

A Drumbeat Through History

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In the last seventy-five years we saw the American public begin to look to its past and start collecting all types of antiques and, or at least in their minds, historic treasures of Americana. This interest in both our history and collecting materials from the past has recently changed in direction and unfortunately is now declining from a market that had developed after World War II.

The roll of the old drum as a wastebasket, corner table, or umbrella stand has changed. So have the prices with fewer pieces coming out of homes or roadside antique shops. Now most are found in old collections.

The objective of my presentation is to both entertain and to a modest, I hope, extent educate the members and visitors to this meeting on American military drums and their identification.

The drum being used by the military goes back to the beginning of recorded history with the basic purpose remaining the same: a drum was and is a tool to **"Stir the Spirit, Prepare for Battle, and or Give Commands."** Be it a tribal drum from the beginnings of human history or a modern military drum, the cadence and music does stir the spirit. Mankind has always prepared for battle with song or dance, and drums have been used or for this purpose by nearly all the people of this planet we call Earth.

As students or collectors, we immediately know the term the **"Golden Age"** for those who study or collect Pennsylvania/Kentucky Rifles. There is also I believe a **"Golden Age"** of decorated military drums. In modern American History this age was the period from the last quarter of the 18th century to the middle of the 19th century. Thus perhaps from 1770 to 1870 one could state is the hundred years given for the Golden Age. This is based on the quality of craftsmanship in construction, high artistic skill in the applied decorations or designs, and perhaps the social importance of the military and its music in the culture and society of the new republic.

The artistic skill, mentioned, could pre-date the timeline I have mentioned but examples prior to this period in America are too few for a realistic survey of examples.

Painted drums much as banners or flags can identify a tribe, nation, or a regiment. In the collecting community the painted symbol not only helps to date the example but also provides an attractive market appeal. This of course has played a role in the change in the market value of these antiques with those having quality artwork and sound condition bringing a higher price.

The age in which a drum was manufactured and thus used can be determined by some basic observations. The easiest guide is to look through the air hole and, if still present, view the maker's label. By the last quarter of the 18th century we find labels in most drums. In my study and collecting of American drums many labels found on late 18th or early 19th century drums appear to be handwritten on paper and then glued in place. Sometime in the late 18th century we begin to see the handwritten label replaced with a printed label. In America there is an overlap with handwritten examples in use as well as printed examples. According to some, the expanded market for drums and also large government orders caused the printing of such labels.¹ Should the label be gone or destroyed on an American drum one can then view the "tack design". In this review, discussions with member Bruce Bazelon, fellow collectors, and a study of the few extant publications the tack design comes into review.²

It is my belief, and that of others, that the major manufacturers, such as the makers in Germantown Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, New York and Boston all had their own distinct tack design. In more rural areas, where a cooper might produce a drum for the local militia, we will not find a constant pattern that fits into this interpretation. I should note that we can find a known maker's tack signature with a label for a different business or individual. These I believe are retail facilities that purchased, not manufactured, the drums or other materials being sold. In preparing this article I also noted that there is a Boston or New England School of painting, a Philadelphia style, and a Baltimore pattern. This however is for another presentation.

The basic construction, height of the drum, and style of painting (if painted) also helps to determine its age. As noted in the images viewed, we can see both a unique style to the artwork as a means of identification in addition to the tack design.

The drums depicted in the initial images show an evolution from small rose head nails/tacks, to brass tacks, artistic styles and paper makers' labels. The following images will show a variety of makers with their individual signature depicted in the tack design. We will also see the various styles of artwork as it develops and then becomes more standard with a regulation format and style of eagle. This regulation pattern coming into prominence in the 1850 time period and thus is the most significant style at the outbreak of the Civil War. The bulk of the large number of surviving Civil War examples were made under government contracts and have the ribbon with US in the eagle's mouth. The early manufacturing techniques, heraldic eagles, and hand workmanship depart the scene after the American Civil War and thus ends the "**The Golden Age**" of drum making in the United States.

The examples shown, with a few noted exceptions, are the collection of drums acquired with my military collection by the United States Army Center of Military History.

¹ See Bruce Bazelon and William F. McGuinn. *A Directory of American Military Goods, Dealers and Makers, 1785-1915* (Private Printing, 1990)

² G. Craig Caba. *United States Military Drums, 1845-1865: A Pictorial Survey* (Harrisburg, PA: Civil War Antiquities Limited, 1977) 2

An 18th Century Drum Information supplement

This information page is being provided with additional data for those who have an interest in known 18th century examples. It is based on examples that I have viewed, had access to and are believed to be manufactured in the 18th Century. There are other examples, many in European museums and collections, but realize examples that can be substantiated to the 18th Century are extremely rare in North America. Many early rural constructed examples are identified as 18th Century and one should realize that crude or elementary construction does not necessarily provide age of the piece. If marked (*) images are provided in the presentation and from my collection. The collection now with the US Army Center of Military History.

1. **New England Drum**, by Robert Crosman of Taunton Massachusetts.
There are 3 known examples, all having handwritten labels that note the maker, his location and date. The dates reported are 1739, 1740 and 1745. They all have had repaint actions having both added and or removed paint. I am not able to determine the time periods for these modifications. Based on a report, provided by Mr. Steve Rogers it appears that they may have had an original brown paint as found on the makers known furniture and they have red hoops. The body seam is closed by small rose head type tacks with the body height being 14 ¾", rim height being 1 7/8", and diameter 15" on the examined example.
2. **French Military Drum**, found in Massachusetts, and would likely appear to be a trophy from the French and Indian War (perhaps Louisburg). In the restoration & cleaning one could see elements of additional French markings from the period of use and some overpainting. By its large size my belief is that it was manufactured in Europe following the examples seen in paintings of early drums. Originally part of my collection, it is now exhibited at Fort Pitt. The height is 22 1/4" with a diameter of 17". The hoops are painted with a series of red, white, and blue pattern of lines and when found it retained period heads and one original buff leather pull. The escutcheon style design on the face was done by a skilled artist showing the symbols of France. (*)
3. **Pine Tree Drum**, this example is considered a regimental drum of a Massachusetts Regiment from the Revolution. Found in Massachusetts with the early emblem of a "Pine Tree" (skilled artist) surrounded by delicate scroll work and a ribbon with the Latin motto "It is Sweet and Fitting (or noble) to Die for Ones Country". This motto is found on period currency from North Carolina and as an epitaph memorial to an officer on Washington's staff. From old notes I believe it is approx... 14 ¼" by 14 ¼"+ (*)

I should add that most of the original Colors from the Revolution have Latin for wording and the early Federal Colors, such as the 3rd Legion have the Latin replaced with English as is also noted on a Regular Army Eagle drum.

4. **The 13 Star Regimental drum 1775 – 1800** (Guthman Americana) having been exhibited and published by the late Bill Guthman this is a well-known example. The multi pointed stars formed in a circle with one in the center total 13. The style of the stars, with 8 points is typical of the period and as more states were added the star number would have changed. This example, now in a private collection, was approximately 16 ¼” in height and 15” in diameter. The body is a medium blue with dark blue hoops and as with all of Bill’ drums left in the condition found.
5. **Regulation Eagle drum, circa 1791 – 1800**, by Henry Fraley. At this time it is one of two known examples with his label. Fraley was a Philadelphia Associator during the Revolution and also a craftsman who manufactured artillery carriages and related materials under government contracts. He also had contracts for drums during the Revolution. It appears that he no longer was operating his business by 1800. The business was taken over by his son-in-law Thomas Bringham, a Germantown neighbor, and the tack design was continued in use. The Turkey Eagle found on military buttons and documents of the period is nicely presented here with a unit designation in the ribbon. *1st Compy 1st Battln, 2d Regiment*. The maker, style of eagle and unit designation help define the time of use and for the Regular Army, the militia not having multi battalion regiments. This example is 15 ½ by 15 ½ inches and found with the heads, rope and ears. (*)
6. **Federal Period drum, circa 1793 – 1798**, marked Thomas Jaquett, 35 South Front Street (circa 1793 – 1798). The one of two known example with this label. I believe the label substantiates that he had a retail facility for imported and local products. This drum has essentially the same tack design of Fraley with additional tacks forming a V above the top circle and below the bottom circle. This may indicate made by Fraley for this outlet. (*)