



TWELVE GREAT CARVERS

By Tom Grinslade



Figure 1. The Nicholas Currier horn carved at Fort William Henry Nov 4th 1756.

Among the carvers of powder horns during the Colonial Wars, there were a few carvers whose artistic ability greatly exceeded that of the many other makers who produced horns. Soldiers who were stationed at forts for long periods of time between engagements had the opportunity to make powder horns or hire a more skilled soldier to make them a horn to memorialize their service. The name of the fort, the date and the soldiers name are often found on horns making them a valuable document of history. Early in the Eighteenth Century some American powder horns were being made, but their greatest production occurred during the French and Indian War and the Revolutionary War. The horns displayed represent the efforts of some of the finest work of horn carvers during that period.

Indian warriors who massacred the British soldiers. Noteworthy is the fact that Nicholas Currier was the great grandfather of the well-known Currier in Currier and Ives prints. Many collectors feel that John Bush was the first carver of distinction and therefore considered him the leader of the powder horn carvers who followed. Bush's style of illuminated letters, his precise layout of names and figures and his flowing floral patterns were outstanding. He was captured at the fall of the fort and thought to have died later aboard a ship on the Atlantic Ocean. Nine powder horns carved by John Bush still exist today. (There are a number of carved horns from the period before the French and Indian War, in the 1740's and 50's or King Georges' War with attractive flowing style of calligraphy, that represent at least four different makers who are still being researched and represent an earlier style of engraving).



Figure 2. Close-up of the Currier horn displaying the outstanding calligraphy of the maker, John Bush.

The powder horns in this display are arranged for this discussion in a chronological order, beginning with the Nicholas Currier horn by John Bush (Figures 1, 2, and 3). The place was Fort William Henry and the date on the horn was November 4th 1756 which was before the Fort was captured in 1757 by French forces and their

Samuel Lounsbury, a contemporary horn carver of John Bush, served at Fort William Henry with Bush, at which time each of them undoubtedly became familiar with the carving of the other (Figures 4, 5 and 6). Although similar, the different individual carving characteristics of the two makers was documented by Lee Larkin several years ago. One of the symbols Lounsbury used on his early horns were the stylized letters "W A R" and a frequent use of rhymes such as on this horn "I powder with my Brother Ball A Hero Like I Concur all". Also on this horn appears the words "His Horn made at Charlestown alias No 4 June 20th 175?". This is the second horn being described in this discussion and was one of maybe 15 or 20 known horns carved by Lounsbury, but is unique in that it is the only horn attributed to him personally.

The third powder horn is by an unknown maker and is one of several horns describing Forbes Road (Figures 7, 8 and 9). The carving on the horn includes pictures of buildings in Philadelphia,



Figure 3. Close-up of John Bush's trademark designs.



Figure 4. The Samuel Lounsbury horn made by him.



Figure 5. Another view of the Lounsbury horn.



Figure 6. The distinctive letters "W A R" were used by Lounsbury on his early horns.

burgh. The road west from Philadelphia to as far as Carlyle was passable, but from there to Fort Duquesne was a forest wilderness. The building of Forbes Road consisted of cutting a sixteen-foot wide trail for about 200 miles through the forest from Carlyle to the forks of the Ohio. The previous attempt in 1755 by General Braddock to build a southern road through the Cumberland to Fort Duquesne ended in disaster and the death of Braddock. Major General John Forbes learned from the earlier attempt that he needed supply posts along the way and led a victorious 6,000 man expedition by creating forts along the route as shown on this horn.

The fourth powder horn c. 1758 is a large 16-inch map horn attributed to the "Master Carver", an unknown maker who because of his attention to detail was given that name by Walter O'Connor (Figures 10-13). Some of these horns by the Master Carver do not have a name or a date on them and thus have escaped the attention of many collectors. Walter O'Connor felt that these horns had a maker who was attached to the Highland Regiments that served the Crown in the French and Indian War and he identified 19 of them as being by the "Master Carver". The pictures carved on this horn start at Point Levy below Quebec and then proceeds up the Saint Lawrence River, circling around the horn to Lake Ontario then Lake Erie and ending in Lake Superior. Along the way Quebec, Montreal, Fort Oswego and Fort Niagara are displayed as well as Indians, a dog chasing a deer and a hunter firing a musket plus two heraldic shields.

The fifth powder horn like the previous horn is a large 16 inch map horn of the French and Indian War (Figures 14-16). There are many map horns that cannot be attributed to an individual

Lancaster, Carlyle and Shippensburg and then forts at Loudon, Littelton, Stoney Creek, Bedford, Ligonier and Fort Pitt. In 1758 the British Army wanted a road into the center of the country and more specifically to be able to send troops to attack the French who were occupying Fort Duquesne, which was at present day Pitts-



Figure 8. Five- sided Fort Pitt located at the confluence of the Allegheny and the Monongahela Rivers.



Figure 9. The supply forts built as the troops progressed from Carlyle towards Fort Duquesne.

Figure 7. The Forbes Road horn with stops along the road and a picture of Fort Pitt.



Figure 10. A map horn showing the Saint Lawrence River the Great Lakes made by the Master Carver.

carver, but share similar routes to Canada by way of the Hudson River from New York City to Fort Edward and from there north at Fort William Henry on Lake George to Montreal by way of Lake



Figure 11. Pictures of Fort Frontenac and the Fort at Montreal plus a hunter along the Saint Lawrence River.



Figure 12. This side shows a view along the Saint Lawrence River from Quebec to the Falls of the Niagara River.



Figure 13. A scene of Lake Ontario with Fort Niagara and Fort Oswego.

George and Lake Champlain or east from Albany to take the Mohawk Trail to Lake Ontario. The forts, towns, trees and animals that are depicted are frequently accompanied by the symbol of the British Arms. On this horn the British soldiers of General Wolfe are shown opposing the French troops of General Montcalm on the



Figure 15. The Mohawk River connecting Albany to Lake Ontario.

Figure 14. A typical map horn with the route from New York to Canada along the Hudson River.

Plains of Abraham outside of Quebec. An unusual feature on the horn is the outline of the Saint Lawrence River with seven ships sailing towards Quebec and Montreal.

The sixth powder horn belonged to a Connecticut soldier named Moses Walcut and was made for him at Fort Edward in 1758 (Figures 17-21). Three main features on the horn are the British Coat of Arms (Figures 19 and 21), five soldiers presenting muskets in a salute (Figure 18) and a hellhorse (Figure 20). The winged horse known as a hellhorse or demon steed or nytemare from ancient Greek and Roman mythology appears on about a dozen powder horns attributed by John Proud to the hand of Richard Cresey. The rest of the surface of the horn is covered with a busy group of figures consisting of a soldier, trees, birds, deer and geometric designs. Previously this horn and three others were attributed to an unknown maker, but due to the research and studying of styles, particularly of the hellhorse design, they are all thought by Proud to be the work of Richard Cresey.

The seventh powder horn in the list has a signature line with the name of Captain Edward Brown and the location of Crown Point in November 4 1760 (Figures 22-24). The well-formed block letters, the graceful twist of the horn and its mellow yellow color provide



Figure 16. Map of Lake George and Lake Champlain.

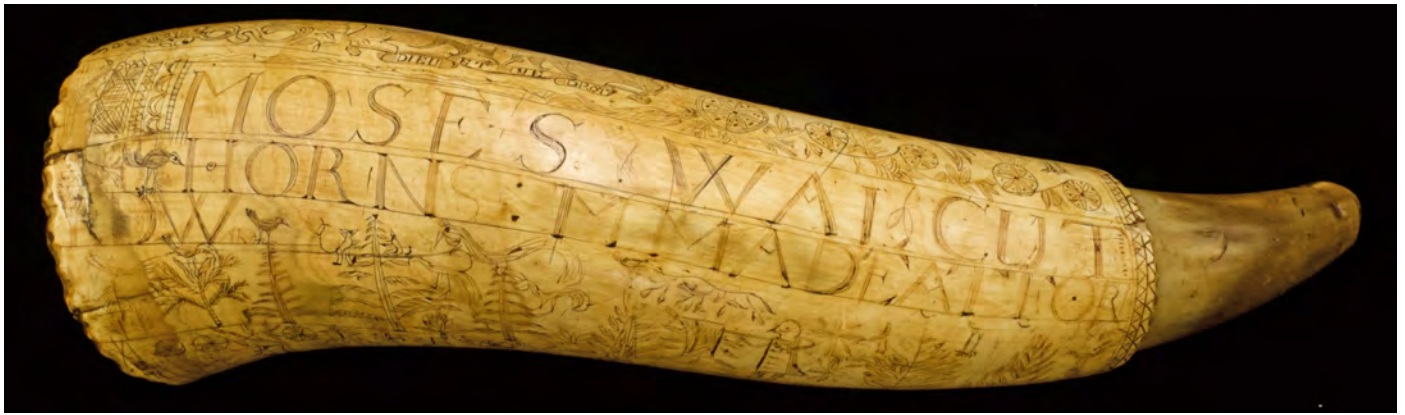


Figure 17. The Moses Walcut horn dated 1758.



Figure 18. Opposing soldiers presenting arms, possibly signaling a surrender.



Figure 19. A view of the British Arms.

a fine background for its designs of a hellhorse, a British Coat of Arms and diagram of the fort at Crown Point. The maker is probably Richard Cresey again as the hellhorse is the same as that on other horns by Cresey. The difference is that the busy background designs on the Moses Walcut horn are absent on this horn, which gives the two horns a considerable different appearance. Richard Cresey applied his talent to the making of powder horns over a 21-year period from 1758 to 1779. He enlisted as a drummer from Connecticut and was also a gunsmith in the Continental Army.

The eighth powder horn has a signature cartouche with the name of James Coachman in it. Research by Nick Powers revealed that Coachman was a Lieutenant in the South Carolina Militia and fought under Colonel Middleton in Grant's Campaign against the

Cherokee Nation in the Carolinas. During the Revolutionary War he was a Captain under Francis Marion. This powder horn is one of a group of powder horns that have a connection to soldiers in the Highland Regiments as the makers or owners who are associated to the areas in which they served such as Havana, Cuba; Charleston South Carolina; Saint Augustine and the Cherokee conflicts (Figures 25 and 26). The maker of this horn was a highly skilled professional engraver who signed his name as Pev Robertson on a similar horn and made six or seven horns that have survived. The horn is finely engraved with the label "the City of Havana Illuminated at ye Embarkation of ye British Troops July ye 7th 1763" with a picture of 17 buildings with flying flags that are listed by name on the horn. Other points of interest are various places like



Figure 20. The “hellhorse” was a figure used frequently by Richard Cressey on his horns

The Puntal, Morro Castle, four sailing ships and fishermen casting a net. The 11 inch horn has an attractive yellow color with the carving tinted a black and vermillion shade, a lobe on the butt end and six decorated rings on the spout.

The ninth powder horn is an exceptionally well preserved horn by Jacob Gay who was a prolific maker of powder horns during a long period of time from the French and Indian War through the Revolutionary War. He is noted for his depiction of animals, often identifying them with a printed label. His drawings of soldiers and his serpentine vines and flowers are very artistic. On this horn a deer is illustrated along with four British soldiers firing on four American troops and the common rhyme “I powder With Brother Ball / Most Hero Like Doth Conquer All Anno 1775/Capt JAMES McCALLEYs/HORN” (Figures 27-30). James McCalley is shown on the tax lists from Deeryfield, New Hampshire. Another symbol on the horn mimics the British Coat of Arms, however, in the center instead of the shield design on the Arms, is a circle that says “Liberty 1775 / Success To America”. Another cartouche, which is in the middle of flowing vines and flowers carved along the horn has the important words “MADE AT / Cambridge / By J. Gay”

The tenth powder horn has a bright cream color surface giving it an extremely attractive appearance to add to its importance as an outstanding example of folk art (Figures 31-33). Along with the owner’s name of James Van Guilder, the date of 1775, the location of Roxbury and the first line of the rhyme “Steal not this horn” (for on it is the owners name) is shown a fort with two cannons. Also carved on this horn are three nautical items consisting of a three masted ship, a sloop and a mermaid. On the other side of the horn there is a man with a heart drawn on his chest looking at

a drawing of a circle containing a buck, a flying duck and a tree. The British troops stationed in Boston in 1775 were surrounded by Rebel troops on the mainland. To the north was Charlestown, on the northwest were Winter Hill and Prospect, to the west was Washington’s Headquarters at Cambridge, to the south was Roxbury Fort and Dorchester Heights with Castle William to the southeast. The location of Roxbury was important to the rebel troops because of the commanding view they had of the Neck, which connected Boston to the Mainland. The powder horns made at these locations during 1775 and 1776 are often referred to as “The Siege Of Boston Horns.” The military history of James Van Guilder who was from Great Barrington, Massachusetts included his service as a private in Captain William King’s Company of Minute Men who marched on April 21, 1775 in response to the Alarm. Additional company returns show subsequent service of Van Guilder at Dorchester Heights and the Camp at Ticonderoga, November 27, 1776.

The eleventh powder horn is identified as belonging to “MISTER SHUBAL BRAGG HIS HORN MADE MARCH THE 16th 1776” (Figure 34-38). This horn is crowded with many figures engraved with exceptional skill by Andrew Clark, an artist who drew individuals with great detail and accuracy. On it are 17 men and women shown in many activities such as hunting, on horseback and as an old clergyman labeled “EVANGILIST SAYS” with a warning “FLEE FROM THE WRATH TO COME”. He sometimes copied political cartoons of the time on his horns. The scene he copied on this horn is labeled “MISS PHILLIS / BOHEA ALIAS / TEA BANISHED” which he reproduced from the THE ROYAL AMERICAN MAGAZINE of 1774 titled “The able Doctor, or America Swallowing the Bitter Draught” showing Lord North forcing his remedies from a teapot down the throat of a prostrate



Figure 21. A view of the British Arms. Full page width



Figure 22. The Capt Edward Brown horn dated November 4, 1760.



Figure 23. A view of Crown Point.



Figure 24. The British Arms and a “hellhorse”.



Figure 25. Picture of seventeen buildings flying flags in Havana.



Figure 26. James Coachman’s horn showing the harbor at Havana.



Figure 27. The James McCalley horn made by Jaycob Gay.



Figure 28. The undecorated backside of the James McCalley horn.



Figure 29. Another overall view of the James McCalley horn.

America. A different horn by Clark had the picture of the Boston Massacre of 1770 copied from Paul Revere's pamphlet shown on it. Andrew Clark grew up in Maine, which was part of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts at that time and served in the Revolutionary War as a private in Brigadier General Knox's Corps of Artillery in 1777 and 1778. Seven horns are known to have been made by him mostly for soldiers from Maine.

The twelfth powder horn is covered with figures that are the epitome of "folk art" designs. The name of the owner is inscribed in a cartouche as SPICER MILLERD and features as a central motif a soldier wearing a military coat and carrying a halberd in one

hand and a sword in the other (Figures 39-42). The surface is covered with folksy drawn animals starting with eight birds, three four legged animals, a deer with two branches for horns and a winking owl. The Massachusetts militia company of Captain Squire Millerd in Colonel John Waterman's Regiment included five other Millerds who were probably related. Spicer Millerd was listed on an abstract for wages and billeting from December 4, 1776 to January 9, 1777 on a document from Warwick.

A discussion of "great carvers" would not be complete without the mention of a maker who I believe is perhaps the best artist of all those who carved American powder horns. He identified some



Figure 30. A cartouche with “Success to America” and “Liberty 1775”.

of his horns with the signature “J W his pene”. Institutions have five of his horns with this signature and there are two or three other horns that may be all or in part by him. As a contemporary of Samuel Lounsbury, he was stationed with him at the Fort at Number Four and also served at Fort William Henry and Crown Point. Their styles were very similar and close examination is required to distinguish the difference between their horns. They each used a design that looked like the central pistil of a flower with panels of flowing vines on each side of the symbol. However, J. W. did not use the same designs on either side of the upright symbol, but varied them with a variety of freeform artistic designs from his imagination. His ability to lay out his engraving to encompass the whole horn, his excellent calligraphy with bold letters and flowing serifs and the graceful birds and animals that he created were drawn with artistic skill unsurpassed by any other carver.



Figure 31. The James Van Gilder Horn at Roxbury.



Figure 32. This side of the horn shows a boat, geometric designs and a mermaid.

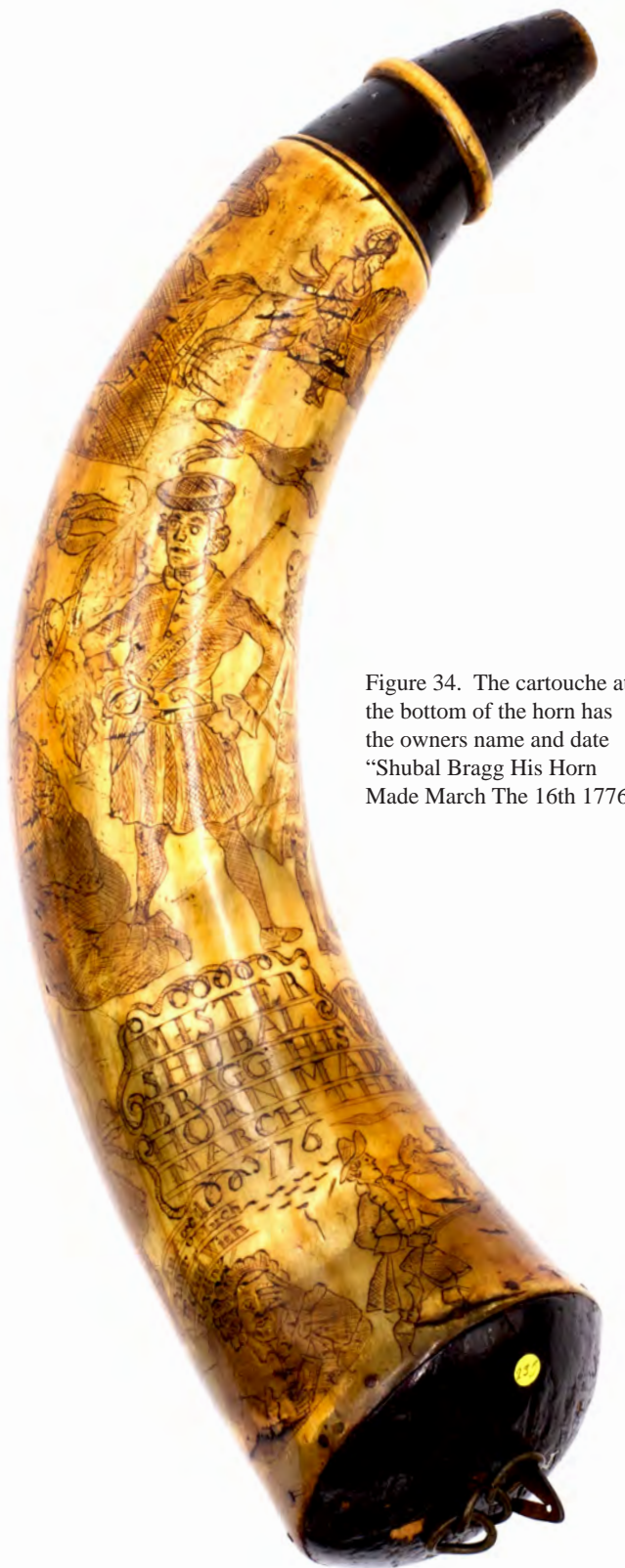


Figure 34. The cartouche at the bottom of the horn has the owners name and date "Shubal Bragg His Horn Made March The 16th 1776".



Figure 35. An Evangelist proclaims a warning "Flee From The Wrath To Come".



Figure 36. Detail on horn is from a political cartoon from the Royal American Magazine in 1774 titled "The Able Doctor or America Swallowing The Bitter Draught." It represents Britannia pouring tea down the throat of America.





Figure 37. Taken from a political cartoon showing a Scottish Highlander with his sword.



Figure 38 Detail represents two additional figures on the horn.

Bibliography

- Dresslar, J. *The Engraved Powder Horn: Folk Art of Early America*. Bargersville, IN, Dressler Publishing, 1996.
- DuMont, J. S. *American Engraved Powder Horns the Golden Age 1755 to 1783*. Canaan, NH, Phoenix, 1978.
- Grancsay, S. V. *American Engraved Powder Horns*. Ray Riling Arms Books. 1965.
- Guthman, W. H. *Drums a Beating Trumpets Sounding: Artiscally Carved in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781*. Hartford, CT, Hartford Historical Society, 1993.
- Grinslade, T. *Powder Horns: Documents of History*. Texarkana, TX, Scurlock Publishing Co, 2007.
- Swayze, N. L. *Engraved Powder Horns*. Yazoo City, MS, Gun Hill Publishing, 1978.



Figure 39. An image of a soldier in a regimental coat and pointed cap carrying a sword and a halberd.



Figure 40. An image of a soldier in a regimental coat and pointed cap carrying a sword and a halberd.



Figure 41. The "Winking Owl".



Figure 42. The backside of the horn displaying the soldier, the owl and various animals.

The author would like to thank Jim Reid for his photographic expertise and providing the pictures for this manuscript.

