

# The Longrifle Makers of Guilford County

By C. Michael Briggs

The Longrifle Makers of Guilford County is a study of two North Carolina Longrifle Schools. The first one is called "The Early Deep River School" and the second one is called "The Jamestown School". By school I mean regional architectural style. North Carolina had nine Longrifle Schools between 1765 and 1900.

Guilford County, like most of Piedmont North Carolina was settled by people that came down the Great Wagon Road from Southeastern Pennsylvania, the Delaware Valley and Nantucket Island. Guilford was settled by a mix of Germans, English and Scotch-Irish. The Germans settled here first in the 1740s. The three oldest churches are found in the Southeast section of the county, all are Lutheran. English Quakers arrived next and started three churches called New Garden Friends Meeting, Deep River Friends Meeting and Centre Friends Meeting. Each was started between 1751 and 1754. The Scotch-Irish arrived in the early 1760s and started Buffalo Presbyterian and Alamance Presbyterian.

The Early Deep River School probably started in the late 1760s and ended around 1810. During the Revolutionary War, General Nathanael Greene wrote that local gunsmiths were repairing his army's weapons. Research has been unable to confirm the identity of those gunsmiths. There was a group of gunsmiths working in the Centre Meeting house area on the border of Guilford and Randolph County that supposedly included a man named Matthew Osborne. According to local legend, Osborne made a number of Longrifles for his Quaker neighbors. When he learned some of those rifles had been used at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse, he repurchased the rifles and broke them against a tree. We do not know who founded this school. David Grose, Craft Jackson and Alexander Frazier of Randolph County were later gunsmiths also working in this style.

Around 1810, the Early Deep River School evolved into what became the Jamestown School. The latter School became the largest Longrifle School in the Southern United States with over 90 gunsmiths and apprentices, lasting until 1902. The Jamestown Rifle became one of the county's chief exports over that period.

It has not been possible to document who was the first Guilford County Rifle Maker. The first three identified rifle makers were Thaddeus Gardner, David Grose and Craft Jackson. These three men made rifles that differed from each other in architectural features. However, each of these men and their apprentices contributed features that later



came to be known as the Jamestown Rifle. Over the years, these features evolved into similar styles.

## *Thaddeus Gardner*

Thaddeus Gardner was born in Guilford County on March 29, 1774 to William and Suzanna Gardner who moved here from Nantucket Island in 1772. Gardner would have been 26 years old in 1800, and since most young men served their apprenticeships during their teenage years, it is quite possible that he began making rifles in the 1790s. We do know that Thaddeus built a gun shop and water powered mill off Gallimore Dairy Road near Highway 68. His millrace is still visible at the site of the Greensboro Pipe Company. In the late 18th century his shop fronted Old Salisbury Road.

Thaddeus Gardner built a large-scale business over the years with the help of his sons William (born 1807), Grafton (born 1817), Bartlett (born 1819), and apprentices such as William Lamb (born 1806), who was also his nephew. Thaddeus Gardner and William Lamb must have been partners for a period of time in the late 1820s because there are several rifles signed T.G. & W.L. In 1836, Gardner placed an ad in a Charlotte newspaper that he had "rifle guns for sale, 40 or 50 on hand." He listed his address as Friendship, P.O. Thaddeus Gardner was disowned by Deep River Monthly Meeting in 1814 for excessive profanity after failing to change his ways despite repeated warnings.

In 1850, according to the census of Manufacturing, William Gardner was running the shop and employing two

and a half men. The shop used a ton of iron and 1,000 bushels of coal annually. The shop was producing 200 rifle barrels and 100 completed rifles annually.

Thaddeus Gardner signed a number of full-stock, flintlock rifles, some of which survive today. Most of his rifles differ from the other rifles of the Jamestown School by featuring a short, one screw barrel tang, rather than the typical three-screw tang. Of the early makers Gardner, Grose, and Jackson, only Gardner became a prolific maker of rifles. Thaddeus Gardner seems to have had the most influence on what became the Jamestown Stock architecture as even his earliest rifles feature a slender stock architecture and some have a broken forestock style molding. He died on July 24, 1851 and is buried at Deep River Friends Meeting Graveyard.

#### *David Grose*

In 1805, the Guilford County Court awarded an orphan named John Conner to serve as an apprentice to David Grose "to learn the art and mystery of a gunsmith." In 1806, David Grose purchased 120 acres of land from Jesse Williams for the price of \$360. The tract of land was between New Garden Friends Meeting and Horsepen Creek along Friendly Road. Grose built a house and gun shop on that site. In 1806, the local court awarded 14 year old David Muly to David Grose to serve as an apprentice. There are three David Grose signed rifles that still exist, all are in the author's collection. Two of these rifles are stocked in the Early Deep River School architecture. The third rifle was made 1816 or later and displays features from the Jamestown School as well as features found on other North Carolina Schools including a Mecklenburg School side plate and inlays. David Grose moved to Terre Haute, Vigo County, Indiana in 1821.

#### *Craft Jackson*

Craft Jackson was one of the first three identified Longrifle makers working in Guilford County. He first appears in the 1810 Guilford County Census. In 1811 he was awarded a 14 year old orphan named Isaac Jones to "learn the art and mystery of a gun smith".

Craft Jackson owned 337 acres on the west bank of Deep River and built a Gun Shop near the present day Jamestown Golf Course. When Craft Jackson died in 1835, he left 179 acres to his son Josh Jackson and 158 acres to his son William Jackson. Recently, two early Guilford Patchbox rifles have surfaced that have been attributed to Craft Jackson. Both show features seen on the earliest rifles signed by Isaac Jones including a wide butt and small beaver tails carved on both sides of the rear lock mortise. Both Craft Jackson attributed rifles are featured in this study. One of these rifles dates to the 1790s and

is the earliest Guilford Longrifle; the second is a few years later. Both feature Early Deep River School Architecture. There is an excellent Isaac Jones rifle on display in the Metals Gallery at the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts in Old Salem.

#### *William Lamb*

The best known and most admired of the Jamestown rifle makers was William Lamb. Known locally as Captain Billy, Lamb was born in 1806. It is believed that he might have been Gardner's nephew since Thaddeus' sister was Mary Lamb (formerly Gardner) was disowned by Deep River Monthly Meeting for marrying out of meeting in 1805.

William Lamb's first gun shop was located off of present day Highway 68, near Gallimore Dairy Road. In 1844, William moved to Deep River and erected a water powered barrel mill with Anderson Lamb who was his bother-in-law and possibly a distant cousin. In 1847, Anderson Lamb sold his half interest in the mill to Henry Wright. The 1850 census of manufacturing shows Lamb and Wright operating a gun barrel mill employing 4 men with \$700 invested. Monthly wages were \$60. They annually used two tons of iron and 1,600 bushels of coal while producing 400 gun barrels with a value of \$1,600.

William Lamb took several apprentices over the years and later brought his two sons Henry Clarkson (born 1829), and Jesse G. (born 1831) into the business. Most of his early rifles are signed W. Lamb on the side or center of the barrel. There is one early rifle signed simply W.L. on the center of the barrel. Most of his later rifles are signed W. Lamb & Sons, although a few survive signed W. Lamb & Son. William made numerous full stock, flintlock, patchbox rifles of high quality. In 1857, William sold or gave his barrel mill to his son Henry Clarkson, but was still involved in the business in the 1860s. There is evidence that William made some rifles at Camp Fisher (a military boot camp in High Point) in 1861, and this could be where he received the nickname Capt. Billy. According to an H. Clay Briggs article in the 1935 Greensboro Daily News, William Lamb built a small shop near Idol's mill after the Civil War and made triggers for other rifle makers as long as he was able to work.

#### *Jabez Stephens*

Another outstanding craftsman from the Jamestown School was Jabez Stephens. Jabez was born in 1816. His gun shop was located near the present day lake at Adams Farm. Several fine patchbox rifles signed by Jabez Stephens exist. There is one rifle signed by William Lamb & Jabez Stephens on the patchbox lid. Jabez probably stopped making rifles in the 1850s. He died in 1866.

The most prolific Jamestown Gunsmith was Anderson Lamb. He was born in Randolph County in 1815. His gun shop was located on Bull Run Creek, off Mackay Road, near Adams Farm. He also employed several apprentices and brought his sons Ithamer (born 1839) and Jesse (born 1842) into the business. Anderson's early rifles are signed A. Lamb on the side of the barrel, his later rifles are signed A. Lamb & Co. According to oral history, Anderson Lamb signed some rifles "Cicero Lamb" in his later life, but the author has never seen one. Anderson Lamb died in 1891. Several previous authors have claimed that William Lamb and Anderson Lamb were brothers. I recently found proof that they were brother-in-laws. William married Anderson's older sister, Frances Lamb from Randolph County.

The Jamestown School grew slowly over the years and reached a peak in 1850, with that year's census listing 18 gunsmiths and 18 gun stockers. Because of this large trained workforce, the area became a center for military rifle making during the War for Southern Independence with 7 Confederate gun factories located within 20 miles of Greensboro. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at least 87 men (and probably more) are known to have worked in the School.

There were many families that worked in the Jamestown School: Armfield, Couch, Gardner, Lamb, Ledbetter, Wood and Wright were families who worked together over the years. The last gun maker was S.H. Ward.

Ward was born in 1836, and began making rifles after the War. His first gun shop was located in the yard of the Mackay Hunting Lodge where Cedarwood subdivision is now located. Around 1890, he moved to Friendly Road, near present day WoodStream Apartments (one of his rifles can be seen at the apartment clubhouse). According to oral history, S.H. Ward was a large man, weighed over 300 lbs. and did not make most of the rifles bearing his name. His son Harper Ward and hired hands Ed Thornton and Duck White made most of his rifles. S.H. Ward sold rifles up until 1902 and died in 1905.

#### Research

The source of the information in this article comes from previous books, articles, non-published papers on the subject, and over 30 years of research, collecting, and studying the Guilford County Longrifle makers and their rifles. Of special note are John Bivins' book *Longrifles of North Carolina*, and the lifetime of scholarship and research on the Jamestown School by the Late Jack L. Perdue. Jack wrote many articles on the local rifle makers and researched deeds on the location of their gun shops and produced the most accurate map to date showing their sites. The 1935 article by H. Clay Briggs titled *When Guns Were Made By Hand*, that was published in the Greensboro Daily News was also helpful.

#### List of Gunsmiths, Gun Stockers and Apprentices who worked in Guilford County

Abner Gordon	Elihu Barnard	James Archer
Adams Couch	Emsiah Trogden	James Duck White
Albert Whiteheart	Evan Johnson	James E. Marlow
Alfred Gardner	Francis Ledbetter	James Gordon
Alfred Ozment	Francis S. Carpenter	James M. Wood (1829-1878)
Alpheus F. Ledbetter (1831-1862)	Frank J. Carpenter	James Sampson
Alveus P. Ledbetter	George W. Macy	James Wood
Anderson Cheves Ledbetter	Grafton Gardner	Jehu C. Lamb (1811-1875)
Anderson Lamb (1815-1891)	H.C. Lamb & Co.	Jesse G. Lamb
B. Franklin Briggs	H.L. Groner	Jesse Lamb
Bartlett Gardner	Harper Ward	Jesse Wood
Bartlett Yancey Couch	Henry Clarkson Lamb (1829-1912)	John Conner
C. Whiteheart	Henry Ledbetter (1809-1880)	John J. Armfield
Chesley E. Ledbetter	Henry Parrish	John Quincy
Cicero Lamb	Henry Wright	John R. Carter
Cornelius Lancaster	Isaac Jones	John Ward
Craft Jackson	Isaac Lovett	Jonathan Vickory
D. Gardner	Isaac Williams	Joseph S. Armfield
Daniel Muly	Ithamer Armfield	Judd Franklin Ledbetter (1835-1874)
David Grose	Ithamer Lamb	Kinney Boylan
Ed Thornton	J. Ozment	L.H. Robeson
Eli Gordon	Jabez Stephens (Stevens) (1816-1866)	Lamb & Armfield



**List of Gunsmiths, Gun Stockers and Apprentices who worked in Guilford County (*Continued*)**

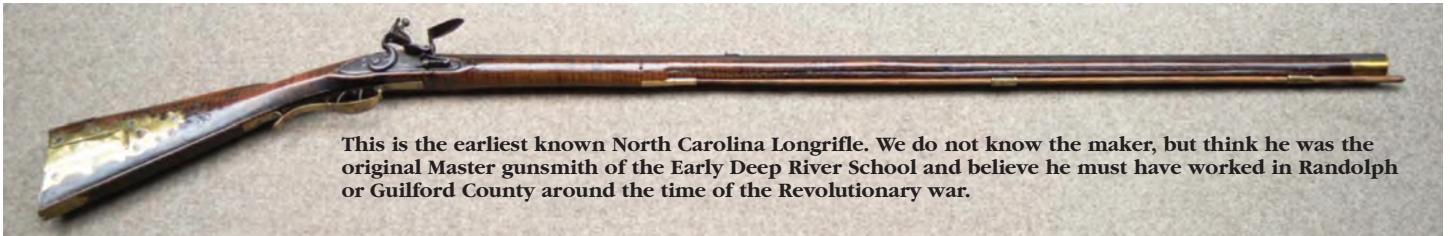
Lamb & Brother  
 Levin T. Stack  
 Micajah Howard  
 Milton Couch  
 Milton Wood  
 Miranda (Randy) Ledbetter  
 Nathan Albertson  
 Nathan Wright  
 Obed M. Dixon  
 Philip Jean  
 Robert Gilbreath

Robert H. Polk  
 Simpson Jones  
 Soloman H. Ward (1838-1905)  
 Thaddeus Gardner (1774-1851)  
 Thomas Bevill  
 Thomas Fletcher Merritt  
 Thomas Gluyas\*  
 William Blackwell  
 William Gardner  
 William H.C. Couch  
 William Lamb (Capt. Billy)

William R. Dixon (Dickson)  
 William T. Thompson  
 William Whittendon  
 William Woodyly  
 Z.J. Ledbetter  
 Zachariah Watson  
 Zimri S. Coffin (Captain)

\*Commander of the N.C. State  
 Armory at Florence

**EARLY DEEP RIVER SCHOOL LONGRIFLE, MAKER UNKNOWN**



This is the earliest known North Carolina Longrifle. We do not know the maker, but think he was the original Master gunsmith of the Early Deep River School and believe he must have worked in Randolph or Guilford County around the time of the Revolutionary war.



Early Style Daisy Patchbox.



Note Relief Carving in front of Patchbox.

**EARLY DEEP RIVER SCHOOL LONGRIFLE, MAKER UNKNOWN**



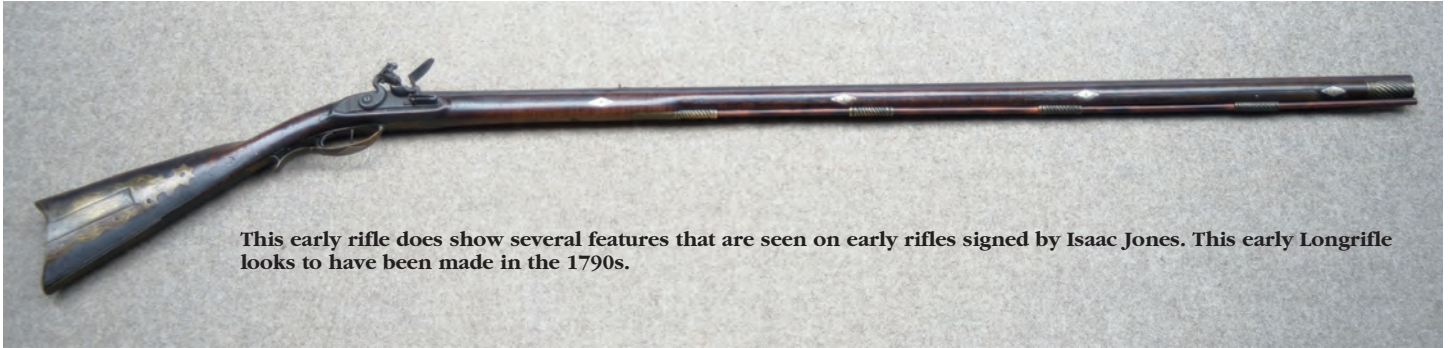
Check Rest side view.



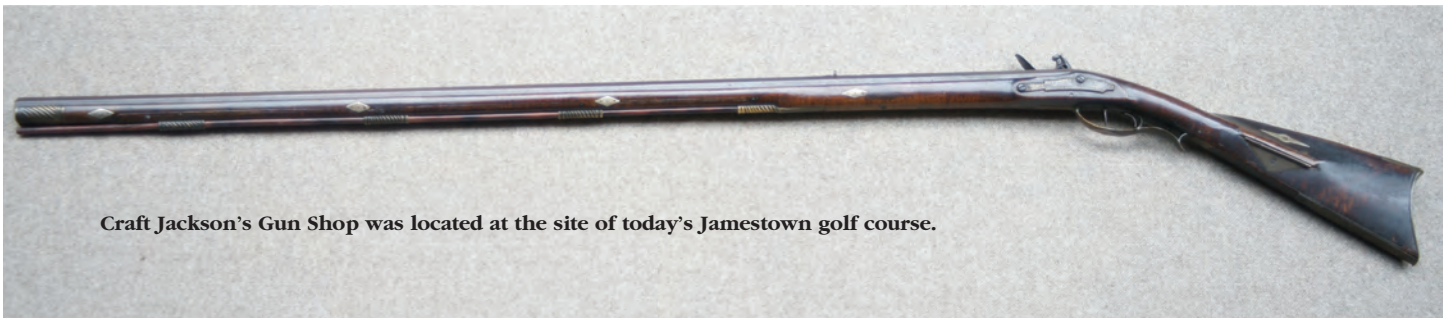
Note Relief Carving.



**EARLY DEEP RIVER SCHOOL LONGRIFLE BY CRAFT JACKSON #1 (ATTRIBUTED)**

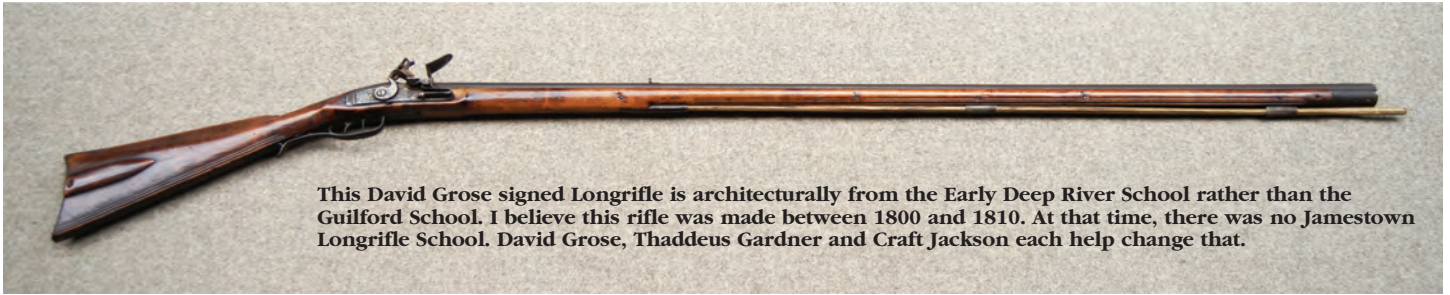


**CRAFT JACKSON LONGRIFLE #1 (ATTRIBUTED)**





**DAVID GROSE LONGRIFLE #1**



Sliding wood Patchbox and Triple Beam Molding on Stock.



Triple Beam Forestock Molding.

**DAVID GROSE LONGRIFLE #1**



Guilford County Made Lock.



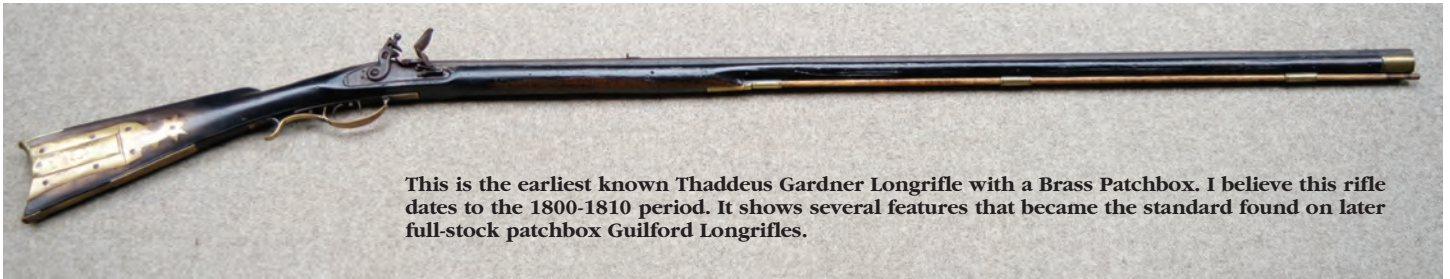
Two Screw Sideplate.



Short One Screw Barrel Tang.



**THADDEUS GARDNER LONGRIFLE #1**



This is the earliest known Thaddeus Gardner Longrifle with a Brass Patchbox. I believe this rifle dates to the 1800-1810 period. It shows several features that became the standard found on later full-stock patchbox Guilford Longrifles.

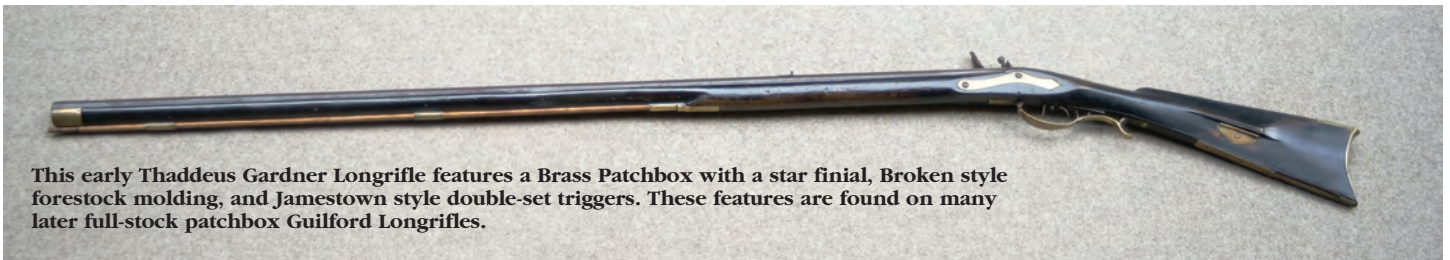


This is an early example of what became the Guilford "Twisted Star" or "Daisy" style Brass Patchbox.



Check Rest with Pick Holder & early two screw side-plate.

**THADDEUS GARDNER LONGRIFLE #1**



This early Thaddeus Gardner Longrifle features a Brass Patchbox with a star finial, Broken style forestock molding, and Jamestown style double-set triggers. These features are found on many later full-stock patchbox Guilford Longrifles.



Thaddeus Gardner's Stamp Signature on barrel.



This is the earliest example I have seen of Guilford Broken-style forestock molding which starts and stops on either side of the thimble. On many later full-stock patchbox rifles the Broken-style molding stops and starts on either side of a silver inlay, usually in the shape of a diamond.