



Episode 10, 2003: Flint-Lock Rifle Mercer County, Pennsylvania

Wes: This episode comes from Philadelphia. But our first investigation begins a half an hour outside the city in Doylestown. August, 1783. The American revolution is winding down. But in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, a gang of loyalist saboteurs supporting the British crown still runs wild. Some call them tories, opposed to independence. Others just call them criminals. [gunshot fired] they're the Doane gang, and there's a price on their heads. Local authorities finally track the Doanes to an isolated cabin. They're surrounded, and a shootout ensues. [gunshots fired] When the smoke clears, their leader, Moses Doane, is dead. The gang leaves their legend, and maybe something else behind. Over 200 years later, the Bucks County historical society has a gun which one Doane family descendant thinks her ancestors used in the shootout. [gunshot fired]

Elyse: Donna Doane is a realtor in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. When Moses Doane and his brothers took up against George Washington, that was when their reputation started to slide and when they became the notorious Doane outlaws. I don't believe everything I hear about the Doane family, but this is one story that I would like to know the truth about. I'm Elyse Luray, and I've come to Doylestown, Pennsylvania, with Wes Cowan, to find out if a gun here really belonged to the Doane gang. Donna, tell us, what do you want to know about the gun?

Donna: I want to know if this is the gun that was used in the shootout with the Doane outlaws.

Elyse: And why would you be curious about this gun?

Donna: Well, for the family history of it. I'm a Doane and I'd like to know if it was something that was in my family.

Elyse: So, you might be the descendant of an outlaw?

Donna: Quite possible. There's a lot of legends in Bucks County about the Doanes and I just wanted to see if we could separate a little bit of the fact from fiction.

Wes: It's a really interesting question, and Elyse and I've got our work cut out for us.

Elyse: After talking it over, Wes is going to look into the gun while I'm going to investigate the story of the Doanes. I first need to determine if the political climate was right for a tory gang. I'm meeting revolutionary war historian and antique gun collector Herman Beddinghoff to find out.

Herman: You know, in the 18th century, when people think of Pennsylvania, they think of Philadelphia, the birthplace of our nation. And right around the corner in Bucks County, I was surprised to find out that there were tories, loyalists to the British crown. Well, I think it was John Adams that said at the time of the American war for independence, we have a third of the population that is strongly for us, we have a third of the population that are strongly loyalist, and then we have this third of the population that kind of floats in between. A lot of people would even change sides, depending on what the outcome of a particular battle was or what the fortunes of war were.

Elyse: Tell me about Bucks County.

Herman: Well, Bucks County at the time of the American war for independence was primarily of Quaker persuasion. Quaker persuasions were pacifists. They had a very comfortable economy going with the mother country. They were self-sufficient, so the so-called independence clause was not really attractive because no one seemed to know exactly what it meant.

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Elyse: We're investigating this story for Donna Doane, who is a relative of the Doane gang, and she believes they were loyalist.

Herman: They fit a perfect profile for loyalist. After all, they came from a Quaker heritage. Their parents were Quakers, and had the British won the war, they'd probably be heroes.

Wes: The most obvious place for me to start looking into the gun's history is right here at the Bucks County Historical Society. I'm meeting with the head curator, Corey Ainsworth, to find out what he knows. So, Corey, how long has the so-called Doane gun been in the society's collections?

Corey: Since 1924, when it was given by a descendant of Daniel Moore. Daniel Moore received the gun from his ancestor, Daniel Thomas, who had been a sheriff of Bucks County right around the turn of the 19th century.

Wes: So, after the shootout, this Sheriff Thomas picks it up at the cabin. Somehow the gun got into his possession. So there's about a 100-year gap between the time of the shootout and when this gun was first exhibited.

Corey: That's right. In 1882.

Wes: Moore, in 1882, exhibited the gun at the Bucks County bicentennial exposition. So has the society ever tried to find out exactly when the gun was made?

Corey: The research on this particular gun has not really been done. We have a collection here of more than 50,000 objects.

Wes: That's a pretty good excuse. [laughter]

Corey: It's as good as any. I'm anxious to start digging into it.

Elyse: I'm headed to the library. With all these stories surrounding the Doane outlaws, I want to find some hard evidence that proves the shootout actually happened. I'm looking through the Pennsylvania archives, a collection of colonial and state records. And I found a confession from one Jesse Vickers, a member of the Doane gang. He starts by confessing to the robbery of Bucks County treasury in 1782, which at the time, was one of the biggest robbery of public funds. And in his confession, he lists all the members of the Doane gang: Aaron Doane, Moses Doane, Maylon Doane, and it goes on to list some other people that were part of the gang. According to this, the Doane gang went on to rob about a half dozen tax collectors, all loyal to the new American regime.

"Joseph Doane and myself went together from Doane's house to one weaver, a tax collector, and forced open the door and went into the house. Levi Doane and myself agree to go to the swamp to rob one more collector...to Mr. Hole, a collector. After searching the house, we found \$1. ...and Doane demanded the money. And then he ordered the collector to collect no more."

So the Doanes were obviously targeting anyone who was collecting money for the cause of American independence. And in the process, they were making a lot of money for themselves. But the Pennsylvania authorities were onto them. "300 pounds for anyone capturing the Doane gang." It says the reward is offered, dead or alive. Still nothing here about the shootout. I'll have to dig deeper.

Wes: In order to learn if the so-called Doane gun could have been in Bucks County at the time of the shootout, I'm meeting with Ron Gable, an expert in antique Pennsylvania rifles. The first thing we want to do is work out where the gun was made. At the time, most guns were made by local gunsmiths, who had their own individual styles. What's your first impression?

Ron: The stock profile and the contour is typical of what you would see in a Bucks County gun. Here's a Bucks County gun here, and you can tell, if you look at the two guns, without knowing anything more about it, the stock profile is almost identical on these two guns. Maybe the 1820 time period.

Wes: So the stock, the gun's wooden part, doesn't fit our time period. It's too late.

Ron: And it looks like there have been some changes to the gun. The side plate is a replacement. Somebody tried to duplicate the original and just didn't use heavy enough brass. And the trigger guard is iron. It should be brass. It should be brass. And you can see where there had been another trigger guard in there. Based on all these alterations, I'd say the gun saw some pretty heavy use.

Wes: But while some of the parts are too new for the shootout, there still may be some hope.

Ron: You can look at the lock, which is the firing mechanism here. The lock is marked, H. Nock, London. He made guns for trade with the United States and he died, I believe, in about 1805.

Wes: So the lock could certainly date from the time period that we're interested in, the 1780s, then.

Ron: That's right. And if you look at the top of the barrel, there's two holes for screws. There's a screw that holds it on to this stock, and there's a second hole that had previously held it on to another stock.

Wes: So this is not the stock that started out with that barrel.

Ron: You have an English barrel, and an English lock on a Bucks County gun.

Wes: Ron, you said it was an English barrel. I assume that you said that because of these proof marks on the barrel here.

Ron: Yeah. Hopefully, we'll be able to decipher these marks and perhaps pin down the exact age of that barrel.

Elyse: I've been searching through the "Pennsylvania Gazette" and I think I just found something. It's an article from 1783.

"Last Thursday, a small party in Bucks County, having intelligence that Moses Doane, Levi Doane and Abraham Doane, all three outlawed for robbery, were in a ruined house."

And it goes on to describe a shootout between the Doane gang and a local posse. Moses Doane was killed. Levi and Abraham escaped by the back door. That's it! That's our shootout. At least we know not everything Donna's heard is pure legend. But there's no mention of a gun being found at the crime scene. Now everything rests on what Wes finds out.



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Wes: If we can match the marks on our gun barrel with a mark in one of these reference books, we'll be able to tell if it's old enough to have been at the shootout in 1783. All right, looks like we got it.

Ron: Yeah, well, this is the easy one. This is the British proof mark right here, the crown with the "v" under it. If we look in here, hopefully we're going to find that. There it is. English inspection mark, London, that's right. Since 1670, so certainly early enough. There's another set of marks on the barrel, which may help us narrow down the time frame. If we can figure out who the guy is that made the gun here. It's a rectangle with two letters, the first being a "t." this has got -- this book is basically London gun makers.

Wes: Hey, look at this! Oh, there it is.

Ron: Now wait, that looks like it. There's your "t," there's your dot. Thomas Richards. Thomas Richards. Here we go. Thomas Richards. Yeah. Gun maker, Birmingham. He died in 1779. So the barrel had to be made before the raid.

Wes: Well, that's fine. If it was made after the raid, we'd have a real problem.

So with this information, what do you think the history of this gun was?

Ron: What possibly happened is that a gun was picked up at the raid. That gun had this barrel and this lock on it. They took it home as a curio just because they wanted to have a souvenir of the raid. At some point, 15, 20 years later, they'd forgotten the importance of it, maybe. Decided to use it as a serviceable gun, got it fixed, got it restocked, and later on donated it to the historical society.

Wes: That's a great story.

Elyse: Hey.

Wes: Hi.

Elyse: So?

Wes: Got some great stuff. I've got everything we need to know about the gun.

Elyse: All right, let's go tell Donna.

Hi, Donna.

Donna: Hi, Elyse. Good to see you.

Elyse: Hi, Donna, nice to see you.

Donna: Hi, Wes.

Elyse: Donna, Wes and I have gotten a lot of information for you. And I'm happy to tell you that the Doane gang did exist. They were here in Bucks County. They were outlaws as you said. There was even a reward out for them all over the county, dead or alive. These people were up to no good. True outlaws. They were



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true outlaws. Earlier you mentioned that this gun was used in a shootout. There definitely was a shootout here in Bucks County in August, 1783.

Donna: Great. That's good.

Wes: Donna, my job was to find out about the gun. Was this gun used by the Doane outlaws in the shootout in 1783? The answer to that question is, parts of it might have been.

Donna: Okay.

Wes: The barrel and the lock definitely date to the time of the shootout. The only problem with that is that the stock, the wooden part, is a typical Bucks County walnut stock from the 1820s. So that was much later. Much later. So the answer to the question, was this gun in the Doane cabin at the shootout, is no, not the entire gun. But the barrel and the lock plate certainly could have been. So the legends continue.

Donna: Well, thank you very much. Thank you both.

Elyse: Before we leave Bucks County, we have one last stop.

Well, Donna, we got a little surprise for you.

Donna: Okay.

Elyse: See this rifle here? That's just like the one that's at the Bucks County Historical Society.

Donna: It's beautiful.

Elyse: And that's the kind of gun that your outlaw relatives would have shot at the shootout. We thought you might like to try it. Want to try it out?

Donna: Sure, I'm game. All right.

[I fell into a burning ring of fire I went down, down, down, and the flames went higher and it burns, burns, burns, the ring of fire the ring of fire]

Donna: Missed. [laughter] thank you very much.

Elyse: You're welcome. Now you're just like your ancestors.

Donna: Yes!

Elyse: 40 miles from here, the declaration of independence was signed and a new nation was born. But this gun and the Doane legend that goes with it reminds us that when it came to independence, the first Americans were far from united. And if the war had turned out differently, would the Doane gang have been called outlaws today?

ENDS



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