

# Gunsmithing A Vital Task In Bygone Days

By NANCY ALEXANDER  
(In Lenoir News-Topic)

Gray, wintry winds rise and climb the steep walled skies of time and sigh of days when deer, elk, and buffalo strolled among the priestly pines; and a man had little else to do but tramp the forests' shadowy haze and with his "rifle-gun" quickly fell his choice of game.

A proud possession of the pioneer was his flint-lock, long barreled rifle, which was usually called a "rifle-gun." A gun was a necessity in those days and was most always by a man's side. It was permeated with something of his personality for it was especially made by his orders or handed down to him by his father before him. Guns were welded on the anvil and forged with a hammer and bored with a water drill. Most blacksmiths could turn out a fairly passable gun; but a man who wanted a sturdy, trusty rifle had it made by a man skilled in the trade— a gunsmith.

Among the fading hills of Mulberry, a small, ice glazed creek trickles along the valley and murmurs softly its name from out of the past—Boring Mill Branch. On its waters there was once the homestead forge of a well known gunsmith, Reuben Coffey, whose name was synonymous with patience and craftsmanship. He migrated from Albemarle county, Va., where he was born September 19, 1759, fought in the Revolutionary war with a North Carolina Regiment, and settled in the Mulberry section on land first owned by Isaac Emmons and afterwards by Washington Moore. His wife was Sally Scott Coffey. They later moved to Wayne county, Kentucky, about 1820 and Reuben died there on March 4, 1841.

While at Mulberry he spent many long wintry days over fire-forged thunder, boring out perfect gun barrels with the minutest of care.

The process of making a good rifle took a man hours. An iron bar of the correct length, obtained from the iron works, was hammered to a thickness of perhaps three sixteenths of an inch. It was then rolled around a smaller iron rod of a diameter less than the gun caliber desired. The roll of iron was welded a few inches at a time, because it was impossible to weld more without the inside rod, which acted as a ram, getting too hot and bending out of shape. The rod was withdrawn from the barrel and permitted to cool, while the barrel was reheated; then the bar was reinserted and the welding process started again, progressing a few inches at the time. After the process was repeated a number of times and the barrel at last completed, the drill, operated by a water-powered steel bit, cut a spiral groove inside the barrel with two inch pieces of steel, with saw-teeth edges, which filed the spiral channels.

The caliber was determined by the number of bullets which could be molded from a pound of lead, usually from 80 to 140, that would fit the gun. The caliber of rifles is now measured by the decimals of an inch, regardless of the number of bullets. So strong were these hand-fashioned, smooth bore

rifles that one was never known to burst. Locks, triggers, guards, ramrods, hammers and all the parts were made by the gunsmith on the anvil. The breechpin and the lock were works of art. There were only a few artisans skillful enough to temper a nice point and give a piece of steel a spring temper for the springs and a firm temper for the "frizzen."

The old muzzle loading flintlock rifle made a man a sure shot, for it took such a long time to load one, that unless the first shot was a deadly one, the game had had ample time to disappear. Between each shot the gun had to be "wiped out", charged with powder, by ramming a leaden bullet encased in buckskin down the barrel, usually with a slim hickory stick ramrod, and then the flintlock "primed" with powder, which was ignited. There was often plenty of time for the animal to escape after the powder was lighted before the discharge came.

There were various methods of hunting. Some hunters set the woods on fire for a circumference of five miles to drive the game of all kinds to the center, where other hunters were stationed to slaughter them. An early writer reported that the deer in such drives were heard "to weep and groan like a Human Creature." This type of hunting, according to the writer, was "much practiced by Indians and frontier inhabitants." Other hunters blinded deer at night with flaming torches, shooting them through the eyes.

Slim, swift, long limbed, deep throated hounds were used for deer hunting; while a mongrel, which was a mixture of cur, bull, and terrier, was bred for bear hunting. The Plott dog, named for a well known frontier bear hunter, Enos Plott of the Balsam mountains, was said to be the finest bear dog in the state.

According to Thwaite's "Daniel Boone": "At first buffaloes were so plentiful that a party of three or four men with dogs, could kill from ten to twenty in a day; but soon the sluggish animals receded before the advance of white men, hiding themselves behind the mountain wall. They exhibited no fear until the wind blew from the hunters toward them, and then they would dash wildly away in large droves and disappear." Tradition has it that buffalo once herded at the head of the Yadkin river; Buffalo Cove and Creek were known to be their feed feeding and watering grounds. It was written that "The ground literally shook under the gallop of the mighty herds; they crowded in dense throngs around (salt) licks, and the forest resounded with their grunting bellows." Their trails could be followed across the mountains into Tennessee. Thwaite wrote, "Three or four men, with dogs, could kill from ten to twenty buffaloes in a day" and "an ordinary hunter could slaughter four or five deer in a day. In the autumn from sunrise to sunset he could kill enough bears to provide over a ton of bear meat for winter use; wild turkeys were easy prey; beavers, otters, and muskrats abounded; while, wolves, panthers, and wildcats overran the country." Panthers, wildcats,



DEMONSTRATION OF PIPE in New York City which can be laid quickly over rough terrain to carry water for fire fighting, city water supply or to pump out flooded areas. This flexible-coupled pipe is stored by the Federal Civil Defense Administration in warehouses throughout the nation for use in emergencies. New couplings allow pipe to be laid without leveling it.

wolves and bears were considered the most destructive animals and preyed on the livestock of settlers. Even in the days of abundant game, hunters had to be skillful and patient. Successful hunters of the sky, skittish deer spent much time learning to imitate their calls and to determine the best weather and wind conditions for hunting. Except for eating purposes, most fur-bearing animals were killed only in the winter when their pelts were in the finest condition; however, deer were usually killed in the summer and autumn when their pelts were the softest and most velvety.

When an animal was killed, it was promptly skinned, the best part of the meat and hide removed, and carried on the hunter's back to his campsite, where at night the meat was smoked or prepared for "jerking" and skins scraped and cured. Hams of red deer were cured and saved for market or for winter use; while skins of deer and bear were "dressed" with the hair left on them. At the camps the skins were baled and wrapped with strips of bark to protect them from the weather and then placed upon high scaffolds to prevent bears, wolves, and wildcats from tearing them to pieces. Tow cloth which had been used for cleaning rifles and smelled of burnt gun powder was hung on trees and bushes near the meat to keep away the animals.

In curing skins it was written: "For Expeditions Sake they often stretched their skins over Smoak in order to dry them, which makes them smell so disagreeably that a Rat must have a good Stomach to gnaw them in that condition; and 'tis said, while that perfume continues in a Pair of Leather Breeches the Person who wears them will be in no danger of that Villainous Insect the French call the Morpion." Bear oil was carefully saved and used for all types of insect bites. Skins were sold to traders who made frequent trips into the frontier or at the scattered trading

posts and later at such early stores as the ones of Harper and Waugh at Fairfield, Johns River, or Wilkesboro. Deerskins were considered very profitable. Roughly dressed, they were worth approximately a dollar each. They were also so light that many could be carried by horseback to market. Beaver pelts were among the most valuable, being worth about two dollars and a half each, and otter skins were valued from three to five dollars each. Skins of buffalo, bear, and elk were too bulky to carry for long distances.

Many of the skins were used at home, where they were turned into leather garments and moccasins and made into rugs and mats to be placed before the great fireplaces. They were also cut and used for plough lines, bridles; the horns and hooves of the animals were turned into spoon and knife handles.

### MILITARY BUDGET

President Eisenhower's military budget for fiscal 1953 asks a total of \$39,200,000. Of the total, the Air Force is expected to receive \$17,800,000,000, which is \$2,400,000,000 higher than requested last year and about \$1,000,000,000 more than the upward revised estimate he sent Congress last August. The Navy will get \$11,200,000,000 under the budget, the Army \$10,000,000,000 and \$200,000,000 for Defense Department expenses.

### Low Heat Best In Lard Making

"One mistake many farmers make when processing their hog carcasses is rendering the lard at too high temperatures," states John Christian, Extension animal husbandry specialist at North Carolina State College. He advises rendering lard at a temperature below smoke-point. This is a temperature of 265 degrees F., he says. If smoke is given off when rendering lard, says Christian, the temperature is too high. This will cause the lard to become off-color. It will also reduce the keeping qualities of the lard.

If the lard is to be kept for a long period of time without becoming rancid, Christian advises sealing the lard in half-gallon jars while it is still hot. In this way it can be stored in the smokehouse for a year's time and still be fresh and usable.

Christian says if the lard is to be put into stands, an antioxidant may be added by mixing one pound of white vegetable shortening with five pounds of lard. This will give enough antioxidant to postpone rancidity for at least a month or so. He adds that there are commercial antioxidants available at processing plants, although in some vicinities he believes they will be difficult to locate.

Traffic accidents killed more Americans in 1956 than ever before. The traffic toll is expected to be more than 40,000.

# Blowing Rock School

Miss Cannon's 4th and 5th Grades. Ronnie Pitts, Dean Knight, Barbara McLean, Shirley and Dewey Coffey were absent part of last week because of sickness, but they have returned to school. Ideal citizens chosen by the class for the first semester are Ronnie Pitts and Gloria Walsh. Lindel Miller went to Crossmore last week end. Judy Teague visited her great-grandmother, Mrs. Hatten, in Statesville.

aid Tolbert captain and Ben Green co-captain. Basketball Blowing Rock dropped two games to Virginia-Carolina last Wednesday. Blowing Rock boys lost by a 52-48 score. Virginia-Carolina girls defeated Blowing Rock 77-62. Blowing Rock boys won over Bethel last week by a 71-28 count, while the girls lost to Bethel 65-57.

Mrs. Beach's 4th Grade Doris Cornett has moved to West Jefferson. Carlene Ford, Jo Ann Lentz, Ashlyn Klutz, and Margaret Harmon made a bulletin board on "Introducing Friends."

The following have visited the class in the new building: Mr. Angell, Mrs. Harmon, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Pitts, Mrs. Martin, Mrs. Dula, Mr. Hayes, and Mrs. Edmisten. The fourth grade contributed \$16.10 to the March of Dimes. Mrs. Winkler's 6th Grade Rhea Holder, Sonny Young, Billie Foster, and Robert Harmon are studying the forming of snow.

The class has made a January safety chart. Students have also been making charts for health. Visitors in the room last week were Dr. Davant, Mrs. Edmisten, Mr. Angell, and many fathers and mothers.

Mr. McCurry's 7th and 8th Grades Good citizens for the week ending January 18 were Beulah Harrison and Ronnie Green. Jimmy Coffey has been sick for several days, but is back in school. Two basketball teams have been organized. The girls have Frances ampton as captain and Marian Ford as co-captain; the boys chose Don-

F. I. A. TAX Beginning January 1, the rate of contribution for employees and employers to Federal Social Security was raised from 2 per cent to 2 1/2 per cent. This tax, of course, applies only to the first \$4,200 of salary or wages earned. For self-employed persons, the Social Security tax moves up from 3 per cent to three and three-eighths per cent. The increased tax will go into a special fund to finance disability benefits recently authorized by Congress.

## Paul said to Mr. Ed:



Paul

One day there was a beautiful bull rampaging and bellowing and snorting in the pasture. A lion heard him. The lion sneaked up on the bull, attacked him and ate him. Then the lion felt so good that he, too, romped around the pasture and roared in rapture. A hunter heard the lion. The hunter stalked the lion and shot him. Moral: Never shoot off your mouth when you're full of bull.

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Green, heater, clean, white side walls.
- '55 CHEVROLET BELAIR  
2 Door, two tone, green and ivory, radio, heater, overdrive, white side walls.
- '54 CHEVROLET  
4 door, black, extra clean, radio, heater, automatic transmission.
- '53 PLYMOUTH  
4 door, maroon, radio, heater, white side walls.
- '53 PLYMOUTH  
4 door, two tone gray, hydrive, heater, clean.
- '53 FORD  
4 door, gray, radio, heater.
- '53 FORD  
2 door, two tone blue, radio, heater, white side walls.
- '52 PONTIAC  
Gray, 6 cylinders, straight drive, radio, heater, extra nice.
- '52 FORD CLUB COUPE V8  
Radio, heater.
- '52 CHEVROLET  
4 door, radio, heater, two tone green.
- '51 PLYMOUTH  
4 door, black, white side walls, low mileage, heater.
- '51 KAISER  
4 door, black, extra clean, heater.
- '50 MERCURY  
2 door blue.
- '50 FORD  
4 door, green.
- '49 CHRYSLER WINDSOR  
Gray, radio, heater.
- '49 FORD V8  
2 door, black, heater, radio.
- '46 DODGE  
4 door, one owner, heater.

### — TRUCKS —

- '56 DODGE 1/2 TON PICKUP V8  
Blue, extra clean, radio, heater, good tires, one owner.
- '56 DODGE 1/2 TON PANEL  
Black, heater, locally owned, ready to sell.
- '51 DODGE 1 1/2 TON TRUCK  
Good tires, heater, black.
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Extra clean, heater.
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