

Photographs A-1 through A-5: Plain/Common Rifle, Deep River, Guilford County, North Carolina. Maple Stock, .44 caliber.

Southern Longrifles Plain and Fancy

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Guns made in the old (ante-bellum) South had architectural features that were different from those made in the mid-Atlantic and Ohio Valley regions. The objective of this article is to familiarize the reader with some of these variants so that he or she may be able to identify Southern firearms and begin to appreciate the craftsmanship of their makers.

Rifle A. Most gun collectors are familiar with the term, "Lock, Stock, and Barrel," and this longrifle (A-1) takes that term literally. The rifle has no butt plate, no nose cap, nor decorative inlays of any kind, yet its graceful outline displays a classic form. The origin of this rifle is somewhere along the Deep River region of Guilford County, North Carolina. The flint lock is marked R. Patrick & Company. This firm was established at Liverpool, England in 1794. Ann Patrick, one of the few women active in the gun trade, ran the business for eight years after her husband's death, before selling out to Williams & Powell in 1834. The slightly downturned point at the rear of the lock mortise (A-2) is the first characteristic of note. The wrist area is long and slender with a three screw barrel tang extending almost to the termination of the comb area. The plain iron triggerguard (A-5) is graceful in design and held to the stock with two wood screws. The front trigger (A-2 and A-3) is filed to a triangular shape along its face and has a slight inward curve at its tip. Both of these details are traits found on many Virginia and Carolina rifles. The grease hole (A-2), another Southern trait, is only one half inch in diameter. There is no butt plate, toe plate, nor heel extension. The distinct angle of the heel where it meets the butt crescent may be due to extreme wear over long years of use. The butt is fairly wide, almost two inches. The cheek piece (A-3) is well pronounced due to the deep concave formed between the molding and the stock comb. The comb of the rifle terminates into the wrist area (A-4) with a graceful little "tear drop," shape; a typical Carolina detail. There is no side plate. The mouth of each lock bolt hole is reinforced with a brass washer (A-3). Directly behind the rear extension of the triggerguard are two holes (A-5); one has been plugged. Most collectors insist that these holes held vent picks made of turkey feather quills; but they may have been made by screws or nails that held one end of a makeshift sling. The other end of the sling was a simple loop around the barrel of the rifle. The use of a sling would be a practical way to carry a rifle while riding horseback or bearing a pack. The



use of a sling on military muskets was commonplace, and many early hunting rifles of Teutonic origin used fabric slings fastened to the stock on metal, "button-headed," screws threaded into the belly of the stock in the same area as the holes on this rifle. Whatever their purpose, they are seen quite often on Southern flintlock rifles. There is no rear entry pipe, although the mouth of the hole has been enlarged to a funnel shape to readily accept the ramrod. The two ramrod pipes are made of copper. There is no nose cap. The termination of the stock at the muzzle is formed and shaped similar to that found on early English fouling pieces. "Poor boy," is the trite term used to describe this type of rifle. A more correct term would be a plain rifle or a common rifle. It was a tool of the frontiersman, along with his axe and plow, and like those tools, was used up to nothing over generations of hard work. In my opinion, it is the true "Kentucky type" rifle and to find one in its original condition is extremely rare.

Rifle B. This fancy rifle (B-1) was made in the same general area of Guilford County, North Carolina, as the preceding plain/common rifle. It too, has a long three screw tang and "tear drop" terminus where the comb and wrist of the stock meet; but there are other distinctive features about this rifle which should be of interest to the reader. Jamestown rifles display peculiar shaped inlays of silver and brass (B-3) usually bordered with fine "wiggle work" engraving and attached to the gunstock with large silver headed tacks. The front sights (B-6) are usually attached to two brass wedges dovetailed into the barrel. What appear to be barrel wedge escutcheons (B-5) are merely decorations. The barrel is usually attached to the stock with blind pins filed flush to the



Photographs B-1 through B-6: Jamestown Rifle, Guilford County, North Carolina. Curley Maple Stock, .41 caliber, silver and brass mounts.

wood. Incised lines (B-2, B-3, and B-4) are usually cut into the stock along both sides of the comb and sometimes along the belly of the stock. Long engraved toe plates (B-4) extending almost to the rear extension of the triggerguard and large engraved patch boxes (B-2) with five pointed star heads, along with rectangular piercings in the upper and lower panels, are common to this region. William Lamb, a prolific gun and barrel maker from Jamestown, used a distinctive decoration in the shape of a hand with the forefinger pointing toward the shooter (B-3). The architecture and decoration of this rifle are good examples of the type of work being done by gunsmiths throughout the Piedmont region of Carolina before the Civil War.

Rifle C. Rifles made in the mountains of Southern Appalachia (C-1) have separate and distinct features from those made in the lowlands of the South. Usually they are mounted in iron and have little or no decoration. It is the graceful plainness and the expert forging of the iron hardware that attracts the attention of collectors. The architecture of this rifle is characteristic of guns made in East Tennessee and Western Carolina, but it could have been made in Arkansas, where it was found by my father in 1923. The rifle is stocked in black walnut and completely iron-mounted with the exception of the silver blade on the front sight. There is no pronounced lock molding: it just melts (C-2) into the forearm and the wrist areas of the stock. The pronounced outline of the comb is actually the extension of the barrel tang (C-4) that comes up and over the comb area and almost touches the extreme extension of the butt plate heel. The butt plate itself has a deep crescent outline (C-2 and C-3). The toe plate (C-3) is as long as the heel extension, almost coming in contact with the rear extension of the triggerguard. All parts of the butt plate assembly are nailed to the stock. The terminus of both the breech tang and the toe plate are tapered to a sharp point. The triggerguard has a forward curve at the end of the grip rail and both the front and rear extensions are elongated to extreme lengths (C-5) almost touching the toe plate and the rear ramrod pipe. The cheek piece (C-3) is well pronounced due to the deep concave area formed into the stock just above the molding. The iron side plate (C-5) is a lengthened variation of a common pattern used on Southern Mountain rifles. The rear ramrod pipe, made from one piece of sheet iron, is seven inches long. There are three iron ramrod pipes, instead of the usual two, pinned to the forestock. The nose cap is made of sheet iron with lead poured in around the muzzle. The rear sight is in the shape of a full buckhorn (C-6). The artistic skill of the mountain gunsmith in his use of forged iron parts to create a harmonious relationship between wood and iron is well demonstrated on this rifle.

Rifle D. This fancy rifle (D-1) with its unique pistol grip was probably made in central Georgia by a member of the Higgins family of gunsmiths. The rifle butt appears to be attached to the grip but actually the gunstock is one solid piece of walnut. In order to achieve this illusion, the maker carved an incised line (D-2) over and around the stock where the comb and grip combine. A cap of silver one inch thick (D-5) is attached to the butt of the grip with a single iron screw. The pistol size lock (D-2) is accentuated by a border of sheet silver attached to the lock mortise by small silver nails. The use of incised lines carved along the base and comb of the stock as well as the sharp drop from the line of sight to the heel of the rifle (D-2) are architectural features influenced by Virginia and Carolina gunmakers. The patchbox (D-2), made of sheet brass, has a distinctive design with the use of narrow rectangular piercings on the top and bottom panels combined with the arrangement of various curves and protrusions on the head, terminating with a heart near the wrist area of the stock. The lid of the patchbox is released by a plunger mechanism (D-5) extending through the toe plate of the stock. The brass butt plate (D-6) with its panelled design is another distinguishing feature used exclusively by this family of gunsmiths. The curvature of the butt plate is emphasized by a strip of sheet silver inlaid into the left side of the stock (D-3) and held in place with small silver nails. The heel plate extension (D-5), made of brass, is formed into a graceful willow leaf design. The beavertail style of the cheek piece (D-3) has well-defined molding carved around the edges of its outline. The elliptically-shaped inlay on the cheek rest is cut from sheet silver and has four piercings which form the sign of a cross. The protrusions filed at each end of the inlay are duplicate in form to those used on the patchbox head and the side plate. The vent pick holder (D-3) is a brass tube attached to the bottom portion of the cheek piece by two silver staples. The side plate and rectangularly shaped barrel wedge escutcheons are made of sterling silver. This rifle was originally a full stocked flint lock, but was later cut back to a half stock and converted to a percussion ignition system. The nose cap is pewter; the ramrod runner, brass, with silver ramrod thimbles. The rear ramrod entry pipe is made of brass, formed and shaped in a traditional Virginia/Carolina style. Scratched on the bow of the brass triggerguard is the name "D. L. Johnson," followed by "Ft. Smith" (Ark.) and the date "1881." The gun was purchased from a Johnson family member living at Waco, Texas in 1956.

The objective of this article was to familiarize the reader with some of the architectural features of Southern made longrifles. I hope that objective has been accomplished and that this presentation has stimulated an appreciation for the craftsmanship of Southern gunsmiths.

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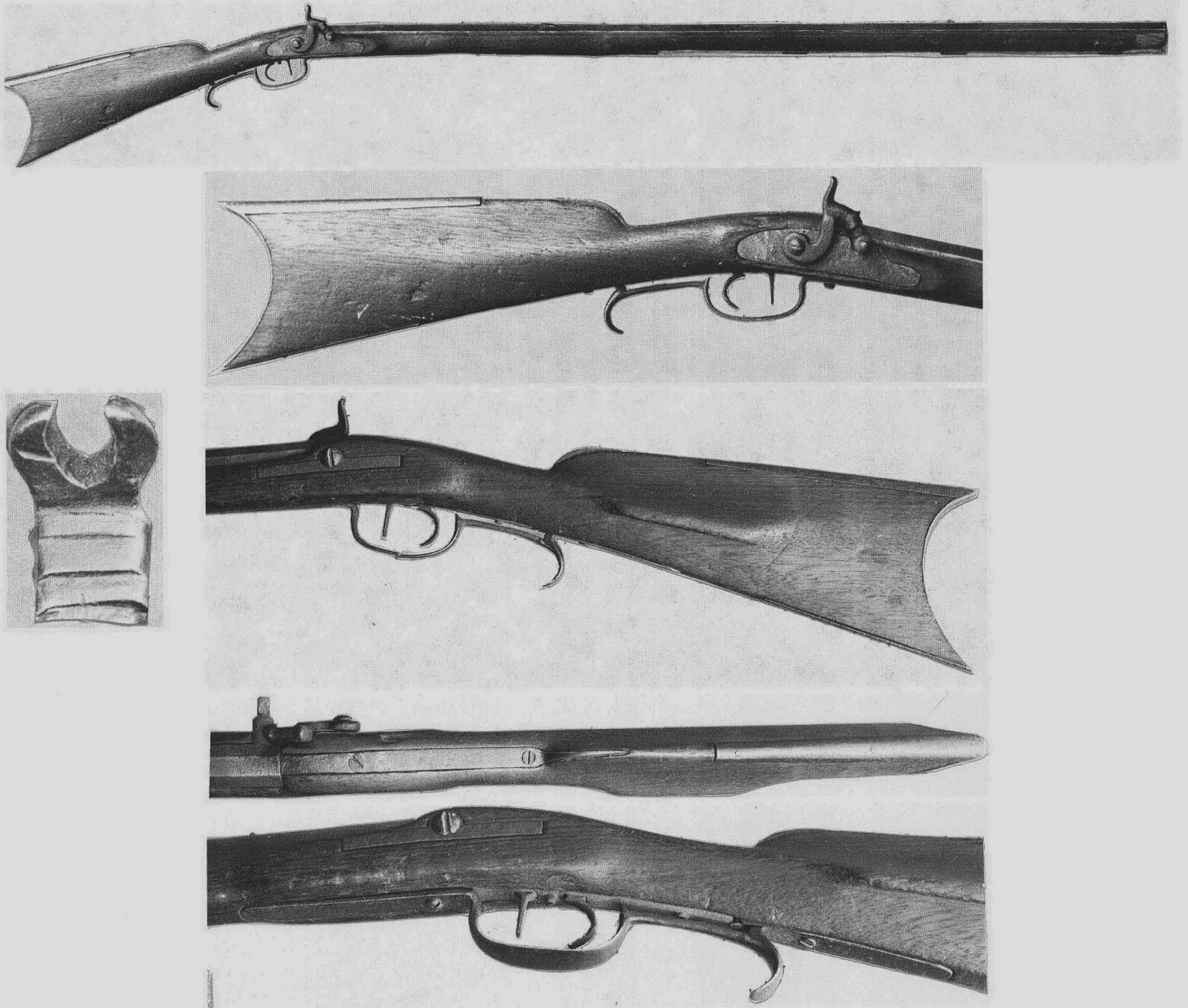
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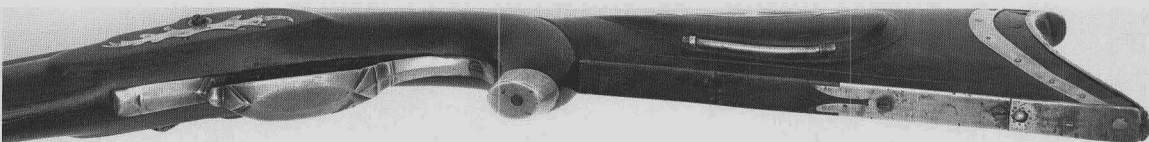
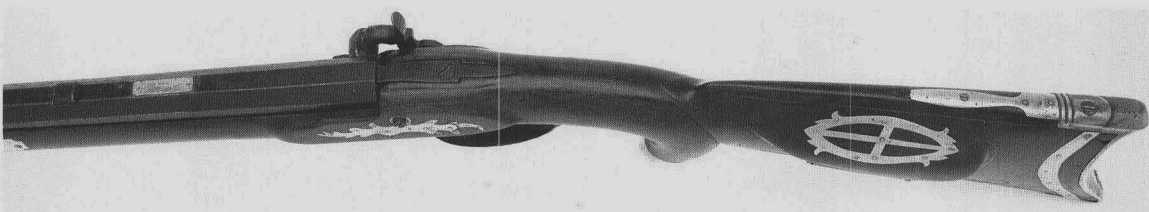
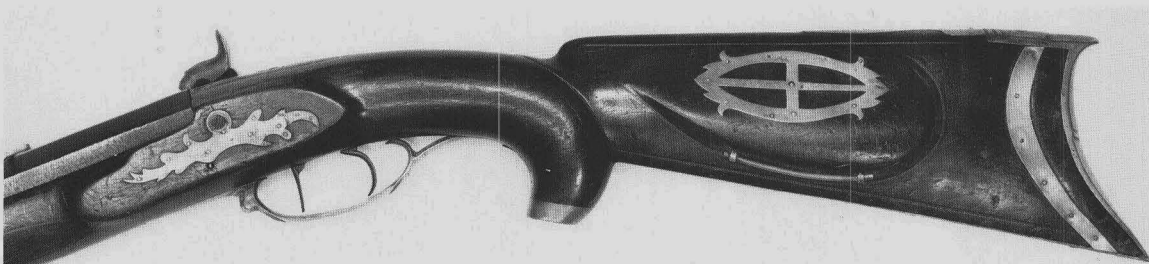
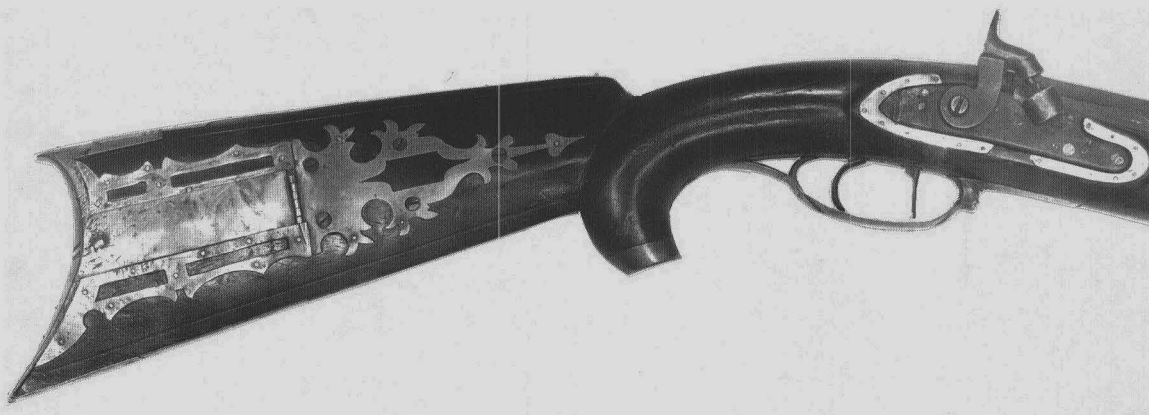
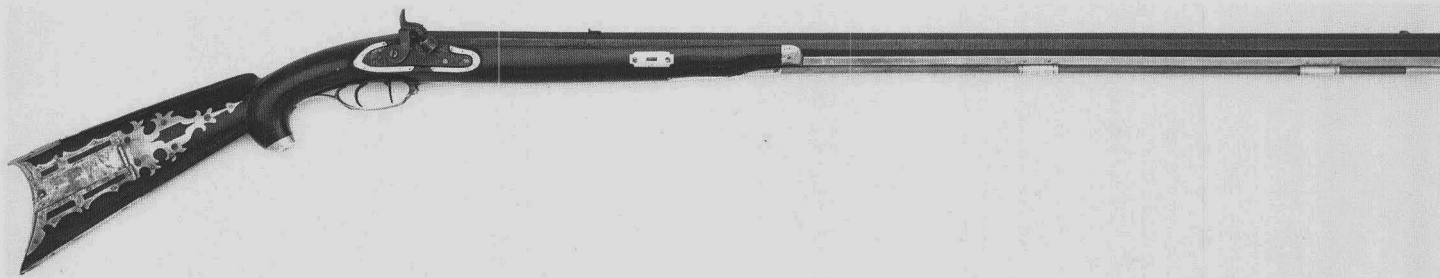
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Photographs C-1 through C-6: Southern Mountain Rifle. Walnut stock, .40 caliber, iron mounts.



Photographs D-1 through D-6: Pistol Grip Rifle, Georgia. Walnut stock, .40 caliber, silver and brass mounts.