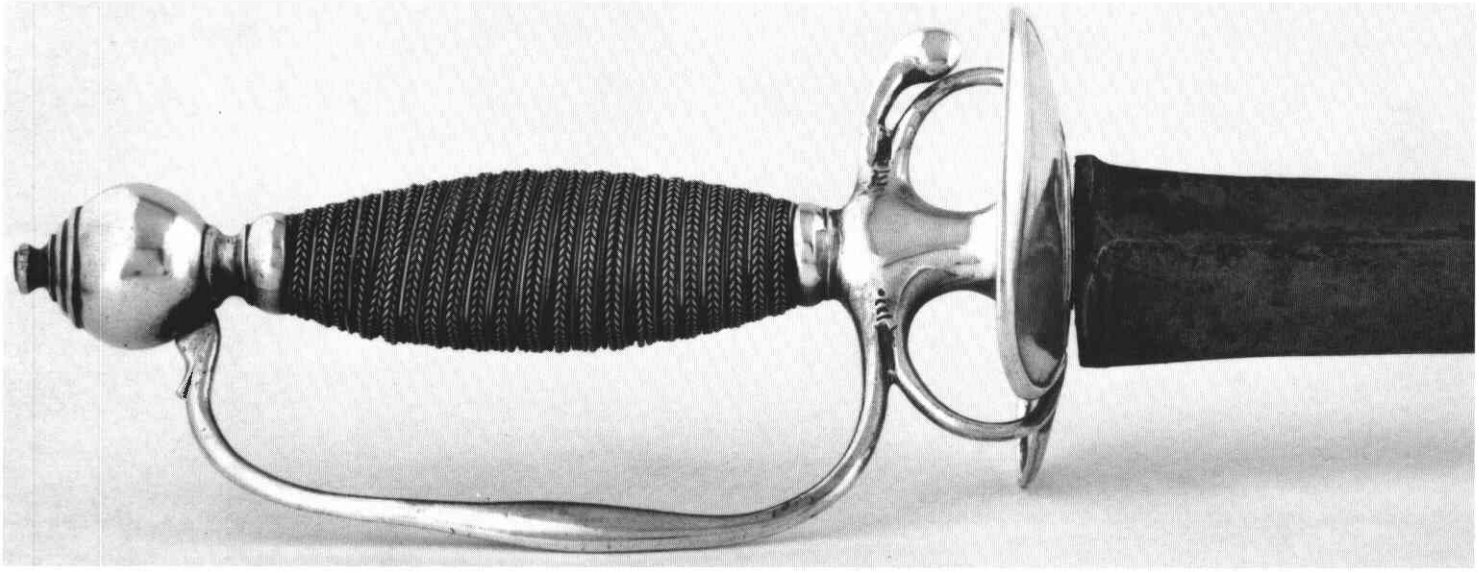
Silver-hilted smallsword made by Jacob Hurd (1702/3-1758), engraved with the name of Col. Richard Hazen and dated 1735. The rare and complete leather sword harness includes scabbard, waistbelt, and frog. (photo courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)



Smallsword by Jacob Hurd, c. 1730-1740. The edge of the counterguard is engraved with initials "EL" for either Ensign Enoch Little (1685-1766), or his son Capt. Edmund Little (1715-1803). (photo courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Jacob Hurd and the Boston Smallsword

John D. Hamilton

The first half of the 18th century witnessed the establishment of Boston as the preeminent silversmithing center in the American colonies. During that period, which corresponds with the reigns of King George I (1714-1727) and George II (1727-1760), there were approximately sixty silversmiths in the Massachusetts Bay Colony who created a wide variety of utilitarian, commemorative, and religious articles. Also during that period a number of advertisements for the sale of fine gentlemen's swords were placed in local newspapers by artisans such as Samuel Minott (1702-1803) and Daniel Henchman (1730-1775), gunsmiths John Pim (c. 1722) and Samuel Miller (c. 1730-1742), and merchant importers Joseph and Daniel Waldo (c. 1748). Those advertisements, however, probably referred to swords that were imported for the convenience of customers; no swords are known that bear the marks of the aforementioned advertisers. A list of Boston silversmiths who actually made and marked smallswords would include:

John Coney (1656-1746)	Ephraim Cobb (1708-1775)
Edward Winslow (1669-1753)	William Cowell, Jnr. (1713-1761)
John Edwards (1671-1746)	William Swan (1715-1774)
John Allen (1672-1760)	William Homes, Sr. (1717-1783)
Andrew Tyler (1692-1747)	Jonathan Otis (1723-1791)
John Potwine (1698-1792)	Benjamin Burt (1729-1805)
Jacob Hurd (1702-1758)	Zachariah Brigden (1734-1787)
William Cario (n.d.-1809)	

The smallsword of the 18th century was more than a weapon: it was a symbol that proclaimed its wearer was a gentleman of some means, or at least had pretension to being such. Bostonians attuned to such fine points of the dress code deemed a silver hilted smallsword an indispensible item of apparel. In all things they generally preferred traditional styles rather than current London fashion fads that, like New England weather, were often subject to capricious change. Life in early 18th century Boston was thus constrained by a conservatism that appears to have even influenced the form of sword hilt favored by society. This attitude encouraged the Boston silversmiths to adhere to a sword hilt design that remained static for almost three quarters of a century.

Boston silversmithing traditions became entrenched and perpetuated through the early development of a select circle of second and third generation interlocking family

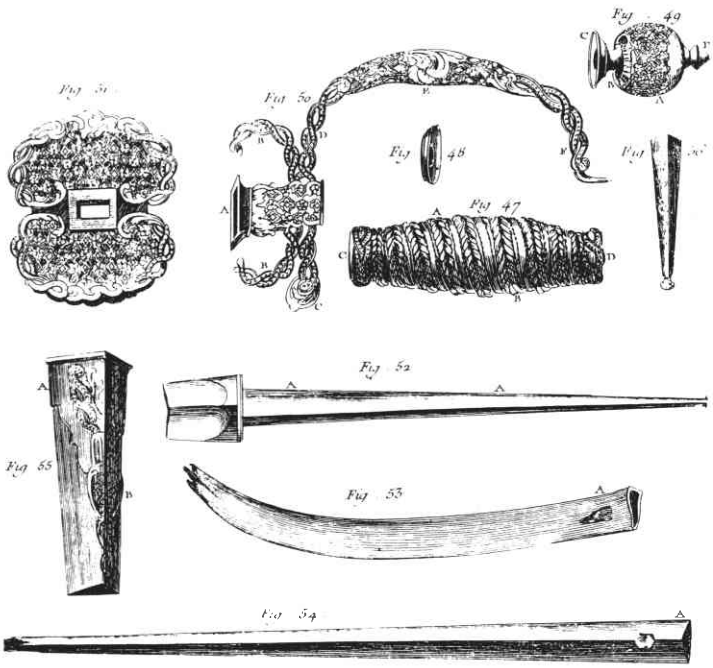
compacts bound by apprenticeships and intermarriage. As practiced by these families, the craft rarely allowed for admitting outsiders or foreign design influences. Even silversmiths who apprenticed under Boston masters and then worked beyond Boston, such as John Potwine, Jonathan Otis, and Ephraim Cobb, became apostles of the Boston style.

More than three hundred pieces of Boston-made silver are known to have survived from the 1725-1750 period, but the prolific output of silversmith Jacob Hurd accounts for the majority of those pieces. Despite having left a sizeable legacy of his work, the true extent of Hurd's production remains difficult to assess because none of his business ledgers are known to have survived. His sons Nathaniel (1729-1777) and Benjamin (1739-1781), who followed him in the silversmithing trade, do not appear to have produced smallswords. There are, however, at least a dozen well-known swords that bear Jacob's mark, representing more hilts by him than by any of his contemporaries.

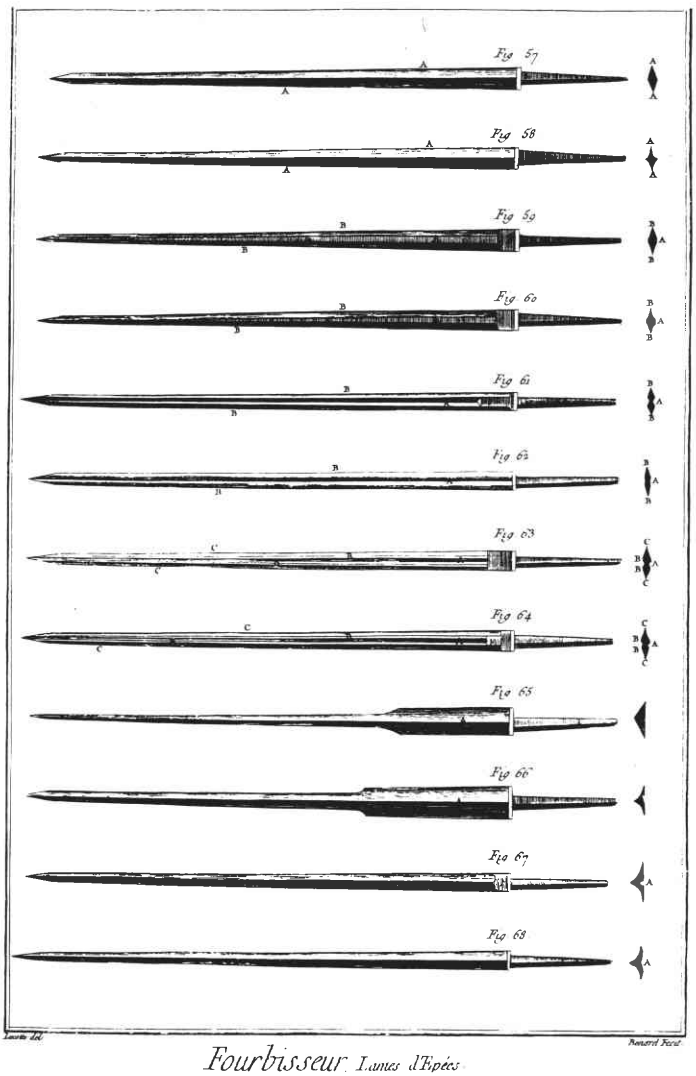
Jacob Hurd was the son of a joiner, or wainscotter, which means that his training as a silversmith was undertaken by another person. It is generally conceded that young Jacob received his early training in the shop of silversmith John Edwards, but no articles of such an apprenticeship were recorded (which would have been the case in Middlesex County had he been an orphan).

Boston's minor office holders traditionally came from substantial artisan families, and Hurd was no exception. In 1731 he was elected Constable but declined to serve, yet he did accept membership in Boston's Ancient and

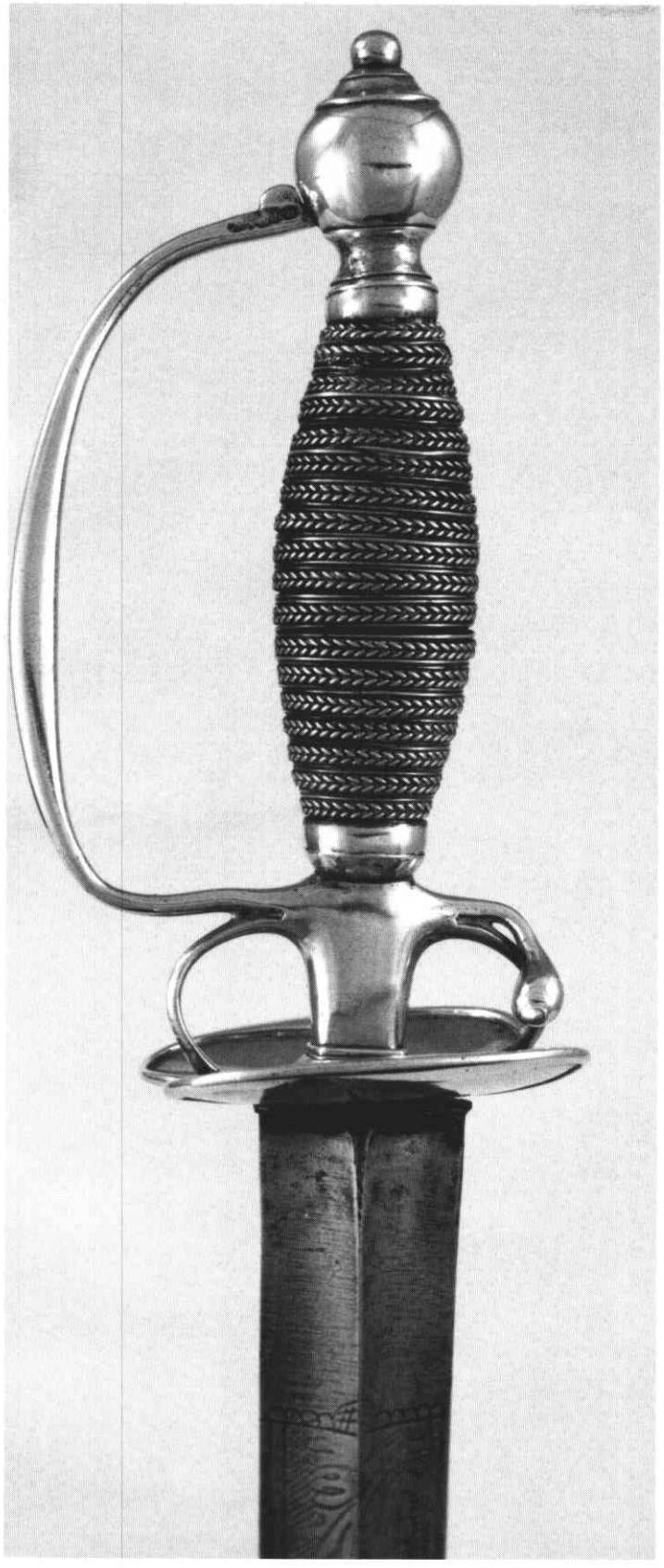
Interior of a mid-18th century sword cutler's shop (Plate I, *Fourbiseur),* Diderot *Encyclopedia,* 1754.



Smallsword hilt components (Plate V, *Fourbisseur),* Diderot *Encyclopedia,* 1754.

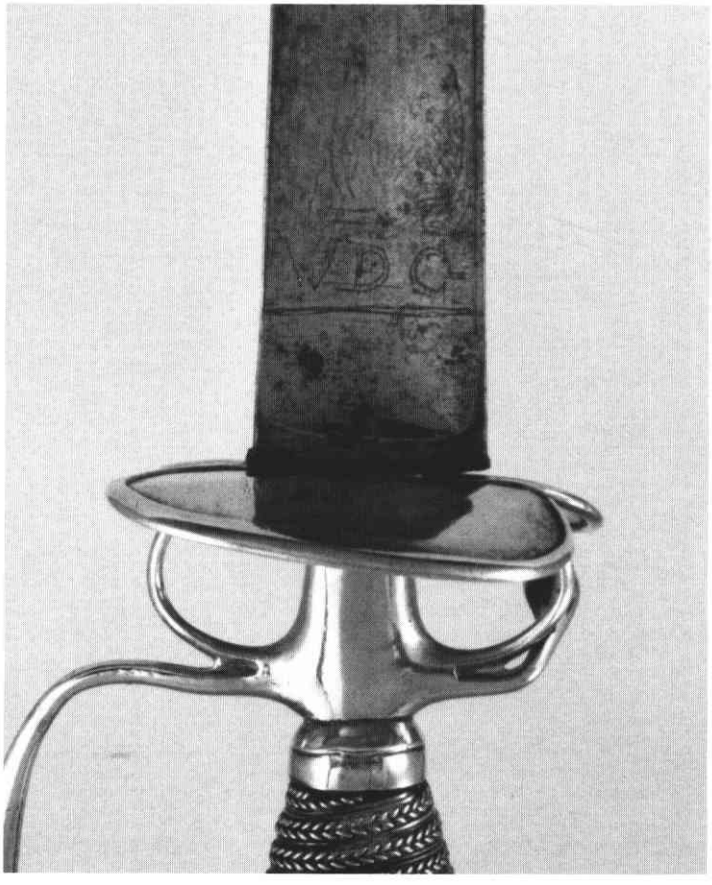


Smallsword blades (Plate V. *Fourbisseur),* Diderot *Encyclopedia,* 1754. Numbers 65 thru 68 show blades of triangular cross-section, number 65 and 66 are "reinforced [*A le renfort*]."



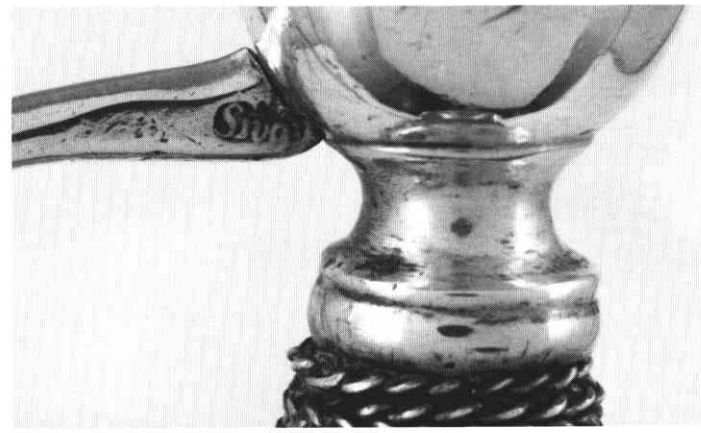
Smallsword by Zachariah Brigden (1734-1787). The scabbard locket (top mount) is engraved with unidentified initials "DS."
(photo courtesy the Estate of Roland B. Hammond)

Pommel and knucklebow marked "Z. Brigden."
(photo courtesy the Estate of Roland B. Hammond)



Blade etched with initials "WDC" and foliate strapwork.
(photo courtesy the Estate of Roland B. Hammond)

Smallsword by William Swan (1715-1774). Guard engraved with the initials "IC" which are believed to represent John Chandler.
(photo courtesy the Estate of Roland B. Hammond)



Pommel and knucklebow marked "Swan."
(photo courtesy the Estate of Roland B. Hammond)

Blade of the William Swan hilt, etched with floral strap-work that includes a "bird of paradise" motif.
(photo courtesy the Estate of Roland B. Hammond))

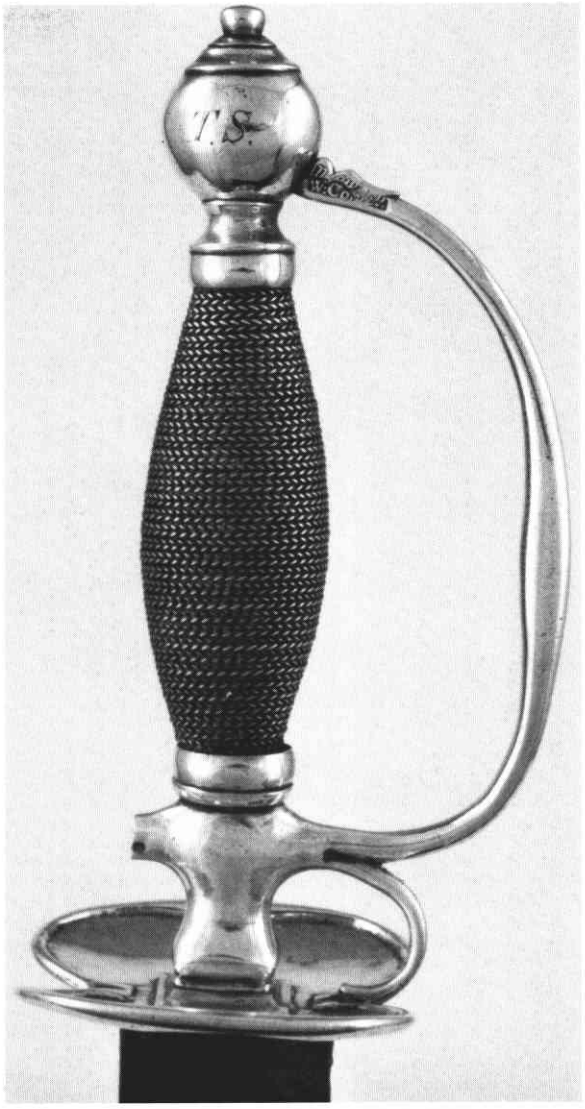
Honorable Artillery Company. Recruited to the "Ancient and Honorables" in 1743, he rose to the rank of First Sergeant in 1745. His established business reputation, rather than any feat of martial arms, probably accounts for his having subsequently been elected a captain in the Boston regiment of militia, a commission he retained until his death. This strong connection with Boston's military infrastructure might well have fueled his production of smallswords. If, in fact, he had apprenticed under Edwards, he would surely have been exposed to the necessary smallsword production techniques, for a number of swords by Edwards are extant that bear a great similarity to Hurd's.

A number of Hurd's swords have acquired pedigrees derived from recorded family histories, wills, and hilt inscriptions. His simple uncluttered design offered several convenient areas for inscription, inducing a generally high proportion of owner-marked hilts and scabbard mounts. From such evidence, it appears that Hurd's sword patrons resided within a day's ride of Boston in the towns of Newbury, Ipswich, Haverhill, Pepprell, Lexington, Plymouth, and Greenland in southern New Hampshire (see list).

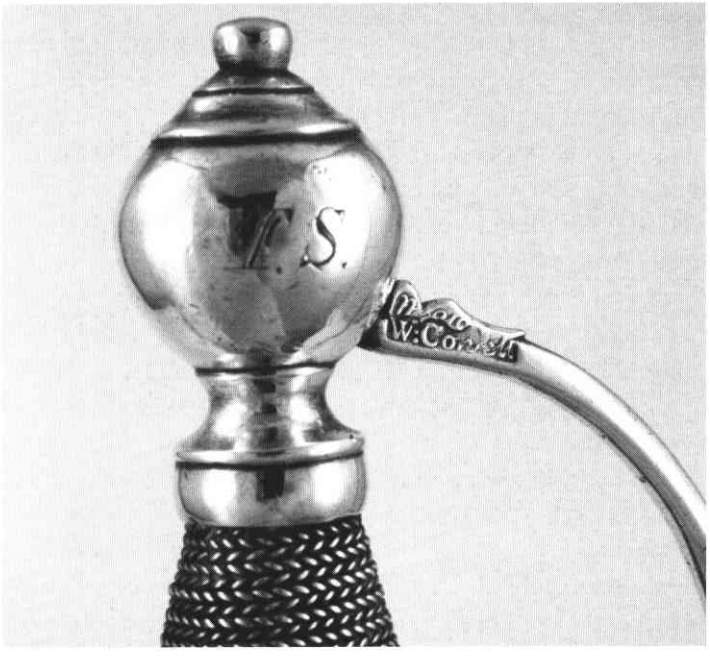
The prevalence of such inscriptions was not necessarily ego-induced. Inscriptions aided identification of property when swords were laid aside on social occasions and then reclaimed by their owners. The 18th century penchant for marking silver hilted swords and other possessions stemmed from a more practical motive: numerous notices in Boston newspapers announced house break-ins, confirming that silver articles were a particular objective for thieves. The fact that no residence was immune is evidenced by a notice in the *Boston Post-Boy & Advertiser* (Sept. 9, 1765) that announced "the following articles, taken among the rest from the Lieutenant Governor's house, ...a silver hilt of a sword which had been wash'd with gold, the blade is found..." Inscribed silver was of course, more easily identified and recovered.

There are several features found on hilts made by Hurd that appear as idiosyncratic traits, identifying his work from that of others, the most noticeable of which was the placement of his mark. There were no rules governing the placement of marks, but American silversmiths did tend to follow certain discreet patterns. In the second quarter of the 18th century, the use of a first initial and full last name, i.e., "J. Hurd," was an American departure from the English tradition in which a full surname was rarely used. Between 1697 and 1720 the English hallmarking tradition called for use of the first two letters of the last name; a practice not followed in America.

Most other smiths traditionally placed their mark on



Smallsword by William Cowell, Jr. (1713-1761).
(photo courtesy the Estate of Roland B. Hammond)



Pommel engraved with the initials "TS" and knucklebow marked "W: Cowell." The initials "TS" are believed to represent a member of the Storer family; the guard is engraved with the name "A. Hall," another owner. (photo courtesy the Estate of Roland B. Hammond)

Smallsword by Ephraim Cobb (1708-1775) of Plymouth, Massachusetts. The sword has descended in the Bradford family. Cobb apprenticed to Moody Russell (1694-1761) of Barnstable, who in turn apprenticed to Edward Winslow (1669-1753). Jonathan Otis (1723-1791) of Sandwich, Massachusetts was a nephew of Moody Russell, and like Cobb, also apprenticed to Winslow. (photo courtesy Ronald Bourgeault)

that portion of the knucklebow nearest the pommel, or on the rim of the shells. Hurd, on the other hand, quite unabashedly struck his mark on the inside center of the clamshell guard. When a Hurd-made sword is worn, this placed his name foremost in a position for all to see.

The creation of a silver sword hilt required rather specialized equipment. Casting flasks or mold frames and patterns are not often mentioned in the inventories of Boston's many smaller silver shops. A number of the larger shops, such as those maintained by Coney, Edwards or Hurd, routinely cast special parts that they sold to the others. This practice is clearly evident upon comparison of such components as cast teapot feet. As a businessman, Hurd could rely on the popularity of a fairly static sword hilt design in order to justify the expense of creating the necessary hilt molds. It is therefore probable that Hurd also provided hilt components to his less well-equipped contemporaries. Barbara Ward observed that "The existence of objects displaying specialization in the production of cast parts indicates that specialization most often occurred when certain types of objects became traditional rather than popular in their form and design. As a form became static, it became possible to standardize the production of small parts."[1]

[1] PhD Thesis, 1983

Following contemporary practice, Hurd cast sword hilt knucklebows and crossguards (quillon, pas d'ane rings, ricasso) in a single unit. His bilobe, clamshell-shaped guard was separately cast with a reinforced rim that could withstand the rigors of a strong defensive parry. His ovoid-shaped pommels, however, were formed from hollow halves, swaged from plate and soldered together to form base, ball and button, all in one piece. This method afforded strength and balance with an economy of noble metal.

The making a velum-covered wood scabbard and silver scabbard mounts lay well within the capabilities of the colonial craftsman, but the manufacture of a smallsword blade did not. In the 18th century, smallsword blade manufacturing was the special monopoly of German sword cutlers. Boston silversmiths were thus forced to acquire unmounted German blades via England. John D. Aylward cited a 1699 advertisement (*London Gazette,* July 10, 1699) that serves as a reminder of how sword blades were "put to the candle." In such an auction format, bids on barrels of blades were accepted until a one-inch candle stud had burnt out; the last bid received before the flame extinguished itself was the winner.

The great Diderot *Encyclopedia* of 1756 provides a chart of many specialized styles of smallsword blades that were used by sword mounters *[fourbisseur],* but two styles in particular were most popular in Boston: each had a hollow-ground, or grooved, triangular cross-section that imparted lightness and rigidity to a needle-like shape designed primarily for thrusting. Normally these blades were given a fairly straight taper, but a variety of reinforced blade with a widened, stepped-down forte was much favored by military officers from 1710 to 1775.

As early as 1738 Silversmith William Cario advertised "fine sword blades...sold and mounted" in the *Boston Gazette* (Oct. 23/30, 1738). Cario pitched his advertisement to the trade as well as the private patron. It was equally apparent that later, as a "supplier of a general assortment of stones, tools, and all other necessaries for the goldsmith's and jeweller's use," Daniel Parker (1728-85) clearly indulged in the wholesale of "best sword blades." Parker's advertisements in the *Gazette* began in 1761 and continued through 1765, and like Cario's advertisement, illustrate how Hurd and his contemporaries might obtain the one element of a sword that they could not, and need not, make.

This examination of Jacob Hurd's role in the Boston smallsword production process has been brief but, hopefully, thought-provoking. It is unfortunate that silver scholars have traditionally focused their research efforts on the minutiae of pots, porringers, and spoons, virtually ignoring martial examples of the silversmith's craft. Comparison is warranted of hilt elements such as pommel profiles and fillets, knucklebow finials, and shell reinforcings. An index

and genealogical trace of the master hilt makers and their apprentices is also needed. I believe that the combination of Boston's "closed" shop practices and Jacob Hurd's production methods had a far greater impact on the implanting of a regional smallsword hilt design than has heretofore been appreciated.

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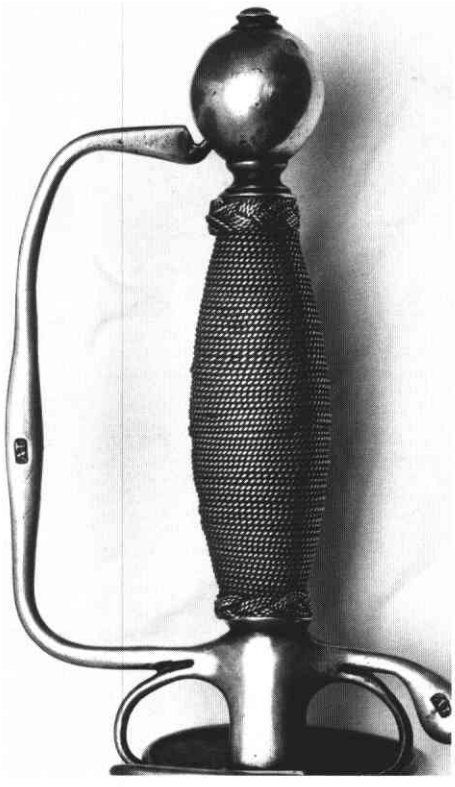
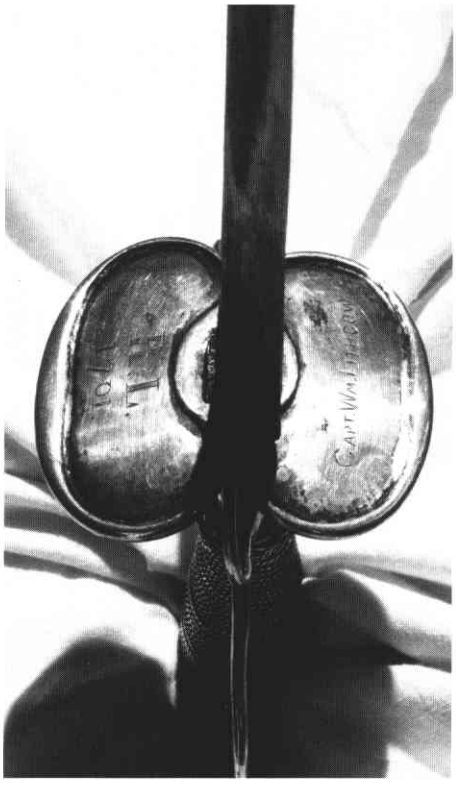
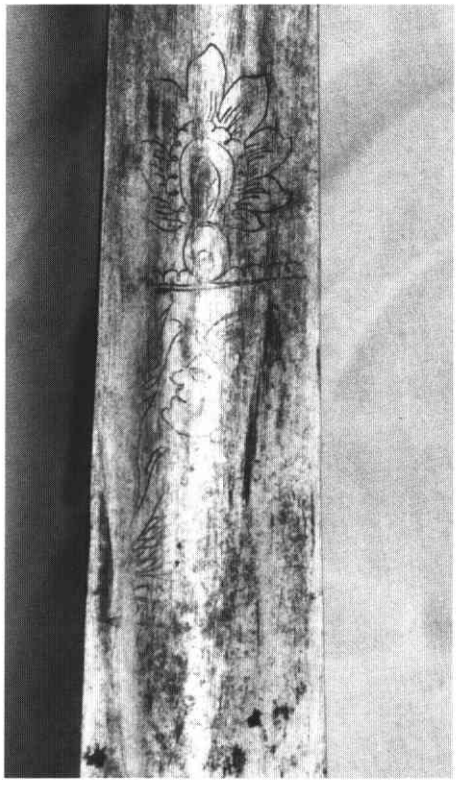
Smallsword by Andrew Tyler (1692-1741). The sword has descended in the Lithgow family, who were early 18th-century Maine settlers.
(photo courtesy of Dr. Herbert T. Schwarz)



Hilt marked "A.T." (Andrew Tyler) on the center of the knucklebow and on the quillon.
(photo courtesy of Dr. Herbert T. Schwarz)



Shells engraved with the initials "RL" (Robert Lithgow) and the date "1701," and "Capt. Wm. Lithgow" (1750-1796).
(photo courtesy of Dr. Herbert T. Schwarz)



Blade etched with figure of an Indian in headdress. William Lithgow, Sr. (1712/15-1798) served as a government Indian agent for a period of about twenty years.
(photo courtesy of Dr. Herbert T. Schwarz)