

Kentucky Rifle

Built circa 1815 by George W. Tryon



George W. Tryon built this Lancaster-style Kentucky Rifle about 1815. The top flat of the 43 ¾" long, .44 caliber octagonal barrel is marked "TRYON. PHILAD^A." The lock is marked "DREPPERD / LANCASTER" and features a period goose-neck cock. The rifle has double set triggers, a full-length curly maple stock, a hand-engraved four-piece Philadelphia-style patch box with a pineapple motif, a brass butt plate, a carved cheek piece, a thumb inlay at the wrist, three-barrel keys with fancy brass escutcheon plates, an engraved brass wear plate with pineapple finial, and three brass ramrod ferrules. The barrel, stock, and brass furniture are stamped with the assembly number "0". Inside the patch box are some old patches with grease, a worm accessory, and a spare flint. The muzzle is marked with concentric circles and stars. This beautiful piece is 60" long and weighs 9¼ lbs.

George W. Tryon was born during 1791 in Philadelphia, PA. He apprenticed under and subsequently became a partner of Philadelphia gunsmith Frederick W. Goetz. In 1811, at the age of 20, he purchased his partner's interest and established his own business at 165 North Second Street in Philadelphia. When the War of 1812 broke out, he enlisted in the army and was ordered to Camp Cadwallader, NJ. Before seeing any active service, however, he was sent back to his gun shop by the government because his work there was considered of greater value than serving in the field.

Several years after the War of 1812, Tryon purchased property opposite his original shop on North Second Street. He transformed a horse stable at the rear of this lot into a factory, converted the first floor into a store, and used the upper floors as a dwelling. During this period, he manufactured and sold Kentucky Rifles.



Today, this 200-year-old muzzleloader is in remarkable condition. The iron parts have an attractive patina with no evidence of wear, rust, or pitting. The brass furniture is mustard color, with only light wear to engraved areas. The lock is in the original flintlock configuration, having never been converted to percussion. The curly maple stock is flawless; being totally void of chips, cracks, or blemishes. Appraisers at a major auction house used the word "fantastic" to describe it. I think you'll agree after seeing the following photos and reading the accompanying information.

A Closer Look



During this time, it was common for American gunsmiths to use locks made by other artisans. The lock on this rifle is marked “DREPPERD LANCASTER.” (*The Drepperd family was among the most well-known and prolific lock makers in Lancaster, PA.*) It matches the profile of nearly identical locks made by Henry Drepperd. The rifle has “set triggers.” Once the rear trigger is pulled, the action of the front trigger is significantly lightened.



This rifle features a classic four-piece Philadelphia-style patch box with a stylized pineapple finial, engravings, and other design features. The toe plate, along the underside of the stock, has a button that releases the door to the compartment holding patches and other shooting supplies.



The rifle barrel shows no signs of wear, pitting, or corrosion. It's been “swamped,” meaning it's been tapered slightly from the breech to the muzzle to reduce weight and improve the rifle's balance.



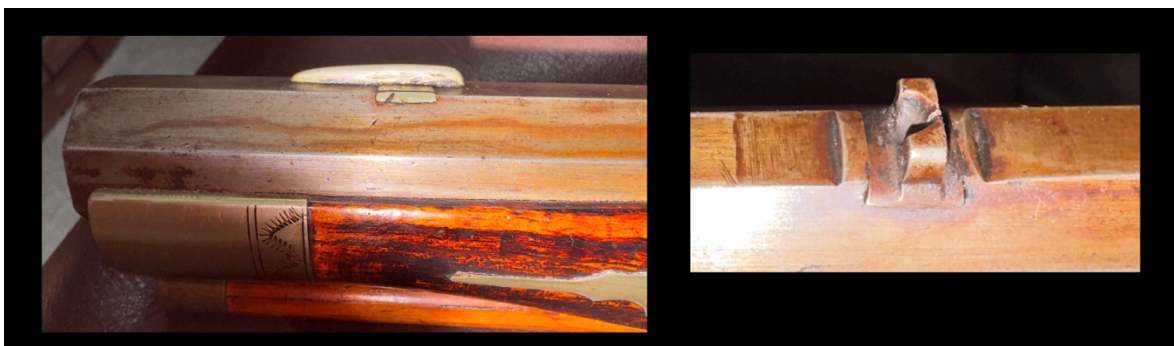
18th and early 19th Century rifle makers used sand-filled molds to fabricate the brass furniture used on their firearms. The shape and overall design of several parts, like the side plate

and trigger guard, were influenced by local customs and the practices of the local gun-making school.



The muzzle shows the early style of rifling with wide lands and narrow grooves. A hand operated rifling machine was used to create the spiral channels inside the barrel. Each of the seven grooves was cut separately by repeatedly twisting a wooden rod with an imbedded metal cutter through the bore.

Tryon put his last name and shop location on the top flat of the barrel. In addition to identifying him as the builder, this information helps date the rifle. In 1811, he marked his rifles "GOETZ + TRYON." In 1814, he changed the marking to "TRYON. PHILADA." During the 1830s, He entered separate partnerships with his son and Samuel Merrick. This led to further changes to the maker's mark on his firearms.



Tryon installed a set of handmade rifle sights into channels cut into the upper barrel flat.



The wear plate on the underside of the handguard protects the curly maple stock from damage when the rifle is fired from a support, such as a tree limb. Most Kentucky Rifles lack this interesting feature.



The brass toe plate incorporates an attractive pineapple finial and floral accents. One must press the button in the center of the toe plate to open the patch box.



When this rifle left George Tryon's shop about 1815, James Madison was our 4th President, Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett were both alive, and the fighting at the Alamo was 21 years in the future. Few of these guns have survived the ravishes of time. Fewer yet have endured in such extraordinary condition.