

The Buffalo Robe and Joseph Craig Kentucky Rifle

After about 20 years in Allison-Antrim Museum's collections, a new discovery has been made. Between 1999 and 2001, this very rough-looking buffalo robe or blanket was donated to Allison-Antrim Museum by the late Dr. James H. Craig, Jr. board member. It was lined with beautiful, deep green, Victorian-era velvet. For many years it was draped over the upstairs banister in the historic, 1860 Irwin Museum House.



The hide had dried out over the centuries of its existence and became broken in some places. Upon gently lifting one of the torn areas, a bit of a painting was revealed.



On June 20, 2019, the buffalo robe was carefully laid on tables and the slip-stitching, which held the velvet lining to the hide, was meticulously snipped. What was revealed is a Native American painting. It is not known if the velvet material was slip-stitched to the hide when it was purchased or if it was attached in later years.



Craig Ingram, AAMI board member, took the winter-time female buffalo hide to a friend of his, George Nas, an authority of Native American artifacts. Buffalo existed up to about 1750 in Pennsylvania, as well as antelope, which is depicted. The "paint" used was all made from the earth, i.e. berries and or minerals. The circles around the outside are moons, possibly representing the seasons of the year, with color changes of the Moon. An egret and a buffalo are also depicted, along with possible waterfalls and trees, denoting water sources and or hunting ridges that may have existed. Native American tents (depicted on the hide) were used in Pennsylvania until around the 1750s or 1760s. The overall painting was possibly a map with different hunting locations used throughout the year. The hide itself, is suspected to have been "cured" by Native American Indian women using saliva and chewing the hide.

"J. Craig" is stenciled on the hide in four places. Who was J. Craig? Board member Craig Ingram, a collector of antique guns, through his research, discovered J. Craig was Joseph Craig, a trader of Native American artifacts and a gunsmith, who lived in western PA. Through talking with other Kentucky Rifle Association members, Ingram learned the Joseph Craig family, "bought and sold Indian artifacts as well as made plains rifles." Ingram describes Craig's guns as, "being in the plains rifle format and this gun was most likely made in the 1850s or '60s."

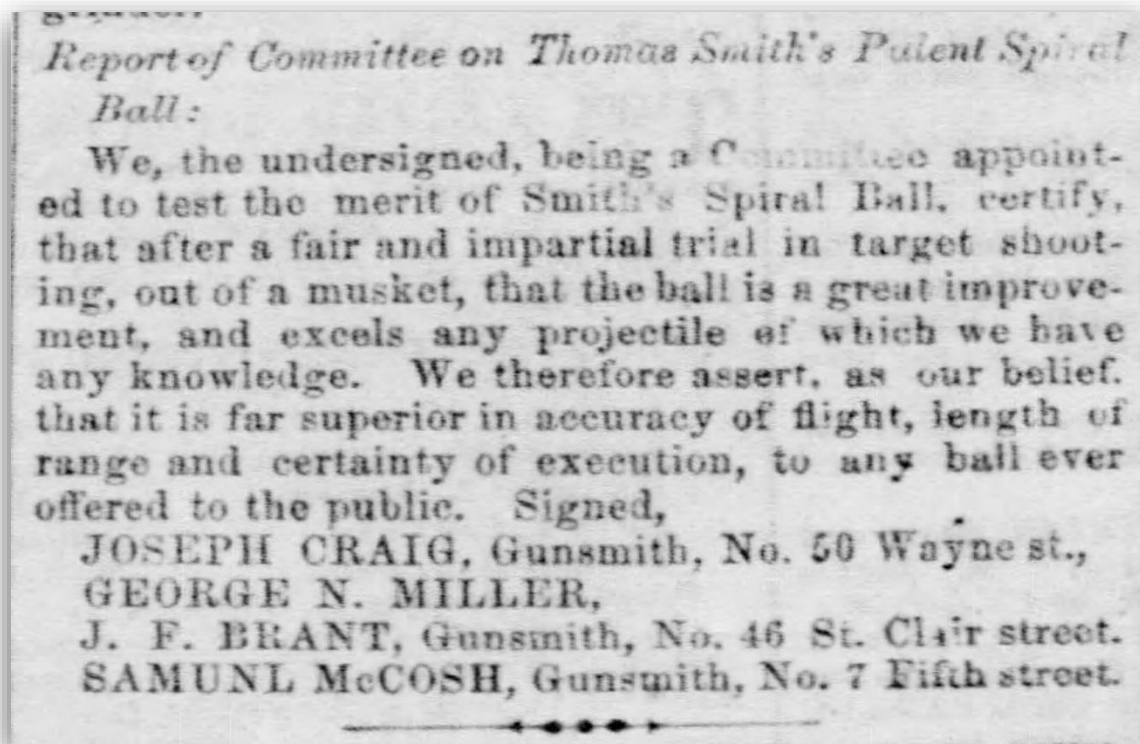
Joseph Craig lived in Pittsburgh, PA. While doing research, Craig Ingram came across a Kentucky/Pennsylvania percussion rifle marked "J. Craig, Pittsburgh." The rifle was for sale by a dealer in Minnesota. Its description read: "Antique circa 1850 Kentucky/Pennsylvania half stock hunting rifle, approximately 40 caliber. The 34" rifled barrel has a dark brown patina with deep rifling which has light pitting. Both front brass blade and buckhorn rear sights are present. The butt plate and trigger guard are brass with a light brown patina. The front lock has a set trigger which functions. The very good walnut has good color and a pewter or German silver nose cap. This old rifle is in very good overall condition." Commenting on the sales ad, Ingram said, "This rifle is in really good condition as the guns typically saw a lot of abuse out west."



As an aside, Ingram shared that a local gunmaker, J. H. Johnston in Waynesboro, moved out to Pittsburgh about the same time Joseph Craig was making rifles. “They (Johnston and Joseph Craig) were both capitalizing on the migration westward.”

Several AAMI board members went together to purchase the J. Craig rifle, which is now part of a very unique collection ~ a Native American buffalo robe purchased and owned by Joseph Craig and a Kentucky/Pennsylvania rifle made by Joseph Craig.

Recently found is a Wednesday, September 10, 1856, newspaper ad that was in the Pittsburgh Daily Post. It reads: Report of Committee on Thomas Smith’s Patent Spiral Ball: We, the undersigned, being a Committee appointed to test the merit of Smith’s Spiral Ball, certify, that after a fair and impartial trial in target shooting, out of a musket, that the ball is a great improvement, and excels any projectile of which we have any knowledge. We therefore assert, as our belief, that it is far superior in accuracy of flight, length of range and certainty of execution, to any ball ever offered to the public. Signed, JOSEPH CRAIG, Gunsmith, No. 50 Wayne st., GEORGE N. MILLER, J. F. BRANT, Gunsmith, No. 46 St. Clair street. SAMUNL McCOSH, Gunsmith, No. 7 Fifth street.



Regarding the 1856 newspaper ad, Craig Ingram said, “What’s really neat is the tie in with McCosh and Miller – two of the great western PA (gun) makers.”

The remaining question is: How did the family of the late Dr. James H. Craig come into possession of the buffalo robe. I called Dr. Jim Craig’s sister Julie Craig Baldwin. Their mother Jemma Annabel’s brother, Bill McLaughlin, who owned the McLaughlin Hotel in Greencastle, made a trip, with family members, “out to the badlands of the Dakotas.” It was during this time that the buffalo robe was acquired. Jemma Annabel married James H. Craig, Sr. The buffalo robe was kept in the family and passed onto Jemma Annabel and then to James H. Craig, Jr.

The last unexplained coincidence is how often the given name ‘Craig’ (Ingram) and surnames of Joseph Craig and James Craig have been intertwined. Perhaps the definition of coincidence is the best answer: The state or fact of things occurring together or simultaneously. A remarkable concurrence of events or circumstances without apparent causal connection.

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