



A Few Had Old French Pieces

THE MUSKETS OF APRIL 19, 1775

Introduction

- ▶ On the eve of the American Revolution, Massachusetts militiamen obtained their weapons from a variety of sources: inheritance, the French and Indian War, the Siege of Louisbourg and from commercial markets.
- ▶ The result was a variety of weapons of different caliber, origin and value. It was not uncommon to see within the same militia company 20-gauge fowlers, 12-gauge fowlers, English muskets, dog lock muskets from the King William's War era, Dutch muskets, American muskets with parts from several sources and French muskets.
- ▶ In Lexington, Benjamin Locke's musket was of French origin; John Parker's musket was a combination of English, American and French parts and several other militiamen fielded with fowling muskets.



As militiamen from the village of Lynn marched off to war on April 19, 1775, an observer noted “[one man with] a long fowling piece, without a bayonet, a horn of powder, and a seal-skin pouch, filled with bullets and buckshot. . . Here an old soldier carried a heavy Queen’s arm with which he had done service at the conquest of Canada twenty years previous, while by his side walked a stripling boy with a Spanish fusee not half its weight or calibre, which his grandfather may have taken at the Havana, while not a few had old French pieces, that dated back to the reduction of Louisbourg.”

History of Lynn, p. 338

What We'll Discuss Today

- ▶ British Guns
- ▶ Dutch Guns
- ▶ French Guns
- ▶ American Guns





British Muskets

British Muskets Issued to Provincials During the French Wars

- ▶ Historically, during the French wars Massachusetts Bay Colony encouraged its provincial soldiers to provide their own arms, rather than rely upon the government. This effort was met with moderate success and as a result, a wartime shortage often existed. As a result, Massachusetts was forced to petition Britain for military supplies.
- ▶ Unfortunately for Massachusetts Bay Colony, the muskets and related equipment supplied by the British government was not the top of the line. Colonial governments traditionally received in times of crisis obsolete and older arms from Britain. By comparison, military regiments stationed at home or in Europe generally received newer, high-quality arms.

British Muskets Issued to Provincials During the French Wars

- ▶ Naturally, one must ask what type of musket was issued by the British government?
- ▶ In the fall of 1755, then Governor Shirley described the 2000 stands of arms he received to include “Land muskets of the King’s pattern with double bridle locks, old pattern nosebands and wood rammers.”
- ▶ In the spring of 1756, 10,000 stands of arms were shipped to the colonies, including Massachusetts. The shipment consisted entirely of “Land service muskets of the King’s pattern with brass furniture, double bridle locks, wood rammers with bayonets & scabbards and tann’d leather slings.”
- ▶ The descriptions of these muskets, particularly with the emphasis on “double bridle locks”, suggest the muskets issued to Massachusetts provincial troops was the 1730 King’s Pattern (often and erroneously referred to as the 1st Model Brown Bess).



The 1730 King's Pattern

The 1730 King's Pattern

- ▶ The 1730 King's Pattern represented most muskets shipped from England to Massachusetts during the French and Indian War.
- ▶ The 1730 musket's overall length was 61 11/16 inches, its barrel length was 45 1/2 inches and its caliber was .77
- ▶ This firelock featured a double bridled lock, a wood ramrod, a brass nose band to slow wear on the fore end of the stock and a redesigned oval trigger lock.
- ▶ All furniture was brass.



SKINNER

Dutch Muskets

Dutch Muskets

- ▶ While the British "Brown Bess" and French "Charleville" pattern muskets are probably the best known of the long arms used during the American Revolution, muskets of Dutch origin saw use during the American Revolution.
- ▶ Dutch gun makers centered in Amsterdam (as well as Rotterdam and Maastricht) and easily established themselves among the premier arms makers in Europe by the mid-1600's.
- ▶ The British purchased muskets from the Dutch prior to the establishment of the 1730 King's Pattern muskets, and while some authors refer to Dutch muskets as resembling the early "Brown Bess" muskets, the reality is that the 1730 King's Pattern muskets copied the Dutch pattern.

Dutch Muskets


- ▶ Because the British government could not always keep up with demand and wartime shortages during the French and Indian War, Massachusetts Bay Colony also received Dutch muskets produced between 1706 and 1730.
- ▶ Dutch muskets were generally 61 3/8 inches in length; its barrel was 45 7/8 inches and had a caliber of .78.
- ▶ Its furniture was composed of iron or brass, the ramrods were made of wood and the lock plate was rounded (as opposed to flat). The accompanying bayonets were short-shanked rectangular blades.
- ▶ With the help of Benjamin Franklin, The Colony of Massachusetts purchased several thousand Dutch muskets during the Revolution. According to author and researcher Harold Peterson, nearly every surviving Dutch musket in America can be traced to Massachusetts.




Dutch Muskets



Number and Condition of Dutch and British Guns In Massachusetts

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- ▶ Unfortunately, the British and Dutch muskets were in less-than-ideal condition when they arrived in Boston.
 - ▶ On July 16, 1756, Colonel John Winslow and Lieutenant Colonel George Scott both complained that the arms they received “are in very bad condition.” That same year, Virginia’s Lieutenant Governor Robert Dinwiddie complained about a shipment of arms that was received and slated to be shared amongst the American colonies, including Massachusetts. According to Dinwiddie, the stands of arms were “in a very rusty condition, and it w’d appear they had been under water for months.”
 - ▶ The previous year, on September 28, 1755, Governor Shirley and Major General William Pepperrell both received correspondence highlighting the inadequacies of weapons and equipment sent to Massachusetts provincials. “The locks being wore out and the hammers so soft, that notwithstanding repeated repairs they are most unfit for service, particularly Sir William Pepperrell’s Regiment being old Dutch arms.”

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- ▶ In the eyes of the British government, the Dutch and English muskets provided to Massachusetts soldiers were property of His Majesty and were expected to be returned to government officials at the end of each campaign.
 - ▶ Yet despite the existing deficiencies, Massachusetts soldiers often refused to return these stands of arms.
 - ▶ In 1757, the British Comptroller complained “out of the 2,000 [muskets] issued to the Province of the Massachusetts Bay, he has just yet received 300 only.”
 - ▶ Two years later, Governor Pownall complained “I had caused about three thousand ... arms to be delivered to the men, raised the last year for His Majesty’s service, under General Abercromby; I have an account of one hundred and fifteen only, as yet returned.”
 - ▶ Assuming the estimates are accurate, at least 4585 British and Dutch muskets remained in the hands of the Massachusetts provincials by 1759. As to how many of these retained muskets were used at the outset of the American Revolution more research needs to be conducted.



French Muskets

French Muskets

- ▶ Most firearms for the French infantry prior to the American Revolution were made in St. Etienne and Tulle. A third major area of weapons manufacturing was in Charleville.
- ▶ There were a variety of French weapons that were exported from France to Canada to support the military effort against the English.
- ▶ While the early 18th century brought a flurry of developments in French musketry, it appears that the two more common French guns that ended up in Massachusetts hands were the 1728 Infantry musket and the 1716/1734 Contract Fusil de Chasse.



1728 French Infantry Musket

1728 French Infantry Musket

- ▶ This famous weapon was contemporary with the Brown Bess used by the British. Until the end of the French and Indian Wars, it was manufactured in large numbers by the French arsenals at St. Etienne, Maubeuge and Charleville.
- ▶ The 1728 model introduced the concept of a gun with three-barrel bands. The lock also had a pan to frizzen bridle instead of the earlier vertical frizzen bridle. Ramrods varied – some were wooden while others were metal.
- ▶ The French 1728 infantry musket were all iron mounted, however, there are a few surviving brass mounted examples of 1728 that were made for the French Navy.

1716 /1734
Contract Fusil de
Chasse



1716 /1734 Contract Fusil de Chasse

- ▶ Hunting guns were made at St. Etienne and Tulle.
- ▶ Fusil de Chasse guns were slightly slenderer than the military muskets and officer fusils and varied between .60 and .62 in caliber.
- ▶ In both the 1716 and 1734 contracts, the guns were described as having 43" to 46" length barrels and except for a limited number, most were steel mounted. The locks on these weapons did not have either internal or external bridges.
- ▶ It is believed that approximately 6,000 Fusil de Chasse guns were sent to Canada between 1716 and 1763 to arm Canadian Milice. Many of those also ended up in the hands of Massachusetts men.

TO BE SOLD,
A FEW half barrels of choice GUN-
POWDER, Four four-pound CANNON, true fortified,
with their implements, French MUSKETS, and about twen-
ty casks SALT PETRE.——Enquire of
WILLIAM COOMB S.
Newbury Port, February 6, 1777.

How Did French Muskets End Up In
Massachusetts Provincial Hands?

Where Could One Buy a French Gun?


- ▶ “To be sold by John Pim of Boston, Gunsmith, at the Sign of the Cross Guns, in Anne-Street near the Draw Bridge, at very Reasonable rates, sundry choice of Arms lately arrived from London, viz. Handy Muskets, Buccaneer-Guns, Fowling Pieces, Hunting Guns, Carbines, several sorts of Pistols, Brass and Iron, fashionable swords, &c.”
- ▶ “Newly imported, and sold by Samuel Miller, Gunsmith, at the Sign of the Cross Guns near the Draw-Bridge, Boston: Neat Fire Arms of all sorts, Pistols, Swords, Hangars, Cutlasses, Flasks for Horsemen, Firelocks, &c.”

Boston Newsletter, July 11, 1720; *Boston Gazette*, May 11, 1742

Captured French Guns?

- ▶ “We killed and took about the same number of the enemy. The lieutenant of the British company and myself, were foremost, and we advanced on and found their sleeping-place, and while running it up, the Lieutenant was shot through the vitals and he died soon thereafter. Thus I was all alone, the remainder of our party not having gained the summit; the enemy retreated, and i followed them to the other end of the hill. In my route on the hill, I picked up a good French gun and brought it home with me.”

*The Life of Captain David Perry, A Soldier of the
French and Revolutionary Wars*



LOST in the Battle at Menotomy, by
Nathan Putnam, of Capt. Hutchinson's Company, who was
then badly wounded, a French Firelock, marked **D**, No. 6, with
a marking Iron, on the Breech. Said Putnam carried it to a cross
Road near a Mill. Whoever has said Gun in Possession, is desired
to return it to Col. Mansfield of Lynn, or to the Selectmen of
Danvers, and they shall be well rewarded for their Trouble.

French Guns Used on April 19, 1775



American Fowling Guns

“There were several centers of colonial gunsmithing in New England. The largest by far was in Boston and the suburban Boston area ranging roughly to the semicircle of today’s Route 128. Going west there were many gun-making shops and even small factories in the Worcester-Sutton area. Still farther west there is the complex of gun-making communities running up the Connecticut Valley”.

Merrill Lindsay *The New England Gun*


**DISTRIBUTION OF GUNSMITHS
AND ARMS MANUFACTURERS IN NEW ENGLAND.**



- ▶ American made fowling pieces did double-duty as hunting guns and firearms for defense.
- ▶ Generally speaking, fowlers carried on April 19, 1775, fell into one of three categories: New England fowlers, Club Butt fowlers or English Style Fowlers.
- ▶ New England fowlers made up the largest group of guns and exhibited considerable French influence in their stock design and their hardware. The stocks have a rounded drop to the stock that was copied from French fowlers and is often referred to as a “Roman Nose” profile
- ▶ Club Butt fowlers were manufactured in Massachusetts and possibly Rhode Island. They have a decidedly convex curve to the underside of the buttstock.
- ▶ Another group of long guns exhibits characteristics of both British fowlers and muskets. These guns had a stock profile similar to British sporting guns of the eighteenth century.

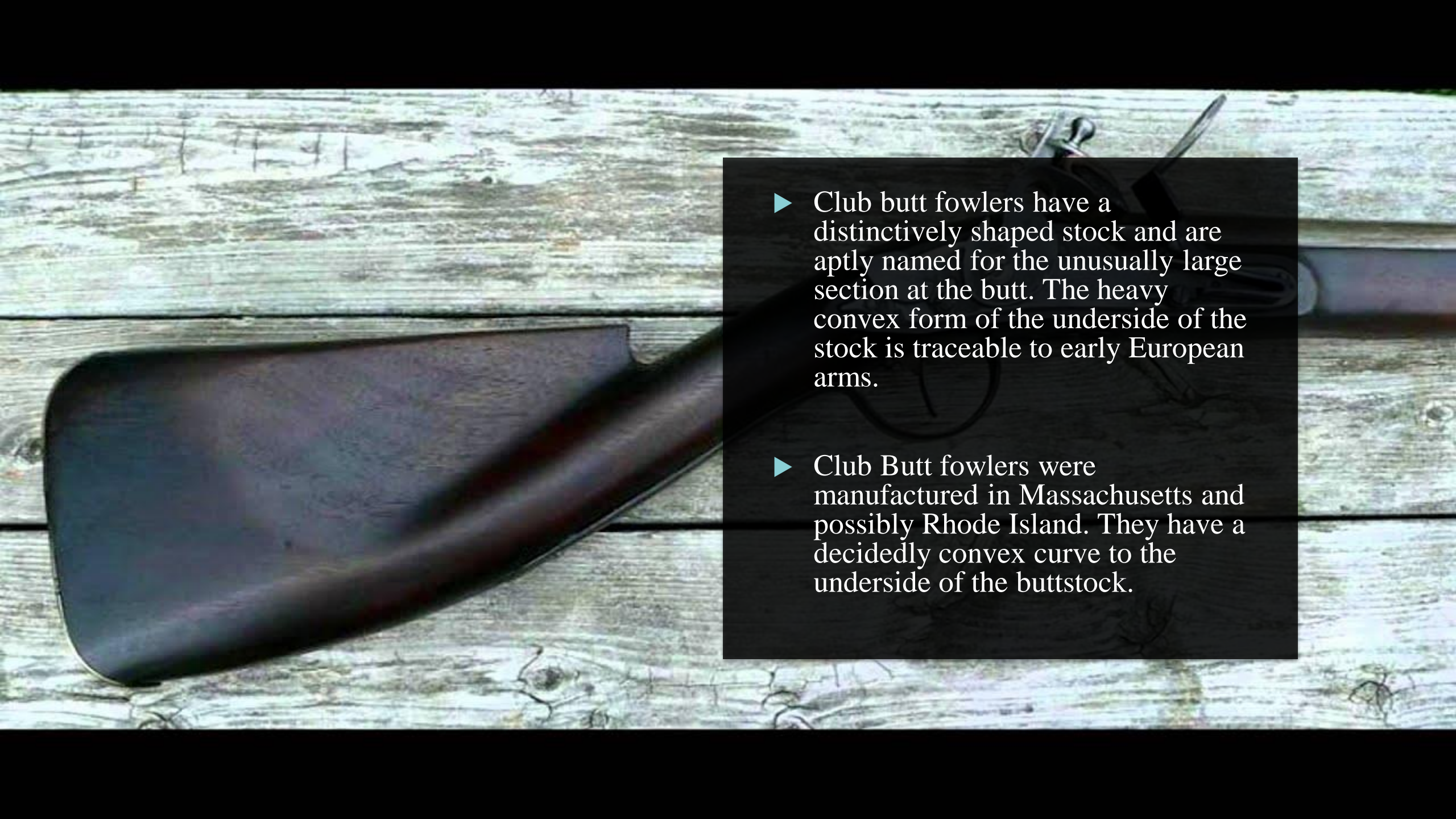


New England Fowlers

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- ▶ New England fowlers vary in design more than those in the other categories because they were produced by a greater number of gunmakers over a longer time period and spanned a larger geographical area.
 - ▶ Many New England fowlers have barrel lengths that range from 44 inches to 52 inches, and buttstocks that curve downward following the design of French guns after c.1720. The lower edge is concave and the comb convex, creating a downward curved buttstock referred to as the “Roman nose” design.
 - ▶ New England fowlers were patterned after the French guns produced at Tulle, Saint-Etienne and Charleville. In addition to copying French guns, gunsmiths used Dutch guns for examples to imitate.



Club Butt Fowlers

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- ▶ Club butt fowlers have a distinctively shaped stock and are aptly named for the unusually large section at the butt. The heavy convex form of the underside of the stock is traceable to early European arms.
 - ▶ Club Butt fowlers were manufactured in Massachusetts and possibly Rhode Island. They have a decidedly convex curve to the underside of the buttstock.



English Fowlers



- ▶ American made “British style fowlers” were closely copied from British guns that were imported from England, and the two are often difficult to differentiate from each other.
- ▶ Usually the carving is more sophisticated, the hardware more elaborate, and the engraving finer on the British guns. For instance, shell carving at the barrel tang is usually better executed on the British fowlers and the lines of the engraving have a grander style.
- ▶ Adding to the confusion is that American made guns often used British locks and barrels.



The Catch All: Composite Fowlers



Questions?