

Wilson Cypher Guns—Chief's Guns Of The Revolution

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Among the gun fragments recovered from historic sites spanning the years of the American Revolution are found a few rare pieces of brass stock furniture which appear to have come from a particular type of English-made light fowler designed for use as a "Chief's gun," or presentation piece from the British establishment to Indians of rank. The recovered furniture can be matched exactly with fittings on existing guns of that period, to the point that the assemblage found on the existing guns (this assemblage appears to be unique and constant in form) can be used in turn, to identify isolated fragments found on historic sites.¹ The key piece of furniture is the thumb plate, which is engraved with the royal cypher "GR" surmounted by a crown (see Figure 1).

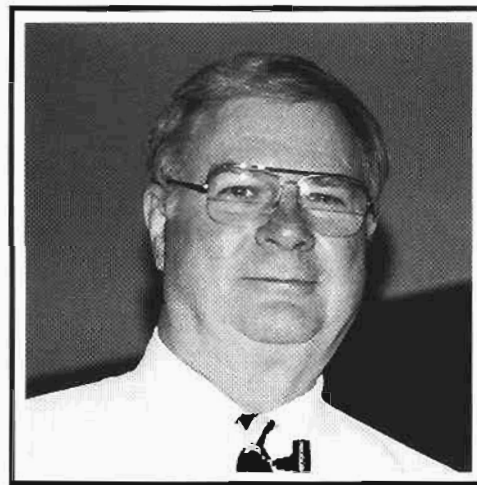
The existing guns known to me, from basically original to considerably evolved, are all marked **WILSON** on the lock, and **R*W** on the barrel, clearly attributable to the shops of Richard Wilson of London in the latter part of the 18th century. These factors, together with the apparent time frame, are the basis for the name here applied to these guns and the title of this paper. One of these guns, stocked in a style typical of the revolutionary period, is shown in Figure 2.

These segments will be covered in the following account:

1. To establish the character of these guns, a complete Wilson Cypher gun stocked in the "Brown Bess" fashion will be examined.
2. Historic sites on which Cypher furniture has been found will be mentioned briefly, and the found material described.
3. A Cypher gun stocked in the slightly later "Nock" fashion will then be examined.
4. Finally, a comparison will be made with the Chief's guns known to have been made for use in the War of 1812.

A WILSON CYPHER GUN STOCKED IN THE "BROWN BESS" FASHION

The gun of interest (Figure 2) measures 52 inches in length from muzzle to heel, weighs 5¼ pounds, has a 37 inch "trade gun" barrel of about 20 gauge, is stocked in walnut and outfitted with sturdy, engraved, all-brass furniture. On the upper left flat of the barrel, near the breech, are London view and proof marks in sunken ovals, with the maker's mark **R*W** (Figure 3). The top flat of the barrel is engraved **LONDON**, in block letters (Figure 4). On the lock plate, a



royal crown over the royal cypher is engraved below the pan, and the name **WILSON**, in block letters, is engraved vertically on the tail immediately behind the cock (Figure 5). In size and weight, this gun is similar to a short barreled trade gun.

The crowns in the proof marks are quite plain, indicating an earlier usage (see Glendenning, 1951, p. 22 and Englehardt, 1954, p. 170), and with the "sunken" type of die, an 18th century time frame is indicated. The precise limiting date of "sunken" marks is hazy, and none of the authorities have addressed the subject. Dating the end of the use of this particular Wilson mark is also hazy, but most of the guns so marked can be attributed to the 18th century. The design of the stock on this gun, with the line of the wrist carved well back into the stock beneath the high comb, was popular for fowling pieces through most of the 18th century, and was the official pattern for British military arms in the Brown Bess period, which came to a close at the end of the century. Taken together, the proof marks and the design of the stock indicate this gun was manufactured in the 18th century, and possibly in the period of the American Revolution. More will be learned about possible dating in a following section on artifacts recovered at historic sites.

The thumb plate (Figure 1) is a bulb shaped cartouche topped by a small scallop finial, with a collar and an inverted pear shaped finial at the bottom. The cartouche area is outlined with a single engraved line, within which is engraved the King's cypher **GR** (for **George Rex**) surmounted by a crown, all executed in a tasteful manner, apparently by an accomplished craftsman.

Attachment of the thumb plate, which is inlet flush with the surface of the wrist, is accomplished by a bolt which rises up through the wrist, from an entry hidden under the



Figure 2. A Wilson Cypher gun stocked in the Brown Bess fashion.

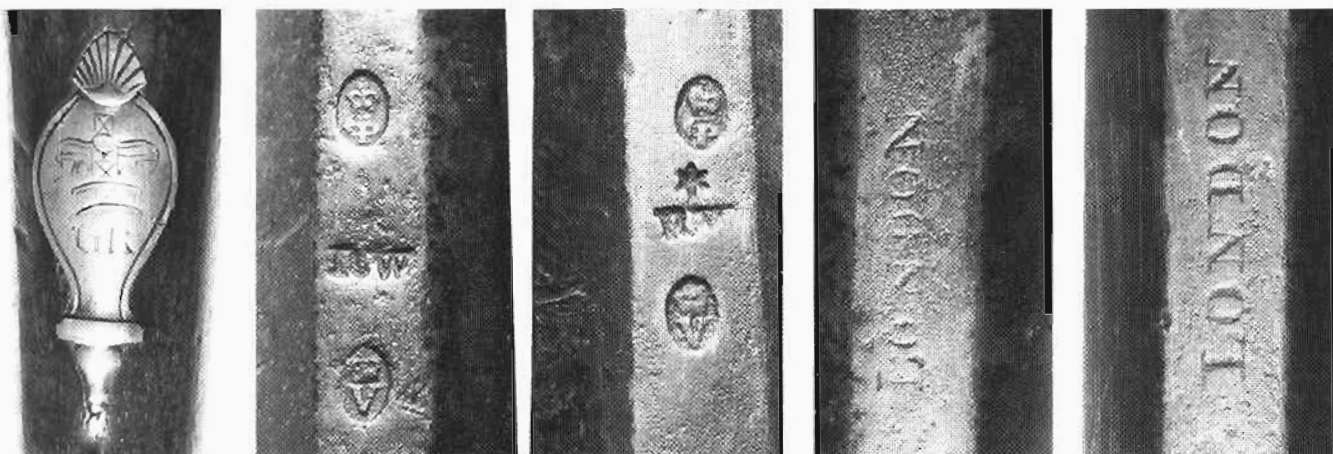


Figure 1. Brass thumb plate, 2¼" in length, on a Wilson Cypher gun, engraved with the royal cypher GR surmounted by a crown.
 Figure 3. Proof marks and maker's marks on two Wilson Cypher guns. Left: from a Brown Bess stocked gun; right: from a Nock stocked gun.
 Figure 4. LONDON marks on two Cypher gun barrels. Left: from a Brown Bess stocked gun; right: from a Nock stocked gun.

trigger guard tang, to engage a drilled and threaded boss cast in the back of the thumb plate (see Figure 11 and Figure 32).

Engraved on the long butt plate tang is a tall bird, neatly done, holding a sprig of leaves in its beak (Figure 6). This image should have some symbolic significance, as it is repeated with only small variations on all the Cypher guns I have seen (three), but at present it's meaning is a mystery. In addition to the bird, the double-line outline at the edge of the tang, the fan of lines on the finial below the terminal spike, and the spike itself, are also common features. A wood screw at the heel and one near the toe secure the plate, and the tang is fixed by a transverse pin through a lug under the finial.

More neat engraving is found on the side plate (Figure 7), which has a low triangular shape, drilled to accommodate two lock bolts and a retaining screw through the tail. A two-line outline runs around the central body, segregating the tail and blending into the forward reach. A scallop pattern graces the center screw, while a few wisps of foliage adorn the forward reach. No name or maker's mark is present on the inside of the plate.

The forward tang of the trigger guard is thumb-shaped with a foliage finial splayed into three leaves (Figure 8). An eight-armed "snowflake" is engraved on the bow which is also edged with two lines. The long rear tang has a single-line edging, with few radiating lines on the last inch at the back.

The ramrod pipes are very simple: each is a smooth

cylinder with thin ring collars at the ends. Attached to the rear pipe is a double-chinned apron with a pointed finial, decorated with a few engraved strokes (Figure 9).

Looking at Authenticity. In offering this piece as a prototypical candidate, the question of authenticity is raised as a matter of course. I obtained this gun in its present condition from Bob McCrory of Ardmore, Oklahoma, in January, 1984. The fore end of the stock, forward of the rear ramrod pipe, is a replacement. The forward and middle ramrod pipes match the tailpipe very closely in style, manufacture, and patina, and may have been salvaged from remnants of the original fore end. Some of the wood to the rear and to the upper right of the breech may be replaced as well. The finish on the wood is uniformly smooth, a blend of old and new.

The plate of the lock appears to be entirely original, and fits the lock inlet perfectly, but the mechanism has been overhauled—probably reconverted from percussion; places which should show a patina are bright, such as the under side of the pan, and the otherwise dusty and desiccated lock mortise shows scrubbing from the new main spring.

All the rest of the gun appears to be original. The pin secured furniture (the butt plate tang and the three-pinned trigger guard) is completely snug in the wood, with all pins in place (see Figure 32) and worn over appropriately. The fit of



Figure 5. Slightly convex lock from a Brown Bess stocked Wilson Cypher gun. It is $6\frac{1}{8}$ " long and $1\frac{1}{16}$ " wide at the fence. Brass butt plate on Brown Bess stocked Wilson Cypher gun. The tang is 4" long.



Figure 6. Tang of



Figure 7. Brass side plate, $5\frac{11}{16}$ " long, from the Brown Bess stocked gun. The king's cypher GR and a crown, found at Fort Niagara, western New York state.



Figure 10. Brass thumb plate, length $2\frac{1}{4}$ ", engraved with the

the side plate in it's mortise is very snug, and the back side of the side plate and the interior of the mortise both show color and character appropriate to the age of the gun.

Shrinkage of the wood at the butt plate is about right, giving the sole of the plate a little "edge" of relief from the wood. Attachment of the thumb plate is consistent with the original design, and in keeping with thumb plates on all Chief's Guns. Signs of use and wear are evident in the right

places; compare, for instance, the well rubbed thumb plate on this gun (Figure 1) with the Fort Niagara thumb plate (Figure 10), which was discarded when fairly new.

Noting the exceptions just discussed, I consider this gun to be fairly authentic in general form and character, and reliably original and authentic as regards the assemblage of furniture and the stock, from the tail pipe to the butt plate, inclusive.

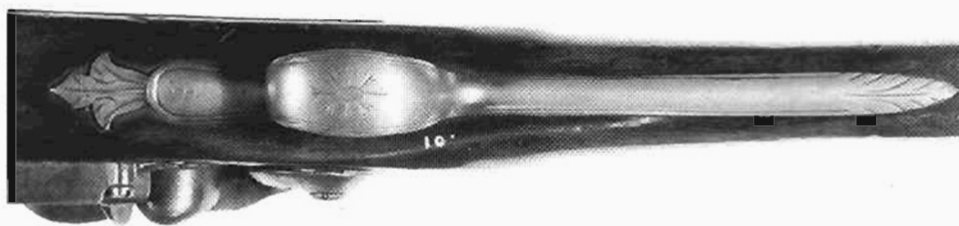


Figure 8. Trigger guard of brass, 9 7/8" long, on the Brown Bess stocked Wilson Cypher gun. See Figure 32 for lug arrangement. Figure 11. The back of the Cypher thumb plate found at Fort Niagara. A retaining bolt engaged the drilled and threaded boss. See Figure 32.

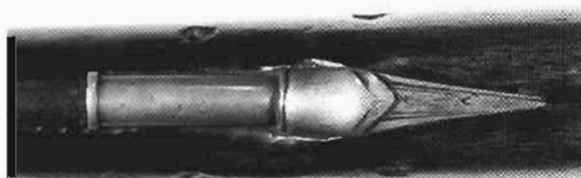


Figure 9. The brass rear ramrod pipe on the Brown Bess stocked gun.



Figure 12. Cypher side plate, of brass and 5 3/4" long, found at Fort Niagara. There are no ID marks on the inside surface.

CYPHER FURNITURE FROM HISTORIC SITES

Historic sites which have yielded furniture from "Cypher" Chief's guns are located in western New York state, northwestern Illinois, southwestern Missouri, and north-central Texas.

Fort Niagara (New York). Fort Niagara is of primary importance. It is located on New York's south shore of Lake Ontario at the mouth of the Niagara River, north of the present town of Buffalo. A Cypher thumb plate (Figs. 10 and 11) and a side plate (Fig. 12) have been found here.²

The fort was established by the French in 1679, but was captured by the British forces in 1759. During the American Revolution, Fort Niagara was used as a major staging point for British military operations (Hayes, 1967), and from 1775 through 1783, was the gathering place for the Iroquois allied to the British cause. Indian and Loyalist raiders who ravaged the western frontiers of New York and Pennsylvania from late 1777 through mid-1782 used Fort Niagara as their home base (Stevens, 1987), and it was this time period which saw an extraordinary presence of Indian warriors, and the need to maintain their arms.

When the war ended with the Americans victorious, the Treaty of Paris gave territorial jurisdiction over the Iroquois homeland (western New York state) to the United States, which motivated many of the Indians to move to Canada, where a special reserve had been established for them. Those remaining gathered into the principal towns, and commenced trying to optimize such rights as they could negotiate with the fledgling new government (Tooker, 1976).

Archaeological material recovered at Fort Niagara is predominantly British, and dates to their 18th century occupancy (Hayes, 1967). In the collections which I examined in 1984, I saw no gun material of French or American origin, and no gun material of any sort from the War of 1812 period. I am inclined to relate the two pieces of Cypher furniture recovered at Fort Niagara to the period of British occupancy in the 18th century, and more particularly to the years from 1777 to 1782 period, when the Indian presence was at an extraordinary high.

Big Tree village or Gannondoway (New York). Gannondoway was one of the towns retained by the Seneca nation. Later called Big Tree, this Iroquois town was located on the Genesee River some thirty miles south of the present town of Rochester, in western New York state, and was occupied from 1780 to 1820 (Charles F. Hayes III, telephone communication, 13 Feb 1996). In the collections of the Rochester Museum and Science Center, among the artifacts found on the surface at Big Tree, is a Cypher thumb plate (item number 6374/178) shown here in Figure 13. This thumb plate is made in exactly the same manner as the one from Fort Niagara, with a threaded boss on the inside surface, but the width of the bulb is somewhat less and it was not engraved in a very neat manner.

A limited time frame cannot be placed on surface-found material without corroboration from controlled digging; all that can be presumed is that this thumb plate was lost or discarded sometime before 1820.

Crawford Site, Saukenauk Village (Illinois)³ Saukenauk Village, at the confluence of the Rock River with the Mississippi, was occupied by the Sauk people from as

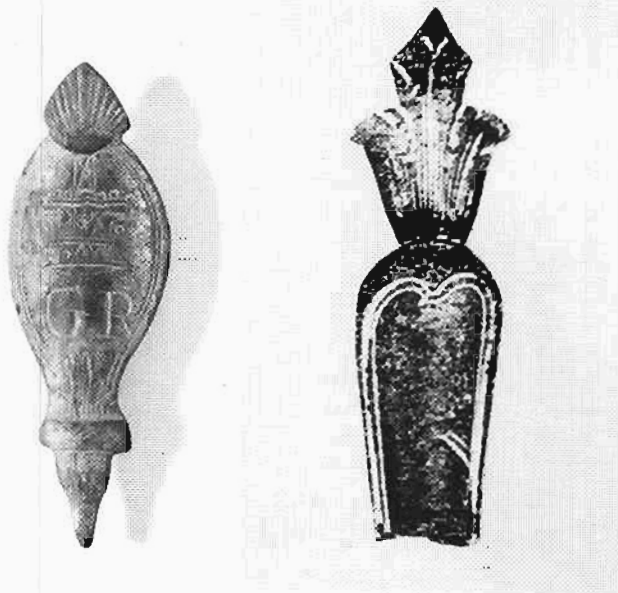


Figure 13. Cypher thumb plate of brass, length 2 1/4", found at Gannondoway or Big Tree village, western New York state. A boss cast into the back is drilled and threaded. Figure 14. Cypher type forward tang and finial of trigger guard, about 2 1/4" overall length, found at Crawford site, Illinois.

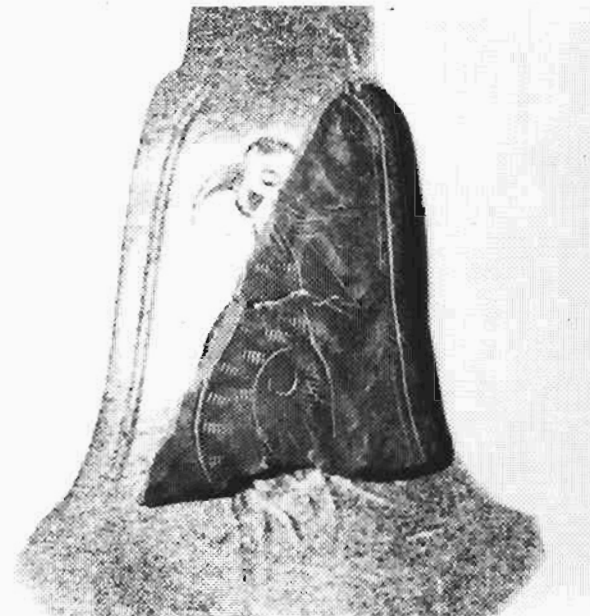


Figure 16. Fragment of a brass buttplate tang, 1 1/2" along the diagonal break, showing part of an engraved bird. Found at Spanish Fort, north central Texas. It is laying on an image of the Crawford site tang shown in Figure 15.

early as 1734 to about 1830 (Tom Emerson, telephone communication, Feb, 1996). The Village was scattered over several miles, and considering the near 100-year span of Sauk occupancy, it might have yielded a fascinating array of historical material, had systematic excavation been possible. However, the locale was also attractive to Illinois "pioneers," and as a result the Indians were "removed" and the site overrun and replaced by the town of Rock Island and it's suburbs.

The Sauk took little part in the Revolutionary War, but had a long trading relationship with the British. This may have qualified some of their headmen for special gifts such as Chief's Guns, since two items of Cypher type furniture, a trigger guard forward tang and a butt plate, are present in the profusion of gun material collected here (Hamilton, 1980, p. 77, 92-93).

The forward trigger guard tang, shown here in Figure 14 (from Hamilton, 1980, fig. 53C) fits the pattern already seen, with exceptions in the outline being two-lined instead of one, and no crescent strokes are present within the outline (compare to Figure 8 here). The kink in the outline at the head of the tang is seen on the Nock stocked gun, to be discussed in the next section (look ahead to Figure 21a).

A complete butt plate from the Crawford site has all of the basic Cypher characteristics (Figure 15 here, from Hamilton, 1980, fig. 52A) except that the bird is rather short and a bit stout, and has no sprig of foliage in the beak. Another small difference is this plate's curving profile at the first step in the tang, compared to the more angular step seen on the WILSON. Such differences indicate more than one furniture founder/finisher was employed, and it may be that at some time prior to the War of 1812, gun shops other than Wilson's



Figure 15. Butt plate tang, about 4" long with engraved Cypher type bird, found at Crawford site.

were involved in producing Cypher guns. Bailey tells us that Wilson was the sole supplier into the 1790s (Bailey, 1985a, p. 1), but if there was a need, some other gun shop could have been awarded a contract.

Dating the Crawford material from site characteristics can not be more definitive than the 100-year Sauk occupancy. Although the site was a recognized Indian town during the Revolution, and there is plenty of material present from that period, placing this Cypher type furniture in that time frame would be based on associations from other sites, such as Fort

Niagara; thus the material helps to fix dates within the site, instead of the other way around.

Brown site, a Big Osage village (Missouri). The Brown site is near the western border of Missouri, some 50 miles north of the present town of Joplin. This was the heart of the Osage country in the 18th century. Thought to have been occupied by a contingent of the Osage people from 1700 to 1795 (Hamilton, 1980, p. 164), this is the only Osage site among the several known from which an item of Cypher furniture has been reported. That one piece, a thumb plate, is pictured in a rather dark illustration in Hamilton (1980, his fig. 48B), but is not reproduced here.⁴ It appears to match the Cypher pattern in all respects, and is essentially identical to the other Cypher thumb plates illustrated in this paper.

The Osage-British connection was well established within a few years after the end of the French and Indian War, in spite of Spanish efforts to prevent it. By 1770, English "malefactors" were trading into the heart of the Osage country, providing a plentiful supply of guns and ammunition (Din & Nasatir, 1983, p. 70). This activity persisted and expanded through the Revolutionary period, supplied from the north by traders from the British posts at Detroit and Michilimackinac, and from the south by trading interests headquartered in British West Florida. British military agents were also active in the region, but few details are known. By the end of the century, this activity had waned, and in 1797, no British interference among the Osage was observed (Din and Nasatir, p. 294).

A Cypher gun was among the English arms obtained by the Osage, if the thumb plate represents a complete gun, but it may have come into southwestern Missouri for any number of reasons.

Spanish Fort, a Wichita village (Texas). This site is in north central Texas on the Red River, another distant outpost of late British influence. It has yielded at least one fragment of Cypher type furniture: a fragment of a "bird" engraved butt plate tang. The fragment has affinities to the butt plate tang in the Crawford site collection, but is also slightly different. The Spanish Fort fragment is shown overlain on Hamilton's illustration of the Crawford site specimen in Figure 16.

The presence of British trade guns at Spanish Fort was conclusively documented in 1772. Englishmen were present at this location in person in 1777 to carry on a trade which flourished for a few years, but declined to nothing by the end of the century (see Burke, 1991, p. 65/14). The Indians of Spanish Fort were not involved in the British-American hostilities of the Revolution, and were ambivalent toward the Spanish, who were trying to rule this region from San Antonio. For the most part, these Indians were fully occupied trying to maintain a position in the trading network which extended to the nomadic tribes to the west. Just how a Cypher gun got

here we may never know, but the time of English penetration into the area was within the war period, and a few diplomatic gifts to the right chiefs may have been a matter of policy. This lone fragment suggests Cypher scarcity in this part of the country, but also gives some definition to the extent of distribution ultimately accomplished by these guns.

A WILSON CYPHER GUN STOCKED IN THE "NOCK" FASHION

In the decade following the American Revolution, many changes were initiated in the standard arms of the British army, bringing major changes to the design of all British arms. Among the more prolific experimenters was Henry Nock of London, active in the gun trade from the earliest 1770s until his death in 1804 (Blackmore, 1961, pp 90-109). His story is interesting and important, and I highly recommend Chapter V of Howard Blackmore's *British Military Firearms: "The Experimental Arms Of Henry Nock."*

Nock's influence on stock design is of primary concern here. In 1786, Nock had worked up an experimental double barrelled musket (Blackmore, p. 95) stocked in a very plain manner, with a low comb and no continuation of the wrist line carved into the butt. The wrist blended into the comb and butt smoothly, without the hannister-rail effect long used on the Brown Bess. This pattern gained prominence when Nock was awarded orders for another experimental musket similarly stocked, the "Duke of Richmond's" pattern, following trials in 1790 (Blackmore, p. 105). Nock's pattern replaced the Brown Bess stock pattern on all new designs beginning in 1802, when production of the New Land Series began.

Somehow, Nock's influence spilled over into the stock design of Chief's guns, and the next piece to be considered here appears to be another Wilson gun with Cypher furniture like that already seen, but stocked in the Nock fashion (Figures 17a and 17b). This gun is very much like the one discussed earlier, as regards overall size, construction, and markings; it is 52¼ inches in length from muzzle to heel, with a 36¼ inch trade gun barrel of about 18 gauge (slightly larger than the 20 ga. on the other gun), with all the same marks and characteristics (Figures 3 and 4).

Figures 18 through 21 show the brass furniture on this gun, which is immediately recognizable as matching the Cypher pattern furniture installed on the gun stocked in the Brown Bess fashion, and found on the historic sites. Some details of the engraving on the furniture differ slightly, and the execution of the cypher on the thumb plate is crude, but there is no question that the decorative patterns are a direct continuation of those used on the Brown Bess stocked gun.

A significant change is evident in the decoration of the lock plate (Figure 23a), where the maker's name is now



Figure 17a. A Wilson Cypher gun stocked in the Nock fashion.

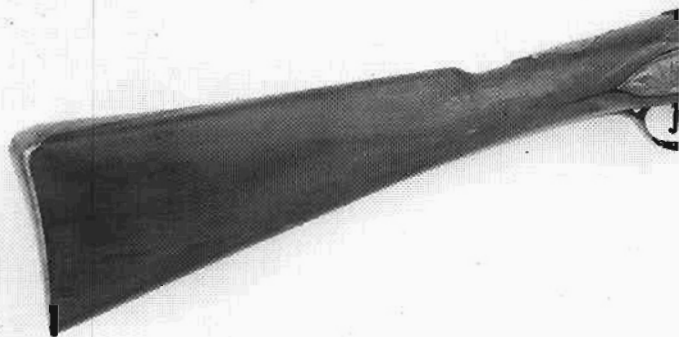


Figure 17b. Close up of the wrist and butt of the Nock stocked Wilson Cypher gun.

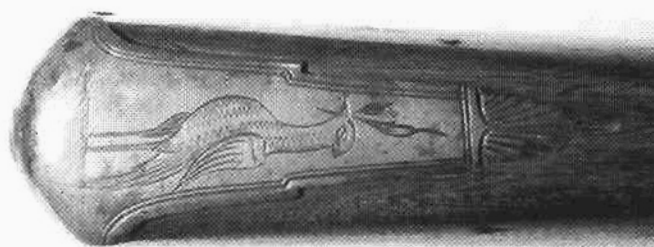


Figure 19. Butt plate tang, 4" long.



Figure 20. Side plate, 5 3/4" long.

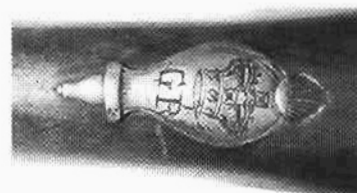


Figure 18. Thumb plate, 2 1/4" in length.



Figure 23a. Lock area of the Nock stocked Wilson Cypher gun. The slightly convex lockplate is 6 1/8" long and 1" wide at the fence.



Figure 23b. Close up of the boar's head and horn design on the tail of the lock plate shown in Figure 23a.

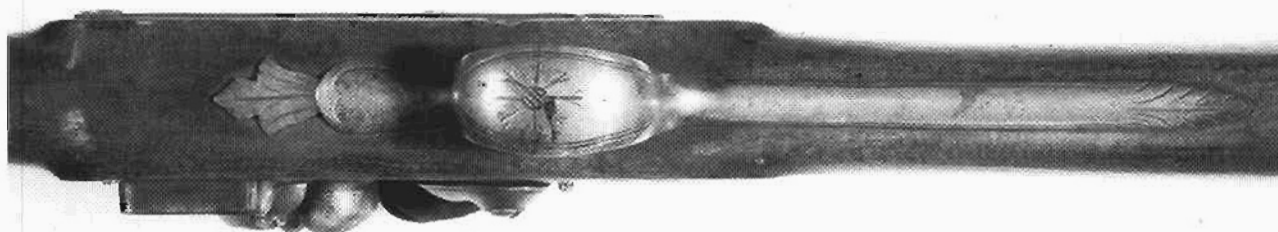


Figure 21. Trigger guard, 9 5/8" long

under the pan, with a bold, strongly chiselled boar's head and horn design on the tail (Figure 23b).

Some of the overall differences are also noteworthy, and possibly significant. The weight is slightly more, 6¼ pounds, due in part to the larger barrel, and in part to the stock being of birch wood, which can be more dense than walnut.⁵ In addition to the variant stock pattern and type of wood, the lines of the stock are not refined but crudely robust, and the surface is only roughly sanded. The gun is quite sturdy and serviceable, but the overall character is coarse. Several tidbits of information from Blackmore, Darling, and Bailey shed glimmers of light on these anomalies.

Blackmore (1968) tells us Nock was busy making many different guns (p. 106), and failed to meet delivery requirements for the Duke of Richmond's muskets contracted in 1790 (p. 109). Further, many carbines made by Nock, delivered in 1797 under another contract, received complaints of being of inferior finish (p. 108). It appears the Nock facilities were overextended, and shoddy work was being shipped.

We learn from Darling (1970) that, at this same time, Nock and Wilson appear to have had a virtual monopoly on the manufacture of India Pattern muskets for the military establishment (p. 52), and so great was the pressure to accelerate production that inferior walnut was used for stocks, and even standards of proof were relaxed (p. 50). Perhaps Nock and Wilson formed some sort of cooperative agreement, trying to meet delivery requirements, and this Nock-stocked Wilson originated in that period.

Bailey informs us that the Wilson shops had been the designated supplier of all Indian firearms required by the British Government since before the Revolution, but the relationship expired before the end of the century (Bailey 1985a, p. 1). Wilson did not participate in the manufacture of government Indian guns for the war of 1812 (p. 13), and later, in the often quoted letter by Gorge Simpson of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821 (I saw it first in Hanson, 1955, p. 17) Wilson North West guns were severely criticized for their poor quality and workmanship. The long slide from prominence to extinction appears to have commenced in the last decade of the 18th century. The gun here at hand may be an early manifestation.

Checking Authenticity. There is no evidence or suggestion that any of the stock wood has been replaced on this gun. The stock is either all right or all wrong. The fore end tip looks like it has been sawed off, losing about an inch and a half. The coarse iron ramrod came with the gun, and has the broken stubs of an integrally forged wad puller on the small end. It could be (probably is ?) a replacement. All furniture is snug in the wood, with no indication of alteration

or misfit adaptation. Pin fastened parts are fully pinned, without signs of tampering, and the thumb plate, though a little cocked, is attached in the regulation manner (see the middle gun in the X-ray image, Figure 32). Traces of red paint are present in the grooves of the engraving and other protected places in the furniture, reminiscent of the red paint present on a graceful little 18th century fowling piece by Wilson, described by Donald Baird (1968, p. 6).

When I first obtained this gun from a collection being disbursed by Jackson Arms in October of 1974, it was suffering from an enthusiastic but primitive attempt to convert it back to flint lock. The work on the barrel was tolerable, but the external lock parts needed work. The configuration of parts now present on the lock was accomplished in April 1976 by Kit Ravenshear, who took special pains to leave the markings on the lock undisturbed. The gun is in sound original condition otherwise, accepting the signs of hasty fabrication.

COMPARISON WITH A CHIEF'S GUN OF THE WAR OF 1812

Many characteristics of the Cypher gun were carried forward into the design of the Indian Medallion gun, which has been well established as the Chief's Gun of the War of 1812.⁶ An example marked **GRI**—on the badly corroded lock, probably for William Grice of Birmingham, is shown here for quick reference. Notably, the form of the stock is a direct application of the Nock pattern, with a blended wrist and butt (Figure 24), but the finish of the stock is back up to old standards.

Gone is the Cypher thumb plate; in its place a cast silver medallion (Figure 25), featuring the image of an Indian with bow and quiver, and feathers in a head band. Just as the engraving of the King's Cypher varied on the earlier guns, this Indian will be seen with small differences from gun to gun (compare Figure 25 here, with Egles, 1976, p. 55). Attachment of the medallion followed the method established for the thumb plates (see the bottom gun in Figure 32).

Excepting the Medallion, the furniture is still all brass, but is not as sturdy as before. Metal has been saved in the butt plate, and the tang is substantially reduced; there is little room for engraving on the tang, so a small boar's head and horn design has been applied at the base of the tang, just above the heel (Figure 26). A similar boar's head and horn is present on the tail of the lock (Figure 27), much subdued from the bold image on the lock of the Nock-stocked Cypher gun (Figure 23b).

In outline, the Medallion side plate is similar to the Cypher design, but has a bow-arrow-shield design engraved in the fully outlined central panel (Figure 28). The finial on

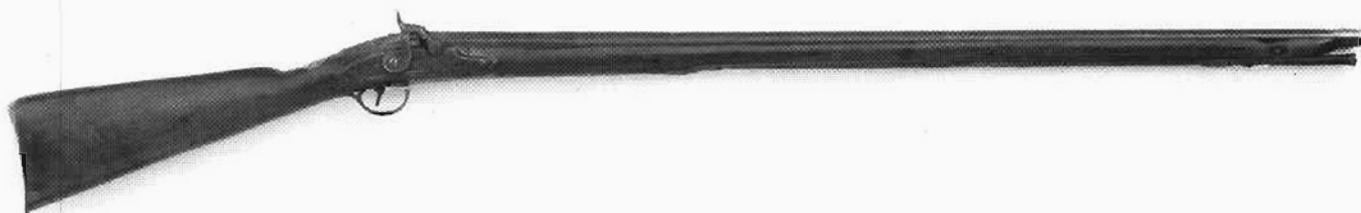


Figure 24. An Indian Medallion gun by Grice (converted to percussion), with all the characteristics attributed to Chief's guns made under the 1813 Board of Ordnance contract, during the War of 1812.



Figure 25. Silver Indian medallion on the Grice gun, the thumb plate on Chief's guns made during the War of 1812.



Figure 27. Close up of boar's head and horn design on the tail of the lock plate of the Grice gun.

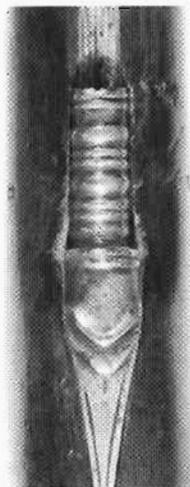


Figure 30. Rear ramrod pipe on the Grice gun. Note the corrugated tube.



Figure 31. "Spider" front sight on the Grice gun. The splayed legs are inlaid into the metal of the barrel.

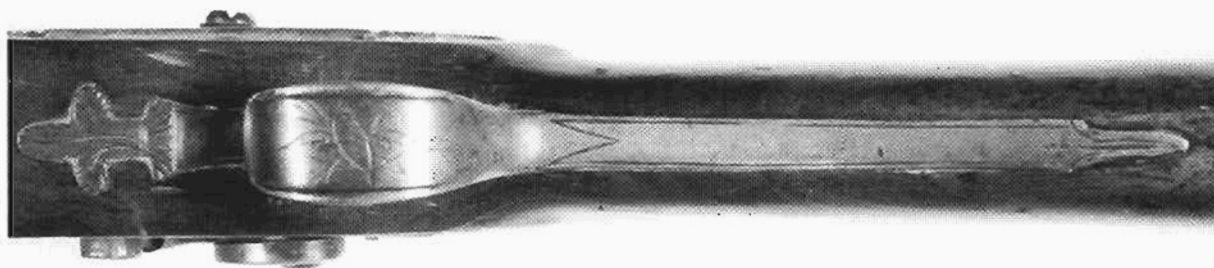


Figure 29a. Trigger guard on the Grice gun.



Figure 28. Brass side plate on the Grice Indian Medallion gun.

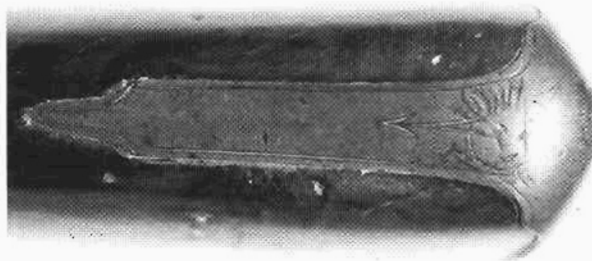


Figure 26. Butt plate tang on the Grice gun, with boar's head and horn design engraved near the heel.

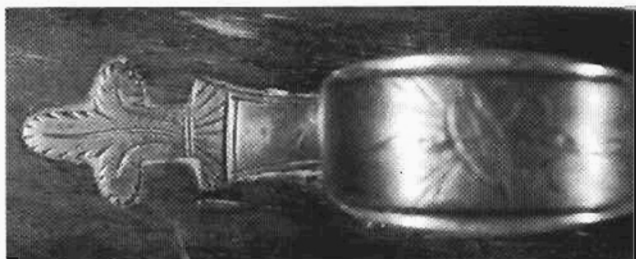


Figure 29b. Close up of the forward part of the Grice trigger guard.

the forward tang of the trigger guard has evolved from three leaves into three feathers (?) similar to the crest of the Prince of Wales, and the "snow flake" formerly on the bow is replaced with another rendition of the bow-arrow-shield design (Figures 29a and 29b).

One point of regression is seen in the ramrod pipes, which are now "corrugated," adopting the style used on English trade guns since the early 1700s. A rear pipe is present (Figure 30), fitted with the apron and finial seen on the Cypher rear pipe.

Barrels of the trade gun pattern were used, but were proved under the rules of the Board of Ordnance and were so marked, without any mark identifying the maker (see Bailey, 1985a, fig. 6d). The front sight was made of brass in a distinctive "spider" pattern (Figure 31), which was actually inlaid into the metal of the barrel, a seemingly expensive and unnecessary technique. For trade gun barrels, though, these were the best, as attested to by the many Medallion guns which lasted through the flint years into the percussion era, and kept on shooting. In my own experience I can recall seeing very few North West guns from the 1812 period, but the Medallion guns are not so uncommon, and are nearly always found converted to percussion with evidence of extensive use. It appears Mr. Wilson's successors in the Chief's Gun business in the 19th century were held to higher standards, even though special guns for Indians were rapidly becoming a thing of the past.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Looking back now over twenty some years of chasing Cypher clues, it is quite possible that the several "finds" of Cypher furniture from historic sites mentioned here could simply be happenstance encounters, limited by the collections I have seen and publications I have read. The same is true for complete guns: I know of three, the two presented here and one more which has been restocked as a Kentucky style buck and ball gun. I have not made an organized search, nor sent out questionnaires, but offer this article to promote consideration and discussion, and to encourage a closer look by all. Hopefully, additional existing guns will be recognized, and more Cypher type material will be identified in collections from sites where British-Indian cooperation in the affairs of the American Revolutionary War was substantial.

NOTES

1. Passing mention has been made of early Chief's guns of this sort on two occasions. De Witt Bailey, in his review of the Board of Ordnance 1813 contract (1985a, p. 14, Fig. 6C), mentioned that the Indian Medallion replaced the Royal Cypher (on Chief's guns) in the 1790s, when a new, more modern styling was adopted for Indian firearms. In his supplement to that review (Bailey, 1985b, p. 6), he mentions learning of an early Chief's gun by Wilson, dating to the 1790's. There must be a few more out there some where.

2. After the Trade Gun Conference sponsored by the Rochester Museum in 1984, I stayed over a day to look through the gun material in their collections from 18th century sites I was looking for Carolina gun furniture, of which there was none, but got to see the Cypher furniture from Fort Niagara and Big Tree instead.

3. Hamilton (1980) calls this locale the "Sullivan Site (RI-81)" in the text of his *Colonial Frontier Guns*, but indicates in his list of sites (pp. 164 & 166) that "Sullivan" site is really "Crawford Farm" site. The Illinois Archaeological Survey refers to site RI-81 as "Crawford" site, only, and does not recognize nor know the origin of the Sullivan designation (Tom Emerson, personal communication). "Sullivan site" may be a collector's term.

4. Hamilton (1980, page 88) captions the Brown site Cypher thumb plate as "Another British military escutcheon." This item was not included in his previously published report covering Brown site Indian gun parts (Hamilton, 1960).

5. The wood in this Nock style stock was identified as "birch, *Betula*" by Donna J. Christensen, June 18, 1976, at the Center for Wood Anatomy Research, U.S. Forest Products Laboratory, Madison Wisconsin.

6. The story of the Indian Medallion gun has been revealed in a series of articles headed by the observations of Charles E. Hanson, Jr. within the chapter titled "Secondary British Types" in his 1955 classic *The Northwest Gun*. Next came Gordon T. Howard with his 1963 inquiry "Chief's Gun—or What? Thirteen years later, Ross Egles made a substantial contribution toward the understanding of these guns in his well researched "Canadian Indian Treaty Guns" published in 1976.

De Witt Bailey supplied the fascinating historical detail and wrapped up most of the loose ends in "Those Board of Ordnance Indian Guns—Again!" which appeared in 1985. It is interesting that this evolution spanned four decades, with a paper appearing roughly every ten years.

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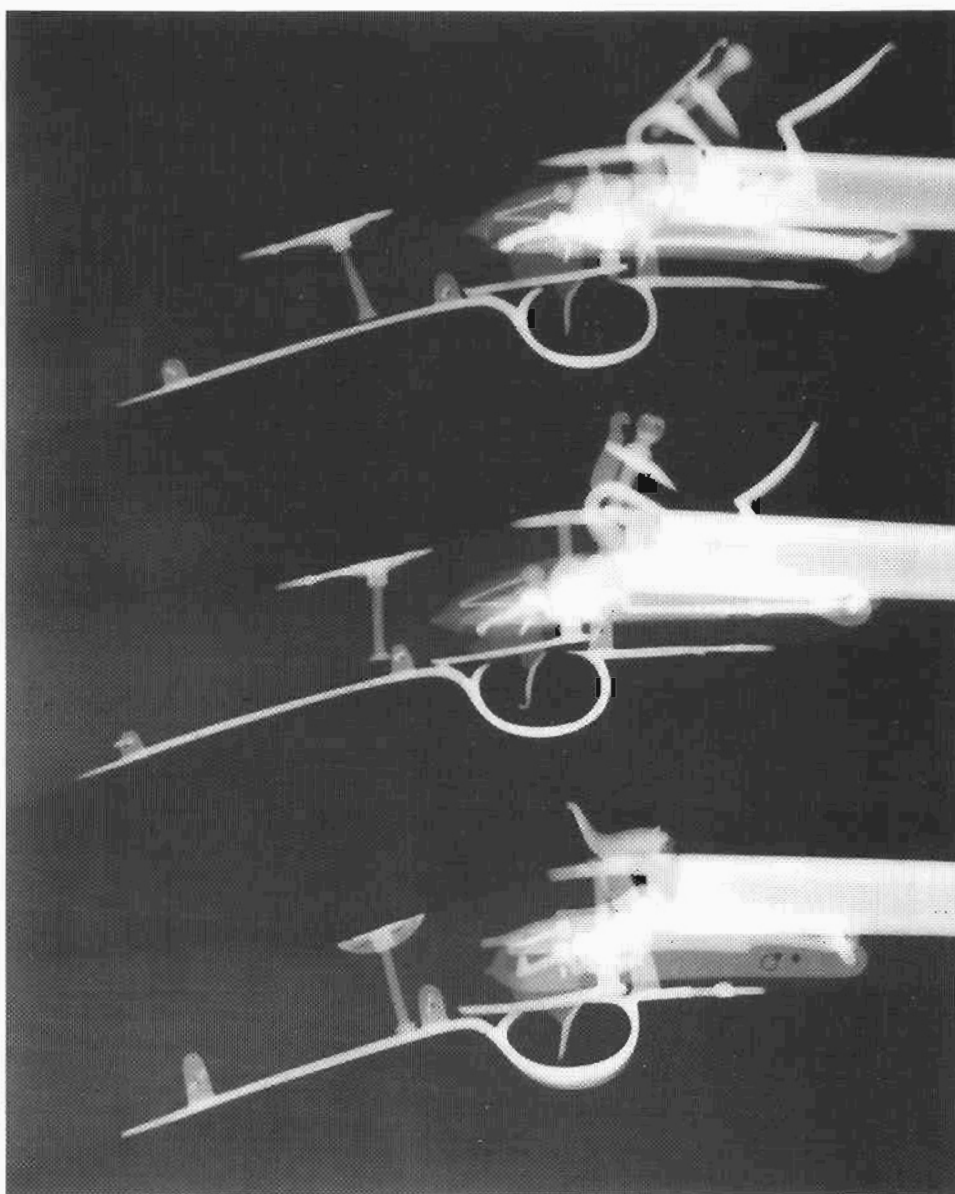


Figure 32. An X-ray image of the lock areas of three Chief's guns. Top: Wilson Cypher gun in Brown Bess Stock. Middle: Wilson Cypher gun in Nock stock. Bottom: Grice Indian Medallion gun. Note uniform method of thumb plate attachment and three-lug arrangement on all trigger guards.