

Exhibition Guide

THE KENTUCKY RIFLE is an American innovation that developed by the 1750's. German, English, and Scotch-Irish settlers brought firearms with them that were unsuitable for use on the frontier. The gunsmith's task was to make an accurate firearm that consumed less lead and gunpowder and was quick and easy to load. Lengthening the barrel, reducing bore size, and reducing rifling groove depth were innovations developed by these immigrant gunsmiths. A key innovation was using a greased patch wrapped around the lead ball. The greased patch would grip the ball, fill the rifling grooves, and easily slide down the barrel with a ramrod. The greased patch gave rise to the "patchbox," a simple hinged lid of brass covering a cavity in the stock where grease or greased patches were kept. It later became a focal point of decoration on the rifle. The most beautiful and highly decorated rifles were made soon after the Revolution until the 1830's (termed The Golden Age). Industrialization resulted in the decline of artistry on the rifle. Neither the Continental nor American military ever used the rifle to its full advantage; the Kentucky was primarily a sporting arm used for hunting, self-defense, and recreation.

SCHOOLS OF GUNSMITHING: The term "school" refers to a collective style prevalent within a geographical area. The concept was fostered by the apprentice system, in which a boy was legally bound to a master gunsmith to learn the trade. After that, the young gunsmith could work as a journeyman or set up his own business. If he stayed in the area, his first rifles would resemble his master's. If he moved away, he would assume the style of rifles made in that region or school. If he moved to an area far from other gunsmiths, he could use his creativity to establish his own style, train apprentices, and another school would evolve. This pattern occurred during the mid-1700's through the mid-1800's.

BERKELEY AND JEFFERSON COUNTIES: As early as 1726, Morgan Morgan settled near Bunker Hill. In 1762, Mecklenburg (later named Shepherdstown) was established, as was Martinsburg in 1778, and Charles Town in 1786. Brothers Henry and Philip Sheetz were making guns by 1768 in Mecklenburg. In 1776, they supplied 24 guns per month to the state of Virginia. Thomas Rutherford of Mecklenburg, Adam Stephen and Anthony Noble of Martinsburg, and David Hunter and Peter Light of Berkeley County also all supplied guns for the state during the Revolution. Many workers were employed to meet the demand. After the Revolution, demand for military guns declined and civilian arms like the Kentucky rifle became the focus. The Sheetz family remained active. One signed



Rifle by Martin Sheetz

original rifle and one signed restocked rifle by Philip exist; none by Henry. Jacob and Martin, sons of Philip, worked in Shepherdstown during the Golden Age. Michael, Henry's son, moved to Charles Town, while Henry and other sons moved to Hampshire County and flourished there. George and Martin Rizer worked in Martinsburg after the Revolution, and then moved to Cumberland, Maryland in 1793. Daniel Marker worked in Martinsburg as well as Sharpsburg, Maryland. He later moved to Ohio.

SHEPHERDSTOWN SCHOOL: The Sheetz gunsmiths in Shepherdstown established a strong style from which the Rizers in Martinsburg, as well as later gunsmiths in the region, borrowed heavily. The earlier Winchester School also influenced the region. Details of the Shepherdstown School are: low straight comb architecture; 4-petal flower patchbox; pinned upper and lower patchbox plates; lobe at midpoint of rear ramrod pipe; short bow trigger guard; single trigger; 8-point star with opposing curves connecting smaller star points; lock bolt plate with horns; and tapered rear finial.

RIFLES IN THE DISPLAY CASE FIRST FLOOR

1. Virginia doglock fusil, Berkeley County, ca 1740. Marked William Mitchell PC (Peace Commission) on stock. Made without a trigger guard. Attributed to son-in-law Thomas Anderson. Earliest known Virginia rifle. 53" barrel, .70 cal., 70" overall length. William Mitchell was an attorney and Commissioner of the Peace or Magistrate of then Frederick County.

Jefferson and Berkeley County Rifles

2. Pre-Revolution era rifle, ca 1770. 2-piece patchbox; finial affixed with pins; early hand-made flintlock. Low comb architecture, incised carving, fore stock molding. 41" rifled barrel, .54 cal., 56" overall.
3. "M Rizer" Martin Rizer, Martinsburg, Berkeley County, ca 1790. Relief carved curly maple stock with 4-petal flower patchbox. Short rifle with 37" rifled barrel, .45 cal., 52" overall.
4. "P Sheetz" Philip Sheetz (Shiz, Schutz), Shepherdstown, ca 1780 (restocked ca 1825). Exquisitely engraved brass patchbox. Curly maple stock, brass mounts.
5. "M Sheetz" in script on a silver plate. Martin Sheetz, Shepherdstown, ca 1795. Grand bird finial patchbox; superb relief carved curly maple stock; silver eagle cheek piece inlay; brass wire inlay; false "pinprick" patchbox lid release. A masterpiece. Cut to half stock and double set triggers added in period.
6. "M Sheetz" in stamped block letters. Martin Sheetz, Shepherdstown, ca 1800. Incised carved maple stock with 4-petal flower patchbox. Silver 8-pt. star in cheek piece. 44.5" rifled barrel, .50 cal., 59.5" overall.
7. "J Sheetz" in script. Jacob Sheetz, Shepherdstown, ca 1810. Maple stock with engraved and pierced patchbox. 8-pt. silver star in cheek piece, brass mounts. 42.5" rifled barrel, .45 cal., 57.5" overall.
8. "Sheetz & Clark" in script on a silver plate. Michael Sheetz and James Clark, Charles Town, ca 1820. Curly maple stock with pierced and engraved patchbox, relief carving, masterful silver cheek piece inlay with silver wire, several silver inlays. 42.5" barrel, .50 cal., 58.5" overall.
9. "D Marker" in script. Daniel Marker Sr. Martinsburg, ca 1820. Beautifully relief carved curly maple stock with checkered wrist. Pierced and engraved "Q" finial patchbox. Remains in original unrestored but poor condition. A rarity; few Kentuckies remain in this condition. 41.5" rifled barrel, .50 cal., 57.5" overall.
10. "W M Sheetz Shepherds Town VA No 85" in script. Shepherdstown, ca 1840. curly maple stock with old dark finish. Entirely silver mounted including butt plate and trigger guard. Well engraved and pierced patchbox. Rectangular silver inlay engraved "Peter C Brooks From his Grand Father Shepherd". 44.25" rifled barrel, .40 cal., percussion lock. Rezin Davis Shepherd, the grandson of Shepherdstown's founder Thomas Shepherd, presented it to his grandson Peter Brooks. The rifle is in like-new condition.



William Miller Sheetz trunk, first floor

RIFLES IN THE ARTS AND INDUSTRY ROOM THIRD FLOOR

1. "J Entler" in script. Jacob Entler, Shepherdstown, ca 1800. 46" round barrel, .70 cal. smoothbore fowling piece. Converted to percussion in the 1830's; curly maple full stock. Silver inlay between lock bolts engraved "W A Chaplin" who was born in Shepherdstown in 1839; brass band at fore end rather than traditional cap. Unrestored condition.
2. "J Sheetz" in script. Jacob Sheetz, Shepherdstown, ca 1800. 44" octagon to round barrel .70 cal. smoothbore fowling piece. Flintlock; plain maple stock; silver rear sight; engraved butt plate and trigger guard.
3. W M Sheetz No 60 in script. William Miller Sheetz, Shepherdstown, ca 1840. Probably his 60th rifle with figured walnut stock, silver plate engraved J S Sheetz in block letters and JSS engraved on thumb plate (the owner). Nesting bird patchbox finial, silver inlays. 36" octagon rifled barrel. .40 cal., percussion lock.
4. "J Sheetz" in script. Jacob Sheetz, Shepherdstown, ca 1825. Pierced and engraved patchbox, maple stock. Brass mounts, triggers, and trigger guard of later date.
5. "F Sheetz" in script. Frederick Sheetz, Hampshire County, ca 1795. Pierced and engraved patchbox and relief carving in the Winchester style. Silver 8-pt star in cheek piece. 45" rifled barrel, .54 cal., 61" overall.