

Locksmiths and Locks in Lancaster County

By Henry J. Kauffman

The focus of this survey will be on the locksmiths and locks of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, 1780-1890. A review of the publications about Lancaster County reveals that nothing has been published on either of the two subjects.

Such an omission does not seem strange when looking into other areas. For example, a 1786 trade directory of New York City does not list any locksmiths. Also, a 1789 trade directory of Boston does not include any locksmiths, nor does an 1800 business directory of Philadelphia, then the largest and most prosperous city in the United States. One would imagine the trade of locksmithing should have been “bursting at the seams” at that time. The demand for door locks would have been quite great.

The most likely solution to the puzzle can be explained by the fact that after the American Revolution, trade with European countries expanded a great deal. It is very likely German lockmakers were busy at their workbenches turning out locks for Philadelphia ironmongers (hardware merchants) to sell. It also is possible that a few blacksmiths were not busy shoeing horses, and they devoted some of their time to the making of locks and keys. Lockmaking would have been a tedious work for “rough and ready” blacksmiths; however, there always have been exceptions to a general rule.

Without further knowledge of these faraway places, the focus will now turn to matters in Lancaster County. One of the real sources about occupations of citizens has been surviving tax assessment records. A fairly complete collection from about 1750 to the present century is at the Lancaster County Historical Society. Occupations are not always listed, but, fortunately, many are. Records were examined for the span of years from 1810 to 1830. In that period it was found that the names of twenty-one locksmiths were recorded.

Their names follow:

Boot, John
 Brunner, Casper
 Brunner, Peter
 Bundle, Michael, Jr.
 Gross, Michael
 Hansch, Jacob
 Hantch [Hansch?], Nathaniel
 Heffer, Jacob (with Peter Brong)
 Hoffnagle, Peter
 Houser, George
 Kehler, John
 Mayer, George (gunlocks)
 Moyer, Mathias
 Nagle, Stephen, Jr.
 Pyle, Andrew
 Sinclair, John
 Sweitzer, Daniel
 Trippert [Drepperd?], Andrew
 Trissler, John
 Wentzel, Alexander
 Zigler, [Ziegler?], John

Probably all of the craftsmen mentioned made locks for doors. The construction of houses in Lancaster County in the nineteenth century created a demand for thousands of door locks, many of which survive in place today. Two of the men were listed as makers of gunlocks. Jacob Heffer was making locks for Peter Brong. Fewer than a half-dozen Brong products are known to survive today, so it is entirely possible that Heffer also made door locks. It is particularly interesting to note that Heffer became a full-fledged gunsmith, and a rifle bearing his name is displayed currently in the Rock Ford-Kauffman Museum. It is a very creditable product for gunsmith Heffer.

George Mayer also is listed as a maker of gunlocks; however, the writer has no memory of seeing such a signature on a gunlock. Not listed on the assessment rolls is the name of Jacob Fondersmith, whose newspaper adver-

Hardware, Glafs, & Paints, TO BE SOLD BY FREDERICK STEINMAN,

At his Corner
nufactory, in
few doors be-
of the Crofs-
ly received a
ment of iron-
lery, faddlery
of the best and
which he will



and for Mak-
king threot, a
low the figa
keys, slate-
general iron-
mongery, cut-
and brass ware
not of quality
but of the low-
est prices, for cash, or country produce.

Mill, crosscut, hand; fish,	†	Tap lines and spelter.
pannel and other saws.	†	Cast iron's steel
A variety of carpenters	†	Iron chisels.
tools.	†	Lead and oak trows.
Joiners', coopers', ma	†	Copper & tin kettles
sons', curriers', smiths	†	Grass for dogs, neatly
faddlers' & shoemakers	†	and iron
ditto.	†	Carpenters' hatchets.
Anvils, vices and bick	†	Iron irons, mortife and
irons.	†	other chissels.
Sledge & hand hammers.	†	Screw and shell augers.
Locks, hinges and wood	†	Spades and shovels,
screws of many sorts &	†	Wool and tow cards.
files.	†	Flat irons.
Sheep & taylors' sheers.	†	Bluepots and crucibles.
Curry combs and horse	†	Turkey oil & other tones
brushes.	†	PAINTS.
Brass, and iron wire.	†	Best Prussian blue, No. 1,
Files and rasps.	†	2, 3 and 4.
Shovels and tongs.	†	White lead.
Brass and iron candle-	†	Spanish brown.
slicks.	†	Vermillion.
Pewter plates & dishes.	†	Venetian red.
Basons and spoons.	†	Stone ochre, & red lead.
Knives and forks.	†	Whiting.
Pocket and pen knives.	†	Verdegrease.
Razors and scissars.	†	Umber and litharge.
Brass kettles of all sizes	†	Rose pink.
Desk & drawer furniture.	†	Sugar of lead.
Brass and copper warm-	†	Boiled and other oils.
ing pans.	†	Spirits of turpentine.
Orders from the country executed with care and punctuality.—The highest price is given for old Brass, Copper and Pewter.		

Locks were one of the many wares
advertised by Frederick Steinman.
(Lancaster Journal, 1 January 1796)

tisement for a specialist in making door locks is shown below. There was a man named John Fondersmith making locks in Pittsburgh in 1837. Various members of a family often worked at the same trade, and very likely John was related to Jacob.

WANTED IMMEDIATELY,
A Journeyman Door Locksmith.

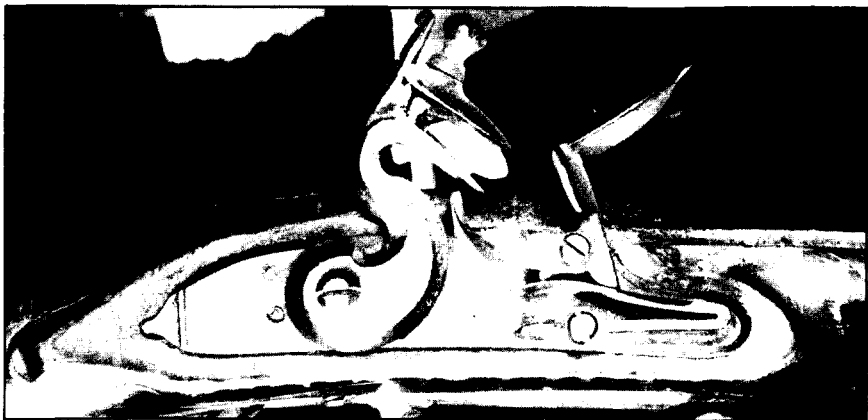
ONE well acquainted with his business shall have constant employment and generous wages, if application be made soon to the subscriber, living near Jacob Comfort's tavern, on the Lancaster and Marietta turnpike.

JACOB FONDERSMITH.

June 15 128-39

Jacob Fondersmith advertises for a door locksmith.
 (*Lancaster Journal*, 15 June 1816)

We should note that the name "Trippert" probably was a "German" tax assessor's way of spelling the common name "Drepperd." Several Drepperds were involved in making locks for guns. One lock is illustrated with the name "Drepperd" engraved on the lock plate. Many rifles made in Lancaster County in the nineteenth century have locks made by one of the Drepperds. In the Rock Ford-Kauffman Museum there is a gun with the Drepperd name on the lock and the barrel. The name on the barrel and the lock definitely proves the complete gun was made by a craftsman named Drepperd. The combination



Gunlock showing the engraved name "Drepperd." (Author's collection)

of names is a real rarity in the gun world. Only two other examples are known to the writer.

Although Daniel Sweitzer is not identified as a maker of gunlocks, a few survive with his signature, and these are much rarer than Drepperd locks.

Gun Lock Manufactory.

—
DANIEL SWEITZER, & co.

RESPECTFULLY inform their friends
and the public in general, that they
have commenced the

Gun Lock making Business,

In the borough of Lancaster, West of
the Court-house, on the street leading to
Millerstown,

WHERE THEY MAKE AND REPAIR
Musket Locks, Rifle do. with single and
double rollers; also plain Gun and Pistol
locks, in the best and neatest manner, and
on reasonable terms.

WANTED,

TWO or three journeymen, who un-
derstand filing at the above business.
Good workmen will meet with good en-
couragement and constant employment,
by applying at the Factory.

N. B. Orders from a distance, post
paid, will be punctually attended to.

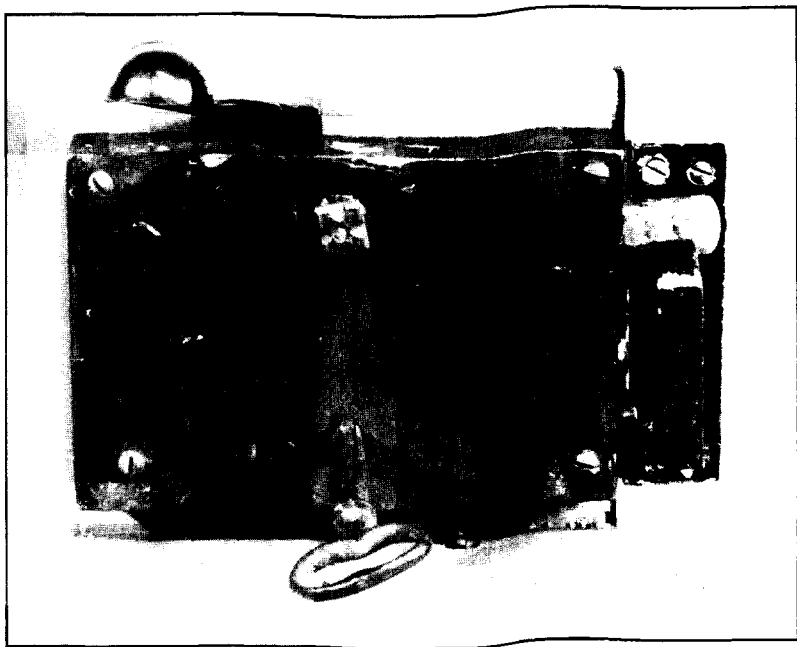
August 26, 1808. 13 3rd row

Daniel Sweitzer advertisement. (*Lancaster Journal*, 26 August 1808)

The real kernel in the enumerated names is that of Mathias Moyer. After twenty-five years of looking at door locks in Lancaster County, the writer can identify positively only one door lock as the product of a Lancaster locksmith. This lock was found in an important farmhouse. Unfortunately, the writer did not examine the locks remaining in the house to see if others bore the signature of Moyer.

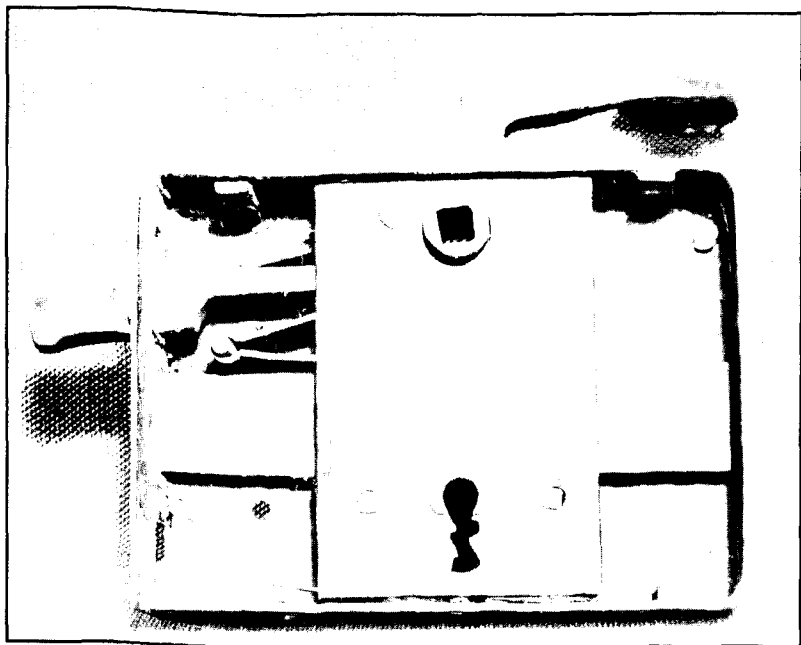
The question immediately arises why fifteen or twenty locksmiths did not sign their products. Before answering that question it should be mentioned that probably more than Moyer signed their locks, but such objects simply have not fallen into the hands of informed collectors. There are very few collectors of door locks.

Of course, we know that many objects of silver, pewter, and copper bear the names of their makers. These names were imprinted by striking a steel die on the softer metals. Iron was hard, and resisted the imprinting of a name



Iron door lock made by Mathias Moyer and (below) his imprint on the handle of this lock. (Courtesy of the Rock Ford-Kauffman Museum)

with a steel die. A family of lockmakers working in Lebanon County is known to have engraved their names on the iron door locks which they made. A close examination revealed that the Moyer name had not been engraved. The members of the letters are too wide to have been engraved. The dilemma remains: how did Moyer apply his name to the handle of his lock? This door lock is displayed in a case in the Rock Ford-Kauffman Museum.



Back view of a nineteenth-century iron lock with "Germany" stamped on the bolt (right side, center). (Author's collection)

Finally, we should mention that the iron door locks are sometimes called "German iron door locks." This custom has occurred because "Germany" is imprinted on the inner parts of some locks made in the late nineteenth century. There seems to have been an attempt to conceal this name, for it was placed where it could not be seen when the lock was installed. These locks were made in Germany.

Henry J. Kauffman is a retired professor of industrial arts at Millersville University. He is the author of many books and articles on early American guns, antiques, architecture, and crafts. The extensive collection of early American guns, metalwares, household utensils, furniture, and other artifacts gathered by Mr. Kauffman and his late wife Zoe is now at the Rock Ford-Kauffman Museum.