

ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION OF THE AMERICAN LONGRIFLE

by Mel Hankla & Frank House

In 1984, during my studies at Western Kentucky University, I learned of the Folk-Art Apprenticeship Program sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts. Motivated by a lifelong fascination of the iconic “Kentucky Rifle” and with help from Folklore Professor, Dr. Jay Anderson, I applied for and was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts apprenticeship grant to work with nationally known contemporary flintlock rifle builder, Hershel House. The original rifle that had influenced Hershel House’s contemporary work more than any other was signed - Jacob Young. Ironically, nine years later, this rifle became the first antique Kentucky Rifle of my collection and started a lifelong quest to know more!



Figure 1. Elegant in its simplicity, this longrifle was made by Jacob Young for William Waid Woodfork.

Gunsmith Jacob Young

Elegant in its simplicity, this longrifle made by Jacob Young for William Waid Woodfork was built around an exquisite handmade lock also signed by Young (Figure 1). This flintlock was painstakingly wrought, even at a time when high-quality ready-made English locks were available. Producing the lock alone surely took more time and effort than making all the other components of the rifle combined. The fact that Jacob Young handcrafted this lock reflects his skill as a gunsmith, as well as the pride he took in those skills. Both the priming pan and the enclosure of the frizzen are lined with pure gold: a gold flash guard dovetails into the iron of the barrel, surrounding a gold touchhole liner. (Figure 2) The bolts holding the lock are overlaid with silver and rest upon a silver sideplate designed with a candle-flame-shaped finial. Upon this sideplate, prominently engraved in beautiful script, is the owner’s name: “Wm. Waid Woodfork.” The unique patchbox was fashioned from a single piece of cast brass, planished and expertly fitted with a captured lid (one that did not extend to the buttplate), all encircled by a delicately engraved surround. The trigger guard is also unique, constructed with a reverse curve at the termination of the grip rail, kissing the rear support of the guard. The cheekpiece holds the largest of a dozen coin silver inlays: a large, elongated diamond shape that is decorated with a skillfully engraved Federal eagle. No screws or pins visibly attach this inlay and a closer look would find it held in place by a pin inserted from under the cheekpiece. To affix the inlay in this manner was an arduous task, but one obviously important to Young, and he wanted nothing to distract from or dislodge his decoration.¹ All of these parts are tastefully engraved with very specific details and decorations that will visually tie things together as we further discuss the findings of our research.

William Waid Woodfork, for whom the above rifle was inscribed, was an early pioneer in Jackson County, Tennessee, owner of a large plantation and an influential man. Woodfork was a surveyor. In 1806, he was paid by the state of Tennessee to separate White County out of Jackson County. William H. Speer, in *Sketches of Prominent Tennesseans*, wrote that Woodfork “was a man of fine

ability and large fortune, being one of the richest men in Tennessee.” He was also a noted horseman:

*Tennessee was far in advance of Kentucky prior to the war [1812] in thoroughbred horses, the development of this animal dating back to 1808 in the vicinity of Nashville and the breed improved by the judicious expenditures of money by such men as the immortal Andrew Jackson... and William Waid Woodfork, of Davidson county.*²

Therefore, the rifle Jacob Young made for Woodfork was elaborate and worthy of his status.

Jacob Young also made a rifle for early Kentucky frontiersman William Whitley, who was born in Virginia in 1749 and moved to Kentucky in 1775 (Figure 3). Whitley served under George Rogers Clark during the Revolutionary War, was a state legislator and fought multiple campaigns against American Indian tribes. Sportsman’s Hill was the name of his Bluegrass home, which is noteworthy as one of the first brick houses (constructed between 1787 and 1794) built west of the Allegheny Mountains. Sportsman’s Hill is even more significant as the site of America’s first circular racetrack for horses. In defiance of British norm, Whitley arrogantly raced horses on his track counterclockwise, which American horse races still run today. The estate also earned another moniker: “Guardian of Wilderness Road,” as the gathering place for numerous early frontiersmen including Simon Kenton, Isaac Shelby, John Sevier, George Rogers Clark, Daniel Boone and James Hankla (my own fifth great-grandfather).³

The rifle that Jacob Young crafted for William Whitley (probably around 1800) appears stylistically to have been made several years earlier than the rifle Young made for Woodfork. The butt is considerably wider and is designed with a stepped wrist – a unique characteristic indicative of early Moravian design influence that will be discussed further as we report our on-going research. The stock has been broken through the wrist and carries a tidy brass repair. The flintlock, stamped “H. Deringer-Philad,” is a period replacement. Although not as elegant as Woodfork’s rifle, Whitley’s rifle is dec-



Figure 2. Jacob Young made this rifle for *Wm. Waid Woodfork* and elegantly engraved his name on the silver sideplate. Its unique patchbox was fashioned from a single piece of cast brass and fitted with a captured lid. The rifle is built around a handmade flintlock signed by Jacob Young - notice the gold lined flash pan and flash guard inlaid into the barrel. The cheekpiece holds the largest of a dozen coin silver inlays: a large, elongated diamond decorated with a Federal eagle.

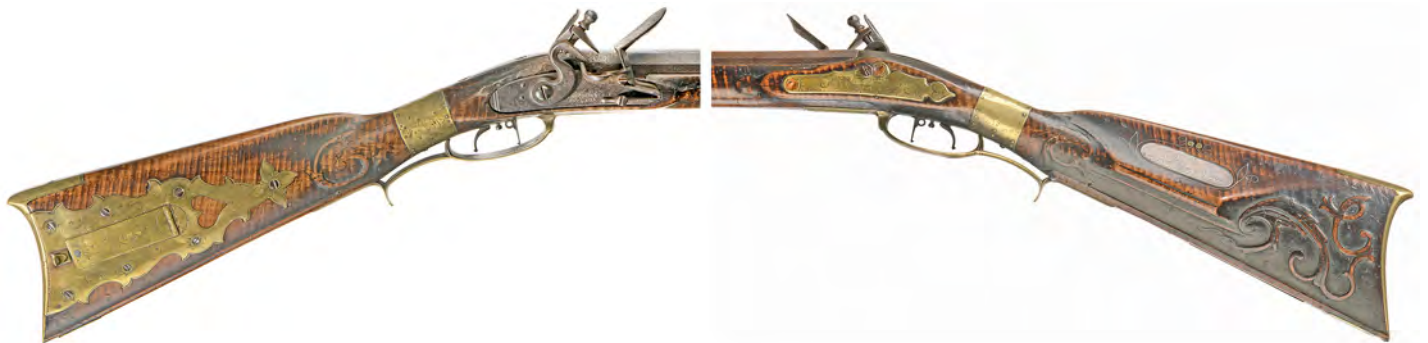


Figure 3. Jacob Young built this rifle for William Whitley. Stylistically it appears to have been made several years earlier than the rifle Young made for Woodfork. It is designed with a stepped wrist – a characteristic indicative of early Moravian design influence. The stock has been broken and carries a brass repair.

orated with bold relief rococo carving, exhibiting another facet of Jacob Young's gunbuilding style.

In 1813, William Whitley carried this rifle to the Battle of the Thames in Ontario, Canada, where he was killed. Sixty-four years old at the time, he had enlisted as a private in John Davidson's Company under Richard Mentor Johnson's Kentucky Mounted Infantry. In all of Whitley's prior campaigns, he had been wounded only once. Yet the night before the Battle of the Thames, Whitley is said to have told his friend John Preston that he believed he would die the following day. At the onset of the battle, to avoid sending the entire regiment into an ambush, Johnson called for twenty volunteers to draw fire from Tecumseh and his warriors: the Kentuckian's "Forlorn Hope." While Johnson rode beside the little band, William Whitley rode at the head. During the first volley of the engagement, nineteen of the group were unhorsed and fifteen were mortally wounded. When the smoke cleared, both William Whitley and Shawnee leader Tecumseh were dead. Richard Spurr, a private in Samuel Comb's Company and one of those who volunteered to draw fire, said later in life that he

had seen Whitley and an Indian he recognized as Tecumseh each fire at one another and that each was killed. Spurr carried the bodies of both Whitley and Tecumseh into camp with General Harrison. John Preston, who survived the battle, returned Whitley's horse, rifle and powderhorn to his wife, Ester Whitley.⁴

Gunsmith Thomas Simpson

Overall style and elements of artistic design, of the above-described rifles built by Jacob Young, led us to the work of Thomas Simpson. Gunsmith Thomas Simpson was found in the Watauga region of eastern Tennessee around 1776, about the same time armorer William Young – and his gunsmith son Jacob – were in the same region (William serving under the command of General Griffith Rutherford). Simpson's name appeared on a pension record noting his service as an armorer in Captain John Sevier's Company on William Christian's campaign against the Cherokee in the Watauga region.⁵

Mr Bradford,
 TAKE this method through the
 channel of your paper to inform the
 public in general, and those it may concern
 in particular, that I am ready and
 willing to make a rifle gun, that is,
 the barrel, lock and mounting from the
 bar, and the stock from the tree, with
 any one man in the United States, for
 two hundred guineas, who shall make
 the neatest and best at the judgment
 of the best of workmen.
 THOMAS SIMPSON,
 Sumner county, North Carolina, 1790
 P (3W.)

Figure 4. In the July 26, 1790 issue of the *Kentucky Gazette*, Thomas Simpson challenges that he can build the “neatest and best” rifle in the United States.

Stylistic similarities exist in the design and artistry in rifles produced by Thomas Simpson and Jacob Young. Jacob Young would have been 13 years old in 1787 when his father and Thomas Simpson were first recorded on tax rolls in the Cumberland.⁶ Some scholars of the American Longrifle speculate that Jacob Young may have apprenticed under Thomas Simpson. While no documenta-

tion has been found to support this hypothesis, artistic elements and architecture of their construction methods are quite similar and they did live in close proximity, with early roots in the Watauga.

The July 26, 1790 issue of the *Kentucky Gazette* (Fayette County) published a notice from Thomas Simpson: “I am ready and willing to make a rifle gun, that is, the barrel, lock and mounting from the bar, and the stock from the tree, with any one man in the United States.” (Figure 4). His location was listed as Sumner County, North Carolina. Formed in 1786, Sumner County encompassed what today is eastern Davidson and most all of Robertson, Wilson, Macon, Smith and Trousdale Counties of northern Tennessee – in the heart of the Cumberlands.⁷

Colonel Gasper Mansker and his Thomas Simpson Rifle

In 1791, Thomas Simpson built a masterpiece rifle for **Colonel Gasper Mansker** (Figure 5). The rifle is elaborate and probably took months to build, making it most likely the next rifle Simpson produced after his 1790 *Kentucky Gazette* newspaper notice. The style and lines of this rifle are sleek and graceful, shaped around a hand forged .50 caliber barrel that is just shy of four feet in length. The stock is fashioned from exceptional maple wood with brilliant curly grain, exhibiting bold relief carvings that flow from butt to muzzle. Sand-cast brass mountings are artistically sculpted and expertly engraved. Silver accents adorn the wrist, toe, cheek and heel. Mansker was acquainted with Simpson before he commissioned the rifle, as the two men carried chain on a 640-acre survey in February 1789 along Maddison’s Creek (then North Carolina, today in Tennessee). Two years later, in April 1792, the Commissioners of North Carolina deeded this surveyed tract to Thomas Simpson for £100.⁸

Thomas Simpson wanted to ensure there was no doubt that he was the one who crafted Mansker’s exceptional rifle, and thus engraved the Latin term *fecit* (“he did it”) adjacent to his signature on the silver plate affixed to the top flat of the barrel. “G. Mansker” is in-



Figure 5. In 1791, Thomas Simpson built this masterpiece rifle for Colonel Gasper Mansker. Its stock exhibits bold relief carvings that flow from butt to muzzle. The rifle is signed, dated, and inscribed with its owner’s name, G. Mansker.

scribed on the patchbox door's silver overlay. Mansker's ownership is further documented by a rare letter: on 17 June 1793, Chickasaw Chief Piomingo wrote to Indian Agent General James Robertson, stating: "I want you to get Simson [sic] to make me a gun like Col. Mansker's."⁹

Chickasaw Chief Piomingo and Thomas Simpson's Rifle

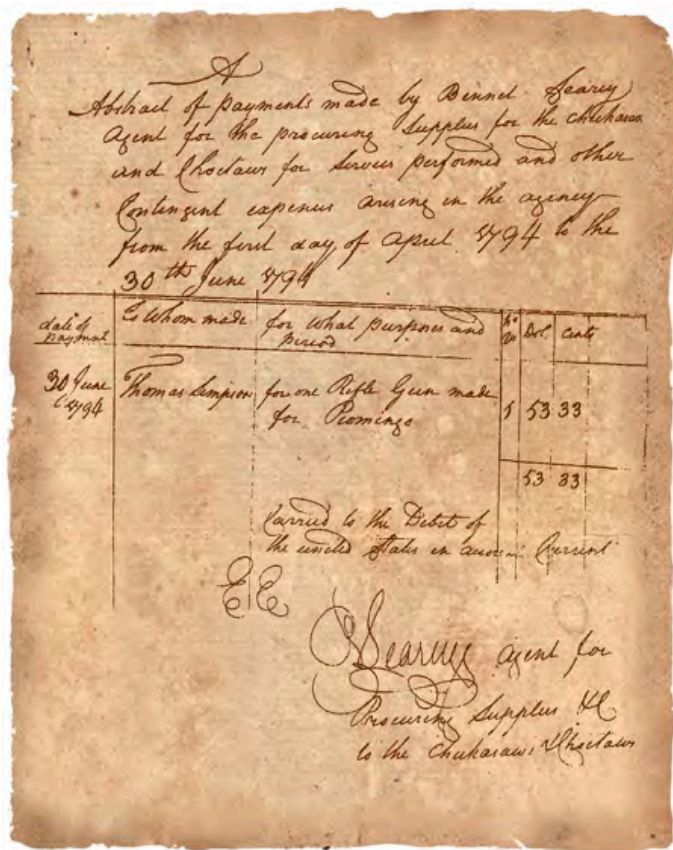


Figure 6. Chickasaw Chief Piomingo wrote to Indian Agent James Roberson requesting, "I want you to get Simson [sic] to make me a gun like Col. Mansker's." This receipt found in the National Archives, clearly state that Thomas Simpson was paid \$53.33 for "one rifle gun made for Piomingo." It is dated June 30, 1794.

Simpson complied, and completed a rifle for Chief Piomingo by June 30, 1794, when Bennet Searcy, agent for procuring supplies, recorded a payment to Thomas Simpson (Figure 6). The receipt stated: "Thomas Simpson for one Rifle gun made for Piomingo – \$53.33." This cost was unusually high – a typical rifle at the time sold for no more than about \$13 dollars.¹⁰ Perhaps part of the remarkable cost can be explained by Simpson's agreement to build the rifle quickly, but the price also probably indicates that the rifle was of much better quality than average, as is the rifle made for Gasper Mansker. It is interesting to note that Piomingo, Mansker, and William Whitley served side-by-side in the fall of 1794 on the Nickajack Expedition against the Chickamauga. It is quite possible that Piomingo carried his new rifle into that campaign.¹¹

Simpson and Young were exceptional pioneer gunsmiths and were integral to the development and evolution of the iconic Kentucky Rifle. They provided these valuable tools that supported the westward expansion of the United States of America.

Origins and Evolution

The rifles made by Jacob Young and Thomas Simpson, and the stories of their owners, laid a firm foundation for lifelong research regarding their stylistic evolution. In 2003, Frank House and his wife Lally acquired the Jacob Young rifle made for William Waid Woodfork. This common interest between Frank and I nurtured comradery and produced a treasured friendship. We both were intrigued about the origins of these rifles. Who taught who, and who learned where? When Frank House and I started discussing our individual observations, we had no idea of the depths our discourse would delve. We were quite focused on one small group of rifles. Specifically, we were searching for the origins of the common stylistic trends that we saw in rifles signed by Thomas Simpson, Jacob Young and Lexington, Kentucky's Bryan family.

Although starting rather specific, the fruits of our research kept leading us towards the very beginnings of the American longrifle. The origins of the American longrifle is quite an enigma, and through the years many theories have been presented as to its beginnings with several hypotheses being prematurely published as definitive history. However, when almost 300 years have passed since the first documented description of such a unique and intriguing tool, its provenance undoubtedly presents a puzzle with many missing pieces.

To begin, we start to recognizing subtle, yet valid similarities in grand early rifles that were un-signed. At the time, they seemed to share little to no regional relationship. Our goal was to unravel this enigma and we started to catalog and do in-depth study into each example. Gradually we identified pieces that belonged within what we looked at as a puzzle. Each identified piece provided a more detailed view of a much larger picture. Not limiting our study to geography, we followed stylistic and artistic detail as well as family lineage if at all possible. Starting with the rifles from Tennessee described in detail at the beginning of this article, we soon discovered association with the Bryan family of gunmakers who had settled in the 1780s in the Bluegrass Region of frontier Kentucky. We followed the genealogy to the Salisbury region of North Carolina and from there followed style and migration routes back to the very origins of the American longrifle in Pennsylvania.

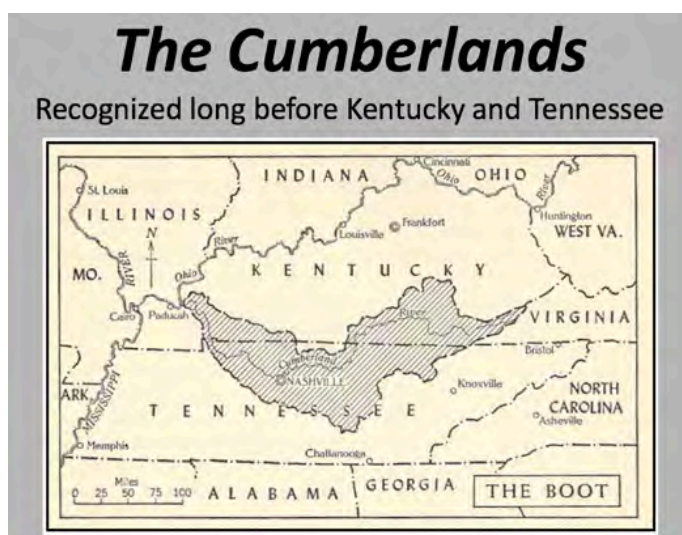


Figure 7. The drainage basin for the Cumberland River encompasses parts of both Kentucky and Tennessee. This area was long known as "The Cumberlands."

Thomas Simpson and William Young left the Salisbury region of North Carolina, crossed the mountains and settled in the Cumberland region of today's Tennessee and are found on the 1787 tax rolls. Jacob, born in 1774, would have been 13 years old. At that time, it would have been Sumner County, North Carolina which was formed in 1786 and encompassed what today is eastern Davidson and most all of Robertson, Wilson, Macon, Smith and Trousdale counties of Tennessee (Figure 7).¹²

The rifle that Thomas Simpson made for Gasper Mansker descended in the family and was in the possession of fifth-great-grandson, Dr. Charles Simpson. His family genealogy allowed us to identify the proper "Thomas Simpson", who in 1773, was a "silversmith" in Salisbury, North Carolina. In 1776, Simpson was an armorer serving under Colonel William Christian in his expedition against the Cherokee. He was one of 350 North Carolinians sent from Salisbury to Sycamore Shoals to march with Capt. John Sevier. We know that Simpson was still in Salisbury in 1786 from the records of a law suit listed: *Thomas Simpson, Silversmith VS Robert Adams*. However, the next year, 1787 he disappears from Salisbury records and pays taxes in Tennessee. (Sumner County, North Carolina.)¹³

Three Rifle Makers / Families

Our study evolved into focus of three rifle makers, and other gunsmiths within their family.

- *Thomas Simpson from Salisbury*
- *William Young, and son, Jacob Young*
- *William Bryan, his son Daniel Bryan and Daniel's eldest son's, Louis and William Bryan*

Even before our attention was drawn to the work of Jacob Young and Thomas Simpson, we were very familiar with rifles produced by the Bryan family from Lexington, Kentucky (Figure 8). However, little to no research had been done regarding this family until we found William Bryan and his son Daniel serving alongside Thomas Simpson and William Young as armorers in the Cherokee Campaigns.

The Bryan clan left Pennsylvania and reached the Forks of the Yadkin River in North Carolina in 1749. The patriarch Morgan Bryan (1671-1763) was 78 years old. He was the grandfather of Rebecca Bryan, wife of Daniel Boone. By 1751, he had claimed 15 tracts totaling over three-thousand acres. Important to this study is that when the Moravians arrived in North Carolina from Pennsylvania in 1752, they claimed a 155 square-mile tract that became

the settlement of Wachovia. The neighboring area to the west was the "Bryan Settlement."¹⁴

Rifles produced by the Bryan family are the epitome of early longrifles made within the state of Kentucky. As our study progressed it became clear there were obvious stylistic and mechanical commonalities within the Bryan's work and that of Thomas Simpson and Jacob Young. William Bryan (father of Daniel) and his brothers Morgan, James, Joseph and brother-in-law William Grant established "Bryan Station" circa 1775-1776 on the banks of Elkhorn Creek. In 1776, in fear of hostile Indian attack, they abandoned the fort and traveled back to North Carolina. In 1779 William Bryan, and the others moved their families from the Yadkin River Valley to their previously established station situated some five miles northeast of Lexington. This is the same year that William Young moved his family from North Carolina to Boma, Tennessee (then Sumner Co. North Carolina). Tragically, William Bryan was killed and scalped only one year later in 1780. William's son, Daniel Boone Bryan, continued gunmaking and built Waveland Plantation that still exists just south of Lexington. It is documented that in 1800 there were 25 gunsmiths working in the Bryan gunshop.¹⁵

Although somewhat difficult to follow, there are some interesting family ties that add credence to the study. First, William Bryan was married to Daniel Boone's sister Mary, thus making him Boone's brother-in-law. His sister Susannah Bryan, married Basil Boren and their daughter Mary, married Jacob Young. Susannah Bryan's father, Morgan Bryan Jr, was a younger brother of Joseph Bryan who was Daniel Boone's father-in-law, thus also providing family ties between the Young's and Bryans.¹⁶

It is more than coincidence that the rifle's made by Thomas Simpson, Jacob Young and the Bryan family all share obvious stylistic association. Our research revealed that Thomas Simpson and Jacob Young lived in close proximity. Young in Robertson County, and Simpson in today's White County, Tennessee. Thomas Simpson, William Young and William Bryan are documented to have lived in Rowan County, North Carolina and served together as armorers in the Cherokee campaigns. Further military exploits put Gasper Mansker, with his Simpson rifle, William Whitley, with his Jacob Young rifle, and Chickasaw Chief Piomingo also with a Simpson rifle, all alongside while serving on the Nickajack Campaign. These men were comrades.¹⁷ And lastly, the rifles from Kentucky's Bryan family exhibit strong architectural similarities to rifles by Simpson and Young. Thus, a good case can be made that the artistic association between the rifles made by Thomas Simpson, Jacob Young, and the Bryan Family, is influence dating from the last quarter of



Figure 8. This superb longrifle is signed, "L. & W. Bryan," Louis and William were the oldest sons of Daniel Boone Bryan of Lexington, Kentucky. The rifle's produced by the Bryan family are the epitome of early longrifles made within the state of Kentucky.

The following comparative photos exhibit obvious stylistic commonality between these makers (Figures 9, 10 and 11).

Thomas Simpson - 1791



Jacob Young - 1815



Thomas Simpson - 1791



Jacob Young - 1815



Thomas Simpson - 1791



L. & W. Bryan - 1810



Figure 9. Comparative photos showing the artistic and architectural similarities of rifles by Thomas Simpson and Jacob Young. Notice the patchboxes with captured lids.

Figure 10. Comparative photos of the Thomas Simpson and Jacob Young rifles, showing the almost identical cheek piece design and diamond inlays.

Figure 11. This photo shows the almost identical stock architecture of the Bryan rifle and the rifle by Thomas Simpson. These stocks appear to be cut from the same pattern.



Figure 12. This rifle was first published as #42 in Dr. George Shumway's 1980 landmark publication, *Rifles of Colonial America*. Notice that the patchbox is in the shape of a door lock plate. Shumway built a case for this striking rifle to be attributed to the Moravian gunshop in Christian Spring, Pennsylvania.

the 18th century to Rowan County, North Carolina. These discoveries somewhat answered our initial questions, however, we had discovered more than what we were originally looking for.

Digging Deeper

Setting the stage to more seriously delve into this study, we set six criteria for assessing the relationship of identified rifles. Each potentially associated rifle would be evaluated:

1. Artistically
2. Stylistically
3. Mechanically
4. Geographically
5. Genealogically
6. Chronologically.

Scrutinizing the rifles by Young, Simpson and the Bryans, lead us to a rifle that was first published as #42 in Dr. George Shumway's 1980 landmark publication, *Rifles of Colonial America 18* (Figure 12). Shumway built a case for this striking rifle to be attributed to the Moravian gunshop in Christian Spring, Pennsylvania.¹⁷ For many years this attribution stood. After acquiring the rifle and studying it in great detail, noted gunsmith and respected scholar of the American longrifle, Wallace Gusler,¹⁹ offered a compelling argument that the rifle was built in North Carolina, rather than Pennsylvania. Because of style, it was Gusler's belief that the rifle was produced in the Moravian gunshop in Bethabara, North Carolina, sometime after 1766 by Valentine Beck. Our research also suggested that #42 was produced in North Carolina, but we found documentation and observed details that suggested the rifle could have easily been produced earlier than 1766. First was the "punch-dot" decoration on the muzzle. This detail drew our attention as the

same rather unique element of decoration is found on rifles made by Thomas Simpson and Jacob Young. Importantly, this decoration is also found on a door lock plate on the "Single Brothers House" in Old Salem, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. (Figure 13) We also noticed that the brass patchbox cover is in the shape of a "door lock plate," and the coil spring which opens the lid of the box is of the same design as springs used to operate door locks (Figures 14 and 15). Furthermore, the carving behind the tang of this rifle is almost identical to the stylized fleur-de-leis finial of the door lock plate at the Single Brothers House (Figure 16). These elements of design made us wonder if perhaps the gunmaker was also a "lockmaker" and upon further study, discovered that Andreas Betz would be a good candidate.

Betz arrived in the Moravian settlements in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania in 1747. His trade is listed as a locksmith. When the Moravians sent a delegation southward to settle Wachovia, North Carolina in 1752, Betz quickly followed with records documenting his arrival in Bethabara in 1754. In 1766, Andreas Betz had to leave the church for marrying out of the Moravian sect. He married Barbara Bruner of Salisbury, sister of gunsmith Henry Bruner, Jr. On March 26, 1767, Betts purchased lots 65 and 66 in the north square of Salisbury from John Frohack and on February 14, 1770, Rowan County Court Minutes reports, "*Peter Crouse, 8, orphan, was bound for 13 years to Andrew Betz to Larn him the Art & Mistry of a Gun Smith.*" (Figure 17). Thus, documenting that not only was he a locksmith, but also a gunsmith.²⁰

As for arguing that the style of this rifle could be earlier than 1766, we use the research of Robert Leinemann to build a foundation for our case. In his 2017 book, "*Moravian Gunmaking II – Bethlehem to Christian's Spring*"²¹ Leinemann brings forth and illustrates documents recording Casper Wister's involvement in the settlement of early America - specifically the longrifle trade. Quite

the entrepreneur, Wister immigrated to Philadelphia in September 1717. He was the son of Johannes Wuster who served as forester or huntsman to the Elector Palatine and Casper was expected to follow suit. After a four-year apprenticeship he worked in the forest two years before being lured to the New World. Looking for a way to make a living, he soon learned the trade of brass button making which launched him into a very successful career. During the thirty-five years he lived in America he amassed one of the greatest fortunes of the period. By 1729 Wister was filling the bowels of empty German ships with premier American timber (including figured maple) providing ballast for the returning commercial vessels. Records indicate that in 1732, Wister received 6 rifles from a noted gunmaker, Johann Aldoph Doll, in Rothenberg, Germany. Numerous letters from Wistar describe the rifles he wanted for the new American market, *“the barrels should be longer than normal because the people prefer rifles with barrels that are three feet and three to four inches long.”* In another letter he wrote, *“The Rothenberg guns, they are nice except two of them are too short.”*



Figure 15. The coil spring which opens the lid of the box is of the same design as springs used to operate door locks.



#42

Moravian Door Lock

Figure 13. The “punch-dot” decoration on the muzzle is a decorative element also found on rifles made by Thomas Simpson and Jacob Young. Importantly, this decoration is also found on a door lock plate on the “Single Brothers House” in Old Salem, Winston-Salem, North Carolina



MESDA Door Lock Plate

#42

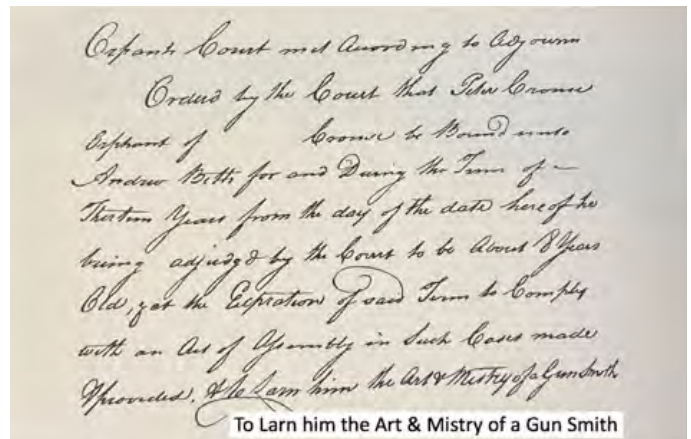
Figure 16. Notice that the carving behind the tang is very similar to the finial of the door lock plate from the Single Brothers House in Old Salem – Museum of Early Southern Decorative Art.



Figure 14. The brass patchbox cover is in the shape of a “door lock plate,”

In 1733 Wister wrote Doll ordering 50 rifles, stating:

*“for the American Market, the barrels should be longer than normal... with barrels no shorter than 3 feet and three to four inches long. With large bore and set triggers that can be fired set or not. No more fowlers and the sights not as high nor as close together.”*²²



Apprentice indenture binding Peter Crouse to Andreas Betz of Salisbury dated 14 February, 1770

N.C. Dept. Archives & History

Figure 17.

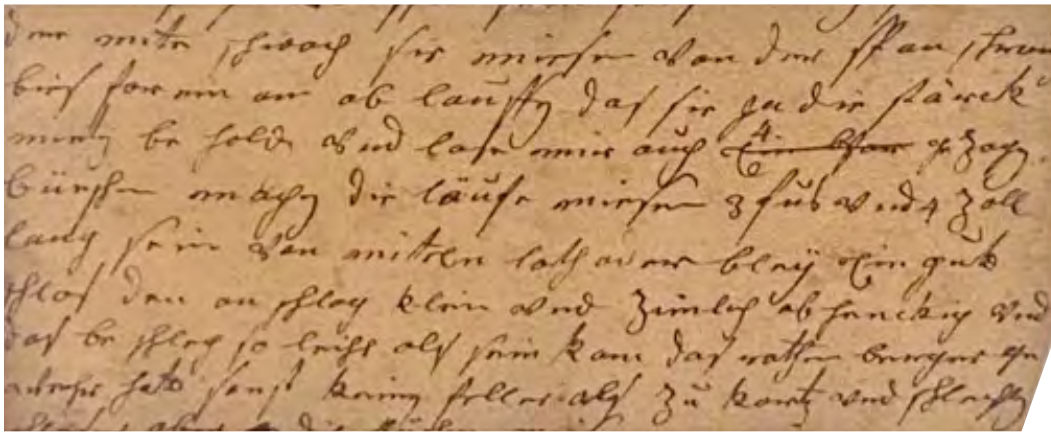


Figure 18. This hand written statement, which records the preference of American's in 1733, perfectly describes the fully evolved American longrifle. We feel this is quite possibly the most important document known in regards to the description and origins of the American longrifle.

Caspar Wister requesting rifles with longer barrels for the colonies - letter dated 1 Oct 1737, Morris Family papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania



Figure 19. An important piece in the stylistic puzzle, this is a relic rifle that's been restocked using earlier parts directly relating to rifle #42.

**Important Piece to the "Origins" Puzzle
- door within a door -**

This statement, which records the preference of Americans in 1733, perfectly describes the fully evolved American longrifle. (Figure 18) We feel this is perhaps the most important document known in regards to the description and origins of the American longrifle. It is also interesting to note that Wister was smuggling these rifles into American. To avoid paying a heavy tariff, he would pay ships passage for an entire family, in exchange for bringing a rifle as personal property.

Lineage of Stylistic Trends

An important piece in this stylistic puzzle is a relic rifle that has been restocked using earlier parts that directly relate to rifle #42 and thus is tied to all rifles in the study. Its patchbox is also in the shape of a door lock plate and is almost exactly the same shape as the box lid of #42 (Figure 19). A tell-tale element of design is the punch-dot engraving outlining the shape of the box, which ties all the rifles in the study together. (Figures 20, 21) The actual lid of the



#42



Relic

Figure 20. These comparative photos show that the patchbox cover of #42 is almost identical in shape to the patchbox surround of the Relic Rifle.

Figure 21. This close-up photo of the Jacob Young patchbox shows the captured lid, the almost identical latching mechanism to the Relic Rifle and the punch-dot decoration that is a common tie throughout this study.



Notice box latch and punch-dot decoration – Jacob Young - circa 1805

box is “captured” a feature we discussed at the beginning of this article and is found on rifles made by Jacob Young, Thomas Simpson and the Bryan Family. The re-used sideplate of the relic rifle is also very similar to the sideplate of #42 confirming obvious design relationships. We discussed Andreas Betz leaving the Moravian church after marrying the sister of gunsmith Henry Bruner Jr. There are no known examples of Henry Jr’s work, but when a sideplate made by his son, Henry Bruner III is observed in a lineup with sideplates from #42 and the relic rifle, there is obvious association. (Figures 22, 23)

Another piece to the puzzle is the well documented rifle owned by John Thomas, commander of the Spartanburg Regiment of the South Carolina militia. His initials are found on the silver thumb escutcheon on top of the wrist. His son, Captain Robert Thomas, had the rifle at the Battle of Mudlick Creek, and was captured

March 2, 1781. The rifle was carried to England by Colonel George Hanger, who presented it to Prince George IV, a gun fancier who was intrigued with the accuracy of American longrifles. The rifle was subsequently refurbished in London by the gunsmith Durs Egg and today is on exhibit at Windsor Castle.²¹ The box on this rifle is also in the shape of door lock plate, with an inner door that is surrounded on three sides. But of more importance to this study is that it originally had a dramatic “stepped wrist” as is found on rifle #42 and the Jacob Young rifle made for William Whitley. (Figures 24,25,26)

As examples of similar architectural characteristics are shown in comparison, the total picture of the origins and evolution of the rifles in our study begins to become clear. The design of the cheek pieces on four rifles dating from the 1760’s all the way till 1815 are basically the same. Sideplates from associated rifles spanning over



#42



Relic

Figure 22. These comparative photos show the almost identical design of the sideplates of #42 and the Relic Rifle.



Relic Rifle Sideplate



Henry Bruner III

Figure 23. This comparative illustration shows the close resemblance of the Relic Rifle sideplate and a sideplate from a rifle made by Henry Bruner III.



John Thomas Rifle

Figure 24. Another piece to the puzzle is this well documented rifle owned by John Thomas, commander of the Spartanburg Regiment of the South Carolina militia. His initials are found on the silver thumb escutcheon on top of the wrist.

60 years, exhibit the same basic design. But the one comparison we found totally stunning was when laying the 1760s period #42 rifle alongside Jacob Young's 1805 period rifle made for Kentucky frontiersman William Whitley. These two gunstocks, produced at least 40 years apart, appear to have been cut from the same pattern. (Figures 27, 28, 29)

To Conclude

As we followed the crumbs of research from Kentucky and Tennessee, the trail led us to North Carolina to a rifle that got its basic style from Pennsylvania. This style was documented by Casper Wister as an American preference as early as 1733. The paper trail evidence and rifles encountered along the way, led us to Philadelphia and revealed what we believe is the very origins of the American longrifle (Figure 30).



Figure 25. John Thomas of Spartanburg, South Carolina was the owner of this rifle. Captured by the British in 1781, it was carried back to England and worked over extensively by noted gunsmith Durs Egg. Its original brass sideplate was replaced with a piece of walnut. The double triggers were replaced with a single set trigger and the guard moved forward. This change called for altering the original step-wrist stock architecture. A detailed photo of the 13 pointed star cheek piece inlay is shown in Figure 24.

Altered by English Gunsmith Durs-Egg, originally had a pronounced "stepped-wrist."



#42



Relic



John Thomas Rifle

Figure 26. These comparative photos show association of the patchbox's on #42, the Relic Rifle and the John Thomas Rifle.



John Thomas



#42



Jacob Young



Simpson

Figure 27. Perhaps the most tell-tale comparison in this study, these photos show the comparison of all four cheek rest, and the almost identical method in which they are carved and positioned on the stock.



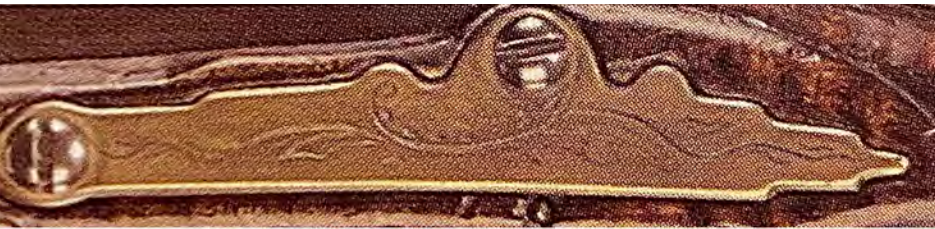
#42



Simpson



Relic



Brunner

Figure 28. Another striking comparison is this lineup of the sideplates from the four rifles.

Pronounced Stepped Wrist

#42 circa 1765



Jacob Young circa 1805

Figure 29. When laying the 1760s period #42 longrifle alongside Jacob Young's 1805 period rifle, these gunstocks produced at least 40 years apart, appear to have been cut from the same pattern. This leads us to believe that this stock pattern has been handed down from master to apprentice - more than once.



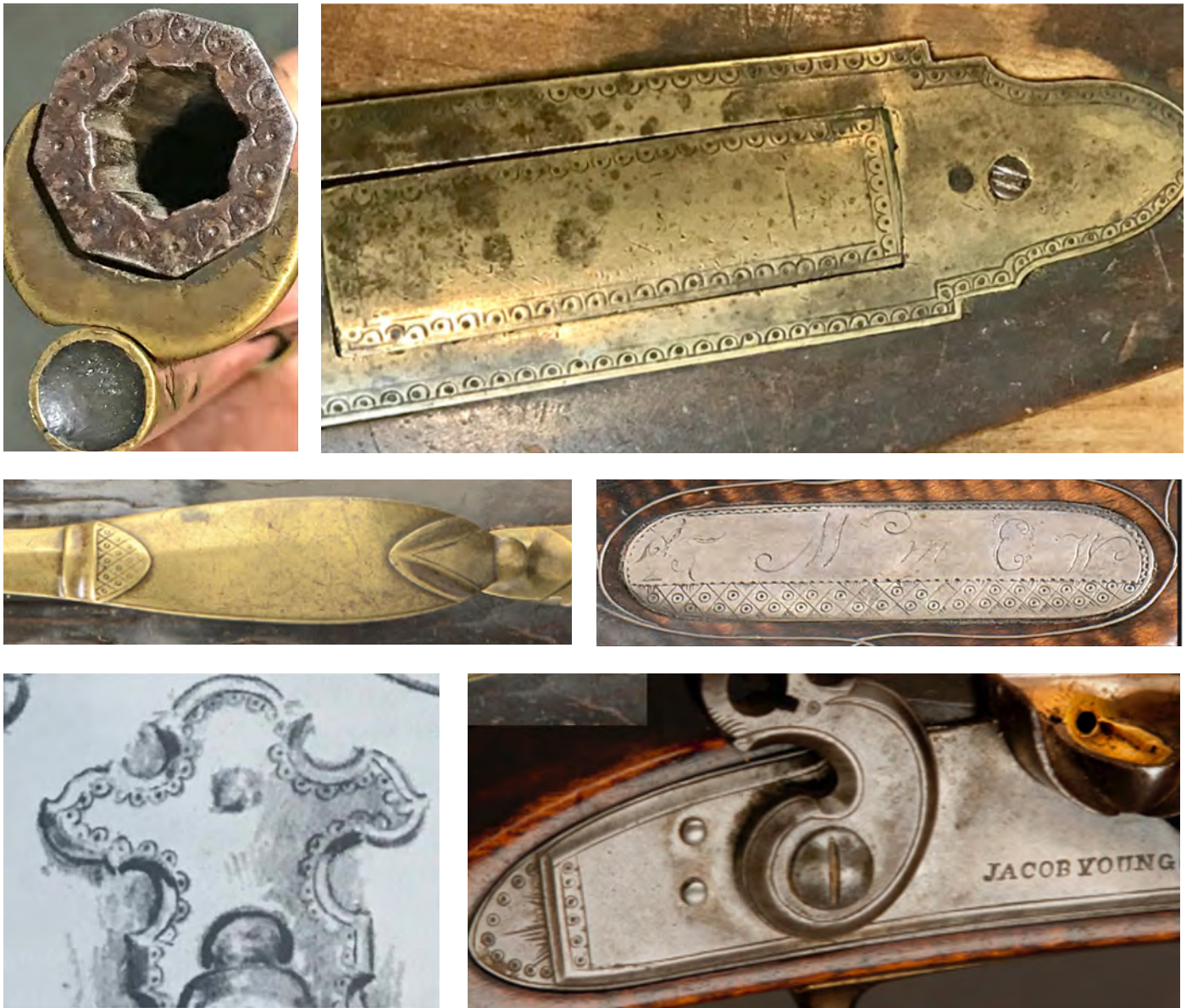


Figure 30. The punch-dot decorations, seen in each of these comparative photos, are found on all the rifles we have discussed in this paper, as well as the door lock plate from the Single Brothers House in Old Salem Museum and Gardens.

Endnotes

- ¹ Mel S. Hankla, "Materpiece Rifles of the Cumberland." *American Society Arms Collections Bulletin* Number 117 Spring 2018.
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- ⁶ Bryon Sistler and Barbara Sistler, *Early Tennessee Tax Lists*. Janaway Santa Maria, CA. 2006.
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- ¹¹ Ibid
- ¹² Richard Carlton Fulcher, *Census of the Cumberland Settlements 1770-1790*. Genealogical Publishing, Baltimore, MD. 1987.
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- ¹⁵ Ibid
- ¹⁶ Gary D. Young, *Life and Times of William Young, Tennessee Frontiersman*, Utah Pioneer Washington, Utah: Lofthouse.com. 2005.
- ¹⁷ Mel S. Hankla, "Into The Bluegrass, Art and Artistry of Kentucky's Historic Icons." Pages 56-60. *American Historic Services*, Hitchins, KY. 2020.
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- ¹⁹ Wallace Gusler. "An 18th. Century Moravian Rifle Gun from North Carolina." Page 4. *Muzzle Blast Magazine*, National Muzzle Loading Rifle Association, Friendship, IN. Jan. 2005
- ²⁰ John Bivins, Jr, *Longrifles of North Carolina*. George Shumway Publishers, York, PA. 1968.
- ²¹ Robert Paul Lienemann, *Moravian Gunmaking II* Kentucky Rifle Foundation, Winchester, VA. 2017.
- ²² Ibid
- ²³ George Shumway, *Rifles of Colonial America – Vol. 1*. George Shumway Publishers, York, PA. 1980.

