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Revealing the Culture of Conflict



Fig. 1. Powder Horn of William Patterson Jr. (1729/30–1761), of Stratford, CT, probably Lake George, NY, 1759. Horn, wood, black paint, iron. OL: 15 1/2", OW: 3 1/4". Inscribed: "William / Paterson / 1759" 2005.20.37

DURING THE COLONIAL WARS and the Revolution, many American soldiers carried the gunpowder for their flintlock muskets in hollowed cattle horns, plugged at both ends. (Fig. 1) These lightweight containers "kept their powder dry" and were obtained from the hundreds of cattle driven behind the troops so that "the army could travel on its stomach." Powder horns were less expensive alternatives to manufactured leather boxes with pine inserts drilled to hold paper cartridges. (Fig. 2) When dexterous comrades elaborately engraved them with the owner's name, location, date, and illustrations from the soldier's world, the horns became a kind of early-day 'dog tag' and, for posterity, a canvas for one of the few indigenous art forms of colonial America.

Today, we enjoy carved powder horns in several ways: from art history and social satire, to documentary identification and the cultural history of military life far from home, to everything from military architecture, maps, and troop movements to poetry and genealogy, and finally to the technical side of design, fabrication, and engraving. As personal possessions, the horns are rare artifacts from a world that was almost entirely male, mobile, outdoors, and non-domestic, but they are most sobering as a window on the deep ironies of war. Several powder horns, collected since the 1950s by the late William H. Guthman of Westport, Connecticut, and recently acquired by Historic Deerfield, are also signed by their carvers and are the only surviving records that identify these men. Incredibly rich as transient survivals from public service 250 years ago, each horn carries a personal history lesson from the mid-18th century about the owner and the carver — both soldiers — pressed into near anonymous roles in securing and then later destroying a major portion of the British Empire.

One horn in a hundred is noteworthy, and the best of them are distinctive and beautiful. The unidentified carver of the horn signed for William Patterson Jr. (1729/30–1761) created a bold composition of three detailed components centered by the wonderful sailing ship racing the fish around it.[1] (See Fig. 1) The artful animation is compelling because the carver's "canvas" is a tapered spiral that cannot be seen in its entirety at any one time. As a result, the best carvers had to design an overall composition comprised of essentially three parts that evolve into the next as the viewer rotates the horn. Some horns have little or no decoration on the inner curve concealed against the wearer's body.



Fig. 2. Cartridge Box, probably American, late 18th century. Leather and white pine. OH: 6 1/4", OW: 10", OD: 4" (without strap). 1124

Engraved Powder Horns from The French & Indian War

by Philip Zea, President, Historic Deerfield

The cow's horn itself is a natural, bone-like material similar to your fingernails. It is malleable when heated and can be shaved to create a thin, smooth, translucent surface. The carved wooden plug on the Rufus Hill powder horn contains a paper label protected by a thin horn window. (Fig. 3) The plastic nature of horn explains the origins of the word "lantern," or light horn. Horn was also used for purposes other than storing gunpowder. Inkhorns are rare containers for transporting ink. (Fig. 4) After Joseph Catlin died during the Deerfield Raid in 1704, his estate inventory listed a Bible, "two books & Inkhorn" appraised at five shillings six pence.[2] In the 19th century, ladies commonly used elaborate hair combs manufactured from horn.[3] (Fig. 5)

Although some powder horns bear dates before the 1740s,[4] the artistic roots of the great, engraved American







Fig. 3. Detail, Powder Horn of Rufus Hill, attributed to the Hill-Tyler Carver (working 1755), Lake George, NY, 1755. Horn, wood, paper. OL: 14 1/4", OW: 3 1/4". Inscribed on paper: *"RUFUS HILL: / Lake George Call'd by / The French Saucreman / Sepr ye 7th A:D:"* Inscribed on horn: *"RUFUS HILL / Lake George / September Ye 5 1755 / July 1755 Ye 3rd / Allbone [Albany] / Sept Ye 8th 1755 / Our Battle At The / Lake St George / Was Fought With 2300 / French. / RH"* 2005.20.5

Fig. 4. Ink Horn, England or America, 18th century. Horn. 5 5/8" Ink horns are rare artifacts of literacy that allowed for the storage and transportation of expensive ink. Mr. and Mrs. Hugh B. Vanderbilt Fund for Curatorial Acquisitions. 1993.31.1

Fig. 5. Hair Comb and Box by Alfred Willard, "Boston Comb Manufactory," Boston, MA, ca. 1832. Horn, cardboard. OH: 7", OW: 7 3/8", OD: 3 1/4" (comb); OH: 7 7/8", OW: 8 1/4", OD: 3 1/2" (box). Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur H. Ruggles Jr. in memory of Dr. and Mrs. Arthur H. Ruggles. 1986.9&10

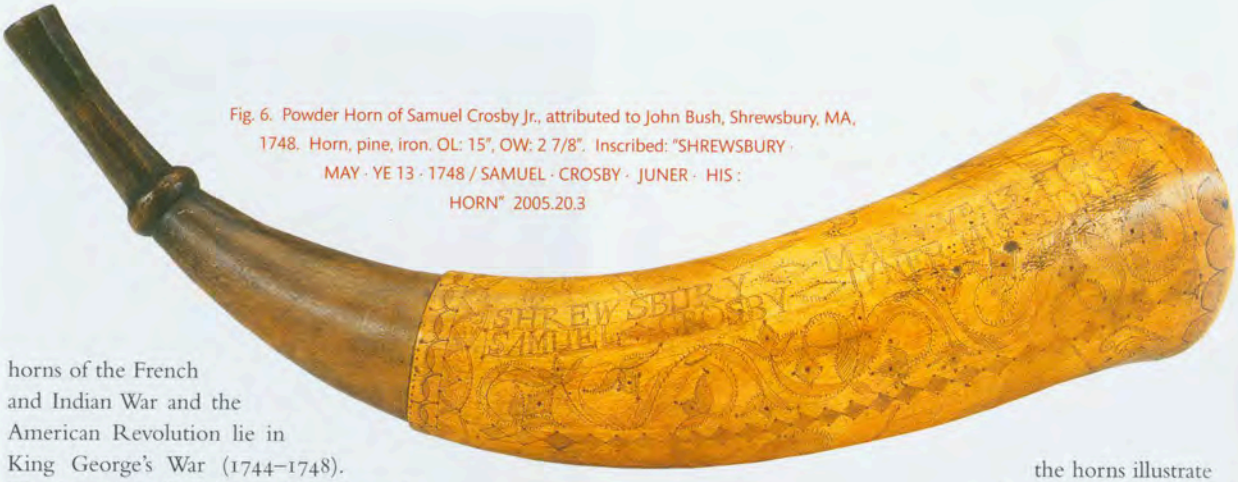


Fig. 6. Powder Horn of Samuel Crosby Jr., attributed to John Bush, Shrewsbury, MA, 1748. Horn, pine, iron. OL: 15", OW: 2 7/8". Inscribed: "SHREWSBURY · MAY · YE 13 · 1748 / SAMUEL · CROSBY · JUNER · HIS : HORN" 2005.20.3

horns of the French and Indian War and the American Revolution lie in King George's War (1744–1748). The horn inscribed in 1748 for Samuel Crosby Jr., of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, introduces the importance of that town to understanding the artistic genre of powder horns and the carving style later developed in the Lake George region of eastern New York during the French and Indian War. (Fig. 6) The prototypical Crosby horn presents neat double lines, uppercase block letters with diagonal line shading and gothic lettering interspersed with geometric devices and a scrolled border of shaded tulips. The circle of lunettes at both the throat and plug is likewise found on the later Lake George horns, and the row of shaded diamonds is also similar to the incised chevron device found on Lake George horns perfected by John Bush (born 1725), soldier and clerk, and others in the 1750s. In fact, the Crosby horn may well be the early work of Bush, who hailed from Shrewsbury and was 23 years old in 1748.[5]

The French and Indian War, or the Seven Years' War as it was called in England and Europe, raged from Quebec to the Carolinas, yet the most elaborately engraved horns were carried in New York, New England, the eastern Great Lakes, and the St. Lawrence Valley. Their colonial owners were the pawns of conflict in the intercontinental struggle of England and France for supremacy. This struggle continued through a series of wars between 1690 and 1815, ending with the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo by Lord Wellington. While history always remembers the generals and the diplomats, few artifacts from this time reveal the world of the rank-and-file, especially the part-time militia soldiers who filled the muster rolls for each summer's campaign in the woods of North America. Powder horns are a window on that world and illustrate the ethos of camp life far from home. The soldiers from Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire in particular carried their emotions on their hips. Their horns capture love gained and lost, pride, and ego, or homesickness and deprivation; natural wonders observed along the way; tedious drudgery, hopelessness, disease, and fear; and the ubiquitous suspicion of authority — hurry up and wait. While the horns illustrate the mood of men who worked and waited for the unknown, the rare words of diarists like Colonel Seth Pomeroy (1706–1777) of Northampton, Massachusetts, capture their aimless toil:



Fig. 7. Powder Horn owned by Colonel Nathan Payson of Hartford, CT, attributed to the Memento Mori Carver (working 1756–1760), Lake George, NY, October, 1756. Horn, wood, iron. OL: 16 1/2", OW: 2 7/8". Inscribed: "NATHAN. PAYSON Esq Col / LAKE. GEORGE. OC er 1756 / FORT. WM. HENRY / FORT. EDWARD / MEMENTO . MORI" 2005.20.18

Fig. 8. Detail, Powder Horn of Thomas Smith Diamond, attributed to the Goldthwait-Smith-Diamond Carver (working 1756), Lake George, NY, 1756. Horn, iron, cherry, leather. OL: 12", OW: 2 1/4". Inscribed: "Tho: Smith Diamond / His horn Camp At Lake / George Octbr 23: 1756 AD / Fort / William / Henry / Gate / The Road" 2005.20.10

Wed [Aug] 20 [1755] ... Set to work 200 or 300 men to dig a trench round our Store house with a Design to Secure ye Store House but If I was to Judge by ye Present appearance of things [it's] an ill contrived Peace of fortification . . . Thursday 21st a rainy morning & fair afternoon Came 4 Indians [that] General [Wm] Jonson Sent to Canada before he left home [for] news if any comes . . . Capt Pason the head of ye Scout that went 5 Days ago Came In this Day but Coa'd find no rhode to ye broad bay which was his business to Look out it being all mountainous.[6]

Finding one's way in the woods was critical to officers and soldiers alike, as Captain Nathan Payson of Hartford, Connecticut, could attest to Colonel Pomeroy. A year later, Payson had a colonel's commission of his own and a new powder horn engraved by the unidentified carver who signed his work "Memento Mori," or Remember Death. (Fig. 7) The horn evokes the importance of place (and of finding your way!) in the endless forest with a continuous map of the 12-mile terrain from Fort Edward to Fort William Henry, the massacre scene vividly described in James Fennimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*. Other horns, like the one that belonged to Thomas Smith Diamond, record a specific site: here the detailed plan of Fort William Henry complete with the staircases visible through the windows of the barracks. (Fig. 8) Royal Engineer Captain Harry Gordon wrote:

Fort William Henry...is a Work that consists of 4 Bastions with intermediate Curtains [section of a wall or rampart between gates, bastions, or towers] — and a Ditch 8 feet deep and about 30 wide. . . . . The Work of the Ramparts and Parapets is faced up with Large Logs of Timber bound together with smaller ones. The Rampart in most Placds 15 foot broad on the Curtains. . . . The Rampart is between 10 and 11 foot high, and the Parapets form 5 to 5 1/2 There are Barracks for between 300 and 400 men. . . . This Fort stands upon a high sandy bank 20 Foot above the Lake which covers one front . . . an Attack cannot be well carried against any but the Western Front.[7]

Most rare are the map horns that depict large tracts of land like the Hudson and Mohawk Valleys. These horns were often made away from the front as souvenirs of service, or later as reproductions, and illustrate the relationships between place names that defined regional campaigns.

Among the most beautiful powder horns are those engraved by the aforementioned John Bush. (Fig. 9) He fashioned this horn for Deerfield's William Williams Jr. in his precise but fluid hand, characterized by highly stylized capital letters, especially the letter "W," graceful C-scrolls on most of the capital letters, and borders and other decoration linked with feather-like shells and flowers. Williams served as surgeon's mate for his uncle, Doctor Thomas Williams (1718–1775) of Deerfield, and was present when Thomas' brother, Colonel Ephraim Williams Jr. (1715–1755), was killed along with the venerable Mohawk sachem, Hendrick [see pp. 58–61], in the vanguard of the "Bloody Morning Scout" at the beginning of the Battle of Lake George on September 8, 1755. After service in the 1758 and 1759 campaigns, William Williams Jr. became a surgeon in 1760 and died of smallpox that year. Bush only worked a couple of years before his capture on August 9, 1757. When his will was prematurely probated on October 14, 1758, he was described as the "Negro son of Georges Bush," who a month before had petitioned Governor Thomas Pownall (1722–1805) for help locating John, a "Mulatto Fellow, about 30 years of age." That year — 1758 — ironically marked the apex of powder horn carving in the work of other craftsman whom Bush influenced, Samuel Lounsbury, Nathaniel Selkrig, "JW," and "Memento Mori."[8]

The powder horn owned by Israel Putnam (1718–1790) of Pomfret, Connecticut, a captain in Rogers' Rangers, is attributed to Bush or more likely Samuel Lounsbury.[9] (Fig. 10) The Putnam horn is characterized by the four-line rhyme, baroque floral design, volute border at the throat, and deeply carved dark zigzag accent of the illuminated lettering of the word "WAR." Of special interest is the "plan of the stations from Alboney to Lake George," which includes diagrams of Fort William Henry (near the plug) and Fort Edward, and notes the location of smaller blockhouses along "The Road" between the two.

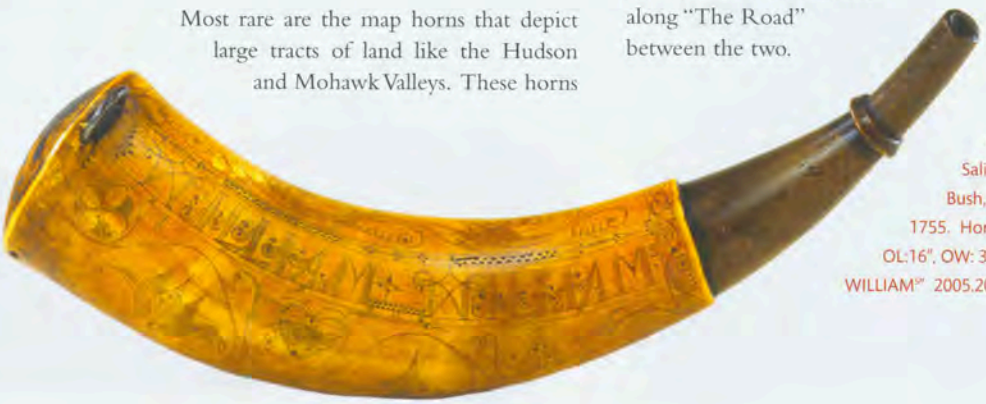


Fig. 9. Powder Horn of William Williams Jr. (died 1760) of Deerfield and Sheffield, MA, and Salisbury, CT, attributed to John Bush, probably Lake George, NY, 1755. Horn, pine, iron, pigment. OL:16", OW: 3 1/4". Inscribed: "WILLIAM WILLIAM" 2005.20.6

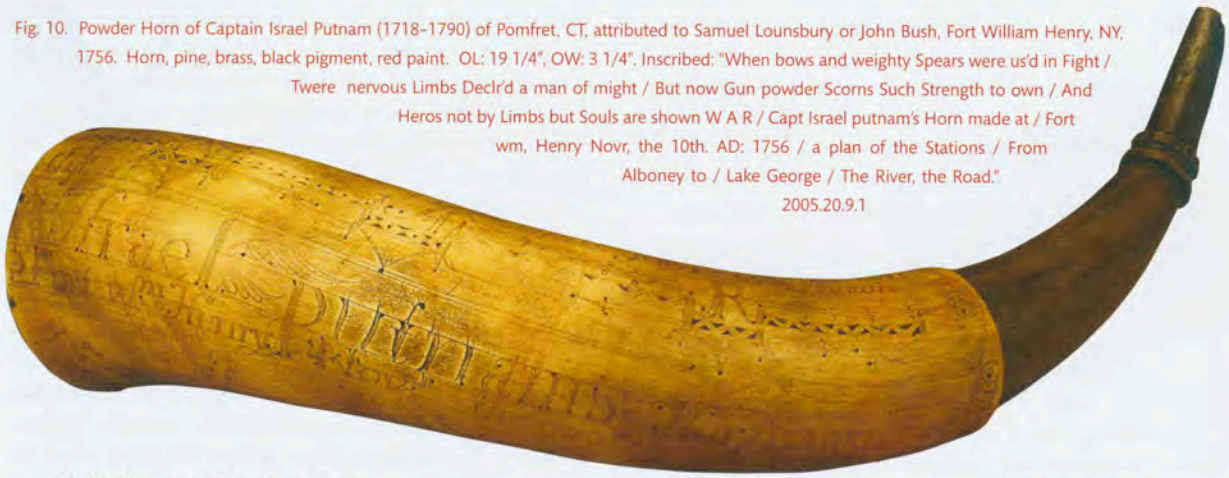


Fig. 10. Powder Horn of Captain Israel Putnam (1718-1790) of Pomfret, CT, attributed to Samuel Lounsbury or John Bush, Fort William Henry, NY, 1756. Horn, pine, brass, black pigment, red paint. OL: 19 1/4", OW: 3 1/4". Inscribed: "When bows and weighty Spears were us'd in Fight / Twere nervous Limbs Declr'd a man of might / But now Gun powder Scorns Such Strength to own / And Heros not by Limbs but Souls are shown W A R / Capt Israel putnam's Horn made at / Fort wm, Henry Novr, the 10th. AD: 1756 / a plan of the Stations / From Alboney to / Lake George / The River, the Road." 2005.20.9.1

If this horn could talk, what a story it would tell. Israel Putnam is a New England legend. Leader of a company in Rogers' Rangers, he was promoted to the rank of major in 1758 before capture and imprisonment in Canada. Made a lieutenant colonel during the 1759 campaign, Putnam later commanded a company during the 1762 Havana Expedition in the Caribbean where he was shipwrecked during a hurricane. Two years later, he fought against Pontiac near Detroit. After the war, he opened the General Wolfe Tavern in Pomfret, Connecticut, and became prominent in the Sons of Liberty. When the Lexington Alarm came, Putnam rushed to Cambridge. He became lieutenant colonel of the 11th Regiment of Connecticut militia and eventually major general. At the Battle of Bunker Hill, it was Putnam who reputedly commanded, "Don't shoot until you see the whites of their eyes!" In the 19th century, Putnam's powder horn became as legendary as its owner. It was exhibited at the dedication of the Bunker Hill Monument in 1843 and at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876.[10]

Although the Putnam story is made-for-Hollywood, the interpretive value of his powder horn lies in exploring the near anonymous conditions that created it. The toughest questions surround: Who were the carvers? What sort of people were they? The horn that bears the name of Richardson Miner provides an angle on the militia regiments from southern New England and what their society was like. This horn was quite likely made by its owner and is characterized by a deeply incised floral design of stylized tulips meticulously executed by a competent engraver whose skill exceeded all other horn carvers during the French and Indian War. (Fig. 11)

Richardson Miner served during the 1755 campaign as armorer in the 2nd Connecticut Regiment, and during the 1760 campaign in the same capacity.[11] The importance of his assignment cannot be understated. As a craftsman experienced in working with a range of metals and alloys, it fell to the armorer to keep the ordnance in good working order, and when possible to make something out of nothing. The musket illustrated is a mongrel made of disparate parts by a man like Miner. (Fig. 12) The butt plate and barrel bands are French in style. The barrel and stock are American-made. The trigger may be French while the trigger guard is probably German or Dutch. The later lock is English.[12] Colonel Seth Pomeroy, though an officer, was also a gunsmith and an armorer. He describes in his diary the amount of broken equipment left on the battlefield that still held intrinsic importance. Just after the Battle of Lake George, he wrote:

> *Wed [Sept] 10th we put up & brought In a grat qunty of ye French Stores gun blankit hatchit &c. Provisions 2 or 3 waggon load. Thursday 11th a number more Sent out to Pick up what they Could Find Left in the Battle. Friday, Sept 12 . . . we are more and more Convinst [that] yt our Enemies have met with a grate State by Picking up there things [that they] yet In there hast run off & Left.*[13]

Back home in Stratford, Connecticut, Richardson Miner worked as a clockmaker and silversmith.[14] In the lower hallway of the Ashley House at Historic Deerfield is a fine tall clock made by Miner about the same time as his horn. The style of the engraved name on the clock is quite similar to the







name engraved on the powder horn. (Figs. 13, 14) Miner's training in metallurgy equipped him to serve as an armorer, maintaining the weapons of his comrades, and his ability to engrave silver and brass gave his burin a pastime and a purpose on an occasional powder horn in the woods of New York and New France.

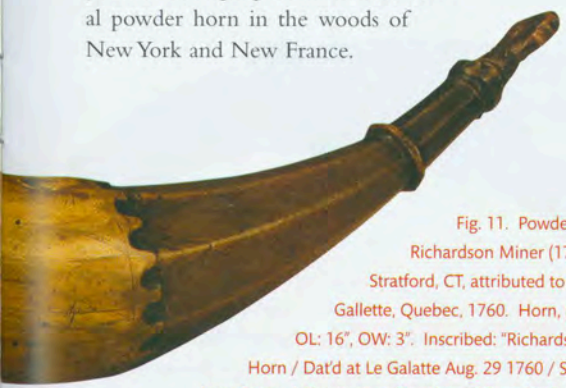


Fig. 11. Powder Horn of Richardson Miner (1736–1797) of Stratford, CT, attributed to his hand, La Gallette, Quebec, 1760. Horn, pine, iron. OL: 16", OW: 3". Inscribed: "Richardson / Miner's Horn / Dat'd at Le Galatte Aug. 29 1760 / Sir I hope you hant forgot / Always to strike when Th'Iron hot" 2005.20.32



Fig. 12. Detail, Musket, 18th-century. Cherry, iron, steel, brass. OL: 57 1/2". Gift of Mrs. June K. Lauzon. 1991.52. The .72 caliber musket is made from an American barrel and stock; barrel bands, trigger, and a butt plate that are French in style; a trigger guard that may be Dutch or German, and a later English lock.

Fig. 13. Tall Clock by Richardson Miner, Stratford, CT, ca. 1760. Cherry, eastern white pine; brass, steel, iron, glass. OH: 87", OW: 18", OD: 11 1/2". Gift of Eric M. Wunsch. 1969.288

Fig. 14. Detail, Clock Dial by Richardson Miner.

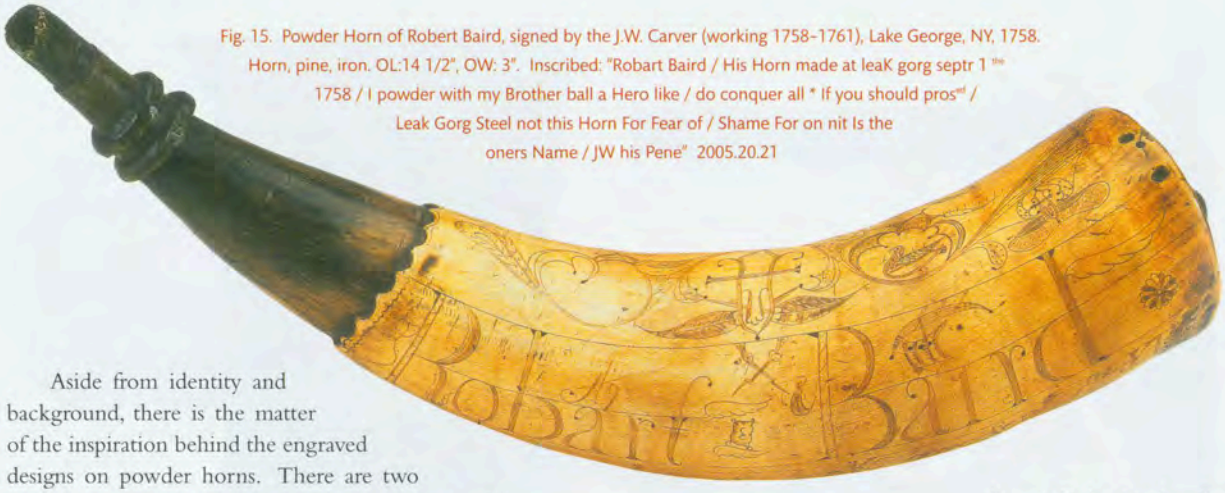


Fig. 15. Powder Horn of Robert Baird, signed by the J.W. Carver (working 1758–1761), Lake George, NY, 1758. Horn, pine, iron. OL:14 1/2", OW: 3". Inscribed: "Robart Baird / His Horn made at leaK gorg septr 1 the 1758 / I powder with my Brother ball a Hero like / do conquer all * If you should prosed / Leak Gorg Steel not this Horn For Fear of / Shame For on nit Is the oners Name / JW his Pene" 2005.20.21

Aside from identity and background, there is the matter of the inspiration behind the engraved designs on powder horns. There are two essential sources: the world back home and the world at hand. Soldiers at home would have seen asymmetrical crewel embroidery executed by their mothers, wives, and sisters, and a walk to town might reveal the floral carving on gravestones in the mid-18th century. The larger towns supported printers whose presses supplied engraved ornament on title pages and mastheads. In turn, everyone's ledger provided access to handwriting styles — some more florid than others. The more literate might have had access to calligraphy books and formal training. However, the more relevant influences on horn engraving were probably found right in camp: on printed maps, officer's commissions, and other public documents. The interrelationships between engraving, printing, and florid handwriting — even regardless of literacy — seem logical and is recorded on the powder horn of Robert Baird, signed at Lake George in 1758 by the anonymous carver, "JW his Pene." (Fig. 15) Books and magazines may have inspired his conventions: the crossed muskets, Oriental style ships, and detached birds and mammals. "JW" must have been a trained engraver accustomed to using alternating thin and thick lines to enliven his art. At the same time, the work of "JW" is clearly in the delicate hand of a careful copyist inspired by the work of John Bush and others.

Regardless of source, powder horns by nature of their purpose and surroundings are mostly about death. The horn of John Rockwell (1733–1825) is attributed to the anonymous *Memento Mori* carver (Remember Death). (Fig. 16) He worked between 1756 and 1760 around Lakes George and Champlain, and at Fort Oswego on Lake Ontario where this horn was carved. His horns include a border around the plug that consists of a series of dotted or crosshatched lunettes or triangles. The cartouches surrounding the names and dates have a similar border and present the most fully developed Baroque ornament found on American powder horns. His depictions of maps and buildings are detailed, like the tents and garden at Fort Oswego. Some horns have a head in profile with a pipe, or in this case, the Devil, uttering phrases like "Fools such as we," a timeless comment on the soldier's lot in life. Cynic or realist, *Memento Mori* clearly had formal training as an engraver and exposure to stylized engraved ornament.[16]

At the same time, powder horns also connote survival. One of the greatest horn carvers was a survivor of both the French and Indian War and the American Revolution. His name is Jacob Gay, an enigmatic carver who may have been from central New Hampshire and of Acadian origins since his name is sometimes spelled Guay. Horns associated with him

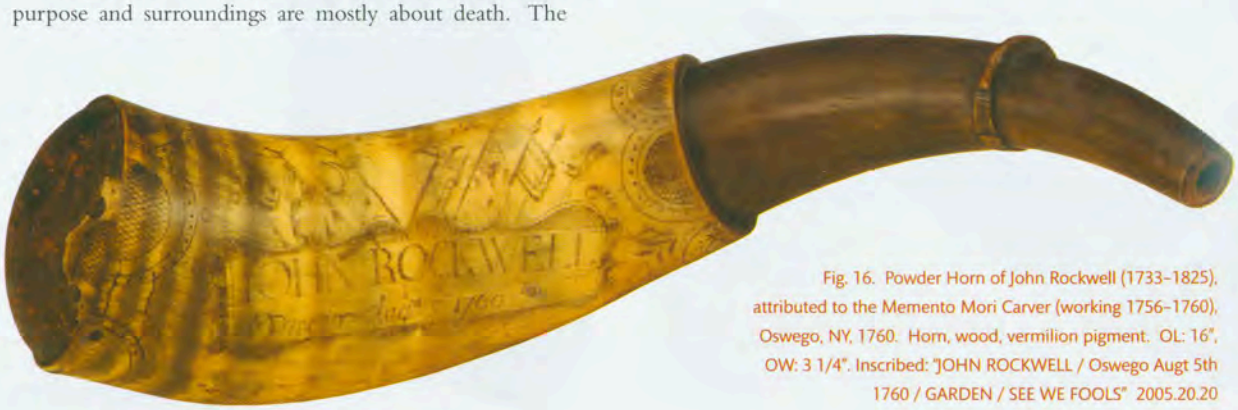


Fig. 16. Powder Horn of John Rockwell (1733–1825), attributed to the Memento Mori Carver (working 1756–1760), Oswego, NY, 1760. Horn, wood, vermilion pigment. OL: 16", OW: 3 1/4". Inscribed: "JOHN ROCKWELL / Oswego Augt 5th 1760 / GARDEN / SEE WE FOOLS" 2005.20.20

range greatly in quality and are characterized by beautifully shaded letters with strong contrasts, delicate scrolling, and amusing faces. The scalloped border is deeply carved, and the animals are muscular. (Fig. 17) The horn signed by Gay for John Mills is one of the finest examples of his work and was Bill Guthman's favorite. A John Mills served in Captain Alexander Todd's Company of the New Hampshire provincial regiment stationed at Crown Point in 1760 when this horn was signed.[17]

The engraving on powder horns captures the personalities, concerns, and surroundings of their owners and makers through abstract pictures and text — like a perpetual museum label. They tell of ego, loyalty, revolt, loss, boredom, satire, fear, despair, memory, place, death, and survival. In fact, very few artifacts whose purpose is dominantly functional become simultaneously a kind of personal scrapbook on something as primal and poignant in society as the ironies of war. Rather than capturing time in a bottle, powder horns capture what mattered most to a soldier at a personal level and at a given time and place. They are simultaneously rare documents of history and expressions of emotion while arguably, on the aesthetic side, one of the few indigenous art forms of colonial America. As a genre, powder horns evoke the significance of cultural allegiance and memory-making in the study of history. The best powder horns in unison reveal the individual differences within the soldier's world, despite its veil of anonymity, and share better than any other artifact what "made America" 250 years ago.



Fig. 17. Powder Horn of John Mills, signed by Jacob Gay (working 1758–1787), Crown Point, NY, 1760. Horn and pine. OL: 14", OW: 3 1/4". Inscribed: "JOHN Mills / his horn Made at Crown Point / November the 4 1760 / J G" 2005.20.26

ENDNOTES

1. William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner, 1746–1781* (Hartford: The Connecticut Historical Society, 1993), 149.

2. Estate Inventory of Joseph Catlin, Deerfield, MA, 1705. Hampshire County Probate Records, 3:146.

3. Mary Musser, "A Century of Combmaking, 1775–1875," *Old-Time New England* 68, no. 251 (Winter/Spring 1978): 59–68; Hazel Baker Clark, "Our Colonial Comb Industry," *Old-Time New England* 41, no. 142 (Fall 1950): 41–45.

4. Although many powder horns bear dates contemporaneous with their making, one must always consider that a carved date may commemorate an earlier event or have been added later.

5. Guthman, 34–38, 80–81.

6. *The Journals and Papers of Seth Pomeroy,* ed. Louis E. DeForest (New York: The Society of Colonial Wars in the State of New York, 1926), 109–10.

7. As quoted in, *Military Affairs in North America, 1748–1765,* ed. Stanley Pargellis (New Haven, CT: Archon Books, 1969), 177–78. See also, Mary Ann Rocque, *A Set of Plans and Forts in America, Reduced from Actual Surveys* (London: 1765), plates 21, 26.

8. Lee A. Larkin, "A Case for Mistaken Attribution: Or, Findings of a Study of the Engraving on the Powder Horns Attributed to John Bush" (reproduced by the author, n.d.); Guthman, 38–39, 85–88; George Sheldon, *A History of Deerfield, Massachusetts,* 2 vols. (Deerfield, MA: Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, 1895–1896), 2:379, 381.

9. Larkin, 3–12.

10. Guthman, 93–95. See Data File 2005.20.9.1 Collections Manager's Office, Historic Deerfield, Inc., Deerfield, MA.

11. *Ibid,* 47–48, 138–40.

12. Consultation with William H. Guthman by the author, June 12, 1992. See, Merrill Lindsay, *The New England Gun, The First Two Hundred Years* (New Haven, CT: Eastern Press, 1975), 25–31.

13. Pomeroy, 115–16.

14. Winthrop D. Warren and Christopher Nevins, "Clocks and Clockmakers of Colonial Fairfield," *National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors Bulletin* (December 1993): 686–91. A half-dozen tall clocks by Miner survive.

15. Guthman, 42, 115–21.

16. *Ibid,* 44–46, 112–14.

17. *Ibid,* 42, 44–45, 122–28.