

## Identifying the father of the gunsmith Peter White

By Lannie Dietle, September 15, 2022

Peter White is one of the few Bedford County, Pennsylvania gunsmiths who made rifles during the flintlock era that have survived. He was living in Bedford County by 1803<sup>1</sup> and was still living there in 1817.<sup>2</sup> By 1819 he had moved to Uniontown, in Fayette County.<sup>3</sup>

Buried in Uniontown, Peter White's now-missing tombstone indicated he died at age 56 on August 25, 1834.<sup>4</sup> This implies he was born circa 1778. A dated gun with a lock plate engraved "P.W." indicates he was already involved in gunsmithing by 1794.<sup>5</sup> That gun has the broad buttstock associated with the Emmitsburg school of gunsmithing, rather than the slender buttstock of the Bedford school. An individual named Peter White was enumerated as the head of a household in the 1800 federal census of Emmitsburg, Maryland.<sup>6</sup> Because of the Emmitsburg-style characteristics of three signed guns including the 1794 gun, and because of the 1800 census record, it has long been theorized that Peter White came from Emmitsburg.<sup>7</sup>

The paternity of Peter White has long been a subject of mystery and speculation, with the gunsmiths Nicholas White<sup>8</sup> and John White<sup>9</sup> suggested as potential candidates. The paternity question has now been conclusively resolved using the estate documents of Andrew White from the Frederick County, Maryland "Book of Descents" papers.<sup>10</sup> These documents, excerpted below, indicate that:

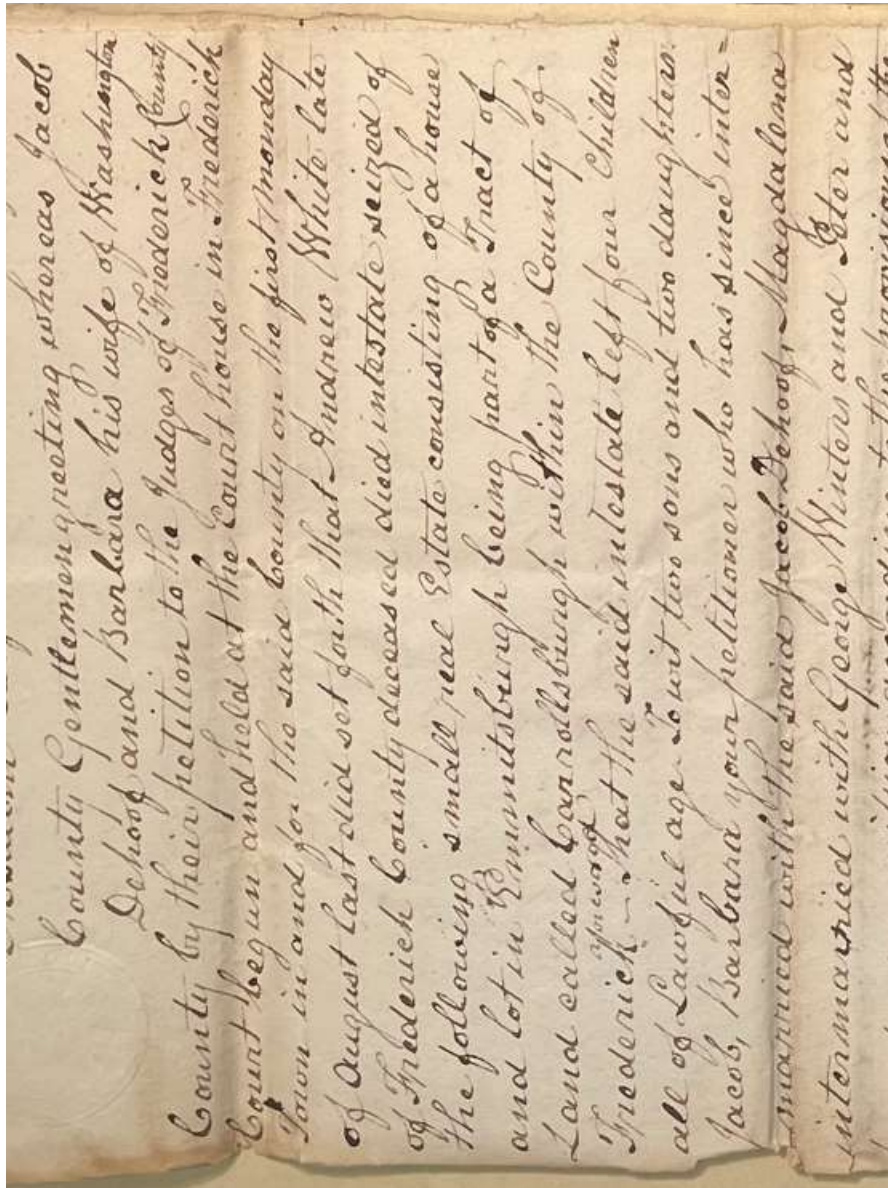
- Peter White's father was Andrew White.
- Peter White's father owned a lot and a house in Emmitsburg, Maryland.
- Peter White's siblings were Jacob White, Barbara (White) Dehoof, and Magdalena (White) Winters.

In 1814 several men were commissioned to view and appraise the real estate of Andrew White. The commission document identifies Peter White as a son of Andrew White in the following statement: *"...whereas Jacob Dehoof and Barbara his wife of Washington County by their petition to the Judges of Frederick County Court begun and held at the court house in Frederick Town in and for the said County on the first monday of August last did set forth that Andrew White late of Frederick County deceased died intestate seized of the following small real Estate consisting of a house and lot in Emmitsburgh being part of a Tract of Land called Carrollsburgh within the County of Frederick aforesaid — that the said intestate left four Children all of Lawful age. To wit two sons and two daughters Jacob, Barbara your petitioner who has since intermarried with the said Jacob Dehoof, Magdalena intermarried with George Winters and Peter..."* This part of the multi-page commission document concludes with the statement, *"Witness John Buchanan Esquire Chief Judge of our said Court the first day August 1814. Issued the third day of January 1815. Tobias Butler, Clerk"*.

Peter White assigned his power of attorney to his brother Jacob. The power of attorney document includes the statement, *"Know all men by these presents that I Peter White of Bedford County in Pennsylvania, being one of the heirs and legal representatives of Andrew White late of Frederick County in Maryland, deceased, have made ordained constituted and appointed, and by these presents do make ordain constitute and appoint my brother Jacob White of Frederick County in Maryland, my true and lawful attorney for me and in my name, to grant bargain sell and dispose of all my right title or interest of in or to the real and personal estate of the said Andrew White, deceased..."* Peter White signed the

power of attorney on July 27, 1815. The shape of the letter “P” in his signature matches the letter “P” of the initials engraved on the lock of the Peter White rifle that is on display at the National Firearms Museum in Fairfax, Virginia.

The January 30, 1815 appraisal document includes the statement, “...That a house and Lot in Emmitsburgh constitutes the whole of the said Estate, which is not Susceptible of division among so many heirs – Therefore we proceeded to value the same in current money, agreeably to the directions of the said Commission And do return the same worth the following Sum of money (to wit.) Six Hundred and twenty six dollars...” A court document from “February Term 1815” includes the statement, “...Jacob White the Eldest person entitled appeared in court in his proper person and elected to take the real Estate of the Intestate at the Valuation made by the Commissioners...”



County Gentlemen meeting whereas Jacob Dehoop and Barbara his wife of Washington County by their petition to the Judges of Frederick County Court began and held at the Court house in Frederick Town in and for the said County on the first Monday of August last did set forth that Andrew White late of Frederick County deceased died intestate seized of the following small real Estate consisting of a house and lot in Emmitsburgh being part of a Tract of Land called Carrollsb<sup>urg</sup> within the County of Frederick - That the said intestate left four Children all of Lawful age to wit two sons and two daughters Jacob, Barbara your petitioner who has since intermarried with the said Jacob Dehoop, Magdalena intermarried with George Winters and Peter and

**Figure 1:** Excerpt from appraisal commission for the estate of Andrew White.

Know all men by these presents that I Peter White of  
Dorset County in Pennsylvania being one of the heirs and  
legal representatives of Andrew White late of Frederick County  
in Maryland deceased have made ordained constituted and  
appointed and by these presents do make ordain constitute and  
appoint my brother, David White of Frederick County in  
Maryland my true and lawful attorney for me and in my  
name to grant bargain sell and dispose of all my right title  
or interest of in or to the tract and personal estate of the said  
Andrew White, deceased, dead or alive, release or releases for

Figure 2: Excerpt from Peter White's power of attorney in the matter of the estate of his father.



**Figure 3:** Peter White's signature on the power of attorney document.

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<sup>1</sup> "Gunsmiths of Bedford County, Pennsylvania", Vaughn E. Whisker, Sr. and James B. Whisker, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> "The Bedford County Rifle and Its Makers", Calvin Hetrick and George Shumway, 1975.

<sup>3</sup> "Genius of Liberty" newspaper, April 6, 1819.

<sup>4</sup> "The Bedford County Rifle and Its Makers", Calvin Hetrick and George Shumway, 1975.

<sup>5</sup> "The Bedford County Rifle and Its Makers", Calvin Hetrick and George Shumway, 1975 (Plate 127).

<sup>6</sup> "The Bedford County Rifle and Its Makers", Calvin Hetrick and George Shumway, 1975.

<sup>7</sup> "The Bedford County Rifle and Its Makers", Calvin Hetrick and George Shumway, 1975.

<sup>8</sup> "The Bedford County Rifle and Its Makers", Calvin Hetrick and George Shumway, 1975.

<sup>9</sup> "Gunsmiths of Bedford County, Pennsylvania", Vaughn E. Whisker, Sr. and James B. Whisker, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Maryland State Archives, Land Commission Papers, MSA Collection Number C2316-3 through -5, 1800-1817.