Viking Helmets.

Illustrations often show Vikings in horned helmets, and the image is so ingrained in our consciousness that the NFL football team going by the same name has horns drawn on their football helmets. However, it is a generally undisputed fact among historians and archeologists that Norse (Viking) helmets did not have horns at all. In fact, so few specimens survive that it is speculated that helmets may not have been widely used by the Norsemen. The specimens from that era suggest that the protective head gear was at best a thin metal “cap” that was likely covered in leather. Functionally, this protective gear would need to be smooth to deflect blows directed to the head. Horns protruding from the side would result in the exact opposite of the desired effect.

Likewise, in the Civil War enactment and role-playing community, we have our own Viking helmet-type historical revisions. Read the following from the Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation “Rules and Regulations.”

WEAPONS
Two-band weapons or cut down weapons of any kind are not allowed. No flintlocks, Kentucky Rifles, shotguns, modern style rifles or modern pistols are to be used or displayed. In other words, NO NON-PERIOD WEAPONS.¹

Well, let us go to the record and see what history says about these “non-period weapons.”

Of the early regiments, most were armed with flintlock muskets and/or shotguns.²

And even better, from “Calhoun County (West Virginia) in the Civil War,”

The attacking (Confederate) force, armed with makeshift weapons ranging from old flintlocks and mountain rifles [emphasis added] to army models taken from slain or captured soldiers, could not compete in range or firepower with the Enfield and Harpers Ferry rifles [emphasis added] of the Union troops.³

The Harpers Ferry rifle referenced here is probably the two-band Model 1841 rifle, aka “Mississippi.” Between the two of them, these quotes manage to validate all the non-period Civil War firearms that Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation prohibits. And Cedar Creek is merely representative. These and similarly anachronistic “rules” are likely to be found in the bylaws of many Civil War enactment units and many events. Ignorance is cheap, and many hobby participants apparently like it.

If not about history, then what is all this about? And exactly what is the nature of the problem with two band weapons? The North-South Skirmish Association shooters use more two-band rifles for competition than three-band rifle-muskets. They are simply quicker to load and fire accurately. The argument against two-band rifles for use in Civil War enactments is that they create a safety hazard when used by the rear rank for front rank soldiers. The distance between the end of the barrel and the bolster is not enough to prevent high decibel noise from being directed at the front rank soldier’s ear during firing. So would not a sensible practice be to not allow two-band weapons in the rear rank? It is hard to understand the “prohibition” when the soldiers with two-band weapons could easily and safely be moved to the front rank. I have been in many events where the scenario would support an entire company of riflemen, yet none are likely to be found. And this is a small part of the bigger picture. The question remains, what role does historical accuracy play, and is it to be a significant part of the hobby?

The broader point here is that a decided lack of understanding exists in terms of the overall authenticity of reproduction “infantry arms” and it is the most glaring deficiency in the hobby. Field merchants report the three-band, Italian made P-53 Enfield reproduction rifle-musket is far and away the “best seller,” year in and year out. It is a reproduction of a later type P-53 Enfield rifle-musket that never saw one minute of action on either side during the Civil War.⁴ There are not just a few inaccurate Enfield reproductions in the ranks; they are predominant on both sides. How many units enforce stipulations that these reproductions be modified for feature accuracy to reflect at least a slight resemblance to the common British private contractor P-53 Enfields that were imported by the hundreds of thousands and issued to both Johnny Reb and Billy Yank? How many events prohibit their use as anachronistic?⁵

We can all improve the feature accuracy of the reproduction firearms in the hobby one participant at a time. Lead by example. How good is your musket? Will it pass a ten-foot test? The field merchants will improve their offerings if the market is there.
For example, Regimental Quartermaster is offering accuracy modified Model 1861 and 1842 Springfields and P-53 Enfields from James River Armory—partially due to favorable reviews here, selling dozens of them. If you have an “out of the box” reproduction rifle-musket, consider getting it feature modified (or “defarbed”). The Watchdog will be offering a book on Springfield and Enfield accuracy modifications soon to help with the task. If a new participant comes to you for advice, please recommend a quality, feature modified reproduction that is appropriate for the unit and time period portrayed. Help them learn to keep the weapon clean, and show them how to safely fire the weapon. If we do this small thing, one person at a time, we will make things better for the future Civil War enacting.

Craig Barry

Types of Paper.

Ever wonder what type of paper you should be using in your impression—be it personal communication, or as a store clerk, business person, or in the military? The sizes of paper and terms found in period sources are briefly described here.

Commercial cuts of paper.

I found references of many more terms and sizes of commercial paper, but these seemed to be the most common:

Pot — 12.5 x 15 inches
Cap or small cap, writing — 13 x 16 inches
Double cap, writing — 17 x 28 inches
Flat cap, writing — 14 x 17 inches
Fools cap, writing — 12.5 x 16 inches
Double foolscap — 27 x 17 inches
Post — 18.75 x 15.25 inches
Folio post, writing — 17 x 22 inches (came in blue and white)
Ledger paper (not ledger books) — 7 x 14 inches
Imperial — 27 x 21.25 inches
Super Royal — 27 x 19 inches
Royal — 24 x 19 inches
Demy — 19 x 15.5 inches

Letter and note paper.

As for letter and note paper, they were prepared in various from the commercial sizes above by the stationers, who also packaged them. A quire of paper was twenty-four sheets and a ream of paper consisted of twenty quires. The terms foolscap, cap hand, post, pot and Imperial papers originally denoted particular sizes of watermarks, but eventually came to note the size of the paper. It seems as if modern terminology for paper sizes differs from the period terms. Modern sizes and terminology are:

Foolscape — 13.5 x 17 inches
Double foolscap — 17 x 27 inches
Folio — 13.5 x 8.5 inches (foolscap paper folded in half)
Quarto — 6.75 x 8.5 inches (foolscap paper folded to make four leaves)
Octavo — 6.75 x 4.25 inches (foolscap paper folded to make eight leaves)
Large post — 16.5 x 21 inches
Demy — 17.5 x 22.5 inches
Royal — 20 x 25 inches

There were three classes of paper: writing/drawing, printing and wrapping. There were five sub-classes of writing/drawing paper: cream wove, yellow wove, blue wove, cream laid and blue laid. Included in writing paper was drawing paper, which was cream wove while writing paper was laid. There were two sub-classes of printing paper: laid and wove. There were four sub-classes of wrapping paper: blue, purple, brown and whitewashed brown.

Laid papers were named for the dim narrow lines watermarked on the paper. Plain wove paper had no water mark on the paper.

Modern “parchment paper” is not accurate for the period. I have not come across the mention of real parchment (animal skins) being used except perhaps as a diploma or the like. The best bet for paper would be to use a one hundred percent rag content or cotton paper with a fairly smooth surface. A laid surface is more difficult to write on if you are just learning to write in a period hand, and are getting used to a sharp-pointed pen nib.

Virginia Mescher

NOTES:
2. Tennessee State Library and Archives, Public Service Division, 403 Seventh Avenue North, Nashville, TN 37243, http://www.state.tn.us/tos/statelib/ tslahome.htm
4. The Italian reproductions are all copies of the Fourth Type P-53 Enfield, originally made by the Royal Small Arms Factory after 1863 for the British Army, and not for export. The earlier version, or Third Type Enfield, made from 1858 to 1863, was the rifle-musket imported by both sides in great quantity. It is somewhat similar in appearance, but significantly different in detail. A cottage industry exists in the enactment community to make the necessary corrections, which often cost hundreds of dollars.
5. To my knowledge? None. In fact, they are most commonly sold to new participants by field merchants. I guess the motto is “close enough”?

SOURCES:
Robert Hunt A Supplement to Ure’s Dictionary of Arts, Manufactures, and Mines (1864).
Black Powder.

Black powder is an old propellant, pretty much unchanged in formula from the 1860s (and before) until now. It is formed from a blend of sulfur, potassium nitrate and charcoal. Black powder is considered a “fast burning” (deflagrating) propellant, but it is terribly inefficient. The fuel burned is carbon, and only about fifty percent of its mass converts to gas. The remainder goes out the barrel as white smoke, or remains in the bore as a corrosive, fouling crud.1

The standard chemical composition of black powder is: seventy-five percent potassium nitrate, fifteen percent charcoal and ten percent sulfur. The actual burn rate of black powder is controlled by the grain size, expressed as a factor of coarseness using multiples of the uppercase letter “F” followed by a lowercase letter “g.” For example, FFFg is less coarse (finer) than FFGg, and thus easier to ignite. It is primarily used for priming the flash pan of flintlocks. FFGg is usually recommended for small-bore muzzleloaders, below .45 caliber and handguns. FFGg is typically the standard load for muzzleloaders larger than .50 caliber. The coarsest grade is labeled Fg. This, or an even coarser grade, is made specifically for artillery use.

Therefore, as a guide, in a .58 caliber P-53 Enfield or Model 1861 Springfield reproduction rifle-musket the maximum recommended load is sixty grains black powder, (FFg or FFFg).2 Large-bore muskets (.69 caliber) can safely take up to an eighty grain load of FFGg.3 For larger bore blanks, FFGg is a little too fine in granulation where the charge is not rammed home, but it may still prove serviceable in a pinch.4 Always follow the recommendations of the manufacturer, which should be provided in the owners manual accompanying the weapon. If you purchased your musket at an event from a field merchant “off the rack,” ask for a copy of the owner’s manual. It is not uncommon for the rank and file to load more than the recommended amount of powder in a round, either accidentally or on purpose. If you doubt this is the case, next time the inspecting officer or your unit’s “Ordnance Sergeant” inspects the cartridge boxes, have him pull a round or two at random and measure it. There are probably a few sticks of “TNT” in at least one cartridge box.

In addition to overfilled blank rounds, another common problem is the tendency of careless enactors to reload following a misfire—in effect causing a double load. It is impossible for any sentient person not to know if the charge ignited. It either did or it did not go BANG! If it did not go off, never reload (after a misfire). If the percussion cap was a dud, fell off the cone or you forgot to prime, clear the vent with a nipple pick, then prime without reloading powder and try it again at the next firing command. If the musket misfires with a clear vent and a good cap, step out of the ranks and declare the failure to a file closer. Let him clear the musket before re-joining the firing line.

I know of one spectacular incident where a new recruit with a borrowed musket was not being monitored by his comrades in arms, and misfired three times. He was ignorant and charged the musket with powder each time. When the fourth round ignited, the force blew apart the barrel bands, broke the stock and bent the ramrod. While fortunate not to be seriously injured himself, or to have injured anyone else, the new recruit faced the additional expense of replacing the ruined loaner musket, on top of everything else he needed to buy.5

This was not a good way for that fellow to begin participation in the hobby, though it is doubtful he will ever repeat that mistake. It could have been easily prevented with about five minutes of training. What sort of black powder firearms training does your unit provide to new recruits? Many are getting quite good at recommending the “correct” equipment down to the thread used for a particular impression, but how are we doing with the implementation side of how that equipment is to be used?

Reproduction muskets and rifle-muskets all have proof marks. What does that mean and what is barrel “proofing”? Are not modern reproduction barrels subject to rigorous United States Government proof laws? Not exactly, reproduction firearms imported to this country are subject to the barrel proof requirements of the country of manufacture, almost all of which have reciprocal agreements with each other. Proofing began in Europe during the sixteenth century to insure the integrity and safety of a barrel made either for domestic use or export.6 The proof mark(s) of the country of manufacture are usually stamped near the breech. Historically, proofing of barrels was never required in the United States for sporting guns, only military firearms. The internal barrel integrity can change over time, depending on the care and maintenance given the firearm. Your reproduction black powder musket is not subject to US military barrel proofing standards.

Even though the barrels on reproductions are often thicker and heavier than originals, they are obviously not designed to handle as much black powder as you can pack in them. The barrels become pipe bombs at some point. Not only is there an element of authenticity to loading the round with the correct paper and string, but it is also important to maintain the correct volume of black powder in the correct coarseness. You as a shooter have to know a proven safe load for your black powder musket and stay at or below it.

There is a tendency within the Civil War enactment community to seek the lowest, short run cost alternative for any given purchase. According to field merchants, the most popular musket sold at events is the Italian made P-53 Enfield mostly because of its initial pricing point, which is thirty to seventy-five dollars less than other models. The best selling cartridge box is imported from Pakistan. An inexpensive US-made version is ten to twenty dollars more, and they sit on the shelf. How come? Field merchants report that the import version has tins, which are an add-on for the better quality US version. Likewise, cost conscious enactors seek the least expensive black powder they can find to load in to their muskets. At the Watchdog, of
course, we seek the best available solution based on historical accuracy, safety and common sense.

Those more familiar with the long term costs of the hobby know that the less expensive out of the box P-53 Enfield reproduction actually requires a couple hundred dollars (more or less) in feature modifications to be remotely accurate to historical specifications of the P-53 that saw service in the Civil War. Also, that Pakistani-import box that costs a bit less to purchase, may not make it to the end of the campaign season in one piece. It is quite likely to fall apart due to the materials and methods of construction. But what about the black powder we pour down the barrel? Is black powder “generic,” or is there a powder.

Black powder does vary in quality due to variations in composition, the quality of the ingredients such as charcoal and consistency of grain size.

A recent survey of available black powder was completed by the Watchdog. It is not intended to be exhaustive in scope, but instead it offers some sensible recommendations on widely available black powder products for use in Civil War enacting.

Swiss black powder currently runs $15.75 per pound. It is excellent powder, but blended for live fire use where its consistent propellant properties direct a miminum of smoke and sound at the paper target down range. It is not necessary to spend what Swiss costs for loading a blank round. However, if you want the best powder available, this is probably it. It is recommended in all calibers, but you could spend half this amount and get equivalent results in a blank round.

Goex black powder is made in Northern Louisiana, in the roughly the same way that it has been made for the past 140 years. It was part of the Du Pont de Nemours (E.I.) and Company until the 1970s. Some of the modern workers at the plant are descendants of mill workers who ground black powder just after the Civil War. To assist in ignition, it is often recommended that those firing blanks with a Model 1861 Springfield use FFFg powder. Goex is a high-quality granulation with such a consistent burn rate that FFFg can be recommended for both .58 caliber Springfield and Enfield reproduction rifle-muskets. It costs roughly $9.50 per pound and it is well worth it. I like it because one granulation can be used for both my large-bore Model 1842 Springfield and my rifle-muskets (Model 1861 Springfields, and P-53 Enfields). Goex is considered clean burning as far as black powder goes and strongly recommended.

Schuetzen-R is a German import black powder. The R stands for “re-enactor,” a mixed grade that they offer at $9.20 a pound. It is a combination of F, Ff, FFFg and FFFFFg and it might be just fine for blank rounds. However, personally I have no desire to shoot a mix of cannon powder and flintlock primer even in blank rounds. I would not load a propellant with four different burn rates in one cartridge tube, blank loads or not. And I would prefer that you did not either, particularly if we are standing next to each other on the firing line. There are better choices for less money. Price is delivered, based on twenty-five pounds.

Schuetzen FFFg black powder is a very good granulation that can be strongly recommended. It runs $11.20 per pound. My experience with Schuetzen suggests that, as with most items made in Germany, it is a very good quality product overall. It is a recommended as an alternative to Goex for blank rounds. Schuetzen comes in a plastic one pound container with a screw-off, tamper-proof lid. I do not how important packaging is, but it was easier to pour into the measuring cylinder. Clean burning with minimal crud and fouling. Price is delivered based on twenty-five pounds.

Elephant black powder went out of the black powder business about two years ago. The only Elephant powder remaining on the market now is remaining inventories of FFFFFg and FFFg. Both cost the same, $9.20 per pound. The entire supply of FFFg is gone. Elephant was, and remains, an acceptable product for the money but not the best available for loading blank rounds. It is known for considerably more fouling crud than other brands. If you live fire, Elephant is known to produce lower velocity because it is less consistent. This powder is not recommended. Price is delivered, based on twenty-five pounds.

KIK black powder is an import from Slovenia, made at a plant where gun powder has been ground since the 1850s. The powder is good quality, and it is considered a lower cost alternative to Goex. KIK runs about eight dollars a pound. It is fast burning, produces consistently high muzzle velocities in live fire tests, and more recoil—one of which is a factor for loading blanks. It is average in terms of fouling. It is good powder for the money.

Lidu black powder is also sold under the name Dragon. This powder is inexpensive, and you get what you pay for. The grain size is huge. It was originally imported as fireworks lifting charge powder. I have seen it for sale for as little as six dollars delivered. It is imported from China. You might think that since the Chinese invented black powder in the twelfth century, more or less, and after all that practice, they might make the best powder. That presumption is wrong. This powder will go BANG, but it is very inefficient and leaves significantly more crud. I have witnessed misfire prone Model 1861s and CS Richmonds clog so completely that the entire bolster filled with black residue after a half dozen rounds of FFFg and they were out of the fight. If left to harden, power tools would be needed to go in through the clean-out screw to remove all the crud. These muskets were not clogged due to long term neglect. They were both Armi Sport models, cleaned and well maintained prior to loading with FFFg Lidu. I have used it without incident, besides a bit more mess, in my Model 1842 and P-53 Enfield. Lidu FFFg is just slightly better, and only burns cleaner because it is still burning when it goes out the barrel. It will work in blank rounds but it is not recommended. It should be avoided as there are better alternatives in the low cost category.

Skirmish black powder is also imported. It is available in Fg and FFFg. It is a low-cost powder intended specifically for use in blank rounds. The quality is more than adequate. The
grain size is consistent throughout the case (twenty-five pounds), but runs large. It costs six dollars per pound. This is a bargain. It is a good product with little evidence of the residue buildup found in other low cost domestic and imported black powder products. Skirmish is recommended for loading blank rounds for use in all .58 caliber muskets. Very clean burning with no evidence of misfires or hang-fires. This brand of black powder gives the best BANG for the buck, no pun intended.

Craig Barry

Black powder distributors:

Powder, Inc. [Skirmish, Goex and KIK brands], 1861 North College Ave., Clarksville, AR 72830; (479) 705-0005 or (877) 833-1799 toll free; powderinc@centurytel.net and http://www.powderinc.com

The Maine Powder House [Schoetzen, Swiss, Elephant and Goex brands], PO Box 5, Peru, ME 04290; (800) 701-9061 FAX; info@mainepowderhouse.com and http://www.mainepowderhouse.com

Prices and availability are subject to change. These prices are as of July 2005 and do not include delivery and HAZMAT fees except as noted above.

NOTES:

1. Black powder, being a deflagrating propellant, has a very sharp pressure curve that you feel in the form of recoil. This sudden build up of pressure is more like a punch than a push. Hence, the stress on the components of the firearm is greater.

2. The original P-53 Enfield was usually found in .577 caliber, but the Italian reproductions are all .58 caliber. The older British-made Parker-Hale reproduction was .577 caliber. According to C. H. Roads’ British Soldier’s Firearms 1850-1864, the Royal Small Arms Factory specified sixty grains of coarse Fg black powder as the recommended load for the P-53.

3. The greater volume in the breech chamber of the .69 caliber barrel accommodates a larger charge, but the barrel is not necessarily stronger or subject to greater stress loads during the proof process. Eighty grains of FFg black powder should be considered the maximum load. Some event (and National Park Service) rules stipulate a sixty grain load as the maximum, and if so stated must be strictly followed, regardless of the specific musket’s bore diameter.

4. Blank rounds made with FFg have always worked satisfactorily in my musket when I was not able to locate FFg black powder. I prefer the coarser FG black powder. My perception is that it settles down into the bolster of my big bore Springfield better. The actual energy produced by a specific grade of black powder is not particularly relevant for the firing of blank rounds if used in the correct amount, but the ease of ignition of the grade is relevant. My perception is that FFg may be better in the misfire prone Italian-made Model 1861 Springfield due to its easier ignition. These models are subject to misfires and hang fires due in part to the bolster design.

5. I am not convinced that the serious enactor ever reaches a point where there is nothing further to buy.

6. The quantity of powder used to “proof” barrels has varied over the years. At one time it was four times the “recommended” load. The key is the pressure in pounds per square inch placed on the barrel. The volume of powder is one factor, but also the explosiveness or “hotness” of the powder is important, too. Most reproduction muskets will stamp right on the barrel “BLACK POWDER ONLY.” In other words—no synthetics. Pyrodex and other synthetic black powder substitutes are “hotter” and do not work well for blank rounds. Pyrodex is less dense than the same quantity of black powder. In addition, Pyrodex must be compressed in the barrel to work effectively. The only way this could be accomplished with blank rounds is to ram the empty paper tube. At the present time most event rules do not permit ramming of the cartridge tube fearing that the ramrod will be inadvertently left in the barrel and fired out as a projectile. “BLACK POWDER ONLY” means just that, and black powder is actually suited better for blanks.

7. This is not only an observation or perception. There is some empirical evidence that Elephant brand black powder is more prone to fouling. The article on live fire testing is called “Practical Chronographic Comparison of Goex, KIK and Elephant Brand of Black Powder.” You can review the data at http://www.norwestcompany.com/comparison.htm. All four participating shooters make note of fouling problems with Elephant powder, especially the FG grain size.

REFERENCES:

The WATCHDOG.
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Before “Paper or Plastic?” There was the Universal Basket.

FIG 1. Basket image. A detail from a circa 1860 storefront CdV. Author’s collection.

The Universal Basket.

Baskets have been made, throughout the ages, by all civilizations but little was written about the process due to the fact that baskets were so common and a part of everyday life.

Baskets. Weaving of rods into baskets is one of the most ancient of the arts amongst men; and it is practiced in almost every part of the globe, whether inhabited by civilized or savage races. Basket-making requires no description here. (Hunt)

Baskets are so useful, are too well known to require description . . . (T. Webster and Mrs. Parks)

They were found in almost every setting, were made to serve a multitude of purposes and came in endless styles and sizes. There were utilitarian baskets for general use, laundry or clothes baskets, ironing baskets, market baskets, egg baskets, garden baskets, sewing and work baskets, cradle baskets, cheese baskets, grain baskets, storage baskets, berry and fruit baskets, potato baskets, wool-drying baskets, hampers, feather baskets, open baskets, covered baskets, fish creels, basket boats, light carriage bodies and the list goes on.

In the Catalogue of Foreign and Domestic Goods many types of basket were sold. Among those listed in the Basket and Willow Ware section were: French traveling baskets various shapes, sizes, number in nest of baskets, French cap, key, work and school baskets, ladies’ and children’s plain and embroidered work and reticule baskets in various shapes, sizes and patterns, knitting ball baskets, segar [cigar] baskets, nursery baskets in various sizes, knife baskets, market and clothes baskets in nests, willow carriages in assorted sizes and mounted on wheels and willow cradles of assorted sizes and mounted on rockers.

The focus of this article will be on baskets of the nineteenth century. There is not room to describe every type of basket but the major types of baskets are described. Since pictures show types and styles, there are images of various isolated basket found in the backgrounds of period engravings. The dates of the images were taken from bound copies of engravings which had been removed from publications dating from 1840 to 1861. The additional images of period style baskets, from the author’s collection, are also pictured.

The Basket Makers.

Although a great many baskets were made at home, there were a limited number of basket manufacturers in the United States as well as it being a cottage industry.

Basket-work is a very practical and valuable occupation in a girls’ school and in the convent. It is simple and easily learned, and is a worthwhile training, for both the hands and the eye. It is more than a pastime. (Knapke)

According to the 1860 United States Census, there were a total of eighty-seven companies making baskets: twenty-seven in New England states, forty-two in Middle states, fourteen in Western states and four in Southern states. In all, 375 men and sixty-two women were employed in the basket industry. The combination of willow furniture and willow ware (baskets) was also included in the census with a total of twenty-six in the country: two in New England states, eight in Middle states, thirteen in Western states, two in Southern states and one willow furniture maker in the Territories. The cottage industry, which employed men, women and children, was devoted to baskets but there were no employee figures available. A large number of baskets were imported from France, Germany, England and Holland, but no statistics were available for the number or value of imports.

According to the census figures, more men were employed as commercial basket makers than women, and in some basket societies, women were not employed and the society would not sell to stores that employed women. Their excuse was that it put men out of work. In Employments of Women there was a detailed discussion on basket makers. Penny indicated that a basket maker needed strength, but skill and practice were just as important, and five dollars could purchase the necessary tools which would last a lifetime. Younger people were apprenticed to an experienced basket maker for a period of seven years in order to learn the trade. There were also books that gave instructions on making the baskets and how to proportion them, but nothing replaced the skill learned as an apprentice. The income differed according to the type of basket made and most workers were paid by the piece. Basket makers could usually earn a dollar a day, but people who were just learning basket making were paid two dollars a week for about a year while they gained skill. In some cases, baskets were made as an assembly line process with as many as five people working on one basket—each worker doing a specific job.

Basket making was considered a lower grade of a manual trade. A great many immigrant families were employed by the basket industry and also engaged in the cottage industry. Sometimes entire families would be engaged in making baskets.
in order to support themselves. Penny described several such basket makers. One German widow, living in New York, managed to support herself and her family on the baskets she made. She purchased, at seven cents per pound, the willow ready for use and sold the small, covered baskets for a price of two dollars and twenty-five cents per dozen. Another German woman made fancier, molded baskets and made one dollar per day. Another woman dyed the willow and her baskets sold for one dollar and fifty cents.

The Baskets.

There were several types of baskets, each one having many styles and shapes. Utilitarian baskets were made in different styles of woven and coiled baskets. Woven baskets were just that—woven of various materials including osier or willow, rattan (sometimes spelled rataan), barks, twigs or splints (or splits) of several woods. Coiled or spiral baskets were made with grasses, palm, rushes, sweetgrass, pine needles or straw. Finally, novelty baskets were made from a multitude of styles and materials.

Woven Baskets. Most of the period basket images were of woven baskets—some roughly done and others very fine work. Some were open and others had lids. The uses were as varied as the styles and most were free-formed baskets, most of which were made either of willow, rattan or splints. Woven baskets, either free-form or molded, came in limitless styles, used a variety of materials and had a multitude of purposes.

Some of the most recognizable woven baskets were formed on molds and were generally associated with New England. Two common types were Nantucket Lightship and Shaker baskets. The makers of these baskets were probably not included in the figures for the commercial basket making industry since these baskets were mostly done as a cottage industry.

Nantucket Lightship Baskets. Not all of the Nantucket Lightship baskets were made on the lightships, but the name seems to be common for that particular style of baskets. The shape seemed to be influenced by New Hampshire baskets. Both were made with turned wooden bottoms, but the New Hampshire baskets were made with oak splints. They had a riveted bail handle rather than a swing handle, and the Nantucket baskets were usually made of rattan.

This type of basket seems to have been more generally associated with the lightships, but they were also made off-island (away from Nantucket Island) and elsewhere in New England. Today, the most expensive ones are still made on the island, but less expensive ones are made elsewhere and many come from Asia. These baskets became less popular during the Depression of the 1930s, but the style was revived by José Reyes, an off-islander, in the 1940s and originally called his baskets "friendship" baskets. He also developed the covered oval purse style in 1948.

The first lightships were stationed off Nantucket Island as early as 1819 and were used to warn incoming ships of the dangerous shoals off Nantucket Island. Although lightships were used prior to 1854, that is when the first one was actually commissioned and the service ended in 1905 when the ships were replaced by buoys. The men had an eight-month duty and each day was divided into two watches. The work was difficult, but the crew did have some free time. To make the time pass more quickly and to make extra money, members of the crew often did handiwork or made baskets. During their four-month stay on land, the crew would prepare the raw materials such as the rattan and turned wooden bottoms. Then, while they were on the ship, they would assemble the baskets. The mechanical process of assembling the baskets was called "scrimshawing" (not to be confused with scrimshaw or the art of incising designs on ivory, bones of a whale or other sea mammals).

Baskets, made by the sailors, were molded over wooden shapes. The first mold, brought on board a ship, was recorded in 1856. This style of molded basket was woven with flat strips of rattan inserted into the side of a turned wooden bottom, and was shaped over molds or blocks as the weaving continued. The molds enabled the basket maker to produce baskets of a consistent shaped and size. After the assembly was complete, the baskets were shellacked, which gave them their distinctive sheen and shape and size. After the assembly was complete, the baskets were shellacked, which gave them their distinctive sheen and also made the baskets more durable. They were usually round or oval in shape and ranged in sizes from a pint to a peck and a half. They were sold individually or in sets of five or eight.

Shaker Baskets. Like the Nantucket baskets, the majority of Shaker baskets were also woven over a mold, but were made with ash splits rather than rattan and had a woven bottom rather than wooden ones. Although a mold was used to standardize the basket size and shape, the type of weave used could vary. That produced an endless variety of baskets. Some baskets, using poplar cloth, palm leaves, or straw were woven over the same molds but produced a different look. The cat's head or kitten's head baskets, with pointed bottom corners that resemble cat's ears, are typical Shaker shapes, as are the round woven bottom basket, sieves, rectangular baskets and cheese baskets, with their hexagonal-weave bottom. All these styles were woven in various sizes.

The Shakers probably learned basic basket making from the local Algonquin Indians, but added their own unique combination of art and utility to produce baskets of uncommon beauty. Basket making was primarily associated with northeastern Shaker villages, but Mt. Lebanon, New York was probably responsible for most of the Shaker basket sales in the nineteenth century. Between 1801 and the end of the nineteenth century the community made more than seventy thousand baskets, which were sold all over the United States. The basket sales were mostly for "fancy baskets" rather than larger utility baskets. The term "fancy" did not refer to just decorative or frivolous baskets. It indicated that the baskets were of superior quality and extremely well made. Wetherbee mentions in her book that there were more than twenty styles of baskets recorded in a Shaker ledger written between 1855 and 1875.

Shaker baskets were a collaborative effort of both the brothers and sisters; the brothers made the molds, splints, handles and rims. The sisters wove the baskets that were used within the community and sold to the local outside communities. The Shakers embraced new technology in making their baskets. At first the brothers made the splints by hand planning the larger
piece of wood with a draw knife, but by 1816 they began to pound the ash logs into splints using a water-powered triple hammer. The splints were then planed to a standard thickness. The narrower more delicate splints, used by the weavers for the finer baskets, were made by running the wider splints through a splitter.

Miscellaneous Basket Woven Styles. Molded baskets were not the only woven baskets produced. Baskets were made of plain splints of ash, oak, hickory, rattan, palmetto, palm fronds and willow wands. Homemade baskets were also made from available materials at hand.

Some familiar shapes were the rectangular market baskets (a dual lobed basket, which was called an egg basket or buttock basket), melon, berry and potato baskets, large utilitarian ones such as laundry or wash baskets, storage and field baskets. Wool drying baskets had wooden legs and an open work bottom so that the washed wool could drain and have air circulation underneath the basket. Feather baskets had a lid that slid up and down on the handle, but could not be removed. Variations in the weaves differed according to the basket style and material used. The work could be an open design or a closely woven one, depending on the purpose of the basket. The splints also would differ in width and style which affected the look of the basket. Sometimes dyed splints were also used to vary the look of the basket.

Coiled Baskets. The coiling of bundled grasses, tree fronds, fine stems, tree needles or straw has been practiced by Native Americans since around 7000 BC. The fine materials were bundled, or twined together in a bundle, and secured by thread or string. The bundle was then coiled into a shape or woven though wheel spoke-like supports. These baskets were made in numerous shapes, sizes and designs and served many purposes from storage to small gems of art work. Some baskets were watertight and could be used for storing or transporting liquids. One can still find these types of baskets in areas where Native Americans ply their traditional crafts.

A well-known type of coiled basket is the sweetgrass baskets of South Carolina, which were introduced in the United States 300 years ago when the craft was brought to America by West African slaves. The baskets were used as collection and storage baskets. Another common use for sweetgrass baskets was winnowing rice. This basket was called a rice basket or fanner. Men made the larger storage baskets, used for grain, cotton or fish from a marsh grass called bulrushes. Women made the smaller baskets with a softer grass called sweetgrass. These baskets are still made in the Low Country of South Carolina.

Novelty, Fancy Fair or Work Baskets. Numerous instructions for these baskets were found in magazines such as in Godfrey’s, Peterson’s, Arthur’s and The Ladies’ Home as well as in girls’ activity books. Some of the materials used were mosses pasted on pasteboard, alum crystals (which covered a small existing wire or willow basket), baskets of allspice, cloves, rice, beads or shells, colored feathers, straw, millet, lavender stems, card paper (similar to modern cardstock) covered with quilled (narrow paper strips tightly rolled) paper and baskets made of woven paper strips or one of cardboard covered with wafers (circles of gilt or colored paper glued on the base basket). Instructions for work baskets made of fabric covered pasteboard or wire frames were also found as well as ones that were knitted or crocheted. Since these instructions for these baskets are numerous and as they were more of a novelty item of fancy-work rather than a utilitarian basket, they are not detailed here.

The Basket Making Process.

Very few primary sources describe the basket making process, but I did find one post-Civil War primary source that detailed the construction process of willow and split baskets. While it did not describe using a mold, the weaving process was similar. The American Cyclopedia included the following general description of a woven basket.

In making baskets, the twigs or rods, being assorted according to their size and use, and being left considerably longer than the work to be woven, are arranged on the floor in pairs parallel to each other and at small intervals apart, and in the direction of the longer diameter of the basket. Then two large rods are laid across the parallel ones, with their thick ends toward the workman who is to put his foot on them, thereby holding them firm, and weave them one at a time alternately over and under those first laid down, confining them in their places. This forms the foundation of the basket, and is technically called the slate or slate. Then the long end of one of these two rods is woven over and under the pairs of short ends, and all around the bottom, till the whole is woven in. The same is done with the other rod, and then additional long ones are woven in, till the bottom of the basket is of sufficient size. The sides are formed by sharpening the large ends of enough stout rods to form the ribs, and plaiting or forcing the sharpened ends into the bottom of the basket, from the circumference toward the centre; then raising the rods in the direction the sides of the basket are to have, and weaving other rods between them till the basket of the required depth. The brim is formed by bending down and fastening the perpendicular sides of the ribs, whereby the whole is firmly and compactly united. A handle is fitted to the basket by forcing two or three sharpened rods of the right length down the weaving of the sides, close to each other, pinning them fast about two inches below the brim, so that the handle may retain its position when completed. The ends of the rods are then bound or plaited in any way the workman chooses. This is a basket of the rudest kind. Others will vary according to artist’s purpose, skill and materials. When whole rods or twigs are not adapted to the kind of work required, they are divided into splits or skins. Splits are made by cleaving the rod lengthwise into four parts, by means of an implement consisting of two blades, crossing each other at right angles, the intersection of which passes down the pith of the rod.
These splits are next drawn through an implement resembling a common spoke-shave, keeping the pith presented to the edge of the iron, and the back of the split against the wood of the implement. The split is then passed through another implement called an upright, to bring it to a more uniform shape. This consists of a flat piece of steel, each end of which has a cutting edge, like that of an ordinary chisel; this piece is bent round, and the edges are made to approach each other as near as desired by means of screws, the whole being fixed into a handle. By passing the splits between these two edges, they are reduced to any required thickness. The implements required in basket making are few and simple, consisting, besides of those just mentioned, of knives, bodkins, and drills for boring, leads for steadying the work while in progress, and when it is of small dimensions and a piece of iron called a beater. The splints of various kinds of wood, particularly certain species of ash, elm, and birch, are extensively employed in basket work. These splints are obtained by beating logs of the wood with a maul, thus loosening and separating the different layers or rings into narrow strips. This is the simple and primitive process, and is necessarily slow, and restricted to woods of a free texture. Several machines have been invented and are now employed for the manufacture of splints, by which different kinds of wood, prepared by steaming or otherwise, are cut or rived into the required form. Basket willow or osier are the terms commonly applied to the species of salix most used in basket work."

Use and Care of Baskets.

Primary source material occasionally listed baskets as necessary household equipment which sometimes included the proper care of baskets. In Miss Leslie's Lady's House Book, the author had a section on suggested basket-ware needed for a household, but no further description or illustrations were included.

BASKET-WARE—There should be a large market basket and a smaller one, and these should be kept very clean, wiping them always after using, and frequently washing them out with a wet cloth, and then putting them to dry. They will require occasionally scrubbing with a hand-brush, soap, and warm water, to get off the grease that the marketing will leave in them. Fish should be carried home from market in the hand, and not laid in the basket, or they will communicate a taste and smell to the other provisions. If you use a basket for keeping bread, let it be one with a cover, and see that the bread when put away in it, is always closely wrapped in a clean thick towel.

Small hand-baskets are useful for eggs, and many other articles.

It is well to have a bottle-basket with sockets, so that bottles may be carried in it standing upright, and without any danger of breaking.

Demijohns (large bottles covered with basket-work) are extremely useful in a kitchen or store-room, for holding vinegar, molasses, &c.; being less liable to accidents, than earthen, or even stone jugs. Small demijohns, holding from a gallon to two gallons, are very convenient.

For laundry-work you should have one or more large clothes-baskets, which should not be used for any other purpose. A basket with a lid or cover is useful for small muslins, &c., after they are ironed, to preserve them from injury by dust or damp.

An old champagne basket, kept in the kitchen closet, will be found a good receptacle for dusters and sundry other things.

Catherine Beecher mentioned in her book that "Baskets of all sizes, for eggs, fruit, marketing, clothes, etc.; also chip-baskets. When often used, they should be washed in hot suds."

Baskets and Living History.

Although baskets were universal, the styles were not. Since some baskets are regional, i.e., Nantucket or Shaker baskets, consider the location of your persona or impression. There is a time and place where baskets are suitable. They are handy to carry items at living history events, but keep in mind the appropriateness of the basket for what you are doing. A finely dressed lady with the intention of going visiting would probably not be carrying a large market basket, and conversely, a poorer woman going to market would probably not be carrying a delicately made Nantucket basket. The use of a Nantucket basket could be explained, for an upper class woman, by indicating that she had taken a summer vacation at the shore in New England.
upon the skill of the basket maker. Coiled baskets would probably not have been as common in areas away from Native American populations or the Low Country of South Carolina—unless one had been touring in those areas.

To achieve an accurate impression, a basket should not be used as a matter of course for carrying all the “stuff” one tends to have at an event. Please do not use a basket, covered with a tea towel as a modern “carry-all” for your lunch, water, camera, wallet and etc. Consider, on the other hand, carrying less “stuff” with you. Use a dress pocket (a deep one holds almost anything a woman would need to carry) or find some place to store your extra items such as lunch, water and purchases.

In order to view additional images of baskets, search in the background of period photographs, engravings and genre paintings. As shown in the photographs of modern baskets, it is fairly easy to obtain a basket that is appropriate for most living history situations.

Virginia Mescher

Glossary of Basket Making Materials and Terms.
Black or brown ash, and also basket ash tree, hoop ash (Fraxinus nigra) - This wood was commonly used by the Shakers for their baskets. It is found in wet areas as well as hardwood forests and range from Canada to West Virginia and as far west as Iowa. Black ash has the ability to flex and does not break, split, snap or splinter as some other woods will.

Buttocks baskets - Also called an egg basket. It is made with two lobes formed by a cinched middle. This design distributes the weight of the load so that the contents are not broken or bruised and the basket bottom would not break.

Cat’s head basket - Typical Shaker basket. The bottom has points on each corner that resemble cat’s ears.

Checker weave - A plain over and under weave.

Cheese weave - A distinctive hexagonal weave used in making cheese or curd baskets. The large holes allowed the whey to drain before being pressed. This weave was also used in other baskets for decorative and utilitarian purposes.

Chip - Wood that is split into very fine strands. It is used for baskets, bonnets and fans.

Kicked-in bottom - The inside center of the basket is elevated from the rest of the bottom which distributes the weight of the contents around the basket bottom rather than allowing the weight settling in the center of the bottom and causing a weakness in the basket.

Mold - Wooden shapes on which some woven baskets were made. By using a mold, the basket shape and size can be standardized. Nantucket and Shaker baskets are two types of molded baskets.

Open work - A loosely woven basket. It is usually a checker weave and the open areas allow dirt, sand or water fall through the bottom.

Osiur - “A species of willow or water willow, or the twig of a willow, used in making baskets.” (Noah Webster) A species of willow preferred for basket making. It was cultivated in Germany, France and Belgium and exported to the United States. In all there were more than sixty varieties of willows grown for basket making. The violet osier (Salix viminalis) was considered the best for basket making, but other species were used such as the red willow (Salix rubra), Forby’s Willow or fine basket osier (Salix Forbyanan). In 1851, the United States Patent Office reported that more than five million dollars worth of osier was imported into the United States. The prices ranged from one dollar to one dollar thirty cents per ton. It could be purchased by basket makers at seven cents a pound. The report included a number of articles on how to grow osier in the United States as a crop.

Poplar cloth - Poplar wood was too brittle to use in the usual manner of splints for baskets. The process, developed by the Shakers prior to the Civil War, required to make the splints was laborious, but it was a way to use an otherwise useless wood. Thin splints of poplar wood, prepared by Shaker brothers, were woven into a paper-like cloth by the Shaker sisters. This poplar cloth was cut and glued to pasteboard shapes to make fancy boxes that resembled small baskets or could be shaped over basket molds.

Rattan or Ratan - “The name applied to stems, the growth of India, and the produce of various species of the genus Calamus, most or all of which are perennial, simple or unbranched, cylindrical, jointed, very tough and strong, from the size of a goose-quill to the size of a human wrist, and from fifty to a hundred feet in length. They are used for wickerwork, seats of chairs, walking sticks, whips and thongs, ropes, cables, &c.” (Noah Webster) Palembang was the variety used for baskets and was tan to light brown in color. Other varieties were used for furniture, chair bottoms, walking sticks and umbrella handles. For baskets, the outer portion of the stem was shaven into flat strips and then could be striped into various widths. The round core was known as “centre cane” in England and in the United States, it is known as “reed.” Nantucket baskets were commonly made of rattan.

Slide lid - Sometimes called a “feather basket.” The lid is permanently attached to the basket and slides up and down on the handle. This design secures the lid and keeps small or light items, such as feathers, in the basket.

Splints or splits - Flat strips of wood made from oak, elm, ash and hickory. The wood was cut into a squared shape and heated, either by hand or machine, until the wood split at the growth rings. Thinner splints may be made from the thick ones by splitting the layers with a drawknife. The thicker splints are used for the base and sides. Some splints were dyed for added variety.

Sweetgrass (Muhlenbergia filipes) - It is a winter hardy perennial grass that grows in moist soil. It ranges from Alaska to South Carolina and is also found in Europe. When dried, the leaves have a sweet, vanilla-like scent. It is used to make traditional baskets found in the Low Country of South Carolina.

Twined work - This weave consisted of stiff rigid splints or stems, called staves, and the wood was made by braiding pairs or three stems into a larger single strand. As the wood was passed through the staves, it was twisted and resulted in a unique weave.

Twill weave - A simple weave of two under, two over two under. This produces a diagonal pattern.

Weavers - These are a much thinner and narrower splints used for the weaving in and out of the foundation splints.

White Oak (Quercus alba) - Split baskets of the Appalachian mountains are typically made of white oak (strong and rigid, but can splinter or break).

Wicker-work - Baskets made with willow stems, twigs or rods. The weave has a distinctive pattern, but many variations exist. This weave can be combined with twill work to produce even more variations. Strong baskets, furniture and light carriages are made from willow.

Willow - A number of species of willow were used in basket making. Although in the nineteenth century willow was imported into the United States, it was found that some native species could be cultivated in this country to be used in basket making. The purple willow (Salix purpurea), the long-leaf willow (Salix triandra) and Huntington willow (Salix caprea) were three species grown in the United States for basket making.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:


FIG 5. A covered willow basket of willow from *Godey's Ladies' Book & Magazine*, June 1851. Author's collection.


FALL 2005 THE WATCHDOG.
FIG 9. Basket box (left), covered basket with two handles (right) and rattan basket (lower right). *Godey's Ladies' Book & Magazine*, November 1841. Author's collection.


FIG 11. Willow laundry basket taken from an 1850s advertisement for a wringer.

FIG 12. A Shaker-style cheese basket with the typical hexagonal weave. *Old Sturbridge Village* (used with permission).

FIG 13. Molded Nantucket style baskets (both round and oval), swing handle attached with rivets. Author's collection.

FIG 14. Two-lobed basket, also called an egg basket. Author's collection.
FIG 15. A large wood-split basket. Author’s collection.

FIG 16. Willow laundry basket (left) and a swing handled basket, with ears formed from splint (right). Author’s collection.

FIG 17. Market basket with wooden runner strips (left) for added strength and one with colored splits (right). Author’s collection.

FIG 18. Roughly made grapevine basket (left), woven rattan basket (upper center) and sweetgrass coiled baskets (lower center and right). Author’s collection.

FIG 19. Two types of cat’s head Shaker baskets—basket (left) with side handles, shows the weave on the bottom and basket (right) shows the points that projected at each corner. Author’s collection.

FIG 20. Two baskets using narrow splits typical of Shaker made baskets. A Shaker-style market basket (left) and a “kicked-in” bottom style (right). Author’s collection.

Basket photographs taken by Michael Mescher.
More Thoughts on Leather, Cartridge Boxes and Cap Pouches from E. J. Thomas.

During the Civil War Northern tanneries reaped considerable profits providing the Union army with harness leather, boots and belting. One Pennsylvania tanner, Alvin Faust, had no splitting machinery, so he took some finished leather to a Quaker firm, E. B. Richie & Co., to be split. Richie asked if it was for war purposes and Faust replied that it was. “Because thee has sent me this lot,” said the Quaker, “I will do it this time, but I will not do any more for thee if it is for war purposes.” Faust expanded his business to include the requisite splitting operation. The Federal contract alone more than doubled his business.

Most leather today is “chrome tanned.” It requires less time to process than vegetable tanning. The process includes some of the same steps as vegetable tanning, but uses chemical agents to speed things up. The hides come from the meat packing plants in bulk and are cut in half along the backbone. The hides are fleshed first, then they are treated in a lime and sulfide solution to loosen the attached hair. The hides then go into large rotating drums containing first an enzyme and then a salt-acid solution. This is called “bating and pickling.” Bating is performed to add softness and flexibility to the leather, and to remove the liming agents. A chromium sulfate solution is added to the same drum, after draining the “pickling,” and the hide is treated for twenty-four hours. This is called a one-vat process. Excess moisture is then removed during a wringing operation. Cattle hide, being too thick for most purposes, is then split using something like a horizontal band saw. This creates one piece with natural grain, and another piece without grain called the split (used for suede). After drying, the leather is “leveled” to get a uniform thickness. Vegetable tanned cowhide is often not split, depending on intended use. There was very little coloration that occurs naturally in the vegetable tanning process. The process took three weeks just for the tanning agents to penetrate the hide, exclusive of final finishing or drying times. In the end it produces relatively dense leather that is firm and solid, yet workable. A light brown in color, vegetable tanned leather will darken naturally with exposure to sunlight. This leather is best for harnesses and belts, in short, the “leather” used to make our cartridge boxes, cap pouches, belts, scabbards, slings, etc. for the Civil War role-playing community.

I have a Federal box in hand to review. It is a Federal pattern of 1857 from a new field merchant, E. J. Thomas of Philadelphia, Manufacturer and Dealer of Army Accoutrements. The box is completely handmade with vegetable-tanned US leather from one of the fine Amish harness-makers, Weaver Leatherworks. The construction is two-piece, as the Federal Ordnance Department specified with the seam on the lower backside of the box, though seam location will vary on originals. The thread is three-cord Irish linen, treated with a rosin and beeswax concoction called “kit.” The resulting color is not white, but a grayish-brown. The concoction is warmed prior to being applied to the thread and it will actually seal the awl holes. It is actually watertight. Count me among the fellows that share the sentiment of that Confederate soldier who wrote in his diary, “Trust in God, and Jefferson Davis, but keep your powder dry.” The awl holes are hand punched with an original #42 diamond point sewing awl, the type in use during the period. The outside stitches are eight per inch and are all sewn by hand. The US standard was eight per inch and the cartridge box is an exact copy of an original 1857 Federal cartridge box. The direction of the stitches is correct as all these details are copied exactly from the original.

In the 1860s, harness makers hand-stitched the cartridge box, starting with the chap (side) piece. The side stitches are done with the pouch facing away from you. The harness maker would sew farthest to nearest towards the flap, and then knot-off so the knot is in the inside front on one side. Then he would flip the pouch and start again highest to lowest, then knot-off so that knot is on the inside back. This cartridge box is done in that identical fashion. This attention to detail is rare. The leather is marked for punching with a printing iron (or wheel) by hand. The leather is an excellent harness grade. The dyes for the leather are iron based. The cartridge box patterns are wood, like the originals. The implements pouch is hand-sewn, six stitches to an inch, like the original. The leather is tacked to a block and placed on a knee clamp just as was done then. The pouch has those “*” marks on the front where it was tacked, to cover the holes, just like . . . well, you get the idea. The outer flap is not stamped with any US contractor sub-inspector’s mark, as this was only a distinguishing feature of later models. Lastly, the belt loops are stitched, but not riveted, as is correct for the 1857 version. E. J. Thomas also offers a Model 1839 .69 caliber box, and a Model 1839 .54 (Mississippi Rifle) box, also copied from original specimens. The E. J. Thomas cartridge boxes all include tins and a “US” box plate ($185 to $195).

You will be excused if little details like this are not as
fascinating to you as they are to me. It is not just the materials and dyes that are authentic to the period, but the hand craftsmanship as well. Notice the fit where areas are joined together. These are qualities of a bygone era, and increasingly rare in modern times, though, thankfully not in our hobby. This cartridge box comes highly recommended and the quality of it is uncompromising. The E. J. Thomas cartridge box compares very favorably with the quality and workmanship of the current state of the art US pattern cartridge boxes currently priced between $155 and $250. Having an item such as this (a truly very favorable with the quality and workmanship of the current togetherness. These are qualities of a bygone era, and increasingly rare in modern times, though, thankfully not in our hobby. This recommended unconditionally. Original tins (not included) fit MI relocated the machinery to Richmond for the manufacture of accurate reproduction of an original made by talented craftsmen) state of the art US pattern cartridge boxes currently priced for each drawing will be selected when two hundred tickets per raffle are sold—or regardless, no later than 29 January 2006.

E. J. Thomas, PO Box 332, Hatboro, PA 19040, (215) 340-0806 and J.Zilley@hotmail.com.

Craig L. Barry

Preservation Fund Rifle-musket Raffles.

To support of our 2005 battlefield preservation efforts we are offering chances on two, feature modified rifle-muskets. Tickets for each raffle are ten dollars ($10). The winning ticket for each drawing will be selected when two hundred tickets per raffle are sold—or regardless, no later than 29 January 2006.

You may purchase tickets by mail at PO BOX 1675, Warren, MI 48090-1675, or in Gettysburg during Remembrance Day weekend 17-19 November 2005 at S&S Sutler of Gettysburg and the Regimental Quartermaster where the arms will be on display. The arms will be shipped to the winners. Please specify which of the following drawings you wish to enter.

Drawing No. 1: CS Richmond Rifle-musket.

In April 1861 Confederate General Thomas J. Jackson liberated the Federal Armory at Harpers Ferry, Virginia and relocated the machinery to Richmond for the manufacture of rifle-muskets for the Confederacy. The stampings, tools and dies taken were designed for Model 1855 rifle-muskets with the Maynard Tape Primer. The CS Armory eliminated that problematic design, but kept the distinctive "high hump" casting for the lock plate. According to the Richmond Dispatch (11 October 1861), "Our Armory can now turn out as perfect a musket as ever emanated from Harpers Ferry. Made—lock, stock and barrel and mounting—entirely by means of machinery formerly employed by the old Government for the same purpose."

This reproduction weapon is made by Armi Sport, and feature modified by Associate Editor Craig Barry. It has an original-looking, hand-rubbed linseed oil finish and a tuned and rebuilt lock. All modern markings have been removed from the barrel. Correct proof marks have been applied. The "high hump" has been profiled to be in accordance those manufactured with the 1862 date. In addition, a non-functioning reproduction Maynard Tape Primer lock plate and hammer are included for potential conversion back to a Model 1855 Springfield.


When the Civil War broke out, Alfred Jenks & Son converted to munitions production from manufacturing of cotton and wool milling machines. Starting in early 1862, they were producing about 5,000 Springfield pattern 1861 rifle-muskets per month. The majority of the lock plates were marked "BRIDESBURG" with the date behind the hammer.

This excellent reproduction was made from a stock blank hand-shaped by James River Armory of Millersville, Maryland. The lock, dated 1862, is rebuilt with quality Euroarms reproduction parts and the stock finish is hand-rubbed with linseed oil. The band springs are handmade as well, and all correct period proof marks are applied.

A New Fabric Source.

A jean cloth textile sample is on hand from "Wm. Booth, Draper at the sign of the unicorn." It is a first rate fabric. Wm. Booth, Draper supplies woolen, flax and hemp fabrics for "authentic historic reproduction clothing" according to the proprietors, Hazel and Laura Dickfoss. They also carry patterns and notions. This merchant may be more familiar to those doing late eighteenth century and earlier nineteenth century enacting, but after looking at the sample and receiving a report from one of our subscribers, we are suggesting that it is worth further investigation.

American Victorians loved to celebrate, and had already established a variety of holiday traditions by the Civil War. Christmas and New Year's Day were looked forward to by most Americans as an opportunity for family gatherings, visiting friends and sharing good will.

American Christmas traditions began in the Colonial era with the attendance of Christmas religious services and little more. The first citing of St. Nicholas as we know him came in Rivington's Gazetteer, published in Albany New York, on 23 December 1773. Colonials were still steeped in Puritan tradition, and religious recognition of the holiday was considered the “proper” celebration. New Year's Day, however, received secular celebration with firecrackers, family dinners and “mummers.” The mummer tradition came from old English history, where men in masks would visit homes and play music, shoot off guns, and be mischievous, to which the household would react by providing food and liquor.

Christmas traditions from various countries were introduced to America in the nineteenth century. By 1812, Catholic and Episcopal churches in the East were decorating with evergreens and singing Christmas hymns.

Around 1820, the Pennsylvania Dutch were using tabletop fresh trees and decorating them with gingerbread and candles. In 1823, Clement Clarke Moore published, “An Account of St. Nicholas.” The St. Nick of Moore’s children story was adopted from the Persian saint, Nicholas of Myra, who legend tells was a Bishop who rode on a horse, visiting homes and leaving food and treats for children. The children left out wooden shoes for the Bishop filled with hay and carrots for his horse. (The shoes would evolve into hanging stockings by the nineteenth century.

By the 1840s, large Christmas dinners, decorating with holly and evergreen, playing games and sharing small gifts were becoming common. In 1850, Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine published the first illustration of a decorated tabletop tree, paving the way for trees in the home, and commercially made decorations.

As people corresponded to send one another holiday greetings, Christmas cards were commercially developed. First produced in Europe, greeting cards were published in New York by R. H. Pease in the early 1850s. Commercialization and acceptance of the holiday continued through the 1850s with the production of confections and mass-produced toys for sale.

There are numerous accounts of Christmas and New Year's activities from the Civil War years. They include descriptions of various traditions such as large dinners, formal visits, church services, simple decorations and the giving of gifts, both North and South. Christmas trees did not appear to be universal yet, but children hanging stockings on the mantel or their bedposts appear to have been common. Homemade gifts and small tokens were the norm for gifts. Women made elaborate hand sewn gifts for family members including slippers, smoking caps, stockings, shirts, and dolls. Purchased gifts included toys, hankies, gloves, books, pencils, candy and jewelry. “Christmas Gift” was a tradition with both children and young servants. Early on Christmas morning, the young ones would run through the house, entering rooms and yelling, “Christmas Gift!” hoping for small gifts from the occupants.

Christmas hymns and songs written prior to 1866 include “It Came upon a Midnight Clear” (1849), “Jingle Bells” (1856), “We Three Kings” (1857) and “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” (1863).

Other American traditions included serving eggnog and apple toddy, playing parlor games, having card parties, dances and setting off firecrackers and fireworks on Christmas night. Dinners were very traditional and mirrored our English roots: chicken or turkey, potatoes and other root vegetables, pies, plum pudding, mincemeat, chutney, breads, nuts and fruit. The week following Christmas was usually reserved for visiting, correspondence and public activities such as balls and concerts. Even military accounts of camp life at Christmas note a basic hot meal of game and root vegetables, toasting one another, church services and decorating with greens, especially in the hospitals and the officers’ quarters.

New Year's Eve and New Year's Day were days of
celebration as well, with parties, dinners, dancing and much visiting. Many churches held services on New Year's Eve night, and the next day was spent in visiting friends and family. Some families gave one another gifts on New Year's Day. Firecrackers, fire works, and shooting off guns were a long-held tradition of "freedom", both North and South. Finally, some Victorians recognized Twelfth Night or the Feast of the Epiphany as the close of the holidays, and had family dinner with a Twelfth Night cake (Twelfth Night or Epiphany refer to the arrival of the Three Wise Men at Christ's birthplace). The cake was baked with a silver coin, and the person receiving the coin in their piece was believed to have good luck in the New Year.

Christmas has grown into a major secular event, but is still rooted in the religious and simpler traditions of the Victorians. As memoirs and diaries from as diverse locations as Florida, Georgia, Michigan, New York and Virginia attest, our Civil War ancestors enjoyed Christmas as much as we do today, without being caught up in commercialism.

Karen Rae Mehaffey

A Short Bibliography for Victorian Holidays.

Scrap Pictures.

Scrapbooking is currently a popular pastime in the United States. Many assume it is a relatively new activity—taking its roots from the scrapbooks of our parents and grandparents and the photo album explosion of the last half of the twentieth century. In reality, scrap pictures have been used as early as 1800 to decorate cookies, especially the Springerle cookies (an anise-flavored cookie, usually rectangular or circular in shape, with a design or picture stamped on top). At first the scrap pictures used by bakers had a religious motif, but this eventually gave way to a printed picture, often secular, collected by children as a favorite pastime. Using blank books, the pictures were arranged and embellished with illustrations from periodicals and thus became know as "scrapbooks".

Soon scrap books were published by enterprising businessmen, with the assorted pictures meant to be colored, decorated, trimmed and used as Christmas tree decorations. One of the earliest of these American scrapbooks was "The Pictorial Scrap" published in Philadelphia in 1860. As time passed scrap pictures were used to top a cut out cookie in place of elaborate icing decorations. Bakers reduced their time and expenses by using scrap pictures instead of traditional methods of decorating holiday cookies. Eventually the popularity of the tin cookie cutter made the art of decorating cookies a favorite activity, and topping the cookie with scrap pictures became the rage. St. Nicholas was an especially popular figure, as was the Madonna and Child. Nature scenes were often used and images of domestic life cut from magazines and periodicals were sought after. Decorating or "embellishing" the cookie with icing, nuts, candied fruits and miniature candies was an enjoyable holiday pastime. A bonus of not removing the picture (attached with sugar and water) and eating the cookie was a perfectly preserved cookie with which to decorate the Christmas tree.

The following is a cookie receipt, which lends itself perfectly to the making of scrap art cookies. After the cookies are baked and cooled, decorate as desired with small scraps of pictures, ribbons, icings and tiny candies. Do not forget to make a hole in the cookie before baking if you intend to use it as a hanging ornament!

1 cup butter
1 1/2 cups powdered sugar
1 egg
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 teaspoon soda
1 teaspoon cream of tartar
1/4 teaspoon salt
2 1/2 cups flour

Cream the butter, egg, vanilla and sugar. Add the dry ingredients. Chill until firm enough to roll and cut. Bake the cookies in a hot* oven for about six minutes. Makes six dozen cookies.

*Lynn Kalil
Subject: A Detail to look for in Reproduction Canteens.

A number of us (particularly those doing a mounted impression) have probably suffered a canteen sling guide breaking off on a reproduction 1858 or 1861 pattern canteen. The sling guide comes loose because the solder weld fails. Curiously, I am not aware of any documented accounts of this happening to original canteens. The reason? Simple. Look at how broad the “flap” of the sling guide is where it is soldered on the original. There is more surface area for soldering on original guides than on many reproduction canteens where just the outermost edge is soldered.

The photographs (FIGS 1, 2 and 3) show an original canteen (found on the battlefield) currently on display at the Little Big Horn National Battlefield Park. The top sling guide that cannot be seen (as it could not be removed from the display) was actually broken in the middle, yet the soldered joints still held! Also notice in that a brass ring and loop is fastened about the neck for the (missing) cork chain, hence showing it was updated to 1872 specifications—the chain was no longer fastened to one of the top sling guides.

FIG 1. A Civil War canteen that was updated to 1872 specifications.

FIG 2. Upper sling guide detail.

FIG 3. Lower sling guide detail.

It seems to me that if a tin canteen, manufactured well before the automobile was invented, can survive the rigors of campaign, present day suppliers should be able to duplicate the process one hundred years later. Look at page 207 of Echoes of Glory: Arms and Equipment of the Union. The 1858 canteen, show on the far left, has its cover torn at the sling guide (to the right of the viewer). The “flap” arrangement of the guide is very prominent. This can also bee seen on a canteen on right of page 208 in Echoes of Glory: Arms and Equipment of the Confederacy. The guide flaps are very prominent.

If the three sling guides on Civil War pattern canteens had stress on them, look at the Indian War era modifications (1878). The bottom guide was removed and the canteen was literally suspended from the top two guides. The guides were no longer guides, but were hangers. Still, there seems to be no documented breakage of the guides. The original practice of using a larger attachment area makes a far more durable attachment. The cost in parts and labor to do this on reproduction canteens is almost negligible and would result in a more accurate and reliable product.

Paul Milligan

It is a detail that many of us might ignore when purchasing a canteen from a field merchant. I am sorry that space and time to get permission to reprint a series of photographs that Paul submitted prevented us from including them. The article, “Oblate Spheroid Canteens, 1858–1916: A Standard Pattern Recognition Guide” by William G. Phillips and Carter Rila, (Military Collector and Historian, Summer 1989) contained photographs illustrating the conversion of top two guides to hangers (many Civil War era canteens were still in service with this conversion). Copies of back issues of the Military Collector and Historian are available from the Company of Military Historians headquarters at PO Box 910, Rutland, MA 01543-0910 or at http://www.military-historians.org. Here are Paul’s notes for these illustrations: “The canteen on the left on page 67, the one on page 71 and the one on the bottom of page 77 are Civil War canteens whose bottom sling guides have been removed, and iron triangles have been fastened to the top two guides by tin straps that have been soldered to the guides per 1878 regulations. The entire weight of the canteen and water now hangs from the top two guides. A very similar pre-1878 non-regulation arrangement is seen on page 70. On this example the top two guides also support the entire weight of vessel and contents (the triangles are omitted; the strap goes directly through the guides).”

Bill Christen

Subject: Universal Soldiering.

First, let me thank you for the incredible job you and your staff are doing with this fine publication. I received my complete set last week, and am devouring them as quickly as possible. It gives this modern-day campaigner great joy to compare the lives of nineteenth century soldiers to those of the twenty-first. Of note now, as then, soldiers often opt for a minimalist approach to their kit, stripping it of all the non-essentials in order to increase mobility, flexibility, and comfort. The attached photo is of me with my “full battle rattle.” It is cumbersome to say the least—compared with my everyday (in camp) kit. You can also tell readers how substandard Army issue brown underwear turns pink when washed. Similar to Logwood dye fading? This leaves the [male] soldier in quite a predicament! Thanks again! I look forward to meeting Watchdog subscribers upon my return (after I make some significant corrections to my nineteenth-century kit). Lieutenant Colonel John Bradley, Camp Echo, Iraq

Thank you for the feedback and thank you for the work that you and other Watchdog subscribers, who are in the Armed Services, are doing. I also received a note from another soldier-subscriber who had to improvise a newly formed combined unit flag for a Guantamano Bay Naval Station detachment using scraps of material from jackets purchased at Wal-Mart in Miami.

Bill Christen
Taking a Much Closer Look at the Three Comrades.

Since soldiers sometime had their photographs taken more than once, one simply cannot assume that this image is the one referenced in Smith’s diary in February 1864. Nevertheless, there are corroborating facts beyond the overcoats, gloves and boots that mark this as a winter scene.

We know that it was not taken in the winter of 1864–65, since the tall soldier on the right is Allen Shattuck. Shattuck was wounded in the battle of the Wilderness in May 1864, remained absent until his disability discharge in September or October 1864, and so would not have been present for a photograph in the winter of 1864–65.

We know that it was not the winter of 1861–62, since Shattuck sports a red diamond on his hat—a divisional patch that was not invented until the summer of 1862. In addition, photographs of the Third Michigan dated to the winter of 1861–62 show them in dark overcoats and trousers rather than the light (presumably sky-blue) overcoats and trousers evident in the subject photo.

It is probably not the winter of 1862–63 since, at that time, the Third was armed with .54 caliber Austrian rifles, not the Model 1855 Springfield rifle-musket shown. The Model 1855s are likely not photographer’s props as there are three of them shown and at least one soldier wears the accompanying accoutrements.

By the process of elimination, the photographs must have been taken during the winter of 1863–64. Further corroborating this conclusion are the Springfield rifle-muskets, which had fully replaced the Austrian arms in the Third Michigan by October 1863. While individually furloughed soldiers usually turned in their weapons, ordnance reports suggest that, when the Third went on its “Veterans’ furlough” just before the end of December 1863, they took their Springfield rifle-muskets with them.

In all likelihood then, this is the photograph referred to in Smith’s diary—the one taken in Baltimore in February 1864 when re-enlistees in the Third were returning to the front from veteran’s furlough. This conclusion could be cemented by identifying the photographer’s location, which should not be hard to do given the distinctive painted backdrop with the flag and fort. I bet that triangulating the travels of other identified soldiers photographed in front of the same backdrop would produce additional confirmation.

New information provided by the photograph:

1. While the ordnance reports do not specify the model of Springfield issued to the Third, the photograph shows that at least some were Model 1855s (with the Maynard lock plate).
2. All other photos of the Third show them in kepis. This is the first inkling that at least some wore civilian-style hats.
3. The image tends to confirm the surmise that overcoat issues to the Third in the winters after 1861–62 were the standard light blue. Note that Lemual’s overcoat is of the double-breasted cavalry style (less common than the single-breasted coat).
4. Note the closely spaced buttons on the uniform jacket peeking out from Shattuck’s open overcoat. This shows that he is wearing a shell jacket or frock coat (possibly issued to him while recovering from his wound).

This exercise shows that knowing what a unit wore, what weapons were issued and having access to individual service records can do to aid in nailing down the when, where, of whom and, possibly, the why of a given photograph.

John Braden

NOTES:
1. A post-war photograph of Shattuck was published in Michigan at Gettysburg. Despite aging, an identically shaped ear in both photographs and the shape of his nose leave no doubt as to the identity.
3. Ibid. The quarterly report for the end of December 1863 shows all but a dozen rifles disappearing, only to reappear, with furloughed soldiers, by the end of March 1864.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON SMITH:
Lemual Smith, like Shattuck, was wounded at the Wilderness—a wound in the right thigh. Smith records in his diary that it occurred “while charging rebel rifle pits,” and that he walked for two days before receiving medical help in Fredericksburg. After recovering, he returned to his regiment, which by then had been transferred as three companies to the Fifth Michigan Infantry. Lemual died in 1876. His wife was granted a widow’s pension because his death was caused by the consumption that he had contracted in 1862. He is buried in Oak Hill Cemetery, Owosso, Michigan. The grave, which records show he should be in, has a gravestone for someone else. Jim Rapai.
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