

# The Musket and Bayonet of Isaac Whitcomb, Continental Soldier

By Peter Albee

My good friend and gunsmith Andy Addams had a gentleman walk into his shop with an old musket that was in need of repair and was very dirty. Andy bought it for parts and put it in the corner of his shop. Two years later, the same gentleman came back and gave him the bayonet (Figure 1) for the musket, which he had just found.

It was a great colonial period bayonet and that got Andy all excited. So he started cleaning and restoring the gun. While cleaning the gun, a name appeared on the side plate: "I. Whitcomb" (Figure 2).

A friend of Andy's researched the name in *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors in the War of the Revolution*, and this is what he found (Figure 3):

*Whitcomb, Isaac, Stow (also given Acton and Littleton). Private, Capt. Job Whipple's co., Col. Rufus Putnam's 5th (also given 4th) regt.; Continental Army pay accounts for service from Jan. 20, 1777, to Jan. 20, 1780; residence, Stow; credited to town of Stow; also, Colonel's Co., Col. Bigelow's regt.; Continental Army pay accounts for service from Jan. 1, 1780 to Dec. 31, 1780; residence, Acton; also, descriptive list dated West Point, Jan. 10, 1781; Capt. 10 in.; complexion dark; hair, gray; eyes, gray; residence, Stow; enlisted Dec., 1779, by Capt. Brown; enlistment, during war; company joined from 15th Mass. regt.; also, Private, Capt. Michael Gab'l Houdin's co., Col. Putnam's regt.; muster rolls for Jan.-April, 1781, dated West Point; also, list of United States pensioners made up to Dec. 31, 1787, as returned by John Lucas, Commissary of Pensions; 5th*



*Mass. regt.; age, 52 yrs.; residence, Littleton; reported disabled by rheumatism, etc.; pensioned Sept. 1, 1782.*

In April of 2011, I was going by Andy's shop and stopped in to say "hi." He met me at the door and said, "Peter! Am I glad to see you. Look at this musket!" He handed me the gun and showed me the name on the side plate. I thought it was a great musket. He then handed me the bayonet, which I loved and started to tell me how he got the musket (Figure 4) and handed me the history of I. Whitcomb.

Growing up in Sudbury, Mass., which bordered two of the towns involved (Acton and Stow) and loving the history of that area (Figure 5), I was extremely interested. Andy told me that the musket could be for sale. It didn't take long for me to walk out of the door with it.

I took the musket (Figure 6) to the next meeting of the Massachusetts Arms Collectors, and showed

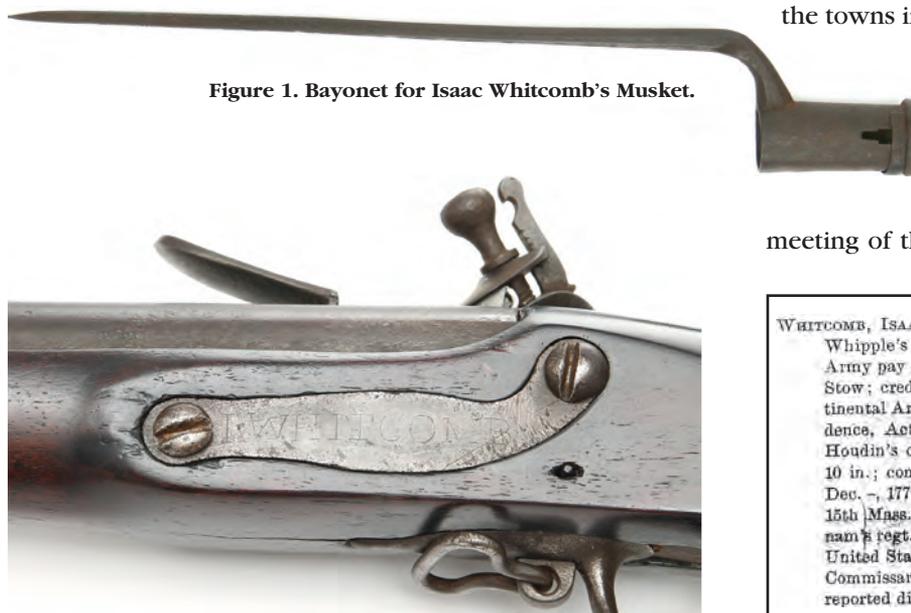


Figure 1. Bayonet for Isaac Whitcomb's Musket.

Figure 2. Side plate with "I. Whitcomb".

WHITCOMB, ISAAC, Stow (also given Acton and Littleton). Private, Capt. Job Whipple's co., Col. Rufus Putnam's 5th (also given 4th) regt.; Continental Army pay accounts for service from Jan. 20, 1777, to Jan. 20, 1780; residence, Stow; credited to town of Stow; also, Colonel's co., Col. Bigelow's regt.; Continental Army pay accounts for service from Jan. 1, 1780, to Dec. 31, 1780; residence, Acton; also, descriptive list dated West Point, Jan. 10, 1781; Capt. Houdin's co., Col. Putnam's regt.; rank, Private; age, 46 yrs.; stature, 5 ft. 10 in.; complexion, dark; hair, gray; eyes, gray; residence, Stow; enlisted, Dec., 1779, by Capt. Brown; enlistment, during war; company joined from 15th Mass. regt.; also, Private, Capt. Michael Gab'l Houdin's co., Col. Putnam's regt.; muster rolls for Jan.-April, 1781, dated West Point; also, list of United States pensioners made up to Dec. 31, 1787, as returned by John Lucas, Commissary of Pensions; 5th Mass. regt.; age, 52 yrs.; residence, Littleton; reported disabled by rheumatism, etc.; pensioned Sept. 1, 1782.

Figure 3. History of Isaac Whitcomb as listed.



Figure 4. Isaac Whitcomb's Musket.

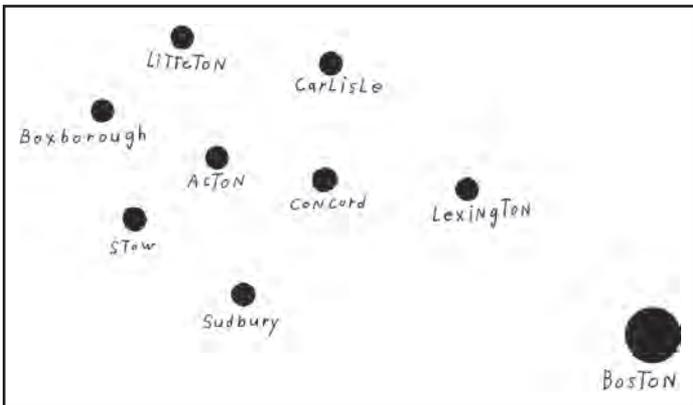


Figure 5. Approximate location of the Albee home-Sudbury, and Isaac Whitcomb-Stow.



Figure 6. Lock on Isaac Whitcomb's Musket.

it to some of the colonial collectors there. We all agreed that it was stocked with American walnut. They felt that the lock was Dutch or German and was made around 1750 to 1760. The .69 caliber barrel looked like it was an early French example. The front band was a little difficult to identify, but was in the French style probably from about 1763 to 1766. The middle band was 1763 French. The back band and trigger guard were 1774 pattern French. The colonial bayonet was one of the best that they had seen.

After the battles of Lexington and Concord, the Colonial States all looked to Europe for arms. Massachusetts was one of the first states to receive muskets from Europe. In 1775 and 1776, they received thousands of arms in all kinds of condition. Probably most of these early deliveries came

from Liege rather than directly from France and included an assortment of French style muskets as well as other patterns.

There were hundreds of workmen in the colonies busy repairing, restocking and making up serviceable muskets with bayonets that would meet the needs of the new Colonial Army. The example I purchased was probably one of these stands of arms.

Soldiers joining the army in 1777 normally signed up for a three-year enlistment, and most of them brought their own equipment. I did some research on I. Whitcomb and discovered that there were two Isaac Whitcombs living in Littleton during the revolution, one born in 1730 and the other born in 1755.

I called the Littleton town hall and they gave me the name and phone number of John Hathaway, who was very active in their historical society. When I called John, he offered to help me if he could. When I told him the name on the musket was Isaac Whitcomb, there was a long pause, and then he said, "Oh, that was my great, great, great, great grandfather!"

Now we were both excited and agreed to meet at the Littleton Historical Society building the next day. I met John Whitcomb Hathaway (his mother was a Whitcomb) and his cousin David Whitcomb (Figure 7). The meeting was very



Figure 7. David Whitcomb and John Whitcomb Hathaway at Liberty Square holding the Isaac Whitcomb Musket.



**Figure 8. Don Morse at the grave of Isaac Whitcomb's Mother's grave. She was Don's grandmother 6 generations back.**

informative. I learned that the Whitcomb family had many members in the revolution. The older Isaac Whitcomb and other family members marched with the Littleton Militia to Acton where they joined up with the Acton Militia and proceeded to the North Bridge in Concord. There they met 100 British soldiers and a battle erupted. Two Acton men were killed along with four British. The British retreated into the town of Concord. I was now able to answer the question of which Isaac carried my musket. Two Whitcomb's were killed at Bunker Hill, Peter Whitcomb and Isaac Whitcomb, but the Isaac Whitcomb who died was only 20 years old at the time.

I also learned that the town of Littleton was founded and first settled by Josiah and John Whitcomb in 1693. John was Isaac's grandfather. The modern-day John and David then took me to Liberty Square in Littleton and showed me a granite monument with the names of Littleton volunteers who fought in the revolution. There were seven Whitcombs listed. Then we went to the old North Cemetery where Isaac was buried. There we met Don Morse (Figure 8) who gave us a tour of the cemetery. Don is 79 years old and his great

grandmother was a Whitcomb; Don is the tenth generation who is still living on the Whitcomb farm.

On January 20, 1777 Isaac Whitcomb enlisted in Stowe in Rufus Putnam's Fourth and Fifth Mass regiment. The town of Stowe may have paid bounties for new recruits or it was simply where Putnam's regiments were recruiting. The Whitcomb family were landowners, so Isaac could afford to equip himself. Rufus Putnam and his Fourth and Fifth Mass regiments were in the battle of Saratoga. In the first part of the battle, they played a small role, but in the second battle, also known as the Battle of Bemis Heights, they successfully attacked a corner of the British defensive position and overran it. Burgoyne was forced to retreat and eventually surrendered. Putnam's unit then went to West Point, NY where they built a fort and patrolled the area.

At the end of Isaac's three-year enlistment, he joined Colonel Bigelow's Fifteenth Mass regiment on January 1, 1780, signing up for one year. The war was moving south and the Fifteenth marched to Georgia and then back to West Point. At the end of his year, Isaac rejoined Rufus Putnam's regiment with whom he served until the end of the war.