



John Meunier

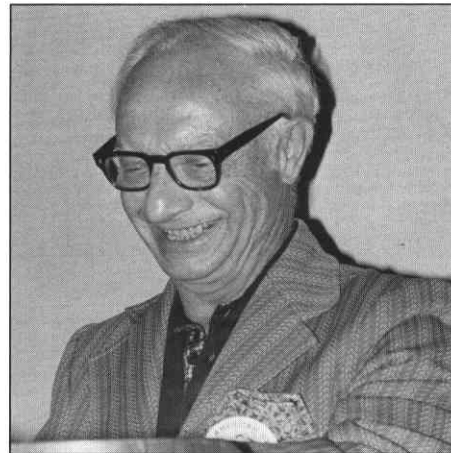
John Meunier—Wisconsin's Premier Gun Maker

Howard E. Janecek

In a quote from Ned Robert's book, on *The Muzzle-Loading Cap Lock Rifle*, he states in italics that "*John Meunier made many of the finest muzzle-loading rifles that have ever been produced in this country, of the finest workmanship,*" and that they were accurate up to 200 yards. That quote is quite an accolade by Ned Roberts to John Meunier, as Ned Roberts wrote the definitive book on the cap-lock rifle and its makers in 1940.

John Meunier was born in Woenschoefen, Germany about 1840 and migrated to the United States where he settled in Milwaukee about 1857. He had descended from a family of gunsmiths and marksmen and was adept in that field. He established himself as a gun maker in his new country in Milwaukee the year after arriving. His name first appears in *The Milwaukee City Directory* in 1863. However, it has been stated that in 1860 he purchased the facilities of the gunshop of W. Haywood that Haywood established in 1844. In 1866, Meunier operated a shop at 273 N. Water St., now North Plankinton Ave., which is only several blocks from where we are now seated. The following year he purchased a three story, newly built building and remained at that address for the balance of the century. It was the three story building that housed his gun-making enterprise, as well as living quarters for himself and for his brothers, Herman and Stephen. At one time, Meunier employed about ten men in his gun making activities, which was quite a substantial amount of employees for that time for such an activity.

During the time of his gun-making activities he, as well as his brothers, were very active members of The Milwaukee Sharpshooter's Society, and they were crack riflemen, especially John; he was known as a crack shot at the age of 13 while still in Germany. During his active participation in shooting matches, both locally and nationally, he won seventy-six gold medals and numerous silver medal awards: he established himself locally, statewide, and nationally as a crack shot. He was not allowed to participate in the Creedmore matches in 1876 in New York, which was the first international rifle match, because he was not American born. The match was between Ireland and the United States. It was the Creedmore match that established the breech-loader as an excellent target rifle, but Meunier still preferred to use his handmade muzzle-loading target rifles in crucial competitions. In 1870, and again in 1876, he was crowned *Schützen Koenig* of the State of Wisconsin.



John Meunier was vice president of the Sharpshooter's Society in 1869 and 1870 and served as president in 1875, 1880, 1882, and 1886. He was also president of The Jolly Gun Club in 1903 and treasurer of the South Side Gun Club in 1907.

Herman and Stephen Meunier were also very accomplished with the target rifle and demonstrated their ability through the 1880's.

John Meunier died in 1919 but the company name continued under the management of his son-in-law John Traudt, until 1941.

The schützen rifle, for which John Meunier was most noted, was used in the deep-rooted Germanic tradition of the schützenfest. The Schützenfest can be described as a shooting competition in which the shooting teams vied for team and individual awards. In the United States, the Pennsylvania-Kentucky rifle gave birth to the popular "turkey shoot" with the onset of the percussion ignition system; those rifles were heavy barreled match rifles which reflected the accuracy of the firearm and were used in the American way, using a rest position. However, the Teutonic aspect demanded the offhand position, and the rifles of John Meunier, as well as other schützen makers, had characteristics to facilitate the standing, unsupported, position.

In 1865, the old Helvetia Milwaukee Shooting Society was reorganized by about 50 members and was named The Milwaukee Schützen Gesellschaft; that name was made official in 1866. They were incorporated, and on March 2nd of 1866, the state passed a bill to establish the association for the purpose of improving in the use of firearms, cultivating the facilities of the body and mind.

Another important factor of the bill was to give the group the power to purchase and hold property.

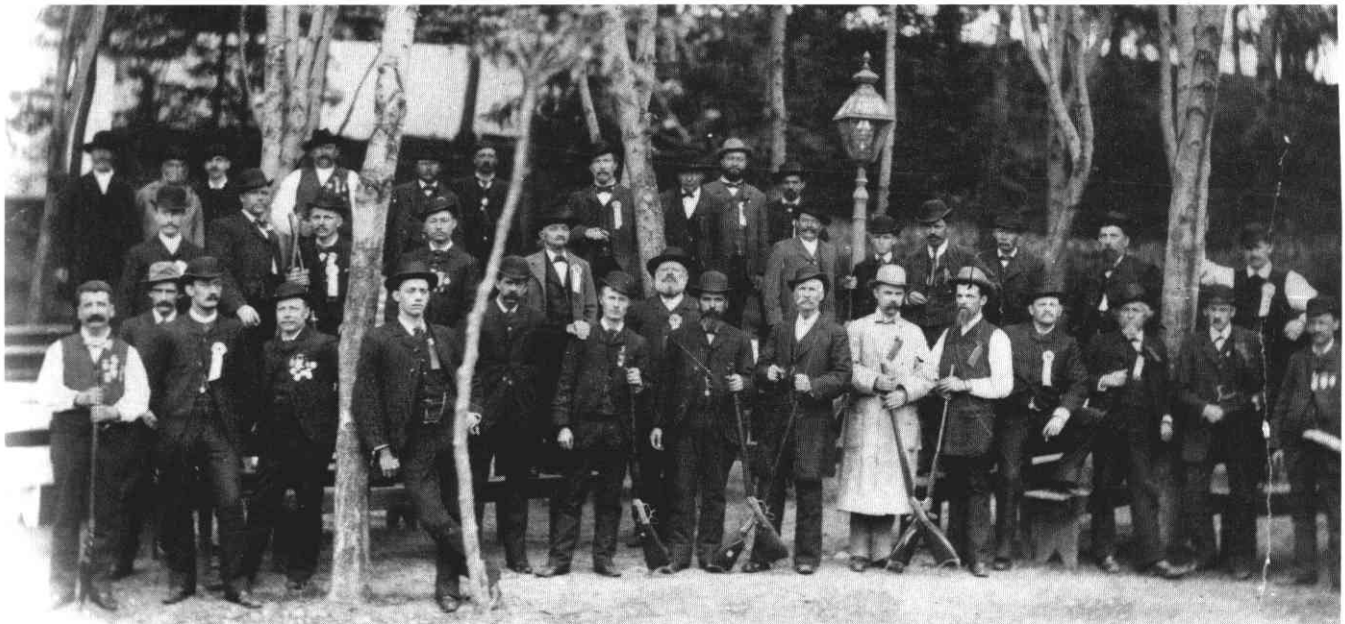
On August 21, 1866, Valentine Blatz, a famous Milwaukee brewer, sold an eight-acre tract of land on 3rd and North Burleigh, which was near the Milwaukee City limits, to the society. The society transformed this acreage into the best, and a well-known, Schützen Park. The sale price was \$5,000.00. The land was greatly improved with buildings, six foot fences, brick saloon, bowling alley, and

dance hall. The park was used as a family affair as well as for shooting matches. Later, because of population growth, the park was sold and other land was purchased south and west of the city in West Allis. Later it was again moved to another park in Hales Corners, which is still further south and west of Milwaukee.

Following are pictures of shooting parks from the archives of The Milwaukee County Museum.



John Meunier seated, standing from left to right are: Stephen Meunier, Will Story, Ed Richter, and Anton Mohr, all well known Milwaukee sharpshooters.



A group of shooters at Schützen Park (Garfield Park) in 1882; 3rd from the left is Meunier.



The South Side Gun Club on 27th and National Avenue, Center, in sweater, is John Richter; seated, to his left, is John Meunier.



On the West Allis Pavillion.



The West Allis Shooting Park headquarters building.



At the West Allis Shooting Park in 1907. John Meunier seated seventh from left, in straw hat.



At the Shooting Park in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, 1889. Stephen Meunier is kneeling in 1st row, with straw hat, John Meunier to his right with straw hat.



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The Champion Team: Central Sharpshooter's Union, Milwaukee, 1907.
 1. Ed Richter 2. John Meunier 3. Stephen Meunier



Ed Richter, Milwaukee sharpshooter.



Ed Richter showing proper stance with a schützen rifle.

The Schützen Rifle

The schützen is a highly specialized target rifle. Rules published for the 1898 national schützenfest prohibit bores in excess of .50 caliber. Barrels of the American-made schützens generally measure two or three times the actual bore diameter. The rifles are equipped with intricate sights and usually have double set triggers. The stocks and trigger housings are formed to fit the palm, hand, and cheek. In some cases, the rifles were precisely fitted to the customer order.

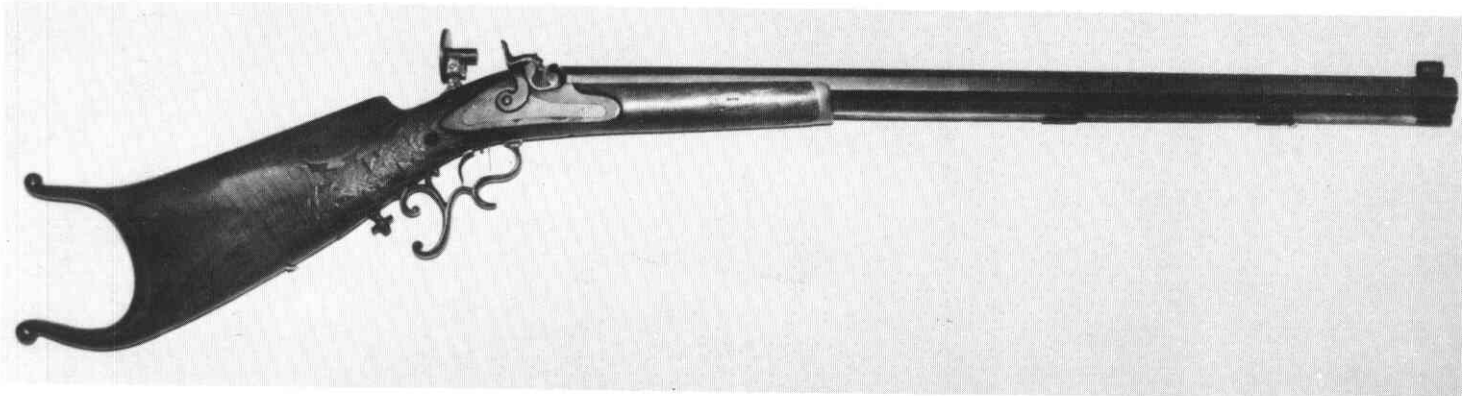
Though Meunier had a relatively large operation, it is doubtful that he made all of the parts for his rifles. He probably purchased parts from a supplier such as Tryon of Cincinnati and others. He spent his time making the smaller parts and assembling and finishing his guns. Even though he employed up to ten men in a relatively large building, he would not have had enough room for a blast furnace, forge, casting equipment, and all else that would be a necessity for the complete manufacture of all of the

metal parts needed.

It is thought that Meunier made what we can call today three different schützen rifles: a first model, a transitional model, and a second model. The weight of the rifles is between 13 and 20 pounds, all have double set triggers, and all had false muzzles. It took Meunier about one month to begin and finish one fine heavy schützen rifle. The bores of the guns are between .30 and .46 caliber. Most have pewter nose caps. All have peep sights. All have, or had, palm rests.

First Model Characteristics:

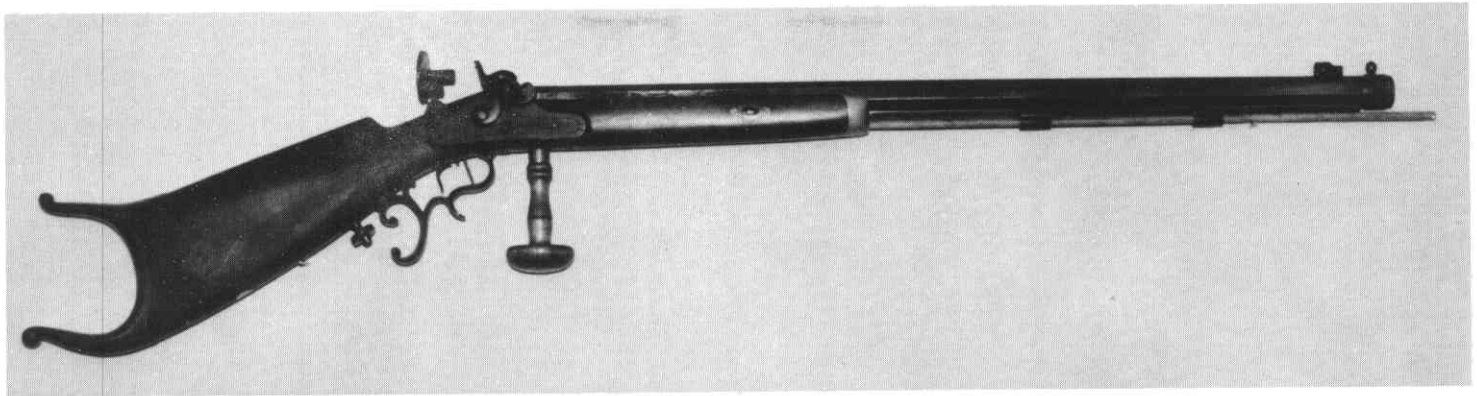
- The trigger guard shaped differently than those on the second model in that it is not ornate and has a simple single spur as a finger rest.
- All had a solid buttplate.
- All had a large screw that holds hinged trigger guard to the stock.



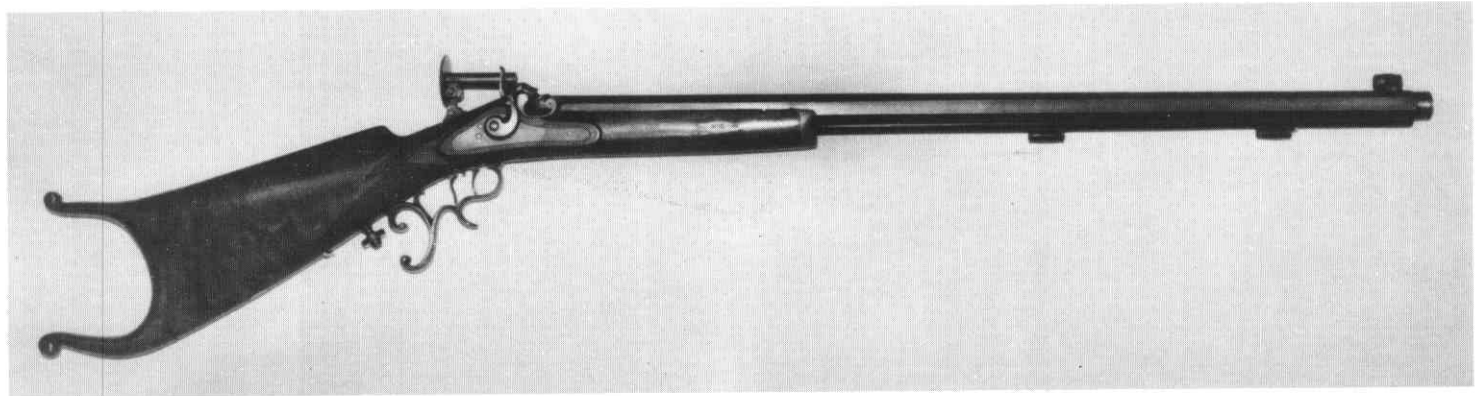
• Solid buttplate, large trigger guard screw; note shape of trigger guard; note applied thumb rest ("Daumenkanzel" - Thumb pulpit); stock heavily carved on both sides.



• Altered to centerfire. Only Meunier known that has been so altered: note large hammer, first model characteristics, carved deer head on left side of stock.



Solid buttplate, large screw that holds hinged trigger guard, and shape of trigger guard as that of previous Meunier.

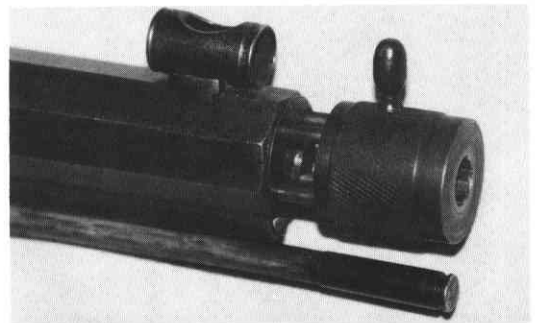
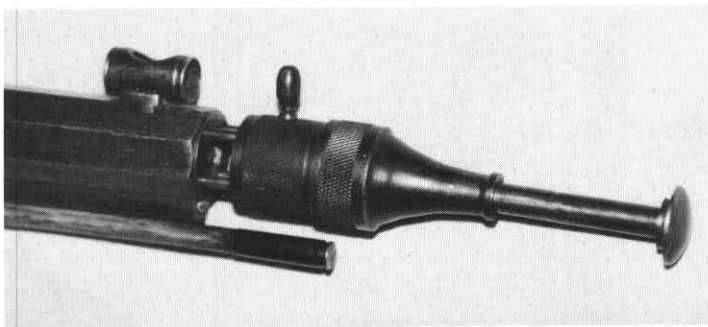


False muzzle and palm rest missing.

Transitions: • Has the solid buttplate of the first model, but the screw that holds the hinged trigger guard to the stock is much smaller and the trigger guard has a change in shape.



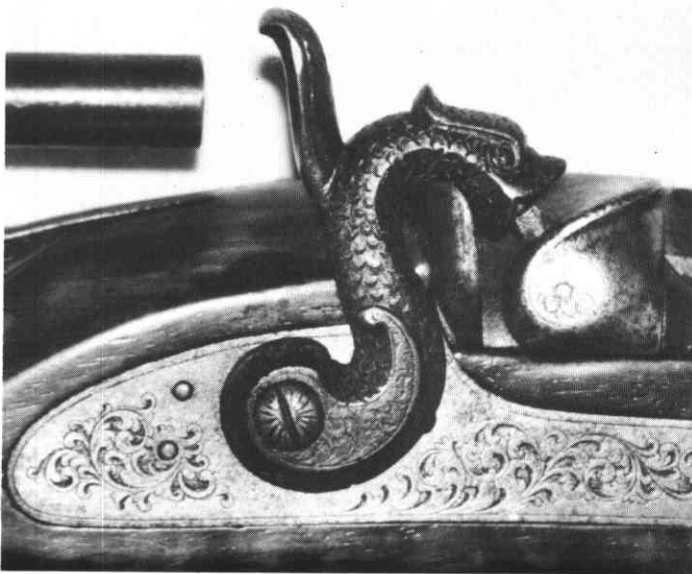
A Transition Muenier. Note smaller screw that holds trigger guard and more ornate trigger guard with half-moon finger rest. Still has solid buttplate.



The false muzzle and starter of the transition Meunier that is shown in the previous photo.



Another Transition Meunier. Again, notice the solid buttplate, small trigger guard screw and more ornate shape of trigger guard.



The engraved dolphin hammer and lockplate on the First Transition Meunier.



The pronounced applied thumb rest on side of the stock of Second Transition Meunier.



The carving on the right side of the stock.

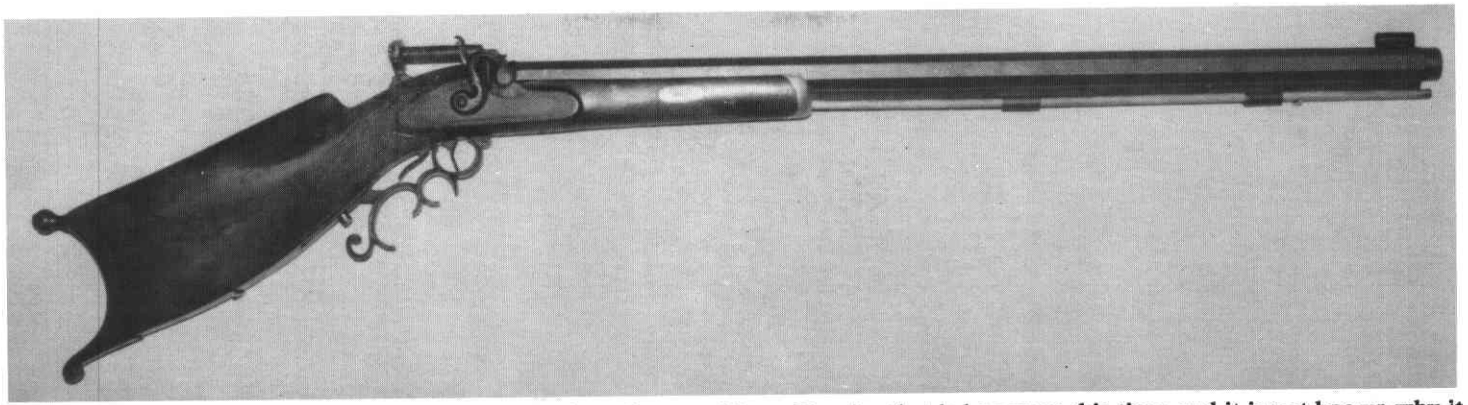
Second model.

• The second model has the same trigger guard and trigger guard screw as the transition, but the top knob portion of the buttplate screws off, and the curved upper

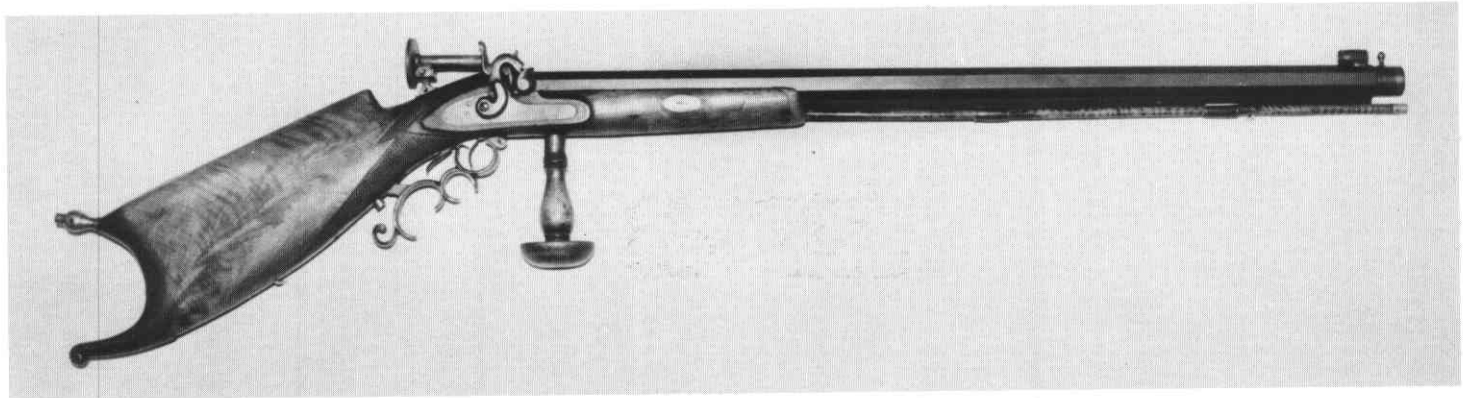


The heavily carved left side of the stock with deer head.

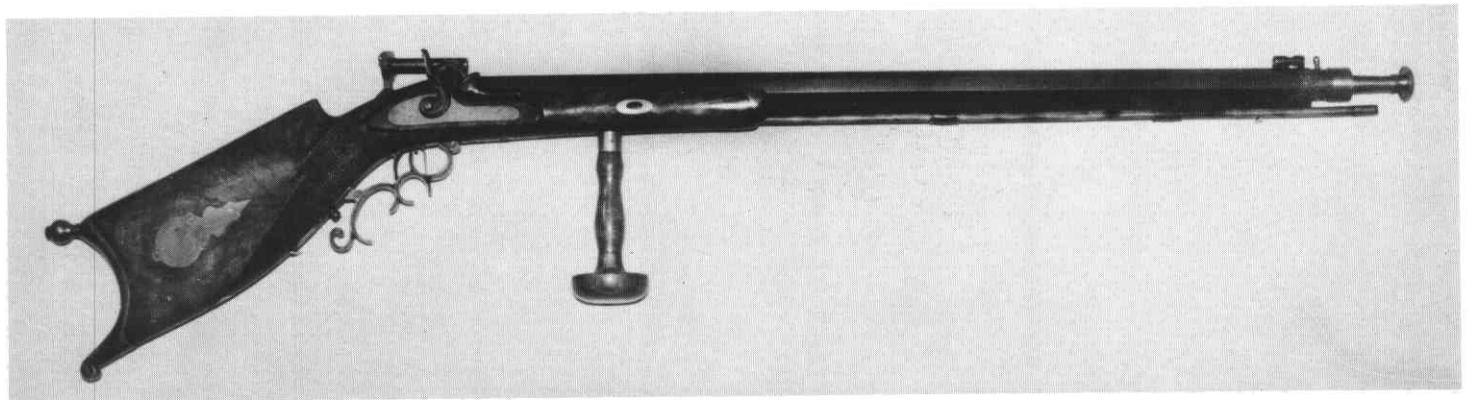
portion of the buttplate is considerably shorter than that of the 1st model and the transition. This "knob" is thought to have been used because of breakage of that portion of the buttplate or to make the rifle easier to case.



• A Second Model Muenier that is smoothbore. It is the only smoothbore Muenier that is known at this time, and it is not known why it was made in smoothbore. It is a relatively plain Muenier, with dolphin hammer.



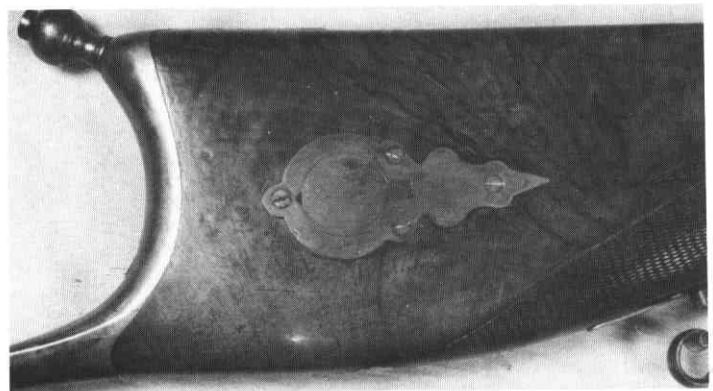
A lighter rifle, checkered, with palm rest and false muzzle.



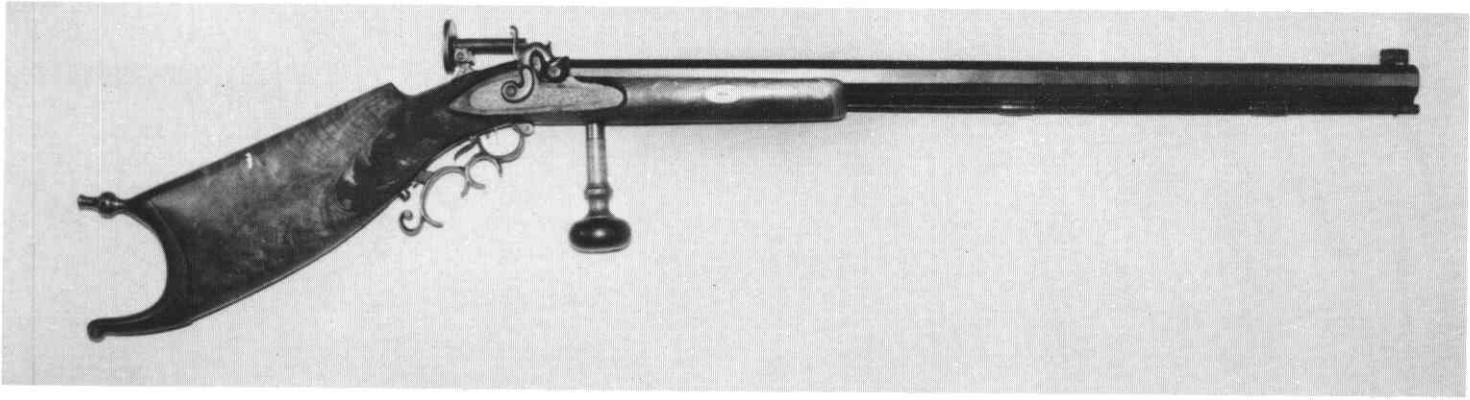
• A higher quality Second Model; made for August Blatz of the brewing family; silver mounted.



"A. Blatz" in a silver escutcheon on the underside of the stock.



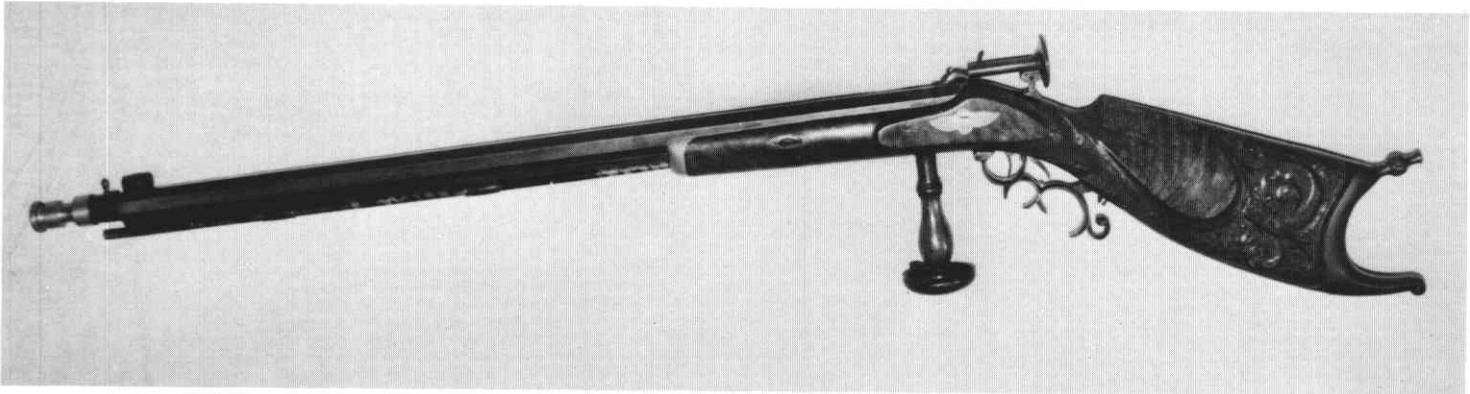
Patchbox on right side of the stock of the August Blatz Muenier.



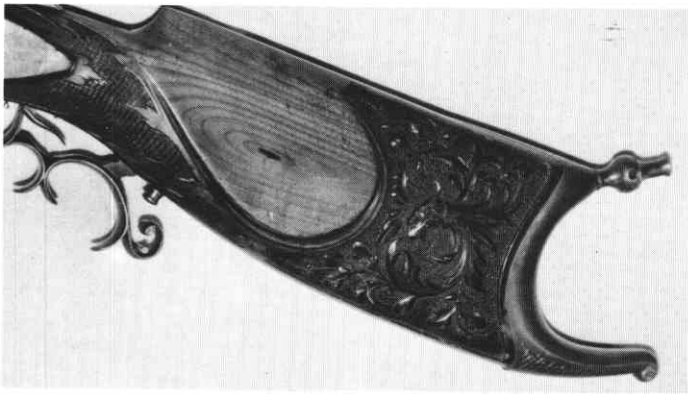
Another Second Model Meunier with fine engraved metal and checkered stock.



Another second model, the right side, and



. . . . the left side

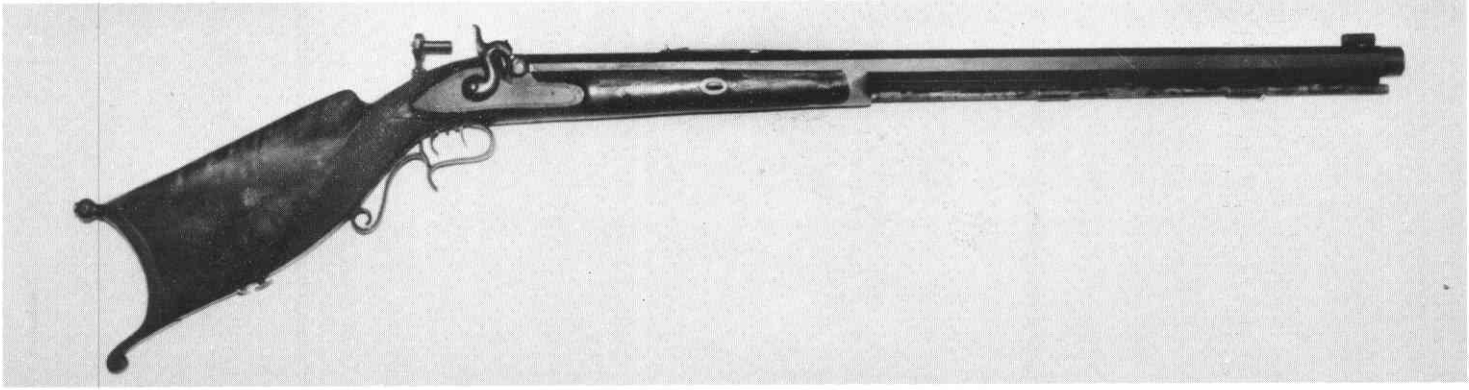


The eagle carved in left side of stock on the rifle at top.



The dragon on the left side of the stock of that Meunier.

Meunier also made lighter target rifles and hunting rifles.



• A “light schützen” in that it is lighter in weight than the regular schützen rifle. It has no palm rest and smaller trigger guard, peep sights and buttplate.



• A hunting rifle with hunting sights, brass trigger guard and buttplate, and was made for use with a sling.



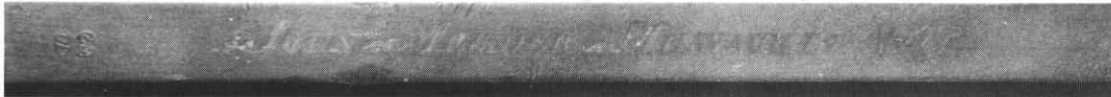
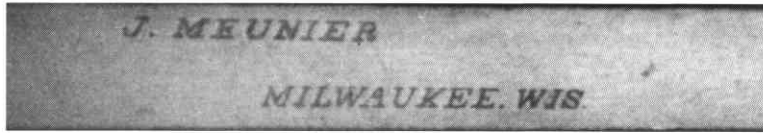
John Meunier 43 calibre Off-Hand Match Rifle, Presentation Grade, gold and silver mountings, and used by A. O. Niedner from 1885 to 1890. Meunier spent more than one year in making and engraving this rifle, which won First Prize in the Centennial Exposition of 1876.

By far the best of Meunier’s schuetzen rifles as the one that won for him the first prize in the Centennial exposition of 1876. The picture is taken from Ned Robert’s book, and he states, “*The rifle was wonderful workmanship. It and all of the accessories were marvelously engraved—the finest I have ever seen on any muzzle loading rifle.*” It had gold and silver mountings and took Meunier one year to make. Used by A.O. Niedner from 1885 to 1890. Archer Jackson owned this rifle at the time of his death, but we do not know where it is today it is a second model.

Barrel markings:

Initially it was thought that the barrel markings would coincide with the arbitrary model designations, but it was

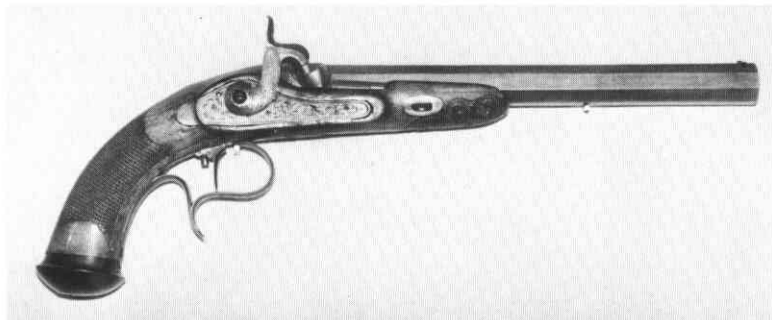
seen that there is no correlation. The various barrel markings are:



As well as making long guns, Meunier made at least two percussion pistols of the target type.



"John Meunier" stamped in a left barrel flat and "Milwaukee Wis." stamped in a right barrel flat. .30 caliber, 10" octagon barrel.

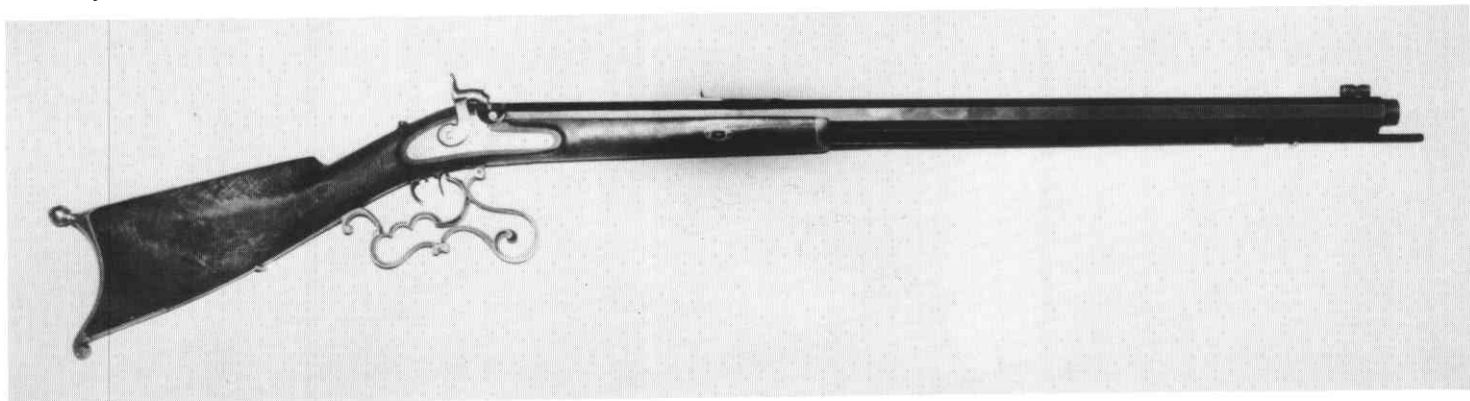


The second of two known Meunier target type pistols: .41. caliber, flared ebony cap on butt, fine checkering, all metal is engraved, stamped "John Meunier" on the left barrel flat and "Milwaukee Wis." on the right barrel flat.

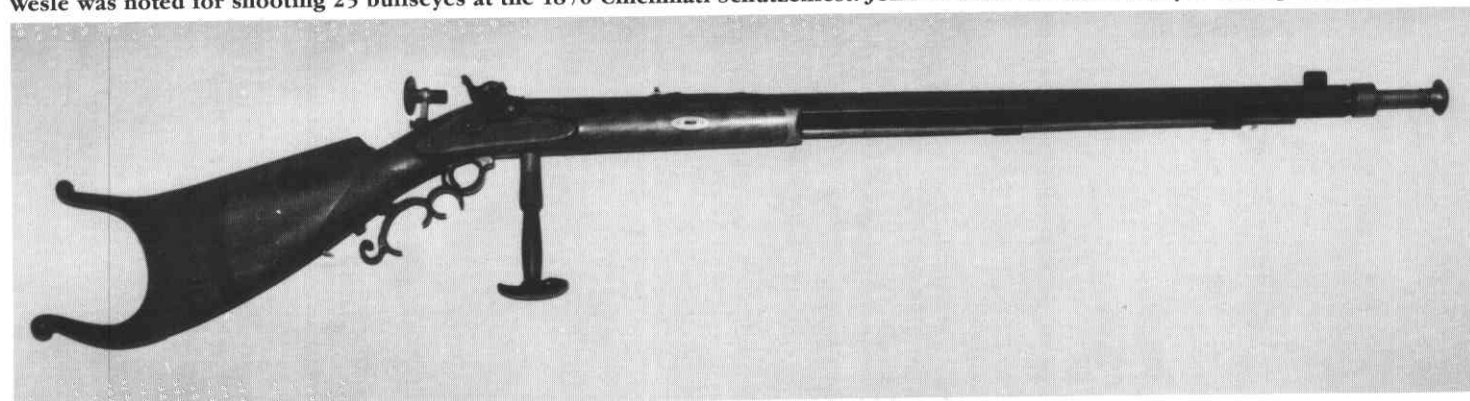
Other Wisconsin Gun Makers of Schützen Rifles.

There were many other gun makers in Wisconsin, as well as John Meunier, most of whom made hunting rifles

and shotguns; there were several other makers of schützen rifles worthy of mentioning.



NORBERT WESLE, Milwaukee, a maker from 1854-1881. Made fine hunting rifles as well as schützens. The furniture on Wesley schützens is identical to those of Meunier, which enhances the premise that these makers purchased these parts from a jobber. No palm rest, but the front of the trigger guard is in the shape of an "S" and is used as the palm rest; Trigger guard is nickel plated. All of Wesle rifles viewed have Remington stamped under the barrel. The only Meunier gun that has a Remington marking is a double shotgun/rifle combination. Wesle was noted for shooting 25 bullseyes at the 1870 Cincinnati Schützenfest. John Meunier shot 50 bullseyes during that same match.



GEORGE SPANGLER of Monroe, Wisconsin from 1855-1900, made this heavy schützen with palm rest and false muzzle. Does not have a set trigger. Again, the furniture is identical to the Meuniers.



A. HURFORTH of Madison, Wisconsin, made a heavy schützen with false muzzle and palm rest. Has both peep and buckhorn sights, and, again, identical furniture as the Meuniers.

Indeed, John Meunier was Wisconsin's premier gun maker.

I am deeply indebted to Howard Madaus for permitting me to use his article in the spring of 1968 issue of *Lore* Magazine, put out by The Milwaukee County Museum, and to Howie Madaus and the museum for permitting me

to photograph their Meunier rifles, as well as others, that are in their extensive collection.

References:

- *The Muzzle-Loading Cap Lock Rifle* by Ned Roberts
- Fall 1969, Volume 19, #4 issue of *Lore* by The Milwaukee County Museum.
- Volumes 4(1965), 6(1967), and 7(1968) of the *Wisconsin Gun Collector* annuals.