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“I Powder With My Brother Ball;” Analyzing Powder Horns From the Colonial Period

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“I POWDER WITH MY BROTHER BALL;” ANALYZING POWDER HORNS FROM THE COLONIAL PERIOD

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the engravings of powder horns in 18th century New England, primarily from the Seven Years War and the American Revolution. These horns offer unique insights into the lives of the largely anonymous men who fought in these wars. The horns are first evaluated from a cultural perspective, looking at references to religion, love, and death. Secondly, the horns are analyzed from a political perspective, focusing on the shifting loyalties of New Englanders away from the British King and toward a new nation.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, North America was plunged into a series of wars that changed the trajectory of the continent. These wars were fought primarily by anonymous men whose lives are largely forgotten. Despite their lack of paper trails, many of these men left behind personal objects that were preserved from generation to generation. Engraved powder horns were saved and preserved up until today, leaving a large collection of objects to evaluate. These horns, created by men from all different backgrounds and social strata, illustrated the men’s hopes, fears, beliefs, and values. Most importantly, they showed the large-scale but gradual change in political opinion on the British monarchy from its highest ebb in 1763 to the outbreak of revolution in 1775.

The first of these conflicts, the Seven Years’ War, was a worldwide conflict fought between 1756 and 1763, in which the war in America—the French and Indian War—was a subsection. In the Americas, Great Britain controlled the burgeoning thirteen colonies that hugged the Atlantic seaboard, while France controlled a vast but sparsely populated land referred to as New France, that included Canada and the Mississippi regions. France and her Native

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American allies gained the upper hand early on, defeating British regulars and American provincials who were ill prepared for wilderness fighting. However, with the rise of William Pitt in the British government, Britain and its American colonies redoubled their efforts and gained victories in 1758 and 1759 and eventually conquering New France. In 1763, the war ended with a decisive British victory and France ceded the majority of its territory in North America.²

Britain had more than doubled its national debt to 146,000,000 pounds to win this victory. The British ministry, which had generally pursued a policy of “salutary neglect” towards the thirteen colonies, began taxing the colonies to fund a war which they had benefited heavily from. Many provincials perceived this as an infringement on their rights as Englishmen and prompted a tumultuous decade, culminating in 1775 with war. Despite tremendous battlefield victories, Great Britain could not crush the American rebellion, forcing their withdrawal from the thirteen colonies and the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783, which formally recognized America’s independence.³

The engravings of powder horns flourished during these wars, ushering in a period known as the ‘golden age’ of powder horns. Powder horns were relatively small, conical-shaped objects made of oxen horns. Powder horns carried the black powder necessary to fire a musket, making them essential tools in eighteenth century warfare. They hung from a cord over a man’s shoulder and sat next to the waist, like a briefcase.⁴ Although not all powder horns were engraved, the ones that were typically shared several commonalities, including inscriptions of the owner’s name, the year, and the horn’s place of origin. The owner of the powder horn was not

² For information on the Seven Years’ War in America, see Fred Anderson, *The War That Made America: A Short History of the French and Indian War* (New York, 2005).

³ For information on the American Revolution and the years preceding, see David Hackett Fischer, *Paul Revere’s Ride* (Oxford, 1995).

⁴ Steven V. Grancsay, *American Engraved Powder Horns: A Study Based on the J.H. Grenville Collection* (New York, 1945), 1-2.

always the actual carver of the horn. Most of the time, men would have other soldiers particularly proficient in carving engrave their horns, resulting in both a combination of images and ideas requested by the owner and new artistic flourishes added by the carver.⁵ Famous carvers, most notably Jacob Gay and John Bush, developed their own signature styles which are identifiable without even seeing a carver's mark. These carvings were often made in forts or military encampments. During the Seven Years War, most horns were carved in the forts that protected the New York frontier from French attacks from Canada. In contrast, horns of the American Revolution were predominantly carved during sieges like the Siege of Boston in 1775.

This paper will focus on powder horns made by men from New England between 1747 and 1778. The powder horns will be evaluated first from a cultural perspective and then from a political perspective. The cultural section will be broken down into three main themes—love, religion, and death—which were chosen based on the frequency the images or inscriptions appear on the horns and their importance in understanding New England society. The political section will analyze the horns chronologically from the Seven Years War up to the start of the American Revolution. Of note will be the changing imagery in comparison with those of the Seven Years War and before. Prior to the above analysis, this paper will begin with three biographies of men who owned powder horns to provide a context in which to think about these objects.

⁵ E. Lome, "Horns of Plenty: Decorated Military Powder Horns in Colonial America," *Journal of Antiques and Collectibles*, <https://journalofantiques.com/features/horns-plenty-decorated-military-powder-horns-colonial-america/>.

Three Lives

An eclectic group of men from various social statuses, economic groups, and ethnic backgrounds owned the powder horns of the American colonial-period. Some powder horn owners stamped their names prominently in history books, while others have faded into obscurity, leaving little evidence of their existence. Amos Barrett came from an influential family that settled in Concord in 1640 and was a typical powder horn owner, making him quite representative of the group as a whole. Barrett's horn was carved in 1775 in Concord, Massachusetts. (Figure 1) and is inscribed with his name and some depictions of animals. Most interestingly, it bears the inscription "April XIX", which was carved on the horn at a later date.⁶ When the horn was carved, Barrett was 22 years old and living with



Figure 1. Powder Horn of Amos Barrett. The phrase, "ARIL XIX" symbolizes the importance Barrett placed on his participation in the Battle of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775.

his parents, which meant he likely spent most of his days working on his father's farm or performing manual labor on other farms as part of the common New England village exchange

⁶ For Amos Barrett's Powder Horn see, <https://concordmuseum.org/collection/powder-horn/> accessed 4/3/2023

systems that took the place of physical currency. He would remain dependent on his father until he married, at which point his father would either pass down part of his estate or give him money to purchase his own land.⁷ Alongside his farming duties, Barrett served in Captain George Minot's company of militia with many other men in Concord between the ages of 16 and 60, whom for the most part he was closely related to by blood or marriage.⁸

When the Revolutionary War broke out in April of 1775, the Battle of Lexington and Concord marked the most important event of Barrett's life. The memory stuck with him for most of his life, and in 1825 he recorded an account of the battle, writing "When I come to look back I find it is 50 years since, though so long [ago], I can remember the whole of it I think better than I can remember things 5 years ago."⁹ He commemorated the importance of this event with the inscription on his powder horn of "April XIX," carved in remembrance of the date of the battle, April 19, 1775. Like many other provincials who fought in major battles, this experience greatly impacted Barrett because its drastic difference from the ordinary life of a rural farmer. Barrett later served in the American Revolution, most notably participating in the Battle of Saratoga.¹⁰ After the war, like other younger Concord residents, he moved to the frontier because land was becoming scarce in the early settlements of New England. Barrett settled in Union, Maine where he lived out the rest of his life.¹¹

The lives of other powder horn owners during this time period were strikingly similar to Barrett's, living most of their lives in small farming towns while also serving as soldiers during the Seven Year's War or the American Revolution. Israel Putnam's horn was carved at Fort

⁷ Fred Anderson, *A People's Army* (Chapel Hill, 1984), 34.

⁸ Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and their World* (New York, 1976), 71.

⁹ Barrett, *The Concord Fight*, 11.

¹⁰ Barrett, *The Concord Fight*, 7.

¹¹ Barrett, *The Concord Fight*, 5.

William Henry in 1756 by the prolific carver John Bush and contained a four-line rhyme and a map of British forts in upstate New York. (Figure 2.)¹² While the precise engravings and careful calligraphy are important, the value of this horn lies in its owner. Putnam was a New England



Figure 2. Israel Putnam's powder horn carved in 1756 at Fort William Henry. It features a four line rhyme and the motto, "W A R," directly underneath.

hero who fought in both the Seven Years' War and the American Revolution. His exploits were numerous; he narrowly escaped death several times and, most famously, he commanded American forces at Bunker Hill where some say he uttered the words, "Don't shoot until you see the whites of their eyes."¹³ He was widely respected and known throughout the Americas, as

¹² William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 15.

¹³ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'Beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), 93-96.

demonstrated by the fact that he was the only man aside from George Washington to be unanimously appointed a general in the Continental Army.

The word that seems to symbolize Putnam's life best is inscribed on his powder horn in three large uppercase letters: "W A R." Putnam's life, like many other fellow colonists, was punctuated by imperial wars that spilled over to the colonies. He was not a professional soldier, per se, but much of his adult life was spent as a soldier on campaign. This was a common experience; during the eighteenth century, wars were a fact of life with Queen Anne's War (1702-1712), King George's War (1744-1748), the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), and the American Revolution (1775-1783), all taking place within a hundred years and affecting the lives of countless New Englanders. As David Hackett Fischer notes in *Paul Revere's Ride*, "In 1775, many men of Massachusetts had been to war. They knew its horrors from personal experience. With a few exceptions, they thought of fighting as a dirty business that had to be done from time to time if good men were to survive in a world of evil."¹⁴ While Putnam occupied a higher social status than some other powder horn owners due to his widespread fame and long-time service, his wartime experiences were shared by many other New Englanders.

Putnam's life story was well preserved due to his elite status, but this was not the case for countless others like Prince Simbo. Simbo was an African American and probably a free man because it was quite rare for masters to allow enslaved people to go off and fight. The fact that the horn was carved before he enlisted furthers this point and indicates that he may have served in his town's militia unit before enlisting in the Continental Army. Simbo's enlistment date signifies his lower status within society. Many men of substance fought in the early years of war, but gradually grew war-weary, resulting in the phenomenon that Robert Gross writes about,

¹⁴ David Hackett Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*, 155.

which is that “by 1778, “the war was now being fought principally by landless younger sons, by the permanent poor, and by blacks” who were hired to replace conscripted men.¹⁵

Simbo’s horn was carved in 1777 in Glastonbury, Connecticut (Figure 3), with the most prominent image being a dove flying and carrying a feather with “Liberty” written on it.¹⁶



Figure 3. Prince Simbo’s horn carved in 1777 in Glastonbury, Connecticut. In the center of the horn is a dove carrying a feather with the word “liberty” inscribed on it.

As an African American man, Prince Simbo’s horn illustrates the paradox of his situation. Simbo clearly was a staunch believer in the American cause and the idea of liberty, which he professes proudly on his horn. Nevertheless, he must also have recognized that these slogans would not immediately bring change to society and that many opposed equality for all. Despite these contradictions, this horn shows that many African Americans did fight for American Independence. This was not a new development; in the Seven Years’ War African Americans, including the famous horn carver John Bush, fought in provincial units.¹⁷ While it is easy to think of the owners of the powder horns solely as white farmers, this was not always the case, as

¹⁵ Gross, *The Minutemen and their World*, 149-151.

¹⁶ For Prince Simbo’s Powder Horn, see https://www.si.edu/object/powder-horn-carved-name-revolutionary-war-soldier-prince-simbo:nmaahc_2009.14.1 accessed 4/3/2023.

¹⁷ P. Terjanian, “Rediscovering John Bush: Recent Research Sheds Light on the Life and Work of a Massachusetts Militiamen and Influential Horn Carver,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, (2023).

highlighted through the experiences of African-American soldiers like Prince Simbo. These three men, along with countless others, engraved their foremost thoughts and emotions onto their powder horns. In doing so, the various rhymes and imagery provide unique insights into their lives, frequently relating to themes such as love, religion, death, and politics.

Love

Love features prominently on powder horns, often in a frustrated and depressed manner. A prime example of this theme is Thaddeus Bennet's horn, which was carved in 1757 at Fort No. 4 in New Hampshire. The horn is inscribed with a short rhyme which states "The rowse is red the vilet is blue and a fols love can not be true."¹⁸ Bennet appears to be referring to himself as a "fol," whose love was not reciprocated. The men who served in the provincial armies of the Seven Years' War were away from home and encountered very few women for at least a year at a time. Stranded in forts in the remote wilderness of North America, most soldiers felt a similar futility about their love lives. Sergeant Ichabod French's horn, made between 1755 and 1757, expresses similar sentiments, although in a less direct manner. French's horn depicts two well-dressed couples ballroom dancing.¹⁹ (Figure 4.) Through this horn, French was likely both expressing sadness over missing out on this aspect of life and, perhaps, worrying about his love interest dancing with another man at home. Stephen Tambling's horn expresses his lustful desires. Carved in 1761, the horn is inscribed with four lines, which say, "Curteous lady these

¹⁸ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 19.

¹⁹ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 21.

lines I do present / Unto you to give your heart



Figure 4. Ichabod French's horn carved between 1755 and 1757 near Lake George, New York. The dancing couples on the back show French's longing for a companion.

content / Not only this but willingly would kneel / The first letter of each line to feel.”²⁰ When spelling out the first letter of each four lines, the result is a derogatory phrase for the female reproductive organ. It is important to remember that the provincial armies were mostly composed of younger men, whose desire and feelings were preoccupied by thoughts of the opposite sex. Army life suppressed many of these emotions, whether it be worry or lust, which boiled over into inscriptions on the powder horns.

The horns also expressed another kind of love, one more familial and platonic. The inscription on Ebenezer Hitchcock's horn describes that it was “made at Crown Point October 17th 1762 in the 12th year of his [the owner's] age.”²¹ While it is possible the owner was actually 12 years

²⁰ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 53.

²¹ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 48.

old, it is not likely that he enlisted at such a young age. A much more plausible explanation is that the true owner of this horn was Hitchcock's father, Captain Amos Hitchcock, who would have had the horn engraved and then given it as a present to his son on his return home. It is telling that rather than simply engrave the horn for himself, Hitchcock's thoughts turned to his young son. This emphasizes the longing for family that soldiers away on campaign experienced, which were exacerbated by the fact that for many men these campaigns were some of the only



Figure 5. Nicholas Edgecomb Pickett's horn carved in 1766 probably in Marblehead, Massachusetts. Pickett's three children figure prominently at the bottom of the horn with both of the boys wearing crowns.

times that they were away from home for significant periods of time. Nicholas Edgecomb Pickett's horn was carved in 1776, while he was home after the Seven Year's War and echoes these sentiments. (Figure 5.)²² It bears the carving of three faces, two male and one female. Underneath are inscribed Mary, Nicholas, and John, the names of Pickett's three children at the time of the horns' creation. Nicholas and John both wear crowns, illustrating both their importance and Pickett's loyalty to his family. Almost all the iconography on his horn focus on

²² William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 65.

his family, with more illustrations depicting his wife and family doing various activities. This shows the importance of family in this era, when many people who did not go away to college and lived in their fathers houses well into their twenties and stayed dependent until middle age. Familial connections were critical to and often defined the trajectory of a man's life.

Religion

Religion was a central part of life for New Englanders from a young age, as seen through the ample religious imagery on powder horns, specifically of Biblical stories. Biblical narratives were ingrained in New England men's minds from a young age. *The New England Primer* was a textbook used by many young children, which not only taught the basics of English literacy, but also incorporated religious themes throughout the lessons. In the section devoted to learning how to read, the first sentence says, "In Adam's Fall, we sinned all."²³ For many New Englanders, biblical stories were as well known to them as their ABCs and were used to teach children the difference between right and wrong.

James Meldrum's horn underscores the religious culture that ran rampant through New England. Meldrum was a British soldier serving in the 42nd regiment at Crown Point in 1759, but the horn was carved by a 'professional' American carver, who most likely incorporated much of his own imagery on the horn. One scene on the horn depicts two people under a tree each with an apple. The image, labeled "Adam" and "Eve," depicts the creation story in Genesis from which original sin began.²⁴ Simeon Smith's horn, carved during the American Revolution, is

²³ *The New England Primer: Twentieth Century Reprint* (Boston, 1948), 20.

²⁴ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 60.

inscribed with the words, “Grait God of Worship protect our cause and we’ll submit thy will.”²⁵ (Figure 6.) The phrase emphasizes that God intervenes in human affairs and that by maintaining religious piety, God will intervene on one’s side. This concept was widespread, with many men in the Seven Years’ War attributing victories and losses to the will of God.²⁶ For Smith and others like him, God was not far off, but rather a driving force for good and bad things that happened in life.

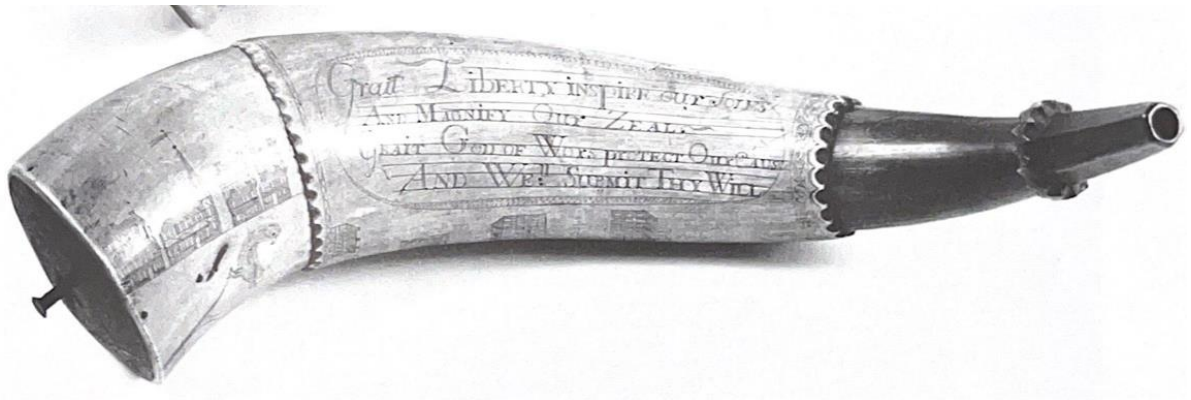


Figure 6. Simeon Smith’s horn carved in 1775 in Charlestown, Massachusetts. The horn’s rhyme shows how many New Englanders saw God as a part of everyday life and as driving force in the results of contemporary events.

Despite all this, the many religious references to God and the Bible does not necessarily mean that every New Englander was devout. Overall, it does appear that New England was a more religious society than its mother country and her soldiers. Many provincials wrote in their diaries and letters with shock about British soldiers’ lack of religiosity during the Seven Years War.²⁷ That said, to a lesser degree some men also wrote with disappointment about the lack of provincial piety. Reverend John Cleaveland wrote that in the provincial army there was a “small number of saints that appear amongst us.”²⁸ The varying degree of strict religious adherence is

²⁵ William H. Guthman, *Drums A’beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 82.

²⁶ Anderson, *A People’s Army*, 197-210.

²⁷ Anderson, *A People’s Army*, 117-118.

²⁸ Anderson, *A People’s Army*, 217.

shown on Shuball Bragg's horn. His horn, carved in 1776, satirizes overzealous religious preachers. It depicts an old clergyman on horseback with a speech bubble that says, "Flee from the wrath to come."²⁹ Bragg's horn is evidence of the carver's casual attitude toward religion. He poked fun at clergymen, who preached that those who did not strictly adhere to religious doctrine would feel God's wrath.

New England was not a homogenous society; everyone had personal beliefs, and some people's faith was stronger than others. Still, New England was an area steeped in religious tradition that formed the base line for how men thought and viewed the world. Historian Fred Anderson writes,

"Whether the soldiers of New England were personally devout men matters less than the fact that, if they wanted to think seriously or abstractly about their experiences at all, the profound religiosity of New England's formal discourse offered them few alternatives to thinking in religious terms."³⁰

The widespread religiosity Anderson mentions is evidenced in the use of religious imagery and language on powder horns. Men displayed their emotions, political thoughts, and hopes through a religious lens.

Death

The topic of death was just as prominent on the powder horns. A fine example of this is found on Joshua Wolcott's horn, carved in 1759 and inscribed with the ominous Latin phrase *Memento Mori*, which means "Remember You Must Die." (Figure 7.)³¹ The horn speaks to the fragility of

²⁹ T. Grinslade, "Twelve Great Carvers," *American Society of Arms Collectors Bulletin*, 119, fig 35.

³⁰ Anderson, *A People's Army*, 217.

³¹ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 30.

life; a sentiment no doubt understood by the men of New England. In civilian life,



Figure 7. Joshua Wolcott's horn carved in 1758 at Fort Edward, New York. The phrase *Memento Mori* means "Remember We Must All Die."

the loss of children was a common occurrence due to a lack of advanced medicine. Ephraim Stow, a farmer from Concord, lost his four children within two weeks and then his wife a few weeks later because of a "throat distemper."³² While this was an extreme case and some families did see all their children live to maturity, disease lay heavily on the minds of men who carried these horns into campaign. Smallpox and other illnesses plagued army encampments to a much greater degree than country towns, especially during the fall and winter. According to historian Fred Anderson, a typical provincial private in the Seven Years' War was four times more likely to die from disease while serving in the army, than while living at home.³³ These realities worried many men and they searched for different outlets for their fears. Some vented their concerns in journals, like the Reverend Cleaveland, who wrote, "I am in health at present ... but God only knows how long I shall enjoy it. People begin here to be taken down with very

³² Gross, *The Minutemen and their World*, 77.

³³ Anderson, *A People's Army*, 101.

malignant fevers. We lost three or four last week.”³⁴ Others used the powder horn as a canvas to illustrate their fear. The powder horn of John Rockwell depicts a devil with the speech bubble, “See we fools.”³⁵ The phrase exemplifies the creator’s regret at joining the army and increasing his risk of dying by doing so. The use of the devil to portray himself may indicate the man’s moral doubts about being a soldier, which has led him to see himself as evil.

Politics

The powder horns of the colonial era reflected the provincials' changing beliefs regarding their king and government. Prior to the revolution, New England powder horns were steeped with iconography that showed support for the king and the British Empire. The British royal coat of arms, a symbol of the king’s authority, was one of the most common depictions. In William Guthman’s authoritative catalog of surviving powder horns, more than a quarter of the powder horns engraved between 1756 and 1774 contain the British royal coat of arms.³⁶ This far exceeds other popular images and themes of the time, such as religion or family.

The standard imagery of the British royal coat of arms was a shield with a lion on the left and a unicorn on the right, with the crown of the British monarch on the top of the shield. The arms came to be a representation of the king and a symbolic pledge of loyalty towards him. This basic blueprint remained the same on most powder horns with minor variations depending on the carver’s ability or style. A typical coat of arms is seen on Philip Bunker’s horn, carved in 1759.³⁷

³⁴ Anderson, *A People’s Army*, 103.

³⁵ William H. Guthman, *Drums A’beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 31.

³⁶ For data on powder horn engravings, see William B. Guthman, *Drums A’beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), 73-211.

³⁷ William H. Guthman, *Drums A’beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 42.

(See Figure 8.) It beautifully depicts the royal coat of arms with a muscular unicorn on the right and a lion on the left.



Figure 8. Philip Bunker's horn carved in 1759 near Lake George, New York. The British Coat of Arms, a popular image on pre-American Revolution powder horns, features prominently in the center.

The widespread engraving of this image shows the prominence of the king and the colonists' respect for his authority. When the later significant Patriot, Dr. Benjamin Rush of Pennsylvania, visited the king's throne in 1768, he was left in complete awe and said the place was like being on sacred ground. He wrote that he "gazed for some time at the throne with emotions that I cannot describe."³⁸ These sentiments through words and imagery show how the colonists, even ones who would later spearhead the independence movement, were enthusiastic supporters of the king, perhaps, at times, even more so than their English brethren.³⁹ This is not to say that colonists were completely enraptured by the British imperial politics in London. Most colonists were much more concerned with local issues and rarely participated in politics outside

³⁸ Gordon. S Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992), 15.

³⁹ Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 15.

of their villages.⁴⁰ Still, the powder horns show that the king was a well-respected figurehead whom the colonists saw as a benevolent monarch.

Other engravings showed the colonists' pride in being a part of the British Empire and their feelings of camaraderie with their fellow subjects across the Atlantic. While less popular than the royal coat of arms, British war heroes commonly appeared on powder horns. David Fletcher's horn, carved in 1746, depicts two figures, one in a regal pose, holding a spyglass, and another looking more militaristic, holding a pistol and a sword.⁴¹ (Figure 9.) They are labeled the "Duke of Cumberland" and "Admiral Warren," respectively. William Augustus, the Duke of Cumberland, was the favorite son of King George II and the well-renowned suppressor of the Jacobite Rebellion in Scotland in 1746.⁴² Admiral Peter Warren was a naval officer who assisted a large provincial force in capturing the near-impregnable French fortress of Louisburg in Canada in 1745.⁴³

The decision to include Cumberland and Warren rather than local, provincial military leaders indicates how colonists viewed their position in the British Empire. The colonists truly considered themselves Englishmen and were deeply connected to the British Empire, sharing in her successes and failures even if they bore little effect on the colonies. Jonathan Mayhew, in his "Twin Discourses" sermon in 1759, thanked God for British military successes in the Americas, but also for successes in the "West-India islands, the coasts of Portugal and France ... [and] Hanover and the Prussia dominions." He saw America as a partner in the British Empire and envisioned America blossoming into a mighty empire, but explicitly noted, "I do not mean an

⁴⁰ Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and their World* (New York, 1976), 33.

⁴¹ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 2.

⁴² Fred Anderson, *The War That Made America* (New York, 2005), 57.

⁴³ Gerald S. Graham, *Empire of the North Atlantic: The Maritime Struggle for North America* (Toronto, 1958), 116-142.

independent one.”⁴⁴ For Fletcher, then, it makes sense why he included Cumberland and Warren: fellow Englishmen who were heroes of the British Empire. ⁴⁵

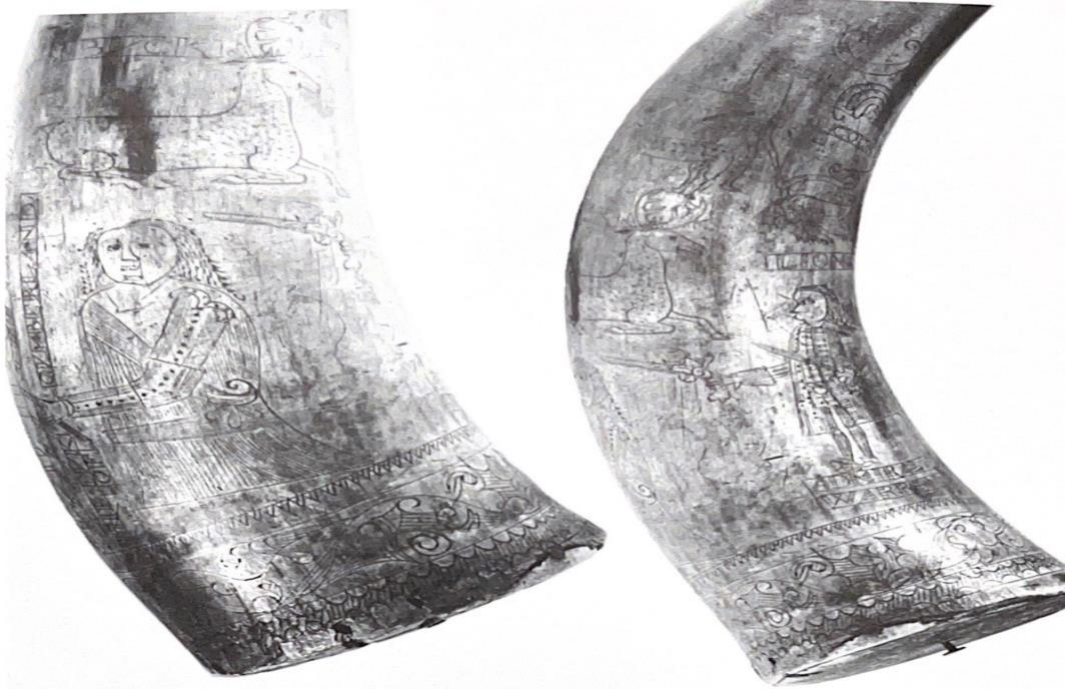


Figure 9. David Fletcher’s horn carved in 1747 in New England. The Duke of Cumberland is on the left and Admiral Peter Warren is on the right.

While the close of the Seven Years War 1763 brought America and Britain closer than ever before, it also laid the groundwork for the revolution that happened only 12 years later. Some powder horn engravings blatantly convey these early signs of frustration and dissension. John Pemberton’s horn, which was carved in 1759 by the prolific carver Jacob Gay, is an excellent example. (Figure 10.) The horn contains a seemingly normal British royal coat of arms, but on closer inspection Gay switched out the normal mottos usually inscribed on it and

⁴⁴ Jonathan Mayhew, *Two discourses delivered October 25th, 1759. Being the day appointed by authority to be observed as a day of public thanksgiving, for the success of His Majesty's arms, more particularly in the reduction of Quebec, the capital of Canada. With an appendix, containing a brief account of two former expeditions aagainst that city and country, which proved unsuccessful* (Boston, 1759), 33-60.

⁴⁵ Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 12.

inscribed, “Most To Be Mad.”⁴⁶ This cryptic phrase suggests that Gay felt the war was nonsensical and “mad.” The questioning of the righteousness of warfare occurs on some other horns as well, but the placement of this phrase on the British royal coat of arms seems to imply a direct issue with the crown, not just the war itself.

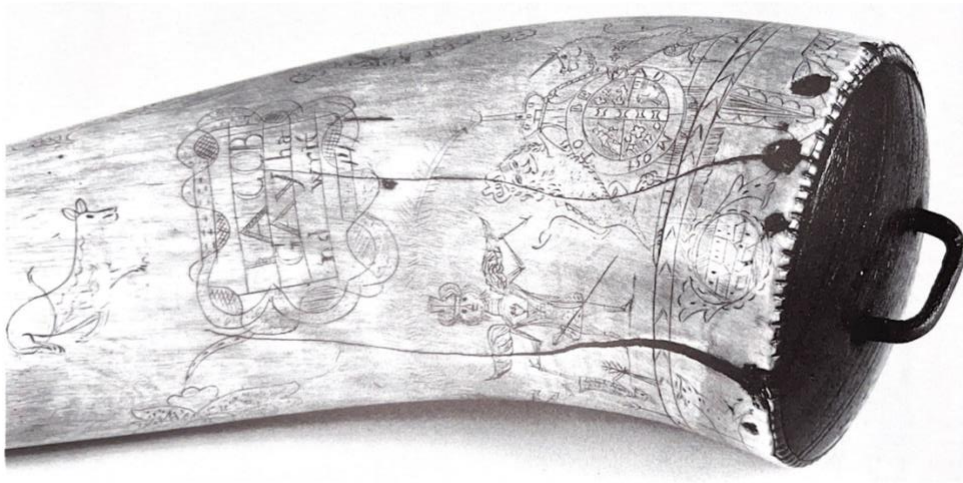


Figure 10. John Pemberton’s horn carved in 1759 at Fort Edward, New York. The horn shows a satirical British Coat of Arms with the typical Latin lines replaced by the phrase, “Most to Be Mad.”

Problems with the British army, and indirectly the Crown, began in 1756 when British officers insisted on taking command of provincial armies, with many provincials flatly refusing to serve under British officers. This proved to be a festering issue during the campaign of 1756, but was eventually solved with the combination of the Provincial and British armies under British command in 1757.⁴⁷ Serving under British officers came with iron discipline that was uncommon and shocking to many provincial soldiers.⁴⁸ Private Luke Gridley recorded 82 punishments in a 6 month span in 1757, which included 71 floggings and 6 executions.⁴⁹ David

⁴⁶ William H. Guthman, *Drums A’beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 39.

⁴⁷ Anderson, *The War That Made America*, 95-99.

⁴⁸ Anderson, *A People’s Army*, 121-135.

⁴⁹ Anderson, *A People’s Army*, 136.

Perry, a soldier writing years later, wrote of three provincials who were whipped for a small offense. He said, “it was the most cruel punishment I ever saw inflicted - by far worse than death. I felt at the time as though I could have taken summary vengeance on those who were the authors of it ... had it been in my power to do it.”⁵⁰ These events led to dislike and distrust of the British army and particularly of its aristocratic officers. Perhaps a particularly bad punishment prompted Jacob Gay to inscribe “Most to Be Mad” on the British royal coat of arms.

Aside from these more serious issues, provincial soldiers also found that while they considered both themselves and men from Britain to be Englishmen, there were many apparent cultural differences between the two groups. British soldiers celebrated different holidays and were considered morally lackluster, with a propensity for swearing that was disliked by many provincials. Provincials also noted their distaste for the British practice of dueling; a practice which was much less common in Colonial America.⁵¹ John Vaughan’s horn, carved in 1764, depicts a rare image of two men fighting with swords.⁵² (Figure 11.) On the left is the devil with the speech bubble that says, “I’ll have one of them.” The iconography clearly shows the carver considered dueling an evil activity with hell as its punishment. The context of the horn, carved most likely at Fort George, indicates that the carver was likely stationed with British regulars who participated in dueling and gave him a poor idea of the practice. The close contact provincial soldiers had with the British army during the Seven Years’ War contributed to new and not always positive perspectives on the British soldiers. Many carried with them the harsh discipline they were subjected to under British officers and the large cultural differences they had

⁵⁰ David Perry, *Recollections of an Old Soldier: The Life of Captain David Perry* (Windsor, 1822), 32.

⁵¹ Anderson, *A People’s Army*, 115-118.

⁵² William H. Guthman, *Drums A’beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 63.

with the British soldiers.⁵³ These issues were documented on powder horns that showed their frustrations and concerns with the British, which may have contributed to the outbreak of the American Revolution.

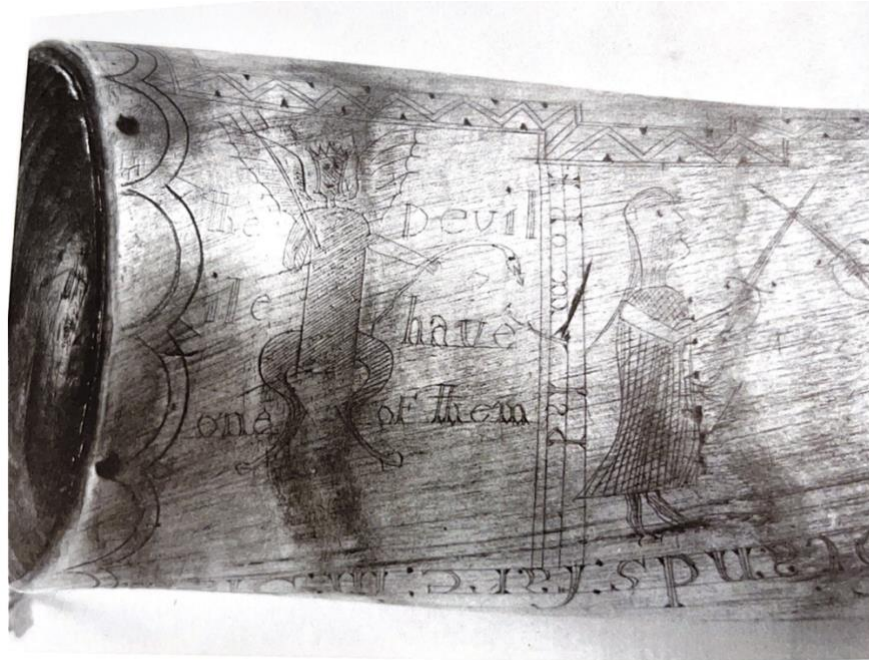


Figure 11. John Vaughan's horn carved in 1764 around Lake George. It shows two men dueling with swords and the devil on the left preparing to get the loser.

It can be assumed that amidst the tumultuous period between 1763 and 1775, powder horns quickly changed to depict radical patriotic sentiment, but in reality, they largely did not. In fact, in proportion to other periods, the early 1770s had a larger number of horns adorned with the royal coat of arms. A prime example is Tilton Bennet's horn, carved in 1770, which is decorated with many imaginative animals and the British royal coat of arms.⁵⁴ (Figure 12.) These depictions during the crises of the pre-war years suggest the continued respect New

⁵³ Anderson, *A People's Army*, 222-223.

⁵⁴ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 66.

Englanders had for their King and their hesitancy to even contemplate separation from the mother country. This cautionary posture is embodied by the Massachusetts town of Concord, a hotbed of rebellion during the revolution. Despite the rebellious reputation of Concord, many of the town's actions and sentiments were relatively moderate until 1774. Concord's General Court representative until 1768 was Charles Prescott, a supporter of the hated Stamp Act whom the men of Concord continued to re-elect even after radical patriots called for his removal.



Figure 12. Tilton Bennet's horn carved in 1770 in New Hampshire. It depicts the British Coat of Arms, which continued to be a popular theme even as tensions between the colonies and Britain continued to rise.

Despite this hesitancy, many provincials were growing increasingly upset with Great Britain's prerogative of maintaining the right to tax the colonies and responses to subsequent provincial protests. Hamilton Davidson's horn, carved by Jacob Gay in 1772, is engraved with a scene of the Boston Massacre, presumably based on the famous Paul Revere print.⁵⁵ (Figure 13.) The orderly British soldiers are shown in lines presenting their muskets to fire while the Bostonians stare blankly at the soldiers, while several bodies lie lifeless on the ground. Carved two years after the massacre, the horn represents the continued anger provincials felt toward

⁵⁵ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 69.

Great Britain and the actions of her soldiers. Despite this depiction of anger, the other side of the horn proudly displays the British royal coat of arms. The juxtaposition of displaying the cruelty of British troops and a pledge of loyalty towards the king in the form of the British royal coat of arms underscores the complicated feelings provincials felt toward Great Britain. Many provincials made a sharp distinction between the actions of the king and those of parliament, which explains continued loyalty to the king. They perceived the king as a good and benevolent monarch who was being led astray by designing ministers, who were the real suppressors of provincial rights.⁵⁶



Figure 13. Hamilton Davidson's horn carved in 1772 in New Hampshire. It depicts the Boston Massacre here on the back, while on the front is the British Coat of Arms.

This sentiment of separating the king from Parliament is exhibited in how provincials referred to British armies. The troops occupying Boston were referred to as ministerial or

⁵⁶ W. D. Liddle, "A Patriot King, or None: Lord Bolingbroke and the American Renunciation of George III," *The Journal of American History*, 4 (1979), 960-963.

parliamentary troops rather than the king's troops.⁵⁷ The powder horns of the pre-war era indicate the simmering anger towards Great Britain, while also indicating the continued respect for King George III and the reluctance of many to move towards decisive action against Britain.

After 1774, powder horns with imagery related to freedom and liberty began to increase rapidly. Horns were emblazoned with popular patriotic rhetoric, as seen in Asa Willcock's horn. Carved in 1775, Willcock's powder horn is engraved with soldiers fighting and the phrase "Liberty and Property" wrapping around the butt of the powder horn.⁵⁸ "Liberty and Property" was a popular phrase that appeared on many horns, which referenced people's inherent natural rights that the colonists believed were being violated. This change demonstrated the shift from minor discontent to calls for decisive action.

The most significant new change was the engraving of satirical British royal coats of arms in place of the traditional British ones. Amos Bostwick's horn, carved in 1776, is a good example. It shows the typical lion and unicorn on each side surrounding a crest, topped with a crown.⁵⁹ (See Figure 13.) Interestingly, instead of the traditional British mottoes, the new motto says "Success to America." The new satirical "Success to America" coat of arms underscores the end of support for the King among most Americans. The royal coat of arms historically symbolized loyalty to the crown and its removal extinguished the last symbolic link between Great Britain and the colonies.⁶⁰ It represented how the colonists' loyalties had shifted towards a new entity that was not a monarch but the idea of a new country—America.

⁵⁷ Liddle, "A Patriot King," 965.

⁵⁸ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 80.

⁵⁹ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 95.

⁶⁰ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 2017), 286.



Figure 14. Amos Bostwick's horn carved in 1776 in New York. It shows the new "Success to America" Coat of Arms that replaced the British ones during the Revolution.

This abrupt shift was a result of the actions of King George III and parliament, who believed that a seditious group of colonists were conspiring to foment rebellion among the populace and that the only way to stop it was to pursue a hard line.⁶¹ The belief resulted in the Coercive Acts of 1774, which convulsed the colonies and infuriated many New Englanders. King George III publicly renounced the colonies in August 1775 after long being seen as the colonies' savior. He declared that the colonist's last attempt at reconciliation, the Olive Branch Petition, was "meant only to amuse, by vague expressions of attachment to the parent state, and the strongest protestations of loyalty to me, whilst they are preparing for a general revolt."⁶² Bloodshed at the Battle of Lexington and Concord only strengthened New Englanders' conviction that peace was no longer an option. Altogether, these events forced the mostly hesitant and indifferent colonists into much more radical beliefs that appear in the imagery and inscriptions of the powder horns in 1775 and 1776.

⁶¹ Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins*, 151-159.

⁶² Joseph J. Ellis, *The Cause: The American Revolution and its Discontents, 1773-1783* (New York, 2021), 63.

Conclusion

New England powder horns of the Colonial Era held great material significance to men of the time period. Many of New Englanders served in military capacities either during the Seven Years' War or the American Revolution, leading many male members of society to own and engrave their own powder horns. These engravings offer unique insights into the lives of countless men who otherwise would be largely forgotten. Powder horns highlight the impacts of love and lust on the soldiers, largely devoid of romantic connections while on campaign. They highlight the prominence of religion in New England society and the ways in which religious education formed people's thoughts and actions. Further, these horns highlight the timeless travails of soldiering with the risks of death and men's longing for home. Perhaps most fascinating, they document the shifting political opinions of the colonists. The history of powder horn imagery begins in the 1740s and 1750s with pledges of loyalty to the king the form of British royal coats of arms and images of famous British generals. Soon after the Seven Years War, small changes began to occur, such as John Pemberton's horn which voiced frustration with the British war effort. Throughout the 1760s and 1770s tensions began to grow and appear in illustrations, but the horns still mostly showed a continued loyalty to the crown. From 1774 onward, liberty motifs and "Success to America" inscriptions replaced this ongoing loyalty. Working in tandem with diaries and letters of these New England men, a picture emerges of who these men were, what they believed in, and why they decided to revolt. Powder horns are a valuable and unique source for studying early American history.

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