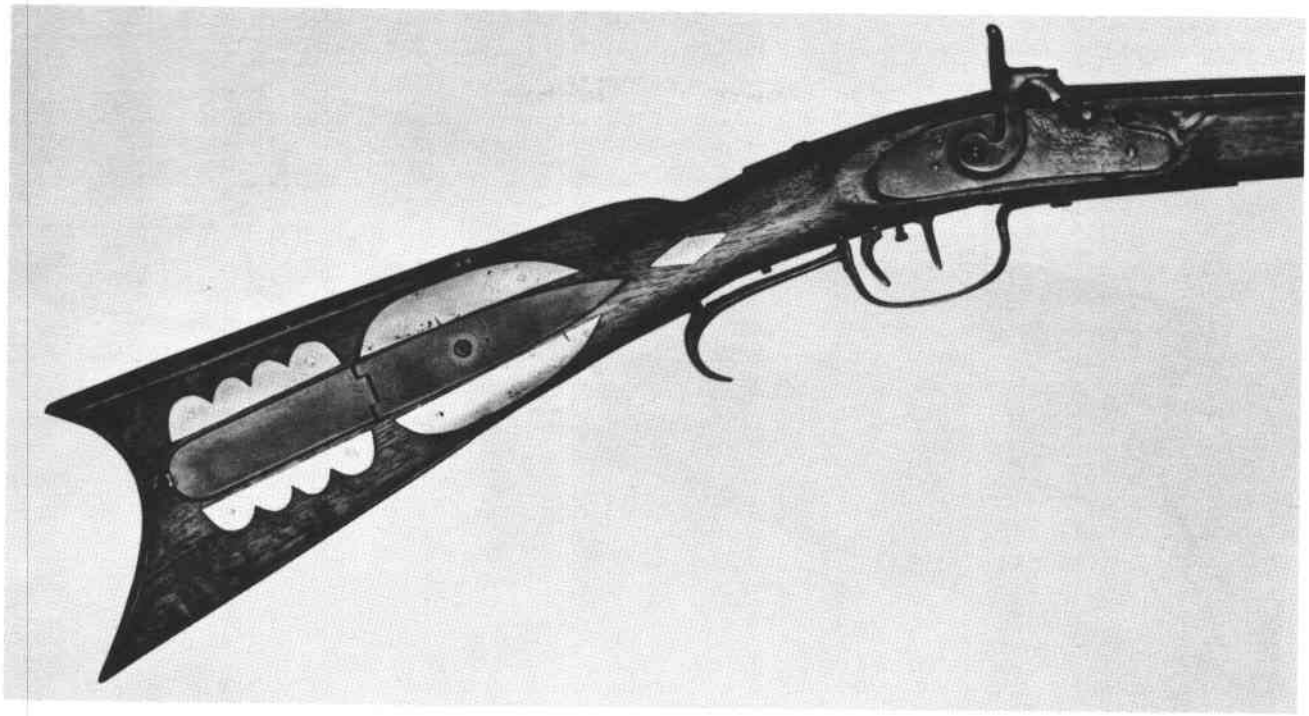


FIGURE 32

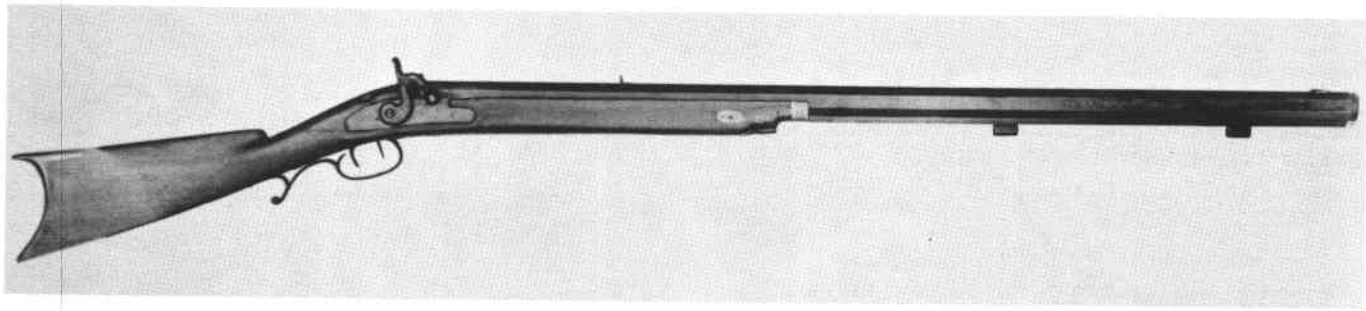


FIGURE 33

This rifle (fig. 33) is one I've owned for many years, and is signed "DeLong & Son Chattanooga Tenn." on the barrel. It is a typical example of a large-caliber plains-type rifle, turned at the muzzle for a bullet starter. The walnut stock has a pewter fore end cap and iron mountings. The finials of the triggerguard may have been copied from those of an English shotgun.

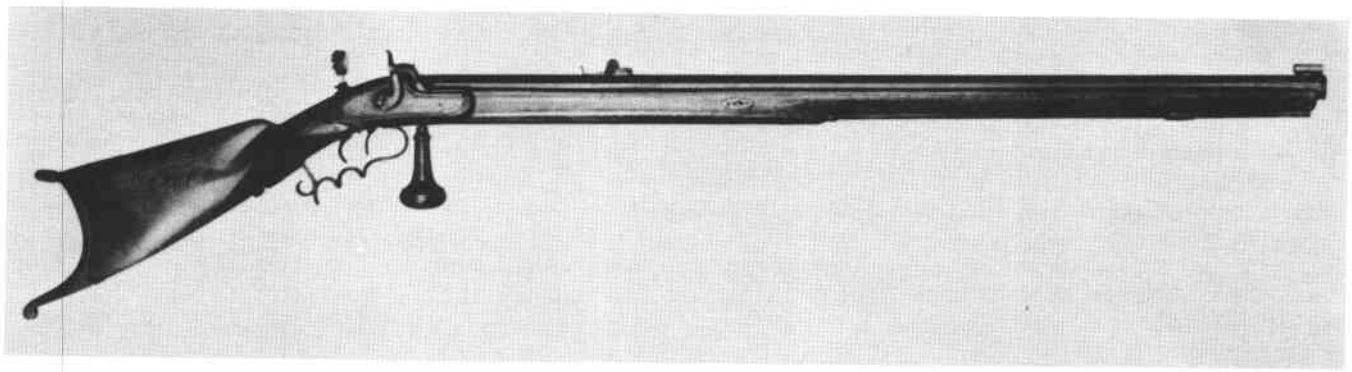


FIGURE 34

We now come to one of Tennessee's finest gunsmiths, whose work and history would be a fitting subject for discussion to the exclusion of other gunsmiths of Tennessee. Franz Bitterlich was born in Bohemia in 1829, migrated to this country, married his wife Nancy in Illinois around 1850, and settled at Nashville to become a successful and wellknown gunsmith. This rifle (fig. 34) from the Hal Swann Collection, shows European influence and close inspection of the gun reveals the highest quality workmanship you could expect from a

man who did his apprenticeship in the "old country." This fullstocked walnut target rifle is fine — period. Franz also made halfstock target guns along this same general pattern. His engraving, though sparse, was of the highest quality.

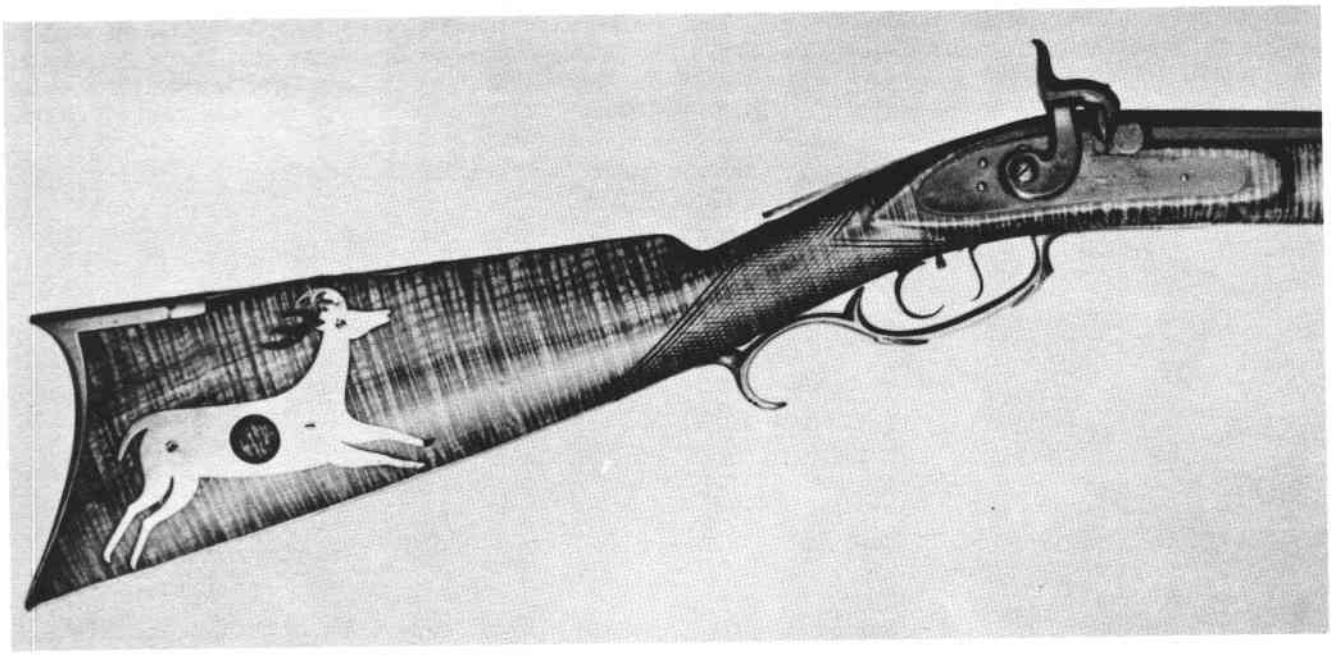


FIGURE 35

The next rifle (fig. 35), also from the Swann collection, shows that Bitterlich also made guns which conformed to the domestic product. This silver- and gold-mounted halfstock is signed "Betterlich and Legler" on the lockplate and barrel.

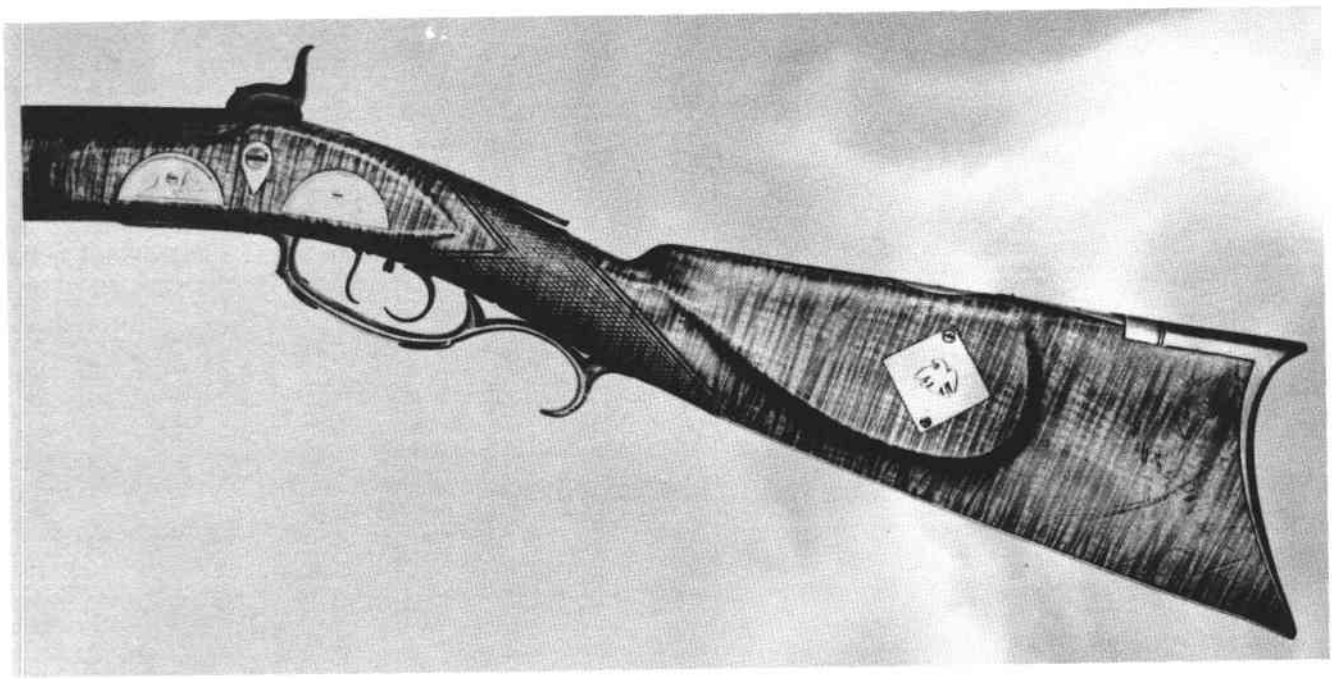
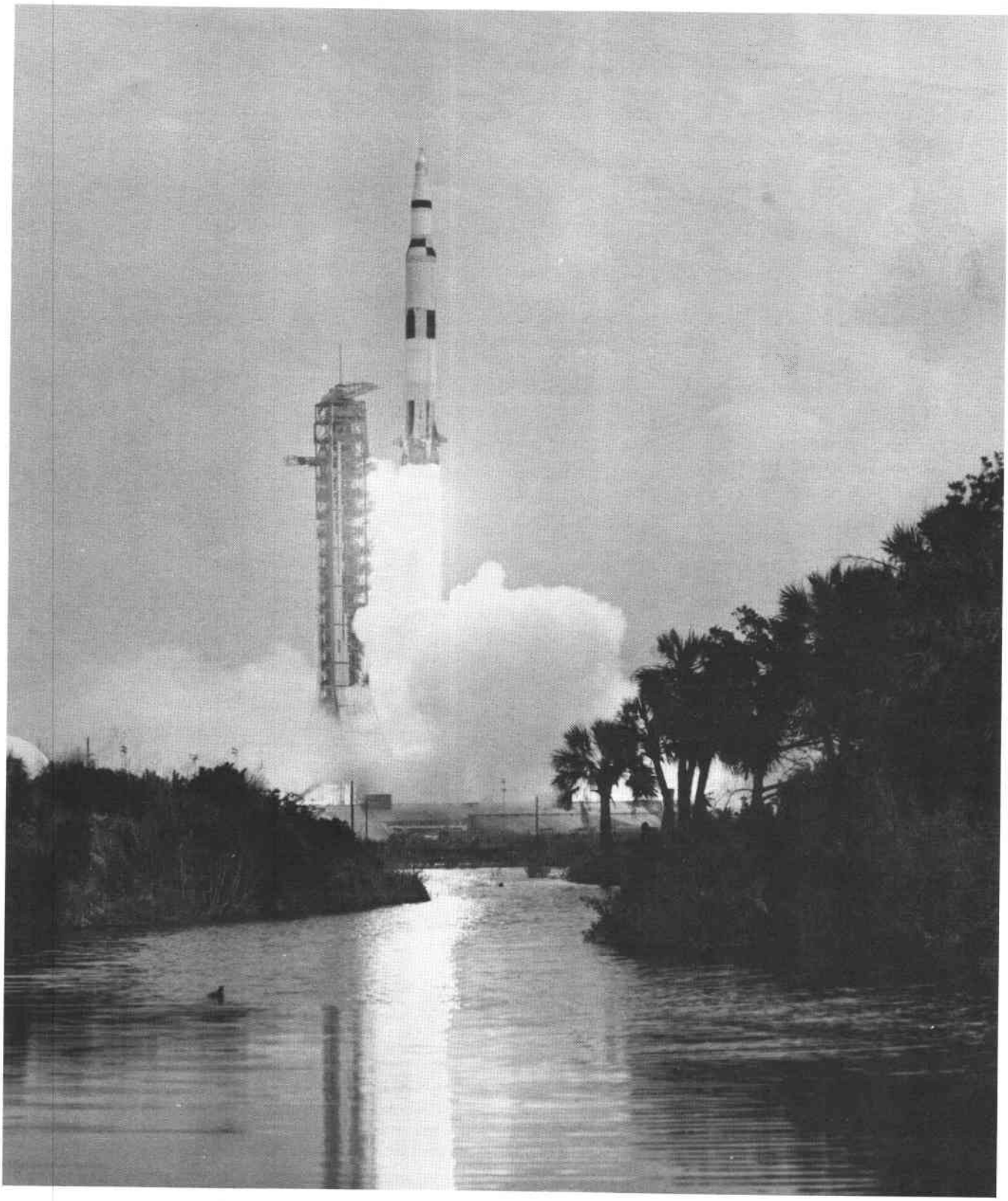


FIGURE 36

The left view (fig. 36) of the buttstock needs no further discussion, other than to point out the gold eagle overlay on the silver inlay on the cheekpiece. The triggers are similar to those found on some Carolina rifles. Rifles of this general style are common to middle Tennessee. I regret that I have no photographs of rifles by some of the earlier middle and west Tennessee gunsmiths. Most of those of which I am aware are relatively late. I do have information on some pre-1825 middle and west Tennessee makers, but I have

not seen any of their work. I am anxious to learn of any guns by middle-Tennessee gunsmiths H. Estes, J. Burlington, and Samuel Crockett.

I hope that you have not been overly bored with my discussion. Rather than go on and on with an almost endless enumeration of names and locations of Tennessee gunsmiths, I've tried to concentrate on what is generally referred to as the Tennessee rifle, with a few examples thrown in to show that there are variations from the norm. I'm sure that there must be at least one among my audience who wishes I'd shut up and sit down, so in consideration of him, I'll do just that. Thank you very much for your kind attention.



APOLLO 13 LIFTOFF, APRIL 11, 1970, CAPE KENNEDY, FLORIDA
Photo courtesy NASA