

"NON-MAP" POWDER HORNS.

A Talk Presented to the American Society of Arms Collectors in Washington, D. C. on March 28, 1969.

Paul J. Westergard



PAUL J. WESTERGARD

Mr. President and fellow members of the Society, my first comment must be to express my humility and hesitation at following the fine and learned talks already heard. Also to tell you that my talk will not be of such scholarly and serious type, but will be what my wife calls a "fun program." No science — there are no 2 or 3-screw horns! None here are map horns, and there are no famous makers nor factory records to be researched!

I never set out to collect powder horns — they just accumulated as interesting arms accessories, and most were found on back-country vacation and weekend trips thru New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and the Carolinas. One such trip took us miles into the mountain backwoods when the Great Smokey Mountain National Park was just opening and the "highlanders" were still very suspicious of we flatlanders." They referred to us as "furriners" to our faces. I noticed the men usually wore "bib" overalls with a leather belt around the outside, and kept their hands tucked in the bib as they talked to us. It was years later before I learned that they usually carried a pistol there! But we were invited to "stay over," and did stay overnight in their cabin with 85-year old Wiley Gibson and his wife "Sairey" (Sarah). Wiley was a maker of ML percussion Tennessee "hog" rifles, and his gunmaker greatgrandfather had fought at the Battle of Kings Mountain. When I first located him, he just stood there with some other mountain men and denied having ever heard of Wiley Gibson.

But, lets get on to the horns. I've found them fascinating—no two being ever exactly alike. Cattle horns provide a wonderful, natural material for powder containers, being of the proper shape, waterproof, light, easily worked, lasting forever, and is readily available. Seems as tho someone looked well ahead when he designed cows. Do kindly remember that a cow has a right and a left horn, and that only a left-handed shooter can use a left horn! Of which, I do have a couple here. So, most powder horns are the right horn, while the left horns were softened in boiling water, cut into sections or cut open and flattened and made into many varied items, such as combs, cups, spoons, etc. A superior natural plastic before the days of present-day artificials!

Polished horn has a pleasant, sensuous, tactile sensation when handled. I will pass some specimens around for your examination as I talk. Please note the two general types, one to be slung, and the other to be carried in the "possibles bag" or in a pocket. Note now that my exhibit is divided into groups and individually numbered.

The First Group, numbered 1 thru 18, being the HOMEMADE HORNS. All were made with simple tools such as saws, spokeshaves, drills, files, and knives, and were scraped smooth with a knife or broken glass and polished with sand and ashes on oiled leather pads. These are from the era of whittling, when every man and boy carried a jackknife and individuality was the order of the day. Such horns fascinate me — so much ingenuity and clever handcraft is demonstrated here, especially in homemade measuring devices, as we will see later.

Other containers, easily found, have often been used. I showed a gourd and a bottle with a string attached, both found containing powder in hunting bags. I have seen bottles, Coca-Cola bottles favorites, used by southern country ML shooters. During the Civil War, a Confederate colonel wrote to his supply headquarters asking for tin powder flasks, complaining that "many of my men are still using bottles."

On the board, horns numbered 3-4-5-6 are small pocket or pouch horns of plain type.

No. 7 reminds me of the nursery jingle about the "maiden so forlorn, who walked the cow with the crumpled horn" — Surely this is that horn! 'Tis from a runty North Carolina Mountain cow.

Reprinted from the American Society of Arms Collectors Bulletin 20:22-25

Additional articles available at <http://americansocietyofarmscollectors.org/resources/articles/>

Nos. 8 and 9 are nice horns, scraped beautifully thin.

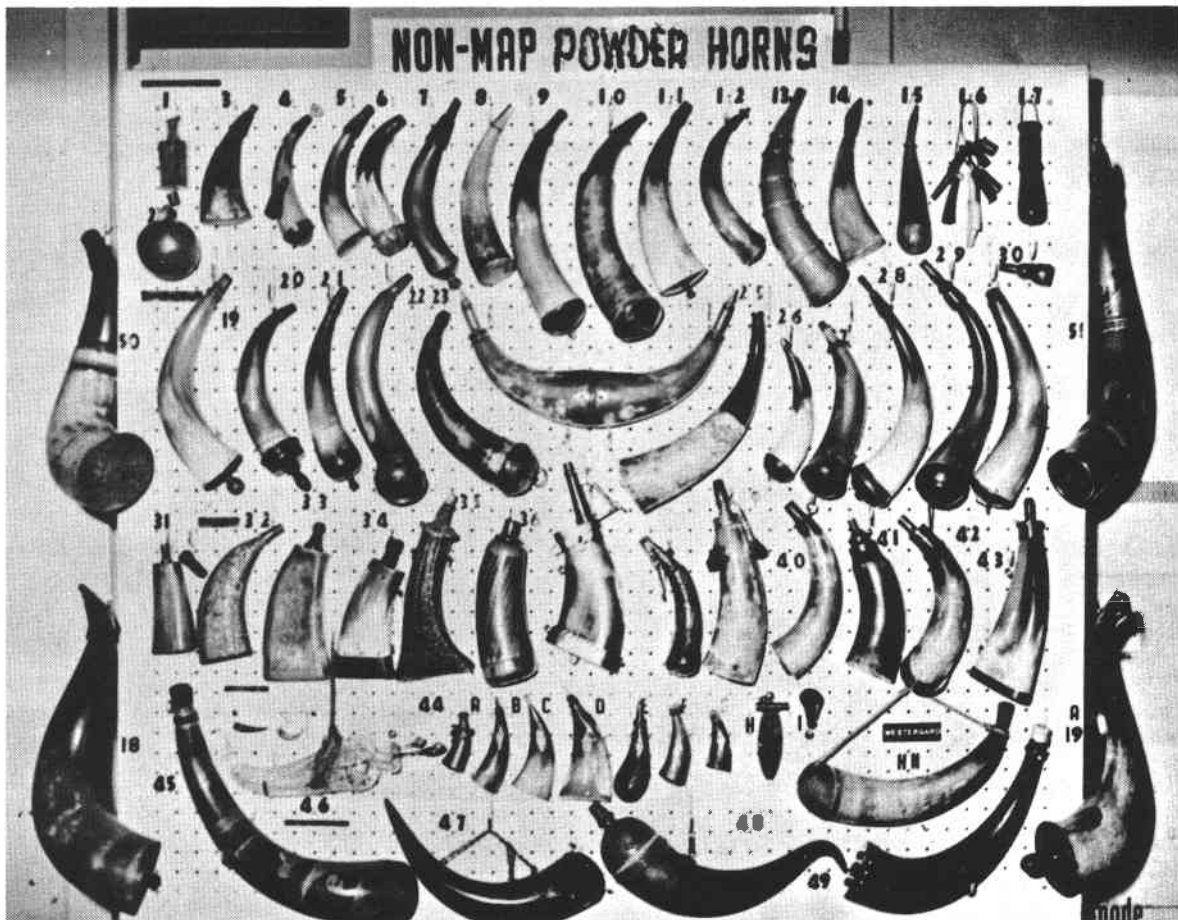
No. 10 is of the French and Indian Wars, with crude knife-point engravings of floral designs, a mermaid, a wolf and a stockade fort, with small grenadier-hatted soldiers being drilled by a large officer carrying a sword. Years ago, I found it in a Plainfield junkshop — gilded and varnished! Long, careful cleaning with varnish remover, just a stamp-sized spot at a time, brought the design to light and I was able to preserve the original color and patina.

Nos. 11 thru 15 are all average horns.

No. 16 is a group of loading measures made of horn, bone, pewter and brass.

No. 17 is a single paper cartridge container (or "box") from a matchlock musketeer's bandolier. 'Twas a poor arrangement—they rattled, were not waterproof, and were given to leaking fireflashes and blowing the lot up—which didn't do the musketeer any good either!

No. 18. This big oxhorn was used by a market hunter-wildfowler on Barnegat Bay, New Jersey in the late 1800's and was given me by his granddaughter about 1919.



SOME OF PAUL WESTERGARD'S FINE COLLECTION OF HORNS BEING THOSE USED IN HIS TALK.

The Second Group, numbered A19 thru 30 is the product of professional Horn & Combmakers, whose raw material was purchased from local butchers or imported from cattle-raising countries. Large quantities were required to satisfy military needs alone. These horns were usually delivered undecorated. Some were later marked, engraved or carved by their purchasers, who sometimes had them engraved or carved by professional engravers or carvers. Some of the finest carving I have ever seen was done on either old or

new horns was done during the first quarter of this century by European workers contracting for Bannerman, who advertised individual custom work in any design desired. A19 is a naval or military horn, as used by American, French or English ship's gunners to prime their great cannon. Note the screwplug stopper in the large end, which is dished to funnel the powder in from the supply barrels.

No. 19 is a smaller horn of similar pattern, as made professionally for military use, and which has somehow acquired the often-heard name of "militia" horn. Seems like too dam fine a horn for militia issue.

No. 20 is of the same general design, but with a rounded base retaining only a small "dish," and has a silver shield set in one side. It is obviously a custom piece—what colonial craftsmen called "bespoke work."

No. 22, a long, graceful horn, carries a small mirror in the large end.

No. 23, a handmade horn, is a true lefthand horn, just for a lefthander.

No. 24 is a fine, thin and rare double horn.

No. 25 is a memento of the First Russian Invasion of the United States! It came to me from Alaska, and dates to the Russian Fur Traders Company of 1800-02. Many forget that the Russians were moving their settlements south along our Northwest coast until stopped at their Russian River settlement a little north of San Francisco, and forced back to Alaska by the tough American Governor. The horn's engravings include a double-headed Russian eagle, several cannon and a large log (?) fort, with a palace and other buildings.

Nos. 26 thru 30 are all Pennsylvania horns, as sold with those rifles. Such horns are readily identified by turned true round base plugs, usually with turned mouldings or grooves and with various impressed or stamped designs. The pouring spouts appear turned, but were doubtless done with some sort of a dowel-cutting die.

The Third Group shown, Nos. 31 thru 43, are Transitions from powder horns to powder flasks. The question arises—Just what is a powder horn? What makes it a powder flask made of horn? I define as a horn, one left in natural shape, whether slung or in pocket form. It can have a metal measuring spout. When the natural horn has been reshaped and has had manufactured parts added until it resembles a bottle or flask, I call it a horn flask, just as I say a metal, leather or wooden flask.

No. 31 is a handmade all-horn Pennsylvania pocket flask, with measuring-cup cap.

No. 32 is a fine deeply-carved Baltic area horn flask.

No. 33 is of similar shape, but is professionally engraved.

No. 34 is rather similar, but is American, probably Pennsylvanian, with a slide-covered hollow in the American walnut base for percussion caps.

No. 35 is European staghorn. I got it from France.

No. 36 was bought on Cape Cod about 1922, and I was told it had been used by a ship captain. That it was a type used by mariners and horsemen, with the long end cut off for easy stowage in a mariner's seabag or a horseman's saddle bag. The top end is turned and appears to be boxwood.

No. 37 is a musketeer's wheellock flask of horn and iron, with a measuring spout.

No. 38, a Danish horn, with a non-measuring brass spout, is covered with carved Biblical scenes and names, including the owner's name and the date of February, 1695. Wish more of those old fellows had included dates!

No. 39. This one may be very early French military.

Nos. 40, 41, and 42 horns have clever homemade measuring spouts and cutoffs, 42 having an ingenious screwoff top converted from an oil lamp top.

No. 43 is a widely-used factory pattern of flattened horn, with a brass base and a brass screw-off measuring spout. I show it here as the final production line type of a slung horn flask as made and used thru most of the 1800s, here and in Europe both as military equipment and by civilian hunters.

Group Four, Number 44, consists of priming, cap and salt horns. We all know the priming horn, but very few recognize the cap horn, made and used by the poor man, whereas the well-to-do gunner used an expensive brass gadget to carry his caps and to place them on the gun nipples.

See No. 44H. Remember that salt then scarce and expensive, and that travelers often carried a pocket table supply. The three kinds of these tiny horns can usually be identified by the size of the spout openings, cap horns being largest, being sized to drop one cap out at a time, and varied to fit the cap being used.

Group Five, Nos. 45 thru 48, show the feminine touch. When working horns became obsolete they were sometimes hung up as decorations and were curiously embellished, as is No. 46, a supply horn with a stopper that is a funnel. Various decorative articles shaped like powder horns, including jewelry, hatpin holders, pincushions, etc. became popular around the turn of the century. Note Nos. 46 and 47. No. 48 is unusual, with the spout at the large end. The design is erotic, as this Turkish horn represents a woman's breast. Erotic or pornographic designs or verses are occasionally found on weapons and accessories. No. 49 is of Asiatic buffalo horn with ivory trim. Borneo or Sumatra? Nos. 50 and 51 are Australian "house" horns, with the typical serrated horn edges at the large end, with 6" of the tip being retained, provided with a dowel and decorated with deep carvings and mouldings carried down onto the body. No. 50 is beautifully engraved with a fullrigged ship, "The Celebrated Iron Steam Clipper Grt. Britian," and a four-line drinking toast to Australia in elegant script. And in miniscule script, "Killed for the ship's crew and engraved with a penknife by C. W." Now, why'n 'ell didn't he include a date? Circa 1850.

No. 51, Australian, is a combination powder and drinking horn, with a Sheffield cup set in the large end. Fourteen Australian animals, birds, lizards, snakes and a scorpion are engraved over the horn. Might there be some implied thought in the scorpion and snakes being placed around the drinking end? No. 52 is a rare shooting gallery container, probably German or Austrian. I have seen only two.

No. 53, of white metal is not for powder, but for liquor. It is cleverly shaped to hand under a soldier's clothing on his chest or underarm. The side-placed mouthpiece permits a sly drink with least chance of observation.

The last item is a crude hunting horn with a rough scratching of a deer and snake added. Which reminds me-- I had a number of Southern mountain men in my command overseas during WW 2, and enjoyed their speech and the tales told. One talked of hunting with packs of 15-18 dogs at times. I couldn't understand any poor hillbilly owning such a pack and asked about it. "Oh, no" sez he, "Ah've only got fo' dawgs. When we want to go huntin', we just go down the back field with a blowin' horn and call fo' awhile. Dawgs come from all ovah and when we got us a pack we go -- takes maybe 15-20 minutes."

There is much more that I'd like to tell, regarding the repair, cleaning, and preservation of horns, but that must wait, for I've already overrun my time! Thank you for listening!