

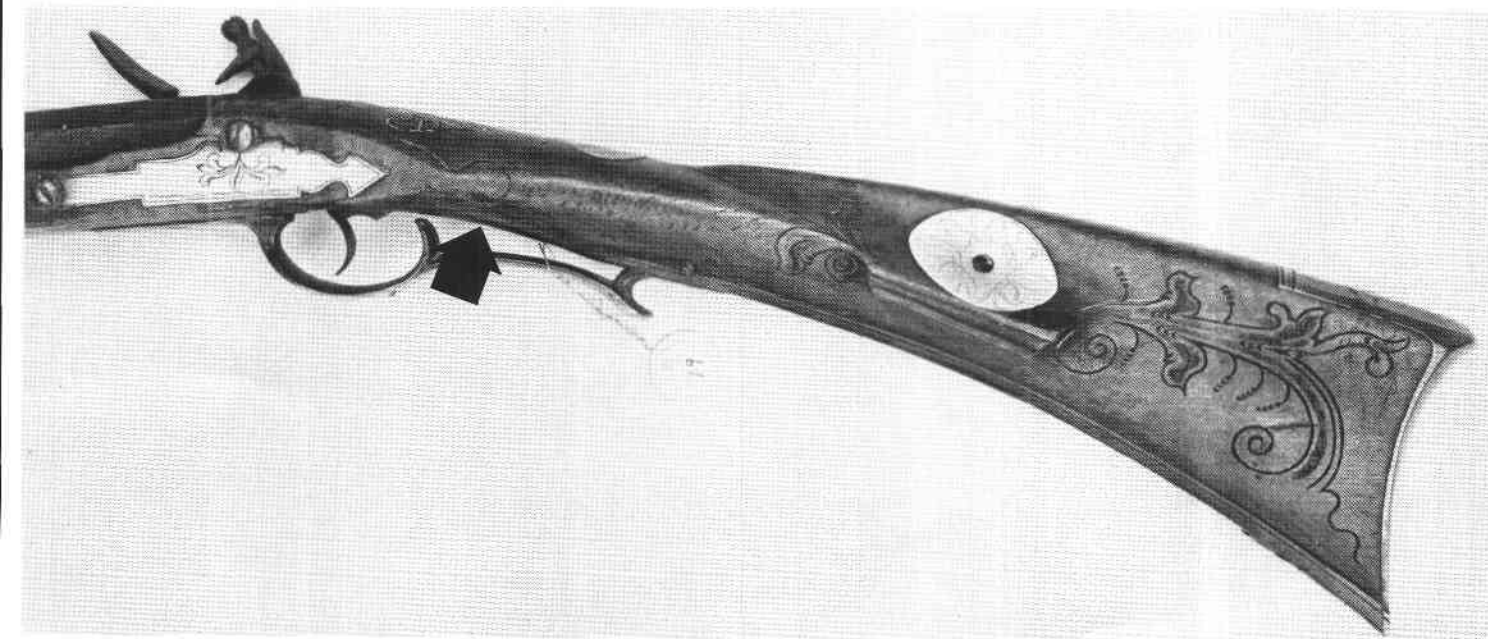
# Lehigh County Gunsmithing Families

Ronald G. Gabel

What a coincidence! It was indeed a surprise to realize that I would be presenting my second talk to the Society here at Valley Forge. It was the 1976 Valley Forge meeting that I offered my first American Society talk entitled "A Closer Look at Lehigh County Kentuckies" (ASAC Bulletin #35). Now, six years later, here I am again. I'm going to keep trying until I get it right.

Students of the Kentucky rifle will tell you that each school of gunsmithing has its own unique characteristics and, as my first talk attempted to illustrate, the Lehigh County school is no exception.

Perhaps a brief review of those characteristics which will positively identify a rifle of the Lehigh County school will be useful.



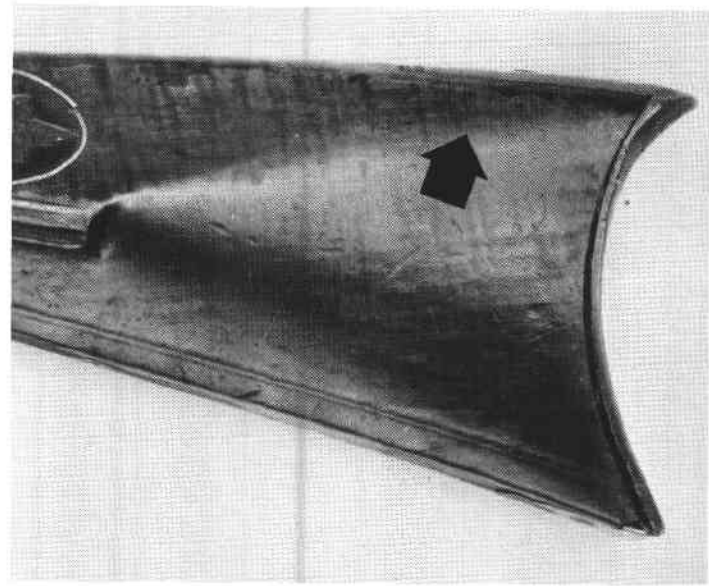
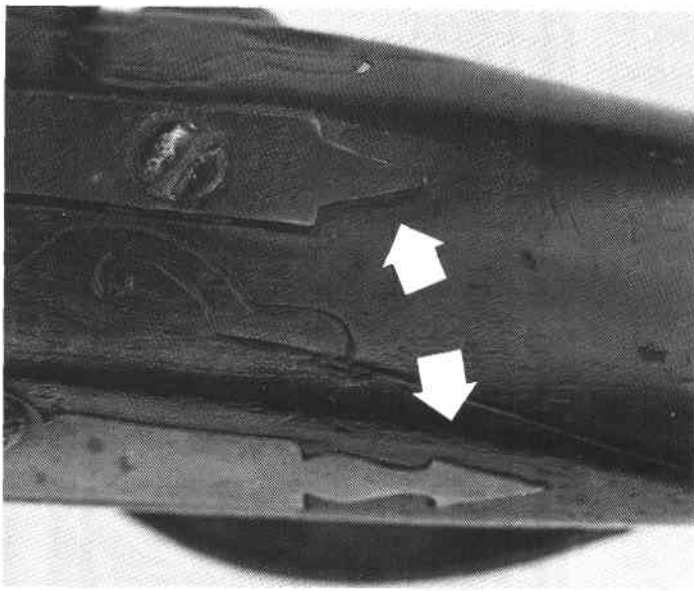
## *Stock Characteristics*

The butt end of the traditional Lehigh County area rifle, in profile, reveals two curved lines; these lines, top and bottom, blend into a Roman style nose and a rather sharp drop, the bottom curve changing more rapidly than the top. Many rifles display a second bottom curve beginning where the larger

curve leaves off, at the triggerguard, and extending up to and under the lockplate.

The wrist of the traditional rifle is broader than it is high, creating an egg-shaped cross section, and the fore end is sharply cut into a V-shaped cross section.

An "Indian Head" design is often incised carved or inlet into the stock — see photo 24.



### *Furniture Characteristics*

The “arrowhead” shape or point is used extensively in the design of sideplates, toeplates, rear entrance ferrules and barrel tangs. The triggerguard is often broader than average, having a brass stud incorporated into the bow just forward of the trigger.

Nose caps are sometimes left open-ended, allowing forestock wood to show through, the bottom being contoured to follow the upper curve of the ramrod. That portion of the buttplate extending over the top of the stock is tapered and inlet, causing it to be nearly invisible from the side view.

The typical brass patchbox is two-piece, the finial in a fleur-de-lis design.

Although the presence of one or more of these characteristics nearly always indicates the origin of the rifle to be the Lehigh County school, the absence of them does not rule the rifle out as being from that area.

The Lehigh County school, as defined in this talk, is that area in and around the present Lehigh County where these characteristics were used.

To the best of my knowledge there were six major gunsmithing families in this area: The Henrys, The Molls, The Neihards, The Rupps and The Kuntzes.

### **THE HENRYS**

In 1742, the Moravian Church decided to build a community north of Bethlehem. This settlement was actually started in 1745, on a tract of ground unequalled in fertility. Here the Moravians found a great spring of water and decided to locate on a tract

of 5,000 acres. They named this tract, at the spring, “Christian Braun.” A second tract they called, “Gnadenthal,” and the third tract they called “Nazareth.”

We are here concerned with “Christian Braun,” later called “Christian Springs.” It is interesting to note that in the year 1756 there were 219 single men in the Nazareth complex. In Christian Springs alone, in 1752, there were 54 people, 16 of whom were boys in the gun shop and related shops. On August 27, 1763, a new building for making gun stocks was completed at Christian Springs.

The master gunsmith of Christian Springs was Andreas Albrecht (later called Andrew Albright). Born in Germany in 1718, he served in the army of Frederick the Great and came to America in 1750. He located in Christian Springs after arriving in Philadelphia.

Albrecht stayed as the head of the Christian Springs gun shop until he left for Lititz, Pennsylvania, another Moravian settlement, in 1771. He died at Lititz on April 19, 1802. While in Lititz, Albrecht was given the son of William Henry of Lancaster to train in the gunsmithing trade. William Henry Jr. was apprenticed on June 27, 1771, at the age of fourteen, and stayed with Albrecht for five years, until September 2, 1776. He was then sent by Albrecht to Christian Springs to complete his training, which he did on July 28, 1780.

After Andreas Albrecht went to Lititz in 1771, his place as master armorer was filled by John Christian Oerter. Oerter was born October 16, 1747, in Frederick Township, Philadelphia County, next door to Henry Antes, whose gunsmith son, William,

was the same age as young Oerter. John Christian Oerter was master gunsmith at Christian Springs from 1771 until his death on May 18, 1777.

According to the tax list of Christian Springs, dated 1779, William Henry, Jr., Joseph Levering and Frederick Steinman were single men at Christian Springs. They were all probably in the gun shops because William Henry paid taxes from 1790 on as a gunsmith in Nazareth. Joseph Levering paid taxes from 1782 to 1784 as gunsmith in Bethlehem, and Frederick Steinman paid taxes from 1825 as a gunsmith in Philadelphia.

The following were known to have been gunsmiths, and were living in Nazareth in other years: Abraham Henry paid taxes as a gunsmith in 1781; and William Antes lived in Nazareth from 1750 to 1759.

There was another group of gunsmiths living in the area, or within commuting distance, who may have had some training at Christian Springs: Peter Neihard, born in 1743; Johannes Moll, born in 1747; Andrew Herman Rupp, born in 1756; John Rupp, born in 1762 and Henry Deringer, born in 1759.

After the Revolutionary War, Christian Springs lost its position as a gunsmithing school, and finally closed down in 1792. In July, 1780, William Henry Jr. petitioned for permission to build a gun shop in Nazareth. Permission was granted. William Henry Jr. is said to have had fourteen employees while in Lancaster, six of whom he brought with him to Nazareth. After four years at Christian Springs he settled in Nazareth, where, on August 25, 1780, he set up his shop. A year later he brought his brother, Abraham, from Lancaster to learn the gunsmithing trade. On November 22, 1781, William Henry Jr. married Sabrina Schropp of Nazareth, for whom he built a house on South Main Street. Here he carried on his business, subject to occasional reprimands due to the noise made whenever he used a triple quantity of powder in the testing of his guns. He also served as the village architect and carpenter.

William Henry Jr. trained his sons, John Joseph and William III, in the gunsmithing trade. About 1792, in association with two others, he bought a large tract of land at nearby Jacobsburg where he had had a gun barrel mill since 1780.

In 1798 the fear of war with France led Governor Mifflin of Pennsylvania to place an order with William Henry Jr. for two thousand guns. When Henry Jr. received this order he informed the

joint session of the overseers and the Elder's conference on January 17, 1798, that he would like to build a two-story workshop in Nazareth to meet the needs of his workmen and to store supplies. He warned them frankly that if this permission was denied he would have to have the work done elsewhere. He indicated his strong desire to obtain his workmen from among the local brethren, as far as possible. Permission was denied. Henry Jr. moved his factory to the Jacobsburg site where it remained until 1813.

In 1808, William Henry Jr. contracted for ten thousand muskets with the state of Pennsylvania and the United States Government. He had a very scant supply of water power and, in looking around for a better supply, he decided upon a place along the Bushkill Creek. Henry Jr. sent his son, William III, to the new site, where the Bolton Gun Works was then established. At this location, under the founder's son, grandson, and great-grandson, Henry rifles were manufactured for almost a century.

While the Henry family of gunsmiths grew and expanded in the Nazareth area, another local gunsmith family was also active. Johannes Moll, who lived close enough to have had some training at Christian Springs, was the first recorded John Moll of Allentown. A John/Johannes Moll was listed in the Northampton tax record for the year 1764.

## THE MOLLS

John Moll married Lydia Rinker in the year 1772. John and Lydia had three sons: John II, born on May 13, 1773; John J., born in March of 1776; and Peter, born on November 26, 1779.

John Moll I prospered in his trade as gunsmith. Upon his death in 1794, he left a large amount of real property in South Whitehall and Heidelberg Townships, in addition to a piece of land 60 feet wide and running to a depth of 230 feet on what is now North Seventh Street in Allentown. This property remained in the Moll family for 110 years until it was sold on January 31, 1884.

John Moll I was survived by his widow and two sons, John II and Peter. During the war of 1912, John II stayed home producing weapons on North Seventh Street while his brother, Peter, answered the call to arms. Peter was one of the men who, on August 18, 1814, met in Center Square in full military uniform to be assigned to active duty. Peter survived the war, came home, and died a rich man years later. This Peter Moll was the uncle of the

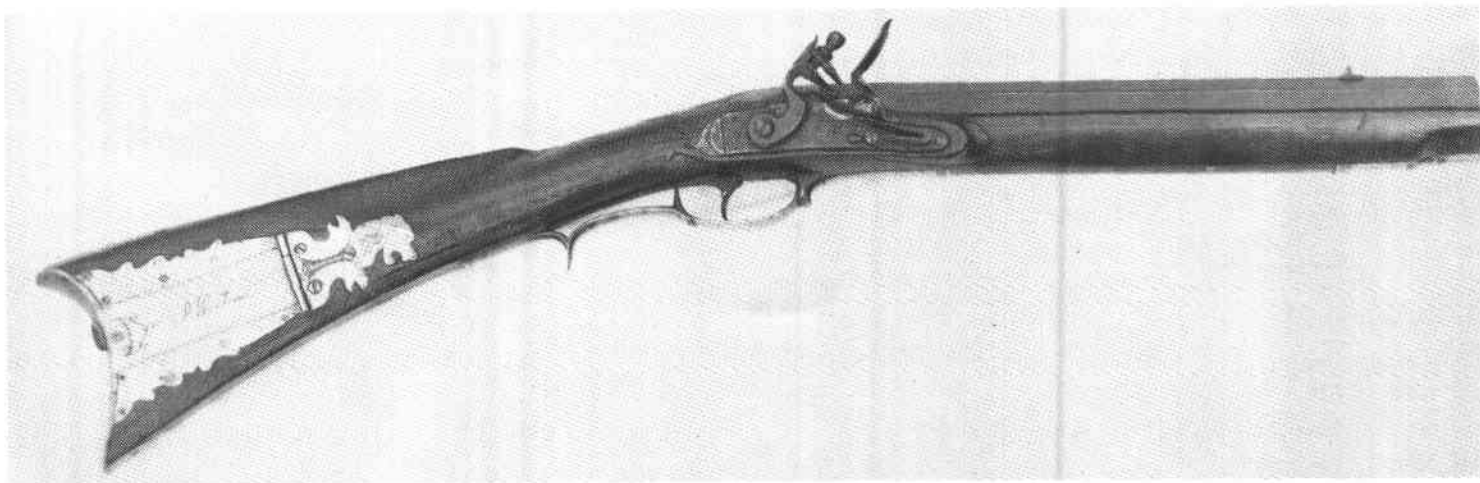
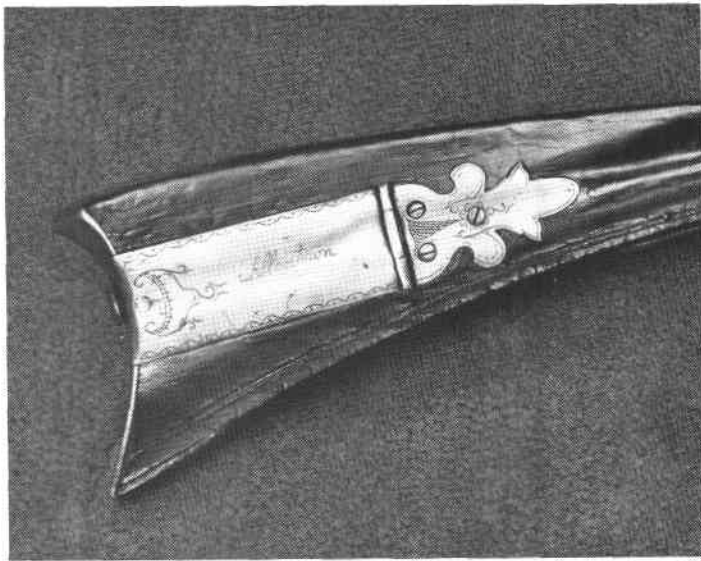
Peter Moll, also a gunsmith, who settled in Hellertown.

John Moll II joined with one of the oldest families of the county when he married Elizabeth Newhard, eldest daughter of Lawrence Neihard who was the brother of Peter Neihard, the gunsmith. From this union were born John III, Jacob, and Peter who later set up his gunsmith shop in Hellertown. John III was born on November 13, 1796, and Peter was born on October 13, 1799.

This Peter Moll appeared in Hellertown as early

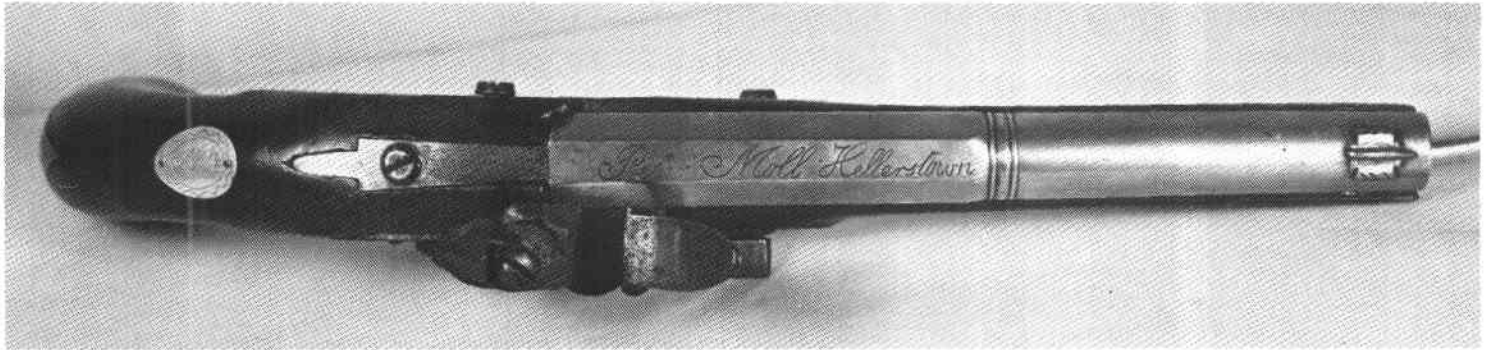
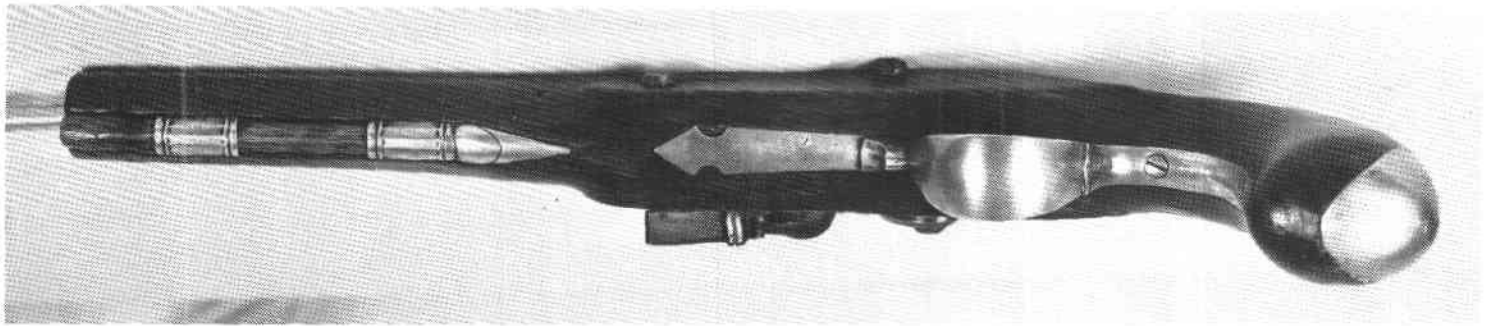
as 1820 when his brother, John Moll III, bought the Allentown gunsmith business from their father on April 11, 1820. Peter Moll's partner in Hellertown was David Moll, a cousin or nephew. David Moll was born on April 22, 1807, and probably learned the gunsmithing trade from the family craftsmen in Allentown.

In 1860, with the outbreak of the Civil War, John Moll III took his son, William H., into the business with him. James Moll, a relative, was also employed at the factory and lived in Allentown.

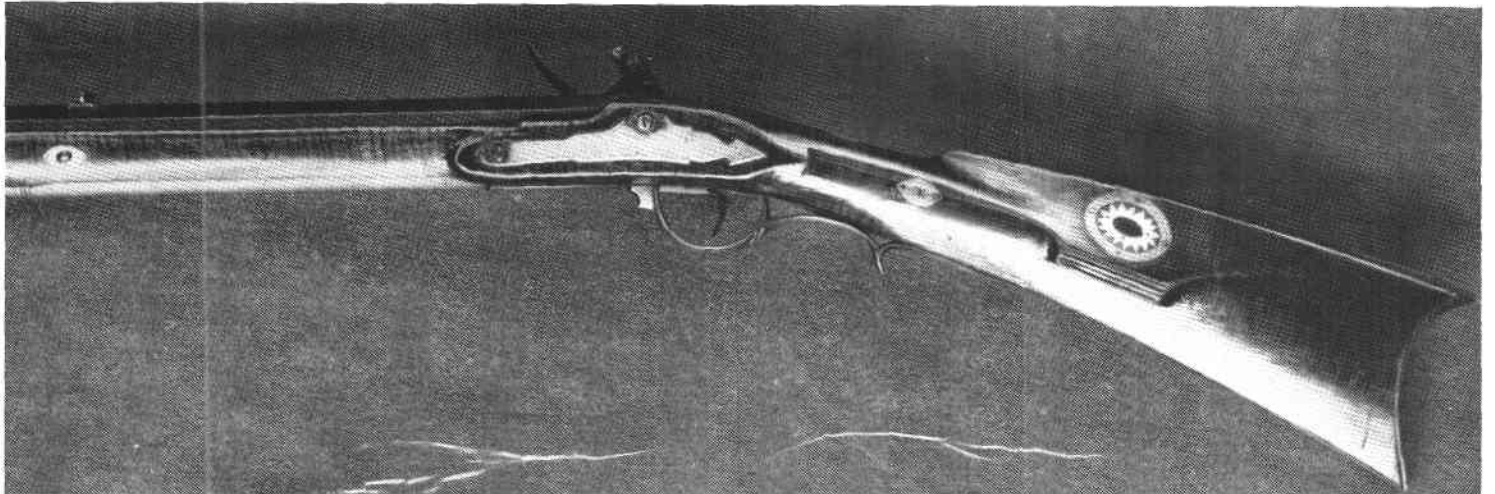
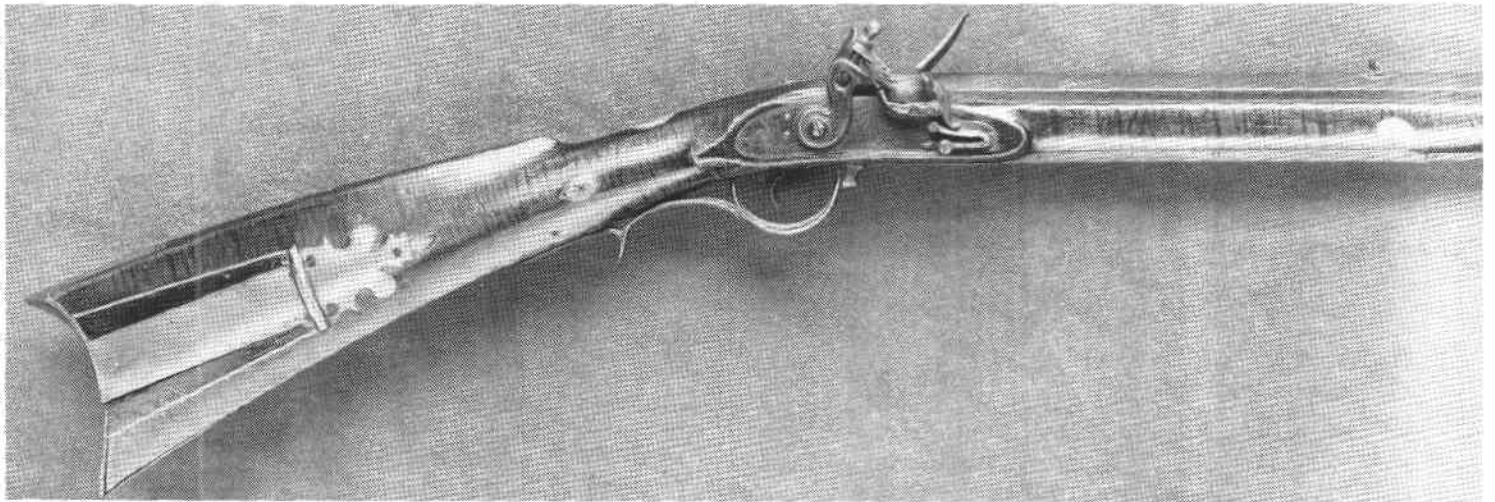


**RIFLES BY JOHN MOLL**





A PISTOL BY PETER MOLL



A RIFLE BY PETER AND DAVID MOLL

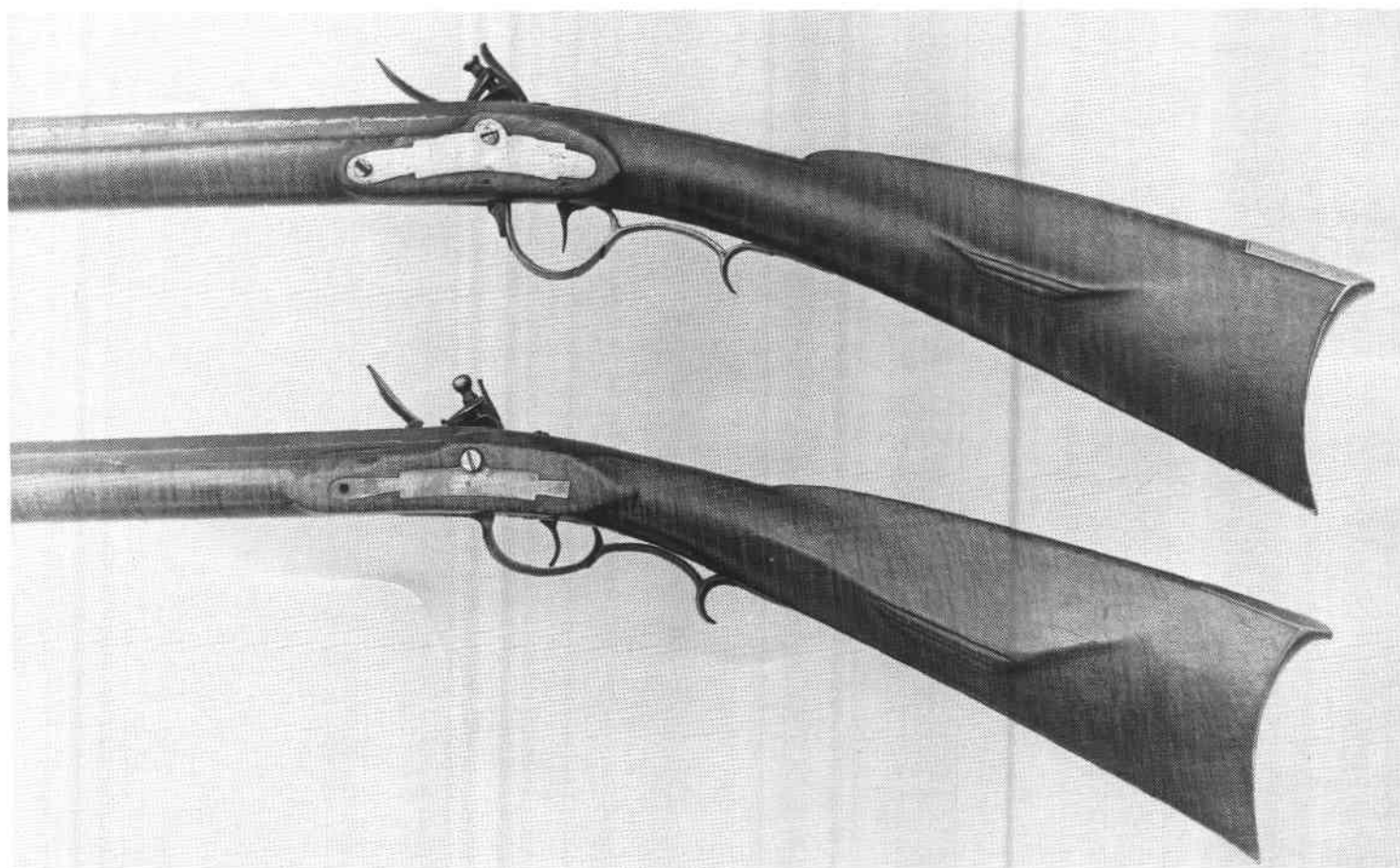
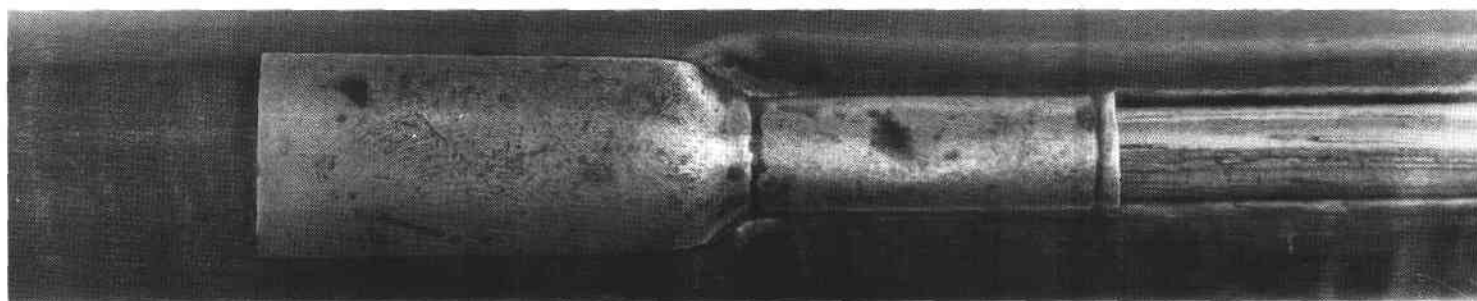
## THE HESS FAMILY

There is yet another local gunsmithing family which can proudly take its place alongside the Molls of Allentown and the Henrys of Nazareth. John Frederick Hess arrived in Philadelphia on September 17, 1753. He migrated to Lynn Township, then a part of Northhampton County and now in Lehigh County. He was a gunsmith by trade. John Hess married Anna Margaret Billman and together they had six children: David (1757); Catherine (1759-1837); Susanna (1760); Christina (1761); Elizabeth (1763) and Phillip (1766).

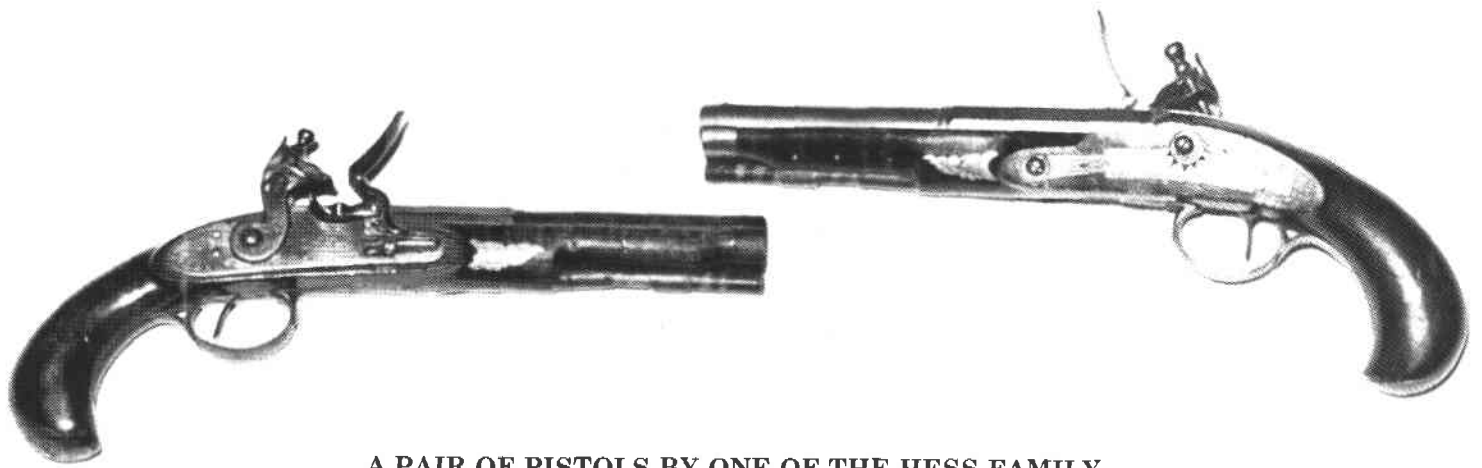
Philip Hess, a gunsmith, had a son, Jonas, and a

son, Philip Jr., who were both gunsmiths. Jonas Hess' sons (Thomas, David, Jonas Jr., Adam, and Joseph) were all gunsmiths. Philip Jr. was the operator of a water-power rifle factory which he erected at the foot of the Blue Mountains in 1832.

The Hess Gun Factory was located one mile west of the Old Lehigh Furnace in Heidelberg Township. This factory was enlarged and improved until it reached the size of 95 feet long by 35 feet wide and employed more than twenty men. The gun factory operated until 1872, when it was finally sold. Another name can be added, viz., a J. Everett, who is listed in the 1850 census as living on the property of David Hess.



**RIFLES AND ENTRANCE FERRULE BY THOMAS HESS**



**A PAIR OF PISTOLS BY ONE OF THE HESS FAMILY**

**THE NEIHARDS\***

In the late 1730s, three brothers, Frederick (1699-1765), Michael (1713-1793) and George Newhard, emigrated to America on the ship St. Andrew. This ship sailed from Rotterdam and arrived at Philadelphia on September 26, 1737. In the following year the three brothers settled on the frontier of Bucks County in present Whitehall Township of Lehigh County.

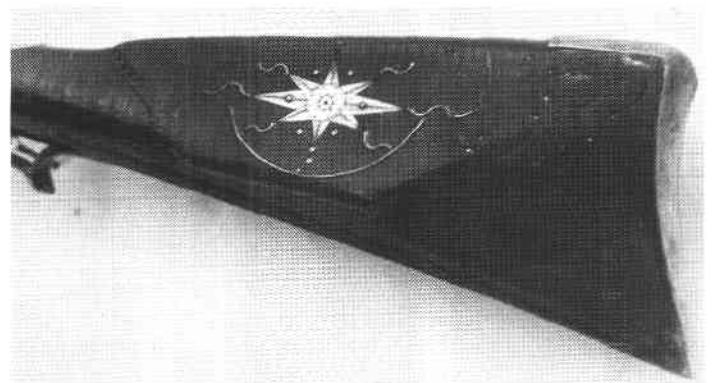
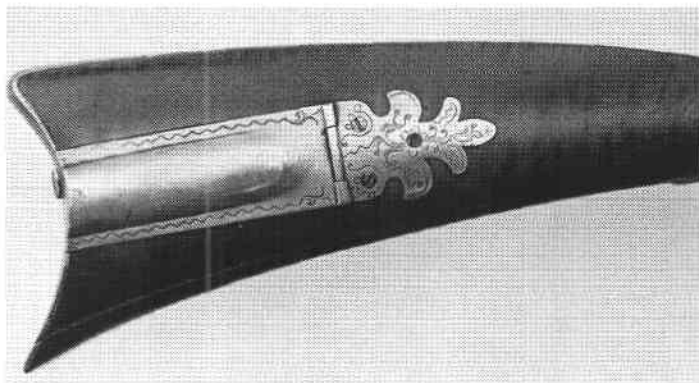
By 1762, the eldest of these brothers, Frederick, was one of the principal citizens of Whitehall Township. His granddaughter, Elizabeth Newhard, was born August 27, 1771, and married John Moll, gunsmith of Allentown.

Michael Newhard was born February 9, 1713, and died in Whitehall Township on March 10, 1793. He owned a tract of 200 acres along the Lehigh River, near what is now Laurys in North Whitehall

\*Neihardt, Neihard, Neyhard, Newhardt, Newhard, and other variants.

Township. Michael had many children, one of whom was George Jacob (1752-1835). George Jacob Newhard's daughter, Mary Barbara, born May 16, 1786, was married to Jacob Kuntz, who later became a famous gunsmith. Peter Newhard, second son of Michael, was born on November 15, 1743, and died on September 16, 1813. Peter was a gunsmith and farmer during the revolution. His services as a gunsmith were in great demand, as his workmanship was then, and must still be, considered among the finest in this area during this period. He also served as a private at the Battle of Brandywine under Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Balliet.

The estate inventory for Peter Newhard shows that he died in 1813. Appraisers for the inventory were Frederick Newhard and Peter Straup. The following names were mentioned in this inventory under "notes outstanding:" Peter Kuntz, David Kuntz and John Rupp, all Lehigh County gunsmiths.

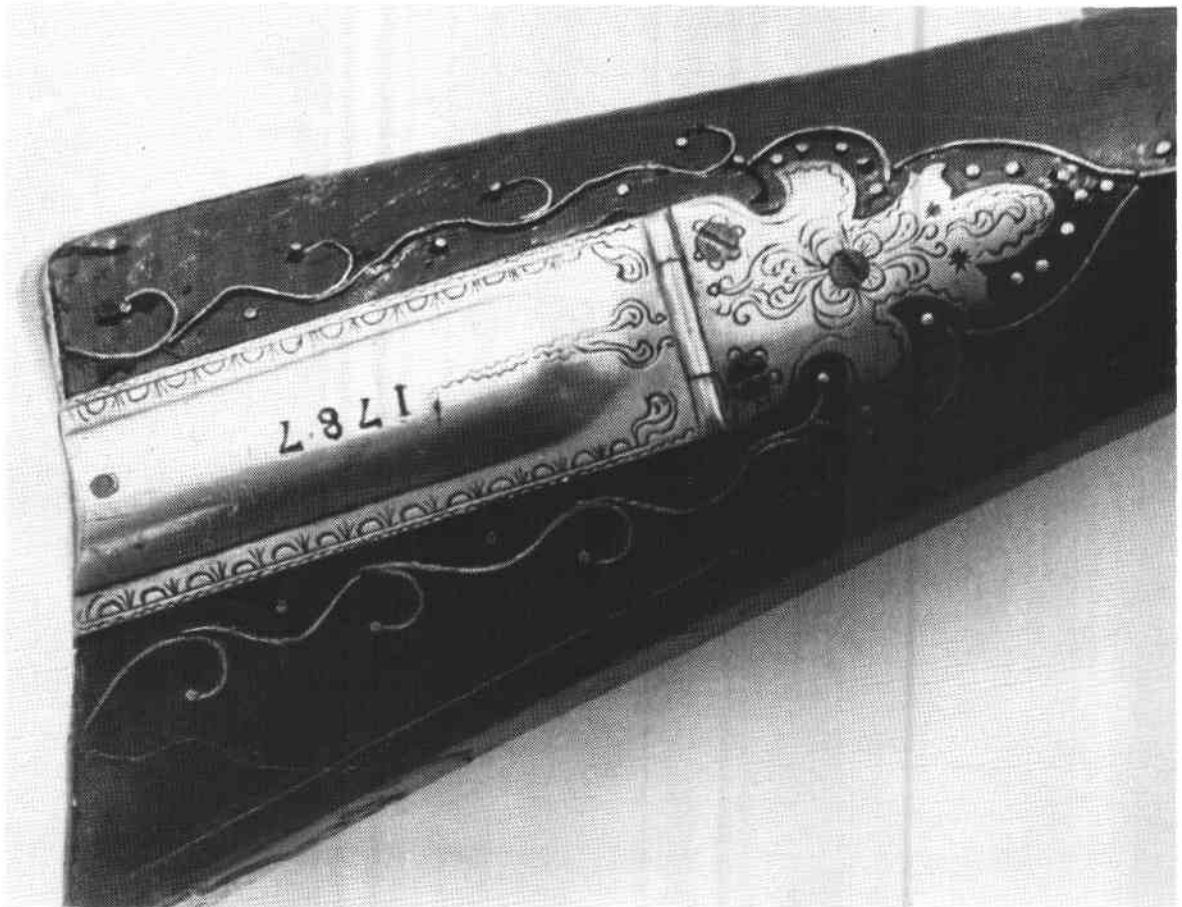


**BUTTSTOCKS BY PETER NEIHARD**





**A RIFLE BY PETER NEIHARD**



**PATCHBOX ORNAMENTATION BY PETER NEIHARD**



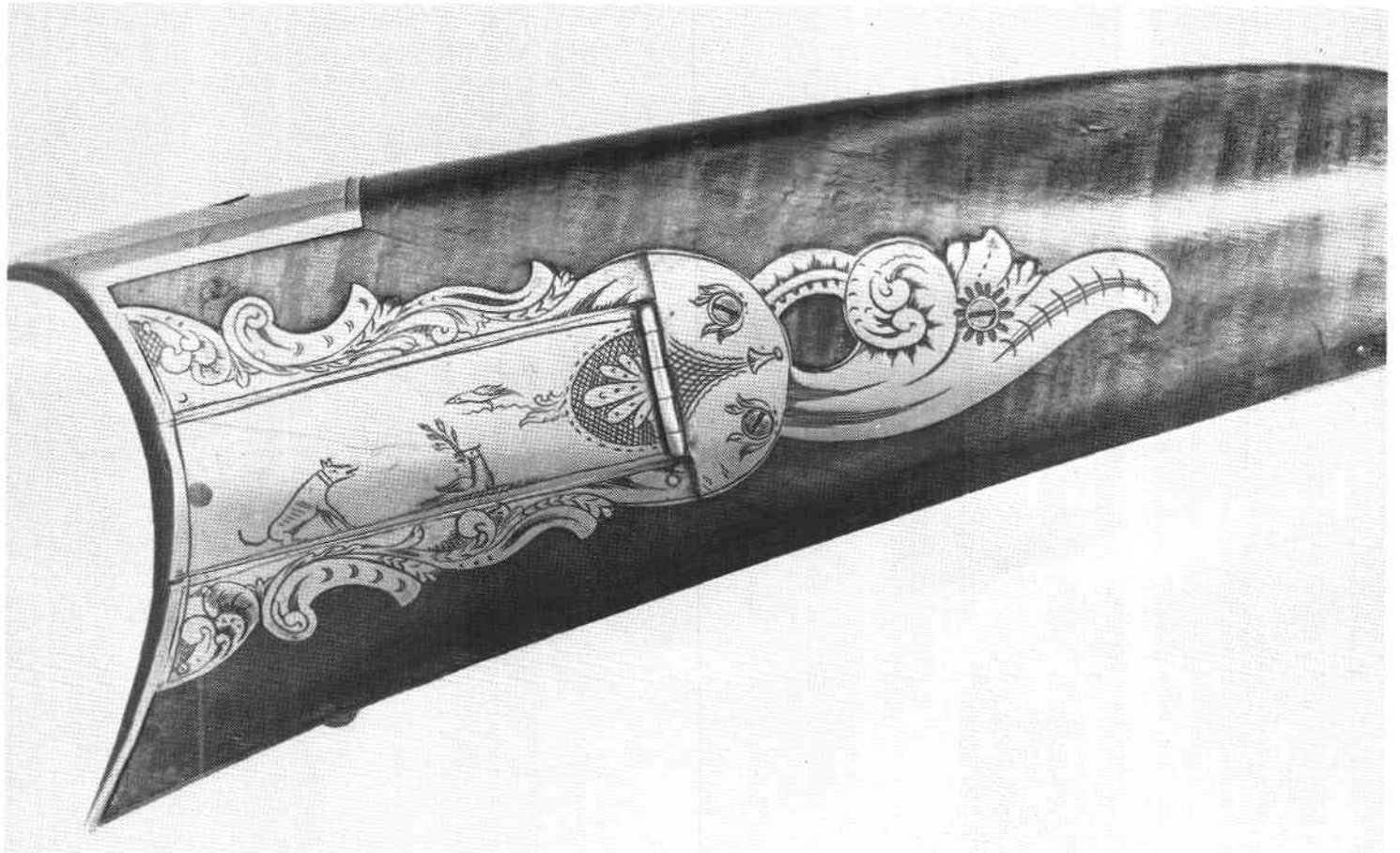
## THE KUNTZ FAMILY

Jacob Kuntz and Peter Kuntz were brothers. Both were trained in Allentown and both were taxed as gunsmiths in Whitehall Township, Lehigh County, Pennsylvania. Jacob Kuntz was born on September 6, 1780, and died on August 6, 1876. Peter Kuntz was born in 1791 and died in 1862. Jacob Kuntz is listed in the tax records of Northampton County as a gunsmith in Whitehall Township in 1807. Ten years later, in 1817, Peter Newhard appears in the tax list as a gunsmith.

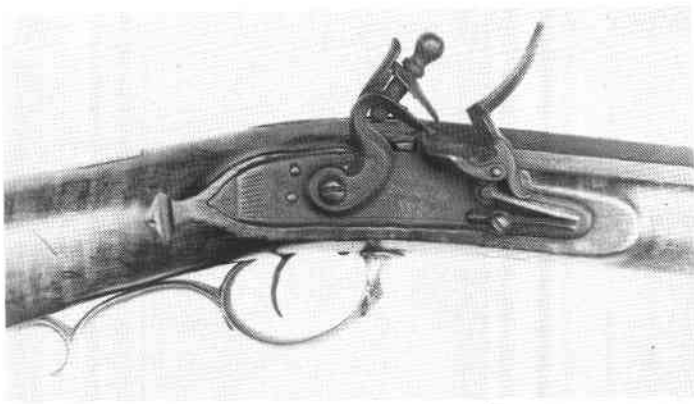
In 1810, Jacob moved to Philadelphia where, after a brief apprenticeship of six months, he began

his gunsmithing career. In 1812 he married Barbara Newhard, niece of Peter Newhard, and in 1813 he advertised that he was open for business as a gunsmith. Jacob was an excellent craftsman. He made a pair of sterling-fitted pistols used by Commodore Barron and Commodore Decatur in their famous duel in 1820. In 1833 the Franklin Institute of Philadelphia awarded him a silver medal for his skill and ingenuity. His products were sought after by wealthy sportsmen of the period. Jacob is buried in the Union Cemetery in Allentown.

Peter Kuntz, who also made high quality rifles and pistols, died in Whitehall Township on October 6, 1862, and was buried in the Union Cemetery.



PATCHBOX ORNAMENTATION BY PETER KUNZ



LOCK AND STOCK BY PETER KUNZ

### THE RUPPS

One more family whose members made their mark in the history of gunsmithing in this area was the Rupp family. Adam Herman Rupp, son of the early settler, George Rupp, was born on November 7, 1756, and died on August 30, 1831. He was one of the area's earliest gunsmiths, having spent his youth on his father's farm in Upper Macungie Township. Adam was enlisted in the Pennsylvania line of militia. He was a private for three years and served in the battles of Paoli, Germantown, Brandywine and Yorktown.

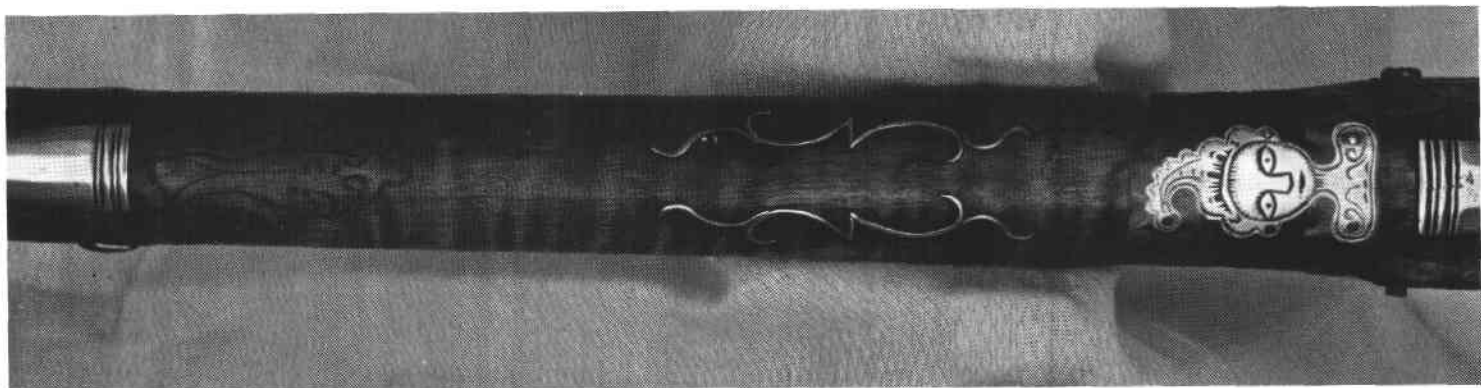
Adam Herman Rupp pursued the art of gunsmithing after his army years. Examples of his work have been dated as early as 1793. He is listed in Macungie Township's tax records as a blacksmith from 1784. His brother, John Rupp, was also listed as a blacksmith. It was not uncommon for gunsmiths to have been listed in tax records as blacksmiths. In 1807, A. Herman Rupp became the tax assessor for Macungie Township, and in that year he listed himself as a gunsmith.

A. Herman Rupp's existing guns are beautifully made, graceful and well-balanced. He died in 1831, a respected citizen, businessman, landowner and gunsmith.

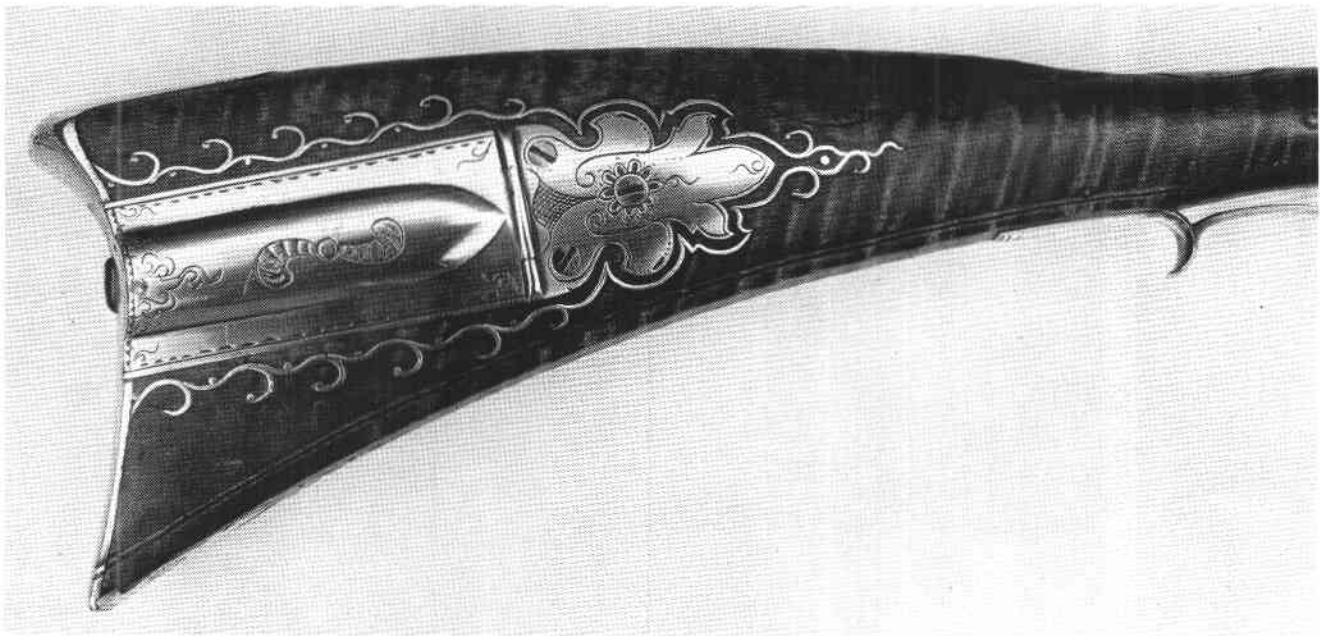
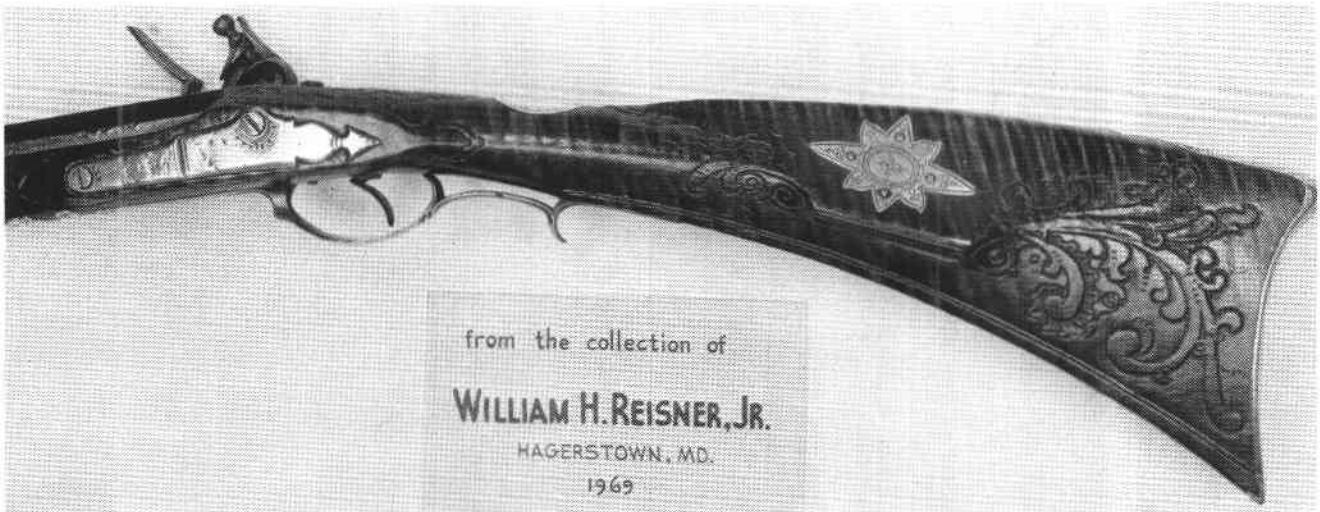
A. Herman Rupp had a younger brother, John, who was listed in the tax records from 1789 on as a "smid." This John Rupp, who may also have been a gunsmith, died in 1836.

Andrew Rupp, another brother of A. Herman Rupp, had a son, John, who was born in 1786 and died in 1848. This John Rupp lived in Weisenberg Township and ran his gunsmith shop there. He made guns from 1812-1848, a period of thirty-six years. He paid taxes in Weisenberg Township, Lehigh County, as a gunsmith up until his death. His guns are similar in many ways to those made by his uncle, Adam Herman Rupp.

There are a great many other local gunsmiths who have been documented but whose backgrounds have yet to be researched. Collectors and researchers eagerly await additional material concerning these local artisans.



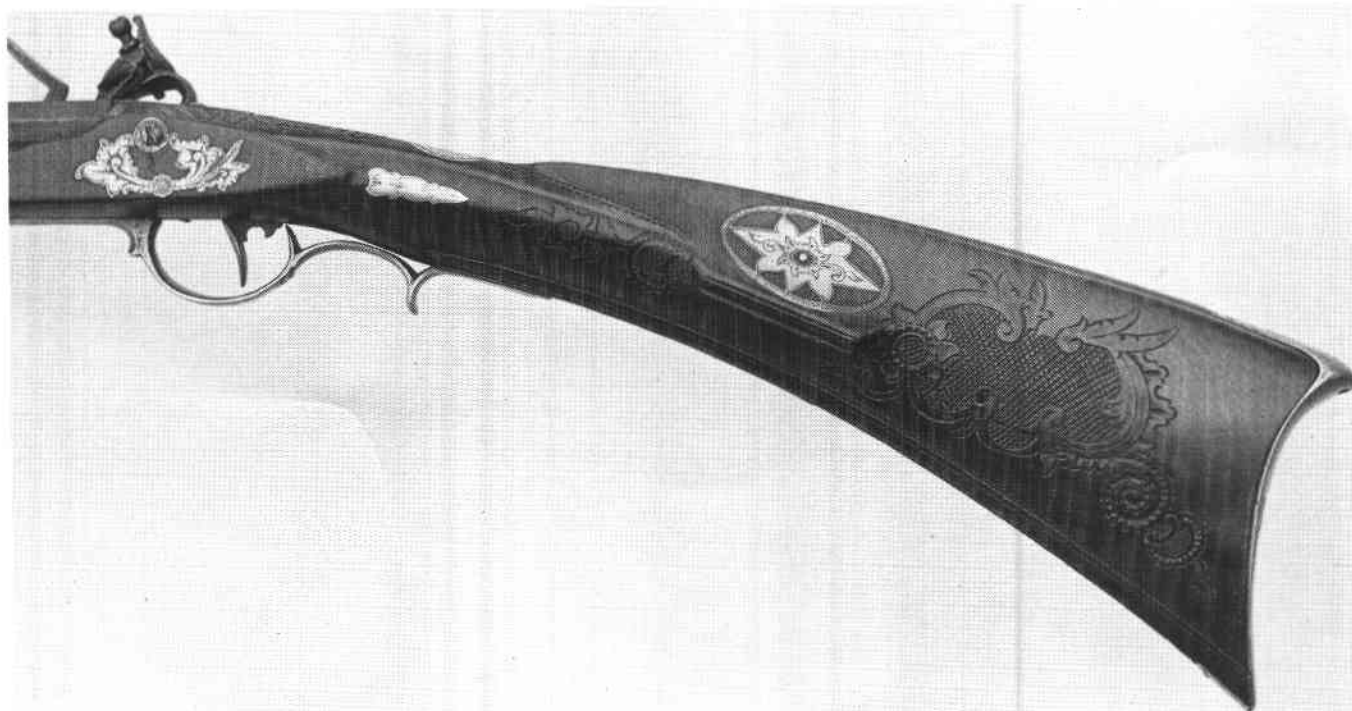
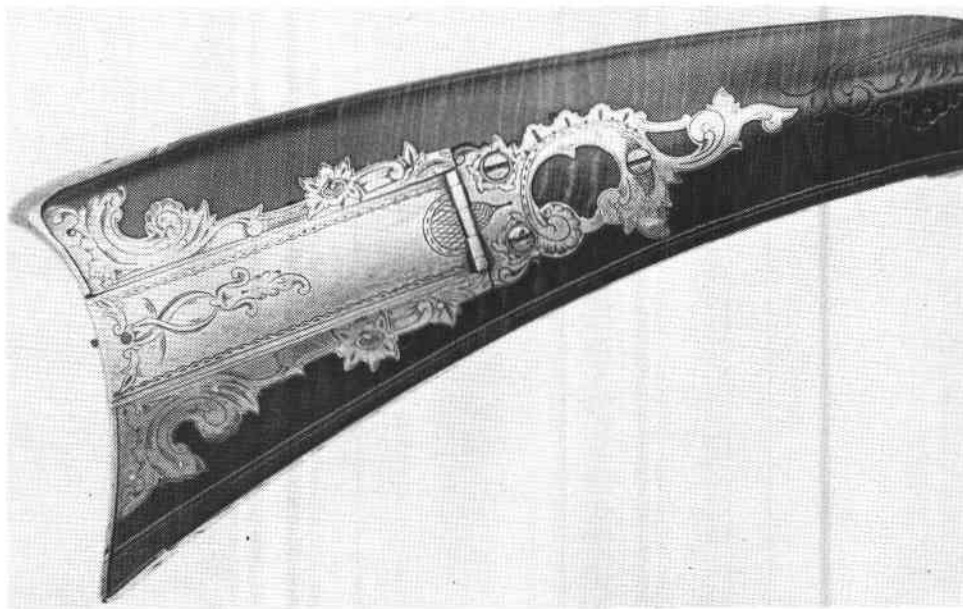
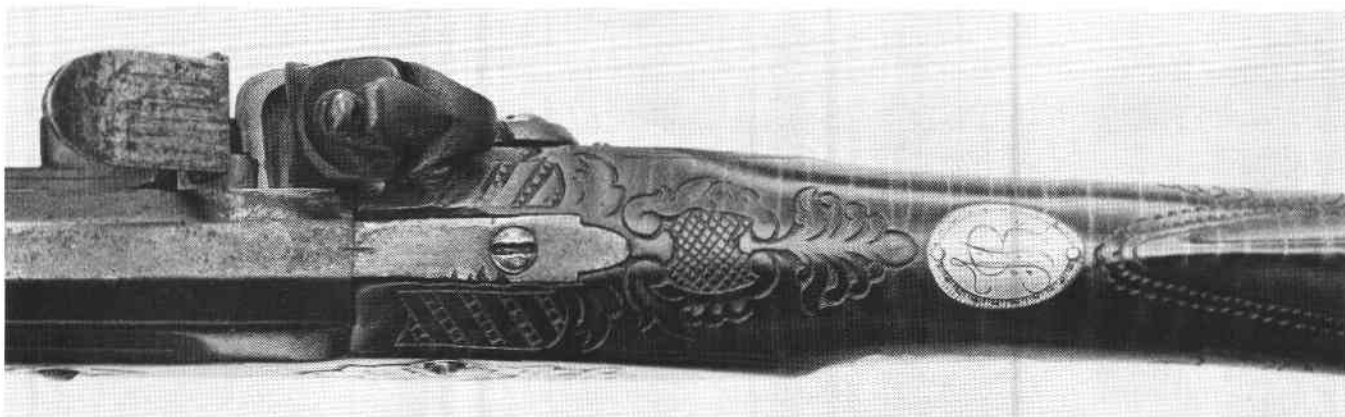
FORESTOCK ORNAMENTATION BY HERMAN RUPP



**MORE OF THE RIFLE BY HERMAN RUPP**



**A RIFLE BY JOHN RUPP**



MORE VIEWS OF THE JOHN RUPP RIFLE.