The Horn Book

The Honourable Company of Horners,
The American Guild of Horn Workers

Russ Young, Pres. Lee Larkin, Vice President Clay Smith, Secty.
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Friendship National Matches - The Flood

Most disappointingly, the national muzzle loading rifle matches at Friendship, Indiana, were cancelled on their very first day this June. The rains upstream caused the normally timid river to swell all the way up to the sheds... and in a matter of about four hours. The officers of your organization all met in the cafeteria for a mid-year executive meeting beginning about 4 PM. About 7:15, an unknown Samaritan came in to see if he could find the owners of the two new pickups about to take in water over by Gunmakers Hall- they belonged to your president and secretary! We went out and the waters were up to the base boards- Roland Cadles van had already taken in some water. Anyone on the range side of the river was trapped there since the roads were absolutely impassable.

The levels went up & up as the velocity of the flow increased. Port-a-potties were careening down stream and water was up to the porch of the Gunmakers Hall by 10 PM. There was a major standing wave in the Sheep Shed. Then the waters began to subside but not for long- about 4 AM the water began to percolate up through the floor of the Hall. Fortunately, that was the high level and by mid-morning, the water had receded, leaving the damage visible everywhere. The state highway was cut off on each side of the NMLRA land and evacuation took the only remaining route, across the bridge and through a tiny town nearby and back to the highway. If the water had been two feet higher, this would have all been a life threatening disaster.

Early in the day on Saturday, guild members demonstrated period horn technology at the Gunmakers Hall. Williamsburg members George Suitor and Clay Smith showed the steps in producing a fine English style pressed horn flask. The art of turning horn into screw tips was shown by Roland Cadle. We had intended to have a general meeting of guild members in attendance in the late afternoon or early evening but the smart folks were already headed to high ground.

News from Dixon's Gunfair

The Honourable Company of Horners was well represented at the 1996 Dixon's Gunfair. Members who had display tables included Norman Brilliant, Roland Cadle, Bob Chattin, Bruce Horne, Lee Larkin and Mark Odle. Tom Ames and Chuck Hamilton were accoutrement judges with the wisdom of Solomon and the connoisseurship of the Rockefellers. And yes, lots of our members won ribbons- see the detailed list that follows.

Unlike last year, the weather was just superb, although the week before the remnants of hurricane Bertha blew through and flooded the valley. Chuck Dixon used almost 250 tons of gravel to keep the parking areas from swallowing vehicles. Last year, the future of the Gunfair was very bleak but a number of reversals occurred over the last year and the outlook is now a bright as ever. And there is a fine bed & breakfast within walking distance of the gunshop! How good can it get?

One of the decisions made at the formation of the Guild was to honour one deserving individual each year for their contribution to the trade. One name was mentioned by almost everyone. At the executive officers meeting at Friendship, we considered the person and decided that he absolutely earned any accolades we could bestow. Thus, after the banquet on Saturday night, your President & Vice President presented Chuck Dixon with a calligraphed recognition from the Guild. Probably no one else in the United States has done so much over so many years to aid the development and improvement of horn work.

While we're speaking of awards, our Guild brother, Bob Chattin, received one of the coveted Ames' frakturs from Chuck Dixon for his many years of demonstrating the arts and mysteries of horn work to the visiting public at the Fair. Congratulations Bob! This is exactly the type of member action that creates a strong and lasting guild; education, both of the public and of fellow guild members, is one of our foremost goals.

The seminars under the big tent and in the audio-visual barn were numerous and excellent. It was impossible to attend them all and get to see any of the tradespeople as well. Your editor was extremely impressed by the quality of the entries in the accoutrements and the displays of original firearms from the local historical society were magnificent. Listen folks, no exaggeration- if the event had lasted another two or three days I *might* have been able to take in everything. This was the most informative & interesting seminar on period technology that I have ever observed. There were experts (yes, real experts, not the old tales) on just about any aspect that you can imagine and all were friendly and open.

The 1996 Dixon's Gunmakers Fair- from a judging aspect

by Thomas E. Ames

Since Chuck Dixon approached me in 1987 with his idea of including powder horns and hunting pouches for critique and award at the Gunmakers Fair, I have had the rewarding opportunity to examine and critique many fine horns and related accoutrements from the hands of

both novices and experienced craftsmen. The category was established with the principle of promoting an understanding of horn working and its historical significance primarily and an award of ribbons secondarily. It is not intended to pit today's artisans against each other in competition and I'm happy to see so much sharing of information between us in spite of the competition circle. It really shows where your hearts are.

I've received much pleasure watching the interest mount year after year; seeing individuals progress in skill level and knowledge of correct historical representation. New participants are always a welcome addition and 1996 was a banner year, breaking records for both quality and quantity. It seemed the new category of "Master Class" took the heat of competition off some of the less experienced craftsmen which resulted in more entries... the overall quality of which we've never seen.

When I volunteered to set up the categories and standards for critiques almost a decade ago, I never thought I'd be challenged with judging this standard of work from some of America's finest artisans. That you are a link between the ideals of a past era and a new era in American history that will need to know and understand the value of creative self expression. You are a teacher and the value of a true teacher lies in their ability to inspire a student to go beyond that of their master.

Thank you for allowing me to be a part of your creative process. It is an honour not take lightly. I hope you will continue to support our work at Dixon's. If you can't make the trip, send your work with someone who can. Best wishes to all.

Award Winners in the Accoutrements Category at Dixon's Gunfair

(Gentle reader: please note that these are taken from your editors scribbled notes as horners picked up their entries and omits winners who got away from me. If you notice a mistake, please let me know and the correct information shall be placed in a forthcoming issue) See also the photos on page 7.

Cadle, Roland: 1st place, engraved horn
1st place, pouch & horn combination
Coffey, Robert: 3rd place, decorated horn
Ehlert, Ron: 1st place (Master's level), map horn
Frankfort, Willy: 2nd place, miscellaneous accoutrement
Judges choice, engraved powder horn
Franklin, Dick: 1st place undecorated horn
Horn, Bruce: 2nd place (Master's level) screw tip horn
Myres, Dave: 3rd place, contemporary accoutrement
Slease, Mike: 2nd place, decorated horn
2nd place, pouch & horn combination
3rd place, undecorated horn

Book Review

by Lee Larkin, Vice President

Dresslar, James E. Folk Art of Early America: The Engraved Powder Horn. Bargersville, IN: Dresslar, 1966.

Often times, at a rendezvous or trade fair, people come up to me and ask how they can get information about "Golden Age" powder horns. I tell them to visit museums and private collections to see as many horns as possible and to read whatever they can find in books, journals or magazines. While visiting museums usually requires time travelling and getting an invitation to view a private collection can prove difficult, the literature about powder horns is a constant, available source of information. When asked what books are most important, I usually mention Grancsay, duMont, Swayze, Grant and Guthman, the five author's I have come to rely on most over the years. But now there is a superb new book to add to that list: Folk Art of Early America: The Engraved Powder Horn, by Jim Dresslar and photography by David Wesbrook. It has quickly found its way to the top of my short list of powder horn books because of its superlative color photographs.

The format of the book is reminiscent of those of duMont and Swayze in its horizontal 9"x12" format. A quick flip through its pages reveals a short preface and introduction by Jim Dresslar and John Bivins respectively. There is a brief editor's note with a description of horn nomenclature followed by page after page of amazing color photographs. Books about powder horns in the past have included at the most a dozen or so color plates (i.e., Swayze and Guthman) and the viewer was forced to imagine what the horn looked like based on sterile black and white photographs and sketches. No longer. Dresslar's book contains over 400 excellent color photographs, capturing the unique beauty and character of these engraved horns. Each horn featured in the book includes information concerning its maker, descriptions of engravings, inscriptions and the physical characteristics of the horn, a brief bibliography of if and where the horn was published in the past, and miscellaneous information concerning the horn. Next is a short section of detail photographs from various horns that were not necessarily featured in the book, followed by a concise bibliography and an index which completes the work.

The author's intent is to show the development of folk art on powder horns in America from its earliest to latest expressions by both professional and nonprofessional engravers alike. In this the work succeeds exceedingly well. The horns are arranged in a rough chronological order from c. 1725 to 1841, easily showing this development. Dresslar scoured museums and private collections for "the best one hundred or so carved powder horns known to exist in the United States." The final result is what the author believes are the best 110 powder horns in America. But, if one is going to claim that these are the best 110 horns, there must be some objective criteria by which each horn was selected or at the least something about a particular horn that just grabbed the author's attention. Dresslar does not give the reader any specific explanations why he included each horn. The reader may have a general idea why a particular horn was included (because it reflects "the magnificent variety of subjects and artistic range of the individual carver"), but has to guess what the author sees in an individual horn that makes it artistically or historically one of the top 100 or so horns in America.

An example of what I'm talking about is the 'J. B. Adhemar' horn - a screw tip dated 1759 (p. 82 & 83). To me, this horn is important because it is the earliest dated screw tip I have seen in photographs and it is similar in construction to many Berks County screw tips. This horn adds considerable weight to the arguments of those who maintain the early production of screw tip powder horns. Additionally, the engravings of an Indian scalping a soldier and another carrying his war club with five gruesome scalps dangling on a pole over his shoulder bring the reality of hand-to-hand combat home to us and makes this an exceptional horn. Unfortunately, none of this type of analysis is forthcoming from the author. Or, another example is the inclusion of the Samuel Lounsbury horn.

Why is this horn included over other horns that the Selkrig-Page carver produced? My favorite by this maker's hand, which is not included, is the Nathaniel Selkrig horn, with it troops in street firing position, its beautifully scalloped engrailing, and the use of the "WAR" motif. Unfortunately, the author leaves the reader guessing as to the specific reasons why the Lounsbury horn was selected over one the caliber of the Selkrig horn. Again, the book would have been much more substantial and reflected to a greater extent the author's obvious expertise, if a short explanation had been included concerning why each horn was selected. Nevertheless, the book succeeds in showing the development of American folk art on powder horns over a one hundred twenty year period.

The author claims to have 43 never before published horns, but in actuality there are 41. The "Indian Trade Silver Horn" (p. 156-7) and the "Jonathan Piper" horn (p. 130-1) were published by Grant on pages 111 and 151 respectively. A few other problems can be found, the most annoying of which is the "John Pembarion" horn (p. 54-5). The "i" in Pembarion is actually a "t" - Pembarton. If you look closely at the "t" in the words "fort," "with," "most," and "brother" which appear on the horn, each "t" is the same as the "t" in his last name. Other problems are nit-picky and concern incomplete bibliographical notes: the Peter Bachop horn also appears in Grant (p. 154) and the William William's horn also appears in Guthman's Drums A'beatin' (p. 73).

Despite these observations, Folk Art of Early America: The Engraved Powder Horn is easily the finest photographic collection of its kind to date and as I said earlier it has gone straight to the top of my list of horn books. The descriptions of the horns are first rate, the design and layout of the book are superb and the photography is unparalleled by any other powder horn book in or out of print. In fact, I don't believe I have ever seen better photographs of accoutrements or artifacts in any book. Wesbrook's pictures capture the imaginative art form and more, something of the awe you feel when you are able to hold one of these graceful old powder horns in your hands and connect yourself to its history. If you are a collector or active horner, this book is an indispensable source of information and an absolute must have. Copies of the book (ISBN 8-9651839-8-8) are available from Dresslar Publishing, P.O. Box 635, Bargersville, IN 46106, (317) 422-5147 for $95 plus $4.95 shipping.

As They Saw It...

Submitted by Chuck Borger

"Their whole drefs is alfo very fingular; and not vert materially different from that of the Indians; being a hunting fhirt, fomewhat refembling a waggoner's frock, ornamented with a great many fringes, tied round the middle with a broad belt, much decorated alfo, in which is faftened a tomahawk, an instrument that ferves every purpofe of defence and convenience; being a hammer at one fide and a fharp hatchet at the other; *the fhot bag and powder-horn, carved with a variety of whimfical figures and devices, hang from their necks over one fhoulder;* and on their heads a flapped hat, of a reddifh hue, proceeding from the intensely hot beams of the fun."

From: A Tour in the United States of America, Vol. I, by John Ferdinand Dalziel Smyth, 1784, reprinted by Arno Press, 1968.

In Memoriam: Norman S. Brilliant

Fellow horn worker Norman S. Brilliant died on August 4th, 1996, after suffering a heart attack. He was only 64. Norman was a U.S. Navy veteran of the Korean War and had retired several years

ago as art director for the American Management Association.

He was an avid Revolutionary War re-enactor and belonged tot he 2nd Pennsylvania Regiment/43rd Regiment of Foot. His love of early American history was combined with his artistic skills to produce a superb engraver of horns. Unlike most of us, he was widely recognized for his talents, appearing in Colonial Homes magazine (June, 1993) and Muzzle Blasts (Jan. 1994). He was listed by Early American Homes magazine in their "Directory of American Craftsmen" and also by the New Jersey Council on the Arts.

Norm was present at the Mercer Museum this year when our guild was founded and had been an exhibitor at Dixon's Gunfair only a few days before his passing. Many of us got to chat with him there.

Many of you undoubtedly know his widow, June, who is an expert on colonial women's clothing and was also a speaker at Dixon's. Those who wish to express their condolences may write to June Brilliant at 25 Candlelight Circle, Columbus, NJ 08022. Norm will be missed by all of his guild brothers and by many re-enactors who will cherish his artistry on horn for generations.

Editor's Shavings...

Please notice the contributions in this issue by fellow Guild members Tom Ames and Lee Larkin! Your editor not only welcomes but solicits articles! Don't be shy. If your writing skills are not the best, remember that putting a nice polish on the words is one of the editor's tasks.

The mailing list for the Guild is up to nearly 140; this is good for the guild but getting hard on your editor who does the writing & mailings...

The annual meeting for 1997 is being planned daily. If you would like to consider presenting a talk or demonstrating an historical technique, contact the editor. Mike Lea did a tremendous amount of foot work for us and secured a deluxe site at the Ohio Historical Society in Columbus, Ohio. It is immediately off the interstate, next door to a fine Super 8 Motel and both have plenty of free parking. The airport is only a few miles away. The dates will be Feb. 28th through March 2nd, 1997.

Your editor visited the Society and saw the meeting rooms and toured the magnificent collections there. You should allow at least a few hours to wander through their superb exhibits and the craft village. While there I stayed at the Super 8 and was delighted with the quality of the facilities and the cheerful staff. Rooms are affordable and nice; lots of coffee and pastries were available for breakfast. This will be a much easier meeting to attend than last year's!

Don't forget- the four video tapes of last year's conference can be ordered from:

Roland Cadle
Route 1, Box 152G
Waynesburg, PA 15370
(412) 852-1094

The set of four is only $87.50 including postage & handling in the United States. Once these are gone, the guild will probably NOT order another group due to the minimum order size from the recording studios... so order now rather than regretting waiting!

Winners at Dixon's, clockwise from top left: Roland Cadle, Lee Larkin, Ron Ehlert, Willy Frankfort