

Jacob T. Sackett, Blacksmith, Gunsmith andViolin Maker

Jacob T. Sackett was born in Hayfield Twp. in 1833, the son of Harvey and Mary (Straw) Sackett. On his father's side he was of New England stock, but his mother was a Pennsylvania German, whose family were members of the same Saegertown area colony of settlers to which the Berlins belonged. Jacob located in Saegertown by 1860, and married a Pennsylvania German: Solomon Woodring's daughter Mary Jane. Jacob worked as a blacksmith, and declared that as his occupation in the 1880 census, but he was more versatile than simply that. He had been listed as a gunsmith in the 1879-80 county directory, and, in 1883, he inserted a description of his establishment in a Crawford County mercantile directory - to wit:

J.T.Sackett, Manufacturer of and Dealer in Rifles Shot Guns &c. Also Horse Shoer and Blacksmith

This business was established many years ago. It embraces the manufacture and sale of Muzzle Loading Rifles, Shot Guns, and Revolvers. In connection with this he carries a line of Breech Loading Rifles and Shot Guns, both double and single barreled, also Ammunition &c. He also manufactures a very superior Violin, which has attained much celebrity for its excellence. These have been used by some of the best violinists of Boston, that center of American Musical culture, where they elicited the warmest commendation, and were preferred to others of celebrated make and costly price. Added to the above is the Blacksmith Department, of which it is only necessary to say: It is complete in all its details, Horse Shoeing is one of the specialties, as is also repairing in all the various branches of the business. The facilities are good and the situation is favorable to the convenience of patrons, while trade transacted is largely distributed throughout the surrounding neighborhood. Mr. J.T. Sackett, proprietor, is a native of Crawford county, and has been for many years, filling a much desired niche in the business of the town.

A few of his guns have been identified, and three of his violins. One of his violins has come to light sadly fragmentary and unplayable. The label indicates it is #11, and therefore one of Sackett's earlier productions. The date, which at first looks like 1841, is likely 1871 or 1891. From the remains, it looks to have been competently made, with tiger-striped maple for the back and neck. The only unusual feature is the screw and ratchet attachments to tighten the strings, located on the neck below the scroll - these usually appear only on the much larger bass viol. This fragmented piece probably survived only because it was in its case. Two other intact instruments are known to have survived locally and a third is reportedly being played regularly in the blue grass band in California.

A rifle bearing Sackett's name was found at a sale in Waterford recently and is now owned by his great grandson, James Marvin who also owns a Sackett violin.

Mr. Sackett died in Saegertown of Bright's disease, on March 16, 1904, and is buried in Saegertown cemetery on the hill overlooking French Creek. Apparently some of his instruments remained to enliven the area, as the fragmentary survival was discovered at a sale in Cambridge Springs in the late 1960s and the two others were also found locally.

-William B. Moore



Firing mechanism on Sackett rifle



Detail of Sackett rifle stock



Identification on fragmented Sackett violin



Partial panel of a Sackett violin



Screw and ratchet attachments



Intact Sackett violin

