

The Enigmatic Rifle Barrel



<http://www.blackandgoldreview.com/2013/09/03/21>

Colonial families living on the frontier usually had to rely on their own hunting expertise to provide enough meat for their families. Being a poor marksman could mean the difference between having plenty to eat or going hungry. Of course, firearms provided the means to procure meat. In today's world, it is hard to image a rifle as one of your most important possessions!

In the late 1970s, while doing research for the Fortenberry genealogy, Adrian Fortenberry was given some items formally belonging to Gasua Chapman Fortenberry. Among the items was a very old, weathered gun barrel. At first, it is not much to look at because only the barrel remains. But research has revealed some interesting possibilities.

It is hard to fathom just how different life can be from one generation to another. For example, my grandmother, Nellie Mae Simmons Fortenberry, was born in 1891 and died in 1974. During her lifetime, the Wright brothers gave us airplanes and Von Braun's rockets took us to the moon.

Even the things we rely on for our daily existence rapidly change. Most people go to a grocery store to buy food never considering how it got there. Go back a few generations and one would have to procure meat by buying it from someone else, raising it, or taking a gun (or some other tool) and locating something to eat from the environment.

Photo of the entire gun barrel



Photo: John Criminger

Our barrel measures 45.625 inches in length and weighs 8.5 pounds. With this barrel length, the final length with the stock of the gun would have been about 63 inches. That would make the rifle over 5 feet long! Due to the size and weight of this barrel, it could only have been some variety of long rifle. Below are some photos of Kentucky Long Rifles for sale on the internet. The four on top have barrels of 48.75 inches and the bottom rifle barrel is 44.25 inches.



http://www.aspenshadeltd.com/inventory_4rifles.html

This view is looking down the barrel of the rifle. The opening measures just under ½ inch which would make it most likely a 48 caliber. Rifling, spiral grooves inside the barrel, was used to make the bullet spiral as it left the barrel. This made the rifle more accurate than firearms without rifling in the barrel. When one is hunting food or protecting a family, accuracy could often insure the outcome.



Photo: John Criminger

Importance of the Long Rifle In American History



<http://i46.tinypic.com/2a4wdfp.jpg>

The American Long rifle, more commonly known as the "Kentucky rifle", was well described in a book originally written in 1924:

“From a flat bar of soft iron, hand forged into a gun barrel; laboriously bored and rifled with crude tools; fitted with a stock hewn from a maple tree in the neighboring forest; and supplied with a lock hammered to shape on the anvil; an unknown smith, in a shop long since silent, fashioned a rifle which changed the whole course of world history; made possible the settlement of a continent; and ultimately freed our country of foreign domination. Light in weight; graceful in line; economical in consumption of powder and lead; fatally precise; distinctly American; it sprang into immediate popularity; and for a hundred years was a model often slightly varied but never radically changed.”

Dillin, John (1967). *The Kentucky Rifle*. York, PA: George Shumway. pp. XI. [ISBN 0-87387-072-7](#).



<http://wulffsrangers.com/Blog/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/boyhunting-lg-white.jpg>

What is a Kentucky Long Rifle?

“The Kentucky or Pennsylvania Long Rifle was of civilian craftsman manufacture and came in a wide variety of designs. Very few were actually made in Kentucky, and many prefer to call them Pennsylvania rifles, where they seem to have originated; others refer to them as Pennsylvania-Kentucky rifles, but Kentucky rifle seems to be the generally accepted term.

The general characteristic of this long rifle was a barrel that was often 48 inches or more long, giving an overall length of more than 65 inches. Calibers ranged between .45 and .60, with the great variety in caliber making it difficult for the army to provide standard ammunition. American militia men often brought the Kentucky Long Rifle with them when they mustered. The Kentucky Long Rifle was accurate to well over 400 yards but took even longer to reload than the official British and American rifle models.“

Quote: Tucker, S. (2012). *The encyclopedia of the War of 1812 a political, social, and military history*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO.



Photos: John Criminger



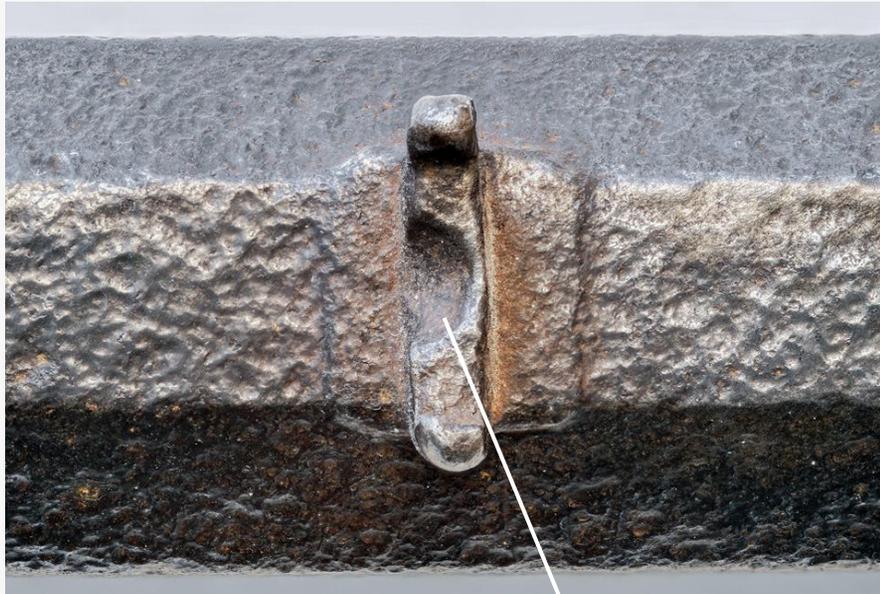
Two structures still visible on the barrel of our rifle

This close-up of the barrel shows the results of the metal aging about 300 years. The surface has slowly oxidized over time leaving small pits.

The top picture shows a close-up of the remains of the rear gun sight. As you can see, it has been broken off sometime in the past and only the base is evident. It must have happened quite a while ago since even the broken surface has pitted with age.

The bottom picture is of the front gun sight. When looking through the rear sight, one could line up the intended target with front sight to aim the rifle.

Location of the two sights on a recently constructed Kentucky long rifle



http://www.vintageweaponry.com/12100006_2.jpg

How the barrel fit into the rest of the rifle



<http://picturearchive.gunauction.com>

This view of a Kentucky rifle shows how the octagonal barrel was fitted into the end of the stock.



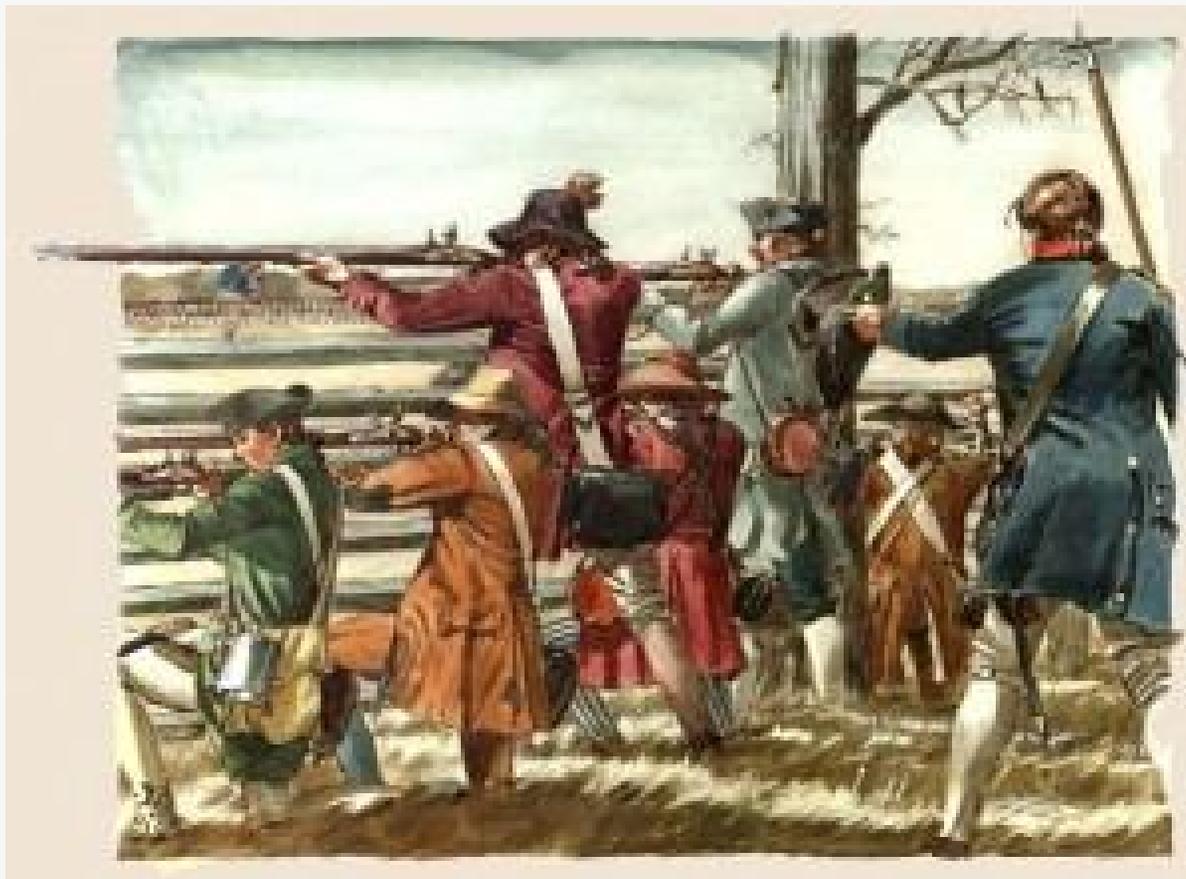
<http://picturearchive.gunauction.com>

This view shows how the octagonal barrel meets the stock and hammer.

Sadly, other than the barrel, none of the other parts of our rifle exists.

When was our rifle barrel in use?

According to the service history of the long rifle, it was most likely developed by German immigrants in southern Pennsylvania during the early 1700s. Due to its accuracy, it became a very desirable weapon for hunting wildlife for food in colonial America. By 1750, it was the preferred weapon on the frontier. When men mustered to serve in military situations, they would bring their own weapons. Because of this, the long rifle saw lots of action during the French and Indian War, Revolutionary War, and War of 1812.



Who was the original owner of the rifle?

Since we know very little about this rifle, the answer to this question would have to be conjecture. Adrian was given the rifle barrel along with a trunk originally owned by Gasua Chapman Fortenberry (1805-1884). One can make the assumption that the rifle, at some point in its existence, belonged to Gasua.

Gasua was the oldest son of William Jasper Fortenberry (1776 – 1842), who was the oldest son of John Faulkenberry (1740-1815). Research indicates that John Faulkenberry most likely was the oldest son of Jacob Faulkenburg. The spelling of the name varied greatly during this period!



Gasua Chapman Fortenberry

The Kentucky long rifle was used a great deal during the War of 1812. Our direct ancestor and Mississippi pioneer, William Jasper Fortenberry served during the War of 1812 for the state of South Carolina. Maybe he used it during his time in the service and carried it with him to the new state of Mississippi in 1819.

Maybe he inherited the rifle from his father, John Faulkenberry. Colonial records mention at least four John Fortenberrys. Two were named as Tories and two as Whigs. It has yet to be determined if one of these men is our ancestor.

Our John Faulkenberry was born in the Shenandoah Valley during the short time three Faulkenburg brothers lived there. Maybe his father, Jacob, was the original owner. What is interesting to note is that there were quite a few gunsmiths in the Shenandoah Valley making long rifles during the time our ancestor was in the valley. Maybe, our barrel is actually from a SHENANDOAH LONG RIFLE!



Tombstone of our War of 1812 ancestor, William Fortenberry. Evidently, this stone was placed on his grave in 1902. Strange way to spell Fortenberry!

"Gateway to the West" Painting by: David Wright



This is almost like a “photograph” of our family moving from the Shenandoah Valley to North and South Carolina in 1745! The lead man is even carrying a long rifle!

There were a lot of “maybes” in this discussion. It would be wonderful if this barrel could talk or someone had written down a few things about it. At this point it becomes evident that information is easily lost over time. If you have anything that has been passed down to you and you know anything about the item, please be sure to write down the story for future generations. If you own a family item and do not have anyone to pass it to in the next generation, please contact a relative to care for the item. It would be really sad to think that a family picture or heirloom is hanging on the wall of a Cracker Barrel Restaurant!

“If you don't recount your family history, it will be lost. Honor your own stories and tell them too. The tales may not seem very important, but they are what binds families and makes each of us who we are.”

-Madeleine L'Engle

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