
Research Supplement

“A CONSIDERABLE BUILDING ON BUSHKILL CREEK”: WILLIAM HENRY OF NAZARETH AT JACOBSBURG

Scott Paul Gordon

The sequence of Henry gun factories in Northampton County is familiar: Nazareth, Jacobsburg, Boulton. William Henry of Nazareth (1757-1821), the eldest son of William Henry of Lancaster, owned the first two gun works; his sons, J. Joseph Henry (1786-1836) and William Henry III (1794-1878), built Boulton. But this elegant chronology—in which the Jacobsburg works replaces those in Nazareth and is in turn replaced by Boulton—tends to obscure the actual life cycle of Henry’s factories. This article draws on the detailed records of Pennsylvania’s Moravian congregations, as well as materials in the Jacobsburg Historical Society archives, to attempt to fill out the picture of the Jacobsburg factory, its founding and its later fate, and of the varied activities of William Henry of Nazareth (WH).

It is often claimed that William Henry of Lancaster sent his eldest son to the Moravian settlement of Lititz to apprentice with the gunsmith Andreas Albrecht. But when WH arrived in January 1770, Albrecht was in charge of Bethlehem’s Sun Inn: the gunsmith did not move to Lititz until May 1771. The Lititz congregational diary reported that “young Billy Henry has come here to spend some time learning the Piano from Brother Grube.” Henry may have wanted his eldest son to learn the “liberal” arts rather than follow his own trade. But these plans soon shifted. After a visit to Bethlehem in June 1771, “Billy Henry” returned to Lititz to “apprentice in riflemaking” with Albrecht.¹

WH remained in Lititz for another five years. In August 1776, he left the Lititz community and moved to Christian’s Spring, a small settlement west of Nazareth. This transfer has been explained by proposing that WH needed further training in gunsmithing from Christian Oerter, then working at Christian’s Spring. But WH did not leave Lititz voluntarily to continue his training elsewhere. He had confessed to Lititz’s authorities a sexual impropriety with an unmarried woman, and church leaders spent August trying to decide what to do. On 28 August Lititz’s congregational diary states that “the Single Brother Billy Henry could not remain here because of his particular circumstances,” but he would be “permitted...to go to Bethlehem to see if there was a place for him there or in Christiansbrunn.” Discussions about

where to place the repentant youth never mention his prospective trade, and the weighing of alternative destinations suggests that the key issue was to find a community that would accept him given his recent history. In early September, young WH arrived at Christian’s Spring—at the time, an all-male settlement.²

WH’s first independent gun establishment was in Nazareth, where he moved in 1780 at age twenty three. To gain permission for this move, WH applied to Moravian authorities who assessed whether he would be able to support himself and whether the town needed the particular trade in which he specialized: authorities did not allow tradesmen to compete with one another. Despite a suggestion that WH move to North Carolina, church authorities allowed him to join the Nazareth settlement. Having read and promised to abide by the town’s regulations, WH received permission to build on a town lot and on 25 August signed a lease, identifying him as “Gun Smith,” for this property. His building plan envisioned a 24 x 26 house; he intended to “dig out under the entire house, and the one half he will use as a cellar and the other half for the workshop.” William Henry of Lancaster provided a fat start-up package for his young son: “the father had given at first \$3000 Congress money, and will give him still more, so that he will have £1600.00. Then the father will give him also glass, nails, an anvil, bellows, and a ½ a ton [of] iron.” It was not long before tension developed between WH and church authorities. He had approached a carpenter and joiner to work on his house “before he had spoken to the carpenters and joiners in Nazareth”: only “when he cannot have it [built] as he wishes [by tradesmen] here,” authorities demanded, can he “take whomsoever he wants to take.” In 1781 the plans for WH’s building were approved.³

WH quickly became an important member of the Nazareth community, its resident expert on a wide range of matters: maintenance of the town’s elaborate water supply system, the upkeep and use of a fire engine purchased from Europe, drafting of legal documents. Named to the Building Committee in 1783, for thirty years he routinely produced drafts or plans for new buildings in Nazareth. When Nazareth created an Overseer Committee in 1785, he was elected and continued to serve until 1818. Like his father

in Lancaster, WH helped his Moravian brethren in Nazareth negotiate the outside world's complex legal and financial machinery.⁴ He became justice of the peace, a Northampton County judge, and in 1792 a presidential elector.

WH worked as a gunsmith in his early years at Nazareth. His younger brother Abraham came in 1781 from Lancaster so he could "learn by him to become a stocker." But WH's deep involvement in so many aspects of Nazareth's community led him to reduce, or stop entirely, his work as a gunsmith. His primary role at Nazareth seems to have been that of carpenter or joiner. He had apprentices studying the joiner trade and, in 1792, WH voiced concern that one apprentice might leave and he himself could not "be much in the workshop, especially during the summer." He needed "somebody, who in the time of being absent, could be in his place and later on could be put as a joiner into the village, for Brother Henry would be able to do a little less in that profession." This report, while not identifying what activities had kept WH from his "workshop," demonstrates that his primary profession in Nazareth was a joiner. In 1794, the Nazareth diary reported that "Brother Henry...would like to give up his joiner-work and that he is willing to begin again his trade, making stocks for the guns." The fact that WH aimed to "begin *again*" his trade confirms that the community's other needs had required WH to abandon for a time his work as a gun stocker, much as his one-time master Albrecht had given up his profession as gunsmith while he managed Bethlehem's Sun Inn for five years. Nazareth authorities rejected WH's petition to resume his work in the gun trade, insisting "that Brother Henry should keep still the joiner shop." WH complied. In 1795, the Overseers Committee rebuked one townsman for giving "carpenter and joiner's work" to men other than WH, who "according to our brotherly agreement should have had the work." That Abraham Luckenbach came from Bethlehem to apprentice with WH as a joiner in 1797 reveals how long he served in this capacity for the Nazareth community.⁵

This situation changed in 1798 when WH "accepted from the Governor of this state a contract for 2000 guns, which are to be delivered in 2 years." This contract led to the construction of the gun works in Jacobsburg on the Bushkill Creek—but not directly. In January, the Overseers Committee recorded WH's request to build

a two-story work-shop. There he will...do the work that necessarily has to be prepared under his inspection. The other things he will let be made somewhere else. As much as is possible, he will try to get brethren who can do his work here. But he supposes that he has to engage 4 to 6 strangers, who will board with him and with Brother Miksch.⁶

WH's request indicates that he planned to undertake gun production in Nazareth itself. He argues that, since he

lives in Nazareth and must oversee many aspects of production, the factory must be built in Nazareth itself. Other activities could be undertaken outside of the town. The complication, WH admits, is that he will likely be unable to find enough trained Moravians to complete the Nazareth-based work, which will require him—against town regulations—to employ non-Moravians ("strangers").

The skeptical Overseers Committee worried that no "such factory has been established" in any Moravian settlement community. The need to hire strangers, from whom "one has reason to fear the worst consequences," was particularly problematic. The Committee ended up postponing a decision. But on the same day it ruled that, until Abraham Luckenbach could operate the joiner shop on his own, "Brother Henry will probably work the joiner shop in the future as he has done before"—which seemed to signal a lack of support for the changes that would be required for Henry to fulfill his government contract.⁷

WH built his factory at Jacobsburg at this time. The Overseers Committee minutes offer no further evidence about this "two-story work-shop" that he had asked permission to build in Nazareth itself. The Jacobsburg factory was not built, as has often been stated, in 1792 but rather in 1798 in order to fulfill the state contract. WH himself stated this several times:

In the years 98 to 1802-3 I was engag'd in furnishing two thousand stand of muskets for the use of the State of Pennsylvania made after a pattern given by the State... I commenc'd by erecting a considerable Building on Bushkill Creek for grinding & boring of Barrels and polishing, [and] also Smith Shops and file Shops &c. which were finished in the spring of 99.

A letter to his brother James in Detroit confirms this chronology. In 1810 WH wrote that he "had erected 12 or 13 years ago a Mill for the purpose of grinding and polishing, etc., gun work" to complete the work required by his "contracts." Only after building Jacobsburg did WH declare unequivocally that "he could not carry on the joiner's work on account of his other businesses."⁸

WH's account of the Jacobsburg factory illuminates the challenges of gunmaking in Nazareth due to the lack of trained men to produce various gun parts. WH had to hire "any common laboring man I met with who was willing to be instructed in this business of Gun making." The lock filers he recruited had been tanners, tailors, and rifle makers. He had to teach a blacksmith just out of his apprenticeship how to forge a lock, and much coal and iron was wasted before his work reached a "tolerable degree of perfection." The situation with the other smiths, the filers, and the stockers was identical. Despite such challenges, WH completed his contract in September 1803 and re-

ceived the balance of his pay from the Governor. (Nazareth authorities reported that he came to a “proper settlement” with Governor McKean but did not deliver the guns required.) At the same time, he furnished to the United States 500 identical arms for the same price: \$13.33 each.⁹

WH’s letter also reveals the later history of the Jacobsburg works. “After my contracts were completed,” he stated, he converted the gunworks “into a Grist Mill,” which “has had sufficient employ as a Country Mill.” “About ¼ of a mile below the Mill,” he added, “I have built a forge with one hammer and two fires.” WH’s Jacobsburg factory only functioned as a gun factory, then, long enough for him to complete his first major gun contract. In another 1810 letter, WH noted that his “youngest daughter is married and lives near my works, three miles from Nazareth.”¹⁰ These “works,” in 1810, were not a gunworks. By 1803, the water power from the Bushkill that had enabled the grinding and boring of barrels was grinding grain into flour.

When Jacobsburg opened, the Nazareth factory did not close, as is sometimes said. WH asked in March 1800 to add an “additional building” to his Nazareth house, presumably to facilitate gun making there. A report in 1801 of a “fire [that] broke out in a back-building in the yard of Brother W. Henry” reveals that he had a smithy on his property. A strong wind “carried some sparks from the smithy in Br. Henry’s manufactory of arms onto the roof of the back-building, which is covered with shingles, which garret was filled with hay and straw, and before somebody had observed anything, the house began to catch fire and the flames leaped out from the roof in several places.” Some of his workmen lived in the Single Brethren’s House, where they at times neglected to pay their board and came to authorities’ attention. He continued to support apprentices and other workmen in the gun trade in Nazareth: Benjamin Chitty sought work as a stocker in 1799 and Edward Warner, who had worked in a Philadelphia “gun-manufactory,” came in 1802 to “Nazareth to Brother W. Henry to work there.” WH offered to lodge another potential worker, a filer, at his own home. It is in this period that Nazareth church authorities began to receive complaints, which became frequent, about men “shooting off guns during the night.” In 1801, for instance, John Youngberg spoke to “Brother Henry about the ‘shooting’ at the factory. Brother Henry says that he cannot possible change this.” When some workmen “put up money as a prize” at these shootings, the Nazareth Elders Conference wondered whether “this is necessary in testing guns.” WH worked as a gunsmith in Nazareth, then, throughout the period that the Jacobsburg factory operated.¹¹

Even with both establishments operating, WH struggled to fulfill his government contracts. On 9 August 1800 WH

delivered 356 muskets (marked “CP”) for “safe keeping” to Youngberg; but the contract required 2000 guns. WH begged church authorities in 1802 to allow him to hire one man eager to learn “the trade,” since without more workers “he would be in great jeopardy” of failing to “supply the government with the required guns within six months.” The following month, desperate enough to risk again offending Nazareth’s authorities, he hired a “stranger” to work for two weeks making stove plates. The experience may have exhausted him. After he completed his contract in October 1803, Nazareth authorities reported that WH “intends no longer to carry on the business so largely.” Shortly after, as we have seen, he converted the Jacobsburg works into a grist mill.¹²

But his operations in Nazareth continued—as did complaints in Nazareth about the shooting of guns, long after Jacobsburg ceased to be a gunworks. WH’s eldest son, Joseph, was “work[ing] in his father’s factory” in Nazareth in 1806 after returning from a three month trip to Shippensburg to “perfect himself in his trade”: Henry Albrecht (son of Andreas) was working there at this time. In 1808, perhaps weary of battling with church authorities, WH offered to use his Nazareth operations only to file locks and polishing (and promised to hire only Brethren). He promised, too, that “the testing of the guns will not be done here in town, nor in the immediate neighborhood, but at the place where the barrels will be made, so that, in the future, there will be no further complaint on account of the discharging of guns.” Christian Brunner, an apprentice of WH years before, would “make the stock at his own house and shop,” and William Henry (III), then fourteen, would be placed with Brunner to “learn the business.”¹³

In 1808, however, WH obtained another government contract, this time partnered with his son Joseph, who had established a Philadelphia gun factory in the summer of 1807. Little evidence survives about how this partnership worked or where its guns were made. None were made in Jacobsburg, which no longer functioned as a gun factory, and Boulton was not yet built. L. D. Satterslee speculated that WH may have “made the rough forgings of the gun parts,” which were then “sent to his son in Philadelphia to be finished up.” Whatever guns or parts that WH contributed were produced in Nazareth or by nearby craftsmen to whom he outsourced particular activities.¹⁴

WH continued to employ quite a few men. Indeed, his need to “keep a variety of Articles to retail to Workmen...such as Groceries, and several Articles of Ironmongery, and occasionally other Articles,” precipitated his most serious and lasting conflict with Nazareth’s church authorities. They rebuked him in 1809 for this activity

since, by selling these goods, WH drew business away from the town's officially sanctioned store—a competitive practice, as we have seen, on which Nazareth authorities frowned. WH pointed out that he had been selling goods to his workmen ever since his 1797 “contract with the State of Pennsylvania to manufacture military arms,” which first had “oblig’d” him to “support a large number of workmen,” and no complaints had been made for a decade. This matter occupied Moravian authorities in Nazareth and beyond for many years, and WH came to believe that the treatment he received from his Nazareth brethren stemmed from prejudice and corruption.¹⁵

The documents produced during this controversy make clear both that WH employed large numbers of men and that, in addition to the Nazareth gunworks, these men worked in several industries that WH had begun while he was between government contracts. As WH told Moravian authorities, when he completed his first government contract he had “in contemplation the erection of Iron Works”:

While making the preparation, I still employed a considerable number of workmen, first making the factory into a Grist Mill, then afterward in erecting a Saw Mill and the Forge, which has continued on. On 2^d July 1809 I again entered into contract with the United States for the Manufacture of the like article as formerly for the State, conjointly with my son Joseph to the amount of \$107,000 worth, which of course again greatly increased the number of men employed by me....

WH had “vertically integrated” his business. Initially these related industries must have supported his Nazareth gun operations and his son's in Philadelphia—but they ensured, too, that he was ready to undertake the enormous 1808 contract for 10,000 guns. The difficulties of fulfilling this contract are beyond the scope of this article.¹⁶

The Jacobsburg factory had a short life as a gunworks. But, “repurposed” in 1803, it survived as an element in a diverse industrial operation along the Bushkill. William Henry should be considered, I think, as a Nazareth gunsmith: his main gun operation during his entire career as a gunsmith was his Nazareth “manufactory of arms.” But he should be recognized as a Jacobsburg industrialist. It was along the Bushkill Creek that Henry assembled the various components—grist mill, saw mill, forge—that enabled his sons to envision a new gunworks on the Bushkill that would harness them into an integrated operation called “Boulton.”

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Scott Paul Gordon, a professor of English at Lehigh University, can be reached at spg4@lehigh.edu .

ENDNOTES & ABBREVIATIONS

JHS: Henry Family Papers, Jacobsburg Historical Society
 MAB: Moravian Archives, Bethlehem
 ND: Nazareth Diary [trans.], Moravian Historical Society (MHS)
 NEC: Nazareth Elders Conference Minutes [trans.], MHS
 NOC: Nazareth Overseers Conference Minutes [trans.], MHS

1. Lititz Diary, 1/18/70, 6/27/71, MAB [tr. Roy Ledbetter]. For WH's life, see *Henry of Boulton: A Pennsylvania Gunmaking Family and its Firearms* (Nazareth, 1988), 5-13, and Hope Luhman, “Moravian Industry: The History and Archaeology of the Henry Tradition of Gunsmithing,” PhD Diss. (Bryn Mawr, 1991), 58-66, which makes good use of the ND.

2. Lititz Brethren's Diary, 8/5-28/76, MAB; Lititz Diary, 8/28/76, MAB [tr. Roy Ledbetter]; ND, 9/2/76. For WH at Christian's Spring, see Bob Lienemann, “Moravian Gunmaking: Bethlehem to Christian's Spring,” in *Moravian Gun Making of the American Revolution* (Georgia, 2010), 29-31.

3. NOC, 4/28 & 6/7 & 7/8 & 11/22/80; 5/30/81. JHS has a copy of Henry's 1780 lease, signed by Moravian Bishop Nathaniel Seidel.

4. NOC records the countless tasks assigned to WH.

5. ND, 11/3/81; NOC, 2/15/92, 1/7 & 2/12/94; 3/11/95; 11/22/97. The apprentice leaving in 1792 was Henry Albrecht (son of Andreas), which suggests the compatibility of working as a joiner and as a gunstocker: see Lienemann, “Moravian Gunmaking,” 3-4.

6. NOC, 1/17/98. For the 1797 Arms Procurement Act, see David A. Stewart and William M. Reid, “Pennsylvania Contract Muskets—1797 Arms Procurement Act,” *American Society of Arms Collectors Bulletin* 91, http://asoac.org/bulletins/91_stewart+reid_pennsylvania.pdf.

7. NOC, 1/17/98.

8. WH draft, 1813, Henry Family Papers 1758-1909, Hagley Museum & Library, Acc. 1209, Box 2 (Robert A. Sadler's “The Henrys and Arms Manufacturing,” *American Society of Arms Collectors Bulletin* 93, http://asoac.org/bulletins/93_gabler+sadler_henrys.pdf, prints this letter); WH to James Henry, 6/8/10, transcr. in JHS, Ser. I, Box 23; NOC, 6/11/99. The 1792 date originated because WH first purchased Jacobsburg land then: see Charles M. Sandwick, *Jacobsburg: A Pennsylvania Community and Its People* (Nazareth, 1985), 18; *Henry of Boulton*, 6. Luhman quotes most of WH's 1813 draft, but oddly omits the first sentence and so later reproduces an erroneous date of 1789 (“Moravian Industry,” 63, 150).

9. WH draft, 1813, Henry Fam. Papers, Hagley; NEC, 10/03.

10. WH to James Henry, 6/8 & 3/25/10, JHS. Sabina Henry (1792-1859) had married J. F. Wolle (1785-1860) in 1809. Conversions of gun boring factories and grist mills were common: Henry J. Kauffman, *The Pennsylvania-Kentucky Rifle* (Harrisburg, 1960), 155-57. For archaeology of the Jacobsburg factory site, see Virginia D. Lopresti, *Blue Skies at Jacobsburg* (Nazareth, n.d.), 33-40, and Luhman, “Moravian Industry,” 228-33.

11. NEC, 2/00, 2/20/00, 3/27 & 31/00, 4/2/00, 12/6/00, 12/15/01, 2/22/03; NOC, 3/5/00; ND, 7/28/99, 10/13/01, 9/15/02.

12. Receipt, 8/9/00, JHS, Ser. III, Bx 1, Fldr 9; NEC, 8 & 10/02, 10/03.

13. ND, 3/4/05; NEC, 4/05; 11/7/05, 2/6/06; NOC, 10/26/03. For Albrecht, see Kauffman, *Pennsylvania-Kentucky Rifle*, 170. Albrecht's children, including Barbara (who married William Henry III in 1817), were born at Shippensburg in 1799, 1802, and 1806 (*Commemorative Biographical Record of Central Pennsylvania* [Chicago, 1898], 789). In 1816, an ill Albrecht moved with his wife and 7 children to Nazareth and rented out half of WH's house: NOC, 3/11/16.

14. L. D. Satterlee to G. M. Shultz, 2/10/1938, JHS, Ser. I, Bx 23. Satterlee believed that, since WH stressed the size of his Bushkill operations, he “must have erected some further factories” or “re-converted the grist mill back into a gun-boring mill” for his 1808 contract. But WH was describing his many activities on the Bushkill, not a gun establishment (Satterlee to Schultz, 1/22/1938, *ibid.*). On the 1808 contract, see J. Joseph Henry to WH, 6/17/08, JHS, Ser. I, Bx 1, Fldr 4.

15. WH to H. Van Vleck, 10/2/09, WH to C. G. Reichel, 2/1/14, MAB.

16. WH to C. G. Reichel, 2/1/14, MAB. For vertical integration, see James T. Carden, “The Henry Gun Works and the Impact of the Federal Contract System (1808-1830),” MA Thesis (Lehigh Univ., 1998).