

*Journal of the*

**LANCASTER COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**Henry Eichholtz Leman and  
His Production of the Pennsylvania  
Rifle**

**Samuel K. Nolt**

---

Ever since the discovery of gun powder about the year 1000 A.D., firearms have been an essential aid to man in the continuance of his existence.

Many are the times when the frontiersman could not have existed without his gun, especially in the early days of the young nation, when his weapon served as a method of securing food and clothing for his family from the abundance of wild game.

As time progressed, the firearm continued to fulfill man's needs; however, its values increased. Rather than serving for mere subsistence value, the purpose of the shooting iron became threefold. It served primarily in military campaigns as well as for mere sporting enjoyment. The weapon also served as a bartering commodity.

To meet these ever-growing demands, certain localities became well-known as production centers. Such is the case of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, which became the "Gun Capital of the New World."<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps none of the innumerable gunsmiths who worked in the Lancaster area over a period of years deserves as much recognition for the growth of the gun manufacturing center as does Henry Eichholtz Leman.

The renowned gunmaker was born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, on March 8, 1812. His ancestors on the parental side were French

Huguenots, who had come to what is now Lancaster County as early as 1716 and had settled in the Paradise Township region. His father, Jacob, who died in 1835, was a farmer near Lancaster and brewer in the town. Henry's mother was a daughter of Leonard Eichholtz; therefore, Henry E. Leman was a nephew of the illustrious artist, Jacob Eichholtz.<sup>2</sup>

The name Leman was and still is pronounced in three ways. Some refer to the name as Lehman while others employ the pronunciation Leaman. A personal interview with the late Dr. Herbert H. Beck, author of the only known biography written on this renowned Lancaster gunmaker, revealed the fact that the correct way to pronounce the name is "lemon," as in lemonade. James Leman, son of the master riflemaker, informed Dr. Beck that the present descendants still retain the latter pronunciation.<sup>3</sup>

Having attended a number of the private schools in Lancaster, Leman obtained a practical business education. He then acquired the skill of gunmaking at the age of sixteen under the tutelage of Melchior Fordney, a well-known gun manufacturer in Lancaster.<sup>4</sup>

Serving in the "Red Rose City" as an apprentice from 1828 to 1831 and having fairly mastered the details of gun-smithing, Leman decided to move to Philadelphia and perfect himself on the finer branches of the art. Here he worked from 1831 to 1834 for George W. Tryon, a successful manufacturer of firearms. In 1834 the craftsman returned to Lancaster and started his own business of gunmaking, which appears to have flourished until 1887.<sup>5</sup>

The first factory established by Leman was situated on Mifflin Street, west of North Duke Street in Lancaster. For purposes of proximity to water power, his forge and boring mill were located in Upper Leacock Township, along the Conestoga Creek. The ruined remains of the workshop can be presently observed in an area called Oregon, which has developed near the highway from Reading to Lancaster.<sup>6</sup>

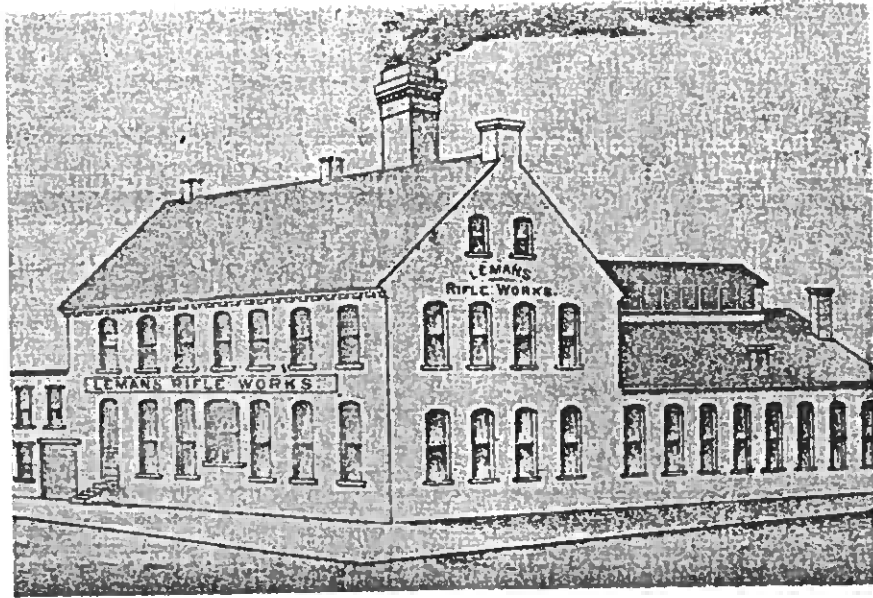
When working in the mill, the riflemaker was engaged in welding, drilling and grinding the rifle barrels. The fine hand and machine work was carried on in the factory on Mifflin Street. Also, in this particular manufacturing establishment, the gun stocks were made and the rifles assembled. On the completion of these processes, the shooting irons were made accessible for purchase by local customers or distant traders.<sup>7</sup>

Relative to Leman's business contracts, Dr. Beck's information revealed that only a few original records describing Leman's commercial interests have survived. Therefore, it is difficult to determine the approximate number of guns which the craftsman actually manufactured before receiving his first government contract in 1837.<sup>8</sup>

It is known, however, that the early firearms of the gunsmith's career were primarily of the musket type, consisting of a flintlock ignition system. These much sought-after guns were known as "trade muskets" or "Northwest flintlock guns."<sup>9</sup>



HENRY EICHHOLTZ LEMAN



Lithograph showing Lancaster Works of Henry Leman at northwest corner of East Walnut and North Cherry streets. From Everts and Stewart's Atlas of Lancaster County, 1875.

The trade muskets made by other makers, as well as Leman, were intended to compete with similar guns being imported into the United States and being shipped to the West for purposes of trading with the Indian tribes.

During the year 1837, Leman submitted letters to the American Fur Company seeking orders for guns. The following letter was dated January 27, 1837:

Sirs:

I am aware of your formerly receiving Rifles from this place (during my apprenticeship at Rifle Making) and none very lately. I can manufacture Rifles at the following prices,

Single trigger-pan, lock, checkered and engraved	\$12
do do long tang breech	\$12

Warranted equal to any manufactured, a sample can be had for inspection. The small advance since you received Rifles from this place is owing to the advance in Materials and Wages.

H. E. Leman<sup>10</sup>

It is interesting to note that on April 25, 1837, Leman offered the American Fur Company the same guns at \$11.00 each and concluded his note with the request: "Please have the goodness to answer this letter."<sup>11</sup>

In 1837, during Van Buren's administration, Leman received his first government contract for manufacturing 1000 rifles. These rifles, costing \$14.00 obviously were of a better quality and perhaps had some inlays that his earlier quotation did not speak of.<sup>12</sup>

Six years later, Leman suggested to Ramsey Crooks, head of the American Fur Company, that his business would be aided and the Indians benefited if he were permitted to manufacture guns for that particular company.<sup>13</sup>

During this time Leman and other American gunsmiths, such as Golcher, Derringer, and Tryon, were supplying the Indians, thus taking over the market previously held by foreign gunmakers.<sup>14</sup>

The plains Indian therefore obtained weapons from two sources—the American transactors who were still active in the business, and the United States Government which furnished rifles to many of the tribes for subsistence purposes.

Contrary to popular belief, Leman did not cease to manufacture the flintlock Northwest trade guns after a few years in business.<sup>15</sup>

By 1850, the flintlock era had passed in the East, but not in the West where the Indians were concerned.

It can be refuted that Leman switched to the new style of percussion cap type rifles, and became famous from association with such firearms. However, the Indians preferred the flintlock muskets over other makes available at that time, so Leman, throughout most of his career, continued to supply the shooting irons annually to the tribes.

The following table lists the Northwest flintlock guns Leman sent to the Indians over a period of years:

Febr.	8, 1842—500	Northwest guns	
Aug.	24, 1842—600	" "	
Mar.	6, 1856—1000	" "	@\$6.50
April	1, 1857—1000	" "	@\$6.50
Dec.	11, 1857—1000	" "	
Dec.	21, 1858—1000	" "	
Oct.	31, 1859—1400	" "	@\$6.75
	100	" "	@\$7.25
Nov.	10, 1860—1000	" "	@\$7.00

This tabulation of orders was found in the National Archives from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to H. E. Leman<sup>16</sup>

Certainly, the listing is ample proof to substantiate the theory that Leman continued to produce flintlock guns as late as 1860.

Today, the flintlock muskets by Leman appear to be quite rare. Although the gunsmith manufactured a great number of the guns, few are in the possession of museums or collectors. What became of the many trade muskets which circulated on the Northwest frontier is a question not easily answered. In the hands of the Redskins, trade guns seldom led an easy life. They were never properly cleaned or lubricated, exposure to the elements was constant, and repairs were limited largely to what could be accomplished with rawhide. Another factor of importance is that flintlocks became obsolete even among the Indians, especially during the transitory period, and most are believed to have been discarded rather than altered to percussion. Also, tribal customs of burying a warrior with his arms, and destruction of captured weapons by our militia comprise the other eliminating factors.<sup>17</sup>

One of these few remaining flintlocks was recently discovered by a Lancaster gun hobbyist. Vincent W. Nolt, prominent firearm

collector, was fortunate enough to be able to obtain one of these rare Leman trade muskets. This valuable relic was discovered in a cave near Big Sandy, Montana, by two adventuresome boys. Their letter to Lancaster inquiring about H. E. LEMAN, which was stamped on the lock plate and barrel, enabled Nolt to learn of the gun's existence and become its owner. Nolt stated that according to local leading gun authorities such as Henry Kauffman, Samuel Dyke, and Herman Dean, it is believed that there remain less than one hundred such guns in existence.<sup>18</sup>

This particular gun is 51 inches in length, has a 36-inch octagon-to-round barrel, and a smooth bore. The walnut full-stock gun is 69 caliber and contains iron trim, with the exception of brass ram-rod pipes, and a brass serpentine-shaped sideplate. To the Indians, the unusual sideplate depicted the equivalent of the "seal of good house-keeping" as it is today, meaning that the brass piece designated the mark of approval of a good gun. The lock piece of the shooting iron is stamped with a tombstone and sitting-fox insignia. Additional marking of crossed swords and crossed pikes is displayed on the side facet of the gun's barrel, designating the Birmingham, England proofmarks. Such marking proves that some of Leman's earlier barrels were imported.<sup>19</sup> The only explainable reason for this action would be that he could import the materials cheaper and faster than he could make them.<sup>20</sup>

It need be said, however, that Leman is more famous for his rifles which he manufactured by the hundreds-of-thousands, than he is for his aforementioned muskets. Presently, collectors refer to these guns as "Indian rifles," due to the fact that they also were furnished to the Indians by the national government. A number of the rifles were of the percussion cap type being of a rather large caliber. Supplied in both flint and percussion ignition, this contract Indian rifle was of medium length, strong and well built, and usually very plainly finished. It was supplied at a cost of about \$12.00. However, notwithstanding the fact that many large caliber rifles were made, the majority of these guns were produced for the average public and were of small caliber.<sup>21</sup>

Of particular note here is the fact that Leman also did considerable work in altering arms from flint to percussion.

The craftsman's sale of these rifles proved to be as successful as the sale of his early muskets. Many traders purchased Leman's rifles and sent them to the West. Hence they appeared to become a great success in the frontier country and large quantities of orders came pouring into Lancaster. These orders for rifles in both full and half stock varieties continued to appear from private individuals, companies, and the national government, until Leman died in 1887.

Relative to the styling of the guns, it is not uncommon to find the rifles cluttered with brass tacks on the butt. Such adornment denoted Indian ownership, while it is believed that the number of tacks represented the number of buffalo killed with the particular

gun.<sup>22</sup> "Leman's rifles probably killed more American buffalo than any other arm in history."<sup>23</sup>

For a number of years the famed riflemaker produced a specialty of short-barreled, large calibered pieces designed for these much hunted animals. According to Dr. Beck, "these Lancaster guns were immensely popular during the last period of the bison's great abundance in the plains of the West."<sup>24</sup>

Frank R. Diffenderffer, noted historian, made the following observations:

Between 1857 and 1870 I was engaged in trade over the West and Southwest, making trips across the plains from Missouri to Mexico, and also from the Gulf of Mexico into Arizona. During that time it was my fortune to meet many tribes of Indians—Apaches, Navajoes, Comanches, Cheyennes, Kaws, and Araphoes—and the most of them carried guns as well as bows and arrows. When occasion offered, I took pains to look at the names of the makers stamped on the weapons. By far, the largest number were Leman rifles, and inquiry always revealed the preference of these Indians for the Lancaster-made guns over all others. It was possible to barter with the Indians for almost any of their possessions, but never for a Leman rifle.<sup>25</sup>

After 1850, the factory at Oregon, which initially served as a workshop for manufacturing both muskets and rifles, was not in operation, so in 1861, the riflemaker's upsurge in arms transactions caused him to transfer his entire business into larger headquarters. Hence Leman moved to East Walnut and Cherry Streets in Lancaster. This event marked the beginning of the gunsmith's heavy machine work being accomplished by steam power—a definite improvement over the employment of water power at Oregon. The craftsman's factory still stands in the Red Rose City although today it is renovated into five residences, numbered 115 to 123 East Walnut Street.<sup>26</sup>

The office of the former factory comprised the building now designated as house number 115. Most of the workmen employed by Leman lived around the corner on Cherry Street in residences numbering 113 to 127. Today, this grouping of homes is known as "gunmaker's row." Also located on this same street was a barrel factory in which were the forge and steam engine equipment for welding, planing, and rifling the barrels.<sup>27</sup> The gunsmiths whom Leman employed were nearly all of German descent. These employees worked by the piece, ranging anywhere from \$12.00 to an exceptional \$15.00 per week.<sup>28</sup> It is interesting to note that the number of men cited as gunsmiths in the individual listing of the 1859-60 Lancaster Business Directory had only an address of residences and were not listed under the heading of gunsmiths in the mercantile establishments of the city. These particular men, most of whom lived in "gunmaker's row," were probably employed by Leman at the time of expansion of his business. It is very doubtful if any guns exist that bear the names of Leman's gunsmiths on the top facet of the barrel.<sup>29</sup>

With the Civil War soon on hand, Leman advertised for some 250 iron workers and polishers to meet the need. It is stated that the gunworks in Lancaster reached an all-time peak in production.

The Lemman Company was employing more than twice the normal quota of men and was repairing and converting as many as 1000 rifles per week.<sup>30</sup>

Shortly after Lemman established his factory at Walnut and Cherry Streets, he purchased a residence at 107 North Duke Street.<sup>31</sup> Evidently with the increase of new homes being built on Duke Street since that time, the door numbers have been changed, and today, this same residence is listed as 307 North Duke Street.

With his wife, the former Anne Dubois of Newburgh, New York, whom he married in 1851, Lemman resided here for most of his life. Each of the couple's five children was born at this residence.

Apparent also during these same years was the expansion of Lemman's commercial interests. In 1861, Simon Cameron of Donegal, Pennsylvania, who was Lincoln's Secretary of War for three months before asked to resign, wanted Lemman to sign a contract requesting 250,000 guns for military reasons. Lemman refused the offer, fearing that the investment for the enlargement of his shop wouldn't be justified by the supplying of weapons for what he thought would be a short war.<sup>32</sup> The gunmaker did, however, gather a great deal of antiquated pieces and convert them into military arms which were soon utilized by the army of the Potomac.<sup>33</sup>

Lemman's commercial trade continued to increase to such an extent that in 1873 he erected a new gunshop, located at the Southeast corner of James and Christian Streets.

In connection with Lemman's manufacture output, there has been much discussion. As part of a speech delivered to the Lancaster Muzzleloaders, a Lancaster antique gun club, Dr. Beck, who personally knew James Lemman, son of the master riflemaker, made the following statements:

I compiled most of my information from James Lemman. He can remember the gunshop located at James and Christian Streets. I asked him if they had any records indicating the number of guns which his father made during his lifetime. The oldest records had been lost, but he remembered that his father employed ten stock makers, each one making two stocks a day or a total of approximately 6,000 stocks per year. There was a period of activity for about forty-five to fifty years, therefore, the total amount of guns produced (mostly rifles) was from a minimum of 270,000 to a maximum of 300,000.

There is no other gunsmith in Lancaster who ever approached that mark in producing guns, not even William Henry, who was Superintendent of Arms and Accouterment during the revolution. I can only find a total of 125,000 to 150,000 guns made under his direction. This proves that there can be no other maker in Lancaster who ever approached, numerically, the total number of guns produced by Henry E. Lemman, gunsmith. James Lemman also told me that he can remember that his father would get car-loads of curly maple wood from Tennessee. This wood was used for making stocks.<sup>34</sup>

Lemman retained his establishment at James and Christian Streets, still producing rifles until 1887 when his factory finally ceased operation. Due to the competitive pressure of the new type breech-loading cartridge guns, Lemman's business gradually dwindled toward the end of his career. While the gunsmith had started his career making flintlocks, and had won fame with his percussions, he



never undertook the manufacture of breech-loaders, which even before 1887 had come into general use. Due to discontinuance of business operations, the renowned craftsman's establishment is not listed in the Lancaster Business Directory after 1888.<sup>35</sup>

Leman seemed to hold great pride in his products, which is shown by the fact that his well-made rifles were stamped "H. E. LEMAN, LANCASTER, PA." If the gunmaker was obliged to take orders for cheap, inferior arms, or if any of his standard pieces contained flaws, he marked these "CONESTOGA RIFLE WORKS." This trade title was also inscribed on guns included in special orders, on which, for one reason or another, Leman did not care to place his name. The cheaper grade rifles often were not made of curly maple wood, but of regular maple with artificial grain. Such an effect was achieved by the wrapping of oil-soaked rope tightly around the entire length of the stock, then igniting the soaked rope in order to scar the wood. This particular process resulted in lines which resembled the grain of the tiger tree striped curly maple. Relative to market value, the cheaper rifles usually sold for \$7.75 to \$9.50, while the regular rifle had a price range from \$10.25 to \$11.25.<sup>36</sup>

Henry Leman was well qualified as an overseer of his workmen, for he, himself, became an expert craftsman in all branches of the trade. He could construct, with extreme accuracy, all the parts of a rifle, even the engravings on the plates and escutcheons. The gunmaker took pains to have as nearly perfect as possible all the guns which left his factory, and the majority of these rifles proved to be efficient and accurate in action. A perfectionist at best, Leman carefully inspected each piece upon completion.<sup>37</sup> A closer examination of Leman's products indicates that in the beginning of his career he was an alert and aggressive businessman. The manufacturer seems to have followed the trends of the times in the contemporary styles of guns he produced.<sup>38</sup>

It is known that Leman manufactured a great variety of guns throughout his career. The rarest and most interesting is the type of trade gun or musket which has been previously discussed. The firearms maker also produced a type of percussion military musket from about 1840 to the Civil War period. A number of these arms, presumably Leman's first ones, have 33-inch barrels and lack patch boxes. The guns, copied after the state militia muskets, were of great similarity to the Springfield Arsenal Musket of 1861.<sup>39</sup> There is a possibility that the "Lancaster Fencibles," a defense group organized in Lancaster during this period, used this type of musket.<sup>40</sup>

It must not be overlooked that Leman also manufactured flasks, bullet molds, and horns as well as presentation guns on special occasions. Several of these firearms can be seen locally. One of the pieces is the unique gun that Leman manufactured for Abraham Beck, father of Herbert Beck. This rifle has remained in perfect condition as good care was always taken of it. Thus, it looks today as if it had come from Leman's factory only yesterday.

The presentation piece is a 30 caliber half-stock, 51½-inch long gun made of the finest materials available, which then included in-

lays of gold and silver. This gun is of an extremely elegant quality.<sup>41</sup> Since this thesis has been written, this very fine weapon has been presented to the Lancaster County Historical Society by the Pirates Club of Lancaster, and is on display here.

Another presentation piece, which serves as a double rifle and shotgun, is presently owned by Vincent Nolt. It has percussion locks, silver inlays and patch-box cover, a walnut stock, and round barrels. Inscribed on the patch-box cover is "Captain John C. Casey—U. S. Army."<sup>42</sup> The following statement concerns the subject of inscription:

John C. Casey graduated from West Point Military Academy in 1829. He was the 551st cadet graduated and he stood 11th in a class of 46 students. From 1842 to 1856 he was assigned to Tampa, Florida as Indian Agent for the Seminole Indians. He died December 25, 1856, at Ft. Brooke, Florida: Aged 47.

Gerald C. Stowe, Curator  
U.S. Military Academy Museum  
West Point, New York<sup>43</sup>

This gun is reputed to have been presented to Captain Casey by Billy (Wm.) Bowlegs, Chief of the Seminole tribe. There was supposed to have been an authentic presentation paper to accompany this gun, but it was mislaid or destroyed by a former owner.<sup>44</sup>

Along with presentation pieces, the master craftsman also produced some "oddities." Two examples of these guns can be cited. The first is what Mr. Herschel Logan, author of a recent book entitled "Underhammer Guns," refers to as a "buggy-whip socket pistol," which was used during the Civil War period. The oddity is about 18 inches in length and has an under-hammer percussion lock, stock of plain maple, brass mountings, octagon-to-round barrel, and is marked "LEMAN, LANCASTER" on the side facet. This boot pistol is believed the only one in existence.<sup>45</sup>

The second oddity referred to is a trap-gun now in the Landis Valley Museum near Lancaster. This gun, which is set on a block, has an eight-inch barrel of about 50 caliber. Its hair trigger could be touched off quite easily by a mechanism extending in front of the muzzle and a little below it. When in use, the gun's delicately adjusted plate at the end of the mechanism might be baited for game or sprung by a moving object as perchance, the opening door of a smokehouse or a chicken-coop. The only marking on this sinister piece is "CONESTOGA RIFLE WORKS."<sup>46</sup>

Thus it can be surmised that the master artist manufactured a great variety of firearms throughout his life. Leman was the last gunsmith to have lived in Lancaster, and during the final years of his prolific career he resided at 427 North Duke Street. This residence has recently been demolished to make way for a convalescent home. He passed away on May 12, 1887 in the 76th year of his age after a lingering illness from a complication of troubles, ending in softening of the brain.<sup>47</sup>

Mr. Leman was a gentleman of far more than ordinary intelligence as is shown by his participation in civic affairs throughout the city. He had been a member of both branches of City Council,

and with General George M. Steinman, was one of the originators of the sinking fund of the City. From 1840 to his death, he was identified with Lodge 43, Free and Accepted Masons, and was one of the charter members of the Lamberton Lodge No. 476, and a member of the Lodge of Perfection. He was also a member of the Board of Trustees of the Lancaster Cemetery.<sup>48</sup>

In conclusion, it can be said that Henry E. Lemman certainly proved to be a widely esteemed and respected person, not only through his contribution to civic affairs, but also through his unsurpassable sense of devotion to his business enterprise.

Lancaster's gunmaker undoubtedly played a major part in upholding the creed to maintain the tradition of Lancaster County as the focal point of gun production.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Captain John G. W. Dillin, *The Kentucky Rifle* (New York: Ludlum and Beebe, 1946), p. 11.
- <sup>2</sup>*The Weekly New Era*, (Lancaster, Pennsylvania) 14 May 1887, p. 8.
- <sup>3</sup>Herbert H. Beck, 515 President Ave., Lancaster, Pennsylvania, personal interview with the author at Dr. Beck's home, 27 Nov. 1960.
- <sup>4</sup>*The Weekly New Era*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
- <sup>5</sup>*The Weekly New Era*, *loc. cit.*
- <sup>6</sup>Henry Kauffman, *The Pennsylvania Kentucky Rifle* (Harrisburg, Pa.: The Stackpool Co., 1960), p. 284.
- <sup>7</sup>Kauffman, *loc. cit.*
- <sup>8</sup>Beck, interview 27 Nov. 1960.
- <sup>9</sup>Charles E. Hanson Jr., *The Northwest Gun* (Lincoln, Neb.: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1955), p. 15.
- <sup>10</sup>Kauffman, *loc. cit.*
- <sup>11</sup>Kauffman, *loc. cit.*
- <sup>12</sup>Kauffman, *loc. cit.*
- <sup>13</sup>Kauffman, *loc. cit.*
- <sup>14</sup>Charles Winthrop Sawyer, *Our Rifles* (Boston, Mass.: The Williams Book Store, 1946), p. 55.
- <sup>15</sup>Charles E. Hanson Jr., Hyattsville, Maryland, 15 Oct. 1959, letter to Vincent W. Nolt.
- <sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup>John E. Parsons, "Gunmakers for the American Fur Company," *The New-York Historical Society Quarterly*, XXXVI (Apr. 1952), 193.
- <sup>18</sup>Vincent W. Nolt, 2015 Clover Hill Road, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, personal interview with the author at V. Nolt's home 3 Nov. 1960.
- <sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, personal interview 15 Dec. 1960.
- <sup>20</sup>Kauffman, *op. cit.*, p. 288.
- <sup>21</sup>Dillin, *op. cit.*, p. 91.
- <sup>22</sup>Kauffman, *op. cit.*, p. 286.
- <sup>23</sup>Herbert H. Beck, "Henry E. Lemman, Riflemaker," *Papers Read before the Lancaster County Historical Society*, XL—No. 3 (1936), 45.
- <sup>24</sup>Beck, interview
- <sup>25</sup>Frank R. Diffenderfer, "The Lancaster Rifles," *Papers Read before the Lancaster County Historical Society*, IX (1904-5), 73.
- <sup>26</sup>Kauffman, *loc. cit.*
- <sup>27</sup>Beck, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
- <sup>28</sup>Beck, *loc. cit.*
- <sup>29</sup>Kauffman, *loc. cit.*
- <sup>30</sup>Frederic S. Klein, *Lancaster County 1841-1941* (Lancaster, Pa.: The Intelligencer Printing Co., 1941) p. 49, 56.