

## FIREARM INFORMATION SHEET

**COLLECTION NUMBER:** 9185

**TYPE:** Kentucky Rifle by John Bonewitz

**IGNITION SYSTEM:** Flint

**LOCK MARKINGS/DECORATIONS:**

**DATE OF MANUFACTURE:** Circa 1780

**PLACE OF MANUFACTURE:** ~~Womeldorf~~, Pennsylvania

**MAKER:** John Bonewitz

**LENGTH OVERALL:** 58 inches

**BARREL LENGTH:** 42 1/2 inches, octagonal, flared (swamped)

**CALIBER:** .60, shot smooth (was originally rifled)

**WOOD TYPE:** Curly Maple

"WOMELDORF + TOWN"

**MOUNTINGS:** Brass with five silver inlays. Molded brass edge to cheekpiece. Patchbox marked "Womeldorf Town" (one of only two known - the other is in the Kindig Collection). Cutout silver eagle on cheekpiece (one of only two known - the other is in the Harmon C. Leonard Collection).

**BARREL MARKINGS/DECORATION:**

**STOCK MARKINGS/DECORATION:** The stock is of beautiful curly maple with *deep* original finish and patina. Relief carving on cheekpiece side of butt exemplifies Bonewitz's relief carving at its finest, including his signature *ruffe* carving beneath the cheekpiece. Unusually exuberant amount of carving around head of patchbox and on right side of wrist. *All Kindig, p. 201*

**REPAIRS/RESTORATION:** None "WOMELDORF + TOWN"

**HISTORICAL/ARTISTIC SIGNIFICANCE:** With its brass cheekpiece molding, silver eagle on the cheekpiece, engraving of "Womeldorf Town" on patchbox, overall extensive carving, flared barrel, and 1 7/8 inch thick flat butt, this is one of the earliest and finest rifles made by one of the half-dozen most talented artisans every to produce Kentucky rifles. This gun represents a Golden Age gun in its earliest manifestations retaining the thick butt, flared barrel and architecture of the Revolutionary War Period of Kentucky.

**PROVENANCE:** Believed to be from the Albert Sullivan, Sr. Collection.

**PUBLICATIONS:** None

**COST:**

**ESTIMATED MARKET VALUE AND DATE:**

"EARLY AMERICAN FLINTLOCKS"

P152

HARTZLER, DANIEL

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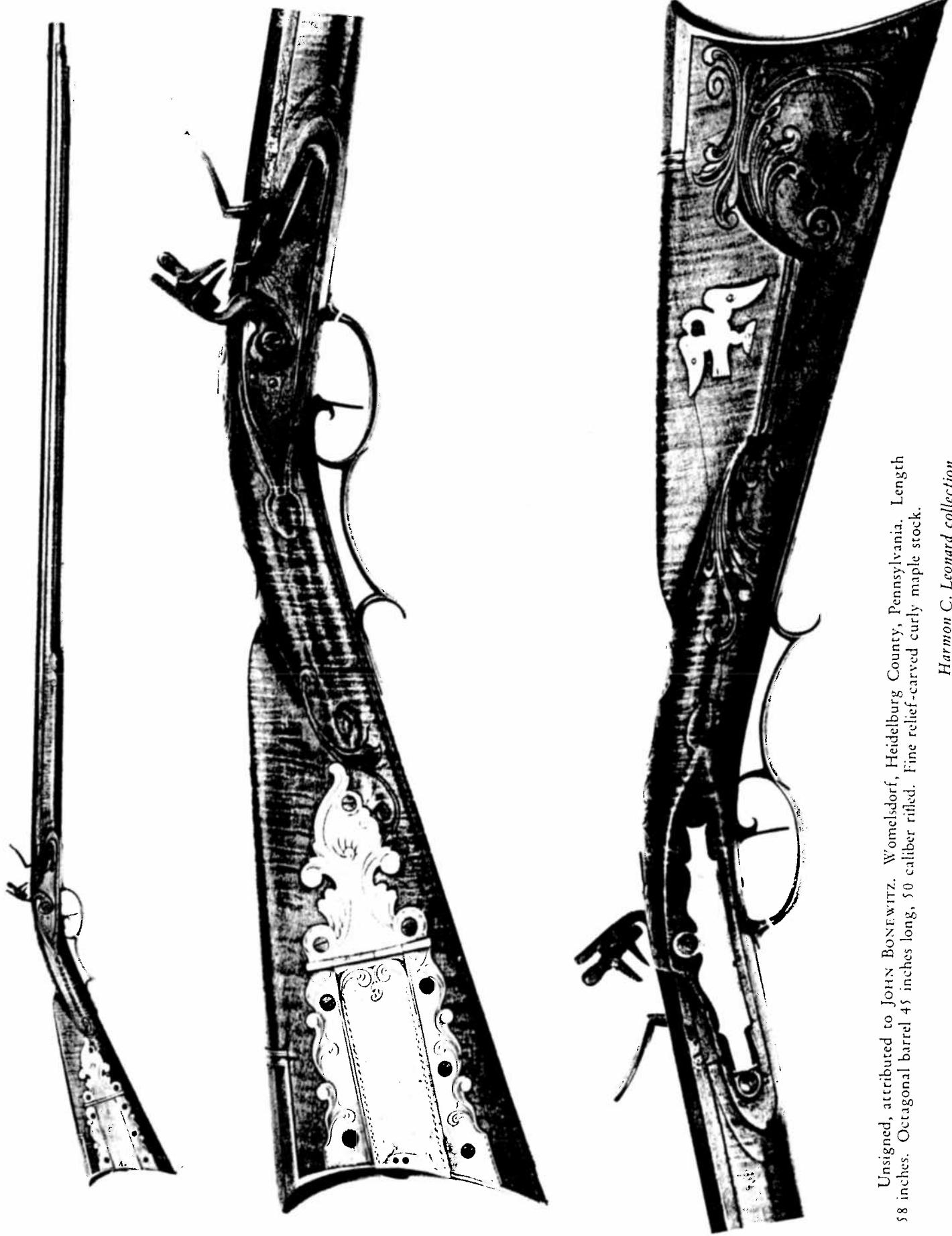
WHISKEY, JAMES

2000

THIS IS # 9185



John Bonewitz of Womelsdorf in Berks County, Pennsylvania, 1772-1810.



Unsigned, attributed to JOHN BONEWITZ. Wormelsdorf, Heidelberg County, Pennsylvania. Length 58 inches. Octagonal barrel 45 inches long, .50 caliber rifled. Fine relief-carved curly maple stock.

*Harmon C. Leonard collection.*

# THOUGHTS ON THE KENTUCKY RIFLE IN ITS GOLDEN AGE



*"All manifestation  
must be born through the heart."*

*This book was born  
through the loving efforts of*

MARY ANN CRESSWELL, *Editor*

SAMUEL E. DYKE, *Research*

HENRY J. KAUFFMAN, *Research*

JOHN E. GROOME, *Printer*

GEORGE N. HYATT, *Publisher*

JOE KINDIG, JR.

BLUFORD W. MUIR, *Photographer*

*These also helped:*

LEE E. BOYER, WILLIAM E. FLORENCE,

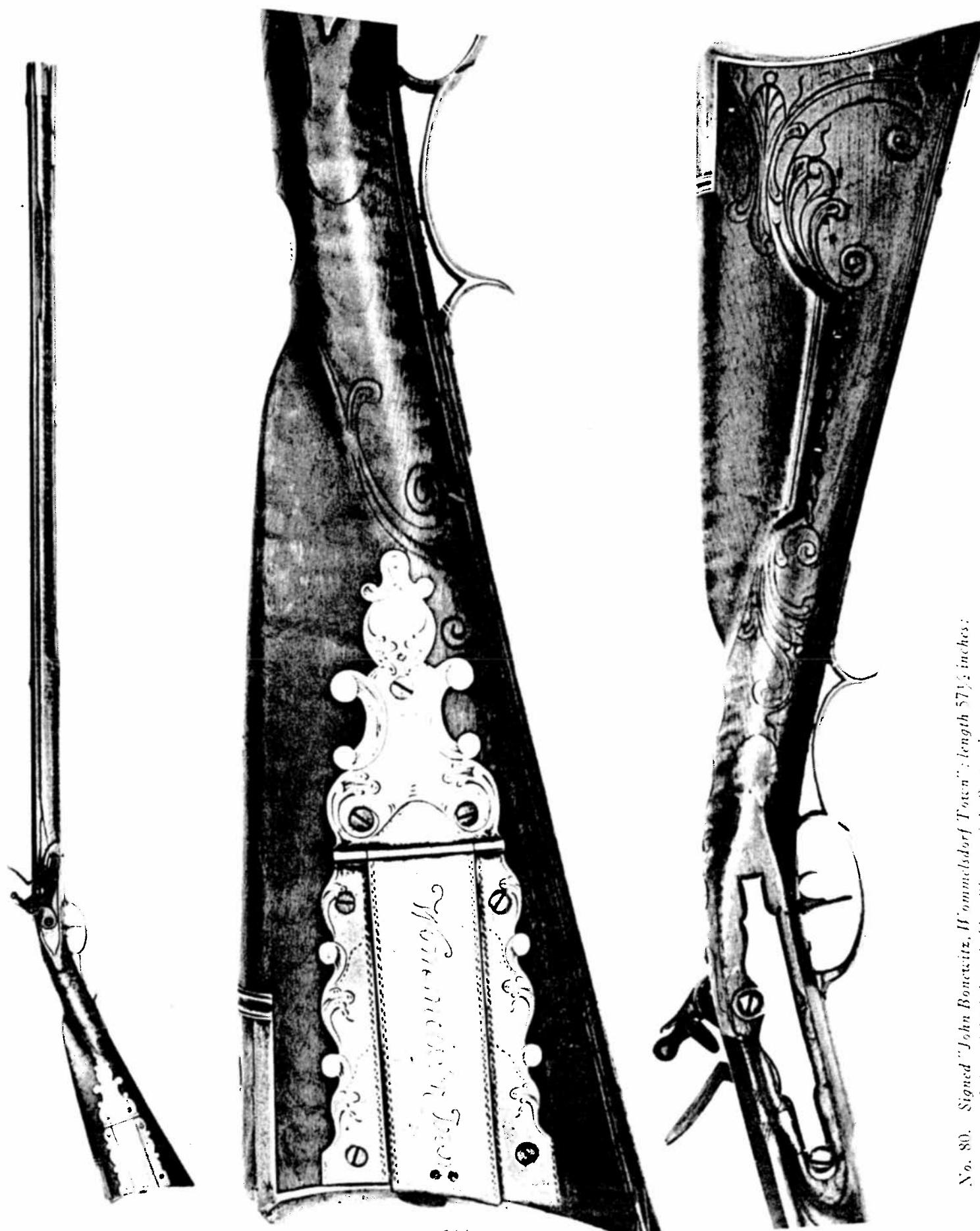
RAYMOND A. FREY, HAROLD L. PETERSON, CARL PIPPETT, CHESTER L. STAGEMAYER,  
SABINA STEELE, WES WHITE.

*It could not have been conceived  
but for the pioneering of*

HORACE KEPHART, CHARLES WINTHROP SAWYER, CAPT. JOHN G. W. DILLIX,  
JOHN HUSTON, MARK WOODMANSEE, DR. THOMAS B. SNYDER, CHARLES D. COOK,  
WILLIAM JACOBS, CARMAN MYERS  
*and many others.*

*There is still much pleasant work  
to be done in this field  
for any who care to labor.*



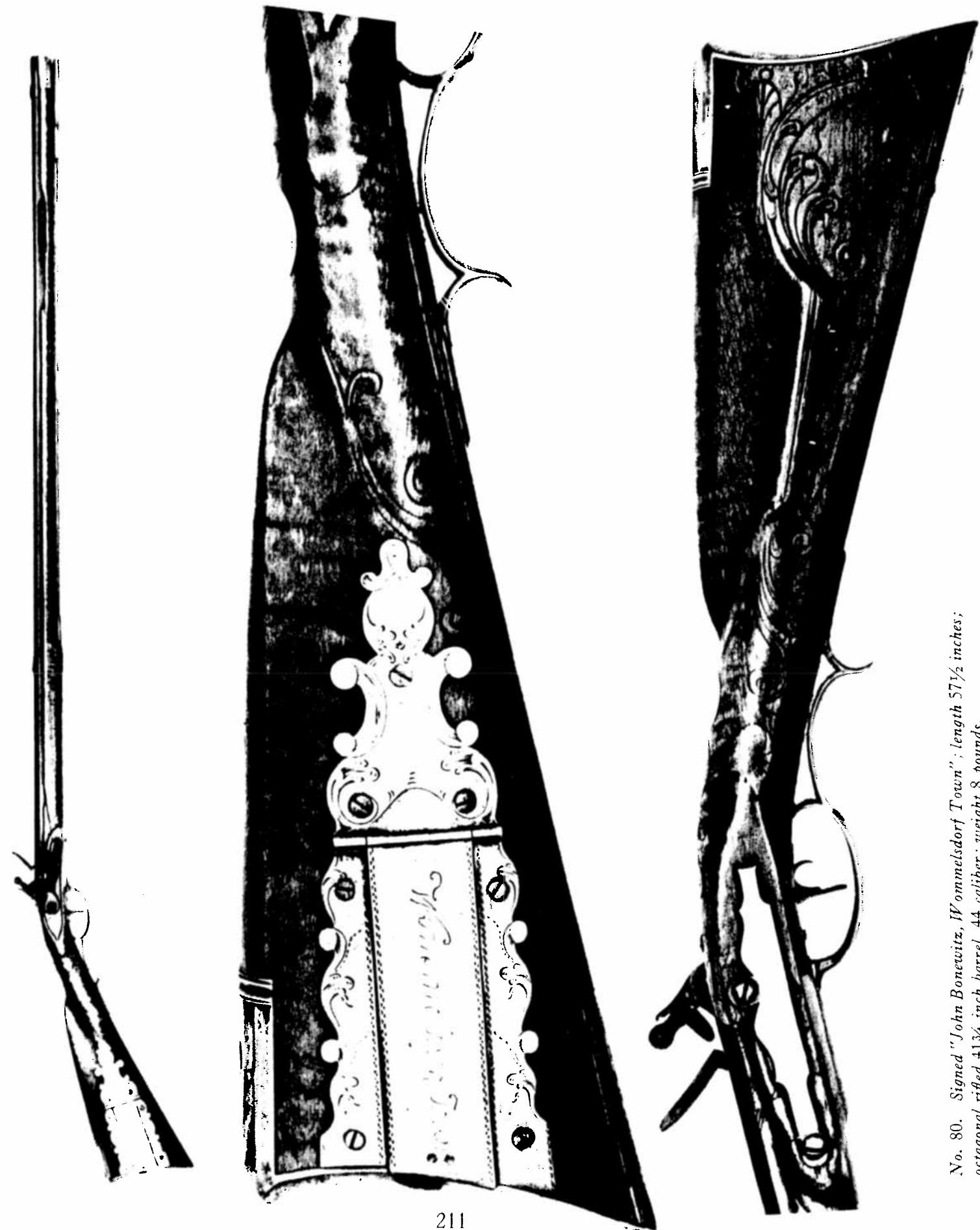


No. 80. Signed "John Boncitz, Wommelsdorf Town"; length 57½ inches; octagonal rifled 41½ inch barrel, .44 caliber; weight 8 pounds.

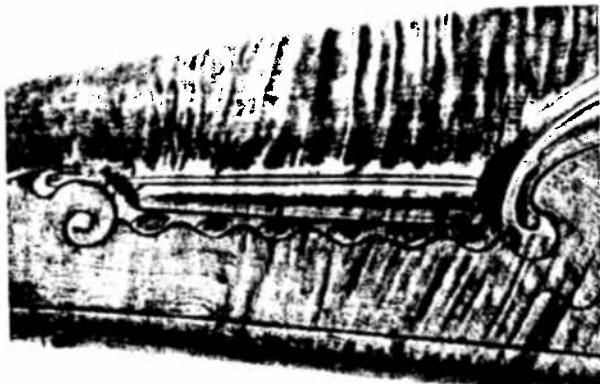
Other Boncitz



No. 80. Signed "John Bonewitz, Womelsdorf Town"; length 57½ inches; octagonal rifled 41¾ inch barrel, .44 caliber; weight 8 pounds.



No. 80. Signed "John Boneweitz, Wommelsdorf Town"; length 57½ inches; octagonal rifled 41¾ inch barrel, 44 caliber; weight 8 pounds.



*Wavy carved detail under cheek piece indicative of J. Bonewitz*

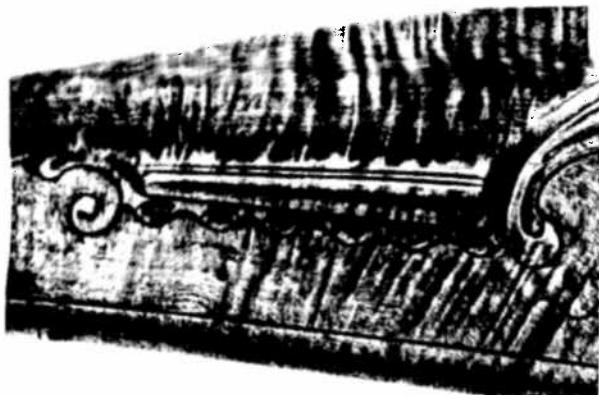
## John Bonewitz

The 1792 and 1800 tax lists of Heidelberg Township, Berks County, identify John Bonewitz as a gunsmith. Womelsdorf is a town in Heidelberg Township which was called Middletown originally. Although these are the only records we have found so far which designate John Bonewitz as a gunsmith, there are many tax records in Womelsdorf from 1779 to 1809 which list a John Bonewitz but, as was customary in that section, do not report his occupation. Since there is little doubt that these records all refer to the same man, we can conclude that Bonewitz worked there from at least 1779 to 1809. As a top-grade workman of this section, John Bonewitz is worthy of much further investigation.

There are many details on his guns which indicated that Bonewitz associated in some way with J. Haga. Perhaps they were apprenticed to the same master. I also feel that Bonewitz had some contact with Wolfgang Haga's work.

John Bonewitz rarely signed his rifles; No. 80 is the only signed specimen I have ever seen. Instead, he sometimes stamped his work "I. B." near the breech with a small die. These initials accompanied by a lion standing on his hind legs (termed a "lion rampant" in heraldry) appear on three of the eight Bonewitz guns. Some collectors, forgetting that I and J were interchangeable in the eighteenth century, have mistakenly attributed this mark to Isaac Berlin.

Of the eight Bonewitz guns to be studied, four are illustrated. All eight rifles have a well defined high comb. The stocks are of from good to excellent quality curly maple. All have a high cheek piece with the same simple molded edge. The carving forward of these cheek pieces is beautifully composed of a few C-scrolls. It is almost identical on all eight guns and is somewhat similar to carving by J. Haga. Seven of the eight guns have one of two designs carved in well executed relief to the rear of the rear ramrod pipe, and seven have beautiful and almost identical designs to the rear of the barrel tang. The carving forward of the patch box is almost identical on seven guns, and the other one, No. 81, is essentially the same but more elaborate. The serpentine detail carved in relief under the cheek piece on all of these Bonewitz guns could almost be considered his "signature,"



*Wavy carved detail under cheek piece indicative of J. Bonewitz*

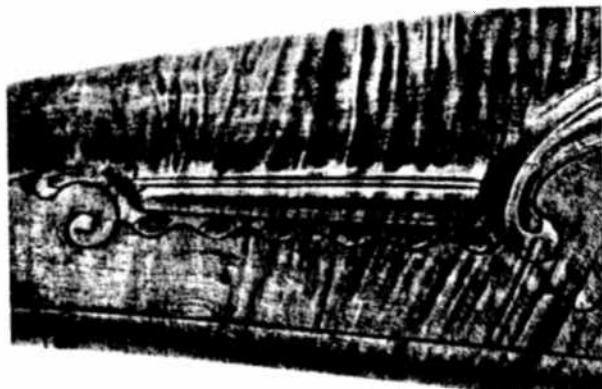
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