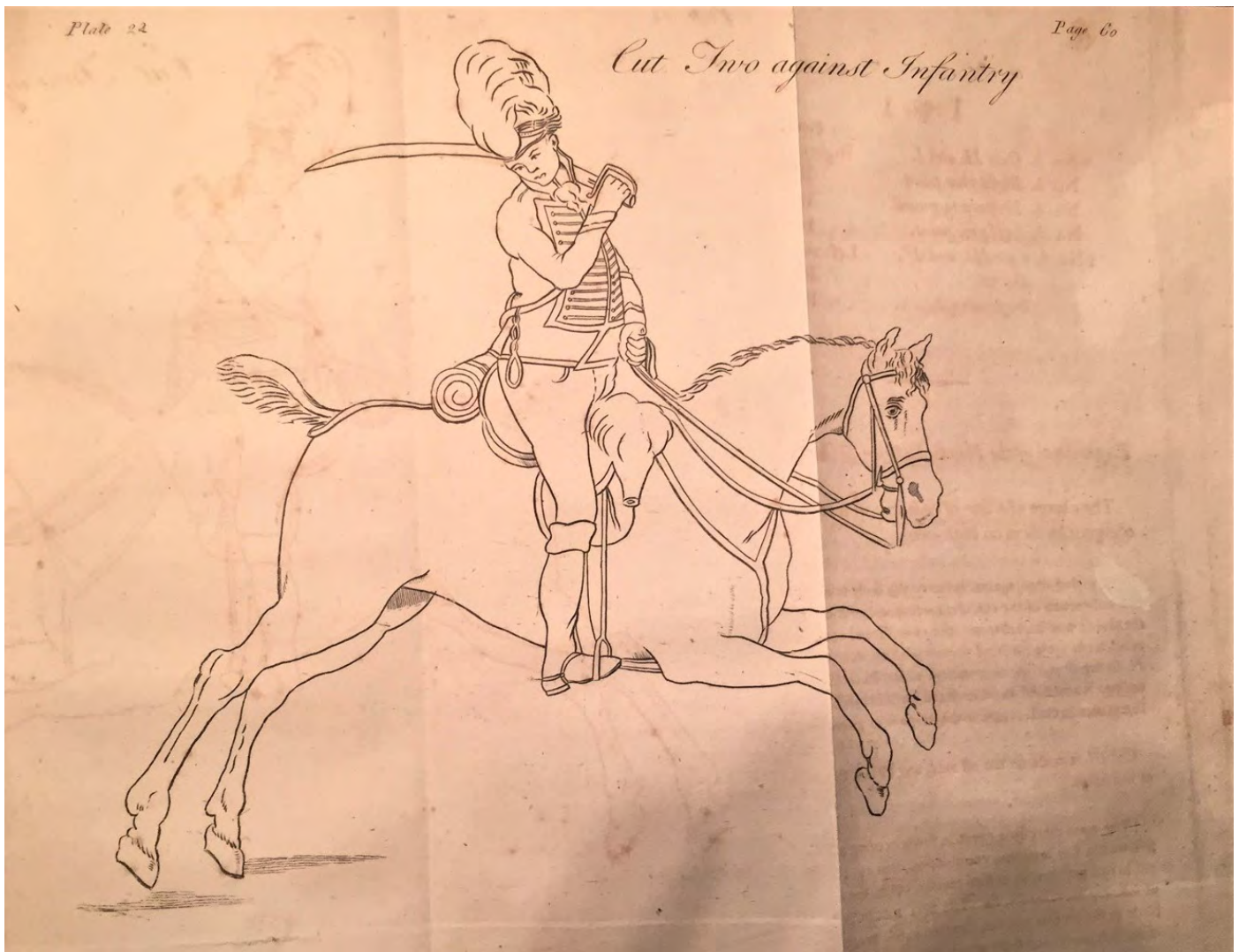


THE RARE AND INTERESTING ROSE MODEL 1807 CAVALRY SABER

By John H. Thillmann



British Trooper on Horseback¹⁷

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Early American Federal period sabers are important to arms collecting interests because they were introduced at the formation and early years of the United States. These sabers from 1783 to the early 1800s were made by a few domestic cutlers and also imported and they were purchased and used by the government as well as by various state and local militia companies.

Background summary leading up to the 1807 Rose Contract:

Our first domestically made and contracted sabers were based upon the Lewis Pahl 1781 Saber design with a few of these rare sabers at the time probably still in Arsenal (likely Philadelphia) although in used condition. The War Department asked Pahl to produce six new sabers as models in 1798 for the new Government contract saber in 1798. He made the six models that year and when received they were divided into three batches of two each, the War Department keeping two. Two were given to Nathan Starr for a

2,000 saber contract (Figures 1 and 2) and two (one lost) to Buel & Greenleaf for a 1,000 saber contract (Figures 3 and 4) for their on-hand examples to be copied for the production of their 1798 contracts. In addition, a very small Pahl purchase order was also added in 1798 for him to produce and additional 88 sabers. So, with the six model sabers Pahl made a total of 94; six in 1798 and 88 in 1799, for which we have payment records.² Note, that the six Pahl sabers and the additional 88 were not inspection stamped and not dated as the Starr and Buel & Greenleaf sabers were. The Pahl sabers were only stamped "Pahl" at the ricasso. These Pahl sabers are extraordinarily rare American martial sabers. For example, with 94 made and only seven examples known they are more than 10 times as rare as the North and Cheney 1798 pistol.³

After 1798 the War Department saber purchases were by purchase order or by contract. If by contract it was then either accepted as submitted, which was then the pattern to be made by a cutler, or they were accepted with modification or rejected.



Figure 1. Note the similarities between the Prahls 1798 (top) and Starr 1798 (below). (Prahls Author's collection, Starr courtesy of Alan Boyd)

This system lasted until the 1830's when saber patterns were again established by the War Department and overseen by the Ordnance Department from patterns that they had on hand. The patterns then were generally derived from European models brought back as suggested models by American officers on European ordnance evaluation trips or as modified by the Ordnance Department. Examples are: the English 1833 dragoon, French 1840 heavy cavalry and the Ordnance Department prescribed 1860 light cavalry.

French light cavalry.

The American version had stirrup hilts composed of a D shaped knuckle bow generally mortised into a distinctive flat toppedommel with a flush peened blade tang, or in other words, no standing capstan, although the 1807 Rose had a button peen of the tang on theommel. The grip was always ribbed wood or twine wound around a smooth wood grip and covered in leather and wound in twisted brass into the grooves. Most had a ferrule at the grip and guard juncture. Blades had a slight curve to favor both the slash and thrust. They had either a single small fuller running along both sides of the back edge (top of the blade) or also on both sides a small fuller above and a larger wider fuller below from a ricasso to within 8 to 10 inches or so of the tip for stiffness.

The scabbards were universally made of leather with an iron top mount that was generally 4 to 6 inches in width and had a domed stud whose purpose was to secure an over the shoulder baldric for suspension on the trooper. The scabbard tip was generally of iron or steel secured to the end of the scabbard, glued and riveted for support and to protect the leather scabbard and saber blade housed inside from damage. This format was used for swords of all types for hundreds of years.

The 1807 Rose Contract Saber

Contract Background:⁵

Leading up to the contract with William Rose was a back and forth between Tench Coxe, the Purveyor of Public Supplies, and the Secretary of War, Henry Dearborn, wherein they were deciding upon a pattern for this new saber contract.

In 1807 on October 29th Coxe writes to Dearborn:⁶

"Sir:

Swords with a guard, not a basket hilt, with steel ferrule & Top, blades two feet and ten inches, leather scabbard, such as our troops use, \$5.00 to \$6 & 1 / 2. I think however they can be had at \$5.00.

For the Hussar saber of 36 inches, like those of Luzerns and Pulaski Legions with iron or steel half scabbard.....

Clearly Dearborn took Coxe's advice and they went with the Hussar hilt and clipped point 34 inches long in the \$5.00 range (Figures 6 and 7). Coxe also mentions that they have on hand in the arsenal⁷ 1,400 sabers from European [German] purchases⁸ and left over Starr and Buel and Green leaf contract sabers (many of the over 3,000+ sabers from the 1789 contract were undoubtedly given to state regiments).



Figure 2. Note the hilt differences: the Prahls 1798 is the model (note that the grip is bound by twisted multi strands of copper wire) above and Starr Model 1798 on the bottom is the copy -but not exactly. The Starr blade is stamped on the reverse with 1799 and US. (Prahls Author's collection, Starr courtesy of Alan Boyd)

The Hussar Style of Saber:

Our early Federal period sabers contracted for by the Ordnance Department, the 1798 Prahls, 1798 Starr and 1798 Buel & Greenleaf, were all based upon the Hussar style of saber that was used by the light cavalry on the steps of Russia and Eastern Europe; Poland, Austria and East Prussia. In general the British copied the Hussar saber and called it their model of 1788 saber (Figure 5). The style was also adopted at the time by the very successful



Figure 3. The 1798 Prael is above and was the model for the 1798 Buel & Greenleaf below. Once again note the similarities but with subtle differences. An important difference was that the Buel & Greenleaf used a ferrule while the Prael did not in the model saber. The Buel & Greenleaf is stamped US and 1799 on the obverse (below). (Author's Collection)

The 1807 Rose US Contract

US government contract is dated 9 Dec. 1807 for 2,000 cavalry sabers at \$5.12 & 1 / 2 cents each.⁹ Delivery was to be in 1808 and 1809.

- The first batch was delivered with an uncovered grip in June 1808 with (ebony wood) and the remainder were delivered by the end of the year.¹⁰
- The remainder were with a leather covered grip.

Inspectors

Pettibone & Charles Eberle. No inspector stamp on the blade, rather it is believed, stamped with a small mound of cannon balls on the scabbard, obverse side between throat mount and mid suspension ring mount. It will be very faint unless the leather is in really fine finish.

There is no information as to why Pettibone did it this way, but interestingly the 1812 Federal cavalry helmet is stamped in the same way.¹¹ It may be that this was an inspection stamp used for other accoutrements and arms before the regularization of inspector initials, since the last federal contract was the Starr and Buel & Greenleaf sabers of the 1798 contract (Dated 1799) for which inspector Robert Orr did not stamp the blades. Orr gave certificates of inspection to both contractors and furthermore, directed them to put a date (1799) and a "US" on the blades. No Orr initials or other inspection protocol was used.

The "so called" 1808 Starr saber with the sunken Starr stamp was stamped with a tiny US and others with only a V (for Viewed) but no inspectors stamp appears until we get to 1812 and then both Starr and Rose sabers were stamped by inspectors Charles Williams (CW) for Starr and George Flegel (F) for Rose.

Some of the 1807 contract sabers were inspected by Daniel Pettibone, but not stamped. Other 1807 contract sabers were inspected by Charles Eberle but were also not stamped. This is a curious omission by the two inspectors.

From Tench Coxe Purveyor of Public Supplies to Charles Eberle Cutler [and Inspector]

June 10, 1808

*"You will be pleased to examine and inspect strictly Horseman's swords now at Arsenal of the USmade by Messrs. William Rose and Sons of Blocking Township Philadelphia. You will find some are with ebony handles & some with leather. It is wished that after the inspection you may inform me which mode of mounting (Leather, ebony or other wood) is to be preferred...."*¹²

Eberle did the inspection and also apparently preferred the leather grip as it was then used for the remainder of the contract.

Item:	Inches:
<i>Saber</i>	
Overall Length	42"
Blade Length	34 & 1/2"
Blade Width	1 & 3/8"
Small Fuller length.....	26"
Fuller to Tip.....	9"
Hilt Length.....	6"
Grip Groves.....	9"
Wire Type.....	Twisted brass thin gage
Bottom of grip to Knuckle Bow Width.....	1 & 7/8"

Item:	Inches:
<i>Scabbard</i>	
Overall Length	36 & 1 / 2"
Width of top mount	3 & 3/4"
Width of Middle Suspension Ring Mount	1 & 1/2"
Width of Median Support Mount.....	1"
Width of drag	5"
Width of Skeleton steel.....	1/4"



Figure 4. Once again the Prahl 1798 on the right was the model and Buel & Greenleaf on the left was the copy. The Buel & Greenleaf Blade obverse ricasso is marked with a US and 1799. (Author's Collection)

first 1807 Contract sabers had ebony grips and today these sabers are extremely rare (Figures 8 and 9).

Some speculate that the lip on the underside of the pommel cap was a carryover from earlier sword fighting techniques. The thought was that the small lip stopped an opponent's blade from raking the forearm of a trooper by impeding it after the opponent's blade slid along the knuckle bow and was stopped by the steel lip. Additional images showing blade stamping and features of the saber may be found in Figures 10 to 12.

The Blade Shape

The Coxe letter press book has an interesting letter that he wrote to Secretary of War Henry Dearborn wherein the blade style is described.

Nov 16th, Nov. 25th 1807 and Dec 5, 1807 Coxe to Dearborn:¹³

Nov, 16th 1807:

".....I can have 2 or 3,000 horseman's swords....the blade to have the curve or sweep of No. 59. The black of the blade to be like the high finished German sword....."

Nov. 25th 1807:

".....I wish to know whether I am to proceed upon these ideas, adopting the blade No. 59 German and the back of the point of the German damascad sword as my model."

Grip Option

Rose, a cutler, had been making swords and bayonets for a long time beginning in the Revolutionary War, so when Rose proposed a saber to the War Department they had a history of making fine swords for at least 20 years for the commercial militia market. The Company had been making grips out of ebony for years and proposed that grip material to the War Department. And indeed, the



Figure 5. 1796 British Saber Exercise book plate.⁴ While the book is dated 1796 the cavalry wood cuts are from an earlier rendition and the saber shown is a 1788 in style. Note that this image is of an early British cavalry trooper and rather than a baldric he suspends his saber scabbard from a belt that has two saber suspension straps. What looks to be a baldric sling over the trooper's shoulder is a strap for attaching a carbine. This kind of "rig" does not appear in American contract sabers until the 1807 Rose, which is the subject of this article. (Image from Thillmann collection)



Figure 6. This overall image is of the saber in the scabbard. Here we see the skeleton scabbard and its iron supports that are all attached with small rivets. This type of scabbard was popular in the French Cavalry for troopers and cavalry officers as well. (Author's Collection)



Figure 7. Here is an overall image of the saber out of the scabbard. Note the clipped tip on the blade. (Author's Collection):

Dec. 5th 1807:

".....The fashion of the blade to be as you shall direct, after receiving my letter of the 16th and 25th Ultimo & this. Be pleased to favor me with a summary final instruction about this purchase of the 2,000 swords & their form."

These letters were sent by Coxe after consulting Col. Chushing and they thought that a gilt German sword they had in inventory was a blade shape that they both preferred. The German No 59 that he mentions is undoubtedly a Diederichs imported German saber. Therefore, the flat blade with clipped tip is undoubtedly a blade modeled after the German blade. Unfortunately the Diederichs swords are not positively identified although there are some candidates such as those etched "American Light Horse" and others that have embellished blades carrying the American Eagle with shield on its breast.

The Iron bound Leather Scabbard:

For the potential 2000 saber contract by Rose, Tench Coxe wrote The Secretary of War Henry Dearborn on November 25 and on December 7th 1807 discussing the type of saber and for our interest the type of scabbard. In the two letters Coxe mentions the ebony grip and shape of the blade but importantly he also states that Rose proposes a leather scabbard iron bound for lightness of leather and strength of iron:

Nov 25 Coxe to Dearborn:¹⁴

"I had the honor to write you on the the 16th Inst. About the final offers made for the swords I mentioned that I could procure them with Leathern scabbards, iron band at top and ferrule at bottom for \$5.00.....No rings but the knob on the top band to secure the sword in the baelt....."

Later in this same letter he mentions a post script relating to the knob (baldric knob) and states the following:

"...I have consulted another workman upon the subject of iron & leather mounting of the sword blades on hand with middle bands and two rings as required on the post script of your letter of the 19th inst...."

No follow up letter exists, but Dearborn must have replied that the rings were to be added without a baldric knob. The sword blades on hand must refer to arsenal stores that were being fitted out and completed.



Figure 8. Here is a comparison of the Rose ebony grip from a commercially made and sold Rose saber on the left and an 1807 contract saber with leather covered grip on the right. Also note that the left grip has a capstan while the 1807 contract saber, the one on the right, has a button. The War Department sabers did not have capstans, most had a button while others were smooth peened possibly from later tightening efforts. Nothing in the government documents indicate the button affectation. The pommel cap top is a separate piece of steel braised on and has a small lip on the underside toward the stirrup or "D" shaped knuckle bow. (Rose on the left courtesy Dave Terefenko and on the right Author's collection)

Dec 7 Coxe to Dearborn: ¹⁵

"I have the honor to send you by Mr. Thomas D. Anderson an iron and leather mounted horseman's sword of the make of Messrs Rose and Sons, Philadelphia County whom I agreed for 2,000 deliverable in parcels by first june of \$5.00 each... ..the jacketing of the leather and binding on the upper and lower edge with iron. & the middle band will combine strength with lightness...."

One further follow up was that there was to be an additional iron band added between the middle band and ring and the drag to further strengthen the scabbard.

In Conclusion:

The 1807 Rose was a saber with one foot in the old Hussar tradition and another in the new light cavalry tradition. It used a skeleton style scabbard of half leather and steel a combination to keep it light while the steel gave it strength (Figure 13) whereas the earlier scabbards were all leather and the later scabbards were all steel. The blade was flat and clipped and the later 1810 Winner and 1812 Rose and Starr sabers were clipped. The pommel dome was flat in the Hussar style while later sabers used a bird's head domed pommel. The hilt had a mortised knuckle bow into the pommel as did the earlier contract sabers based upon the Prael hilt while the later birds head pommels were not mortised but cut for the guard to be inserted. The grip and hilt was more streamlined and the knuckle bow had a very slight S shape which the later hilts emulated but to a higher degree which became the reverse P shaped knuckle bows like the British model 1796.

The saber is a handsome weapon and has great balance. The scabbard stands out and deviates from all others with the iron skeleton format. Finally, it has a two ring saber belt set up. The knob/button for a baldric was no longer the government's preferred method of suspension, possibly copying the British 1796 approach of using a saber belt in place of the baldric.

The 1807 Rose was the last of the Hussar style horseman's sabers in the US Arsenal.

*This article is covered in the author's new book *American Federal Swords* in a manuscript with his publisher, Andrew Mowbray Inc.



Figure 9. Here is a close in view of a Rose ebony grip on one of the Commercial sabers. Note that the grip also has a very small gage tightly wound wire in the grooves just like the leather grip. (Courtesy Dave Terefenko)



Figure 10. Blade stamp on the spine of W. Rose and Sons. They are from two different stamps. (W. ROSE) (& SONS) (Author's collection)



Figure 11. This view of the 1807 Rose hilt shows the width of the stirrup shaped guard with only a slight bend. Later this bend would increase and eventually become the exaggerated reverse P shaped guard in the Rose 1812. The mortised guard and pommel cap followed the Prael model, and note also the double strand of small gage twisted and wrapped brass wire on the grip. (Author's Collection)



Figure 12. Close in view of the clipped tip on a 1807 Rose saber. Note also the slight bevel on the up side of the clip so that it is also sharpened for the better thrust! (Author's Collection)



Figure 13. Skeleton Scabbard detail of an 1807 Rose saber. Clockwise from upper left: top mount; middle suspension ring mount; drag, note that the skeleton edge bars slip into the drag and are then riveted into place; scabbard reverse side so one can see that the stitching is on the side and not on the edge; and mid-mount in between lower suspension ring mount and drag mount. (Author's Collection) print full page width

Endnotes

1. *Sword Exercise and Military Equitation* (In Gold on the spine), Rules and Regulations for the Sword Exercise of the Cavalry (Inside front sheet). By His Majesties Command, Adjutant Generals Office 1, December 1796. London Printed in the War Office; and sold by T. Egerton, Military Library, Whitehall, MDCCXCVI (Inside second sheet).
2. NARA, and FOLD 3 entry in Samuel Hodgdon Letter book 1798-1799, Lewis Pahl gets \$40.00 from the Secretary of War for making 6 swords on Oct 3, 1798.
3. In the new (in edit) US Federal Saber book by the author (*American Federal Swords*, Andrew Mowbray publishers) there is an extensive Pahl chapter. The Pahl 1798 saber had a production of 94, 6 of which were models while the North & Cheney pistol was in two contracts of 500 and 1,500 each.
4. *Sword Exercise and Military Equitation*
5. This section is derived from Rose chapter in the Authors new book "*American Federal Swords*" in manuscript form and with Andrew Mowbray publishers.
6. James Hicks, *United States Ordnance Volume II Ordnance Correspondence*. 428 Rich Ave, Mt Vernon NY 1940. P 142
7. The Philadelphia Arsenal
8. These were purchase order sabers found on the open market to supplant stocks and not contract sabers. *The Company of Military Historians Article* on what are believed to be some of these sabers appears in a 2019 Journal written by John DePue (CMH Fall 2019 Vol 71 No. 3 Washington DC. P 213-217.) Also a large number of swords were purchased from Diederick and Co. including complete swords and just blades. See: Diederick. Letters Tench Coxe 1807, James Hicks *United States Ordnance Volume II Ordnance Correspondence*, Chapter Ii P 17-18.
Diederick was apparently an importer who purchased German swords and sold a batch to the government in 1807 under a purchase order. We know almost nothing about the order other than that there were a number of completed swords and unmounted blades.
9. James Hicks, *United States Ordnance Volume II, Ordnance Correspondence*. 428 Rich Ave, Mt Vernon NY 1940. P 142
10. Ibid P. 144
11. The small cannon ball mound was seen by Jim Brown on a fine original scabbard and noted to also be on the leather portion of a 1812 Federal Cavalry helmet
12. James Hicks, *United States Ordnance Volume II, Ordnance Correspondence*. 428 Rich Ave Mt Vernon NY 1940. P. 144
13. Ibid P 143-144
14. Ibid P. 143
15. Ibid P. 144

