

PETER NEIHART (1743-1813) GUNSMITH OF LEHIGH COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

By Ronald G. Gabel

INTRODUCTION

The rifle pictured in this article happens to be the first Kentucky Rifle purchased for my budding gun collection in the late 1950's. My mother purchased it from our family doctor as a Christmas gift for me at the then outrageous cost of \$ 125.00.

In an effort to earn money for college I worked for the Allentown Sunday Morning Call newspaper where I had the opportunity to write a number of interesting articles for the paper, one article concerned the Henry family of Nazareth and their gun making activities.

Mr. Sam Dyke, a member of the American Society of Arms Collectors (ASAC) from 1958 to 1985 and the second president of the Kentucky Rifle Association from 1964 to 1967, lived only a few miles from our home. He read my article in the paper and called me to ask if I would have an interest in visiting with him in his home to "talk guns". My visit started a long friendship resulting in Sam offering me his help in learning how to thoroughly research a gunsmith.

As might be expected the first gunsmith I researched was Peter Neihard, the subject of this article. At a later date, while a director of the Lehigh County Historical Society in 1971, I published my first article concerning that research in "The Hearthstone" newsletter of the Emmaus Pennsylvania Shelter House Society.

ARTICLE

According to Neihart family records, this family name, which is sometimes found spelled Newhart, Neihart, Newhardt, Newhard, Neuhard, and Neihardt, had its origin from the village of Newhart, in Odenwald, Germany. In this village lived Conrad Neuhart, whose name is found in records from the year 1140. He was an Armorer and became so proficient in this art that Emperor Frederick, called Barbarossa, elevated him to the dignity of a patrician and gave him a coat-of-arms. Conrad Newhard later settled in the province of Zweibruecken, where he was elected to the Senate.¹

The Newhard family remained in the Zweibruecken province until the late 1730s when three brothers, Frederick (1699-1765), Michael (1713-1793), and George Newhard, emigrated to America on the ship St. Andrew. This ship sailed from Rotterdam and arrived at Philadelphia, Pa. on September 26, 1737.² In the following year the three brothers settled in what was then the frontier of Bucks County. (In 1752 this area became part of Northampton County, and in 1812 Lehigh County.)

The eldest of the brothers, George Frederik Newhard, usually called Frederick, was one of the principal citizens of Whitehall Township where, in 1762, he was rated, through his assessment of 22 pounds, as one of the twelve highest ranking men in the township. In 1764 he was assessed for 250 acres of deeded land and 60 acres of undeeded land.

Frederick's grand-daughter Elizabeth was born August 27, 1771, and eventually was married to John Moll, a noted gunsmith from Allentown, Lehigh County, Pa. Elizabeth and John Moll had three children: 1) John Moll, born 1796, and died 1883; 2) Peter Moll, born 1799; and 3) Jacob Moll, born 1803.¹

Michael, the second of the three brothers who came to America, was born February 9, 1713 and died in Whitehall Township, later Lehigh County, March 10, 1793. According to Shumway he settled in North Whitehall Township in 1738. He secured by warrant of June 11, 1738, a tract of 83 acres along the Lehigh River, near what is now Laurys, North Whitehall Township, and added to this so that in 1768 he owned 200 acres, 70 acres of which were cultivated. Michael had many children, one of whom was George Jacob (1752-1835). George Jacob Newhard's daughter Mary Barbara, born May 16, 1786, and died March 6, 1862, was married to Jacob Kuntz, who became a famous Philadelphia gunsmith.¹

The subject of this sketch, Peter Newhard, second son of Michael the immigrant, was born November 15, 1743 and died September 16, 1813. He was a gunsmith and farmer during the Revolution. His services as a gunsmith were in great demand as his workmanship was then and must still be considered among the finest in this area at this period. Peter Newhard owned 345 acres of land near Laurys, and is listed as having been a member of the Union Church in Unionville, North Whitehall Township, Lehigh County. Peter Kuntz Sr. and Peter Kuntz Jr. were also members of the Unionville Church.

The first Unionville Church was named Schlosser's Church. It was a log church built in 1755 on land donated by Schlosser. The church remained known as Schlosser's or Unionville Union Reformed Church from 1764 to 1846. The log church was rebuilt as a stone church in 1797. In 1872 the church was again rebuilt into the brick church now known as the Neffs Church (Unionville now being known as Neffs, Pa.).³

It is recorded Peter Neihard joined the Egypt Reformed Church in 1764 at the age of 21 upon completing his apprenticeship. He was working as a gunsmith as early as 1762 and was taxed as a "Smith" in 1767. Prior to Neihard relocating from the Unionville Church to the Egypt Church in 1764 he and Peter Kuntz Sr. both were listed as members of the Unionville Reformed Church congregation, suggesting the possibility Neihard was trained by Peter Kuntz Sr. Peter is buried at the Egypt Reformed Church. The records of this Reformed congregation are believed to be the oldest of any Reformed church in this country, the earliest notation having been made September 23, 1734.

Records of this congregation show that in 1764 four local congregations merged and purchased a house and six acres of land, situated in what was then called "Magers' Valley," for use as a parsonage. The cost of this parsonage was one hundred and fifty-two pounds, about \$345.67 Pennsylvania currency. The Egypt congregation's share of this amount was one-fourth, or thirty-eight pounds. From an old account book of the congregation we find



that in 1764 Peter Neihard donated 1s 6d (1 Shilling and 6 Pence) toward this amount, about 20 cents.⁴

We also find in the early records of this church that in 1771 the Rev. Abraham Blumer reported a membership in his church in Egypt of forty members, among whom is again mentioned Peter Neihard.³

Peter Neihard married twice. His first wife, Magdalena Kohler, who died in 1777, left three children, all daughters. His second wife Catherine Miller, born October 6, 1758, died June 23, 1842 and left six children by this second marriage.

On January 18, 1768 it is recorded that Peter and his brother Frederick purchased from Michael, their father, forty-three acres, one hundred and three perches. On January 8, 1778 they again made a purchase of 160 acres and 120 perches from their father. On this same date they bought a tract of 55 acres, thirty-five perches from Jacob Miller. In addition, on November 16, 1786, Peter Newhard "located a tract called 'Fairfield'," consisting of 18 acres, 66 perches.⁵

The only mention I have located to date concerning Peter Newhard's military record is the following: "Captain John Moritz was in command of the fourth company of the second battalion

of Northampton County Militia in 1778, under Lieutenant-Colonel Stephen Balliet. This Battalion participated in the battle of Brandywine. Peter Newhard, also a gunsmith, was a private in this company.”⁶

The assessment lists for 1781 disclose the name of Peter Newhard as a real estate owner, while the 1786 and 1788 tax records for Whitehall Township, Northampton County, list him as a gunsmith.⁷

Peter is again mentioned in the church records on April 18, 1785, when the members of the Evangelical Reformed and the Evangelical Lutheran congregations, belonging to the parish in Egypt, in Whitehall Township, Northampton County, agreed to build a new stone church. The parishioners bound themselves and each other to contribute to the requisite and necessary expenses according to their individual ability until the church was built and completed. On the above date a paper to this effect is on record as having been signed by Peter Neuhart.⁴

An assessment was laid upon each member, according to his means, which amount he was required to pay. Peter Neuhart was assessed 13 pounds or about \$ 34.67. It is interesting to note that Peter Kuntz, a non-member from Lehigh Township, also contributed 10s on June 16, 1785.⁴

The estate inventory for Peter “Neyhardt” on record in the Lehigh County Court House shows that Peter Newhard died in 1813. Appraisers for the inventory were Frederick Newhard and Peter Straup. The following names were mentioned in this inventory under notes outstanding: Peter Kuntz, David Kuntz and John Rupp, all Lehigh County gunsmiths.⁸ In the account of Peter Newhard’s personal estate are mentioned the following: “All the tools and utensils for making firearms; sundry old guns and tools; 16 pieces timber for gun shafts; 1 gun for Michael; 1 rifle; three new gun locks; etc.”¹

AUTHOR’S NOTE

I am aware of only a few signed Peter Neihard rifles remaining in existence today, there are, however, several fine unsigned specimens remaining which are attributed to this interesting gunsmith. The rifle pictured in this article, from the collection of the author, is nicely signed in hand-cut block-letter style on the top facet of the barrel. The heavy arrow back side plate is typical of the style found on very early Northampton County Rifles. The rifle has its original fine old hand made flint lock German style lock plate that was most likely made by Peter himself as he had several new plates on hand at the time of his death, more than the average gunsmith who bought his lock plates. The chevron nose cap is a unique feature in the Lehigh/Northampton area, as is the adjustable folding leaf-type rear sight which is original to this rifle.

The patch box has an unusual embossed lid which simulates the early wooden-patch box lids found on German Jaeger rifles from which the Kentucky rifle is said to have evolved. The 40-inch-long full-octagon barrel is rifled .56 caliber with eight grooves of rifling.

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