

by Jim Whisker

Notable Antique Guns

We first meet Joe Gibbins on the tax list of 1830 of Brownsville, Fayette County, Pennsylvania, where he remained until 1882. Gibbins was usually taxed on the gunsmith's trade.

The tax lists yield nothing of great interest, so we will turn to the U.S. Censuses.

In 1850 in Brownsville, Joseph Gibbins, 42, engineer, born in Fayette County; Elizabeth, his wife, 38, born in Lancaster County, PA; Matilda, 18; Henry, 18, engineer; Nathaniel, 12; Sarah J., 10; and Samuel J., 1, all born in Fayette County. This is the only time I have ever seen the county of birth listed in a census.

The 1860 census gives us greater insight into what type of engineer the Gibbins males were. Son Henry is listed as a boat engineer while Joe is listed as a gunsmith with a valua-

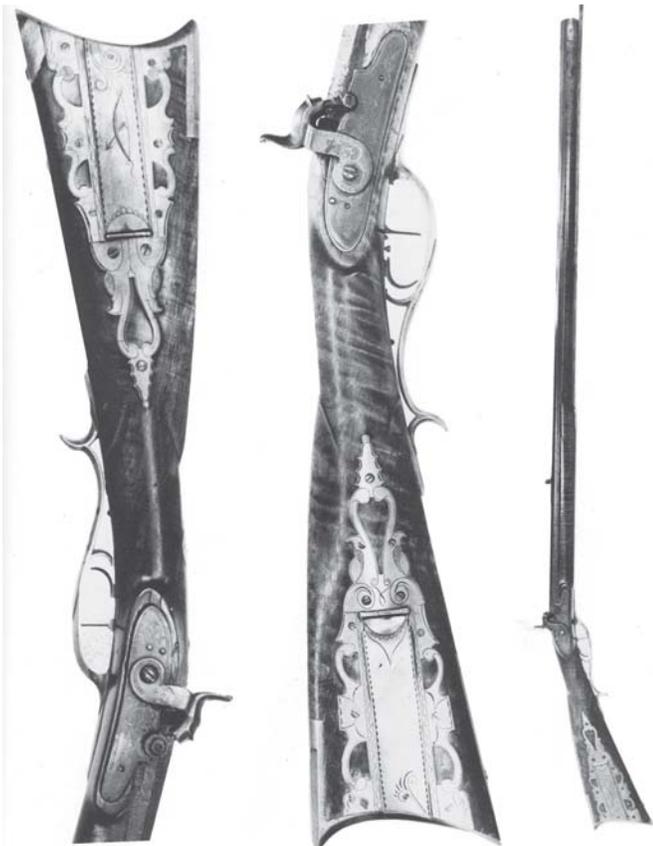
tion of \$1000. Wife Elizabeth, 50, and children Samuel, 11, and Sarah, 18 are still living in the household.

In 1870 the census used a more conventional spelling of the last name, Gibbons. Henry, 62, and Elizabeth, 56, were still living in Brownsville. His valuation had increased to \$2675 total. The spelling reverted to the previously used and apparently preferred Gibbins in the 1880 census. Joseph was noted as being age 72 and Elizabeth was 67.

He advertised his services as a gunsmith as late as 1882 in Polk's Directory. The *Uniontown Daily News Standard* of May 1, 1897, carried this notice, "Joseph Gibbins, father of Samuel Gibbons of this place, died in Pittsburgh at 3 P.M. yesterday, aged 90 years Death . . . was caused by Bright's Disease."

There is a new tombstone in Redstone Cemetery, North Bend, near Brownsville, which reads, "GIBBONS\ Joseph,





Joseph Gibbins

April 29, 1897\father; Elizabeth\died June 3, 1981 [sic]\mother.” We may note that Joseph preferred the spelling: Gibbins; the tombstone used Gibbons.

The Guns

It is possible that Joe Gibbins was a late apprentice of Peter White who lived in Uniontown from 1818 until his death in 1834. I have never seen a flintlock gun made by Gibbins, who clearly worked in the late flint period, although he surely must have made some early in his career. Neither have I seen a relief carved Gibbins rifle. There are many signed Gibbins percussion rifles.

The architecture of Gibbins’ rifles is always pleasing. He “gets it right” in the wrist area and thus the lines flow well in both directions. I have never seen a gun with poor lines when the wrist area was properly shaped. Conversely I have rarely seen a gun with pleasing architecture when the wrist area was poorly honed out.

His patchboxes are typical Western Pennsylvania style and are as well conceived and executed as any gun of the region. Again, the word pleasing comes mind; not outstanding but certainly attractive. His inlays are usually sparse in number but well designed. One who desires to own a splendid example of Western Pennsylvania gunmaking of the immediate pre-Civil War period could do no better than Gibbins’ work.

Several friends have recreated Gibbins rifles and like the originals they are downright attractive. These craftsmen say that reproduction of his work is relatively easy and greatly rewarding. **MB**

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