

The Trade in Sword Blades

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The eighteenth and nineteenth century experience in America was one where the import trade vied with domestic manufacture to supply the goods needed for everyday life. The 18th century mercantile theory was that colonies would not produce any manufactured goods, but would send raw materials to the mother country in exchange for already fabricated items. However, there was a domestic manufacture of all sorts of articles in America from the earliest days in defiance of British mercantile policies.

With the American Revolution, there was no longer a legal impediment to American manufacture but the merchants of Birmingham and London would not give up that easily preferring to flood America with goods of all kinds making domestic manufacture economically untenable. The country tended to divide geographically on this issue with New England having sufficient water power and a population which could not prosper on farming alone locked in controversy with the south whose system of plantations encouraged a thriving trade with England and Europe. This controversy, centering on “the tariff” issue, continued through the Civil War and beyond with the eventual victory of manufacturing interests over the agricultural. The military trade floated along with these shifts in manufacturing capabilities and strength (Figure 1).

The great collection of newspapers which forms the core of the collections of the American Worcester Antiquarian Society is now on line via Readex. This huge repository contains papers from as early as 1680 through, practically speaking, about 1840 though with stragglers to 1860. The largest body of these papers relates to New England though all other states in the Union until that time are represented. Through this collection we can now see the outlines of the import trade and domestic manufacturing in a way previously unavailable.

One aspect of the military trade which can be understood thanks to the availability of the AWAS newspaper col-



lection is the widespread import of sword blades along with already finished swords. It is clear that individual importers could and did obtain them either way. Some examples will speak to the diversity of the import trader.

In the *Baltimore Daily Intelligencer*, July 15, 1794, page 1, William Ball, a well known silversmith and sword maker advertises “The subscriber will give the highest price for new or second hand SWORD BLADES. WILLIAM BALL, Silversmith in Market Street.” The *Boston Gazette*, May 23, 1803, Supplement 2 shows “. . . JONATHAN PHILLIPS, has received . . . a general assortment of HARD WARE . . . at No. 1 Ann-Street, Halbeck, Atwood and Blister’d Steet; German Saws; Sword Blades; Looking-Glasses-&c.”

Alfred and George Welles of Boston dealt extensively in military equipments along with shell combs, elegant ear rings, silver ware and jewelry. They basically imported their wares but also manufactured both jewelry and silver ware at 55 Cornhill. They advertised in the *Boston Gazette*, April 30, 1812, page 4 selling “. . . Gilt and plated Scymiter (sic) Swords and Hangers—silver, gilt and plated mounted Cut and Thrust Swords—gilt band plated Scabbard Dirks and Stilletoes (sic)—elegant Embroidered Sword and Dirk Belts—English and French Hat Trimmings . . . Sword Knits—Rozetts (sic)—elegant gold and silver Epauettes, with counter Straps . . . silk and worsted Sashes—16, 18 and 20 inch Vulture Plumes, of all colors—gilt and plated Breast Plates—a few sets of Horsemen and Artillery Swords, and Sword Blades—Horsemen and Pocket Pistols . . .”



Figure 1. French-made eagle headed sword made for the American trade and signed “A. Berger Warranted” circa 1810.

Halbach Steel, referenced in the Phillips advertisement above also appears in the *Mercury and New England Palladium*, January 15, 1802, page 3 which notes “. . . Halbach’s Best German Steel Mill Saws” “. . . Brass Hilted Swords suitable for a Company of Artillery, Horsemen’s sword Blades, Artillerymen’s ditto . . .” H & B. Penhallow appear in the *New-Hampshire Gazette*, March 11, 1797, page 4 as having “imported from London, Bristol and Liverpool, and by the Commerce from Amsterdam . . . Horsemen’s Pistols, Hangers and Broad Sword Blades.” The Penhallows were also selling a general line of hardware, tools and saddlery. John J. Staples, Jr. also advertises in the *New York Daily Advertiser*, August 4, 1792 as having imported from Europe aboard the “Montgomery,” the “Mary” from Bristol and the “Hannah” from Liverpool a variety of jewelry, plated and silver wares, personal articles, back gammon tables “. . . Guns and Gun-Locks, Swords and Sword Blades, Patent Pistols and Gilt Wire for Sword Grips . . .” Daniel Parker, a Boston Goldsmith advertised in the *Boston Gazette*, September 24, 1764, page 4 as having imported from London jewelry and tools, molding sand “. . . Sword Blades Turkey oil stones, German ditto Bohemia polishing stones . . .”

Marine T. Wickham, best known for his role in the development of US Arms had a secondary business as a military goods store at 94 Market Street in the late 18 teens and 1820s. His advertisement in *Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser*, July 3, 1819, page 1 shows “Wickham & Co.” selling Hardware, Military and Sportsmen’s Articles including “. . . GUN LOCKS and Mounting and component parts of small arms, Dirks,



Figure 2. Imported sword made for M. T. Wickham circa 1817–28. Marine T. Wickham had a military goods business in addition to his work inspecting US arms.

WICKHAM Co.
 No. 94, Market Street, three doors above
 Third Street,
 I HAVE just received from the Manufacturer
 in England. an assortment of Hardware,
 Military and Sportsmen's Articles, all selected
 M. T. Wickham, among which are an exten-
 sive assortment of Lancashire and Sheffield
 files, consisting of 230 kinds.
 Steel of the following descriptions, viz: Cast,
 cutsmans, Shear, German, Blister, Crowley,
 Ford, Coach and Small Spring, &c. &c. 15
 sizes, assorted from one quarter inch to the
 greatest size.
 A great variety of Fowling Pieces, Pistols,
 locks, and component parts of each, with every
 article necessary to equip either the Fowler or
 sportsman.
 A selection of Hardware, such as Anvils,
 files, Saws, Chisels and Gouges, Braces and
 bits, Planes and Irons, Stock Shears, Emery,
 wheels, Sand Paper, &c. &c. all which they
 offer on the lowest terms, for cash or short ac-
 ceptances. Feb 28 1819

Figure 2A.

Swords and Sword
 BLADES, a great variety
 of Fowling and Fishing
 Tackle . . .” (Figures 2
 and 2A).

From the above
 sampling drawn from
 many other advertise-
 ments for military goods
 and hardware importers
 it is evident that arms
 and their component
 parts were standard arti-
 cles of trade. Sword
 blades need to be con-
 sidered in the same class
 as imported Ketland and
 other European im-

ported arms as a typical item of trade. This explains the variety of hiltings and scabbards present in American swords “manufactured in part” by the silversmith who produced fine hilt of precious metals to the country blacksmith.

This does not mean there was no American manufacture of sword blades. These foreign imports competed with American manufacturers such as Lewis Prahl and the Rose family, both of Philadelphia. It is an anomaly of the way the trade developed that Philadelphia, a center of blade production from the Revolution through 1820, would acquire a similar focus in the blade import, rather than blade manufacture, trade during the next forty years. Even so, not all Philadelphia swords of the 1790s contained blades made in Philadelphia any more than all swords used in Philadelphia after 1820 employed imported blades. One interesting sword series is marked on the blade “WILHELM TESCHE PETERS SOHN IN SOLINGEN FECIT” These swords often have the titles “AMERICAN LIGHT HORSE” and “PENNSYLVANIA LIGHT HORSE” conspicuously engraved on the blades. The Tesche swords are often, but not always, brass hilted. Brass hiltling is often seen as a characteristic Philadelphia manufacture but, in this case, it is unknown if these swords were completely made in Solingen, Germany or were imported as parts and assembled in Philadelphia using Philadelphia brass hilts.

To understand the relationship between a manufacturer/importer and a blade manufacturer in the second quarter of the 19th century let us turn to the best documented of those relationships—that of F. W. Widmann and the Horstmann brothers of Philadelphia and the Weyersberg firm back in Solingen.

The most prominent sword “mounter” in Philadelphia from 1820 till his death in 1848 was Frederick W. Widmann, a native of Bremen, Germany who arrived in Philadelphia on



Figure 3. A typical Widmann hilt circa 1820–40. It is marked with his name on the guard.



Figure 4. "Honour and Country" blade with Weyersberg crowned head mark. The grips which are all that remain of the hilt are from Philadelphia.

October 23, 1816 aboard the brig Hannah with one trunk, one knapsack and four boxes of tools. One tool Widmann is known to have used extensively was a rolling machine which impressed leaf ornamental devices on a narrow ribbon of brass. These ornaments would characterize Widmann's hilts for the next thirty years (Figure 3).

Widmann brought something else from Germany—a connection with the well known firm of Weyersberg Gebruder (brothers) of Solingen, the capital of German blade manufacture. The firm was founded in the early 1770s by the Weyersberg family whose trademark was a king's head facing left. The Weyersberg company continued past the death of the last of the brothers in 1829 and was finally amalgamated with W. R. Kirschbaum & Cie in 1883. This crowned head trademark was a common feature on American swords of the period 1820–1865, in large part because of the use of Weyersberg blades by both Widmann and his successor the Horstmann Brothers. However, Weyersberg was by no means their exclusive property. This "HONOUR AND COUNTRY" blade circa 1820 also has a typical Philadelphia bone grip as the sole remaining piece of the hilt. It prominently features the crowned head mark. While the hilt maker could have been Widmann, it was more likely some other mounter as the Philadelphia grip is not typical of his work (Figure 4).

Widmann's greatest work was the gold mounted presentation sword presented to Andrew Jackson by the citizens of Philadelphia on January 1, 1835 on the twentieth anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans. The presentation is described in the *Richmond Enquirer* on January 17, 1835, page 4. This sword today is on exhibit at the Hermitage in Nashville with the scene depicted in gold relief on the lower portion of the scabbard. The scene is also etched on a sword blade marked

"F. W. WIDMANN/SWORD MOUNTER." Titled on the blade is "THE BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS" with a battle scene running the length of the blade. This blade is marked with only a star rosette and its status as a domestic product or an import is in question (Figures 5 and 5A).

One of Widmann's rare advertisements is in the *Philadelphia Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, December 24, 1834, page 4 where he describes himself as a "SWORD MOUNTER . . ." selling ". . . a handsome assortment of Swords, Cutlasses, Dirks, Sword Canes, Blades, Handles, Scabbards, Belts, in short everything pertaining to the equipment of the military . . . the blades are from one of the most celebrated manufactories of Europe, and surpass any offered for sale in this country—the mounting, &c. are made by F.W.W. himself,



Figure 5. "Battle of New Orleans" blade signed F. W. Widmann. The blade is etched with a depiction of the battle and is the same scene that was executed in relief on the solid gold drag of the scabbard of a presentation sword given to Jackson on the twentieth anniversary of the battle by citizens of Philadelphia in January 1815. This sword, now in the Hermitage, is also by Widmann. He was apparently so proud of his work that the scene was also used on this blade. The only mark on the blade is a "*" and it may be of American manufacture.

PRESENTATION OF A SWORD TO PRESIDENT JACKSON.

Philadelphia, January 1st, 1835.

To Gen. ANDREW JACKSON,
President of the United States.

SIR: The undersigned, citizens of Philadelphia, beg leave, on the anniversary of the glorious battle of New Orleans, to offer, by the attention of their friend, Col. A. L. Roumfort, the accompanying Sword, from the manufactory of their fellow-citizen, Mr. F. W. Widmann, as a testimonial of their love and gratitude, towards the benefactor of their country.

The Artist has endeavored, in the ornamental work, to depict that conflict, which resulted in the most decisive and glorious victory, known to our American annals. Art may indeed be inadequate to do justice to such a subject, but its details will be indelibly engraven on the minds and memories of the present and of each succeeding generation of Americans, worthy of the name. In an equal degree must their grateful hearts be impressed with the image of the devoted patriot chief, who, battling for THE PEOPLE and THE PEOPLE'S RIGHTS, is ever invincible, by foreign or domestic foes, by force or fraud, unconquered and unconquerable.

With sentiments of the highest esteem, we remain your friends and fellow-citizens,

| | |
|--|---------------------|
| Michael W. Ash, | John J. McCahen, |
| Lewis Taylor, | A. McCaraha, |
| Peter Wager, | Benj. S. Bonsall, |
| Wm. Rice, Jr., | James Page, |
| John M. Read, | N. Nathans, |
| S. Moss, | John Lisle, |
| Aza Shoemaker, | George W. Geisse, |
| Sam'l F. Bradford, | J. N. Barker, |
| J. Moss, | Edward Hurst, |
| Wm. Eventy, | John J. Krider, |
| F. W. Widmann, (manufac- turer of the sword,) | Jesse Smith, |
| John F. Stump, | Evans Rogers, |
| Wm. J. Leiper, | Edm'd C. Watmough, |
| Edw'd D. Ingraham, | Thos. Penn Gaskell, |
| J. K. Kane, | H. D. Gilpin, |
| James Rogers, | John T. Sullivan, |
| J. Humes, | Henry Maul, |
| Jos. Cloud, | Edward D. Taylor, |
| | J. L. Kay, |

N. Stanley,
Rich'd McDonald,
Geo. W. Riter,
Wm. Butcher,
Cheney Hickman,
Joseph T. Myder,
Thos. D. Grover,
G. M. Dallas,
Patrick Hayes,
James Bell,
Jos. K. Evans,
William Geisse,
Wm. Duncan,

Geo. G. Grubb,
John R. Voeges,
Jno. Bartram North,
Samuel Hart,
A. L. Roumfort,
John Kerr,
John Goodwin,
Geo. Guier,
Philip Schroeder,
G. W. Geisse, jun.
John Curry,
Wm. K. Bradshaw.

WASHINGTON, Jan. 8, 1835.

Sir: I receive with emotions of the deepest gratitude, the sword you are pleased to present to me as a testimonial of the regard which a portion of my friends, in Philadelphia, entertain of my services at New Orleans, this day twenty years ago. In memory of the troops that co-operated with me on that occasion, and to whose patriotism and courage more than to the skill of their commanding General, the country is indebted for the signal repulse of the enemy at the 8th of January, I accept it with a pleasure which I cannot repress.

I pray you, sir, to convey to the gentlemen who have united with you in the presentation of this sword, my sincere thanks for the honor done me personally, and the assurance that it shall be preserved as a memento, valuable as a specimen of manufacture, and useful to those who will come after us, as a proof that the public service of the soldier will always find in the approbation of a free people, the fullest reward.

Allow me, sir, to tender to you personally, my acknowledgements for the eloquent and complimentary terms you have employed in the execution of the trust assigned to you on this occasion.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
ANDREW JACKSON.
Col. A. L. Roumfort.

Figure 5A. Newspaper account of the presentation of the Battle of New Orleans sword to Andrew Jackson. Photo courtesy of AWAS.

in a handsome and durable manner, after the style of the first warlike nation . . . Apply at 98, north Third street."

Widmann died on April 12, 1848. His will dated September 10, 1846 indicated that he hoped his apprentices (Julius Knocke, Charles Loemmel and Jacob Faser) would continue the business but this did not happen.² Instead we find the "machine book" kept by William H. Horstmann and Sons recording in his balances for January 1849, meaning a transaction from 1848, of the purchase of "Tools & Machinery of Sword Shop. Both of Exec of F. W. Widmann taken at Inventory at 200.00". How did this transfer come to pass? (Figure 6A).

William H. Horstmann was a fellow German of Widmann's, immigrating to Philadelphia in either 1815 or 1816. Horstmann, however, was a third generation coach lace weaver from Hessen Cassel. While Horstmann was dealing in military goods as well as selling the lace products he manufactured by 1819, there was nothing in either the interest or capabilities of the elder Horstmann to actually make the metal goods he included in his business stock, while his manufacturing capacity for woven goods was huge for the day. William H. Horstmann, then in his sixties, gave up the active management of his firm in 1845³ (Figure 6).

His successors were his two elder sons, William J. Horstmann and Sigmund Horstmann, both very talented businessmen. The "brothers" moved quickly to expand the business beyond its traditional weaving trade. In short order they not only added the sword making capabilities left by Widmann but also the insignia making business of John O'Harra, as well as flag and drum making departments.⁴ While these manufacturing departments were small compared to the massive coach lace and military weaving capabilities shown by Horstmann, they greatly expanded the range of the business (Figures 6A and 6B).

The Horstmann brothers were in no position to learn the sword making trade from the ground up. They did the simple thing, buying not only Widmann's business but employing two of his three known apprentices, Charles Loemmel and Julius Knocke. Both were still with Horstmann in the 1860s according to a sole surviving employee register covering the years 1867-1875. Loemmel was hired May 15, 1848 and died still in Horstmann's employ October 21, 1867. Knocke was still with Horstmann and in charge of the sword room in 1875. When Loemmel was employed Horstmann he also purchased his sword making tools which are listed in German in the

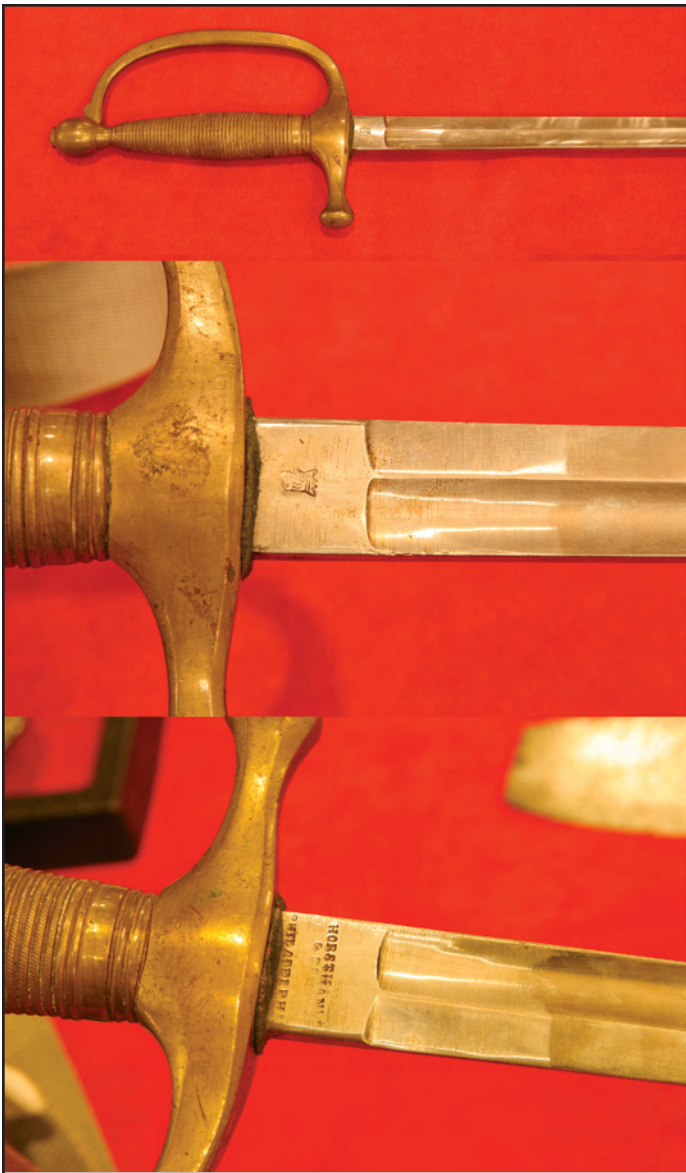


Figure 7. US Army Musician's Sword circa 1860. The blade fricasso is marked "HORSTMANN & SONS PHILADELPHIA" and has the Weyersberg crowned head on the reverse. The relationship of Horstmann and Weyersberg continued through the Civil War with the same markings noted on M1851 staff officers and foot officers swords made during the war.



Figure 8. Blade marked "F. W. WIDMANN ORNAMENTAL SWORD MOUNTER." The tang has the Weyersberg crowned head an elusive "NK" which turns up on other Widmann and Horstmann swords and is likely a Weyersberg factory mark.

REFERENCES

1. Anthony Carter: *Weyersberg, Kirschbaum & Cie* (Norfolk, Eng: Tharston Press), 1997, p. 1.
2. *Philadelphia Will Book 20*, No. 97, p. 203. Philadelphia City Archives.



Figure 9. Presentation quality blade marked "W. Caluberg Solingen." The Clauberg mark is a common feature on Civil War period swords.

3. *One Hundred Years 1816-1916 the Chronicles of an Old Business House in the City of Philadelphia*, William H. Horstmann, 1916, p. 17.
4. Horstmann Machinery Register 1845-72. Horstmann-Lippincott Papers. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Employee Register 1867-75. Horstmann-Lippincott Papers. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.