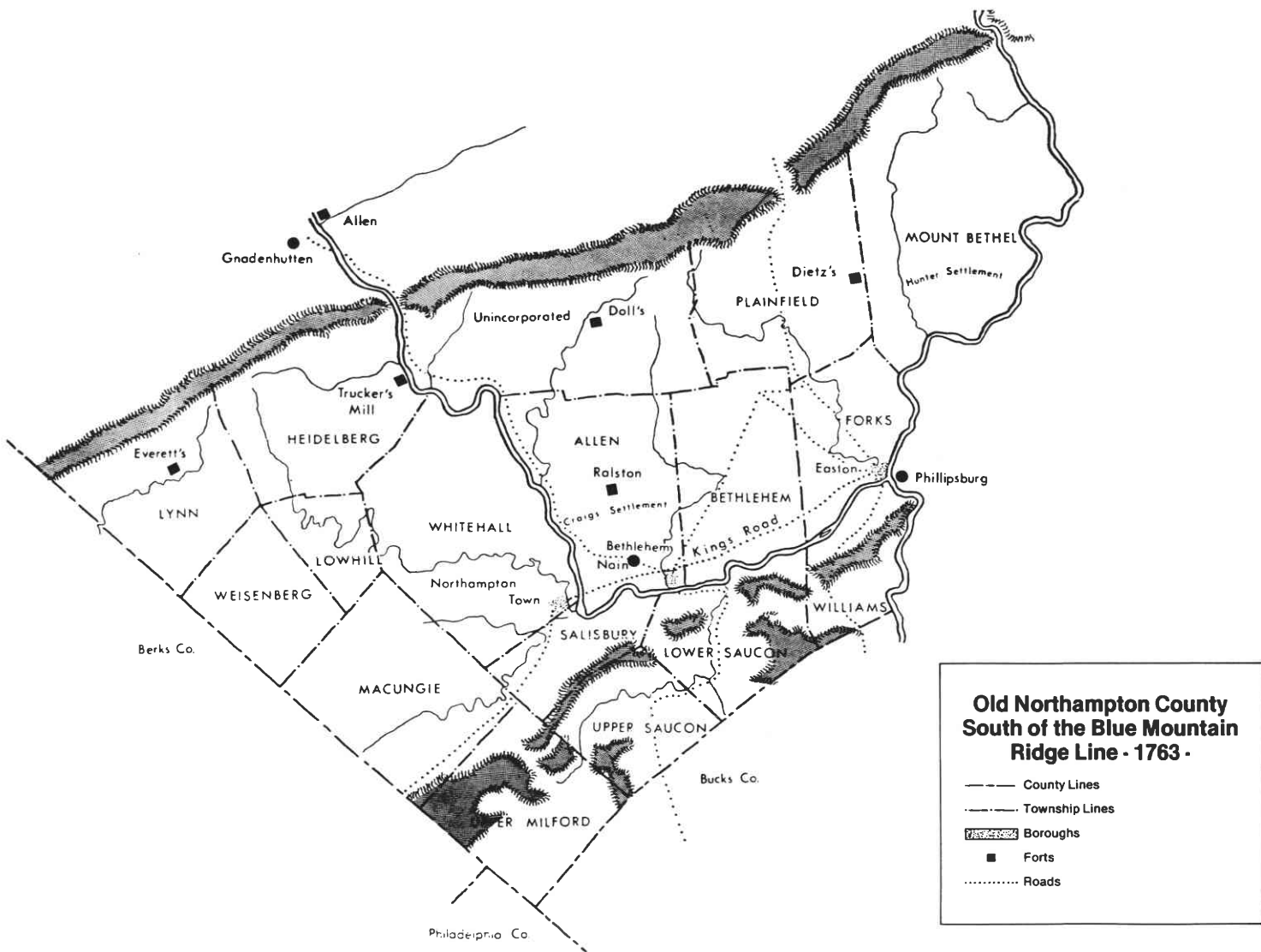


The Northampton County area in relation to the rest of Pennsylvania.



The Northampton County, Pennsylvania, School of Gunsmithing

Ronald G. Gabel

This is the third talk I have had the privilege of delivering before this society, each of which concerned Kentucky Rifles manufactured in the Eastern part of Pennsylvania in and around the town of Allentown. My first talk (ASAC *Bulletin* #35) was presented at the 1976 meeting of our Society in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. That talk, although rather short, was the very important foundation on which this talk is based. In that presentation, entitled "A Closer Look at Lehigh County Kentuckies," I explored the characteristics, unique to the area, which will nearly always identify a rifle manufactured in the Lehigh County, Pennsylvania area.

Identifying Characteristics of Area Rifles

It is important to recognize these characteristics and what makes them unique because (1) they will identify unsigned rifles as having been manufactured within the area, and (2) they will promote the concept that each school of gunsmithing has its very own unique set of characteristics. Learn to identify gunsmithing schools by the characteristics unique to each school, and you are well on the way to understanding the manner by which unsigned rifles can accurately be attributed to specific schools of gunsmithing, counties or even individual gunsmiths.

Within the Northampton County School of gunsmithing, I am aware of eight characteristics which may be considered "unique" to the area: the classic Roman-nose stock profile, the egg-shaped wrist, the V-shaped forestock, the Indian head design, the arrowhead shape or point used extensively in hardware, broad triggerguards with a brass stud incorporated into the bow just forward of the trigger, the open-ended nose cap contoured to follow the upper curve of the ramrod, and the tapered and inlet buttplate tang. Each of these characteristics was discussed in some detail in my first talk.

My second presentation (ASAC *Bulletin* #47) given at the 1982 Society meeting, again at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, went into considerable detail on the genealogical background of each of the area's six major gunsmithing families: the Henrys, the Molls, the Neihards, the Rupp, Kutz and Hess families. Now I would like to expand on these first two talks in an effort to more closely define the Northampton County School of Gunsmithing, consisting of firearms manufactured in what are today Northampton, Lehigh, Carbon and Monroe Counties; to take our first look at the carving and engraving common to the area; and to illustrate how, upon close examination of a rifle's hardware, carving and profile, the section of the school in which an unsigned rifle was manufactured can often be pinpointed.

Identification of the School

Rifles manufactured in the area under discussion have been identified over the years as *Eastern Pennsylvania* rifles, *Lehigh County* rifles, *Allentown* guns, *Bethlehem* school, and



Lehigh Valley rifles, but how should we properly refer to them? A close study of rifles which display one or more of the unique characteristics earlier discussed presents an interesting fact: the use of these characteristics was exclusive to the area geographically identified prior to 1812 as Northampton County. Certainly Northampton County was located in *Eastern Pennsylvania* which included *Lehigh County*, separated from Northampton County in 1815, Monroe County, formed out of Northampton County in 1835 and Carbon County, separated from Northampton in 1843. It included the large towns of *Allentown* and *Bethlehem* and made up the greater part of the *Lehigh Valley* which extends into Berks County and the Kutztown gunsmithing schools.

But the area which, in the late 18th century, was known as Northampton County, Pennsylvania, is the area that most closely encompasses the exclusive use of the previously discussed characteristics. We are therefore discussing the Northampton County School of Gunsmithing.

Breakup of School Into Sub-Sections

To aid in pinpointing the precise section of the school in which particular unsigned rifles may have been manufactured, let us break old Northampton County up into four sub-sections: the Southwestern section, the Northwestern section, the Middle or Central section, and the Eastern section. From this talk and from our previous talks you are all familiar with the area's unique characteristics, so let's look first at the gunsmiths who worked in the Central section of the school where these characteristics originated and where they were used most extensively. The Central section consists of Whitehall, Macungie, Upper Milford, Upper Saucon, Lower Saucon, Salisbury, Allen and Bethlehem townships. The Moll, Neihard, Kuntz, Rupp and Henry families all worked within the confines of this Central section of the Northampton County school. Obviously, this is the area in which the majority of the schools' early gunsmithing activity took place. The

genealogy of each of these families were discussed in detail in my second presentation (ASAC *Bulletin* #47).

The Central Section: Early Gunsmithing Activity

The Henry family worked in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, close to the Moravian settlement of Christian Springs, north of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. It was in Christian Springs that the Northampton school of gunsmithing was born circa 1762. Andreas Albright was the first recorded master gunsmith of Christian Springs from 1750 to 1766, when he was replaced by Christian Oerter. Albright continued the manufacture of guns in Lititz near Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Early area gunsmiths who are said to have been trained or employed at Christian Springs were William Henry, Jr., Henry Antes, and Abraham Henry. Living within commuting distance and very possibly trained at Christian Springs were Peter Neihard, born in 1743; Johannes Moll, born in 1747; Andrew Herman Rupp, born in 1756 and the earlier John Rupp, born in 1762.

A look at remaining examples of the works of each of these gunsmiths, all located in the Central section of the school, shows a strong preference toward the use of the unique characteristics that have come to identify this school of gunsmithing.

A look at the earliest known examples of signed and dated rifles from the Northampton County school will verify the existence of the area characteristics at the birth of the school.

Early Signed and Dated Rifles

The earliest dated rifle, a signed Christian Oerter dated 1774, incorporates the sheath-style buttplate. A second early rifle, another signed Christian Oerter dated 1775, boasts an arrowback sideplate and the brass triggerguard stud. An interesting feature of this Oerter rifle is the wire inlay design on the cheek side of the butt which later evolves into a traditional style of relief and raised carving used in the school.

Area carving was accomplished in the raised, relief and incised methods within this school. For purpose of this talk I will define raised carving as that carving which protrudes above the surface of the gunstock; relief carving as that which feels like raised carving to the touch and has the appearance of raised carving, but in fact is flush with or beneath the actual surface contour of the gunstock; and incised carving as line carvings simply cut directly into the stock.

The design of carving typical to early rifles from this school is best described as a C-scroll coming off the cheekpiece, open end down, extending to the toe of the butt with a modified acanthus leaf turning upward toward the tang of the buttplate.

Very little carving of the raised type was used in the Northampton County school, however, many outstanding examples of relief and incised carving have survived.

A signed Peter Neihard rifle dated 1787 on its patchbox lid displays the typical two-piece patchbox with the fleur-de-lis finial, the sheath-type buttplate and carving in a pattern similar to the wire inlay on the earlier Oerter rifle, and the Northampton County Indian.

A signed Herman Rupp rifle dated 1793 again has the typical patchbox with the fleur-de-lis finial, the double curve on the underside of the stock, the arrowback sideplate, the sheath-style buttplate, and the Northampton County Indian.

Each of the early rifles was made by a gunsmith trained at Christian Springs and, as they evolved, featured an increasing number of the area's unique characteristics.

Evolution of the School

After 1800, in all schools of Kentucky rifle gunsmithing, the identification of rifles only by unique area characteristics becomes more difficult. As gunsmiths relocated and incorporated styles from a variety of schools along with their own personal modifications, the style of rifles manufactured in the various schools also changed and evolved.

The student of the Kentucky rifle is fortunate, however, that even as style changed, the old classic characteristics were not forgotten and tended to surface in each gunsmith's work even into the late 1830s. The fact that these characteristics did survive helps us to pinpoint and identify gunsmiths located in the various sections of the school who worked during the later period from 1800 through 1835.

The Southwestern Section

The Southwestern section of the school was the second to evolve. The period of the early 19th century showed a great deal of gunsmithing activity in this section of the school, which consists of the Macungie and Weisenberg townships. Rifles from this section used the two-piece patchbox with the fleur-de-lis finial almost exclusively well into the later period. An example of one of the few signed pieces from this section is the work of gunsmith Stoeffel Long. Sideplates and toeplates from this section have evolved from the arrowback style into simply a point. The oval wrist cross-section continued into the later period, and the drop in the curve in the underside of the stock becomes more severe. Carving tends to become more stylized, picking up an interesting feature common to this section of the school: the use of small dotted half-circle characters within the design of the carving.

Unsigned rifles from this section are easily identified by these features and by the fact that they begin to pick up folk art designs more common to the Kutztown school of gunsmithing.

Macungie gunsmith Henry Hunsicker, who normally signed his barrels H.H., is an example of one gunsmith whose work ran contrary to the section's style. His rifles follow the traditional stock profile and use the arrowback sideplate, but his four-piece patchbox is foreign to the school, and his fine incised carving is more like that found in the Bucks County school of gunsmithing.

The Northwestern Section

Let's take a look at the Northwestern section of the school, the last section to evolve, before returning to look at examples of later period rifles from the Central section. The Northwestern section includes the townships of Lynn and Heidelberg. This section seems to have housed only the Hess family and gunsmiths who worked in conjunction with the Hess gun factory erected in 1832. This factory employed more than twenty men until 1872 when it was sold. The genealogy of the Hess family of gunsmiths was covered in detail in my second talk (ASAC *Bulletin* #47).

Hess rifles are most often unsigned and are the most difficult to identify, from their appearance, as having been

manufactured in the Northampton County school. Their hardware and stock profile tend to be foreign to the school. Their patchbox may be two or four-piece, showing a preference for a simple finial cut into an oval shape. I have never seen a Hess rifle using the Northampton County Indian.

Hess rifles do, however, tend to follow each other very closely in their own individual style, but it is only after examining a great number of them that you will discover the key to their place of origin: infrequently they are found with our school's arrowback toeplates or arrowback patchbox finial. The presence of these few local characteristics identified them as rifles manufactured in the Northampton County school even before the first signed Hess rifle surfaced. When the first signed Hess did turn up, the family was quickly located in tax lists and the mystery of their exact location was solved.

The Central Section: Late Gunsmithing Activity

Now, on our way east across the school, let's pause once more in the Central section where we started. This section, in which our school was born, evolved into one of the most unique, interesting and artistic sections of the school. Patchboxes quickly evolved to the four-piece style as shown by rifles signed by Tobias Grubb, the Molls, Peter Neihard, Jacob and Peter Kuntz, and the younger John Rupp. These ornate four-piece boxes often displayed high-quality engraving and pierced finials. Incised carved stocks featured a unique new carving style used by Jacob Kuntz and the younger John Rupp.

Looking briefly at each of the central section's major gunsmiths during the 1800-1835 period, we notice features which tend to identify one from the other. Just as each school has its own unique characteristics, so normally do each of the individual gunsmiths.

T. Grubb (1792-1872). The rifles of gunsmith Tobias Grubb, active in Allentown 1815-1830, evidence the school's traditional two-piece patchbox as well as the later four-piece box. Grubb triggerguards often end in a flared wide front tang. The most unusual feature of these rifles is an exaggerated molding around the lock and sideplate mortices. Several signed pieces have survived for study.

Moll family. Moll family gunsmiths, active in and around Allentown from 1764 through 1883, are probably the best documented of all of the school's gunsmiths: Moll gunsmiths nearly always signed their work. Since so many signed pieces exist, unsigned pieces are usually easy to recognize. The stock contour, sideplates, buttplates, nosecaps, triggerguards and patchboxes are usually typical of the school. The Molls many times used a thumbnail-style toeplate. Stocks often had a red violin finish, sometimes artificially striped.

John Rupp the elder (1762-1836). Characteristics common to rifles of John Rupp the elder, brother of Andrew Rupp, are unknown since only one signed example of his work is known to the author. The signed piece, however, is typical of the style of other early rifles of the school.

John Rupp the younger (1786-1848). The late-period rifles of this John Rupp, son of Andrew Rupp, use an incised carved design on the butt which consists of cross-hatched carving within an oval cartouche. John had a preference for carving a flower just to the rear of the cheekpiece and touching the car-

touch design. This John Rupp was active from 1812 through 1848.

Jacob Kuntz (1780-1876). Jacob Kuntz often signed his rifles. He produced guns in the Allentown area until after 1810, when he relocated in Philadelphia. Earlier Kuntz rifles displayed most of our school's characteristics. His work is best recognized by its very high quality of carving and engraving. Later pieces so closely resemble the work of the younger John Rupp that it is often impossible to tell one from the other. Kuntz rifles do not appear to have incorporated the flower to the rear of the cheekpiece common to Rupp's.

Peter Kuntz (1791-1862). Peter, younger brother of Jacob, was an interesting gunsmith. Active from 1817 through 1850, his later-period rifles were always well executed and contained some of the section's most unique inlays and engravings. Peter, who signed a number of his works, showed a preference for symbolism in his work.

Peter Neihard (1743-1813). Neihard rifles, typical of the school, often featured a long, low cheekpiece. His carving, also typical of the school, often included small figures resembling pairs of adjacent circles, one larger than the other. Neihard Indian faces are found recessed into the stock, a unique way of depicting the Indian head, the carving emanating from the Indian head often continuing down both sides of the triggerguard.

The Eastern Section

The Eastern section of the Northampton County school of gunsmithing consists of the early townships of Forks, Plainfield and Mount Bethel. Major gunsmiths active in this area were John Schneider, Jacob Deemer, Nicholas Hawk and the Young gunsmithing family of Easton, Pennsylvania.

Rifles of this section were generally manufactured during the later period, after 1800, and exhibited very few of the school's traditional characteristics.

Sideplates tended to end in a blunted point quickly evolving into a shape ending with a small circle not unlike that common to the Bucks County school of gunsmithing. Wrists became more high than wide. Brass wearplates, which sometimes extended along both sides of the triggerguard, were popular.

Nicholas Hawk, active in the 1820s, was a talented gunsmith who worked in Gilbert, Pennsylvania, in the extreme Northeastern area of the school, in what later became Monroe County. He normally signed his barrels and had a strong preference for over-and-under swivel rifles. His work was well executed and profusely engraved. Remaining examples are well documented in existing publications.

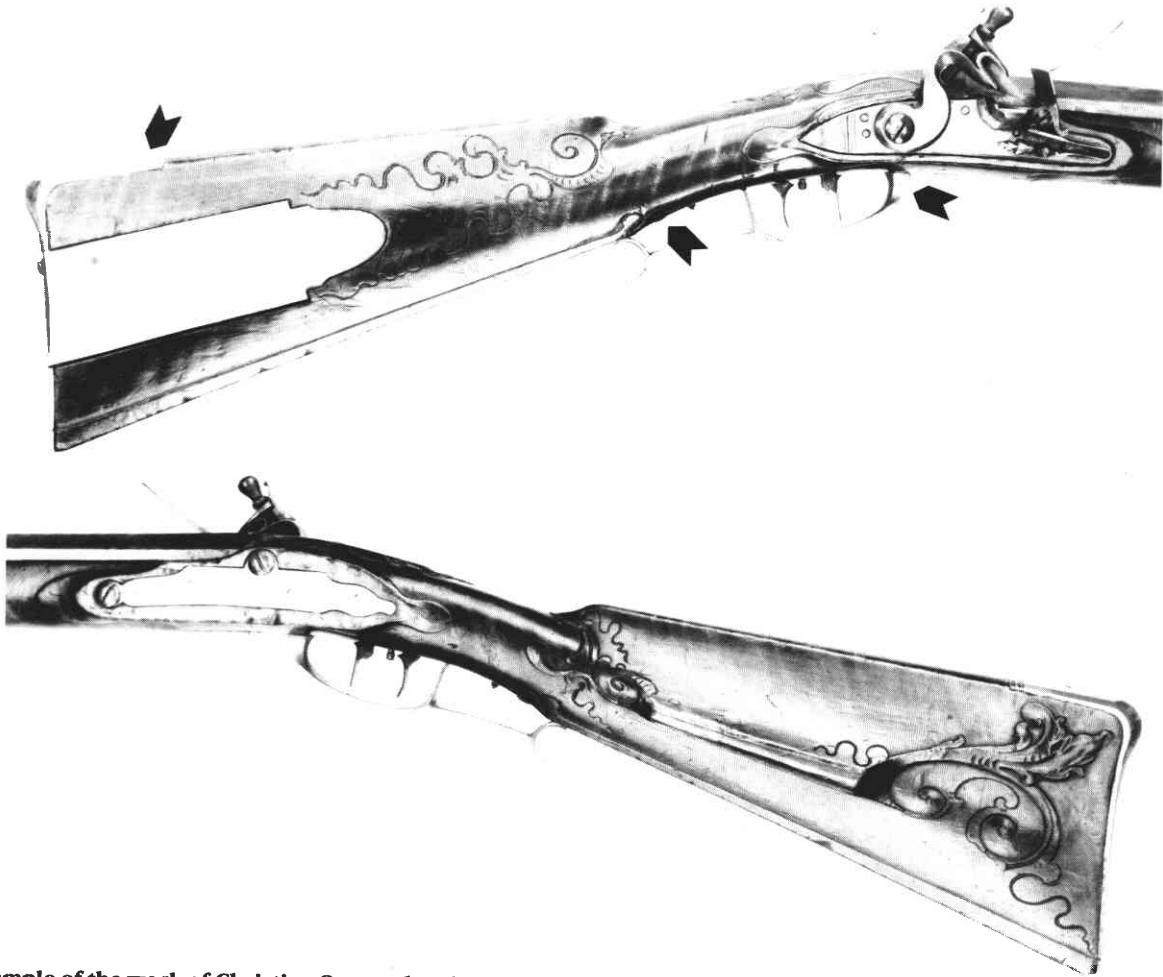
The rifles of Jacob Deemer often had a JD engraved in the thumb piece inlay. Their sideplates usually ended in a blunt point, and their stocks were slimmer and more streamlined. Patchboxes on Deemer rifles followed the style of Nicholas Hawk but never displayed the traditional fine Hawk engraving. Though often confused with Hawk rifles, close examination shows the JD rifles were plainer and of lower quality than those of Hawk.

Rifles of the Young family, who were located at the extreme eastern end of the school in Easton, Pennsylvania, are another example of gunsmiths whose work is difficult to iden-

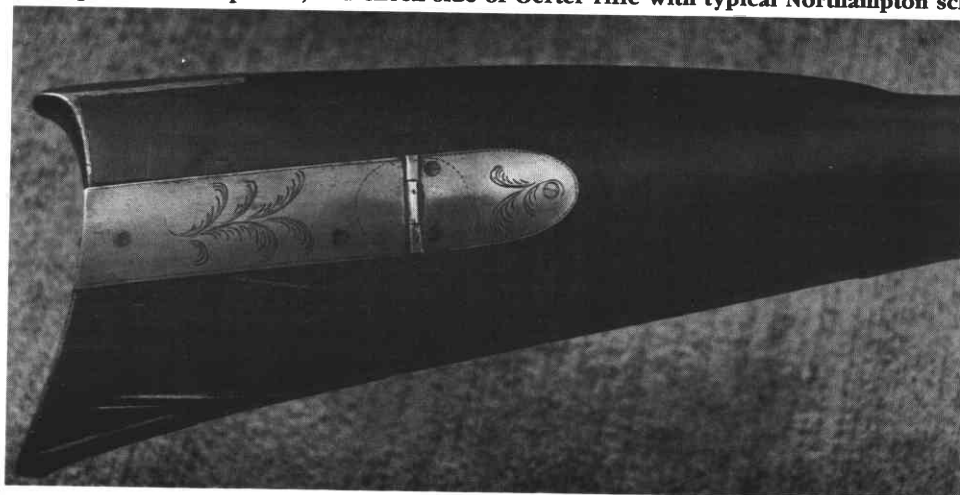
tify by their appearance as having been manufactured in the Northampton County school. John and Henry Young worked in the early period, while Peter was active in the later period. Again, as with the Hess family, few examples are found that display characteristics of the school. The Youngs did use the Northampton County Indian on some of their rifles and pistols. One remaining pistol in particular incorporates a number of Indians into its design. Young rifles often feature a full-panel brass sideplate, and their rear entrance furrels become quite ornate. Rifles of the Young family were often signed.

Conclusion

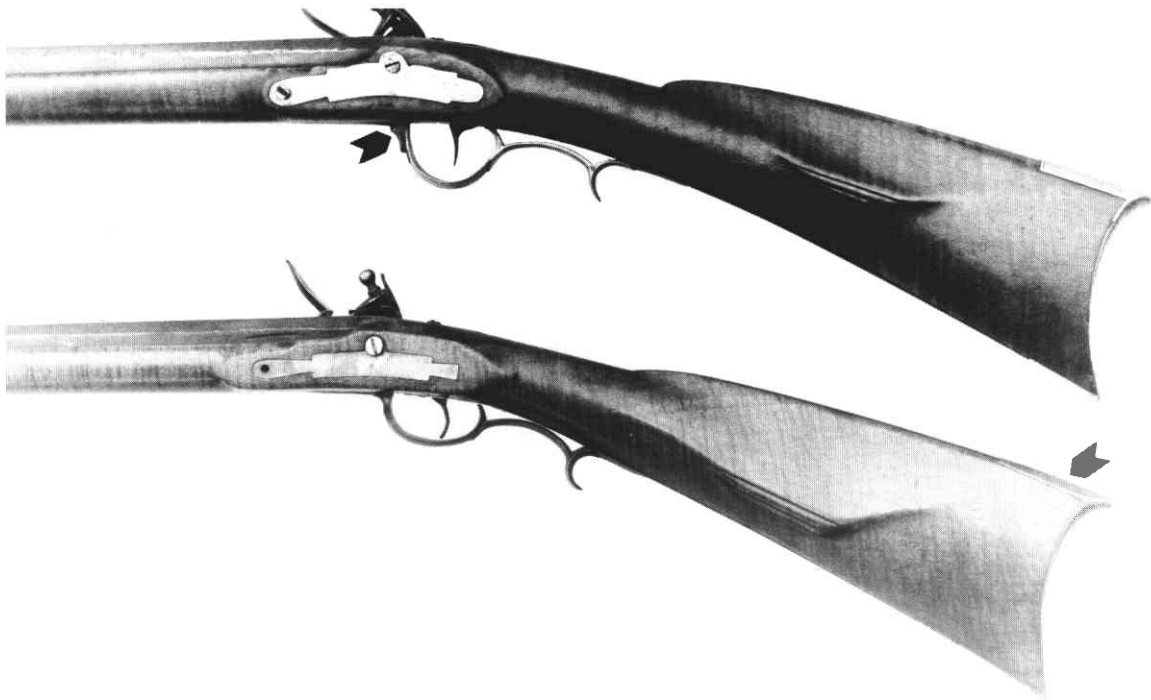
In closing I'd like to restate my objectives. I have endeavored to offer a close examination of the guns and gunsmiths of the Northampton County School of gunsmithing to demonstrate how unsigned Kentucky Rifles may often be accurately identified and/or attributed to particular gunsmiths or schools of gunsmithing, and to set the stage for close scrutiny of other Pennsylvania schools of gunsmithing in the future.



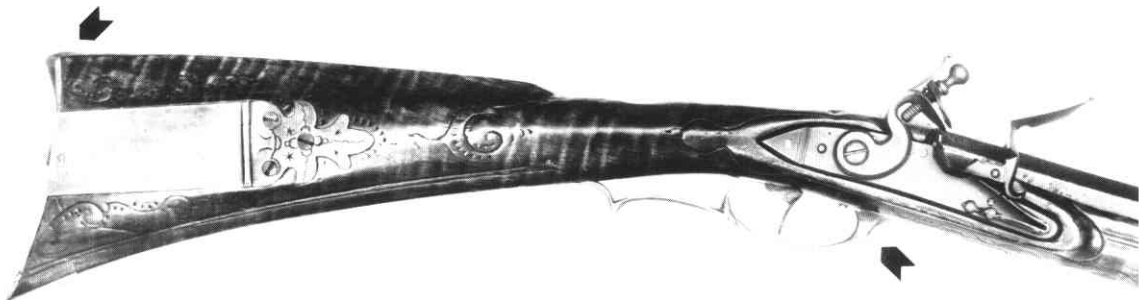
Early example of the work of Christian Oerter showing the early emergence of the sheath-style buttplate, studded triggerguard and the double-breaking lower stock profile, and cheek side of Oerter rifle with typical Northampton school carving.



Hess rifle with two-piece patchbox and typical Hess style finial.



A pair of Northwest section Thomas Hess rifles. The upper piece shows just a hint of the studded triggerguard, while the lower piece has the sheath-style buttplate.



Early Neihard rifle with two-piece fleur-de-lis patchbox, studded triggerguard and sheath-style buttplate.
Photo courtesy James Whisker

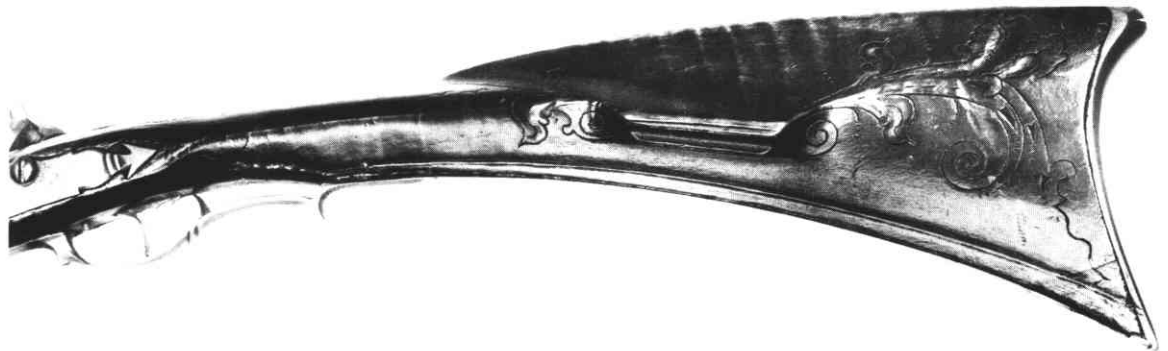


Check side of Neihard rifle showing typical Northampton School carving. Note the adjacent circles feature in the open end of the c-scroll which is common to Neihard rifles.
Photo courtesy James Whisker



A unique John Rupp (elder) rifle featuring a sheath-style buttplate, studded triggerguard, double-breaking lower stock profile and an unusual side opening patchbox.

Photo courtesy James Whisker



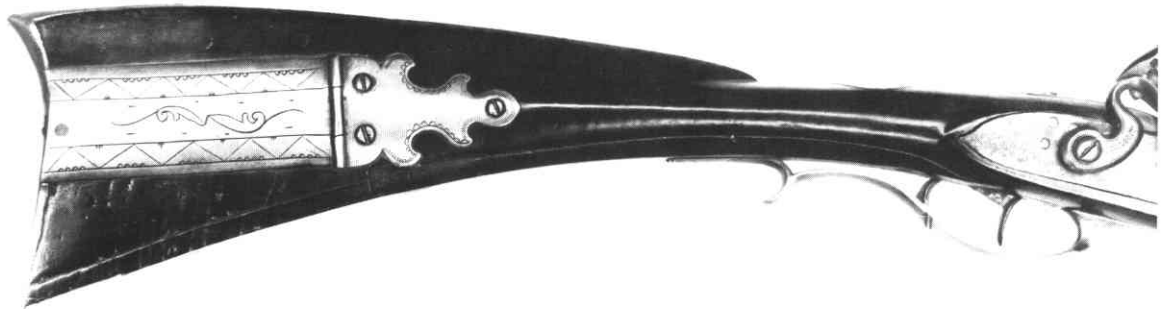
Check side of John Rupp (elder) with arrowback sideplate and typical carving of the school.

Photo courtesy James Whisker



Signed Stoeffel Long rifle typical of the Southwestern section of the school. Note the tell-tale pointed sideplate.

Photo courtesy James Whisker

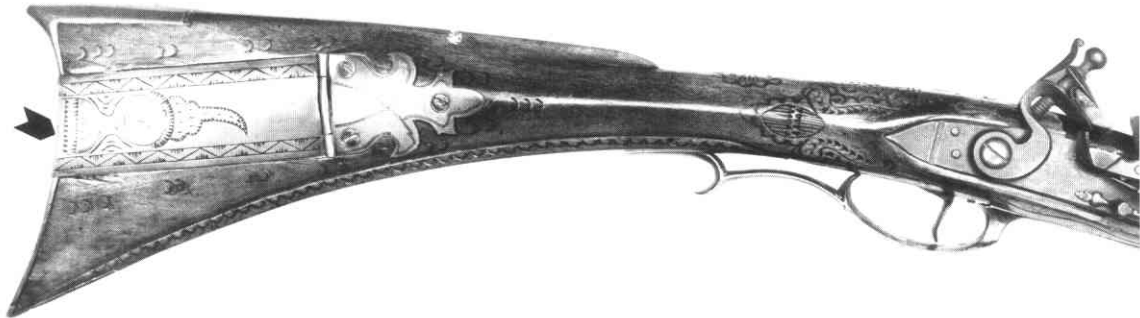


Stoeffel Long patchbox with two-piece fleur-de-lis finial and typical Long style engraving.

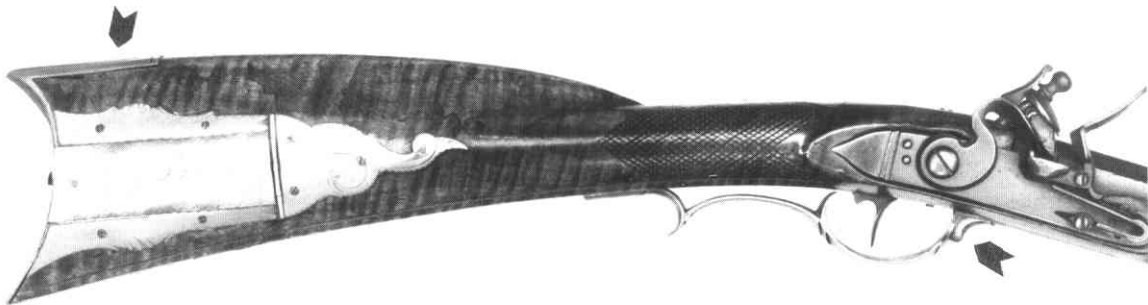
Photo courtesy James Whisker



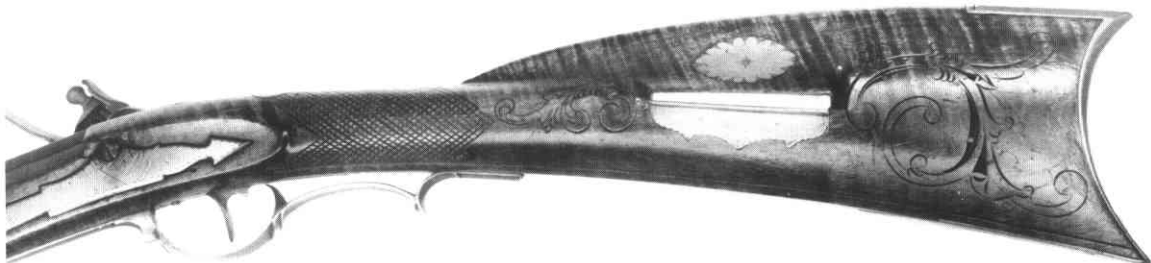
Unidentified Southwestern section rifle. Note pointed sideplate, extreme drop to lower stock contour, 1819 date on sideplate.
Photo courtesy James Whisker



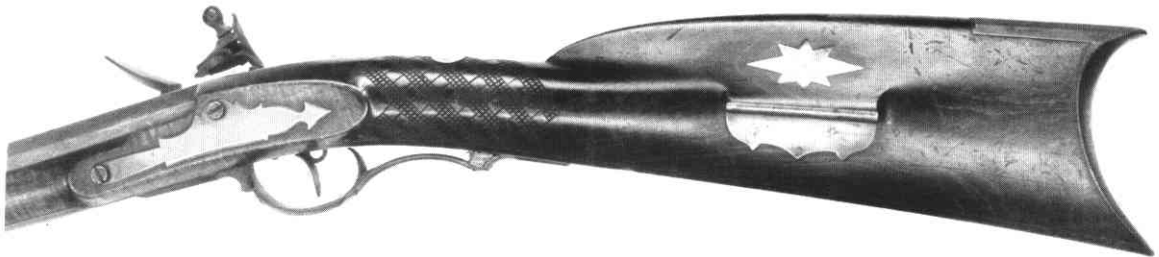
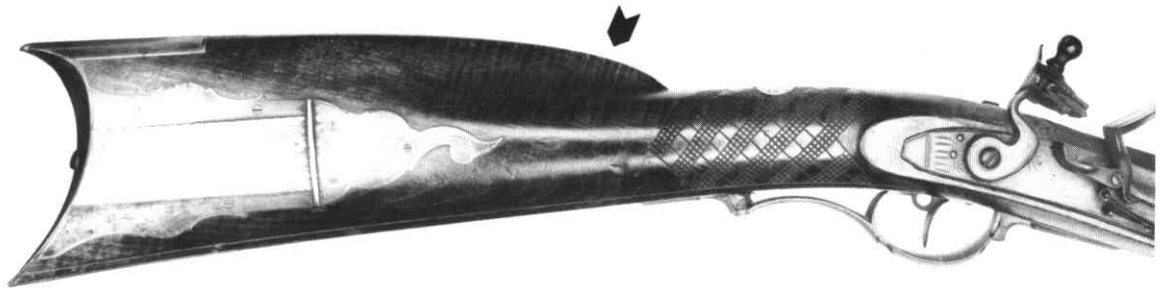
Lockplate side showing two-piece patchbox with fluer-de-lis finial and Northampton school Indian.
Photo courtesy James Whisker



Southwestern section signed Henry Hunsicker rifle with sheath-style buttplate, studded triggerguard and Hunsicker style four-piece patchbox.
Photo courtesy James Whisker



Opposite side of Hunsicker rifle with arrowback sideplate and Hunsickers own carving style.
Photo courtesy James Whisker



Another Henry Hunsicker rifle. Note how the comb curvature becomes more exaggerated in his later period rifles, and its check side.
 Photo courtesy James Whisker



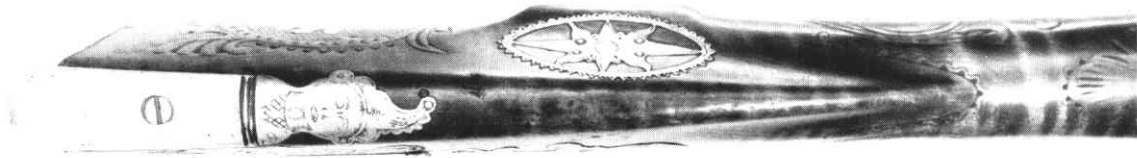
Signed John Rupp the younger Central section rifle featuring Kuntz style four-piece patchbox and typical Rupp forend inlays.



Signed John Rupp the younger Central section rifle with sheath-style buttplate, double-break in lower stock contour, studded triggerguard and late Rupp cartouche carving incorporating the flower design.



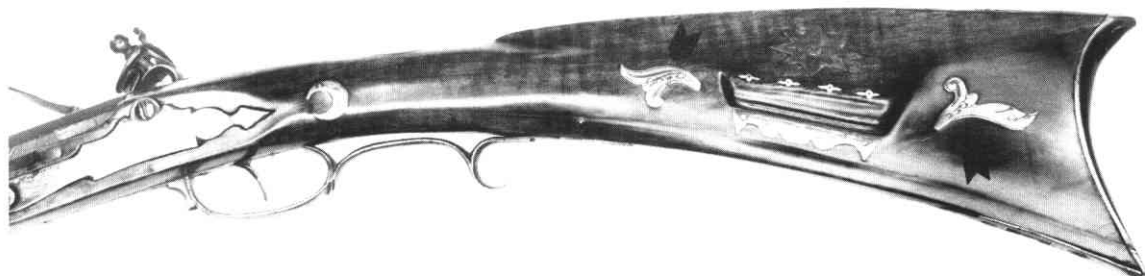
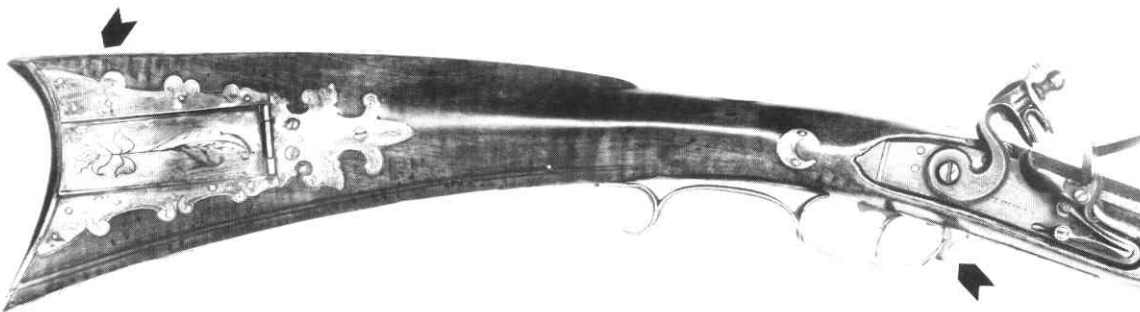
Patchbox of signed Jacob Kuntz Central section rifle with typical area two-piece fleur-de-lis finial.
Photo courtesy James Whisker



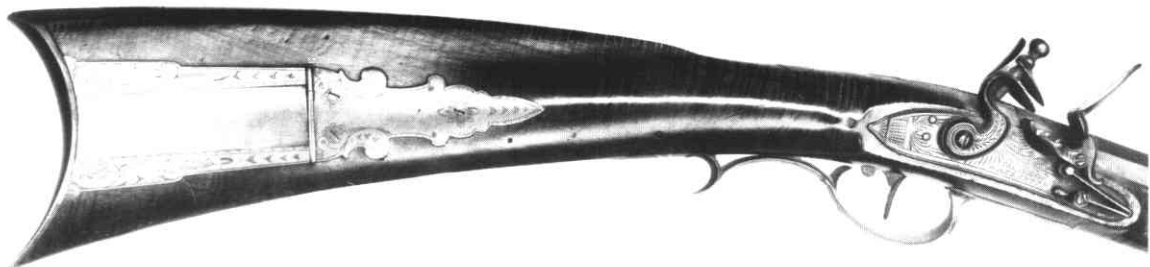
Northampton school Indian incorporated into buttplate tang on comb of Jacob Kuntz rifle.
Photo courtesy James Whisker



Jacob Kuntz rifle stock with sheath-style buttplate and later period carving without floral design.
Photo courtesy James Whisker

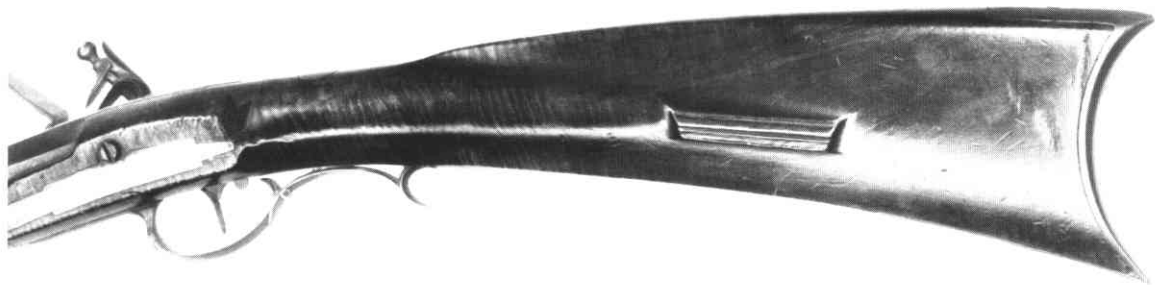


Peter Kuntz rifle, with sheath-style buttplate, studded triggerguard and four-piece patchbox with fleur-de-lis finial, arrowback sideplate, and unique Peter Kuntz inlays around cheekpiece. Photo courtesy James Whisker



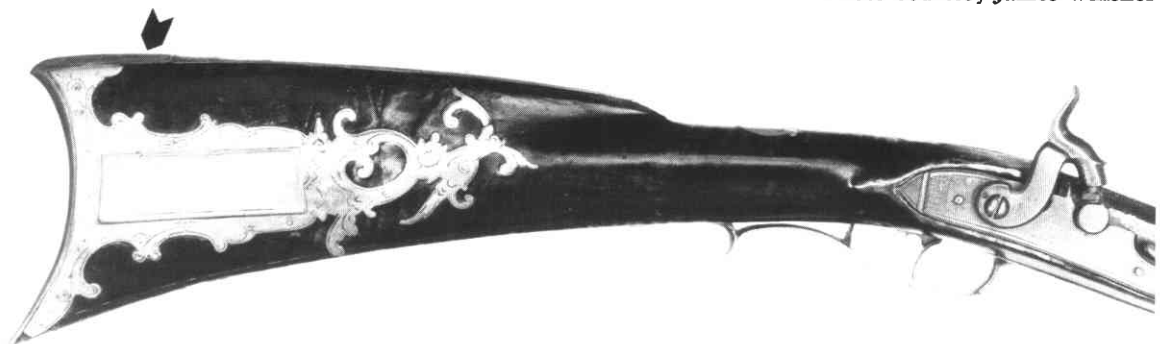
Jacob Deemer (J.D.) rifle showing Nicholas Hawk style patchbox.

Photo courtesy James Whisker

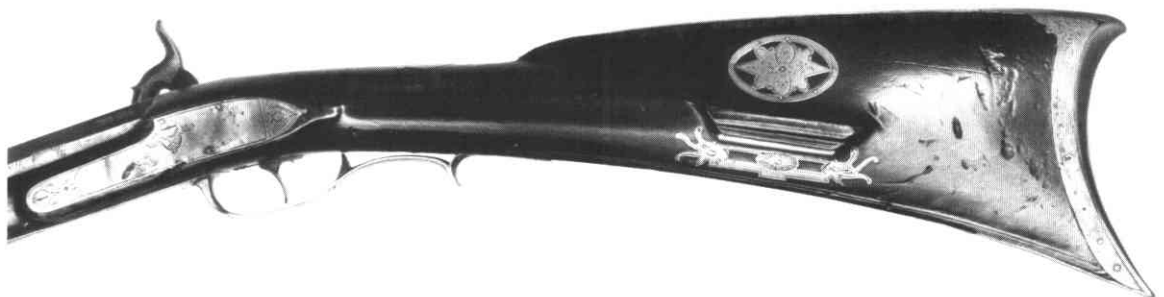


Opposite side of J.D. Eastern section rifle. Note the section's blunted point sideplate.

Photo courtesy James Whisker

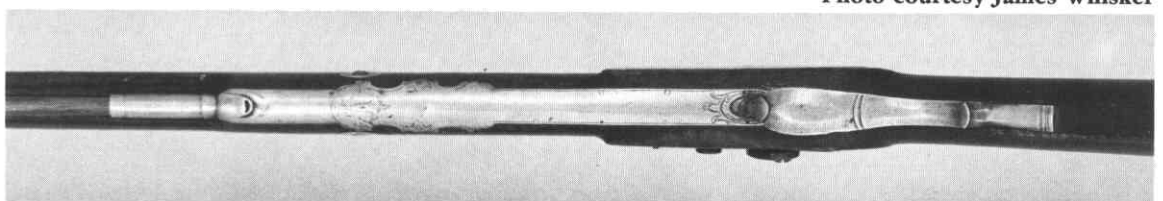


Eastern section signed Henry Young rifle with sheath-style buttplate and ornate and unusual four-piece patchbox.



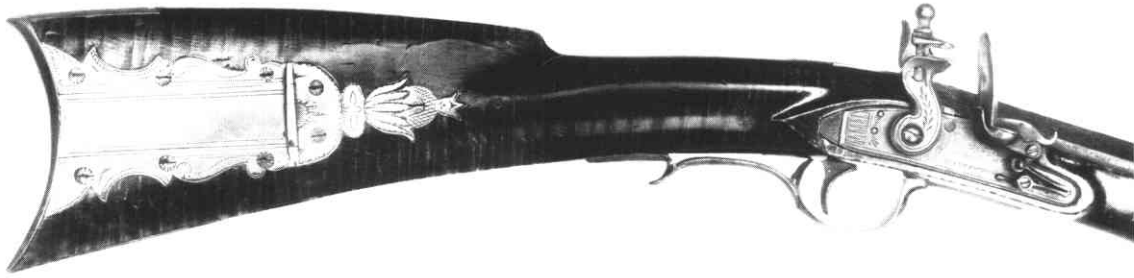
Young rifle with more high than wide wrist and full brass sideplate common to section.

Photo courtesy James Whisker



Eastern section full saddleplate used on Henry Young rifle.

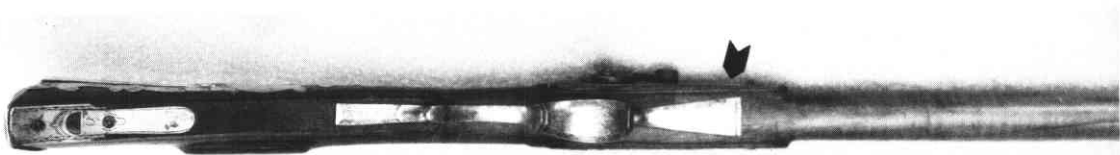
Photo courtesy James Whisker



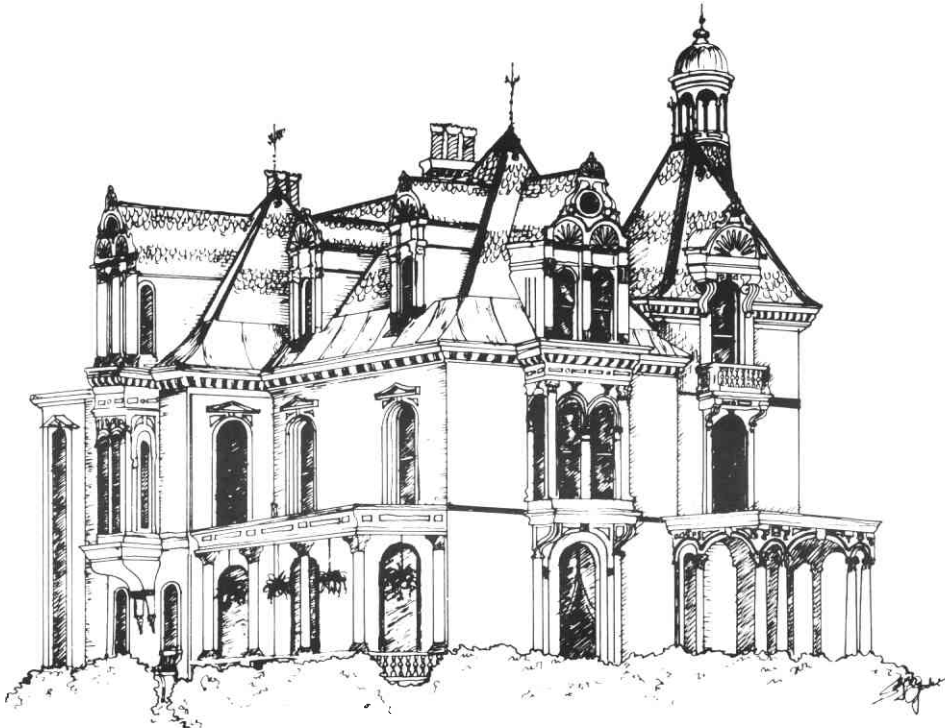
Signed Eastern section Peter Young rifle with four-piece patchbox, sheath-style buttplate and more high than wide wrist. Photo courtesy James Whisker



Cheek side of Peter Young with Eastern section's full brass sideplate. Photo courtesy James Whisker



Underside of signed Tobias Grubb rifle showing his own style flared tang triggerguard.



The Batcheller Mansion