

The **GUN** **REPORT**

Gunsmiths of the
Eastern Panhandle
of West Virginia
by
James B. Whisker

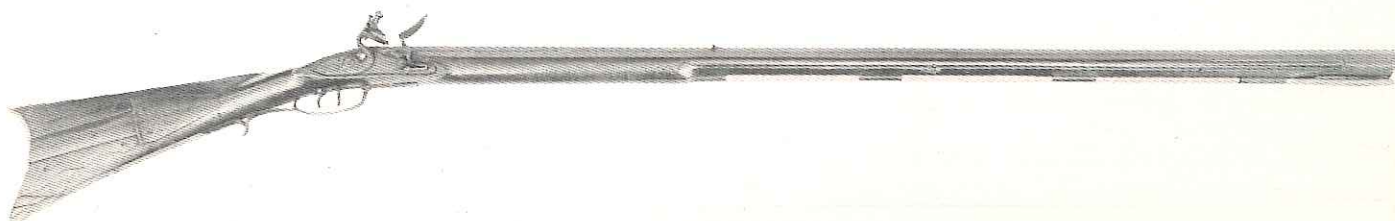
Volume 32, Number 7 December 1986/\$2.75

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GUNSMITHS OF W.VA
(WHISKER)



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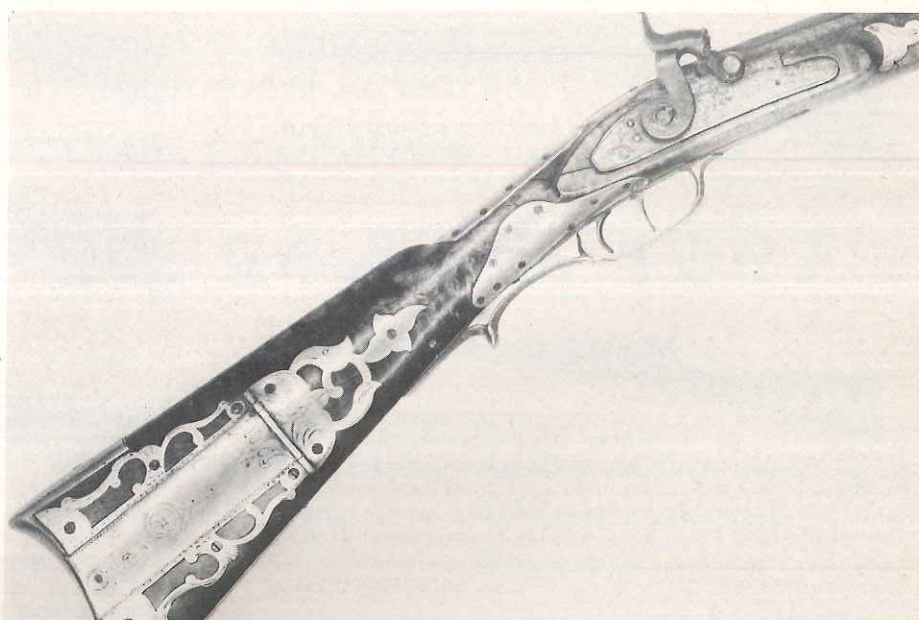


1777-1783 Philip & Henry Sheetz supplied and repaired arms for the Virginia Militia at Mechlenberg, Va. (Now Shepherdstown, W. Va.).

The area we are discussing includes present-day Berkeley, Mineral, Jefferson, Hardy, Grant and Hampshire Counties, West Virginia. It may be argued that the title should refer to Virginia as the majority of these gunsmiths worked there before West Virginia was constituted as a state out of portions of the mother state, during the Civil War. Most of the records with which we have dealt are found in the court houses of Berkeley and Hampshire Counties as these are the mother counties of most of the Eastern Panhandle.

The great schools of gunsmithing are headed by families, often working three or four generations. This is the case here, with the Sheetz, Marker, Rinehart, and Glaze families. With only one exception, an apprentice who lived with Henderson Bishop, we have not established positive links among these families, or link between one family and other, unrelated gunsmiths. Skilled genealogists may one day link up positively the Sheetz family gunsmiths in Berkeley County with those in Hampshire County, although we do strongly suspect that close ties existed.

It seems fairly clear that gunsmithing came to Berkeley County with and through Philip Sheetz, a young gunsmith from York, Pennsylvania (having apprenticed with a gunsmith named Lincafer.) His sons, grandsons, and even great-grandsons, served the area for well over 125 years. Philip brought with him the rococo style then in vogue in the Golden Age of Pennsylvania gunsmithing. The emergence of a distinct Berkeley County style was slow in coming. Most of the early guns resembled products from York and Lancaster



Otho and Zebulon Sheetz, Hampshire County, West Virginia about 1817-1820. Later of Belmont County, Ohio.

Counties, Pennsylvania.

The Hampshire County design was emerging by 1820. More humped with features occasionally of the "Roman nose" style, one can say that this county, then much larger than it is today, had its own school. George Young, origins unknown, was among the finest craftsmen ever to make the Pennsylvania-Kentucky rifle. The early Rinehart and Marker guns qualify for the use of descriptive superlatives as do the Glaze and Sheetz guns of early days in Hampshire County.

The Revolutionary War had created a need for gunsmiths in colonial Virginia. A special commission appointed at least six men as gunsmiths and/or armourers in "West Augusta", a generic term for that vast expanse of western lands

extending up into present-day Western Pennsylvania. Most of these figures disappeared after the initial notes made in the appointments of 1777. Others worked in Mecklenberg (Shepherdstown) as armourers and militia guns suppliers. Beyond the allocation of funds to the Mecklenberg Arsenal/Berkeley Manufactory, there are few indications that these craftsmen had any major impact on arms procurement.

The arsenal founded at Harpers Ferry seems to have been unrelated to the arms production in Shepherdstown. Only the Sheetz family emerged as artisans as a result of their participation in Virginia state arms production. The other appointees disappeared from the public records after the war. Of the many

gunsmiths who were employed at Harpers Ferry only Armistead Zorger seems to have made guns for private sale; few others became privately engaged craftsmen.

The founding of an iron manufactory in the Bloomery District of Hampshire County early on was doubtless one of the principal reasons for the rapid and extensive development of the arms trade in that area. The major portion of the guns trade peaked during the 1830s and was all but extinct by the 1850s in Hampshire County. During that Golden Age, from about 1785 beginning with Rudolph Rinehart, until 1840, the guns made in Hampshire County rivaled those made anywhere in Eastern Pennsylvania. With minor modifications, they used the same Rococo designs and high relief carving.

While beginning slightly earlier, the arms production of Berkeley and Jefferson Counties again produced high-art rifles of modified Eastern Pennsylvania design. The Golden Age ended about a decade earlier here than in Hampshire County.

With the notable exception of George Young, the Golden Age of gunsmithing in West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle was dominated by great families of gunsmiths. Genealogists may one day firmly connect the Sheetz family of Berkeley County with that of Hampshire County, but this has not yet been done. Like the Rineharts, Glazes and Markers, the Sheetz family offered finely

crafted weapons for two to three full generations. The original apprenticeships of these families has yet to be ascertained, although the movement of Philip Sheetz from York to Berkeley County suggests a tie to one of the early gunsmiths in that Pennsylvania county. Subsequent training doubtless was done within the family units.

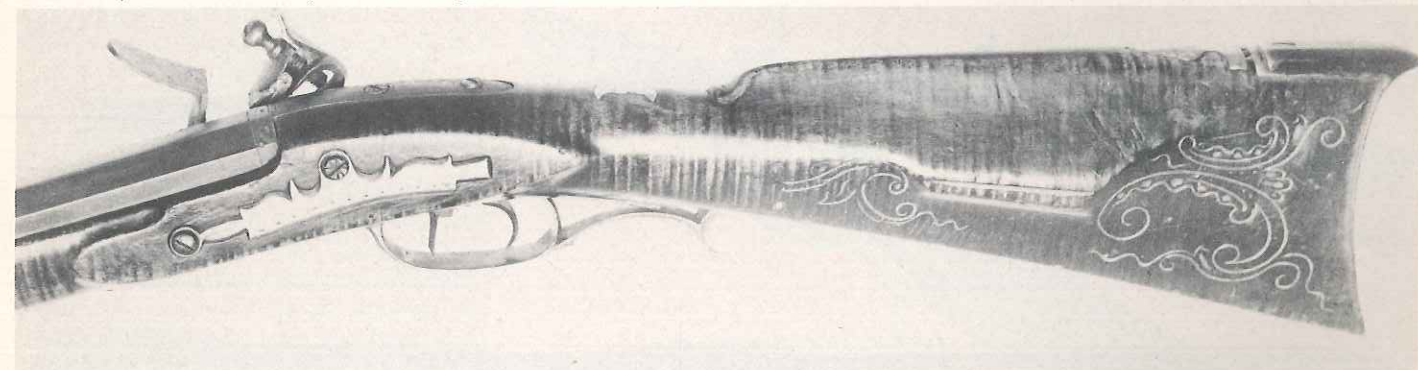
George Young may easily have served as an apprentice to the Rinehart, or pos-

sibly the Sheetz, family. This may also be true of the Kline family, Cornelius Iman, J.J. Good, H. Clay Liggett, and William Hollenback Sr. We do know that Napoleon Medlar was apprenticed to Henderson Bishop, but we do not know with whom Bishop apprenticed.

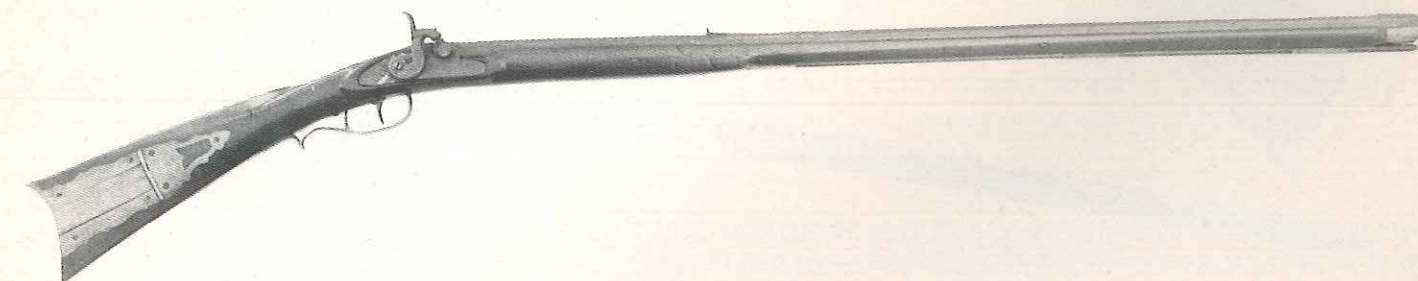
We do know that the Offutt family lent money to the Rineharts of several occasions, but we do not know whether there were other relationships there.



Henry Sheetz, Shepherdstown, West Virginia, about 1810.



Frederick Sheetz



Michael Sheetz (1781-1836) Charles Town, West Virginia.

Similar monetary relationships exist between B.F. Shane who bought N. Offutt's gunshop and Christopher Slonaker who bought the gunshop Shane previously occupied. Slonaker had land dealings with Henry Topper, but we do not know if they had other relationships more to our interest in long rifles.

Three gunsmiths who worked within our area of interest are related to Bedford County, Pennsylvania. Henry Topper, whose only known product is a very poor fowling piece, left Hampshire County to move to Bedford County. John Whetstone was born in Bedford County and worked there, as did his brother, after serving an apprenticeship in Washington County, Maryland. Christopher Slonaker was probably a brother of George Slonaker, and uncle to John G. Slonaker, and may have been trained with them in Bedford County.

Like most high quality arms, those made in the Eastern Panhandle are scarce. They are, sadly, little known outside the region, but the best surely merit additional study and consideration. At their best, the guns of this area are very fine.

The Sheetz, Rinehart and Glaze families gave Ohio some of its best gunsmiths during the period after 1830. Many of the known long rifles by members of these three families were made in Ohio. This is especially true of those guns which are heavily silver mounted or which are half-stocks.

Lack of good records, or at least access

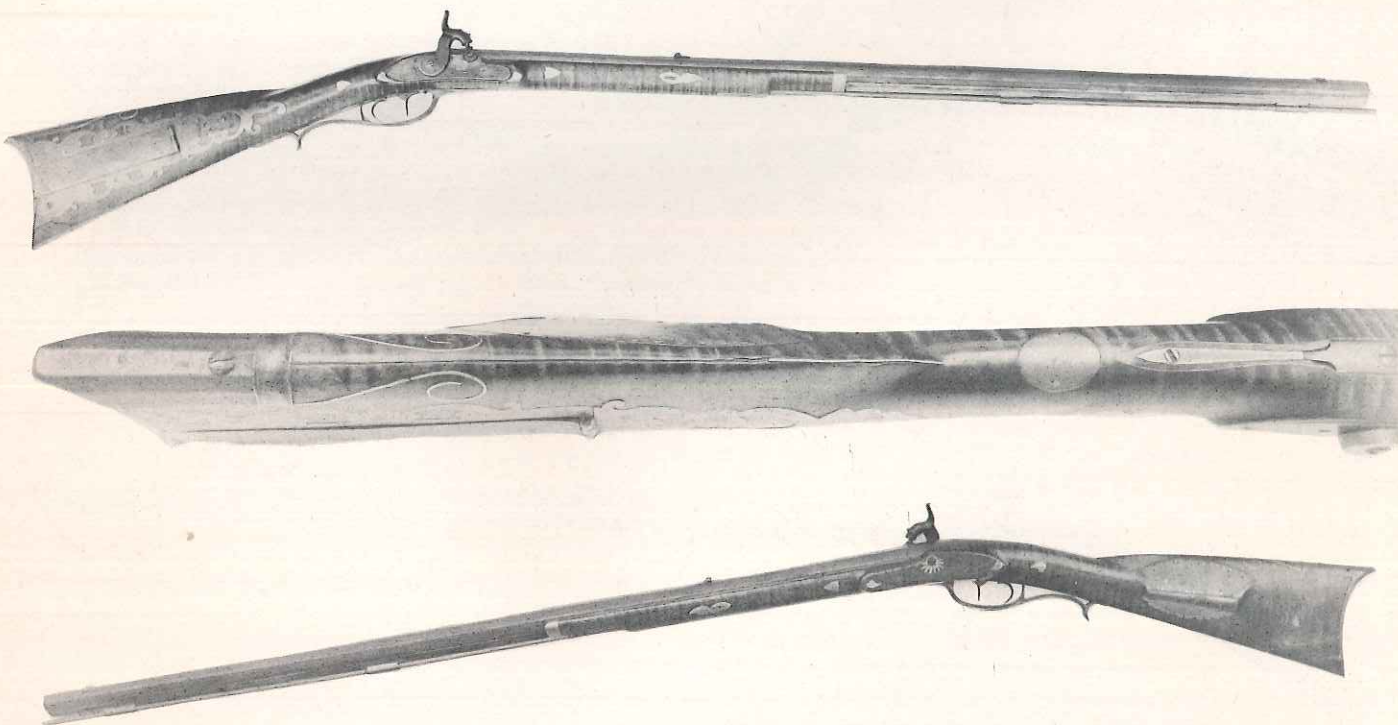
to these records, has hampered research on Virginia and West Virginia gunsmiths. What we know we have learned primarily from the U.S. Census of 1850, 1860, 1870 and 1880; and from deeds and contracts; and from the few known state directories, most of which are dated after the Civil War. Unlike Maryland, Virginia did not keep apprenticeship records as public documents.

Among the full images to emerge in

our research in this area is the life of Cornelius Iman. A son of Amanuel and Barbara (Seitz) Iman, he married Hanna, daughter of James and Jane (Porter) Kimble. Iman was one of the loyalists during the Civil War, and so enlisted in Company I, 7th Virginia Infantry, at Greenland, (West) Virginia in 1862. He was almost immediately discharged due to a severe illness which caused a painful discharge from his ears the remainder



Martin Sheetz (1776-1808) Charles Town, West Virginia. This gun was used at the Battle of New Orleans by a West Virginian who fought with Gen. Andrew Jackson. It is so inscribed in the engraving on the patchbox. (Melancon Collection, Louisiana).



Cornelius E. Iman. Patterson Creek area, Grant County, West Virginia.

of his life. His enlistment papers show that he was a gunsmith before the war, and the U.S. Census listed him in that occupation after the war. According to his discharge papers, Iman was 5' 11" tall, with dark eyes and black hair. He died on 7 June 1885 and his wife and minor children were awarded a pension from the War Department, based on the assumption that death was hastened by the infection, a form of tuberculosis.

It appears that, after the first full generation of gunsmiths, few of the craftsmen remained in (West) Virginia's eastern panhandle during most of their adult lives. Eventually, as midwestern and western gunsmiths are studied and listed, we shall doubtless find that many of those who left this area helped to establish the trade in new areas of America. Donald Hutsler has done an excellent job of identifying those who went to Ohio. A.W. Lindert has studied many in Indiana and Curt Johnson is studying the gunsmiths in Illinois.

Among the more interesting "missing person" stories is that of Jerome B. Wright. We know that Wright lived in Jefferson County because his daughter, Mary C., died in Clarksburg at age 17 on 6 August 1853, and she had been born in Jefferson county. Wright was listed as a gunsmith in the Census of 1850. After 1853 we have no records of J.B. Wright being in (West) Virginia.

George Young was active in Hampshire County from 1824-1834, and then went west. In the census of 1850 he was in Illinois. The census shows that he had a son aged 9 years and a daughter aged 12 years, born in Pennsylvania, but to date we have not located where he was from 1838 to 1841. In 1879 a gunsmith named George Young was active in Eureka, Nevada. George Young had a son named after him, although the name is common enough that this man may not have been related. Several fine, early guns by George Young are known, but, to date, I have not seen any later guns made by him. It is possible that George Young Sr. may have continued to move west after 1850, for he was not located in Illinois in 1860.

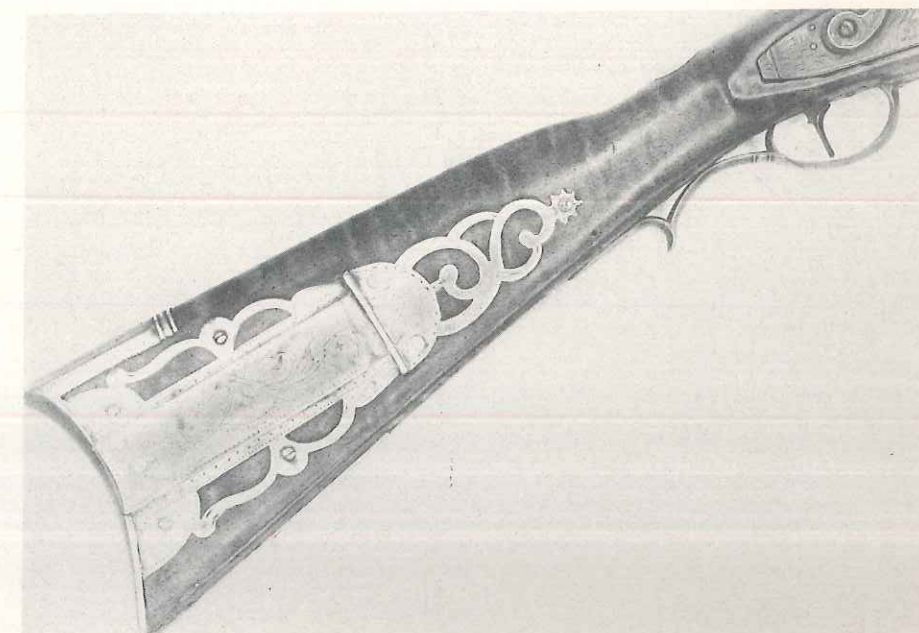
Muzzle loading rifles were made in West Virginia's eastern panhandle long after cartridge guns came into vogue elsewhere. One gun I saw recently was dated 1901. It may have been that a latent conservatism mitigated against complete conversion to breechloading arms; or it may be that, for many poorer folk, muzzle loaders represented an economy. As with long arms almost everywhere, few high quality guns were made after 1840. This is a comment

more on the customer than on the artisans, for most later gunsmiths evidently possessed the skill to make fine, relief carved guns.

The later, percussion guns show an interesting feature known on few guns: both a patchbox and a capbox were often used. In my experience, the only other place where this is common is in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, just to the north of Hampshire County, West Virginia. However, there are few other points of

similarity between the two schools of gunsmithing, and gunsmithing moved east to west, not north-south in the National Road area.

By the end of the Civil War the guns made in the eastern panhandle of West Virginia were much like those made nearly everywhere. They had store bought hardware, cap boxes instead of patchboxes, and half stocks instead of full length stocks. An era and a craft were coming to an end. ■



Michael Sheetz (1781-1836) Charles Town, West Virginia.



George Young (1824-1833), near Romney, Hampshire County, (West) Virginia. By 1850 he had moved to Illinois. In 1876 there was a George Young in Eureka, Nevada, active as a gunsmith. George Young had married Elizabeth Nicholson on March 4, 1824, and had a son, George.

Gunsmiths of the West Virginia Eastern Panhandle

Name	Location	Period	Born/Died
Anderson, James	Berkeley County	1775-77	1740-1831
Baker, Joshua	Jefferson/Berkeley Cos.	1748-1760	
Beck, Christian	Jonestown, Dauphin Co.	1807-11	about 1787-1845
	Lurgan Twp., Franklin Co.	1813-21	
	Martinsburg	1827	
	Cincinnati, Ohio	1841-45	
Bishop, Henderson	Charlestown, Jefferson Co.	1834-73	1808-73
Brant, John	near Romney, Hampshire Co.	1832-52	1809---
Britton, William	near Romney, Hampshire Co.	c.1850	1794---
Brown, W.T.	Springfield, Hampshire Co.	1900	
Carpenter, Nicholas	Romney area	1774-75	died 1791
	near Wheeling, Ohio County	1780-88	
	Marietta, Ohio	1788-91	
Clapham, Josiah	Berkeley County	1776-77	
Cox, Gabriel	West Augusta	1777	
Cunie, Robert	West Augusta	1777	
Entler, Jacob	Jefferson County	1808-22	died 1822
Flagg, John S.	Berkeley Springs	1882-83	
Fowler, Robert	Hampshire County	1774-77	
Glaze, Conrad	Fairfax lots, Hampshire Co.	before 1831	died 1831
Glaze, Earhart	Hampshire County	1780-1810	
Glaze, George Sr.	near Romney, Hampshire Co.	1780-1823	died 1823
Glaze, George Jr.	near Romney, Hampshire Co.	before 1830	1780---
	Bellville, Indiana	Census of 1850	
Good, J.J.	Bloomery Dist., Hampshire Co.	before 1890	
Hiatt, Joseph	Bloomery Dist., Hampshire Co.	1880	1848---
Hollenback, William Sr.	Patterson Creek, Hampshire Co.	before 1829	died 1829
Hollenback, William Jr.	Patterson Creek, Hampshire Co.	before 1850	1818---
	Cabin Run, Mineral County	1850	
Hovermale, Samuel J.	Berkeley Springs	1883	
Hunter, David	Berkeley County	1776	
Iman, Cornelius E.	Patterson Creek, Grant Co.	1870	1830-1885
Kline, Henry	Hampshire County	1802-46	1802---
	Wilmington, Clinton Co., Ohio	1846-66	
Kline, Jacob Sr.	Hampshire County	1820-66	
Kline, Jacob Jr.	Hampshire County	before 1850	1830---
	Crawford County, Ohio	after 1850	
Liggett, H. Clay	Wardensville, Hardy County	1880	1854---
Light, Peter	Berkeley County	1776-78	
Marker, Daniel	Martinsburg, Berkeley Co.	after 1820	1774-1855
Marker, Daniel Jr.	Martinsburg, Berkeley Co.	1831-33	
	Darke County, Ohio	Census of 1860	
Marker, Jacob	Martinsburg, Berkeley Co.	about 1830	
	Wayne Twp., Darke Co., Ohio	1835	

Marker, George	Martinsburg, Berkeley Co.	1790-1823	1782-1850
	Montgomery County, Ohio	1823-50	
Marker, James	Martinsburg, Berkeley Co.	before 1850	1810-1883
	Washington Co., Maryland	1850	
Marker, Paul	Martinsburg, Berkeley Co.	before 1840	1811- after 1875
	Gratis Twp., Prebele Co., Ohio	1850	
	Union City, Randolph Co., IN	1875	
Medlar, Napoleon B.	Charlestown, Jefferson Co.	1860	1840---
Moore, John	Hampshire County	1806-50	1806-72
	Clearfield Co. Pennsylvania	1850-72	
Naylor, Jacob	Hedgesville, Berkeley Co.	1882-83	
Nelson, James E.	Bloomery Dist., Hampshire Co.	1880	1831---
Noble, Anthony	Martinsburg, Berkeley Co.	1777-80	
Offutt, Nathaniel	near Capon Bridge,	1830-55	died 1855
	Hampshire County		
Parkeson, Thomas	West Augusta	1777	
Parkeson, William	West Augusta	1777	
Reed, Capt. Jacob	Augusta Co., Virginia	before 1754	died 1780
	near Moorefield, Hamps. Co.	1755-80	
Rinehart, James	Hampshire County	1835-40	1811---
	Green Twp., Ross Co., Ohio	1850	
Rinehart, John W.	near Springfield, Hamps. Co.	1848-53	
Rinehart, Rudolph	Hampshire County	1785	
Rizer, Martin Sr.	Berkeley County	1779-94	
Rizer, Martin Jr.	Berkeley County	1785	
Rizer, Mathias	Berkeley County	1789	
	Cumberland, Maryland	1800-05	
Rohrbaugh, George W.	Jordan Run, Grant County	1900	
Row, Samuel	Morgan County	1850	1826---
Rutherford, Thomas	Shepherdstown, Berkeley Co.	1776-78	
Shane, Benjamin F.	near Romney, Hampshire Co.	before/after 1856	
Sheetz, Adam	Shepherdstown, Berkeley Co.	1768-80	
Sheetz, Frederick Sr.	Fort Ashby, Hampshire Co.	1792-1841	
Sheetz, Frederick, Jr.	Hampshire County	about 1820-30	
Sheetz, Henry Sr.	Shepherdstown, Berkeley Co.	1775-1815	died about 1817
Sheetz, Henry Jr.	Lexington, Missouri	1850	1795---
Sheetz, Jacob	5 miles East of Romney,	before 1884	died 1884
	Hampshire County		
Sheetz, John Jacob	Shepherdstown, Berkeley Co.	1812-60	1785-1860
Sheetz, Martin	Shepherdstown, Berkeley Co.	1795-1808	1776-1808
Sheetz, Philip	York County, Pennsylvania	before 1762	1738-1793
	Shepherdstown, Berkeley Co.	1762-1793	
Sheetz, Michael	Charlestown, Berkeley Co.	all life	1781-1836
Sheetz, Otho	Frankford, Hampshire Co.	1811-30	died 1833
Sheetz, Thomas	Hampshire County	1820	
Sheetz, William Miller Sr.	Shepherdstown, Berkeley Co.	all life	1810-1866
Sheetz, William Miller Jr.	Shepherdstown, Berkeley Co.	all life	died after 1882

Sheetz, Zebulon	Bloomery Dist., Hampshire Co.	1819-35	
Shough, John	Martinsburg, Berkeley Co.	1797	
Shrout, Hider	Hardy County	1870-80	1843---
Slonaker, Christopher	Bloomery Dist., Hampshire Co.	1827-56	
Stephen, Adam	Berkeley County	1777-82	died 1791
Thrush, Peter	Mineral County	1850-80	1814---
Topper, Henry	Gettysburg, Adams Co., PA	1802-12	
	Hampshire County	1814-30	
	Napier Twp., Bedford Co., Pa.	1832-35	
	Youngstown, Westmoreland Co., Pennsylvania	1838-40	died 1840
Whetstone, John Jr.	Bedford Co., Pennsylvania	before 1799	
	Hagerstown, Maryland	1800-01	
	Bedford Co., Pennsylvania	1801-05	
	Hagerstown, Maryland	1806	
	Martinsburg, Berkeley Co.	1806-07	
White, Nicholas	Frederick, Maryland	1765-88	
	Berkeley County	1789	
	Frederick, Maryland	1797	
Worley, Thomas	Berkeley County	1776-77	
Wright, Jerome B.	Jefferson County	1836	
	Clarksburg, Harrison Co.	1850-53	
Young, George	near Romney, Hampshire Co.	1824-34	
	7th District of Illinois	1848-50	
Zorger, Armistead	Bolivar, Jefferson County	1811---	

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