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WHICH CHRISTIAN BECK IS IT?

PART II

BY VAN PITMAN, KRA

In Part I, the Fall 2012 KRA Bulletin, I examined the life of Christian Beck III, or as Kindig called this gunsmith¹, Christian Beck the Later. His career path started with his apprenticeship in Womelsdorf, Pennsylvania, continued as a master gunsmith in

Roxbury,
Franklin County, PA,
Williamsport, MD, Martinsburg,
VA, and finally the Western frontier. His
journey did not take him to Jonestown, Dauphin
County, Pennsylvania where another Christian Beck is listed
as a gunsmith in the 1807 and 1811 Triennial Assessments
of Dauphin County².

This article, Part II, will investigate this Christian Beck of
Jonestown and the rifles he made then conclude this series
by examining Christian Beck Jr., also known as Christian
Beck the Earlier³.

THE DISCOVERY

A closer examination of all the Dauphin County
(established 1785) tax rolls reveals that Christian Beck of
Jonestown was listed continuously from 1807 thru 1813 in
the Bethel Township Returns⁴. In 1813 Lebanon County

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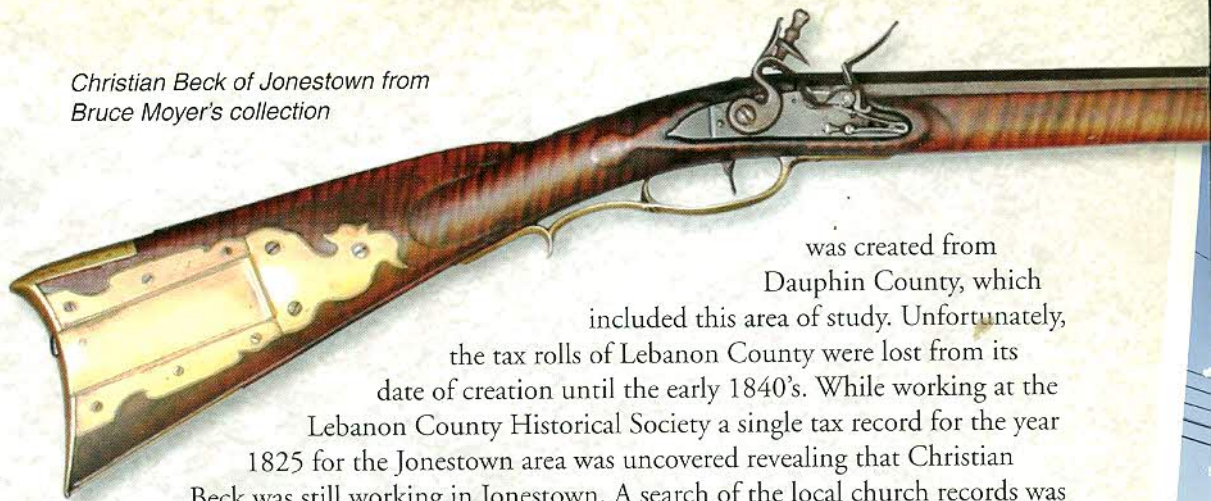
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*Christian Beck of Jonestown from
Bruce Moyer's collection*



was created from Dauphin County, which included this area of study. Unfortunately, the tax rolls of Lebanon County were lost from its date of creation until the early 1840's. While working at the Lebanon County Historical Society a single tax record for the year 1825 for the Jonestown area was uncovered revealing that Christian Beck was still working in Jonestown. A search of the local church records was initiated to find more evidence of his stay at Jonestown.

The records of the Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jonestown did reveal that Christian Beck's wife was Ann (Mason) Beck and they produced eight children whose births were recorded in the church records spanning from 1810 thru 1827⁵. The exciting part of discovering Christian's wife name was that while researching for the first article, Part I, I found in the Salem Lutheran Church of Lebanon records John Philip Beck, the famous gunsmith of Lebanon, Pa, had a son, Christian, who married Anna Mason on July 20th, 1806⁶. This evidence now firmly linked Christian Beck of Jonestown as the son of J. P. Beck.

THE EVIDENCE

Christian Beck of Jonestown's father, John Philip Beck, known as J. P. Beck, is the second son of Johann Christian Beck Sr. a powder maker. J. P. Beck was born in 1751 and died in October, 1811. He worked as a gunsmith in Lebanon, Pa. from the Revolutionary War until his death in 1811. He had eight children by his first wife, Anna Maria (Lauk) of which four were sons. Two of the sons, Samuel and Emanuel, births are recorded in the Salem church records⁷. John Philip Beck Jr., the eldest son, is recorded in the burials section of the church records. Christian is referenced, as stated above, in the marriage records, having John Philip Beck as his witness to Christian's marriage. The family genealogy is provided at the end of the article to help the reader understand the family relationships discussed.

The next reference linking Christian Beck of Jonestown to J. P. Beck can be found in a book written by R. H. Koch, a grandson of Emanuel Beck. In the book Mr. Koch was discussing his interview with Emanuel Beck, J. P. Beck's youngest son, the family lineage and history. During the discussion in 1874 Emanuel stated he had a brother named Christian⁸.

The last family references are after J. P. Beck's death in 1811. In 1813, Leonard Greenawalt and Henry Kelker, executors, filed with the Orphan's Court of Dauphin County the initial settlement of J. P. Beck's estate⁹. The settlement listed those that owed money to the estate. Christian Beck was listed as a debtor for 75 pounds. Perhaps this large sum of money was for helping his son set up his gun shop and for materials used to build rifles, as no explanation for the debt was offered in the filing papers. Then in 1824, Greenawalt, now lone surviving executor, filed with the Orphan's Court the final settlement of J. P. Beck's estate and Christian was listed again as owing an additional 17 pounds, 18 schillings and 5 pence¹⁰.

The final reference will be found when studying the rifles Christian Beck of Jonestown built, to be discussed later in the article.

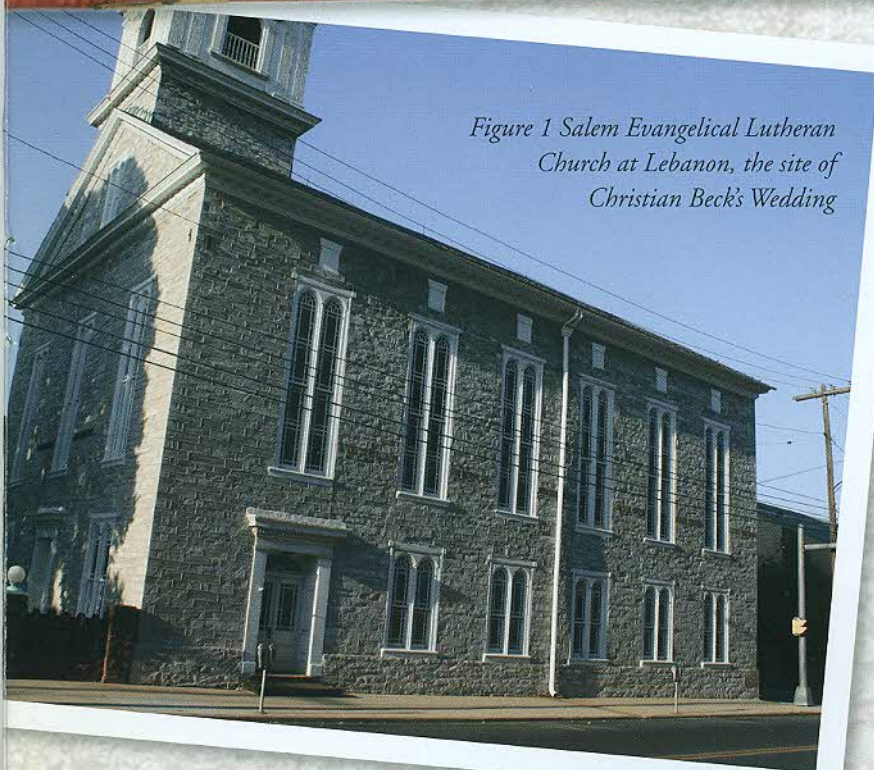


Figure 1 Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church at Lebanon, the site of Christian Beck's Wedding

the third child and second son of J. P. Beck¹¹. He was chosen to learn the trade of gunsmithing and the evidence will show he served his apprenticeship in his father's shop. His apprenticeship years should have been from 1795 or 1796 thru 1802 or 1803. I believe he continued to work with his father after his apprenticeship until his marriage.

As stated earlier, the records of the Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church, shown in Figure #1, indicated that Christian Beck married Anna Mason on July 20th, 1806. He was 24 and she was 18. After their wedding they moved only seven miles from Lebanon to Jonestown where Christian appears for the first time as a gunsmith in the 1807 Dauphin County tax roles. He continues to be taxed as a gunsmith each year until 1813. As mentioned above, Jonestown became part of the newly formed Lebanon County in 1813 and,

unfortunately, the missing tax records make tracking him yearly difficult. We know, however, he was still in Jonestown in 1825 as a result of the discovered single year Lebanon tax reference. Other records placing him in Jonestown include the 1810, 1820 and 1830 Federal Census. In addition, the Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jonestown records, as mentioned earlier, record the birth of his children from 1810 thru 1827 and finally show Ann, his wife, died June 12th, 1834.



Figure 2 Signed J. P. Beck Rifle from the Kindig Collection

LIFE'S STORY

It is easy to understand why Christian Beck of Jonestown has remained hidden from researchers as there isn't a lot of information available on his life. He was born in Lebanon, Lancaster County (first Dauphin County, now Lebanon County) on February, 18th, 1782 as



Figure 3 Signed C. Beck Rifle from the H. Bishop Collection



Figure 4 Signed J. P. Beck #99 from the Kindig Collection



Figure 5 Signed C. Beck from the F. Schry Collection



Figure 6 Signed J. P. Beck from the Kindig Collection

The tax records for Lebanon County come back into play starting in 1842. Christian Beck is listed as living with his daughter, Maria, and son-in-law, Cyrus Mason. The 1840 Federal Census supports this finding as it lists one male of the right age group for Christian in Mason's household. Christian Beck continues to be listed in the tax records but moves from household to household, with an occupation of laborer and even a whip stock maker.

The final defining point in his life is a listing in the Zion Evangelical Lutheran church records that indicates his death as July 25th, 1861 and his age of 79 years, 5 months, and 7 days¹². I believe Christian Beck of Jonestown lived and worked as a gunsmith in Jonestown for 30+ years.

CHRISTIAN BECK OF JONESTOWN RIFLES

From serving an apprenticeship in his father's shop and establishing his own gunsmithing business only seven miles from Lebanon,



This example of a rifle from Christian Beck of Jonestown shop is from Bruce Moyer's collection and shows the straighter comb line, the same carving design, but extended with additional scrolls. The patchbox has his typical side plates with the engraving being limited to a perimeter outline of the side plates, finial and lid.

the rifles of Christian Beck retained the characteristics of his father's, J. P. Beck, rifles. He used the same hardware as his father, utilizing the butt plates, side plates, triggerguards and ramrod ferrules. This may account for part of the large debt that Christian Beck of Jonestown owed his father.



Figure 7 Signed C. Beck from the F. Schry Collection

The photo in Figure #2 is a signed J.P. Beck rifle from the Kindig collection. It shows several common features found on J.P. Beck's rifles, including the style of patchbox with the side plates extending beyond the hinge, the butt plate extension molding using a double line at the end, the single rivet toward the upper corner of the patchbox lid and finally the style of engraving that J. P. Beck used on his rifles. Compare this photo to Figure #3 and see the similarities to Christian's work.

Figure 8 Pitman's Signed C. Beck- Patchbox View

Another similar feature that Christian Beck of Jonestown carried from J. P. Beck's shop is the style of the triggerguard, using

the double raised half octagon at the junction of the bow and rail and two slashes at the end of the front of the triggerguard extension as show in Figures #4 and #5.

Another major feature shared between father and son is in the side plates. They generally share a similar outline and they have a beveled edge on the perimeter of the plate as seen in Figures #6 and #7.





Figure 9 Pitman's Signed C. Beck- Carving View



Figure 10 Pitman's C. Beck -Signature



Figure 11 Maike's Signed C. Beck- Patchbox View



Figure 12 Maike's Signed C. Beck- Carving View



Figure 13 Maike's C. Beck- Signature



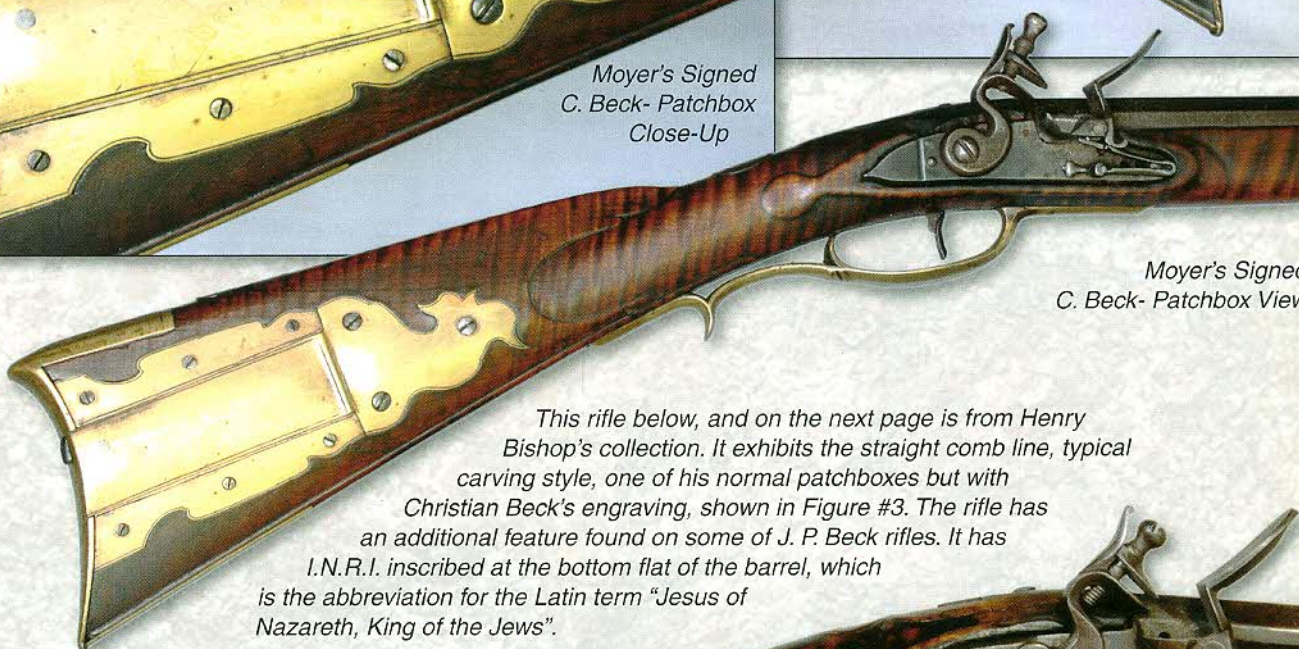
Moyer's Signed
C. Beck- Carving View



Moyer's C. Beck- Signature



Moyer's Signed
C. Beck- Patchbox
Close-Up



Moyer's Signed
C. Beck- Patchbox View

This rifle below, and on the next page is from Henry Bishop's collection. It exhibits the straight comb line, typical carving style, one of his normal patchboxes but with Christian Beck's engraving, shown in Figure #3. The rifle has an additional feature found on some of J. P. Beck rifles. It has I.N.R.I. inscribed at the bottom flat of the barrel, which is the abbreviation for the Latin term "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews".

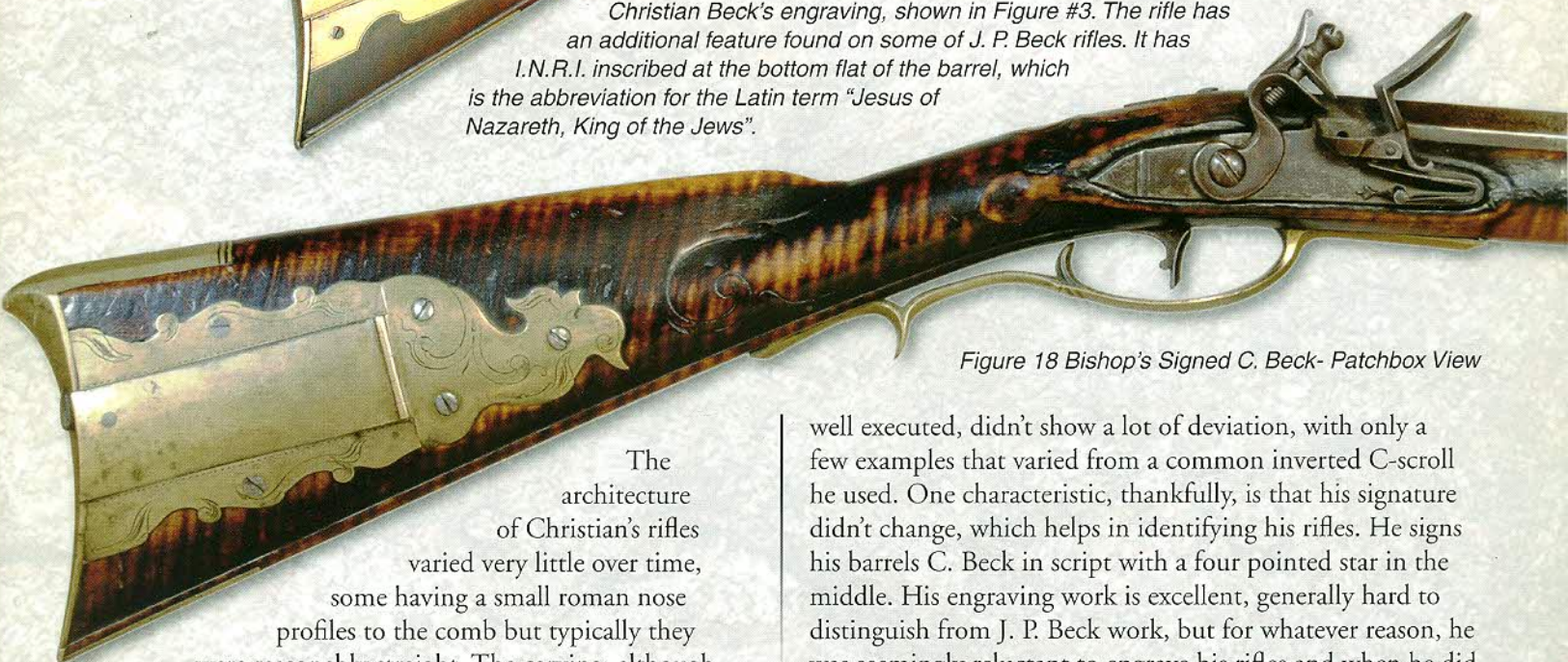


Figure 18 Bishop's Signed C. Beck- Patchbox View

The architecture of Christian's rifles varied very little over time, some having a small roman nose profiles to the comb but typically they were reasonably straight. The carving, although

well executed, didn't show a lot of deviation, with only a few examples that varied from a common inverted C-scroll he used. One characteristic, thankfully, is that his signature didn't change, which helps in identifying his rifles. He signs his barrels C. Beck in script with a four pointed star in the middle. His engraving work is excellent, generally hard to distinguish from J. P. Beck work, but for whatever reason, he was seemingly reluctant to engrave his rifles and when he did



Bishop's Signed
C. Beck- Carving View

Bishop's Signed C. Beck - Barrel Inscription on left,
and Bishop's C. Beck- Signature on right.

it was usually done sparingly. The following figures give you a range of styles of the rifles from the shop of Christian Beck of Jonestown.

The first rifle is from the author's collection and exhibits the slight roman nose comb line and an unusual carving with a typical patchbox without engraving (*figures 9 and 10*).

The next rifle is from John Maike's collection and displays a straighter comb line, typical carving style, and typical patchbox finial with different side plates but without engraving (*figures 11, 12 and 13*).

The last example of Christian Beck of Jonestown work is from the Kindig collection. It has the straight comb line, the C scrolls carving extension, and a patchbox with different side plates with engraving (*figures 22 – 25*).

Christian Beck of Jonestown was a first-rate gunsmith and had the capability to compete with his contemporary competition, namely Nicholas Beyer and Peter Berry, Jr. I believe the style of his rifles fit the time period in which he works and definitely exemplify the quality of his training. His ability to produce quality rifles didn't diminish over time in the rifles that I have seen. However, I have yet to see a rifle that exemplifies the quality of work I believe he is capable of doing, particularly with his ability to engrave and carve. I hope this article will bring more of his rifles out of the closets to be studied and further clarify his working career. I look forward to the opportunity of seeing more examples of his work.

WHAT ABOUT CHRISTIAN BECK THE EARLIER?

John Christian Beck Jr., or called Christian Beck the Earlier by Kindig¹³, is the older brother to J. P. Beck. He was first noted in the 1779, 1781, and 1786 tax rolls of Lancaster County (now Lebanon County), Lebanon Township, as a joiner, or what we would call a finish carpenter¹⁴. It is assumed he continued

Figure 24 Kindig's Signed C. Beck- Patchbox Close-up



this career
until Jan. 17th, 1787
when he sold his joiner tools¹⁵.

His occupation under the tax rolls is not listed again until 1796, once again as a joiner¹⁶. In 1798 Christian Beck Jr. is mentioned in the First (Tabor) Reformed Church records for doing some gilding work on the pulpit¹⁷. He is also credited with being a powder maker in Henry Koch's book on the Beck family, thus ending his career at an explosion at a powder mill in neighboring Myerstown in June, 1806¹⁸. This story is credible as there was a powder mill in Myerstown and Christian Beck Jr. did leave the Lebanon Township tax rolls in 1801¹⁹.

The point of this short history of John Christian Beck Jr. is no primary records could be found that reference him being a gunsmith, contrary to what has been reported in the past. The rifles that are signed C. Beck that were once

Figure 22 Kindig's Signed C. Beck- Patchbox View



Figure 25 Kindig's C. Beck- Signature

credited to him are now, in my opinion, made by Christian Beck of Jonestown, his nephew.

Acknowledgements: I want to acknowledge the following people for assisting me with the research and especially for making their rifles available to photograph for study: Henry Bishop, Tim Hodges, Frank Kobilis, Tim

Figure 23 Kindig's Signed C. Beck-Carving View

Christian Beck Jr. died in near poverty, not having enough personnel property to even settle his estate and provide for his heirs. There was no record of an inventory from his estate that could be located.

With no rifles that I can say were built by him, no historical records that indicate he worked as a gunsmith, and no estate inventory to show he had gunsmithing tools, I have to conclude for now that he was not a gunsmith, contrary to previously published information.

Landers, John
Maik, Bruce
Moyer, Steve Potter, Fred
Schry, and Mac Spencer, all of the KRA. Also, special thanks to Joe Kindig III and Jenifer Kindig for making available their time and rifles that allowed this study to be completed. It is greatly appreciated. ♦

¹ Joe Kindig, Jr. (1960) *Thoughts On The Kentucky Rifle In Its Golden Age*. York, Pennsylvania: George Shumway Publishers.

² Salem Evangelical Church Records, Lebanon, Pennsylvania. Located in the Lebanon County Historical Society.

³ Ibid

⁴ Bishop, H. I. (January, 2010). Master – Apprentice – Master. *American Tradition – Journal of the Contemporary Longrifle Association*, Page 34.

⁵ Information from a German Prayer book owned by Christian Beck III and passed down thru the family and obtained from Link York, wife of a Beck descendant. All information has been verified by various sources.

⁶ Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, Pa., Lancaster County Tax Records, Cocalico Twp., 1751 – 1838.

⁷ Same as Note #5.

⁸ Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, Pa., Manuscript Group 4, Franklin County, Lurgan Township 1801 – 1830.

⁹ Same as note #5

¹⁰ Ancestry.com 1820 Federal Census (on line). Provo, UT.

¹¹ Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, Pa. RG-7 Records of the General Assembly for Franklin County in 1821.

¹² Jacob Fraise Richard, Samuel Penniman (1887) *History of Franklin County Pennsylvania*, Chicago, IL, Warner, Beers & Co.

¹³ Stoner, J. H. (1946) *Mount Alto Furnace Days*, Franklin County Historical Papers, 541.

¹⁴ Bowers, W. S. (1979). *Gunsmiths of Pen-Mar-Va*. Mercersburg, Pa. Mercersburg Printing

¹⁵ Ibid Same as Note 5

¹⁶ Ancestry.com, Online notes from the Ensminger family, Provo, UT.

¹⁷ Berkeley County Historical Society, Martinsburg, WV. *Martinsburg Gazette and Public Advertiser*, April 19th, 1827.

¹⁸ Ancestry.com 1830 Federal Census for Berkeley County, Virginia (on line). Provo, UT.

¹⁹ Perrin, W. H. (1882) *History of Bond and Montgomery County Illinois*, Chicago, IL. O. L. Baskin Publishers.

²⁰ Barrows, F. I. (1917) *History of Fayette County, Indiana*. Indianapolis, Indiana, B. F. Bowers & Co.

²¹ Ancestry.com, Biography of John Christian Beck written by Jesse Glenn Beck in 1941.

²² Ibid Same as Note 21.

²³ Ancestry.com 1850 Federal Census for Hancock County, Illinois (on line). Provo, UT.

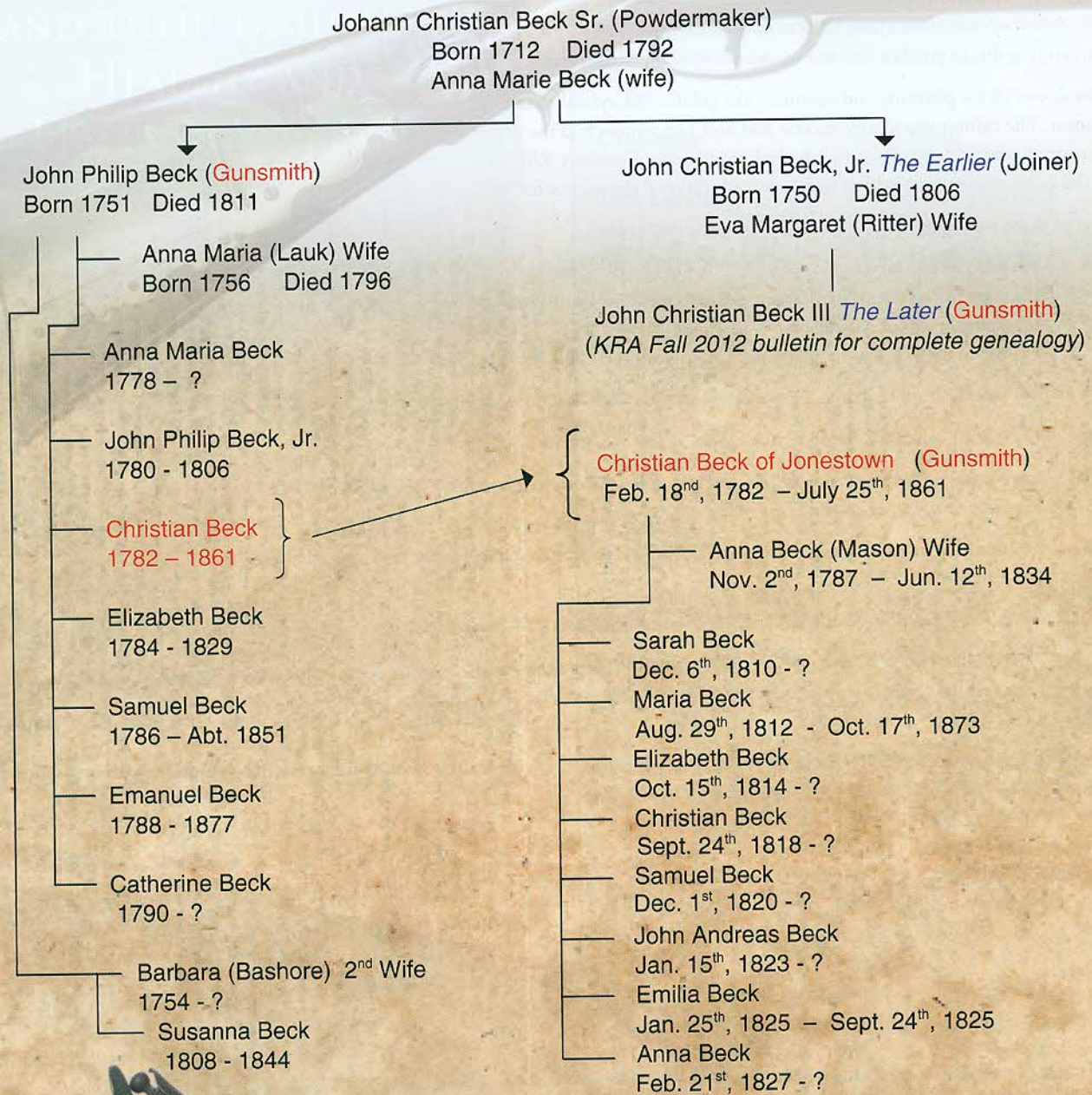
²⁴ Ancestry.com State of Illinois, Illinois Public Land Purchase Records (on line). Provo, UT.

²⁵ Ibid Same as Note 21.

²⁶ Ibid Same as Note 21.

Genealogy of Christian Beck of Jonestown - *Gunsmith*

*This family genealogy was inadvertently omitted from the
"Which Christian Beck Is It? Part II" article in the Fall 2013 KRA Bulletin. - Ed*



A signed C. Beck rifle from Fred Schry collection.