

### ANDREW WURFFLEIN

- 1832 - Arrives from Germany
- 1837 - Applies for citizenship
- 1840 - Becomes a United States citizen
- 1846 - Cofounds Phila. Schuetzen Verein
- 1849 - Receives patent for gun part design
- 1858 - Buys shop at 208 North Second St.
- 1870 - Retires
- 1872 - Dies

### JOHN WURFFLEIN

- 1844 - Arrives from Germany
- 1846 - Cofounds Phila. Schuetzen Verein
- 1848 - Applies for citizenship
- 1850 - Receives patent for gun part design
- 1851 - Becomes United States citizen
- 1851 - Opens shop at 98 South Third St.
- 1864 - Retires to farm
- 1884 - Dies

### WILLIAM WURFFLEIN

- 1870 - First listing as a gunsmith
- 1872 - Andrew Wurfflein dies. Hires Thomas Wallis
- 1876 - First patent
- 1877 - Second and third patents
- 1884 - Patent for breech-loading rifle John Wurfflein dies
- 1897 - First listing as "manager," not gunsmith
- 1906 - Name change: "Quaker City Arms & Target Works"
- 1915 - Business closes permanently

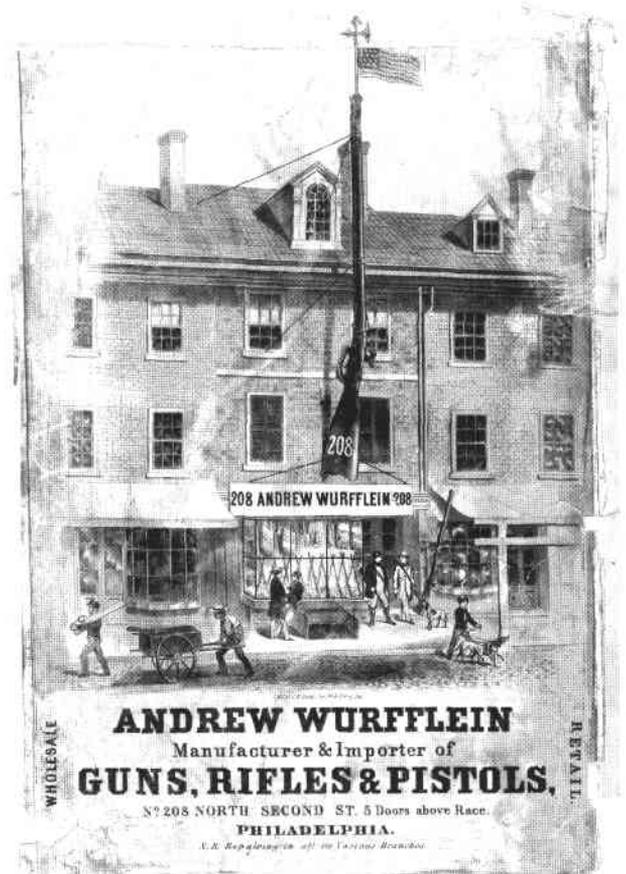


Figure 1. 208 North Second Street. Lithograph by J.H. Camp, 1861. (Courtesy of the Atwater-Kent Museum.)

# The Wurffleins of Philadelphia: Artisans at the End of an Era

Ronelle Willadsen

The early years of our independence saw a massive influx of workers and ideas as a direct result of the tumult, both political and economic, on the European continent. The scope of this upheaval is reflected in the extraordinary population shift resulting in the growth of the German community in William Penn's province of Pennsylvania.

The German artisan was literally being forced out of his homeland by adverse social and economic interactions. The Redemptioner system, having dwindled, left a tremendous number of unskilled or unproductive individuals back in Germany who were unable to leave the country. Although they consumed the limited economic resources of the region, they provided no tax revenues to their rulers. The artisan craftsmen were the only people left to bear the brunt of an increasing tax load. This group included tradesmen of every sort, such as watchmakers, bakers, brewers, and gunsmiths. Political structures were unstable; military conscription was unavoidable; taxes were spiraling upward; and crop failures left an overpopulated countryside on the verge of destitution. The only hope on the horizon for many was a ticket to a new life in America. Among these new arrivals was Andrew Wurfflein, a gunsmith whose family legacy would stretch into the next century.

## BROTHERS IN ARMS

Naturalization papers give New York, 1832, as Andrew Wurfflein's arrival date in America. No information is available on the years immediately following. Andrew does not appear in the city directories of either New York or Philadelphia. The only datum placing him in Philadelphia as early as 1835 is a record in the Cemetery Returns for 1800 to 1860, which lists

Amalie Wurfflein  
B. 5/1834  
D. 8/27/1835  
Age 10 mo.  
Cause—Dentition  
Dr. D. Geiger<sup>1</sup>

This child, and several others of Andrew, were buried in German Lutheran Cemetery.

Andrew continued to live and work in Philadelphia. He filed his intention to become a citizen in 1837 and took his



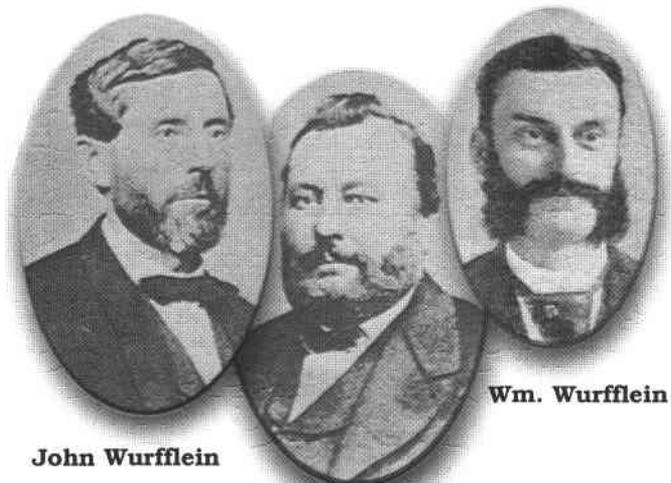
oath as an American citizen in October 1840. According to the Philadelphia City Directories, he was advertised as a gunsmith located at 335½ North Third Street from 1845 until 1850. In 1851, he moved to larger quarters on North Second Street. The success of his business is evident by the fact that only 8 years later, in the summer of 1858, Andrew Wurfflein owned the gun shop and factory at 208 North Second Street<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 1).

Andrew Wurfflein settled his family at this location in 1851, but the street address was then 122 North Second Street. This discrepancy has led some authors to assume the gun shop was moved to 208 North Second in 1858. But the city of Philadelphia renumbered its streets in 1857, and, as a result, many addresses appear as many as 100 to 120 digits higher in 1858. Andrew's address remained the same throughout his years in business. His wife, Caroline, and his children Charles, Julia, William, and Andrew, Jr., lived above the shop.

With Andrew established in a successful enterprise, his brother John Wurfflein, four years younger, had a home when he arrived in Philadelphia in 1844. He too was a gun-maker and very likely spent his first few years in America living and working with his brother in the shop on North Second Street.

The architect's rendering of the property (Fig. 2) gives us a feeling for the crowded conditions and intense utilization of the land in the manufacturing district of Philadelphia. The entire lot only measured 16 feet wide by 102 feet long. A four-foot alley ran across the back between the gun factory and the next building.

John's acculturation was no doubt eased by having a brother who had been in the gun business for 11 years. Still,



John Wurfflein

Andrew Wurfflein

Wm. Wurfflein

John spoke German, and the transition was softened for him and other newcomers by their participation in clubs and social activities organized by the German community. Sporting clubs formed for gymnastics, and, given the number of German gun-makers in Philadelphia, it is not surprising that a shooting club was next. On November 20, 1846, six German-born men, including Andrew and John Wurfflein, organized the Philadelphia Schuetzen Verein. The club's first rifle range was established at Lemon Hill (Fig. 3), a beautiful estate located on the banks of the Schuylkill River in the far western suburbs of Philadelphia. Among the elected officers were John Wurfflein, First Shooting Master, and Andrew Wurfflein, Second Shooting Master. By the end of the first year, the club listed 25 members.<sup>2</sup>

A small book, published in 1906 by the Rifle Club itself, offers a rare, detailed glimpse into the history of this particular club as well as a picture of German assimilation during the Civil War and beyond. By 1860, many cities hosted "Schuetzen Fests," shooting contests with picnics, parades, and prizes ranging from trophies to medals. Philadelphia's club was one of the best, and other clubs "had an opportunity when arranging a 'Schuetzen Fest' to witness the Philadelphia riflers carry off most of the important prizes and trophies."<sup>3</sup>

The skill of the Philadelphia shooters naturally drew attention to the weapons they used. Because many members were gun-makers, the club's successes were an excellent drawing card for anyone seeking accurate, well-crafted weapons, either for competition or, in the case of the military, as personal weapons carried in addition to standard-issue armaments. Both Andrew and John Wurfflein produced rifles for target shooting as well as military purposes.

Though the percussion action had increased speed and safety over the old flintlock days, firing these guns still posed problems for the shooter. The hammer was large and

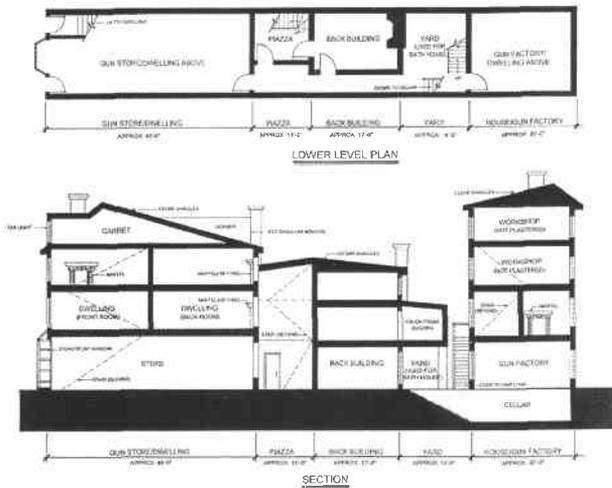


Figure 2. Architect's rendering of 208 North Second Street.

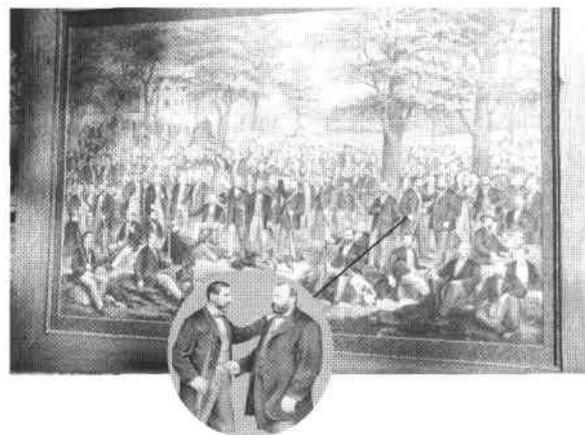


Figure 3. Philadelphia Schuetzen-Verein at Lemon Hill (left, John Wurfflein; right, Andrew Wurfflein). (Collection of Dan Schlegel.)

prominently placed on the side of the breech. If the weapon were mishandled, accidental discharge was a dangerous possibility. In addition, when the piece was held in firing position, the shooter's eyes were within 6 to 8 inches of the hammer, exposed to smoke and flying particles from the exploding cap.

As a gun-maker, Andrew Wurfflein worked with these design problems on a daily basis. In December 1849, he received a patent for an "Improved Concealed-Hammer and Turning-Nipple Lock," a major design alteration specifically addressing safety issues in the percussion system (Fig. 4). This invention, as described in the letters of patent

consists in so constructing the lock that the percussion cap or other primer used to explode the charge is entirely protected from the weather, concealed from view, and when exploded does not cause a volume of smoke to rise above the lock, nor any particles of the primer to escape from the chamber at the moment of discharging the piece, accidental or premature discharges being prevented by securing the trigger by a spring-catch.<sup>4</sup>

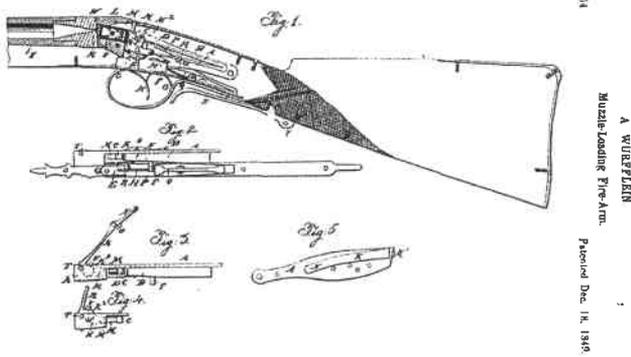


Figure 4. Andrew Wurfflein's 1849 patented design.

Andrew's shop did contract work for the city of Philadelphia in the early 1860s, converting old-model flint-lock weapons to percussion. These smooth-bore former muskets were stamped "A. WURFFLEIN PHILAD<sup>A</sup>" on the lock plate and "CITY OF PHILADELPHIA" on the top of the barrel. There are several historically documented riots and disturbances in Philadelphia in the 1850s and 1860s in which City Council notes indicate purchases of weapons or ammunition from local gun-makers, including Andrew Wurfflein. Wurfflein arms, like many others, most likely saw duty with the city militia at the opening of the Civil War.

Many small gun-makers obtained contracts for conversions to speed the process of arming the federal troops and local militias. Andrew Wurfflein's shop turned out these conversion weapons but also produced rifles more representative of the skill and artistry typical of German craftsmen.

One fine example of Andrew's work is a .56-caliber half-stock percussion rifle with elaborate patchbox detail, double-keyed fore-end, and high-grade walnut stock (Fig. 5). The hammer configuration is conventional percussion rather than that of his 1849 patent, possibly at the request of the patron who placed the order. This rifle measures nearly 4 feet long and weighs 12 pounds. Guns of this grade were always custom-made. Much less ornate versions were available, stocked in several calibers for hunting and target shooting.

Andrew Wurfflein also made a small percussion pistol often called the "Philadelphia-Style Derringer" (Fig. 6). In truth, Henry Derringer, of Philadelphia, held the patent on the famed pocket-sized weapon, but virtually every gun-maker copied the design and produced similar models. Although Derringer eventually filed numerous lawsuits for patent infringement against gun-makers from Philadelphia to California, Andrew Wurfflein's name was never among the litigants.

The Wurfflein pistol was .41-caliber with an average barrel length of 1¼ to 3 inches. The mountings and lock were usually scroll-engraved with "A. WURFFLEIN PHILA." stamped behind the lock. Only a few of these pistols exist in

collections today. Most of Andrew's work seems to have disappeared with the passing years.

Both Wurfflein brothers were capable of artistic craftsmanship, but of the pieces of John's work that have survived, nearly half are engraved with the owner's name, creating the impression that he did more custom work than his brother. John Wurfflein evidently possessed an energy and charisma that helped him develop a niche in Philadelphia's gun-making community. Within 8 years of his arrival in 1844, he co-founded the Philadelphia Schuetzen Verein, became a citizen, and established his own shop at 98 South Third Street. His half-stock plains and target rifles seemed to find their way into the hands of individuals who would become historically significant. These presentation guns were beautifully crafted and typically bore engraved plates with the owner's name and the date of receipt.

In 1851, we find evidence of a rifle commissioned by an Army officer from Washington, D.C., Major John R. Hagner. Diaries kept by Major Hagner indicate a trip to Philadelphia in the fall of 1851, possibly to pick up his new rifle. John Wurfflein's name and address were written in the Major's own hand on the title page of his 1852 diary. John Batten, a collector of weapons from the early days of Western expansion and owner of the Hagner rifle, described this weapon in a 1975 article for the *Arms Gazette*: "A typical plains rifle, weighing ten pounds, it carries a 36½" .50-caliber octagonal barrel, with patent breech and hook tang, 1⅛" across the flats at breech and 1⅛" at muzzle. Stock is walnut with checkered grip and iron mountings. Barrel and lock are both by John Wurfflein of Philadelphia. The rifle had a circular iron patchbox and an inscription stamped on the barrel, "MADE FOR MAJOR J. R. HAGNER U. S. ARMY BY JOHN WURFFLEIN, PHILADELPHIA."<sup>5</sup> Other individuals, whose histories have endured to the present, received rifles from John Wurfflein either as gifts or by commission. In 1855, a plains rifle, similar in design to the Hagner piece, was presented to the Marshal of the Northern Liberties Police District, Colonel John K. Murphy. Described by Ron Gabel, a collector of early Philadelphia gun-makers, the gun was a "finely engraved half-stock target rifle marked 'J. WURFFLEIN PHILAD<sup>A</sup>' on the top flat of its full octagon barrel. The rifle has an inlay to the rear of the trigger guard which is engraved, 'Presented to John K. Murphy by John Wurfflein December 25, 1855.'" The exact circumstances of this exceptional Christmas gift are unclear. However, it may have been connected with the repeal of a city ordinance that prohibited policemen from accepting any gift or reward from a citizen for extraordinary services. While John Wurfflein's gun shop on South Third was outside the boundaries of Northern Liberties, his brother, Andrew, at 208 North Second Street, was within Murphy's jurisdiction. Records have been

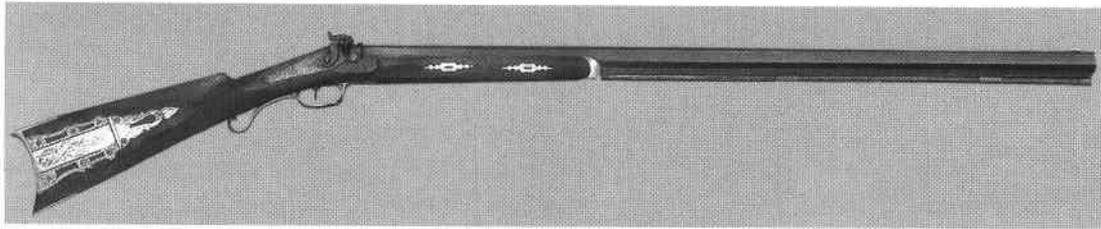


Figure 5. Andrew Wurfflein's half-stock percussion rifle: (.56 caliber). (Collection of Doug and Gail Heiser.)



Figure 6. Andrew Wurfflein's "Derringer-type" pistols. (Collection of Ronald G. Gabel.)

discarded, and time blurs the circumstances, but Murphy or his officers may have helped Andrew, or protected his shop, and John, wanting to repay the brother who gave him a start in America, reciprocated in the best way he could. According to Gabel, Murphy left Philadelphia and went on to distinguish himself in military campaigns of the Civil War and the war with Mexico.<sup>6</sup>

A pattern of military service seems to mark many of the existing rifles crafted by John Wurfflein. Another veteran of the Mexican War who carried a Wurfflein rifle was Major General James Henry Carleton. This rifle appeared in an auction catalog complete with Carleton's commission to Lieutenant Colonel for service in New Mexico in 1865. The paperwork was signed by President Andrew Johnson. The weapon has the same general characteristics of other John Wurfflein presentation pieces: percussion lock, engraving, set triggers, patchbox, double keying on the fore-end, and high-grade walnut stock. In this case, the inscription is stamped on the barrel instead of on an attached brass plate (Fig. 7). Carleton obtained his first commission in the Maine Militia in 1838 but served continuously in the far West from 1854 until his death in 1873 in San Antonio, Texas.<sup>7</sup> His New England origins make it possible to imagine his passing through Philadelphia in the early 1850s when John Wurfflein was becoming a name with Army officers.

Another fine example of John Wurfflein's work only hints at its history. The half-stock target rifle bears a brass inscription plate marked "A. F. Vaughan—California" (Fig. 8). This .45-caliber weapon with crescent buttplate, double-set triggers, and nicked patchbox and trim came in its own custom-made, felt-lined case complete with all the necessary tools to maintain the rifle in working order, as well as bullet moulds to produce ammunition appropriately sized to that particular rifle. No records thus far indicate who A. F. Vaughan might have been or how he became acquainted with John Wurfflein.

Like Andrew, John had a wife and family to support, so developing a successful business was economically necessary. Like his brother, John received a patent for a design enhancement in 1850 as a "Method of Preventing Accidental Discharges in the Prussian Gun." While Andrew's patent design dealt with a safety feature in the muzzle-loading gun, John improved the breech-loading rifle, the weapon of choice among cavalry soldiers during the Civil War, because the weapon was easily loaded while on horseback. John developed his patent while working in his brother's shop. Although actively pursuing a gun-making career, John did not list himself in the City Directory until he opened his own shop on South Third Street in 1851. This period was marked by a brief but prolific collaboration with Frederick Psotta, an

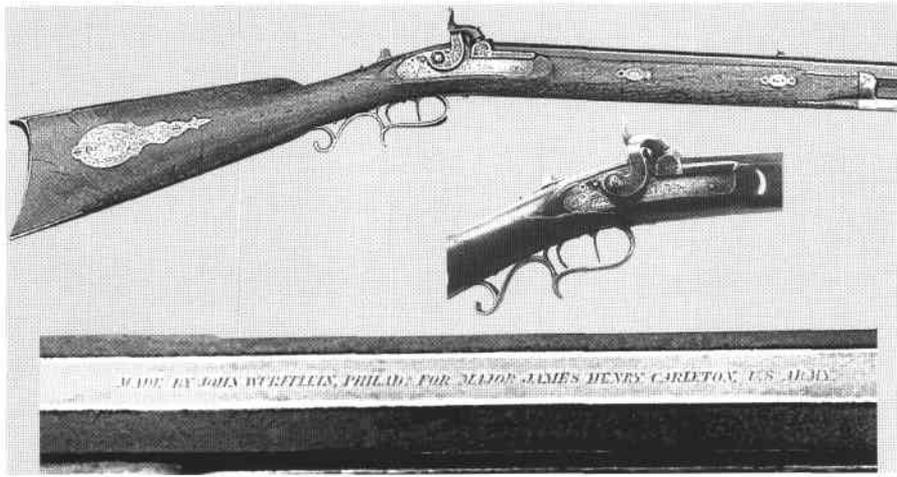


Figure 7. General Carlton's rifle. (Collection of David C. Squier.)

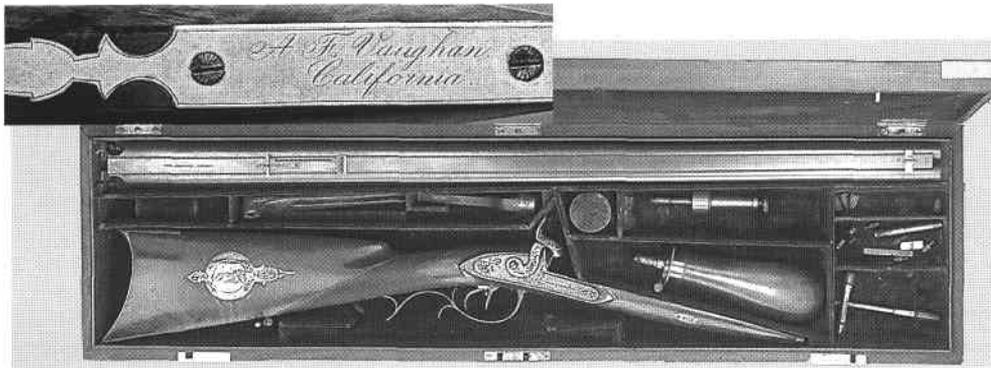


Figure 8. Cased A. F. Vaughn target rifle. (Willadsen collection.)

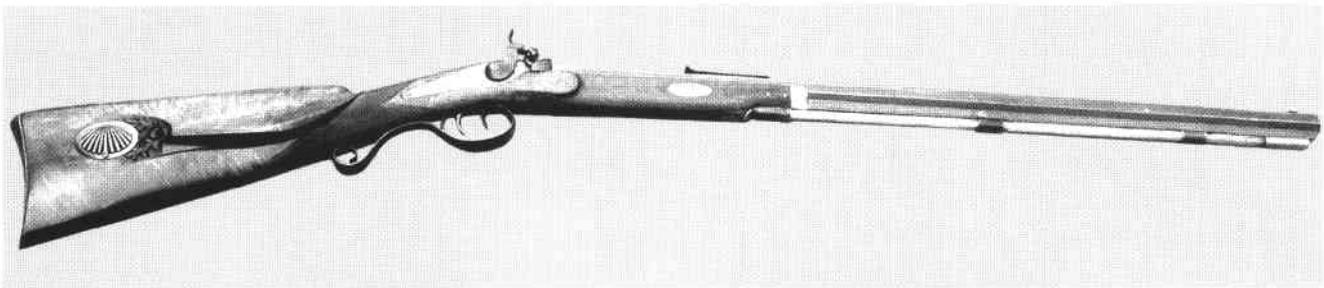


Figure 9. Boy's model rifle with shell-pattern stock. (Collection of Ronald G. Gabel.)

early partner in the Third Street gun shop, before he moved to California to work for A. J. Plate, who also employed several former Derringer craftsmen. John and Psotta built half-stock plains rifles, and a boy's model rifle (Fig. 9). Among the more innovative designs was a .44-caliber revolving rifle (Fig. 10).

The revolving rifle concept had existed in many forms since the early 1800s. Colt, Whitney, and others had all experimented with ways to combine the rifle's styling with the multiple-shot cylinder of a revolving handgun. Wurfflein and Psotta's version was an eight-shot cylinder fitted to a 27" octagonal barrel rifle by means of two horizontal keys fitting through a center pin. The full hood surrounding the cylinder gave the rifle a somewhat cumbersome appearance, but the

machinery was delicate and precise, rivaling the craftsmanship of German clockmakers. The most likely market for a weapon of this kind was the military, but only if the design could be adapted to standardized factory production. In small artisan shops like Wurfflein's, one or two craftsmen worked on each gun. The parts were made by hand for that particular weapon. Seams and joints were individually filed and fitted until the parts connected perfectly, but the slight alterations precluded interchangeability. For this reason, mechanicals as complex as Wurfflein and Psotta's revolving rifle were not destined to be competitive or profitable for their designers.

By the 1850s, significant progress was being made in the area of interchangeable work. The Springfield Armory, using model jigs, taps, and gauges, had begun production of

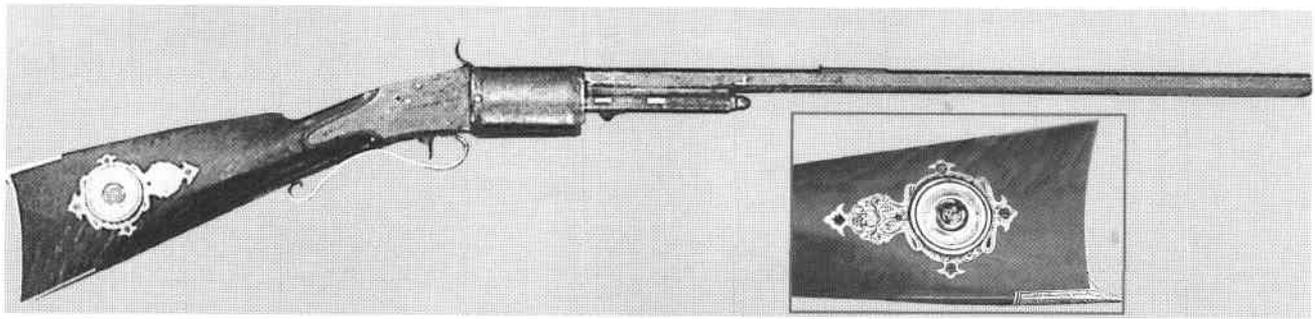


Figure 10. J. Wurfflein & Psotta revolving rifle with close-up of ornate patchbox. (Private collection.)

the new model percussion musket in 1842. The Jenks carbine and pistol, produced at Ames Manufacturing Company, Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, also used interchangeable parts. The system was tested by stripping 10 guns, mixing the parts, and reassembling them at random.<sup>8</sup> By 1851, a method evolved for close forging with steel dies, and metal working with efficient machinery capable of exact cuts, which was no longer dependent on the skill of the operator. Customers purchasing in quantity, such as the federal government, could now bypass the dozens of small manufacturing houses whose quality and reliability varied from order to order. Instead, the larger armories and factories with the business capital to afford the machinery would become the exclusive recipients of the lucrative government contracts.

Technology in the gun industry grew rapidly during the Civil War years, but it had little real impact on the daily operations of the Wurffleins. Andrew maintained his business on Second Street, but John purchased 11 acres of farmland in Montgomery County, just north of the city, in 1863, possibly with the idea of moving his wife and son to the country. But son Christopher died in 1863 at the age of 22. John's only heir to his gun business gone, he closed his doors sometime between 1865 and 1866, retiring to become a gentleman farmer. By 1867, he was a widower, living in Montgomery County alone.

The gun business had been good to John, but he was also a shrewd investor in the burgeoning real estate market of Philadelphia, where, between 1854 and 1865, he purchased four lots in newly developing neighborhoods, as well as a brick home on Masters Street. Oddly, records indicate that he never owned the building that housed his shop on South Third Street. He purchased the farm for a substantial cash price. According to the recorded deed of 1863, the price for his 11 acres was "eight thousand dollars lawful money of the United States of America to them [the sellers] in hand well and truly paid by the said John Wurfflein."<sup>9</sup> He increased his holding by adding another 9.25 acres to the farm in 1869.

Back on Second Street, Andrew began to groom his 17-year-old son, William, to take over the business. In all likelihood, the three sons, Charles, William, and Andrew, Jr.,

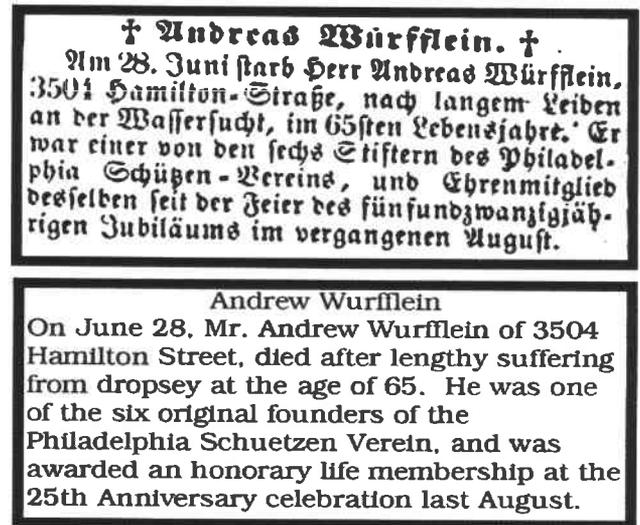


Figure 11. Andrew Wurfflein's 1872 obituary and translation. (Ron Peterson collection.)

had spent their youth learning the gun-making trade. They grew up in the residence above the store with their parents and sister Julia. But by 1865, Andrew's family life was drastically different from what it had been just 7 years before.

Public health in the city was more a matter of good fortune than governmental policy. Epidemics of cholera and tuberculosis, periodically running through the city, caused deaths by the hundreds. Between 1858 and 1865, Andrew lost his daughter, wife, and first son to tuberculosis. Faced with managing a household, raising two boys aged 15 and 17, and keeping the gun shop and factory afloat, Andrew, then 60 years old, married Catherine, 24 years his junior, in 1867. William and Andrew, Jr., continued to live at home and work with their father.

Andrew retired in the fall of 1871 and moved with his wife Catherine to a home on Hamilton Street not far from Fairmount Park. He died there in June of the following year of heart disease at the age of 65. In keeping with the close nature of the German community, his obituary appeared in the *Schuetzen Zeitung* (Fig. 11), the official newspaper of the Philadelphia Schuetzen Verein, where his friends and colleagues would be most likely to see it.<sup>10</sup>

His sons were heirs to his property, and though he left

no will, an administration of his goods indicated an estate valued at \$37,281.36.<sup>11</sup> The accounting also included a “Judgment note on Stock of Gun Store at 208 North Second Street against William Wurfflein” for \$17,661.80. Apparently, Andrew drew up papers allowing William to buy the property on Second Street when he assumed management of the premises. The administration documents also indicated a “discount on Note allowed by agreement of the Heirs” in the amount of \$3,161.80. Assuming the note in question was the one against William previously mentioned, William stepped into his father’s business with a debt to the estate in excess of \$14,000. Details of this transaction give a glimpse into the philosophy of the German community with regard to banking and indebtedness.

Early German immigrants, bound together by a commonality of culture, often chose to resist the customs and traditions of their new home. Linguistic and cultural differences contributed to the social stability and solidarity of the community as well as perpetuated an ultra-conservative attitude toward business practices when dealing with outsiders. Commerce in the German community was a “cash only” proposition. Most merchants distrusted paper money, credit institutions, and banks, preferring to keep cash locked in sturdy boxes and make loans in mutual trust with no more formality than noting, on a piece of paper, the amount due.<sup>12</sup>

The account of Andrew’s “goods and chattels,” which follows, substantiates the notion that established business persons were in the habit of making loans on property to other members of the German community as a matter of course.

**Goods & Chattels per Administration of Will**

- 1. Prom. note of C. W. Schuellemann at 1 yr. fr. 10/4/69. . . . . \$658.37  
Collateral security = Cert. for 100 shares in Hubbel Potter Gold and Silver mining Co-op. Penna. dated 2/26/57 par val. \$50
  - 2. Judgment note on stock of Gun Store No. 208 No. Second St. against Wm. Wurfflein. . . . . \$17,661.80
  - 3. Due bill of Charles Presser dated 12/4/66 . . . \$200.00
  - 4. Judgment note on Lewis Barkhardt—Mauch Chunk dated 10/8/71 . . . . . \$200.00
  - 5. City loan—Cert. of Loan # 502 to City & Co. of Phila. dated Jan. '57. . . . . \$200.00
  - 6. Rifle Club Stock Cert. of 8 shares in Phila. Rifle Club . . . . . \$200.00
  - 7. Union Nat'l Bank Stock Cert. of 2 shares #248 dated 1/10/66 @ \$50 ea . . . . . \$100.00
  - 8. Cash in bank . . . . . \$225.00
- TOTAL . . . . . \$19,445.17**

- 1. Bond & Mortgage on premises #2003 Coates St.—prop. of B. Robinson. . . . . \$4200.00
  - 2. B & M on premises #1436 No. 6<sup>th</sup>— prop. of J.A. Henkel . . . . . \$2500.00
  - 3. B&M on premises # E. side of 9th St. 313 ft. No. of Jefferson St.—prop. of Emma N. Blackhum. . . \$1400.00
  - 4. B&M on premises NE side of Norris St. 79ft. 5" NW of Thompson St.—prop. of Mrs. A. E. Coffee . . . \$2000.00
  - 5. B&M on prem. NE side of Norris St. adjoining #4 above—prop. of Mr. Coffee (husband of #4) . . . . . \$2000.00
  - Policy of Life Ins.—Penn Mutual Life Ins. Co. . . . \$3000.00
  - Benefits accruing fr. 2nd Jefferson Beneficial Soc. . . \$50.00
- Total. . . . . \$15,500**

Andrew passed his knowledge of percussion rifles and pistols to his son William and left him a well-established business during the post-Civil War era in rifles, pistols and parts (Fig. 12). The great military machine that fueled the gun-making industry had died down, taking along with it many small family-run industries that could not compete when the economy was no longer a seller’s market. But when one demand dwindles, another is not long in the making. Leisure activities began to take the place of military involvement. Among the pastimes gaining popularity was indoor target practice. Shooting parlors sprang up around the city, and along with them came the need for a specialized gun designed for indoor use at short range. The percussion parlor rifle became the transitional link between father and son as Andrew Wurfflein’s business moved into the 1870s with William at the helm.

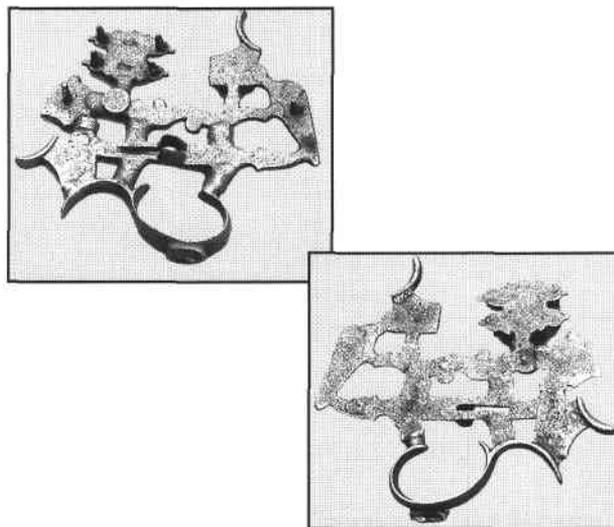


Figure 12. Castings of silver hardware from Andrew Wurfflein’s shop used on “Derringer-type” pistols. (Collection of Ronald G. Gabel.)

Andrew's business passed to his son while John remained retired on his farm in Montgomery County. There is no evidence that John Wurfflein particularly involved himself in his nephew's business. William's future rested solely on his own ability to manufacture and market the next generation in gun technology. Success in the gun business, for William, would require hiring additional personnel capable of creating new designs as well as upgrading the mechanics of the rifles and pistols his father had been making for thirty years.

Since the end of the Civil War, many small gun-makers had gone out of business. Others, feeling the pinch, gave up their individual businesses to join the workforce in more financially secure shops. William searched this pool of gun-making talent for the craftsman who could keep the Second Street gun store in the buying public's eye. The man he chose was Thomas M. Wallis.

Wallis, a British subject, was not a newcomer to the gun-making industry in Philadelphia. His shop at 411 Ella Street had been in business for 11 years when William became the proprietor at 208 North Second Street. Wallis was one of the fortunate gun-makers to maintain a business presence in post-Civil War Philadelphia. By 1870, the market was awash in surplus ordnance, some of which the Federal government dumped into major markets at pennies on the dollar. In such a climate of over-availability, gun-makers with no special skills or merchandise were forced out of business.

Thomas Wallis, however, had a creative mind and apparently sufficient reputation that William Wurfflein was aware of his work. In 1871, Wallis still had a shop on Ella Street. By 1872, his shop was no longer listed in the City Directory, suggesting that he worked for Wurfflein. Both sides gained in this transaction. William gained the craftsman and designer he needed, and Wallis, freed of the overhead of his own shop, and assured of a steady salary, could concentrate on developing his ideas. Back in 1860, when he had opened his own shop, Wallis had only a wife and an 8-month-old son to support, but by 1870, he had five children. The economics of supporting such a large family, given the postwar depression in the gun market, could have been an added incentive to Wurfflein's offer of employment.

William was making basic changes in the way business had always been done at 208 North Second Street. In Andrew's day, there had been hired help, but the designs came from the proprietor. Guns were made in the traditional way for percussion rifles and pistols, with woodwork artistry strongly reminiscent of the maker's German heritage. Word of mouth constituted most of the advertising, and the German community made up the target audience. Andrew was old

school. He attended church where the services were in German, and he lived where he worked.

In contrast, William was born in Philadelphia, attended public school, and grew up speaking English as well as German. Though raised in the traditions of his father's heritage, William had a tremendous advantage over the early experience of his father and uncle because language was not a barrier between his product and his market. He became aware of the need to expand his name recognition beyond the German target-shooting and hunting clientele of his father's day, as well as to diversify the work his shop produced. Indoor shooting as a sport was on the rise, and Wurfflein saw a market for both the parlor rifle he had learned to make under his father's tutelage and a new product line—mechanical shooting gallery targets.

Shooting parlors had existed since before the Civil War, but the resurgence of interest in the 1870s created a market for Wurfflein's rifles and targets.

Indoor facilities provided a way for competitive target shooters to stay in practice during the winter, when the weather kept them off the outdoor ranges. Even though the Philadelphia Schuetzen Verein, of which William was a member, had purchased the Schuetzen Park above Schuylkill Falls and Queen Lane in January 1870, they also acquired the old Arbeiter Hall on North Third Street in October 1872 as an indoor facility for shooting, dancing, and other events.<sup>1</sup> Prize shootings were part of any celebration within the German community, and indoor parlors or galleries, as they became known, expanded the sport to a year-round pastime.

Parlor owners purchased rifles for use by their patrons, but the shooters could bring their own rifles of the type designed for the indoor sport. Any serious shooter would own a parlor rifle of this type rather than practice with a different gun on each visit. Because these arms were fired at a much closer range than were ordinary rifles, the barrel, loading method, and type of ammunition had to be altered to suit. Externally, the parlor rifle structure resembled that of any other rifle, but the redesigned barrel configuration would only shoot the 10-m distance of the indoor target ranges.

A comparison of the parlor rifles made by Andrew and William shows clear similarities. Stock, wrist, and trigger configuration are nearly identical. The most notable differences are the position of the hammer on the lock and the relationship of the hammer to the firing-rod. Andrew's weapon, decidedly Germanic, and using a center-mounted hammer with a drilled hole, allowed the shooter to sight through the hammer while lining up the shot. The hammer was connected to the firing-rod by a notch that prevented the rod from lying loose inside the barrel. William's earliest parlor rifles employed a side-mount lock, a long-standing favorite

among the American military and the generally accepted style of the day for most rifles. In addition, the firing rod was not attached to the hammer, a configuration that required the shooter to tip up the barrel to seat the rod against the hammer before shooting.

Despite these differences, the general operation of the parlor rifle was consistent in both models. Instead of priming the rifle at the breech or muzzle, the shooter placed a percussion cap in the small oval opening on the underside of the barrel. Though the barrel appeared to be standard length, the actual working barrel was, in fact, only 8 to 10 inches long, reaching from the loading slot to the opening at the end (Fig. 13). A 4-mm ball, similar to a BB, was dropped in the foreshortened barrel. When the shooter fired, the hammer pushed a slender rod forward down the longer section of the barrel to impact the cap and shoot the ball.

William's first parlor rifle designs look as though he were determined to do things his way instead of his father's. In the Creedmoor model, which was a side-lock design, neither the pierced hammer nor the attached firing-rod configurations of Andrew's guns appeared in William's creation. His model was made in the early 1870s and named for the Creedmoor Rifle Range on Long Island, New York. The Creedmoor name became synonymous with excellence in long-range rifle shooting. Wurfflein's Creedmoor target rifle is significant, not for its particular merit as a rifle, but as a bellwether of the new marketing approach William was introducing into the family business. For the first time, a Wurfflein-made firearm was given a model name and marketed as a stock item in three finish grades. Name association became a marketing tool. Shooters who participated in the sport indoors, as well as out, would see the rifle and assume the name *Creedmoor* meant accuracy and a level of performance up to the standards of successful competitors.

Despite its lack of innovation, the first Creedmoor model gave Wurfflein an image separate from that of his father. It also gave his employee, Thomas Wallis, time to become acquainted with the Wurfflein gun-making style and discover ways to make it better.

In an odd marketing maneuver, William, who had taken over a 35-year-old gun business, created a flyer for the 1876

Centennial Exhibition advertising every cast-iron shooting gallery target he made, but only one rifle (Fig. 14). Wurfflein's parlor rifles and targets were exhibited in the midst of displays from some of the finest gun-makers in the world, such as Rigby of Ireland and Alexander Henry of Scotland. Though the products of other small gun houses were mentioned as "quality work at very low prices," Wurfflein's work was cited in the United States Centennial Commission's Reports and Awards, Group XVI, as "good, cheap, and very ingenious."<sup>2</sup>

Obviously William would need to do more if he intended to rise to a position of prominence in his industry. Gallery targets were an eye-catching item, good for business, and capable of drawing a crowd to the storefront window. But Wurfflein ran a gun business, and his faith in Wallis's talent as an inventor paid off with his first patent, in October 1876, for an improvement in a supplemental barrel for a revolver.

But seeing the market change is easier than changing with it. Wurfflein tried to upgrade several areas at once, rather than focus on any one element of his product line. He pushed Wallis, while developing the patent for the supplemental barrel, to work on an invention to alter the parlor rifle; the creation of a charging device and firing-rod innovation. This patent, applied for in February 1877, and approved in November of that year, was developed by Wallis, but was assigned to William Wurfflein. This business arrangement allowed Wurfflein to become "manufacturer and patentee," his usual title in advertising and sales literature. Meanwhile, Wallis continued developing patent-worthy ideas in anonymity, because this owner/inventor relationship would never become public knowledge.

Wallis developed other improvements, but William's business continued into the 1880s mainly on the strength of his targets. Wurfflein had won a medal for his targets at the Centennial Exhibition, and in 1879, he won a bronze medal at the Pennsylvania Agricultural Society exhibition for his targets and target guns. Only his gallery items were gaining notice. There was a lull in the family gun business, but before the end of the decade, three events

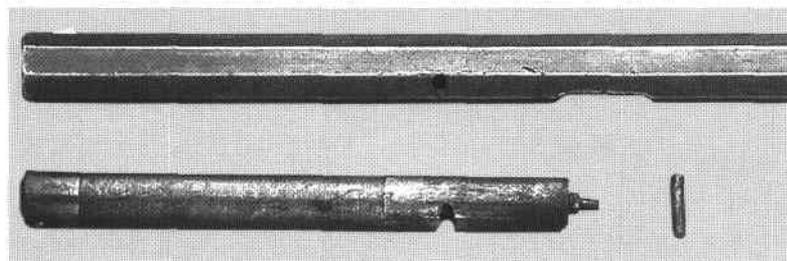


Figure 13. Parlor rifle barrel insert. Oval loading slot is visible on the bottom of the external barrel.

**WILLIAM WURFFLEIN**

Drummer Girl, Beating Drum when Bull's-Eye is Hit, \$50.00.

Plain Hound Target, Comic Figure rising and ringing Gong when Bull's-Eye is Hit, \$5.00.

Ballet Girl, raising Arm and Leg when Bull's-Eye is Hit, \$20.00.

**Manufacturer of the CREEDMOOR PARLOR & GALLERY RIFLE**

Dog Running when Hit, \$3.00.

Using Small Shot and Caps—Price, \$20.00, \$22.00, \$24.00.

**AND all VARIETIES of MECHANICAL TARGETS**

Rooster, small Chick springing on Back when Bull's-Eye is Hit, \$3.00.

Indian Horseman, Falling Back when Bull's-Eye is Hit, \$5.00.

Eagle, opening Wings and ringing Bell when Bull's-Eye is Hit, \$6.00.

**206 NORTH SECOND STREET, PHILAD'A.**  
For Large Illustrated Price List, address as above.

Figure 14. 1876 Centennial Exhibition poster. (Courtesy of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.)

would change the course of Wurflein's business and, ultimately, his life.

The market share was dwindling for shops such as William's, which made only percussion weapons. Large gun houses such as Sharps and Colt had begun offering cartridge weapons in several styles, stepping up the competitive pressure on individual craftsmen who wanted to stay in business. Wurflein needed a fresh idea based on cartridge technology, but adaptable to the capabilities of his made-by-hand shop. The first major event of the decade for William was a Wallis patent turning an existing design into a prototype that would revolutionize Wurflein's production and give him an opportunity to promote himself into the position of prominence he sought. Ironically, the basis for the Wallis patent came, not from a large and prestigious gun manufacturer, but a from small concern in Chicopee, Massachusetts, J. Stevens & Company.

Johsua Stevens began his gun company in 1864, with two designs based on his patent for a breech-loading firearm. In this patent, the barrel of a single-shot pistol tipped up from the rear when a release stud on the left side of the frame was

depressed. At the same time, the spring that caused the elevation also operated an extractor to remove the spent cartridge. The spring action was the subject of the Stevens patent.<sup>3</sup> The tip-up concept was not remarkable by Wurflein's day, but Wallis's improvements were totally original and inexpensive to produce (Fig. 15).

The potential of Wallis's innovations was tremendous because no major changes in the Stevens model had been developed in 20 years. No doubt, William shared his vision for the future of his business with the only family member still living who could truly appreciate the magnitude of the news, his uncle, John Wurflein. An understanding of the timing of events, at this point, is crucial to the development of a theory that may explain the next 30 years in the life of William Wurflein.

Wallis applied for his patent in March 1884. He must have worked for some time to develop the substantive changes he devised in the original Stevens design. Given this scenario, William probably talked at length with his uncle, in 1883, about the new developments going on in his shop. Also evident was the hard fact that promoting a new design with

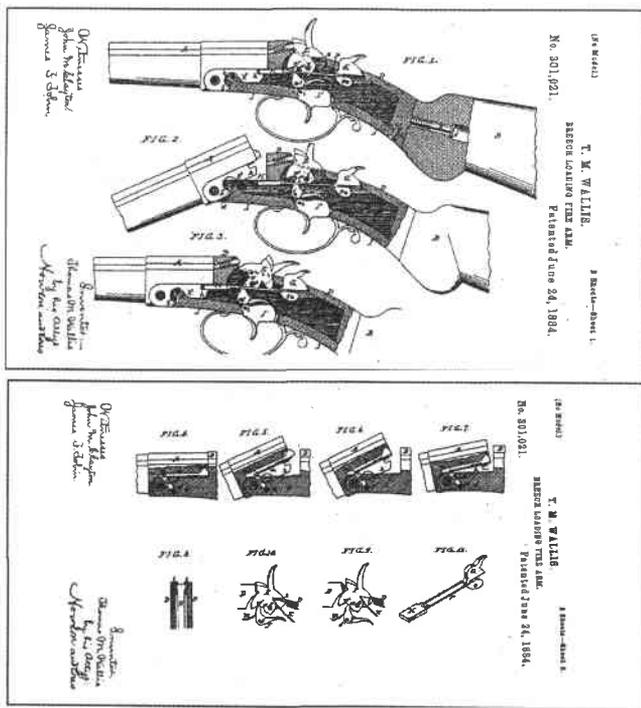


Figure 15. 1884 patent for improvements in breech-loading firearms.

such wide-reaching ramifications would take a capital investment that William could not summon given the disposition of his father's estate. As a measure of support for William's efforts, John lent his nephew \$577.27 in a note dated September 1, 1883, with interest of \$15.20 due February 8, 1884.<sup>4</sup>

When William took over the business in 1870, John, who had been married and widowed by 1869, had no living children of his own. William was the only male heir to pursue the gun-making profession and certainly must have assumed his uncle would remember him in his will for the sake of the family business. However, in 1873, John married Amelia, a woman 34 years his junior, and the same age as his nephew, William. By 1878, John had a son, George, and a daughter, Theresa. This unexpected turn of events had unforeseen repercussions for William when the second major event of the decade occurred in his life—John Wurfflein died, January 4, 1884. John's will provided for his wife and children and, should his children not survive him, his estate passed to his brother's children, including William. Because John's children were only 6 and 8, William was effectively eliminated from receiving any money from his uncle's estate.

Two months later, the United States Patent Office granted Wallis and Wurfflein's patent request, and the time to market the new design was at hand. Iron, wood, and casting materials were necessary in quantity if the gun store was to have a sufficient supply of the new rifles on hand as the news of the improved design hit the market. William's initial loan of \$577 from his uncle was rapidly depleted, and plans to

enlarge the factory, convert to steam power, and hire additional workers meant obtaining more investment capital. In times of difficulty, the unconscious influence of family heritage can guide the choices made. Even though all the male members of William's immediate family were gone, he approached Amelia for the loan rather than deal with a bank.

The third event that shaped William's future occurred on August 4, 1885, when he signed an agreement with his aunt, Amelia, for a loan of \$10,000. Although this was a spectacular sum of money for a small businessman to borrow, William saw the future in steam power and the strength of his breech-loading gun design. The terms of his obligation were strict. He was required to repay \$5,000 at 6% interest during the subsequent 5 years. After that time, he could make interest payments every 6 months to keep the loan current. Throughout the entire period of the indenture, he was obligated to present a receipt for the current year's taxes by the first day of December. Should he default at any time, the property at 208 North Second Street was forfeit, including all of its contents. As an aside, William was also liable for the cost of a lawsuit and attorney's fees of 5%, should Amelia be required to recover her money through legal action.<sup>5</sup>

William's life was at a crossroads. He was heavily in debt, to both his father's estate and his aunt Amelia. Nevertheless, he launched the biggest advertising campaign and factory expansion of his life.

## THE CARTRIDGE GUNS

From the day the patent was approved, every gun that left the Wurfflein shop was stamped "Patented June 24, 1884." Gallery rifles, sporting rifles, target rifles, and target pistols were all built on the same patent frame design, adjusted to the size and model of the firearm. This patent provided uniformity and consistency of design, the closest thing an artisan gun house could offer to mass-produced, interchangeable parts. The next step was to inform the gun-buying public that the Wurfflein gun shop had a new product line with a dramatic improvement over anything the competitors had to offer.

The lack of business records or correspondence hinders the discovery of Wurfflein's marketing methods, but

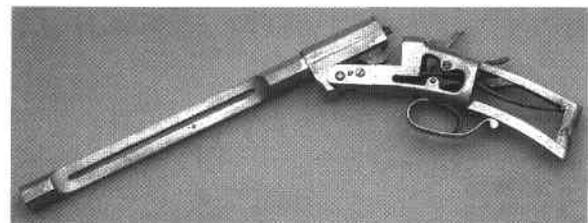


Figure 16. Factory cut-away 1884 patent design. (Willadsen collection.)



Figure 17. Example of broken "D" on maker's stamp.

there are indicators that he thought it was time to "take his act on the road." Shortly after the patent was approved, William made a cut-away version of the patent model showing, at a glance, how the new design had improved on the older versions of the breech-loading target rifle (Fig. 16). This item was specifically designed as a salesman's sample to demonstrate why potential dealers should carry the Wurflein product line. Ironically, a stamped marking on this sales tool is one of the most helpful items in dating guns made during the early years of patent-model production.

Wurflein rifles and pistols were stamped with the maker's name and the patent date on the top of the barrel, near the breech. The factory cut-away was similarly stamped. Only this piece, and one midrange target rifle, serial #640, have the Wurflein name stamped on the barrel with the "D" in PHILAD'A intact. Every other piece of Wurflein's work thus far examined has a broken vertical staff on the letter "D" of the barrel stamp (Fig. 17).

Catalog advertising was becoming the style of the day, and William Wurflein's business was represented by a catalog in 1889. This catalog not only listed the many models he offered but testimonials from target shooters, trick-shot artists, and gallery owners extolling the virtues of his wares. The 1889 catalog is a significant milestone in Wurflein's business because it marks the end of major experimentation with the patent model. Despite the merits of the new design, Wurflein and Wallis immediately began modifying certain elements to speed production and trim costs. A comparison of several early models with the patent drawings shows the changes in breech configuration and pivot-pin number and positioning.

One thing is clear, despite the unifying element of common design, no two of Wurflein's guns were constructed identically. They were handmade by craftsmen whose interpretation and skill were the deciding factors in the similarity of any items. To date, every model examined has some difference, regardless of how small, from others of the same style.

The 1889 catalog offered a list of models that indicates the range of quality available, from the \$15 gallery gun, to the top-of-the-line \$45 Model No. 25. It also included the Wurflein target pistols, which Wurflein touted as "the quickest loaded and handiest Pistol in the market."<sup>6</sup> (Fig. 18 & 19)

Wurflein was establishing a uniform stock inventory that he could market to anyone within reach of a catalog. He was also one of the few makers to realize the added marketing advantage of chambering his rifles and pistols to take cartridges from any maker. Customers could still purchase loading tools and make their own ammunition or buy it factory-made from Wurflein. But they also had the option of using Winchester, Everlasting, Stevens, Colt, or Ballard if they ran out and the factory product was unavailable.

From a collector's standpoint, Wurflein's attempts to standardize his stock seems like an organizational plus. The reality is, in addition to all of the models, there were 12 finishing variations offered as "extras," beside several barrel and caliber choices.

By the 1890 catalog, Wurflein allotted only five pages to guns, sights, and ammunition, and the remainder of the sixteen-page booklet was devoted to mechanical shooting gallery targets. The monthly magazine *Shooting and Fishing*, published in Boston by sportsman and author A. C. Gould, carried ads for Wurflein rifles and pistols from 1890 until November 1894 (Fig. 20). This was the last time Wurflein placed ads in a general publication for his own rifles and pistols.

In 1906, William changed the name of his business one final time. The new name, Quaker City Arms and Target Works, still evoked the days when arms of all kinds were made on the premises, but finally, the name mentioned

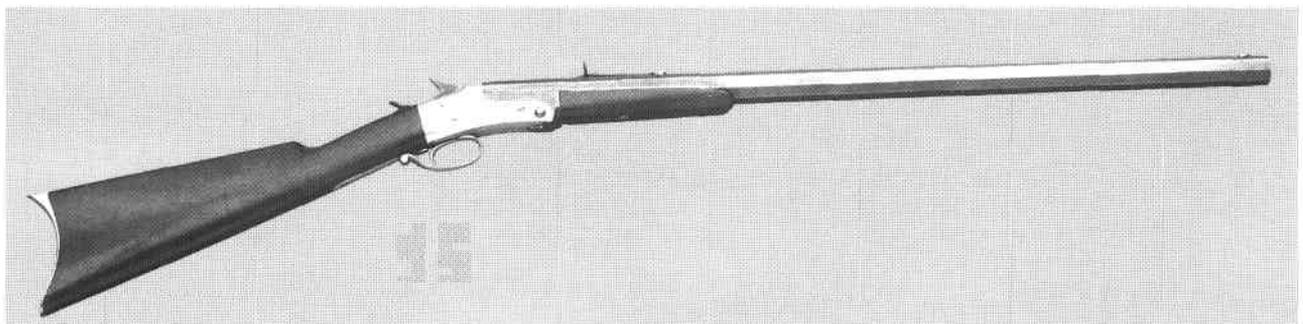


Figure 18. Model #22 midrange target rifle (serial #640). (Willadsen collection.)



Figure 19. Engraved William Wurfflein target pistol. (Peterson collection.)

targets, a product line that had won awards and been financially beneficial since 1870.

### THE END OF AN ERA

By 1913, the Wurfflein business was in serious fiscal difficulty. Every time William published a target catalog, he included the year's new designs and attractions. This required an investment in materials and workers' salaries to create the prototypes before it was certain the new targets would sell. The business had been paring down production costs for years, most notably by ending the manufacture of target rifles and pistols. But hindsight tells us that William's business was falling back two steps for every one step forward. Eventually, income could no longer be shuffled around to keep all the creditors at bay. In William's case, another Wurfflein provided the push that sent the 70-year-old business into the pit of obscurity.

The loan papers between Amelia and William clearly stated that the first \$5,000 must be repaid within the first 5

years of the loan, at an interest rate of 6%. Evidently this part of the agreement was satisfied. However, interest payments had to be made twice yearly if the note was to remain current. When William could no longer make the payments, Amelia foreclosed.

On June 4, 1915, Sheriff A. J. Smallwood posted a notice of dispossession on the door of 208 North Second Street. He also notified William Wurfflein, "manager and real owner," on the same day. Court records of the pleading are gone, but the Sheriff's ledger records that the Judgment awarded to Amelia Wurfflein, in the amount of \$5,321.67, was handed down "for want of an affidavit of defense." The property was sold on the courthouse steps for \$50—to Amelia Wurfflein.<sup>7</sup>

William Wurfflein, at the age of 67, had nothing left of the once thriving business his father left to him 41 years before. He lived out his days in a small, rented house on North Eighteenth Street with his wife, Clara. William died on February 22, 1922, leaving nothing to provide for his wife. Clara spent the remaining 15 years of her life in the Penn Widow's Asylum, where she died in 1937.

## THE WURFFLEIN BREECH-LOADING RIFLE.



**A**UTOMATIC REBOUNDED HAMMER, Checkered Pistol Grip and Wood Fore-end with Fancy Curl Walnut Stock, Verner, Deep, Globe and Open Sights, stands foremost as to symmetrical model, style and beauty of workmanship. For safety, speed in loading, cleaning, effectiveness and accuracy, IT HAS NO EQUAL. For Price List, Address

**WM. WURFFLEIN,** PATENTEE AND MANUFACTURER,  
208 North Second Street, PHILADELPHIA.

## WURFFLEIN TARGET PISTOL.

For Fine Shooting, Symmetrical Model, Style, Beauty, Balance and Accuracy, IT HAS NO EQUAL.

FOR SALE BY ALL FIRST CLASS DEALERS IN FIREARMS.  
FOR PRICE LIST ADDRESS **W. WURFFLEIN,** 208 North Second Street, Philadelphia, Pa.



Figure 20. Wurfflein ads run in *Shooting and Fishing* between 1890 and 1894.



Figure 21. 208 North Second Street (highlighted center building). Photograph taken ca. 1960s before demolition. (Courtesy of Philadelphia City Archives.)

Today, nothing stands on the lot at 208 North Second Street (Fig. 21). The original building from Andrew's day fell into disrepair many times after Amelia took it. In a strange twist, Amelia was required to maintain the buildings in a livable condition because Catherine Wurfflein, Andrew's widow, had a life estate in the property and lived there, undisturbed, until her death in 1920. Amelia died 5 years later.

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