



*Engraving on trigger guard typical of H. Albright*

## Henry Albright

Just recently Henry Kauffman found in the burial records of the Moravian graveyard in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, that Henry Albright was born August 5, 1772, in Lititz, Pennsylvania. The record relates that he resided in Nazareth from 1816 until his death on January 27, 1845, after having lived in Nazareth; Shippensburg; Gnadhutten, Ohio; and a few other places. He married Anna Barbara Hubley on March 27, 1794. They had ten children. On February 25, 1830, he married Catherine Louisa Beck with whom he had four children.

This information basically substantiates the other records we have found concerning the gunsmith Henry Albright, although it does not give his occupation. Earlier records in Lititz list an Andrew Albright as a gunsmith. I have never seen a gun signed by this man. As I stated when discussing No. 13A, I believe this man who signed his guns "Henry Albright" was the son of Andrew Albright who was christened John Henry Albright. The earliest mention of Henry Albright as a gunsmith appears in the General Hand papers of 1794. Here he is listed as having produced at least twelve guns for the government. A Henry Albright is listed as a gunsmith in 1800 in Shippensburg Township, Cumberland County, Pennsylvania. An article on Ohio gunsmiths by R. M. Knittle and S. M. Martin on pages 214 to 218 of the May 1943 issue of the magazine *Antiques* refers to a Henry Albright in Gnadenhutten, Tuscarawas County, Ohio. The authors believe that Henry Albright was working there about 1800. The Warwick Township, Lancaster County, tax record of 1814 lists a Henry Albright as a gunsmith. He is listed there also in 1810 and 1822, but he apparently moved before 1825, for he is not listed in the tax records of that year. We might guess that he was not satisfied working in Ohio and therefore returned to Lancaster County where he had learned his trade. The Moravian burial record at Nazareth claims that Henry Albright came there in 1816, but since the record was not written until 1845, this date is probably in error by a few years. He was a great artist who probably moved frequently and never accumulated much material wealth. It is very possible that his second wife, Catherine Louisa Beck, was a member of one of the gunsmithing Beck families.

The excellence and similarity of details on guns signed by Henry Albright should make identification of his unsigned work much easier. He was a master designer of patch boxes, a master designer and engraver of brass mounts and silver inlays, and a master carver. His skill in all these materials is demonstrated beautifully on the three rifles shown here. The upper and lower plates on No. 23 and No. 25 are

almost identical. The engraving around the edges of these patch box lids is very similar, if not identical, and the engraved detail next to the lid of the patch box on each of the upper and lower plates is almost identical on all three rifles. These are details which Henry Albright probably used frequently and which are not likely to be found on guns by other makers. The side plates on No. 24 and No. 25 are so unusual that very few other gunsmiths are likely to have used the same design. A carved deer of the shape and quality of the two on these rifles would doubtless be Henry Albright's work. The star inlay with an eagle in relief on the cheek piece also identifies his hand I believe. Henry Albright executed some very individual engraving on the heel extension of his butt plates, and he also engraved his trigger guards with an almost identical design. Few trigger guards were engraved at all. Henry Albright left his "signature" in many places on these guns. He is one of the gunsmiths whose life and work should be thoroughly investigated and studied, for he was a really great Kentucky rifle maker and one of the great early American artisans.

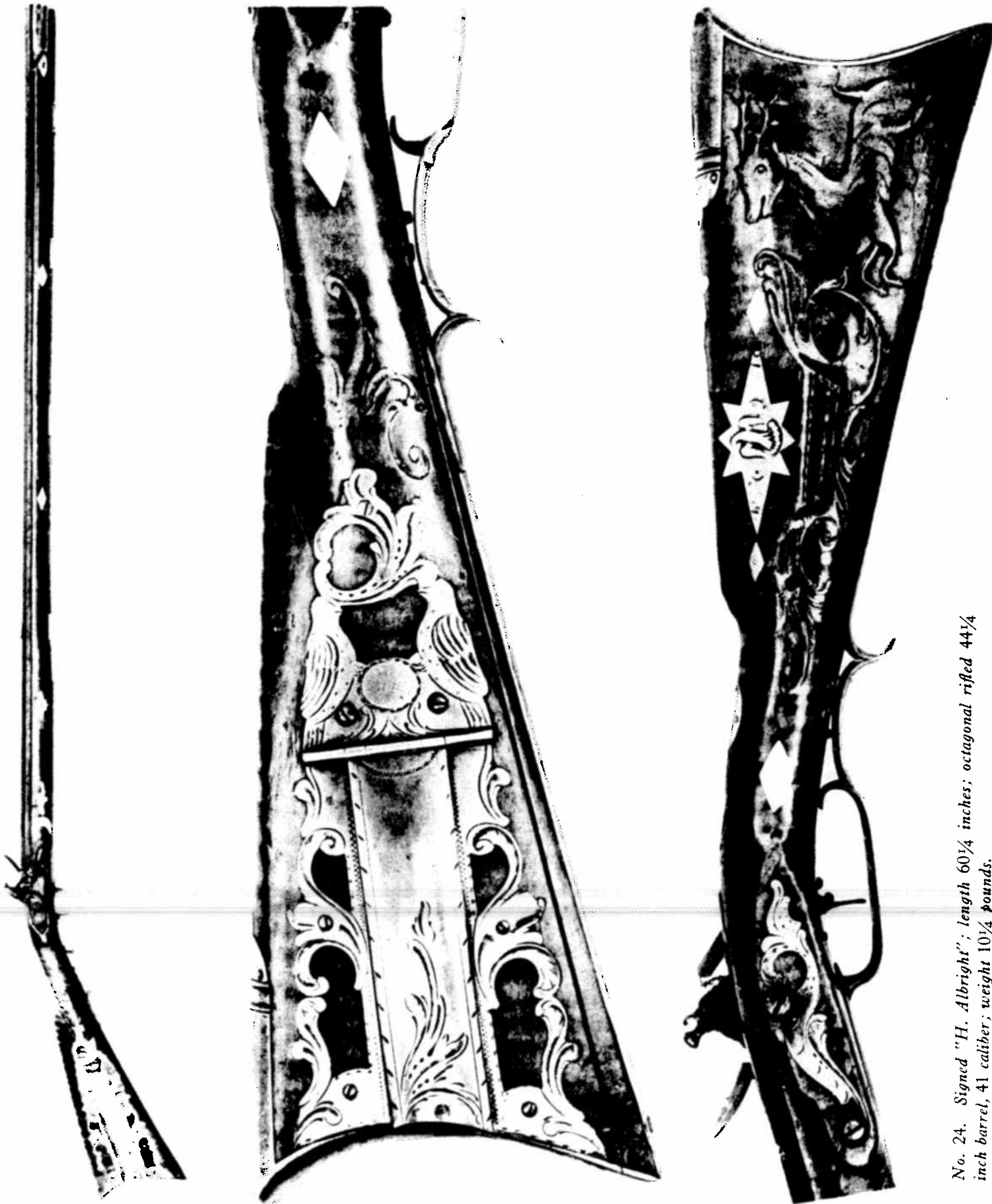
No. 23 has the typical Lancaster daisy patch box. The engraving between the two screws in the patch box head is somewhat similar to a detail at the same place on a Dickert rifle. It is possible that Henry Albright learned his trade from Jacob Dickert. If so, he far surpassed his master in skill and artistry. The relief carving on the cheek piece side of the stock is somewhat similar to that found on other Lancaster guns. The stock is fine curly maple. It displays fourteen solid silver engraved inlays including a moon on the cheek piece. Although the moon is very often contemporary with the eight-pointed star, it is generally not considered quite as early. In other words, the star was the first inlay used on the cheek piece, and the moon probably came into vogue shortly thereafter. Henry Albright was a very fine engraver. Notice that the outline of this patch box follows the artistically designed and deeply executed engraved details. The engraving on the brass side plate is also very fine, and all of the silver inlays have a little engraving. This rifle has a fine high straight comb. The name "H. Albright" is engraved in script on the barrel.

No. 24 is one of the really great Kentucky rifles. It has a patch box of unusually beautiful design and the finest engraving. There are six piercings in the patch box, and all of them are related to the engraved design. Here we see the beauty and symmetry of the C- and S-scroll utilized. The head of the patch box is two lovebirds or doves facing each other. The whole patch box displays the beautiful free flowing curves of eighteenth century rococo design, and some of the lines are engraved more deeply than others making the design appear to be in relief. Indeed, this is the hand of a truly great artisan. The stock bears twenty silver inlays, most of which are engraved. The brass side plate is designed and engraved with C-scrolls also. A side plate of this quality is very rarely found on Kentucky rifles; most of them are of a plain and conventional design. The silver star inlay on the cheek piece is very unusual; Henry Albright is the only man I know of who placed an eagle in relief in the center of the star. A few gunsmiths engraved an eagle in the center of their cheek piece stars, but not in relief. The relief carving to the rear of the cheek piece is superb quality. Henry Albright is the only man I know of who executed

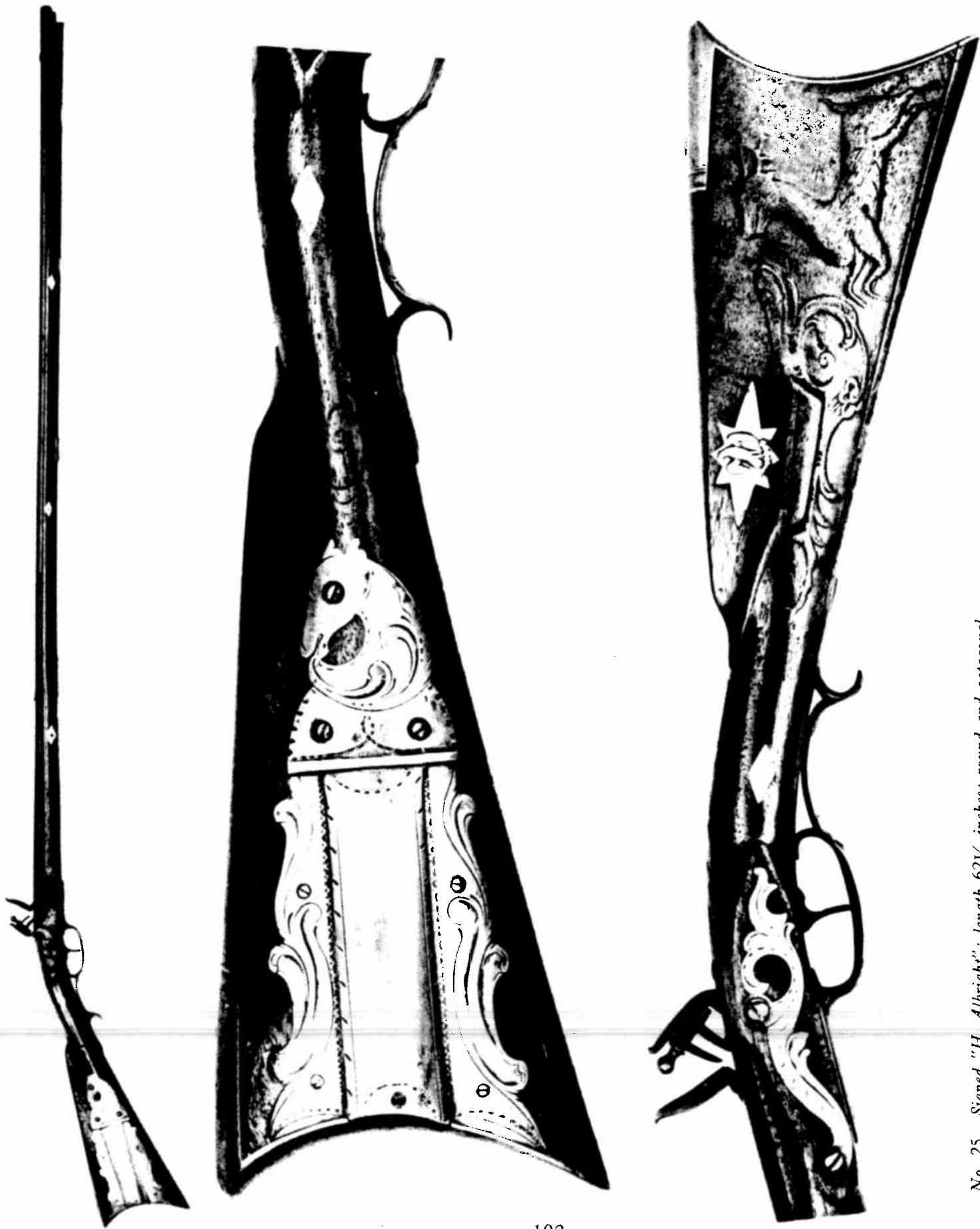
this running deer, and I have seen it on at least three of his rifles. Animal or bird carving in relief is rare and very desirable, and I believe that Henry Albright's deer is the finest animal carving I have seen on any Kentucky. In addition to the carving on the cheek piece side, there is beautiful carving to the rear of the barrel tang and forward of the patch box. The name "H. Albright" is engraved on the barrel accompanied by a number of C-scrolls. He also executed some beautiful engraving around the forward sight on the barrel. This barrel carries a small proof mark in the form of a dagger near the breech. I have found this mark on a few other Kentuckys. It is more or less a copy of a proof mark used in central Europe. The stock is good curly maple. From one end to the other, this gun exhibits the extremely fine quality workmanship that makes it one of the grandest Kentucky rifles. The patch box, the carving, and the many inlays make this rifle what can conservatively be considered a grand work of art.

No. 25 is another extremely fine rifle engraved "H. Albright" on the barrel in the same kind of script as on No. 23 and No. 24. This gun has fourteen silver inlays on the very slender, high combed stock. The stock is walnut—an unusual wood for Kentuckys but found occasionally in early guns. The well designed horse-head patch box has only one piercing. The engraving is well executed in several depths creating the appearance of shading. The unusual and beautiful side plate is very similar in design to that on No. 24. There is an eagle in relief in the center of the silver star inlaid on the cheek piece. Henry Albright was the only man who used this detail to the best of my knowledge. The carving on this rifle is superbly designed and executed in C-scrolls. The running deer is carved to the rear of the cheek piece, and there is some very beautifully executed carving to the rear of the barrel tang.





No. 24. Signed "H. Albright"; length 60 1/4 inches; octagonal rifled 4 1/4 inch barrel, 41 caliber; weight 10 1/4 pounds.



No. 25. Signed "H. Albright"; length 62½ inches; round and octagonal smooth-bore 47 inch barrel 57 caliber weight 6½ lbs.

## “J. Alb.” and “J. Alb., Jr.”

### The Albrights

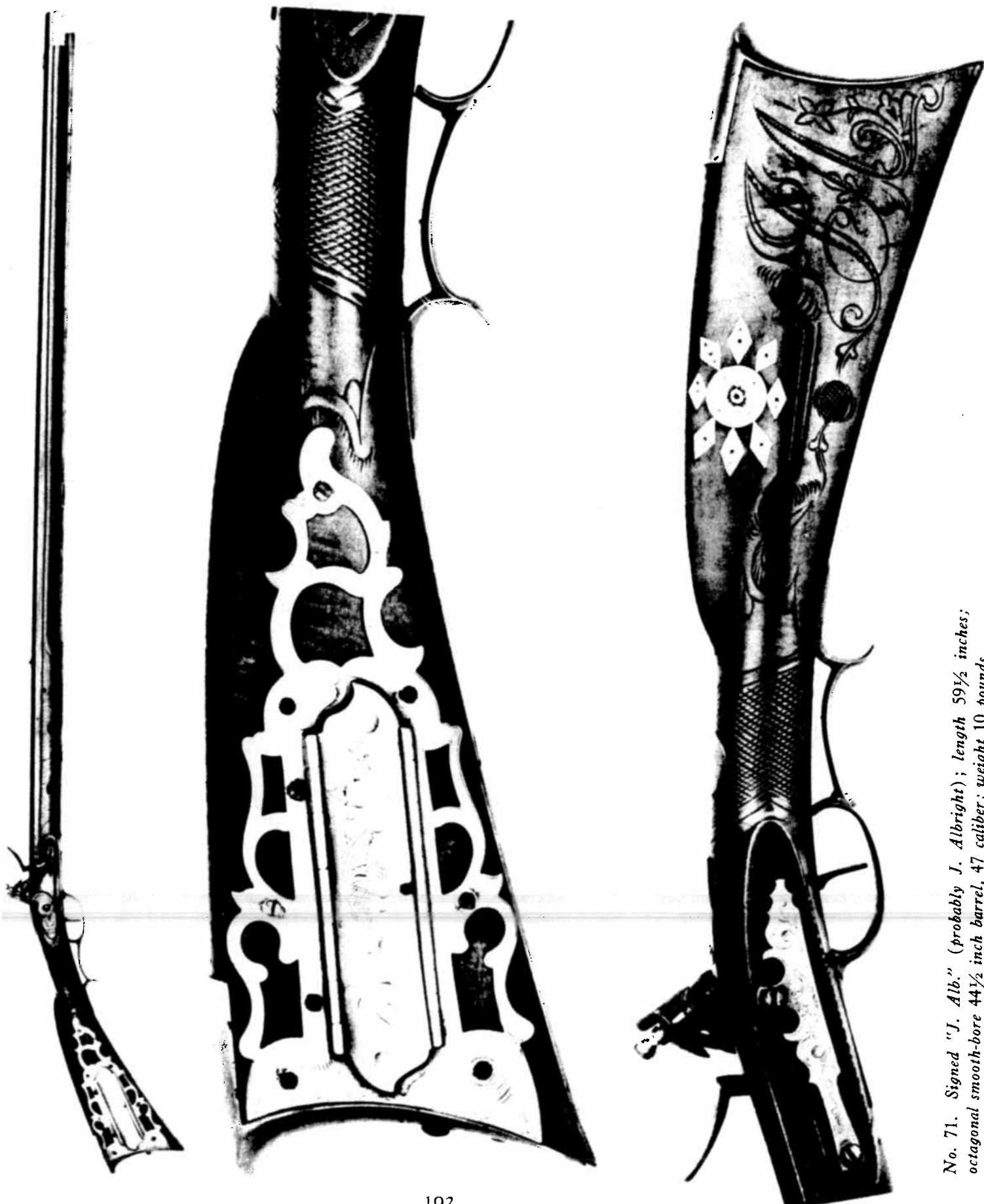
In discussing rifle No. 13A, I have drawn the conclusion that “J. Alb.” stands for Jacob Albright, son of the gunsmith Andrew Albright of Nazareth and Lititz. These two rifles signed “J. Alb.” and “J. Alb. J.” may represent the work of two gunsmiths—perhaps a father and son, Jacob Albright and Jacob Albright, Jr. Some makers did occasionally abbreviate their names. We have found a record of a gunsmith named Jacob Albright in Haines Township, Northumberland County, Pennsylvania, in 1800. About 1840 there was a J. Albright near Wooster in Wayne County, Ohio. This may be a man who worked in Pennsylvania originally and then followed the frontier into Ohio. There was also a gunsmith named Zacharia Albright listed in the Bedford tax list of 1846. Rifles by Zacharia Albright are so similar to No. 71 that we can assume without doubt that there was a close association between Zacharia and Jacob Albright.

No. 70 is a very interesting rifle engraved on the top of the barrel in script “J. Alb. J.” The much accentuated roman nose indicates the Bethlehem school. It has an unusually beautiful curly maple stock. I find no similarity to the work of any other maker except in the patch box head which is somewhat the shape of those on some guns by D. Boyer. A beautifully designed and expertly executed American eagle with a shield on his breast and grasping a snake in one claw and arrows in the other is carved in relief on the cheek piece side. I have never seen another detail like it. The patch box is interesting because it has nine piercings, but the engraving is not the finest quality.

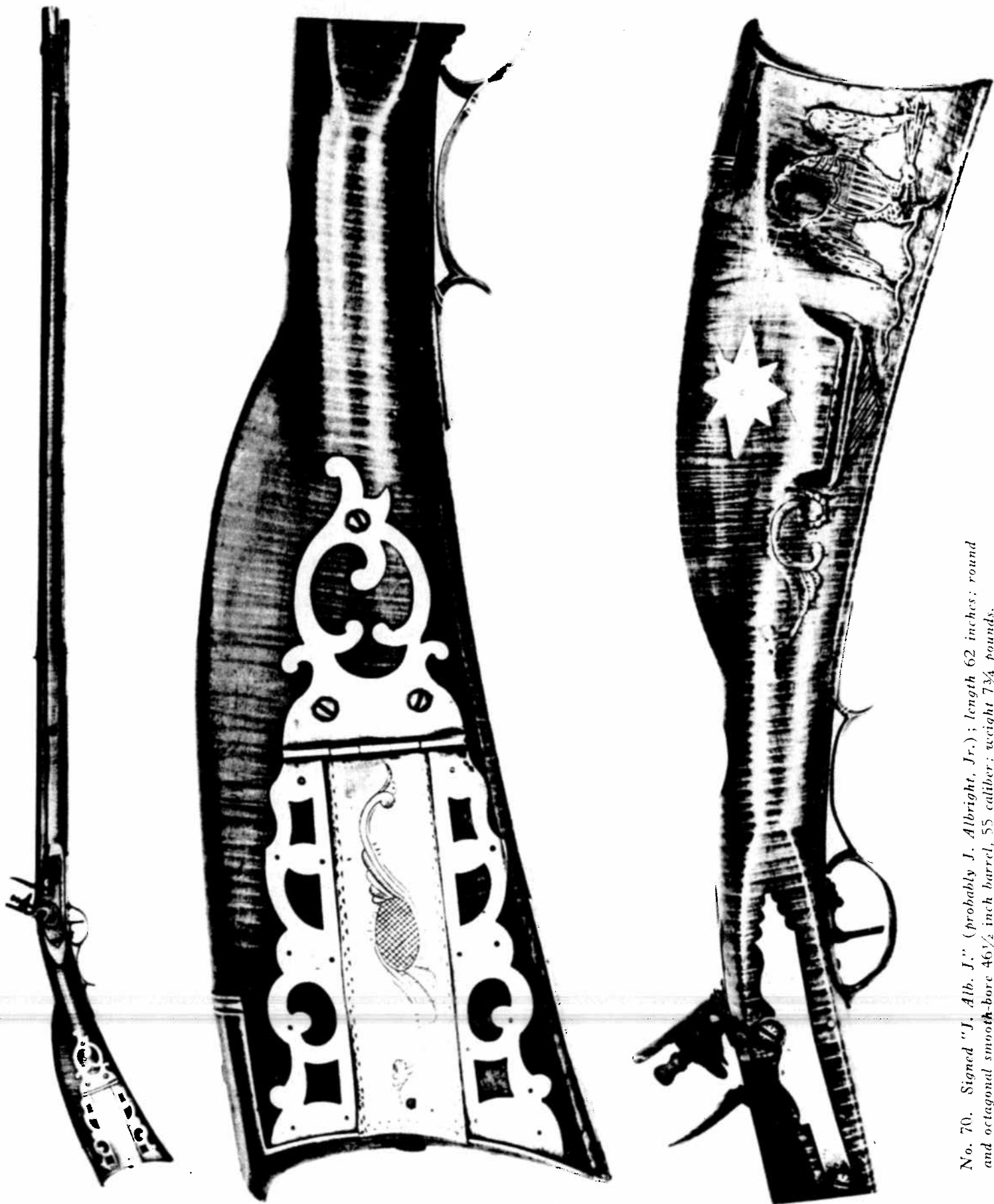
No. 71 is a very unusual and fine rifle engraved on the top of the barrel in script “J. Alb.” It shows little similarity to No. 70, although there are some indications of, if not the same hand, at least an association between the makers. This gun also has a roman-nose stock, but it is not as accentuated as the last. I believe this rifle was made a little later than No. 70. The patch box has eight piercings, and it is particularly interesting because the lid is hinged on the upper side rather than at the end or the lower side as we usually find. There is some similarity between this gun and No. 70 in the piercings of the upper and lower plates and the engraving on the lids of the patch boxes. There is also a similarity in the very fine quality maple in this rifle and the last. The unusual rear ends of the side plates are markedly similar in outline. This man was a good carver, although most of his carving here is only incised. An interesting detail of this gun is the initials “J. A.” carved to the rear of the cheek piece. This might indicate that the rifle was made by the gunsmith for his own use. There are twelve engraved solid silver inlays—most of which are arranged on the cheek piece to form a sort of eight-pointed star. Another interesting feature of this rifle is its “take-down” construction. In other words, the stock is made to separate about eight inches forward of the breech. The checkering at the wrist is a detail which we do not generally associate with an early gun

of the Bethlehem section but usually with those of Lancaster and York. All in all, this is a fine quality rifle which is particularly interesting for its carving, its take-down construction, and its patch box. This man, Alb. or Albright, was a very fine and individual artisan whose work is well worth further study.





No. 71. Signed "J. Alb." (probably J. Albright); length 59½ inches; octagonal smooth-bore 44½ inch barrel, 47 caliber; weight 10 pounds.



No. 70. Signed "J. Alb. J." (probably J. Albright, Jr.); length 62 inches; round and octagonal smooth-bore 46½ inch barrel, 55 caliber; weight 7¾ pounds.