

Characteristics of U.S. Naval Officers' Swords

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The purpose of this presentation is to explain the style of grip, guard, blades and scabbards typical to Naval swords. You will also see the castings, engravings and etchings typically used to decorate U.S. Naval swords. Also included is a connection with the historical ships on which these officers and their swords *might* have served.

Sword 1

The first sword and dirk are dated 1790 (Federal period). The Continental Navy, disbanded after the American Revolution, became the U.S. Navy in 1794. The frigates *Constitution* and *Constellation* were launched in 1797.¹



Figure 1. (Sword 1) 1790's Pillow Pommel five ball (Courtesy of Francis Thurkle, England.)



Figure 2. (Sword1) Small sword knot ring.

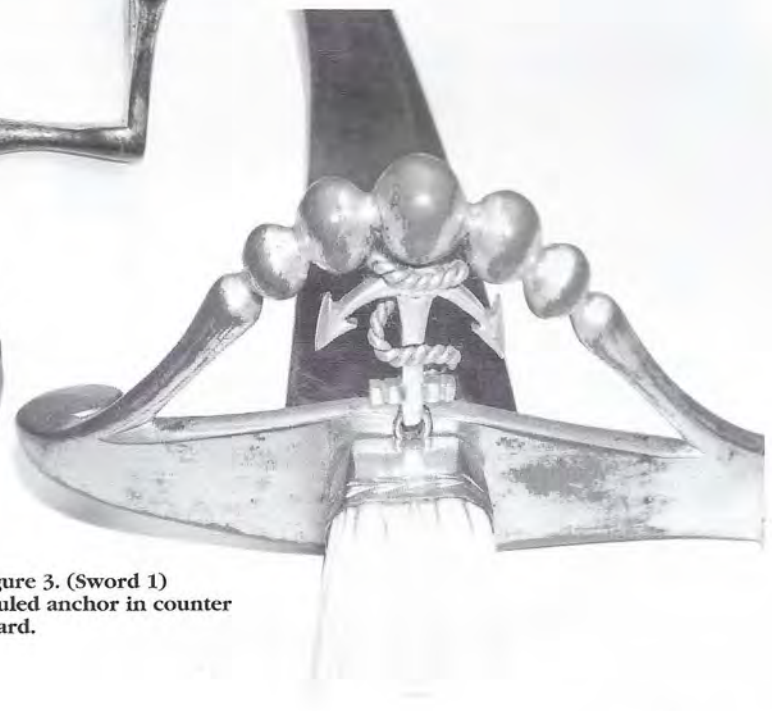


Figure 3. (Sword 1) Fouled anchor in counter guard.

Sword 2

The first Federal sword is a 1790s Pillow Pommel five ball sword by Francis Thurkle. His swords, made in London, England, were highly prized by U.S. Naval officers.² This sword has an Ivory grip with an early U.S. Federal Eagle showing Naval motif of a fouled anchor inset in the guard. It also has a small sword knot ring, which signifies U.S. Naval usage.³

The next dirk is a 1790s Pillow Pommel five ball hilt by J. Herazcek. This dirk was also made for sale in the American market. It has an ivory grip with a five ball knuckle guard. The grip has an early U.S. Federal fouled anchor on the front and the initials *A.H.P.* on the reverse. There is a fouled anchor in the center of the counter guard.

Figure 4. (Sword2) 1790's five ball dirk (Courtesy of J. Herazcek).



Figure 5. (Sword 2) Fouled anchor in counter guard.

Sword 3

The third sword in this group was made circa 1805 and is a Pillow Pommel five ball hilt sword. The ivory grip exhibits the small sword knot ring, which signifies Naval usage.⁴

The blade of this sword was manufactured in Birmingham, England by Thomas Gill, and made for the American market during a period when the size of the Navy was reduced. When American relations with the Barbary rulers reached a crisis in Tripoli, the American ships *Enterprise*, *Philadelphia* and *Intrepid* were sent to protect American trade.⁵

Figure 6. (Sword 3) Circa 1805 Pillow Pommel five ball hilt sword (Courtesy of Thomas Gill, Birmingham, England).

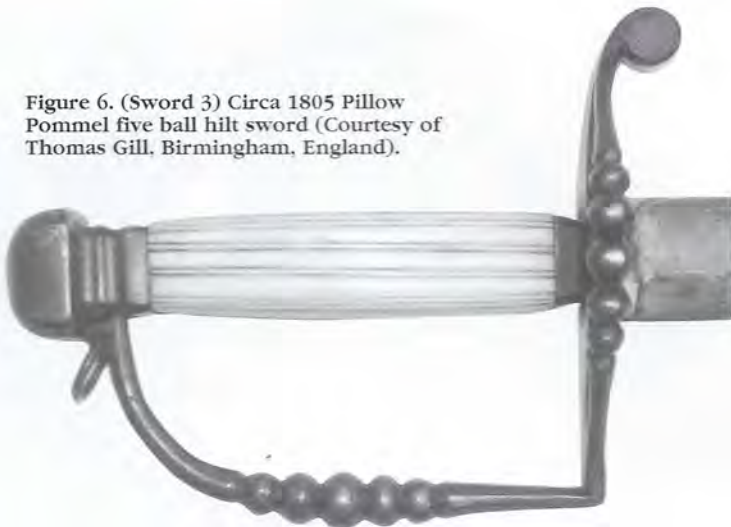


Figure 7. (Sword 3) Small sword knot ring.

Sword 4

The next two swords were made before the War of 1812. This Eagle Pommel stirrup guard by George Upson & Co., New York, was made about 1810. This sword, made for the American market, has a blade imported from England. Upson's brother Henry was an exporter in England.

The ivory grip exhibits a small ring at the top for the sword knot, which signifies Naval usage.⁶

Figure 8. (Sword 4) Circa 1810 Eagle Pommel with stirrup guard (Courtesy of George Upson and Company, New York).

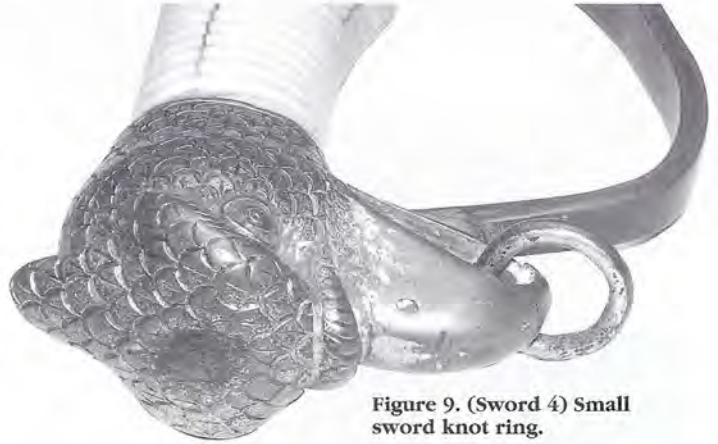


Figure 9. (Sword 4) Small sword knot ring.

Sword 5

This 1810 Pillow Pommel sword with five ball knuckle guard was made by George Upson & Co., New York. This sword also has a blade imported from England and was made for the American market. The dark stained grip was used on swords belonging to a Captain or lower rank. The five ball counter guard has a small sword knot ring in the joint between the sword pommel and the knuckle guard. The presence of this ring signifies Naval usage.⁷

These 1810 swords were made in New York using blades imported from England. During this time, there were bitter economic blockades between England and France due to the Napoleonic wars. The British policy of impressing sailors like those on the USS *Chesapeake* was one of the factors leading to the War of 1812.⁸

Figure 10. (Sword 5) 1810 Pillow Pommel five-ball hilt sword (Courtesy of George Upson Company, New York).



Figure 11. (Sword 5) Small sword knot ring.

Sword 6

This Horstmann & Sons Eagle Head sword was made between 1820 and 1830. Its straight blade was made in Klingenthal, Germany. The grip has two mother-of-pearl scales, front and back. The knuckle guard was gilded with designs in high relief. The counter guard shows an eagle with shield and arrows. Also shown are an anchor, a figure holding a spear in one hand and a club wrapped with a snake in the other, and a sailing ship. One side of the blade shows a stand of arms and on the reverse is a fouled anchor.⁹

Figure 12. (Sword 6) 1820–1830 Eagle Head with straight blade (Courtesy of Horstmann & Sons, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania).

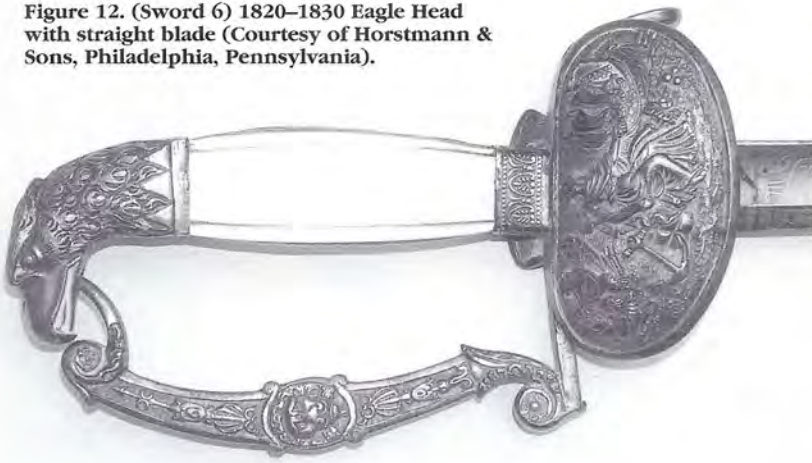


Figure 13. (Sword 6) Guard showing eagle, anchor and ship.

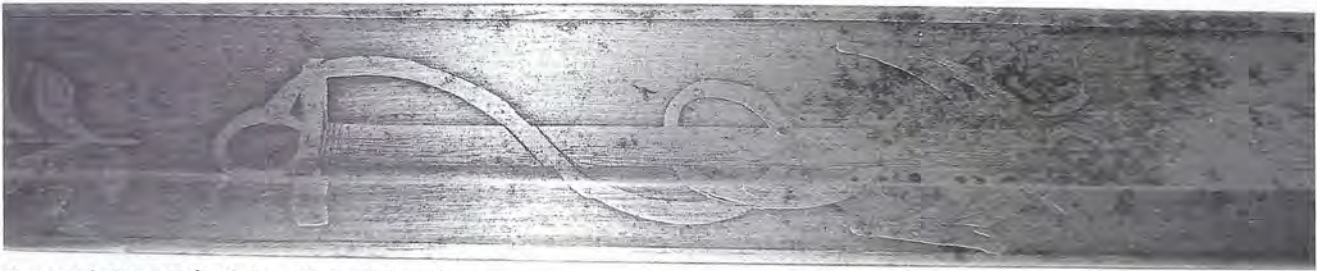


Figure 14. (Sword 6) Blade with fouled anchor.

Sword 7

The following 1820–1830 Eagle head sword with straight blade is not marked. The white bone grip is wrapped with two strands of brass wire. Like the Horstmann & Sons Eagle Head sword, the knuckle guard was gilded with designs in high relief. The counter guard shows an eagle with shield and arrows. Also shown are an anchor, a figure holding a spear and a club wrapped with a snake, and a sailing ship.¹⁰



Figure 15. (Sword 7) 1820–1830 Eagle Head with straight blade.



Figure 16. (Sword 7) Guard showing eagle, anchor and ship.

Sword 8

These 1820 to 1830 era swords were manufactured after the War of 1812 during a period of increasing overseas commerce. The Navy expanded to protect this growing shipping trade. The *Pennsylvania* and *Independence* were examples of frigates that were part of this expanding fleet operation.¹¹

The 1830-1860 Navy Militia NCO sword has a helmet at the top of the grip and no knuckle guard. The quillon is equal on both sides. The sword is made by Horstmann & Sons of Philadelphia. The scabbard is not embellished, however it has a leather throat with one frog stud in the center fitting carry ring and a simple drag.

The sword blade has a fouled anchor close to the grip and a stand of arms. The reverse of the blade is marked with an eagle holding a laurel with three arrows in its talons, and a streamer saying "E Pluribus Unum." Etched leaves and stems cover the balance of the blade.

Figure 17. (Sword 8) Circa 1830-1860 Navy Militia NCO sword (Courtesy of Horstmann & Sons, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania).

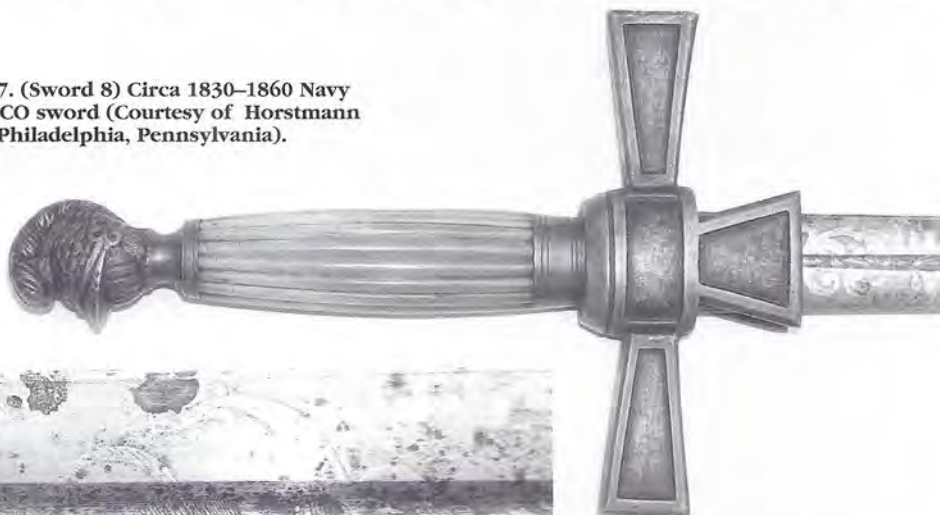


Figure 18. (Sword 8) Blade with fouled anchor.



Sword 9

The next 1830-1841 Eagle head Naval sword has a brass chain between the eagle head and the right quillon with an acorn on the tip. The left quillon is the same with the exception of a missing chain. The grip is profusely carved bone. There are two shell-shaped double counter guards on each side of the grip. The blade has a straight double edge. It is etched with two stands of arms and a fouled anchor. The reverse side of the blade is etched with three stands of arms, flags, floral and leaf designs. The scabbard is engraved on one side with floral leaves and an eagle with wings outspread above a shield. Below the eagle is an eight-pointed star. There are two carry rings at the top and one at the bottom.

Figure 19. (Sword 9) Circa 1830-1841 Eagle Head naval sword.



Figure 20. (Sword 9) Acorn finial and shell guard.

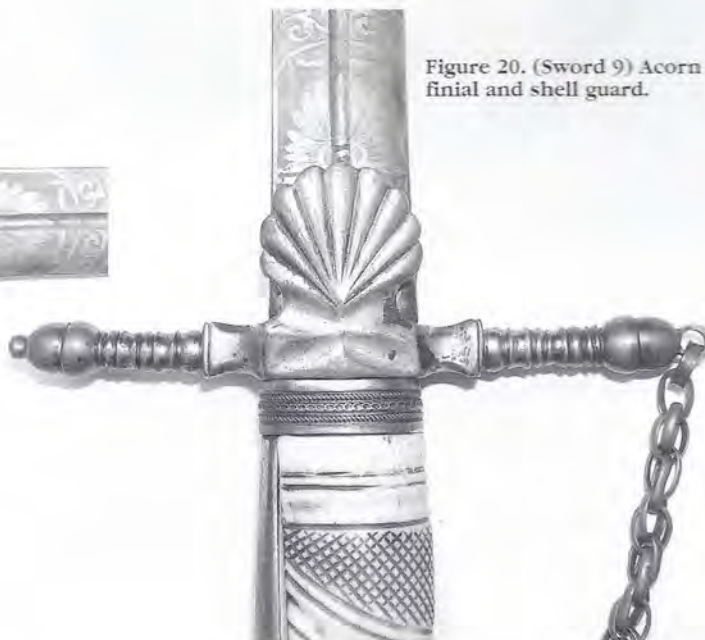




Figure 21. (Sword 9) Fouled anchor on blade.

Sword 10

During the period of 1830 to 1860, American trade and exploration was expanding to China, Japan and India. The East India Squadron was established. The Japan Expedition entered Tokyo Bay with the side-wheeler *Susquehanna* and the sloops *Plymouth* and *Saratoga*.¹²

This U.S. Naval Non-regulation Eagle head sword was made by W. H. Horstmann & Son, Philadelphia, between 1837 and 1843. The eagle head on the back of the guard stretches all the way to the ferrule. The knuckle guard has four branches into the counter guard, which shows a relief of fouled anchor and an eagle. The quillon shows a design of leaves ending in an acorn. There is also a hinged rear counter guard.

The heavy quill back blade is engraved with a fouled anchor and the Native American Tecumseh, holding a hatchet. There is an eagle with wings spread and a banner with "Liberty" under an arch of stars.¹³ There appears to be a Native American head-dress and the remainder of the blade is covered with leaves, flowers and stems to the end of the etching on the blade.



Figure 22. (Sword 10) Circa 1837–1843 Non-regulation Eagle Head (Courtesy of Horstmann & Sons, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania).



Figure 23. (Sword 10) Fouled anchor and eagle with acorn finial.



Figure 24. (Sword 10) "United States Navy" on blade.

The reverse of the blade reads "W.H. Horstmann & Sons, Philadelphia". The top of the blade is inscribed "United States Navy" and next is a stand of arms and a flag. Lower on the blade is an eagle with spread wings, a banner showing "Liberty," 13 stars and a sunburst.¹⁴



Figure 25. (Sword 10) Fouled anchor on blade reverse.

Sword 11

The following Naval sword made between 1841 and 1852 is an Eagle Head sword by London Manufacturing of London, England. The stirrup knuckle guard has floral designs on top and bottom. There are two quillons, both capped with acorns and oak leaves. The counter guard shows acorns, leaves, eagle head with pommel, and eagle relief on top of the capstan. The grip is made of carved ivory.

The blade is etched with a fouled anchor over Tecumseh holding a tomahawk, with an eagle marked "Liberty," thirteen stars and a sunburst. The remaining area is covered with flowers and leaves. The reverse blade shows "United States Navy," stands of arms, an eagle under "Liberty", 13 stars and a sunburst. The remaining area shows floral and leaf designs. The black leather scabbard has a throat with a frog stud marked with a fouled anchor. The center fitting has a fouled anchor engraved on one side. The drag is engraved with acorns and leaves on a stem. The scabbard and grip are gold plated.¹⁵

Figure 26. (Sword 11) Circa 1841–1852 Eagle Head naval sword (Courtesy of London Manufacturing of London, England).



Figure 27. (Sword 11) Acorn Quillons with the counter guard with acorns and oak leaves.



Figure 28. (Sword 11) Fouled anchor on blade.

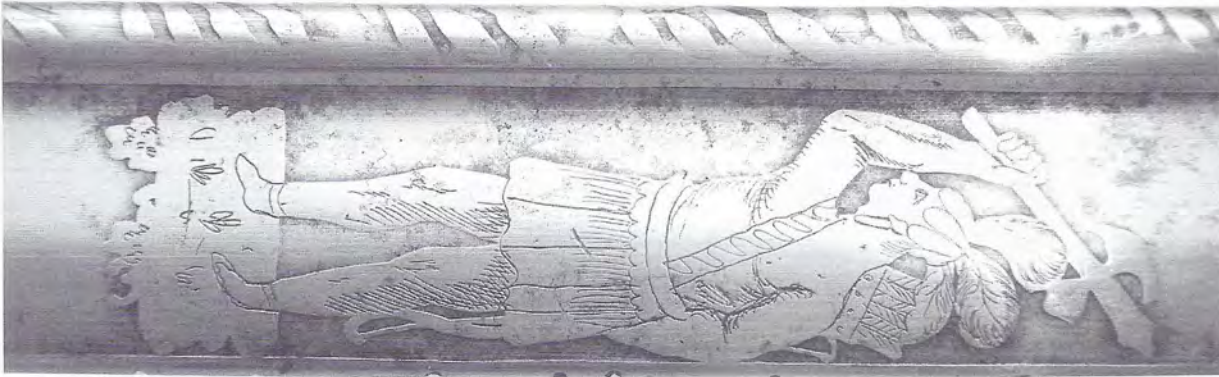


Figure 29. (Sword 11) Tecumseh.



Figure 30. (Sword 11) Reverse with the American eagle.



Figure 31. (Sword 11) "United States Navy" above the eagle.



Figure 32. (Sword 11) Center fitting on scabbard with the Naval anchor.



Figure 33. (Sword 11) Reverse of center fitting with the fouled anchor.



Figure 34. (Sword 11) Drag engraved with oak leaves and acorns.

Sword 12

The final sword was made beginning in 1852 to present day (with variants) by Ames Sword Co. The U.S. Naval sword of 1852 has a grip that is wrapped with shark skin, then wrapped with twisted brass wire to fill the grooves and hold the shark skin in place. The pommel cap shows an eagle surrounded by thirteen stars. The acorns and leaves are cast on the top of the grip and tied with a knot. The knuckle guard shows a dolphin at the top and the dolphin tail in the counter guard. The counter guard is covered with acorns and leaf designs and marked with "USN." The quillon shows a dolphin head.

Figure 35. (Sword 12) 1852 Naval Officer's Sword (Courtesy of Ames Manufacturing company of Chicopee, Mass).



Figure 36. (Sword 12) Dolphin head on knuckle guard.

Figure 37. (Sword 12) Dolphin head on quillon.



Figure 38. (Sword 12) "USN" on guard with oak leaves and acorns.



Figure 39. (Sword 12) Fouled anchor over U.S. shield.

The blade shows "Ames Mfg. Sword Co, Chicopee, Mass." The blade has a quill top from the guard two thirds down the blade. The top of the blade shows a Naval cannon and cannon balls with an eagle on top and a sunburst above. Below that is a fouled anchor, the inscription "USN," and a dolphin. Pictured next is a figure-eight knot of rope, leaves and stems followed by a sunburst.



Figure 40. (Sword 12) "USN" on blade.

The top of the reverse side of the blade shows a fouled anchor and a shield with stars and stripes. Next is a spot for the owner's name to be inscribed within a circle of stars (not used). Below that is a stand of arms consisting of a sword, trident, pike, boarding axe, spear and a flag that reads "USN."



Figure 41. (Sword 12) Fouled anchor on reverse blade.

The scabbard has a carry ring attached to a figure-eight rope knot on the throat, marked "Ames Mfg. Co. Chicopee, Mass." The center fitting also has a figure-eight knot holding the carry ring. The drag tip is in the shape of a dolphin.

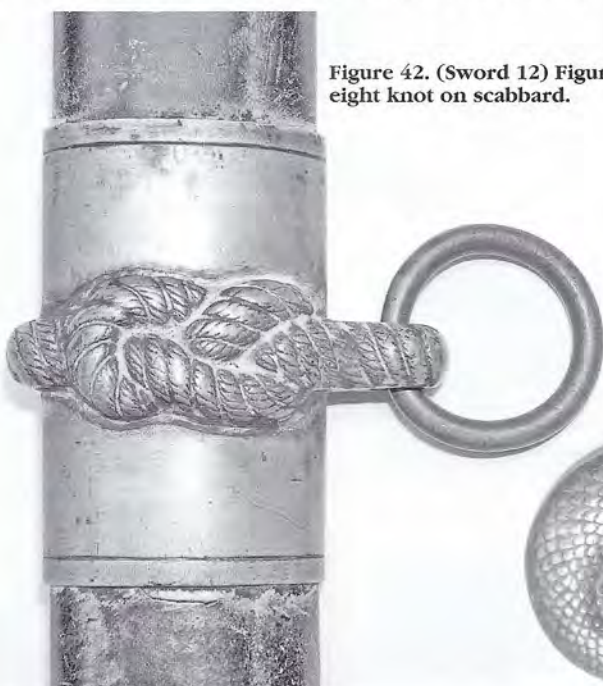


Figure 42. (Sword 12) Figure-eight knot on scabbard.

During this period of American history the Navy went through many changes in technology, beginning with the frigates *Constitution* and *Constellation*, launched in 1797. The *Fulton* and *Fulton II* were representative of the early steam ships built by the Navy. Other steam warships, the *Mississippi* and the *Missouri* were launched in 1841. The *Merrimac* was launched in 1855.¹⁶

This concludes a brief historical timeline of early Naval swords. I appreciate the opportunity to share the variety of marks and styles of swords that are identified as Naval and are part of my collection.



Figure 43. (Sword 12) Dolphin on drag.

¹E. B. Potter, *Naval Academy Illustrated—History of the U.S. Navy*, (New York: Galahad Books, 1971) 79.

²Andrew Mowbray, *The American Eagle Pommel Sword, the Early Years—1794-1830*, (Lincoln, RI: Mowbray) 58, 59.

³Mowbray, 58, 59.

⁴Mowbray, 16, 26, 27.

⁵Potter, 32.

⁶Mowbray, 95.

⁷Mowbray, 95.

⁸Potter, 38.

⁹Mowbray, 15, 98.

¹⁰Mowbray, 152, 190, 192, 194-197.

¹¹Potter, 57.

¹²Potter, 60.

¹³Harold L. Peterson, *The American Sword 1175-1945*, (Philadelphia, PA: Ray Rilings Arms Books Co., 1954) 163.

¹⁴Peter Tuite, *U.S. Naval Officers, Their Swords and Dirks*, (Lincoln, RI: Mowbray, 2004) 56,57.

¹⁵Tuite, 89, 95, 96, 232.

¹⁶Peterson, 163.

Furr, Donald Clegg, *American Swords and Makers' Marks*, (Paragon, Orange, California, 1999).

Mowbray, Andrew, *The American Eagle Pommel Sword, the Early Years, 1794-1830*, (Lincoln, R.I, Mowbray, 1988).

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