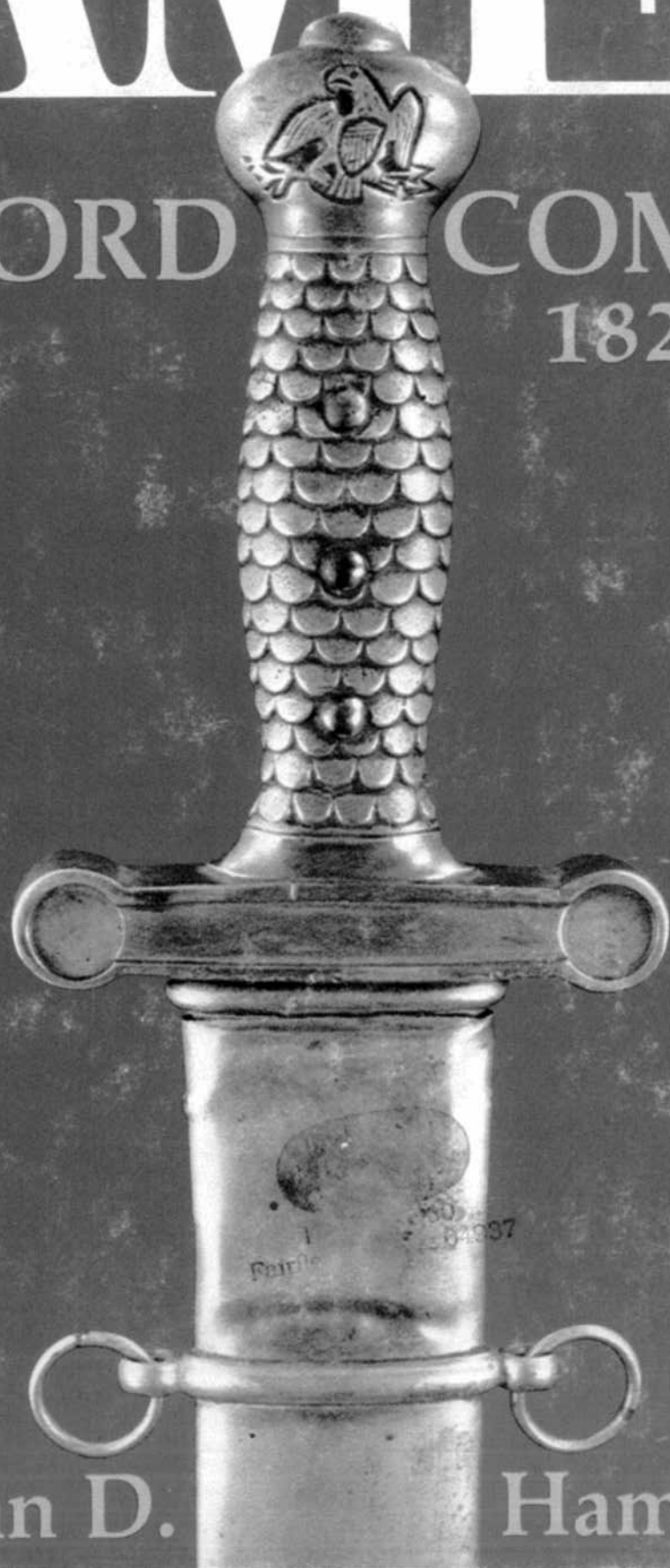


THE  
**AMES**

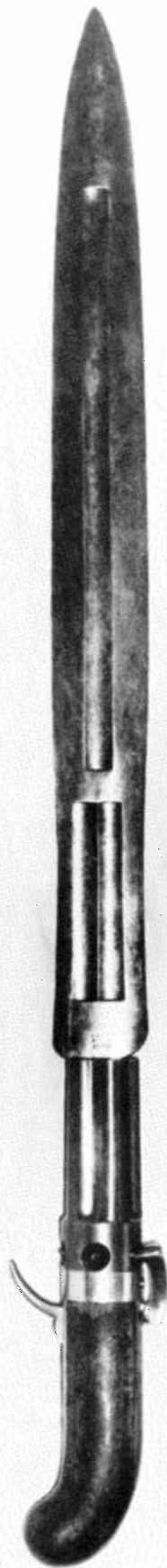
SWORD COMPANY

1829 - 1935



John D.

Hamilton



**Sword Pistol made by R.B. Lawton, c. 1837. The blade of an Ames Artillery sword was attached to Lawton's pepperbox revolver. (Photo courtesy the Carl Metzger Gun Collection, Texas A & M Univ.)**

**(Opposite page) Detail of the Lawton Sword Pistol, c. 1837, showing blade with marking: N.P. AMES/SPRINGFIELD, reverse side marked: UNITED/STATES/1835. Length of blade: 19 inches. (Photo courtesy of The Carl Metzger Gun Collection, Texas A & M University)**

brother Officers in the Texas Navy, was lavishly decorated on both scabbard and blade with symbols that fairly sing "Yellow Rose of Texas." Truly unique, it is one of two known examples of an original, blued Ames blade.

A non-combat version of the Artillery sword was adapted to regalia use by civilian fraternal organizations. This version could be ordered with gilt hilt, and profusely etched blade decorated with floral designs and symbolic emblems associated with the ritual of each order. While the blades bear normal Ames markings, they lack the stamped initials of arsenal inspectors. The hilts were secured to the blade without the normal use of three iron rivets found on the military pattern.

In December 1832, Secretary of War Lewis Cass proposed a plan to convert the existing Corps of Mounted Rangers into a Regiment of Dragoons.<sup>30</sup> The role of Dragoons was viewed as being necessary to perform garrison duty on the inland frontier, where they were expected to act as an economical and effective force against the Indian tribes. Capable of fighting on horse or foot, they were to be trained in the use of rifle or sword. Since no other Federal cavalry forces were then in existence, the formation of a Dragoon regiment was regarded as filling a serious deficiency in the military organization of the United States.

In February 1833, Nathan submitted a proposal to the Ordnance Department for supplying sabres for the newly-formed regiment of Dragoons. The Ordnance Office provided N.P. with five model swords selected primarily for pattern, not grade. One of these, described as resembling the subsequently adopted Dragoon sabre, had a wireback sabre blade, steel hilt, black grip, and steel scabbard. This weapon, similar in design to the Gothic style British Light Cavalry sabre of 1822, constituted the second series of sword contracts that firmly set Ames on the road to becoming America's foremost sword manufacturer.

The British style blade, which Nathan referred to as "wire backed", and other sword scholars have variously dubbed as "pipe", "ramrod", or "quill-shaped", was intended to lend stiffness for thrusting with the point, to a curved sabre-type

blade, basically designed for making slashing cuts. As with most compromises however, it proved less than effective for either purpose and an altogether difficult shape to manufacture.

The day after Nathan submitted his proposal, the Ordnance Office agreed to purchase 1,000 sabres; of which 750 were to be delivered in New York in less than nine months, on or before the first day of November, 1834.<sup>31</sup> The previous October, sufficient carbines, pistols, sabres, belts and trimmings to arm 750 Dragoons were turned over to the Quartermaster at Springfield, where they were inspected and shipped to New York.<sup>32</sup> From there, via Pittsburg, half (375) were sent to Jefferson Barracks, the St. Louis, Missouri base of all military activity in the West. Jefferson served as the major distribution point for troops and munitions destined for scattered frontier garrisons. The other half of the shipment was sent to Fort Gibson, Arkansas. The sabres shipped out in 1833, where probably of the "old" pattern manufactured by Nathan Starr, and had been drawn from arsenal inventories as an interim measure until receipt of the new pattern made by Ames.

Superintendent of Inspections, Major H.K. Craig, received word in April that one or two hundred swords were ready for inspection, but that the method of proof had not been established. Nathan requested further information about how and who would perform the proof. An indication of how testing was performed was reported in the June 1849 issue of *Scientific American*: "swords of metal true are submitted to a bending force of a severe nature, and are then whipped on edge, back and flatwise, on hard blocks of wood of different forms, until the experienced tester is satisfied that it can cut through a bar of steel as thick as that severed by the famous "cross hilt" of Coeur de Lion." Folklore notwithstanding, elasticity was proved or tested by "springing" the blade to see if it remained bent after trial. Temper was judged by ability to withstand shattering if too brittle, without developing flaws or cross-cracks which would be apparent on visual inspection.

Upon completion of establishing proof and visual inspection, military ordnance inspectors stamped their initials within a rectangular cartouche, on the inner surface of the brass crossguard. Officers assigned to this task were Major Craig (H.K.C.) and Major Mann Paige Lomax (M.P.L.). Civilian sub-inspectors at Springfield Arsenal placed their stamped initials JM (Justin Murphy), or WS (William Smith) on the tip of the snub-scroll quillon.



On May 29, Bomford asked Nathan to ascertain the price of the different component parts of the Dragoon Sabre in detail: such as the blade, the hilt and guard. In a response dated June 3rd, 1834, Nathan stressed that the costs were proportioned as near as practical to original expenses, but that the actual cost for each sword and scabbard changed every day as a result of improved facilities and greater experience in manufacturing (production shortcuts).<sup>33</sup>

Nathan felt that increased efficiency could offset any rising costs so that it would be possible to continue to produce the sabre for the original price, but leave very little profit. In attempting to forestall any maneuver by Bomford to reduce the contract price, Nathan forwarded the following cost breakdown for the Dragoon sabre:<sup>34</sup>

Cost of scabbard	2.75
Cost of rings	.20
Cost of blade	4.56
Cost of brass guard	2.25
Cost of grasp	.12
wired covering for grasp	.12
	10.00
Dimensions of Dragoon Sabre (inches)	
length of scabbard	35.62
width of ditto at top	1.43
thickness of ditto at top	.66

(Opposite) Dragoon Sabre, pattern 1833, made for the Republic of Texas, c. 1840. The blade is etched: N.P. AMES / CUTLER / SPRINGFIELD / 1840 and TEXAS DRAGOONS. Similar in nearly all respects to the standard Enlisted version of the Dragoon Sabre, with the exception that the Texas sabres were inspected by William Smith (W.S.) whose initials were placed on the tip of the quillon and the scabbard drag. Blade length: 39½x11½ inches. (Essex Institute)

On August 7th, water was let into the flumes at the new Cabotville works, the wheels were finished and the mill wright work was completed. In September, Nathan informed his major stockholder J.K. Mills, that an inventory taken at the time of the transfer revealed there were on hand or nearing completion, 800 Dragoon sabres (valued at a contract price of \$10@), 300-400 Officer swords (at \$20@) and 200 Artillery swords (at \$4.12½@).<sup>35</sup> Close accountability of each stage in the production of the sabres as reflected in the factory ledger showed a unit cost of \$7.04 yielding a profit of \$2.96 on each sword.

### N.P. Ames Ledger Book September 1834

#### Cost of Dragoon Sword

	cents
Steel	38
forging	100
coal	12
grind.g	40
polishing	17
emery	3
shop & grindstone	7
loss	20
etching	4
hilt	187
grasp & nut	20
fitting hilt	15
scabbard iron	15
bind.g wire	4
bending	20
bands	12
brazing	8
fitting tips etc.	8
grind.g	5
filing tips	12
filing bands	8
draw filing	25
browning	17
cap & chafing	41
rings	6
use of tools and superintendence	60

(Michael F. Bremer Collection)

704

The "Circular to Contractors" sent out late in 1834, outlined an anticipated requirement for arming and equipping the militia during 1835; viz. 1,400 Dragoon sabres and 400 Artillery swords.<sup>36</sup> The pattern and specifications of proof were to be the same as those previously manufactured by Ames, in the event any other sword contractor might wish to submit a bid. Nathan responded in January with a proposal. While informing Major Craig of the contractor assignments, Bomford announced that the Ames proposal had officially been accepted.<sup>37</sup> Delivery of the sabres was confirmed the following year in Bomford's annual report to the Secretary of War, June 1836.<sup>38</sup>

The circular optimistically went on to alert contractors that arms requirements were expected to continue at the same level for the next five or six years. Ordnance Office estimates for 1836 forecasted a need for 2,500 "cavalry" (Dragoon) sabres.<sup>39</sup> In September 1835, Craig arranged with Nathan for 1,700 additional sabres. The contract signed on November 17th, fixed final delivery for the following June.<sup>40</sup> Nathan was able to tell Bomford in January that the sabres would be completed well before the deadline. Nathan also had a large inventory of sabre components nearing completion which had not been contracted for, and attempted to elicit a commitment from Bomford for further sabres. N.P. was concerned about keeping his workmen engaged on the same kind of work rather than shift them to other employment. Sabres exist which bear testimony that more orders evidently did follow in 1837. However, records have not been found to substantiate terms of the contract. The next group were ordered in 1839 and constitute the last official U.S. Government contract for Dragoon sabres of the 1833 pattern.

Once the Dragoon sabres were in the hands of the troops, reports filtered back to Washington about faulty blades. In November 1835, Major Richard B. Mason, 1st Regiment of Dragoons, described them to Bomford as being "of very inferior quality," and felt constrained to assemble a Board of Survey to examine them. Nathan received a copy of Mason's proceedings and in a reply dated December 23, 1835, defended his sabres against the English pattern, stressing that in accordance with views held by officers in the Ordnance Office, the blades had been made to bend rather than break. With such an object in mind, it was intended that the blades be as elastic as the steel would permit. Nathan admitted there was a limit to the elasticity of the metal which was subject to a number of variable factors, but it

seemed to be the bane of his existence that persons who were not qualified, were in positions to judge the quality of his blades. A Lieutenant Worth had purchased a sword from N.P. and while attempting to discover how the officer liked his sword, Nathan realized the futility of asking for an evaluation from the ignorant. As Nathan sardonically related to James, Worth "... don't believe he knows whether I showed him a sword or a jack knife. He will have to ask some one else whether it is best to like it or not."<sup>41</sup>

In February 1835, Nathan purchased an inventory of sheet steel for the Dragoon scabbards, from his usual supplier, Sigourney & Porter in Hartford.<sup>42</sup> This supply did not last long and by May, N.P. was in Boston looking for more scabbard steel.<sup>43</sup> While there, he purchased #21 sheet steel, but was unable to locate the "decarbonized" variety that he specifically wanted. Decarbonized steel had superfluous carbon burnt out of it, making the metal more malleable and easier to bend around mandrels on which the scabbards were formed. Afterward, the metal could be recarbonized and hardened once again. The difficulty in acquiring the right sheet metal probably accounted for a temporary setback he had with the scabbards. Nathan had heard by the Ordnance Office grapevine that 200 Dragoon scabbards were "laid by" for further consideration.<sup>44</sup> Too many rejected scabbards, at a time when the quality of the Dragoon blades was under criticism from Major Mason, could have jeopardized the Ames position *viz a vis* the Ordnance Department. In September, it was arranged for Nathaniel Perkins to visit the shops and provide James with specific information respecting a special annealing process for decarbonizing steel.<sup>45</sup>

Apparently willing to continue producing swords if given a profitable opportunity, Nathan Starr, Jnr. complained to Col. Bomford in March 1837, that his sword making machinery was rusting from disuse.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, he had not been notified when sword contracts were being offered, and argued that he was at least entitled to an opportunity to submit a bid for sword work, in as much as he had been "... the only one that ran all the hazards of uncertainty during the war (1812)." Starr deeply resented those who "... had taken none of the risks incumbent with wartime government contracts," and had in his opinion, made no technical improvements. He accused others of having stolen machinery and tool patterns from his factory. Starr's resentment appears to have been directed toward Cabotville.

The workmanship type of iron hilted swords

produced by Starr twenty-five years previously, had become outmoded by the 1830's. Starr failed to realize that Ames had developed a foundry technology that could economically cast quantities of fashionable hilt patterns in gleaming brass.

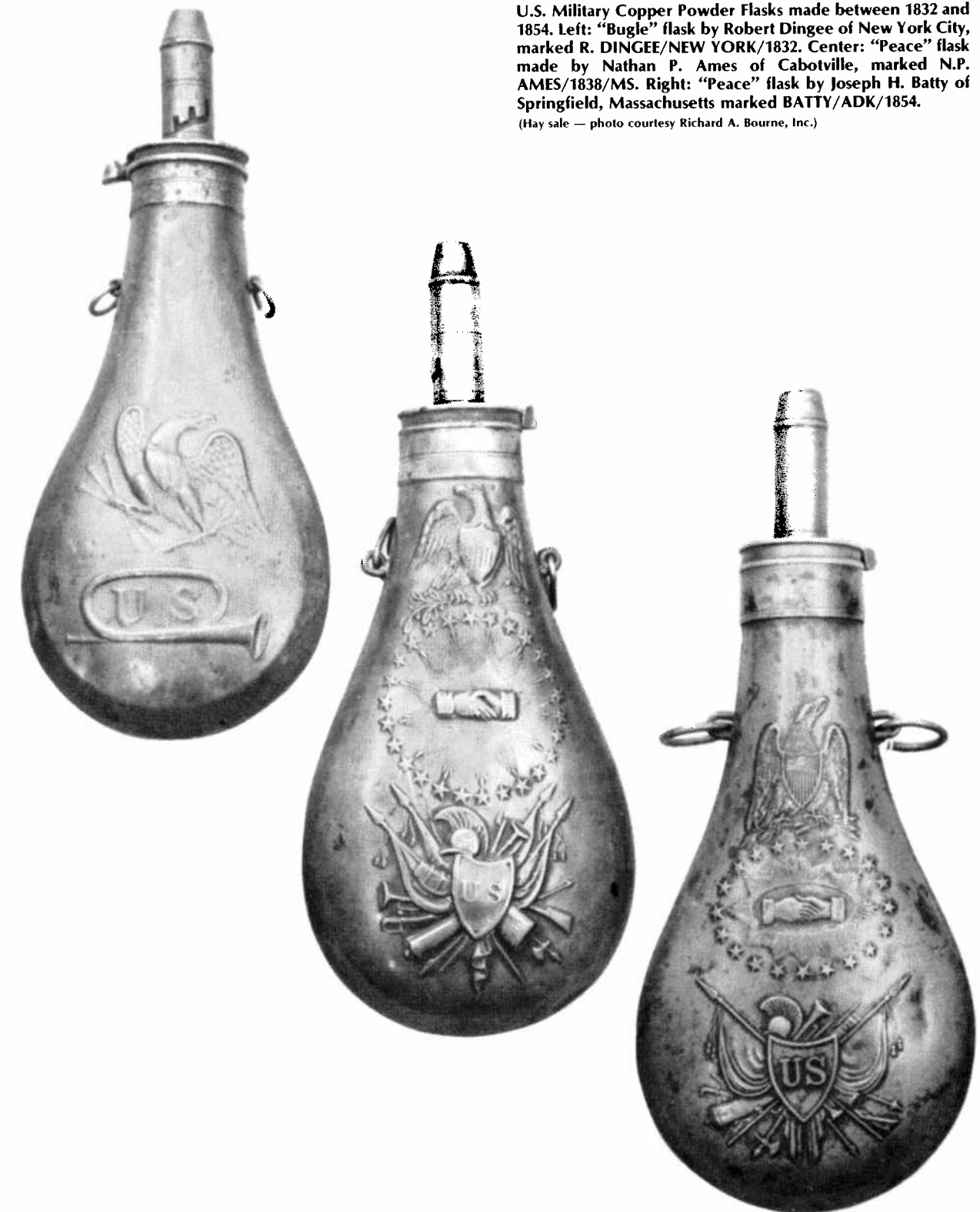
Dragoon blades are found marked N.P. AMES/CUTLER/SPRINGFIELD and dated as early as 1834 and as late as 1840. Markings on enlisted pattern contract blades were etched in a back-slanted, openface script, and bear the legend UNITED STATES surmounting a wreath of laurel leaves. The pommel was secured to the blade tang with a form of recessed, slotted nut that had been characteristically used by Nathan Starr. The threaded nut facilitated replacement of broken blades in the field.

In 1836, dissatisfaction was expressed in the Ordnance Department with the copper powder flasks, decorated with an eagle and the Infantry Bugle Horn, that Robert Dingee had been providing to the Government since 1832. The main complaint about Dingee's flasks, came from Major R.L. Baker, who maintained that because they were made of thin-gauge copper, they became damaged too easily. The use of thicker copper would provide more screw threads with which to attach the top and its graduated powder charger to the flask body. The use of heavier gauge suspension staples and wire rings were also indicated. With Bomford's blessing, Major Baker began correspondence with Nathan concerning improvements in flask construction and decoration. Baker had particular objections to the "very ungainly bird that now adorns the flask of Mr. Dingee's manufacture. . ." and felt that it would bear improvement.<sup>47</sup>

The Ames version that first appeared in 1837, was more stoutly made than Dingee's flask. Nathan changed the design incorporating an eagle above clasped hands (signifying the Union), surrounded by a circle of 26 stars (states of the Union); and a panoply of arms, colours, and shield bearing the initials of the United States. By popular consensus, this style powder flask has become known as the "Peace" flask, coined from the clasped hands device Ames introduced. Ames flasks differ in design from those made under subsequent contracts awarded to Batty in the 1850's, in that the Ames eagle looks to its right; the stars are placed in a circle rather than an oval formation; and only a single drape of the colours is shown suspended from the bottom of the shield.

Ames rifle flasks made under the 1837 contract were inspected by William Smith during that year

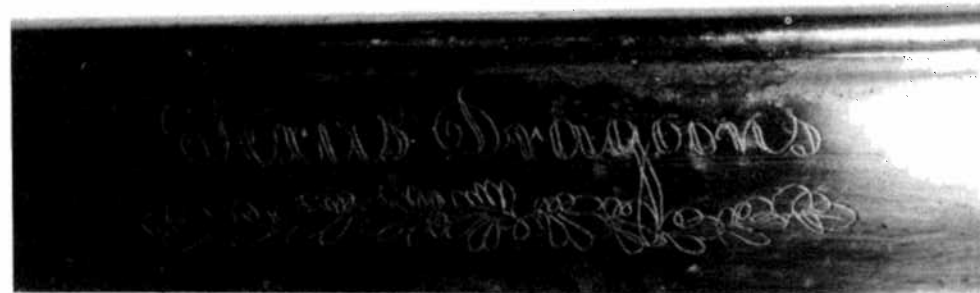
U.S. Military Copper Powder Flasks made between 1832 and 1854. Left: "Bugle" flask by Robert Dingee of New York City, marked R. DINGEE/NEW YORK/1832. Center: "Peace" flask made by Nathan P. Ames of Cabotville, marked N.P. AMES/1838/MS. Right: "Peace" flask by Joseph H. Batty of Springfield, Massachusetts marked BATTY/ADK/1854.  
(Hay sale — photo courtesy Richard A. Bourne, Inc.)



and the next. Additional contracts were awarded Ames during the 1840's. In June 1844, a second contract, for 1,000 flasks, was followed two months later by another for the same amount, all of which were delivered by May 1845.<sup>48</sup> The

fourth and last flask contract for the Ordnance Department was received in April, 1846. Those final 1,000 flasks were inspected variously by Capt. Thornton, Andrew A. Harwood, and James S. Palmer.<sup>49</sup>





Detail of blade etching, Republic of Texas Dragoon Sabre, pattern 1833. Blade etched with identifying motto: TEXAS DRAGOONS, using the typical Ames style of back-slanted, open-faced script. (Essex Institute)

## The Government of Texas by Wm Henry Daingerfield Commissary of Purchases

1840	To N.P. Ames Dr.		
Jany 22	for 280 Dragoon Sabres and scabbards	\$8.00	2240.00
"	- 40 Artillery Swords and scabbards	4.25	175.00
"	- 10 Packing Boxes for	-	17.50
"	- 1½ Reams Packing paper	4.50	6.75
"	- Transportation from Springfield to Hartford		6.87
			2,446.12
	Discounted on the above 50.00 -		2396.12
Feby 4	for 18 Dragoon Officer Sabres and scabbards	15.00	270.00
"	1 Packing Box for ditto		1.00
			271.00
Disct. for op	- 18.97		
		252.03	
		\$2,648.15	

Given in triplicate  
Springfield Feby 4th, 1840 -  
Feby 25th Received Payment N.P. Ames  
by check on U.S. Bank, New York

I hereby certify that I have this day inspected and approved two hundred and Eighty Dragoon Sabres and scabbards and Forty Artillery Swords and scabbards manufactured by N.P. Ames of Springfield Massachusetts. And I do further certify that the said arms have been inspected in accordance with the regulations of the United States Ordnance Department, are equal in quality and workmanship and are of the same pattern of those made for the United States service with the exception of the word "Texas Dragoons" on the blades of the sabres and a five pointed star on the hilts of the swords. The letters W.S. are stamped on each sword and sabre as an inspection mark.

Given in triplicate at Springfield this 22d day of January 1840.

William Smith  
United States Inspector of Arms

(Daingerfield Papers, Texas Archives)

## Ames Sword Blade Production for the Period January 1832 to July 1834. "Wastebook" Account for Madison Kendall (entry No. 42 and 68)

1832	9¢	602			Jan 1	1833
1833	9¢	683 (Atty)	"Long"		Apr 20	
		99			June 6	
				100	June 26	
				417	July 18	
				124	July 24	
				104	July 31	
				135	Aug 21	
				195	Aug 30	
				129	Sep 20	
				113	Oct 24	
				100	Oct 24	
	40¢		94		Dec 14	
	20½¢	246	--		Jan 1	1834
	40¢	--	53		Jan 15	
		--	68		Jan 25	
	20½	170	--		Feb 10	
		172	--		Feb 10	
40¢		97	97	N.P. stops "long" ones	Feb 22	
	21	234	--		Mar 3	
	40	--	19		Mar 5	
			Artillery	Dragoon	Med. Staff	Officer
1834	21¢	207	--	--	--	Mar 27
	1.00	--	38 (Officer)	--	--	Apr 30
	40¢	--	--	93	--	May 15
	40¢	--	--	--	27	May 15
	40¢	--	51	--	--	May 17
	21	531	--	--	--	May 17
	40	--	--	89	--	May 28
	40	--	--	82	--	June 9
	21	98	--	--	--	June 14
	21	160	--	--	--	June 19
		--	118	--	--	
June 21						
		--	62	--	--	July 8
		--	178	--	--	July 10
		--	355	--	--	July 19
	total	996	802	262	27	
	\$10.00@		480			Dec 20
		2,800	1400			1835

(Connecticut Valley Historical Society)

### 3 Early Officers' Swords —



This 6¼ inch plaster plaque, with relief bust of Nathan P. Ames, was cast, and is so marked, at "CHARDIGNY POLYTECHNIC INSTon" in 1840, while Ames was in Europe on a mission for the United States Government. This casting was obtained from the descendants of N.P. Ames. Image reversed. (Andrew F. Lustyik Collection)

In early 1834, Nathan submitted a firm cost proposal to Col. Bomford for furnishing the Ordnance Department with three distinct patterns of swords for officers:<sup>1</sup>

"The swords for officers with silver grip, gilded trimmings and leather scabbards. The blade to be straight with a groove through the center, to be finished with a black crocus polish and etched on both sides. Twenty dollars each.

The swords for the medical staff of the pattern of one of my make that is now in the Ordnance Office. Twenty dollars each.

The swords for the officers of the Dragoons the form to be like one of my make with gilded hilt and metal scabbard that is now in the Ordnance Office. Seventeen dollars each."

Bomford's encouraging response reflected that he would be wanting swords for nearly all officers on the roll of the 1834 Army Register, which numbered 631 officers; viz: 14 General Staff, 34 Dragoon, 83 Medical Staff and Pay Department, and 500 Artillery and Infantry (Engineers included). To meet these demands, Nathan had to design and develop production methods for manufacturing swords prescribed by rather ambiguous uniform regulations which had been issued in 1832: a smallsword for the Medical Staff and Pay Department; a saber for the Dragoons; a distinctive sword for Generals and senior Staff Officers; and something sufficiently adaptable to serve all junior grade line officers.

The sabre for Dragoon Officers was most easily provided by upgrading the quality of the enlisted Dragoon saber then in production. The Officer's version was furnished with a gilt hilt, shagreen covered grip wrapped with coiled gilt wire, a decorated etched blade identified by the logo UNITED STATES DRAGOONS in a panel encircled by half-sunbursts and a wreath of laurel leaves. Other portions of the blade were decorated with etched floral designs, a Federal style American eagle and banderole inscribed LIBERTY, an Indian brandishing a hatchet and

bow, and arrays of assorted arms. The figure of the Indian was an allusion to the great Shawnee Chief, Techumseh, who was killed at the Battle of the Thames by Col. Richard M. Johnson on October 5, 1813. The famous military engagement was marked by an effective use of Johnson's mounted regiment of Kentucky militia against British Dragoons and the tribes of Techumseh's Indian Confederacy. The theme was most appropriate to the concept of Dragoons newly organized in 1833. The scabbard was entirely made of brass.

The Dragoon Officer's saber was never made in great quantity, and its rarity was assured by only two small but significant subsequent orders. Of the 802 Dragoon blades forged in 1834 by Madison Kendall, 38 were specially made at a cost of one dollar each, presumably to be mounted for use by Dragoon Officers.<sup>2</sup> Of these, Bomford had originally indicated that no less than 34 would be required by the Ordnance Office. In September, 1839, the Ordnance Office ordered 4 more Dragoon Officer sabers, just prior to the general changeover to French style weapons introduced in 1840.<sup>3</sup> A final order for 18 Dragoon Officer sabers was received in February, 1840, from the Government of the Republic of Texas.<sup>4</sup>

In the Spring of 1833, as work on the first Artillery sword contract neared completion, Col. Bomford instigated the development of a pattern sword that was intended for use by General and staff officers. Verbal instructions concerning a model were relayed to N.P. via Lt. Tyler.<sup>5</sup> The pattern was derived from the English version of the Lifeguard Officer's sword, pattern of 1822 having a straight, double-edged blade with a central fuller; a boat-shaped shell guard, and a leather scabbard with gilt mounts. Nathan eagerly offered to provide six hundred of these swords at fourteen dollars and fifty cents each, but later the price was more realistically fixed at twenty dollars as determined by actual production costs. It was perhaps the first and last time that N.P. underquoted the price of swordwork. It

*Early Officers' Swords*

was an ambitious project to undertake and could have spelled default or early ruin if Col. Bomford had ordered all six hundred of that pattern.

Work started on the swords in early May, beginning with forging blades and casting hilts. In order to avoid delays in delivery, Nathan commenced work on the blades without waiting for the model to be accepted. The blades, being thinner than those of the Artillery swords, caused a good deal more trouble to grind and properly temper than had been anticipated, but by June about one hundred blades had been cut, nearly all tempered, and part of that number ground.<sup>6</sup> The etching on the blade represented a first attempt at such work. It soon became apparent that a few experiments would be needed before the etching techniques were perfected, and workmen had been trained to attain standards required for officer quality workmanship.

Lt. Tyler rushed the model to Washington, stopping in Philadelphia to have the hilt and scabbard mounts hastily gilded. The work was poorly done and Nathan apologized to Bomford for the appearance of the gilding, and categorically resolved to do it better in his own shop. Thus was planted the seed of the Ames plating

business. The grip was sheathed with sheet silver which was machine tooled to simulate 34 turns of silver wire wrapped around the grip. At no small expense, Nathan built two special cutting engines to perform this and other shaping operations. Arrangements were made to sub-contract the hilt castings. Although the work was probably given to Sam Huse, no such visible markings as found on the Artillery swords give indication that Huse was involved. It was necessary for N.P. to make a die with which to strike the bead work on the hilt and impart a decorative impression to the scabbard trimmings.

A majority of officers on the Army Register were of company grade (Captains and Lieutenants) and warranted a basic sword that was more suited to their junior rank and adaptable to the exigencies of each service. Eagle-headed swords with a "beaded" or five-ball decorated knuckle guard served as the all-purpose Junior Officer sword. They were mounted with a one-piece, reeded ivory grip, a blade decorated with etched floral designs, military trophies, and the inevitable Federal style eagle. As prescribed by Uniform Regulations, hilts and trimmings for the infantry were to be white (silver plated), and

those for the artillery and engineers to be yellow (gilt or brass). Scabbards were of black leather, with appropriately colored mountings. The first pattern N.P. sent to Bomford was provided with a straight blade suitable for infantry use. But in June, when he was informed that the straight blade had been adopted, he was told that it was then essential for him to also provide a model with a curved blade, presumably for use by officers of the artillery and engineers.<sup>7</sup>

The eagle head pommel designed in the Ames shop exhibits two features which aid in distinguishing it from similar examples made by other sword cutlers. With its beak always open, the eagle appears to be constantly screaming. Due to this, the tip of the knuckle guard was anchored underneath the lower jaw.

Surgeons and Paymasters were provided with a smallsword style sidearm, more as an insignia of their profession than as an offensive weapon. Raised beaded work decorated the knuckle guard and the disc-shaped shell guard of the gilt hilt. Beading was also used to outline panels of the grip and visually suggest that the pommel was urn-shaped rather than ovoid. The straight, double-edged blade was made elliptical in cross-section,

without a central fuller found on the General and Staff sword. The blade was distinctively decorated with the etched bust of Aesculapius, God of Medicine and Healing. The gilt mounts of the black leather scabbard were profusely engraved with acanthus leaf floral patterns.

The officer swords required special materials that were as expensive to stock as they were difficult to obtain. While in Philadelphia in January 1834, Nathan found a supply of shagreen for covering the grips of Dragoon sabers, but it was expensive.<sup>9</sup> The skins averaged in size about two and a half feet long by fourteen inches wide, and ranged in cost from \$1.25 to \$7.50 each, depending on quality. From New York City he acquired 25 pounds of German silver at a dollar a

**Dragoon Officer's Sabre, pattern 1833. Blade marked N.P. AMES/CUTLER/ SPRINGFIELD. The hilt is gilt with shagreen-covered, wire-wrapped grip. The ferrule at the base of the grip is decorated with a plain double fillet molding. The single-edged, wire-backed, slightly curved blade is extensively etched and provided with a brass scabbard. Blade length: 33 3/4 inches. (Donald M. Armstrong)**



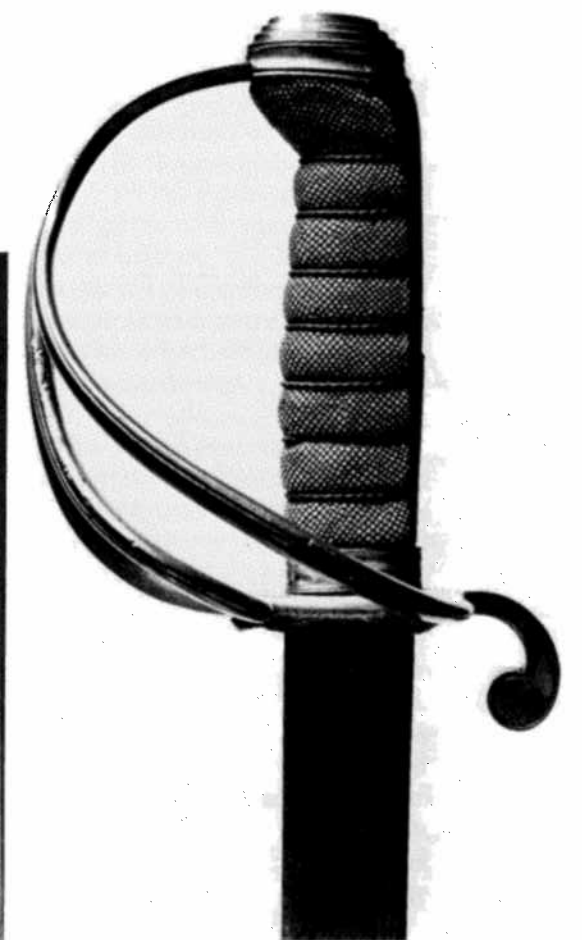
"Battle of the Thames, 5 Oct. 1813" lithograph by Wm. Emmons, Boston, 1842. Scene of the engagement at Moraviantown, Canada, in which the great Indian Chief Tecumseh was killed and British forces were routed by the Mounted Regiment of Kentucky Militia under the command of Col. Richard M. Johnson. As Chairman of the Congressional Committee on Military Affairs in 1832, Col. Johnson submitted a bill establishing the first Regiment of Dragoons. (Museum of Our National Heritage)



**Dragoon Officer's Sabre, Pattern 1833. Blade etched with motto: UNITED STATES DRAGOON, in a panel above wreath of laurel leaves. Each end of the panel is decorated with the Ames style, half-sunburst aurora. (Armstrong Collection)**



(Left) Dragoon Officer's Sabre, pattern 1833. Blade etched with Federal style eagle which was probably designed by Silas Mosman, Jr. The Ames style half-sunburst forms an aurora above the eagle which faces in the direction of the arrows held in its talons. This pose is regarded as a belligerent attitude, reflecting that the Nation was also in a warlike state at that time. (Armstrong Collection) (Right) Dragoon Officer's Sabre, pattern 1833. Blade etched with the figure of Tecumseh, the Indian Chief whose defeat in the War of 1812, at the Battle of the Thames, was a major triumph for American mounted militia, who were the forerunners of the Regiment of Dragoons. (Armstrong Collection)



pound, and upwards of 150 pounds of ivory in nine pieces.<sup>9</sup> The ivory could have been used for the handles of cutlery as well as for sword grips.

## N.P. Ames Ledger Book September 1834

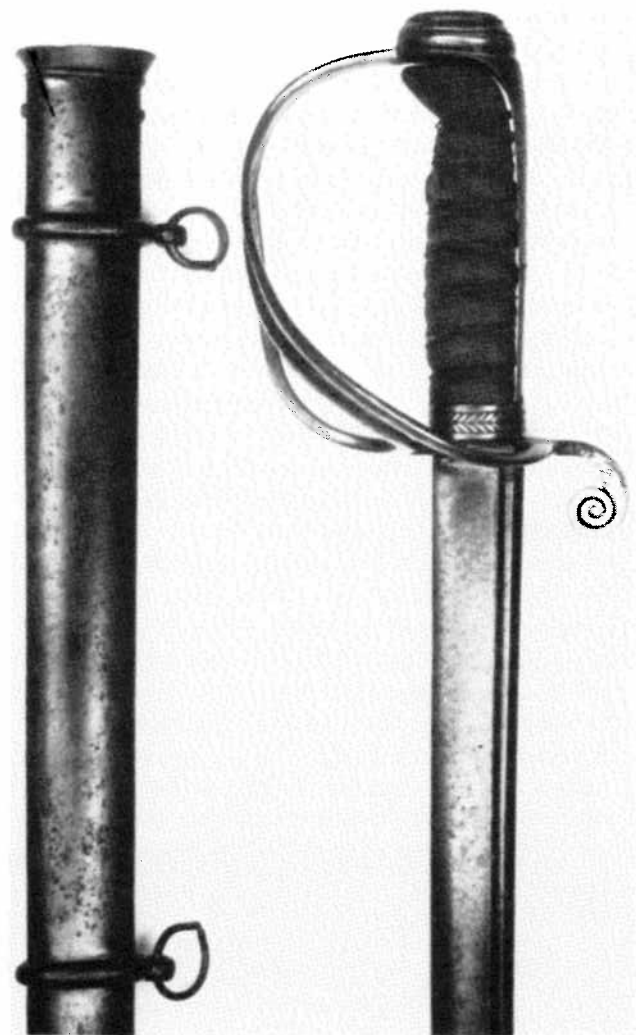
### Cost of Officers sword

forging	40
steel	22
coal	12
cutting	25
grind..g	18
straightening	48
polishing	55
crocus polish	25
emery cutters & files	17
etching	75
hilting	40
scabbard	100
hilt	1150
	1627

(Michael F. Bremer Collection)

Nathan experienced great difficulty in obtaining payment for the officer's swords. Although the Colonel of Ordnance had been encouraged to select a manufacturer who could furnish pattern models of officer swords, and provide future uniformity in their production, no unusual problems in payment had been foreseen. Col. Bomford led Nathan to assume that the Ordnance Department would pay for the swords as ordnance stores and then distribute them to the officers, charging only actual costs. General of the Army, Alexander Macomb, was known to favor this procedure. However, when it came time to pay for the first increment of swords that Nathan had hurriedly rushed to Washington in 1834, bureaucratic and legal restrictions forced him, in mounting frustration, to return them to Springfield.<sup>10</sup> "Proper authority", in the person of Secretary of War, Lewis Cass, would not permit the Ordnance Office to enter into what amounted to a retail sword business, financed with public money. Cass ruled in April that officers were to be informed where, and on what terms, they might apply for their "approved" swords and belts, and order and pay for them as they normally would their uniforms.<sup>11</sup>

Nathan maintained a notebook spanning the first seven months of 1834, in which he recorded the receipt of correspondence from officers



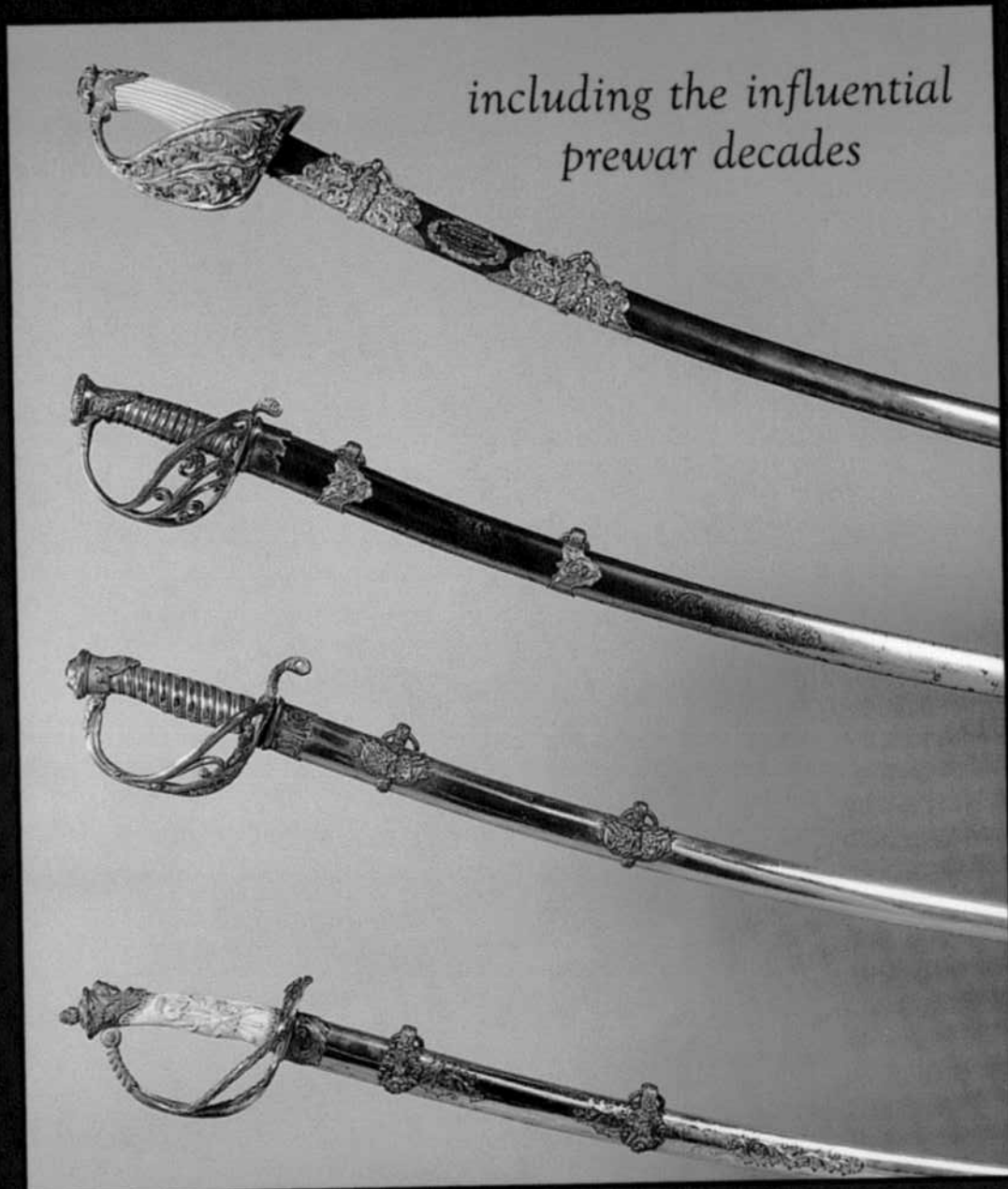
**Militia Dragoon Officer's Sabre, pattern 1833.** Made for the Georgia Hussars of Savannah, Georgia. Blade marked N.P. AMES (remainder indistinct). Hilt of solid silver with shagreen covered grip wrapped with silver wire. The backstrap is checkered and the ferrule above the grip is engraved with a sheaf-of-wheat pattern. The quill-backed blade is etched with floral and martial motifs, the owner's name: WM. N. HABERSHAM and on the reverse side GEORGIA HUSSARS/SAVANNAH within a wreath of laurel leaves. The browned steel scabbard is trimmed with silver mounts. Blade length: 34 1/4 inches. (Photo courtesy Col. Lindsey P. Henderson, Jr.)

garrisoned throughout the United States, who placed orders for the new swords.<sup>12</sup> Entries show that between January and July, 180 swords were ordered:

1	Pay Department
14	Surgeon
77	Infantry
85	Artillery
2	Engineer
1	Dragoon



# Civil War Cavalry & Artillery Sabers



*including the influential  
prewar decades*

A Study of United States Cavalry and  
Artillery Sabers, 1833-1865

— by John H. Thillmann —



# AMES MANUFACTURING COMPANY

*Maker, Retailer & Assembler – Chicopee, Massachusetts*

## THE FIRM

The most famous of the American cutlers during the 19th century, Ames Manufacturing Company was the supplier of choice to the U.S. government, state militias, foreign governments and private purchasers, beginning with their first U.S. contract for artillery short swords in 1832 and running through the last regalia swords of the early 1930s.

Nathan Peabody Ames bought two acres of land in Chelmsford, Massachusetts toward the end of the 18th century and set up a forge. Thus began the long and fateful legacy of this great sword manufacturing family. At the age of 18, Nathan Ames Jr. was brought into the forge and learned the business of making and repairing machinery and keeping the books.<sup>1</sup> Operating in an area known as the epicenter of manufacturing and mechanical innovation during the first half of the century in America, the Ames family was integrally involved in the "Yankee" experience. With a strong dose of enterprise, followed by flexibility and entrepreneurship, they grew slowly at first and then more rapidly into one of the most successful tool making and cutlery firms in America.

The Ames family's rise to prominence can be traced to a chance meeting with Edmund Dwight, a cotton miller who convinced Nathan Jr. to move his family business to Cabotville. As an inducement, he gave them a space at his mill, rent-free for four years. This agreement between the two men was to benefit them both.<sup>2</sup> It was fateful because it moved the small company close to the Federal Armory at Springfield and to cotton mills needing both new machinery and constant repairs. The Ames Manufacturing company made and repaired machinery of all kinds, as well as manufacturing edged tools, construction materials (such as nails, screws and chains) and cutlery products.

In the early 1830s, Ames was using cast steel for their tools and purchased the rights to a process of welding cast steel, which they used from then on.<sup>3</sup> By using cast steel for tool making, Ames was employing a "cutting edge" technology for that time, and the full extent of their involvement will require further study.<sup>4</sup> Cast steel was a process that the British cutlers were using to market their sabers, stating that cast steel produced a better, harder blade than the standard hammered/welded steel blade used by German and French cutlers. If cast steel was being used by Ames, it was likely being imported from England.

As we know, Ames went on to secure contracts with the U.S. Ordnance Department for the sabers of interest to this work. The model 1833 dragoon saber, the model 1840 cavalry and artillery sabers, the 1860 cavalry saber, as well as a huge number of other swords, bayonets, firearms and items as diverse as bronze cannons were all manufactured by the company. The Ordnance Department gave the early contracts to Ames, but went overseas for the model of 1840, apparently because the company was not able to satisfy the quality concerns stemming from the model 1833. This was remedied, and by 1844 they received contracts for additional model 1840 sabers after the initial Schnitzler & Kirschbaum contract of 1840. Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, Ames was the sole supplier of swords for the Ordnance Department (with one exception in 1847 to S&K) until the Civil War and its mad scramble for arms.

John D. Hamilton's book, *The Ames Sword Company 1829-1935* should be consulted for the company's history. It is very well treated in that book and the information is too voluminous to repeat here with any justice to the subject.

## BLADE ADDRESSES, 1832-1865<sup>5</sup>

1832-47 (48) <sup>6</sup>	1834-38	1834-47	1847-48	1848-98
N.P. AMES	N.P. AMES	N.P. AMES	AMES MFG. CO	AMES MFG. CO.
CUTLER	CABOTVILLE WORKS	CABOTVILLE	CABOTVILLE	CHICOPEE
SPRINGFIELD	SPRINGFIELD			MASS
	MASS			

AMES MODEL 1833 DRAGOON SABERS

In 1833, the United States Congress authorized the War Department to establish a mounted arm of dragoons that could fight either on foot or horseback. There were mounted rangers in the service at the time, but they were apparently thought insufficient for the task. The primary function of the dragoons was to fight on foot while using the horse to quickly arrive at the scene of conflict. Their role was principally to protect the frontier and the settler population from Indian depredations. While the infantry was also expected to provide protection, the dragoons could get to any point of conflict faster, and follow up with pursuit if necessary. A second regiment was added in 1836 and a third temporary one-year regiment was added for the War with Mexico. 1,430 men and 68 officers were authorized in the two regiments.

The general annual militia returns for all states in 1834 give a total of 34,025 cavalry enlisted men and 3,013 commissioned officers.<sup>7</sup> The Ordnance Department used the term cavalry when mentioning equipment for the mounted troops, due probably to the large proportion of militia cavalry compared to the relatively small number of dragoons. The army regulations, since they applied to the regular forces, used the term dragoons for mounted troops until 1855 when two cavalry regiments were authorized. Thereafter, the terms dragoons and cavalry were used until the redesignation of the mounted regiments in August 1861 discontinued the terms dragoons and mounted rifles.<sup>8</sup>

The first sabers that would have been issued to the dragoon regiments were the iron reverse P-style hilts made by William Rose and Nathan Starr. Having recognized the need for improved sabers and other types of swords, in 1832 the Ordnance Department requested General John E. Wool, who was in Europe on military business, to obtain sample swords of models then in service in the British army. Wool forwarded eight swords including two with steel hilts and scabbards for heavy and light cavalry. The light cavalry saber would have been the British officers' undress pattern 1822.<sup>9</sup> The 1833 dragoon saber adopted by the Ordnance Department was a close copy of this British saber, but with a brass hilt and slightly shorter blade.

British Light Cavalry Saber Pattern 1821

The British light cavalry saber pattern 1821 was made in both light and heavy cavalry models. They differed primarily in the type of guard. The light cavalry saber had a knucklebow and two branches, and the heavy cavalry had a solid steel cup guard. These sabers superseded the iron hilted pattern 1796 that had a wide thick blade with a stirrup hilt. By early 1825, the Royal Small Arms Factory at Enfield had produced 6,000 of the new pattern 1821 light cavalry sabers. The officers' version of the light cavalry saber is referred to as the pattern 1822.

Complaints about this saber began to be reported within two years of its issue to British troops — the main comment being that the saber and its scabbard were too light and therefore were continually breaking or in need of repair. While modified sabers were made at Enfield and sent to the field for test, no significant changes were made before it was replaced in 1853.<sup>10</sup>

Apparently the U.S. Ordnance Department was not aware of the problems with the British saber, as the same problems arose with the model 1833 dragoon saber, which led to its replacement by the model 1840 cavalry saber.

Background of the Model 1833 Dragoon Saber

In 1834, the War Department published Regulations for the Government of the Ordnance Department. Included was a table of component parts with prices for both "new pattern" and "old pattern" sabers. It was normal to mention both old and new patterns of ordnance stores as stocks of older items remained in arsenal inventories for continued issue to the states under

PARTS, DIMENSIONS AND PRICES FOR THE MODEL 1833 DRAGOON SABER				
SWORDS.				
Component parts of Saber (new pattern) iron scabbard, brown.			Prices	
	inches		Dolls.	cts.
Scabbard, length	35.62		2	75
do. width under top piece	1.43			
do. thickness do.	.66			
do. width above comb	1.06			
do. thickness do.	.45			20
do. rings for				
Blade, length	34.25		4	56
do. width at hit	1.12			
do. do. at center	.93			
Thickness of back at hilt	.37			
do. do. at center	.24			
Hilt, length	5.40			
do. brass work for			2	25
do. grasp				12
do. wire covering				12
Total			10	00

AMES CONTRACTS FOR THE MODEL 1833 DRAGOON SABER <sup>13</sup>		
Purchase Order Date	Quantity	When Delivered
February 1834	1,000	by January 1835
February 1835	1,400	by end of year 1835
November 1835	1,700	all in 1836 & 1837
March 1839	2,000	all in Sept. and Nov. 1839

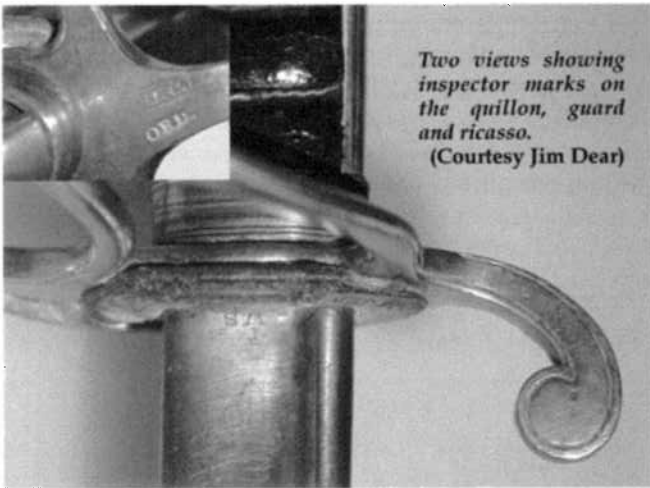
an Act for Arming and Equipping the Whole Body of the Militia of the United States approved April 23, 1808.

From 1812 through 1818, the government had contracted for over 20,000 cavalry sabers primarily from Nathan Starr.<sup>11</sup> Final deliveries were made in 1822 and these sabers were sufficient to supply the needs of the mounted troops until introduction of the model 1833 dragoon saber. The 1834 Ordnance Regulations list the component parts of the "new pattern." While the price totaled \$10.00, the actual contract price was \$8.00 per saber. This compared to \$5.00 for the "old pattern" saber last delivered in 1822. These regulations did not mention the dragoon officer's saber.

Unlike in later years, there is no narrative description of this saber, only a listing of parts, dimensions and their prices as follows shown in the table (left page).<sup>12</sup>

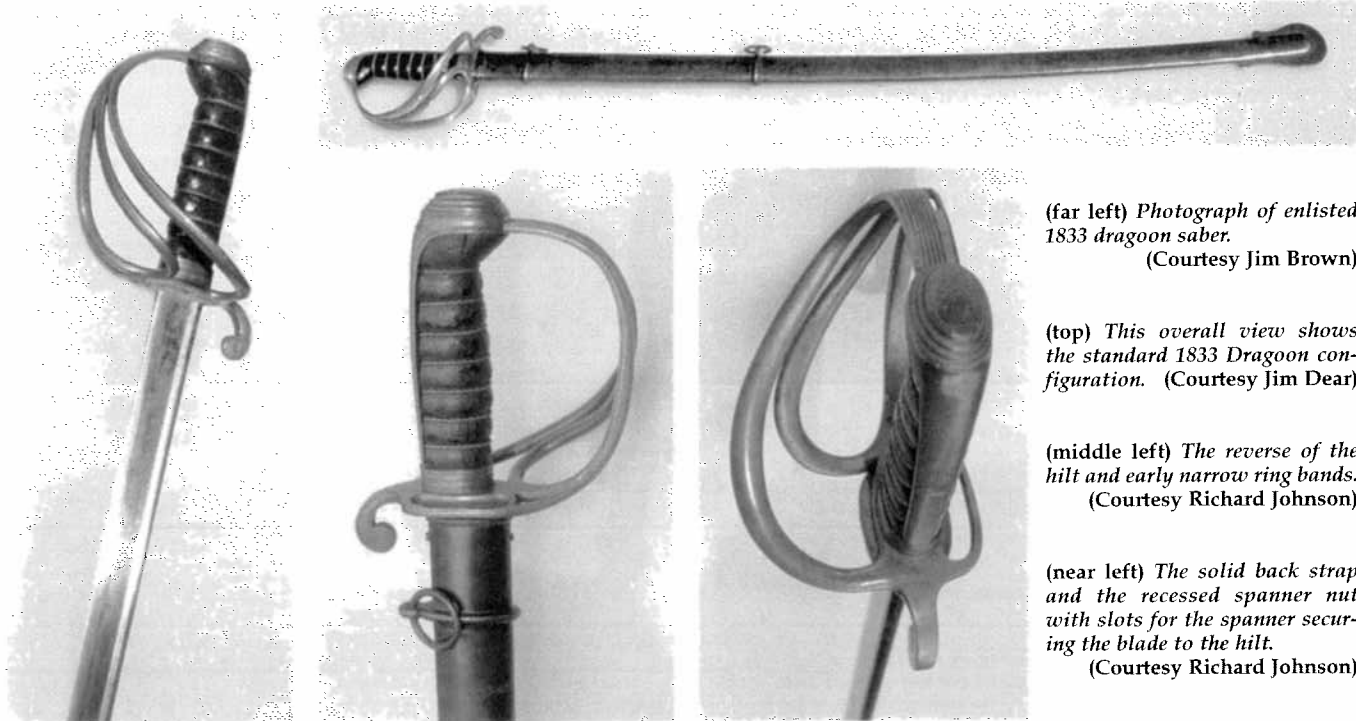
The Model 1833 Dragoon Sabers

The government purchased 6,100 model 1833 dragoon sabers in the five-year period from 1834 through 1839. The final contract of March 1839 indicated that the 2,000 sabers were to be paid for from an appropriation for arming the militia. While this accounting procedure



was used to differentiate between ordnance stores for the regular army and arms and equipment for the state militias, the items were no doubt commingled when in storage at the various arsenals.

The ordnance regulations of 1834 in paragraph 103 specifies that all small arms, before being received, be inspected under the direction of the colonel of ordnance by officers of the Ordnance Department. This included those arms purchased with funds for arming the militia pursuant to the act of 1808. This inspection was important not only for the government, but also for the contractor, as payment for manufactured arms was based on the number accepted at the final inspection by ordnance officers. In War Department Order No. 36 of May 1834, pertaining to officers' swords, it was stated that the Ordnance Department would, to insure good quality, inspect and mark those swords approved for sale to officers of the army.



(far left) Photograph of enlisted 1833 dragoon saber. (Courtesy Jim Brown)

(top) This overall view shows the standard 1833 Dragoon configuration. (Courtesy Jim Dear)

(middle left) The reverse of the hilt and early narrow ring bands. (Courtesy Richard Johnson)

(near left) The solid back strap and the recessed spanner nut with slots for the spanner securing the blade to the hilt. (Courtesy Richard Johnson)



From an examination of numerous examples, the following list was created.<sup>14</sup> It gives the inspector and years of inspection for the Ames 1833 dragoon sabers. The sub-inspectors were Springfield Armory employees who inspected the sabers at the Ames plant during the manufacturing process, stamping various parts — hilt, blade and scabbard — with their initials. The ordnance officers conducted the final inspection and accepted the finished saber for the government. In addition to their initials, they often used a stamp “ORD.” on the hilt and scabbard drag.

INSPECTORS OF THE AMES  
MODEL OF 1833 DRAGOON SABER

Sub-inspector	Stamp	Years
Justin Murphy	JM	1834, 1835, 1836, 1837
Thomas Warner	TW	1837
William Smith	WS	1838, 1839, 1840
Joseph Hannis or James Harris	JH	1839

Final Inspector	Stamp	Years
Captain James A.J. Bradford	JAJB	1835
Major Henry Knox Craig	HKC	1835, 1836, 1837
Major Mann Page Lomax	MPL	1837, 1838, 1839

Enlisted Model 1833 Dragoon Sabers

The United States Ordnance Department purchases of the model 1833 dragoon sabers have two blade inscriptions: “UNITED STATES DRAGOONS” and “UNITED STATES”.

The UNITED STATES DRAGOONS blade inscription is relatively rare, being observed on sabers dated 1834, 1835 and (interestingly) on one known 1839 dated saber. UNITED STATES is most often seen on blades dated 1835 through 1839. The blade etching on the enlisted sabers was applied with a dry needle (engraved) as opposed to the acid etching found on offi-



Blade inscriptions on these enlisted sabers can be quite difficult to see. The top view reads “United States” and the bottom view reads “United States Dragoons”. (Courtesy Richard Johnson)

cer models. Unfortunately, this type of engraving did not produce a deep inscription and normal wear or over-cleaning often destroyed the inscription.

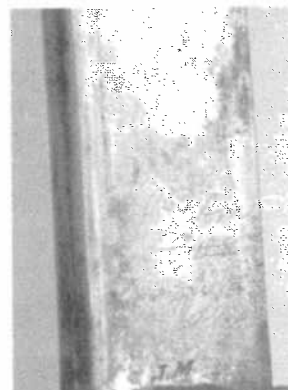
Ricasso Addresses of Ames Dragoon Sabers

As is noted, the blade date is found in script under the Ames address. In addition, the US inspector stamped the blade on the ricasso at the juncture of the ricasso and the guard as may be seen in the following photographs.

N.P. Ames  
Cutler  
Springfield  
1839  
W.S.



N.P. Ames  
Cutler  
Springfield  
1834  
J.M.



Quality of the Model 1833 Enlisted Sabers

It is interesting that the U.S. Ordnance Board recommended adoption of the pattern 1822 British officers' saber as regulation after at least ten years of experience by the British army, wherein they objected to it in a



(left) Reverse of early hilt. (Jim Brown)

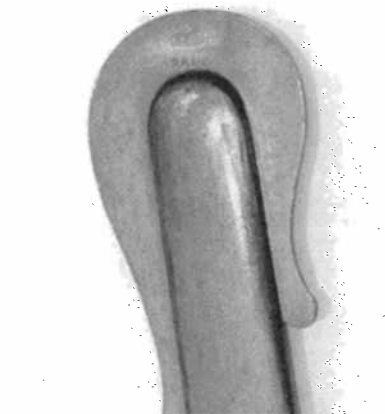
(right) Hilt and scabbard on early “United States Dragoons” marked saber, but with thick scabbard mounts. (Jim Dear)

number of particulars. It was these same objections by U.S. troopers in the field that resulted in letters to the Ordnance Department from dragoon officers reporting complaints about the blade and scabbard. Specifically, they were too light. The scabbard was easily damaged, susceptible to being dented or bent, and the blade was not suited for the thrust. At some point, Ames increased the gauge of the steel used for the scabbards. An 1835

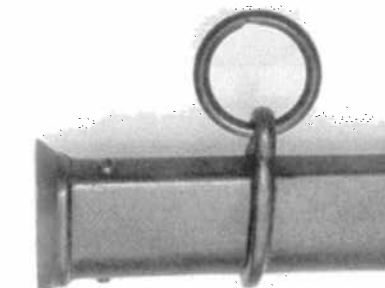
scabbard weighs 13½ ounces, as compared to 19½ ounces in 1839. Finally, it is also interesting that since the blade did not change in length, the scabbard body (measured from the raw throat edge to bottom edge) went from 35¾ inches to 36 inches in length — a 5% increase. The scabbard was already long enough to accomodate the 34-inch blade — no reason for this increase can be determined.



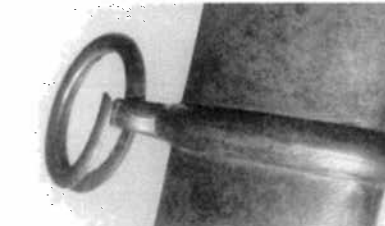
The drag marked WS.  
(Courtesy of Jim Dear)



View of the HKC and ORD inspection stamps. (Courtesy of Richard Johnson)



Trumpet throat, narrow ring band and flat top of scabbard. (Richard Johnson)



The split ring found on the regulation scabbard. (Courtesy Richard Johnson)

AMES MODEL 1833 ENLISTED DRAGOON SABERS

TYPE: U.S. Regulation Dragoon Saber, quill back blade  
(Regulation refers to ordnance procured sabers for issue to regular dragoons or militia cavalry)

All dimensions in inches	Example # 1	Example # 2
BLADE LENGTH:	34	34
BLADE WIDTH:	1½	1½
QUILL THICKNESS:	¾	¾
FALSE EDGE:	10	10
BLADE INSC: (foliate)	United States	United States Dragoons
ADDRESS:	N.P. Ames Cutler Springfield JM	N.P. Ames Cutler Springfield WS
BLADE DATE: (at ricasso)	1835	1839
GUARD INSP:	quillon, at grip ORD HKC	quillon disk WS quillon at grip MPL
GUARD:	type is modeled on the British pattern 1822 in brass, wood carved grip, leather wrap, brass wire wound in 7 turns around grip, in dragoon style (two twisted strands, third fine strand wound around the two)	
SCAB DRAG INSP:	obverse JM reverse HKC ORD	obverse WS reverse MPL
SCAB MOUNTS:	split rings	split rings
MOUNTS/DAG:	steel	steel
MOUNTS THICKNESS:	¾	¾
LENGTH OF SCABBARD:	35¾	36
WIDTH SCABBARD: (AT LOWER RING MOUNT)	1½	1½
WEIGHT OF SCABBARD:	13½ ounces	19½ ounces



MODEL 1833 SABERS PURCHASED BY STATES

In addition to requisitioning sabers from the Ordnance Department pursuant to the act of 1808, a number of states purchased model 1833 sabers directly from the Ames Company. Because of marked examples, we know that the states of Massachusetts, North Carolina and South Carolina bought the 1833, and we believe that Georgia and Pennsylvania also used them. Such sabers were not always inspected by the U.S. Ordnance Department inspectors. However, some do bear inspectors' initials on one or more parts. A state could request inspection on direct purchase sabers and reimburse the government for such inspection.<sup>15</sup> On occasion, it appears that Ames may have used excess government-inspected parts when assembling sabers to fill a state order. The Republic of Texas dragoon sabers purchased at the time by a sovereign nation are described in their own section. An additional state saber that was not available for examination is known to be etched *National Lancers* on the blade, and it has a brass scabbard. The National Lancers were a company of militia in Boston, Massachusetts in November 1836.<sup>16</sup>



Two views showing North Carolina markings on quillon and scabbard drag of Ames Model 1833 Militia sabers. (Courtesy of Don Armstrong)

South Carolina Dragoon Bird's Head Pommel

The only enlisted dragoon saber that deviates from the norm in terms of a design feature is the South Carolina saber. In all respects it is like its cousins in the federal and state service, except for some unknown reason it has a smooth bird's head pommel. The regulation dragoon saber has a modified bird's head pommel ornamented with progressively smaller concentric

AMES MODEL 1833 ENLISTED MILITIA DRAGOON SABERS, NORTH & SOUTH CAROLINA

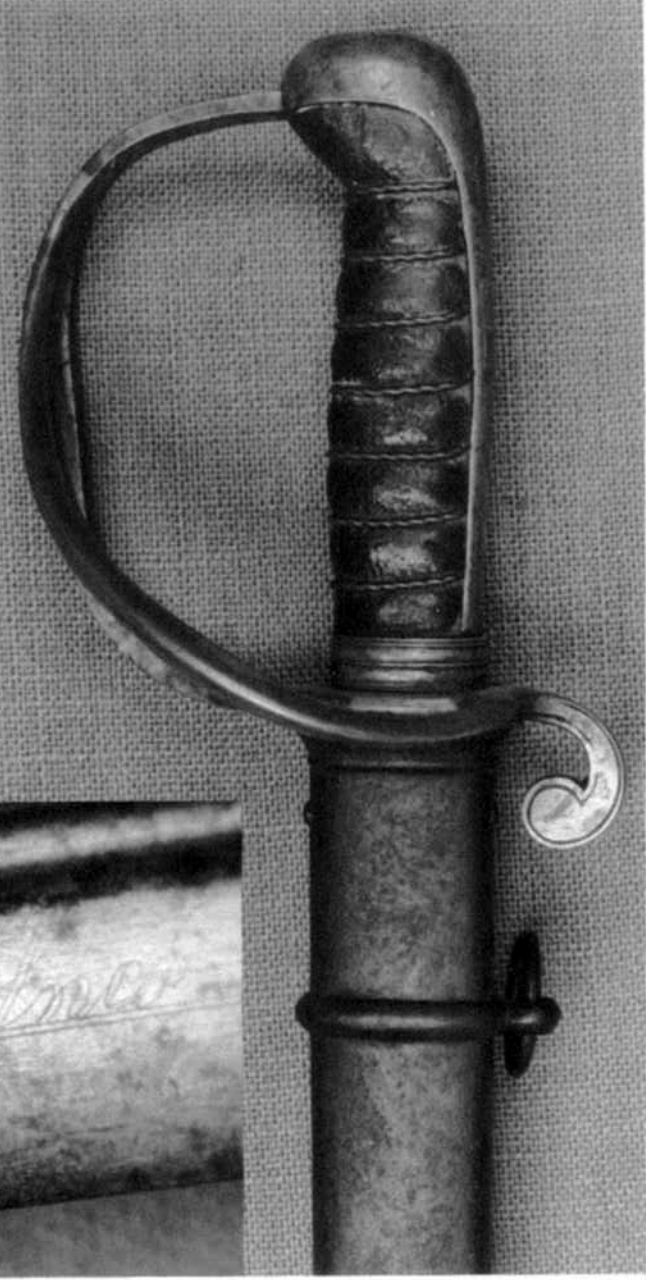
TYPE:	Enlisted Dragoon Saber, quill back blade	
	North Carolina (Ordnance purchase)	South Carolina (State purchase)
BLADE LENGTH:	34	34
WIDTH:	1 1/4	1 1/4
QUILL THICKNESS:	3/8	3/8
FALSE EDGE:	10	10
BLADE INSC.:	United States (foliate)	South Carolina 1835
ADDRESS:	N.P. Ames Cutler Springfield 1837	N.P. Ames Cutler Springfield
GUARD INSP:	quillon disk obverse: NC reverse: WS	none none
GUARD:	type is modeled on the British pattern 1822 in brass, wood carved grip, leather wrap, brass wire wound in 7 turns around the grip, in the dragoon style	
POMMEL CAP:	standard	variation bird's head cap
SCAB DRAG INSP:	obverse WS reverse WS	none none
Scabbard Marking:	N. CAROLINA (obverse drag)	none
SCAB MOUNTS:	split rings	split rings
MOUNTS/Drag:	steel	steel
MOUNTS THICKNESS:	3/16	3/16
WIDTH SCABBARD: (AT LOWER RING MOUNT)	1 1/4	1 1/4
All dimensions in inches		

(right) South Carolina hilt. Note that this hilt uses an 1833 guard, but has a different pommel cap and backstrap. Close examination shows that the grip and wire are the same as on the 1833 dragoon, as is the ferrule, but that the pommel is smooth.

(Courtesy Don Armstrong)

(inset below) The South Carolina blade etching, done in the same way as on the US dragoons sabers. Don't miss the date "1835".

rings. We now know that the state of South Carolina purchased Ames model 1833 dragoon sabers, but must have asked for the very unusual pommel cap shape. It is not known why it was requested as smooth and not in the shape of all other model 1833s. The first "known" example turned up in the Don Armstrong collection. At the time it appeared that the model 1833 Ames grip backstrap and pommel were replaced with a smooth birds head type. Nothing conclusive was ascertained until a second example turned up. As luck would have it, the second example was a battlefield dug example and identical to the one pictured here. Since then, two others have turned up, all in exactly the same hilt configuration with one having a replaced militia curved cavalry type of blade, clearly a period replacement. It is the only design variant of all of the model 1833 dragoon sabers and is rarely encountered.



Unique Saber, Unknown Attribution, Possible "Pattern" or Pennsylvania

There are two plausible theories (others will also no doubt arise) as to what attribution should be given to this saber. The first is that it is a pattern (or possible trial) saber for dragoon sabers, and the other is that it is simply a Pennsylvania militia-purchased dragoon saber. In favor of the former idea that it might be a pattern saber, we have the physical aspects of a "brand new" condition saber packed in original grease with no markings at all except for the P on the quillon. However, an 1833 dragoon saber in worn condition is in the Guthman Americana collection, and that one is actually very weakly dry needle scribed "pattern" on the blade next to United States. So we know where one of the pattern sabers is and how it is marked. The saber pictured here has some very unusual features such as a

red wool washer over the buff washer, and a buff leather scabbard lining. There was early Ames correspondence with the Ordnance Department on loose scabbards and lining them, but on other type swords. In favor of the Pennsylvania dragoon theory, there is the fact that in September of 1840 the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania ordered 4 dragoon officers' sabers through the Ordnance Department. The price was \$15.00 — \$5.00 less than dragoon officers' sabers cost the government. When Ames wrote the Ordnance Department that the sabers were ready and marked "United States Dragoons", the Ordnance Department wrote back that it was desired that the blades not be marked. The "United States Dragoons" marking is found on enlisted blades as the officers' blades are marked (etched) "United States Dragoons". Both the marking and reduced price lead to the conclusion that

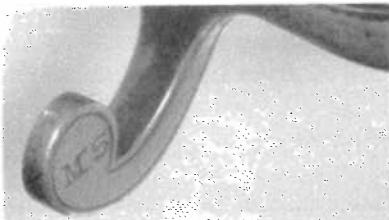
AMES MODEL 1833 ENLISTED MILITIA DRAGOON  
SABERS, MASSACHUSETTS & PENN./PATTERN

TYPE:	Model 1833 Enlisted Dragoon Sabers	
	Massachusetts	Pennsylvania or Pattern
BLADE LENGTH:	34 7/8	34 7/8
WIDTH:	1 1/8	1 1/8
QUILL THICKNESS:	3/8	3/8
FALSE EDGE:	9 1/2	9 1/2
BLADE INSC:	UNITED STATES DRAGOONS	blank
ADDRESS: (OBSERVE)	N.P. AMES CUTLER SPRINGFIELD 1835	blank
GUARD INSP:	none	none
QUILLON DISK:	MS (obverse)	P (obverse)
SCAB DRAG INSP: (OBSERVE)	blank	MPL (cartouche) ORD
(REVERSE)	blank	WS
SCAB MATERIAL:	brass	steel
RINGS:	brass split rings	steel split rings
SCAB MOUNTS:	brass	steel
THICKNESS BANDS:	5/16	5/16
	The Pennsylvania scabbard has a buff leather liner, buff leather blade pad covered in red wool.	
HILT:	brass, brown leather grip, dragoon wire	brass, brown leather grip, dragoon wire

All dimensions expressed in inches



Two views of the saber that may be Penn. militia or a pattern sword. On the hilt, there is a "P" on the quillon (not visible) and a red wool washer over the buff blade washer. Other views include the scabbard throat, which shows a rawhide leather liner and the split ring. (Courtesy Kevin Hoffman)



MS on the quillon of a Massachusetts example. (Courtesy Kevin Hoffman)

The hilt is not gilded (and from all evidence never was), and it has a grip wrap of leather (not sharkskin) — both of which are

enlisted saber features. This is the only known example with these characteristics, and since we are only speculating, other explanations that better fit the facts may surface after further research.

Massachusetts "MS" Sabers

Massachusetts sabers are U.S. regulation in every way. They are known to be marked *United States Dragoons* dated 1835, and *United States* dated 1838. Scabbards are brass, at least for the 1835 purchase. One

dated 1838 had a steel scabbard — perhaps replaced. It is believed that they were direct state purchases and not Ordnance Dept. purchases, because the "MS" quillon disk stamp is not joined by U.S. inspector initials.

AMES MODEL 1833 DRAGOON OFFICER'S SABER

On February 12, 1834, Nathan Ames was in Washington and gave his written proposal to Colonel Bomford for furnishing swords to the Ordnance Department. Included with the swords for other officers was the following:

"... The swords for Officers of the Dragoons the form to be like one of my make with gilded hilt and metal scabbard that is now in the ordnance office. Seventeen dollars each, I offer to furnish to the United States, swords for the Dragoons of the pattern of one of my make which is now in the ordnance office, the blade of which is thirty-four inches long, round back, brass hilt, and brown iron scabbard at the following prices —

One thousand swords and scabbards at ten dollars each.  
Two thousand at nine dollars each or  
Four thousand at eight dollars each."

Colonel Bomford accepted the proposal on the 14th, and apparently told Ames that the initial order would be for 1,000 sabers, but that subsequent orders would follow as the contract price was \$8.00 per saber. He further set forth a requirement for 631 officers' swords including 34 for dragoons. The Secretary of War, Lewis Cass, did not approve of the Ordnance Department purchasing the officers' swords by contract, and indicated that the officers "should be supplied as a matter of private arrangement which in fact it is and should be." Ames was not happy with this arrangement but finally accepted it. He agreed to furnish the swords at the request of the individual officers. The price for a dragoon officers' saber was \$20.00. Why the final price was \$3.00 higher than the Ames offer of \$17.00 is not known, but some small part of it must have to do with the increased complexity of individual orders, payment and shipping. Some features of the saber also changed, resulting in the increased price. Apparently negotiations were conducted in the ordnance office that were not confirmed in writing, or the records did not survive.

It is not known how many dragoon officers' sabers were made by Ames and shipped to regular officers at their stations throughout the country. While Colonel Bomford had indicated a requirement for 34 sabers, this was only the initial requirement for the dragoon regiment authorized in March 1833. In May 1836, another regiment, the Second Dragoons, was authorized. However the total strength of 68 officers does not include five to ten brevet 2nd Lieutenants in each regiment. As the years went by officers died, retired or resigned, necessitating replacement to maintain the unit strength. As a result, it is not known how many were actually purchased.

Since militia officers usually followed the regular

army by adopting the same or similar swords, Ames also produced sabers to satisfy their needs. These sabers could have been obtained by the officers by individual purchase from the Ames Company, through their state militia organization, or from military goods dealers. As an example of a purchase by a state, on September 30, 1839, Lieut. Colonel George Talcott of the Ordnance Department wrote Ames stating that four dragoon officers' sabers were required for the State of Pennsylvania and that Major Lomax would prove them. Ames replied on October 9th that they had the sabers ready to deliver but that all the blades were marked "United States Dragoons," and that he would send others marked differently if wished. Col. Talcott replied on October 14th that if Ames had on hand officers' sabers that were not marked it would be better to furnish them for the State of Pennsylvania. If not, he continued, those referred to in Ames' letter of the 9th instant would then answer.

It is not known how the Pennsylvania officers' saber blades were marked when delivered. However, the cost was \$15.00 per saber, which was \$5.00 less than those sold to the regular army officers. It is not known why the cost per saber was less, but it was the same amount charged to the Government of Texas in 1840 for their dragoon officers' sabers. It is possible that these sabers



This Lieutenant is carrying what appears to be an 1833 Dragoon officer's saber. (Author's Collection)



did not have the heavily gilded hilts specified for the regular dragoon officers' sabers, which would account for most of the reduction in price.

Surviving examples of the dragoon officers' saber are so few that it is difficult to examine a representative number and draw empirical conclusions. The examples presented here are a cross section of the examples carefully examined. These swords are scarce; low production coupled with service losses in two wars and on the frontier explain their appeal. The examples best speak for themselves.

There was no "regulation" dragoon officers' saber described as such, only a model deposited in the ordnance office. Various features are ascribed to the "regulation" saber, but as will be seen, these features can vary considerably.

Between the needs of the regular army and militia officers, Ames produced only a small number of model 1833 Dragoon officers' sabers. They are among the most difficult sabers for sword collectors to find. Just recently, an important N.P. AMES document has come to light. It is a ledger book titled "Account of letters received from U.S. officers" which identifies the officers, their rank, location, branch of service and when

the request for a sword was received. On the top of page two recently promoted Captain Eustace Trenor of the U.S. Dragoons has written for a saber on March 20th of 1834, from Washington City. He would shortly be out west in the Indian Campaigns and based upon the Ames ledger book, he was the first U.S. dragoon officer to have ordered a dragoon officers' saber. He served on the Frontier in the Indian Territory, Texas and Missouri.

COMPONENTS OF A  
DRAGOON OFFICER'S SABER

- Gilded hilt
- Fishskin covered grip
- Coiled gilt wire (referred to as dragoon wire)
- Acid etched blade, with United States Dragoon(s) in a wreath, a figure of Tecumseh, foliates, a federal eagle, and etc., or a blade with dry needle point etching United States Dragoons or United States, or a plain unadorned blade.
- Brass scabbard, steel scabbard with narrow mounts, or steel scabbard brass mounts

Accou of letters received from U.S. officers ordering swords

Nathan P. Ames  
By E. W. Hale

Ames ledger book identifying officer sword purchases in 1833-34. This view shows the inside cover and the first page — notice Talcott appearing prominently on the top of page one.  
(Courtesy of Stan Tranquillo)

Date	Name	Location	Price
1833	Geo Talcott	Washington City	Ord 18 1/2
Nov 14th	Geo. M. Brooke	Fort Howard	25
Jan 7th 1834	Mounted		
Washington	De Bache	Ord	
Feb 1st	A. J. Hoove	L 5 1/2	
Port Winnebago	36 P. Vanclure	L 5 1/2	
Feb 3rd	J. C. Reid	L 5 1/2	
"	A. Duggles	L 5 1/2	
"	C. McDougall	L 5 1/2	
"	A. Johnston	L 5 1/2	
"	J. I. Collinsworth	L 5 1/2	
"	E. M. Lacy	L 5 1/2	25
Fort Dearborn	John Green	L 5 1/2	
Chicago	D. Wilcox	L 5 1/2	
Feb 16th	J. M. Baxley	L 5 1/2	
"	L. T. Jamison	L 5 1/2	
"	E. K. Smith	L 5 1/2	
"	J. L. Thompson	L 5 1/2	
St. Howard	E. Norvell	L 5 1/2	
Green Bay			
Feb 27			

AMES MODEL 1833  
DRAGOON OFFICER'S SABER

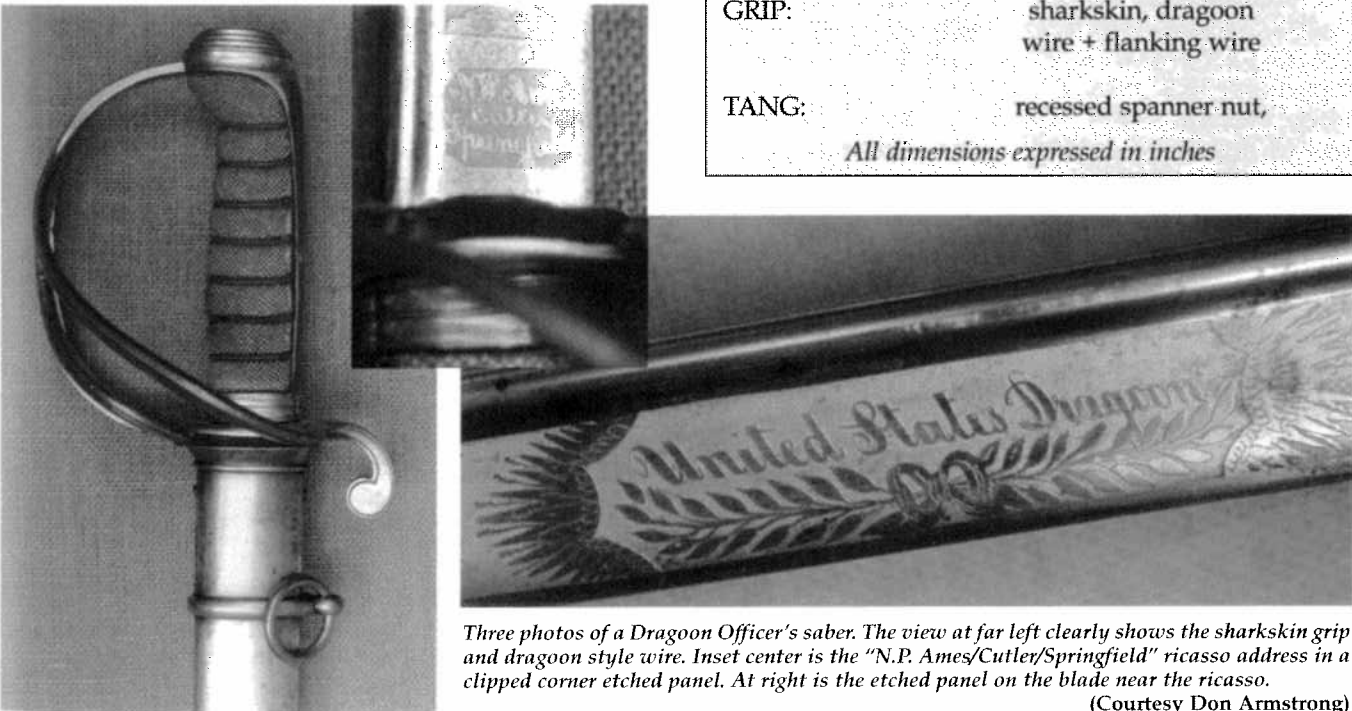
TYPE: Typical model 1833 Officer's Dragoon Saber

BLADE LENGTH:	34
TYPE:	quill back
WIDTH:	1 1/2
QUILLON:	3/4
FALSE EDGE:	8 3/4
BLADE INSC:	United States Dragoon (foliate)
ADDRESS:	N.P. Ames Cutler Springfield (etched)
ADDRESS DATE:	Pre-1847
INSPECTIONS:	none
BLADE ETCHING:	foliate, eagle, Indian, panoply of arms
SCABBARD:	Steel/steel mounts
SCABBARD BANDS:	1/2 wide
WIDTH:	1 1/2
(at low mount)	
HILT:	brass, gold gilded
GRIP:	sharkskin, dragoon wire + flanking wire
TANG:	recessed spanner nut,

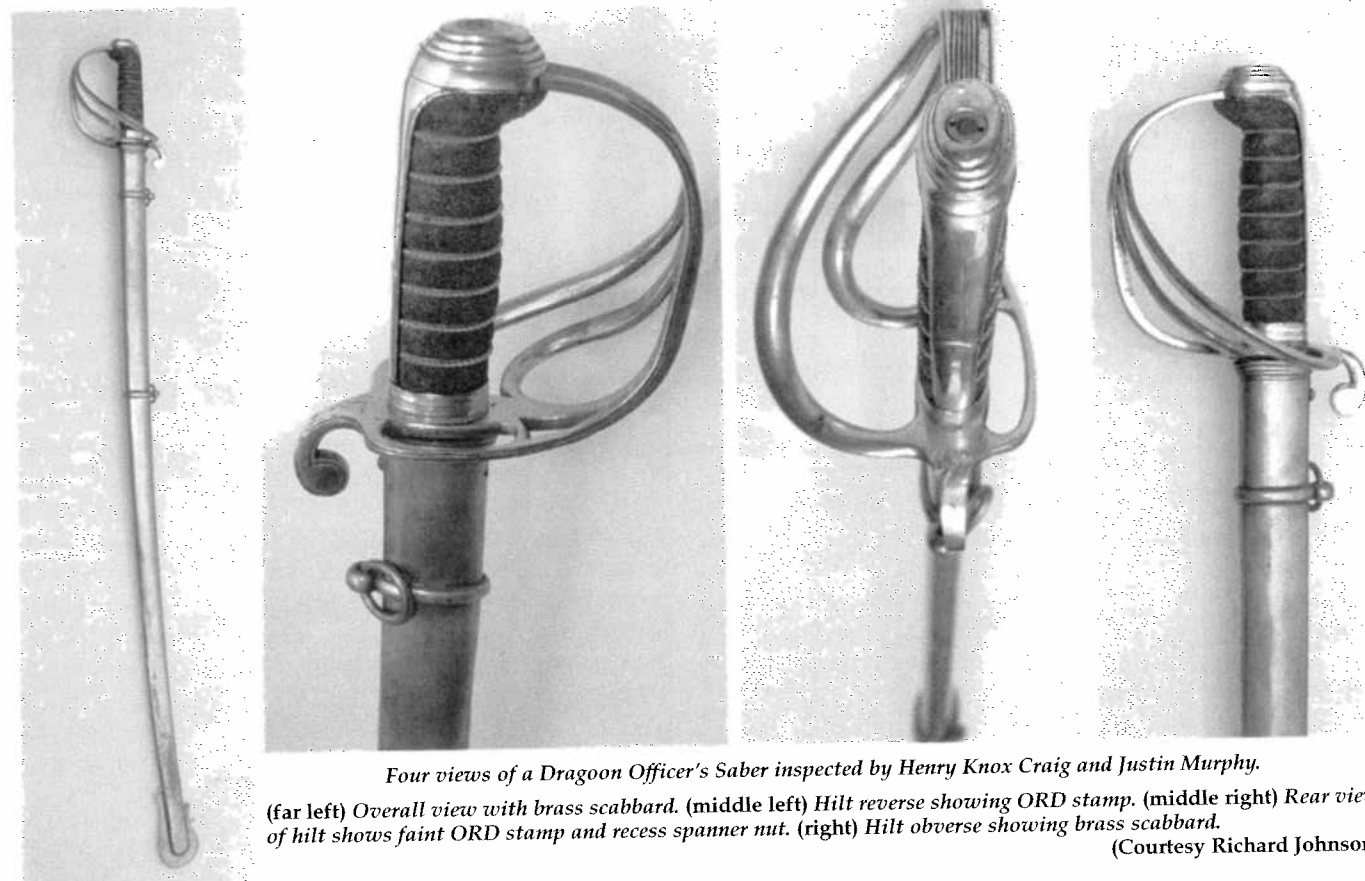
All dimensions expressed in inches

Washington	J. E. Trenor	6 Dgs	18 1/2
March 20th			
Washington	J. P. Dehlin	in 6 Navy	
March 24th			
St. Louis	1. A. C. W. Fanning	12 1/2	
May 12th			
St. Washington	1 E. A. Capron	A	
Mayland May 12			
West Point	17 Artillery Sabel		
May 12th	2 mounted do do		
	1 Medical Staff		
	Ordered by C. Smith		
Chapin Ave	2 Artillery	A	
Pittsburgh	1	May	
May 12			
Clinton Hotel	J. H. Macomb	St	18 1/2
St. Louis May 12			
Washington			
May 12			
Frankford Arsenal	J. Dimick	St	18 1/2
May 15th			

Page 2 of the Ames ledger book. On the top line it records that the first model 1833 dragoon officers' saber was purchased by Eustace Trenor, Capt. U.S. Dragoons, in March of 1834.  
(Courtesy Stan Tranquillo)



Three photos of a Dragoon Officer's saber. The view at far left clearly shows the sharkskin grip and dragoon style wire. Inset center is the "N.P. Ames/Cutler/Springfield" ricasso address in a clipped corner etched panel. At right is the etched panel on the blade near the ricasso.  
(Courtesy Don Armstrong)

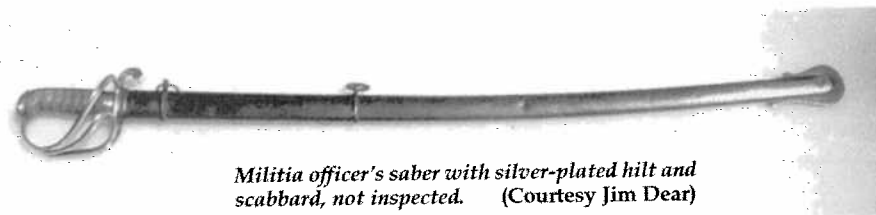


The following sabers are described in more detail as they are different from what is considered to be normal, assuming that there was a norm for the model 1833 dragoon officer's saber.

#### Inspected Dragoon Officer's Saber

This saber is not easily categorized. Its features include: gilded hilt, gilded dragoon wire with gilded flanking wire; sharkskin grip; inspected hilt at the quillon and inside the knucklebow; brass scabbard, smaller dimensions than enlisted, not inspected; enlisted style blade with dry point needle etching *United States Dragoons*; inspected by Justin Murphy; no blade address or date is visible possibly due to over cleaning.

The inspectors' marks of Henry Knox Craig and Justin Murphy have been observed only on sabers dated 1835, 1836 and 1837. Since the saber was inspected in the usual manner, it was made for a regular dragoon or on a special state order, which specified the normal inspection procedures. In any event, it is the only inspected officer's saber that has been observed. When found, this saber had a heavy dark patina on the hilt and a heavy coating of rust on the blade. The hilt cleaned rather easily, bringing it back to near mint condition. The brass scabbard was not dented and cleaned easily. Unfortunately, the blade cleaning removed much of the shallow dry needle etching, only the *United States Dragoons* is partially visible.



#### Militia Officers' Saber

Ames was clearly selling to militia units and selling them sword patterns long after they had been superseded by a newer model sword. This saber is similar to the dragoon officer's model 1833, yet it was made in the late 1840s or possibly even in the early 1850s. The saber is interesting in a number of ways. The hilt is silver plated over brass whereas other dragoon or cavalry officers' sabers called for a gilded or bright brass hilt. Also, while the blade is close to the regulation 34 inches in length, the false edge is longer and closer to the saber identified as the special order example with the model 1840 hilt discussed below.

This saber is not etched in the usual style for the period, in that there is no *United States Dragoon(s)*, *United States* or any other state's designation on the blade. Only the late post-1847 blade address of Ames Manufacturing Company, Chicopee Mass. is inscribed on the blade. However, interestingly, the blade is acid etched in the highly desirable early style with Tecumseh holding a raised tomahawk and with a knife at his belt and a bow and arrows behind, as well as the usual foliate and panoply of arms.



Whether this blade etching was ordered or whether it was still in use is not known. It should be noted that the etching style is not unlike the blade etching style of the model 1840 heavy cavalry saber in use at the time. A special order or possibly transitional model 1833/40 saber that is described and pictured in the Ames model 1840 cavalry officers' section, while having a dragoon quill backed blade, has different etching. It was made before this militia saber (has the Springfield pre-1847 address) so, the question of etching patterns can not be answered definitively. Finally, it should be noted that the blade tang is peened over on this example and not secured with a standard recessed spanner nut, as on all of the other dragoon sabers. This is a very late model 1833 dragoon saber feature found on the dragoon sabers made after the model of 1840 was already in use.

#### STATE MILITIA DRAGOON OFFICERS' SABERS

Dragoon officers' sabers in use by state militia officers were somewhat more varied in adornment (used state and other devices in the embellishment) but maintained the same dimensions and material as the federal officers' sabers. The period of use is from the 1830's to considerably after the adoption of the new model of 1840 saber. Following are some examples of these rare sabers.

#### South Carolina Dragoon Officers' Saber

This saber is identified to a South Carolina officer due to an engraved panel of a palm tree on the brass scabbard. Also engraved on the scabbard is an eagle. The other dimensions of the saber are the same as all other dragoon officers' sabers: blade is 34 3/8 inches long, 1 1/8 inches wide, having a 9-inch-long false edge. Hilt is gilded having a sharkskin grip with dragoon wire and a single flanking strand on each side. Interestingly, the blade tang has a filled-in gilded brass plug where the recessed spanner nut would be and the tang passes through the plug and is peened over. The blade washer is a buff pad.

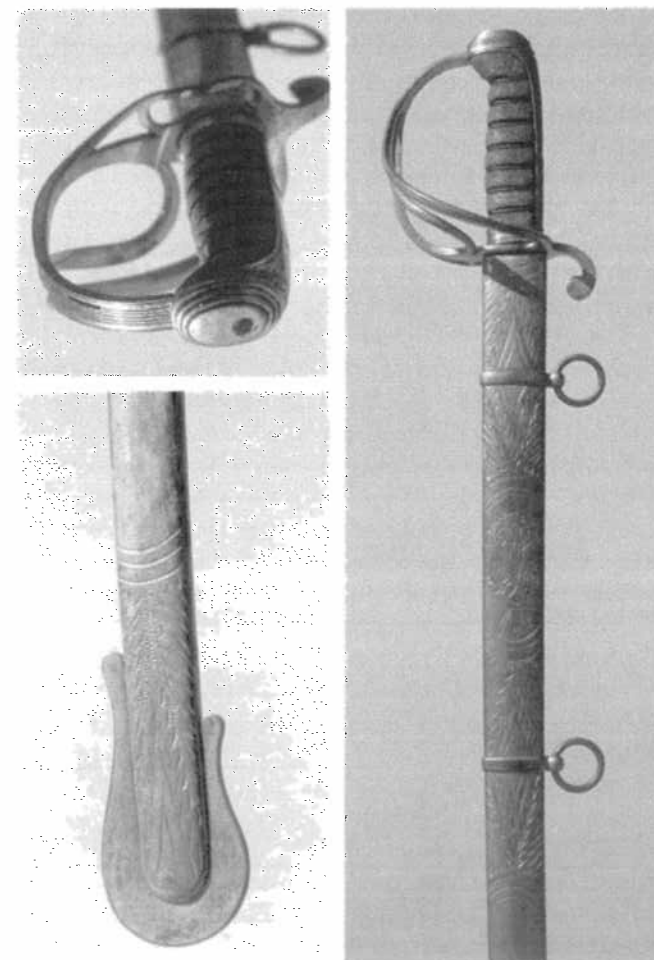
Blade etching on the obverse: stylized design of sun-rays, funereal type of urn from which emanates a heavy

foliate and vine design, Tecumseh, wreath, panoply of arms, American eagle and *E Pluribus Unum* in a ribbon, sunrays and foliate to the end. The reverse: stylized series of spike-like leaves, funeral urn with a vine and foliate, panoply of arms, American eagle and *E. Pluribus Unum*, sunrays and foliate to the end. The brass scabbard is foliate and has stylized floral engraving.

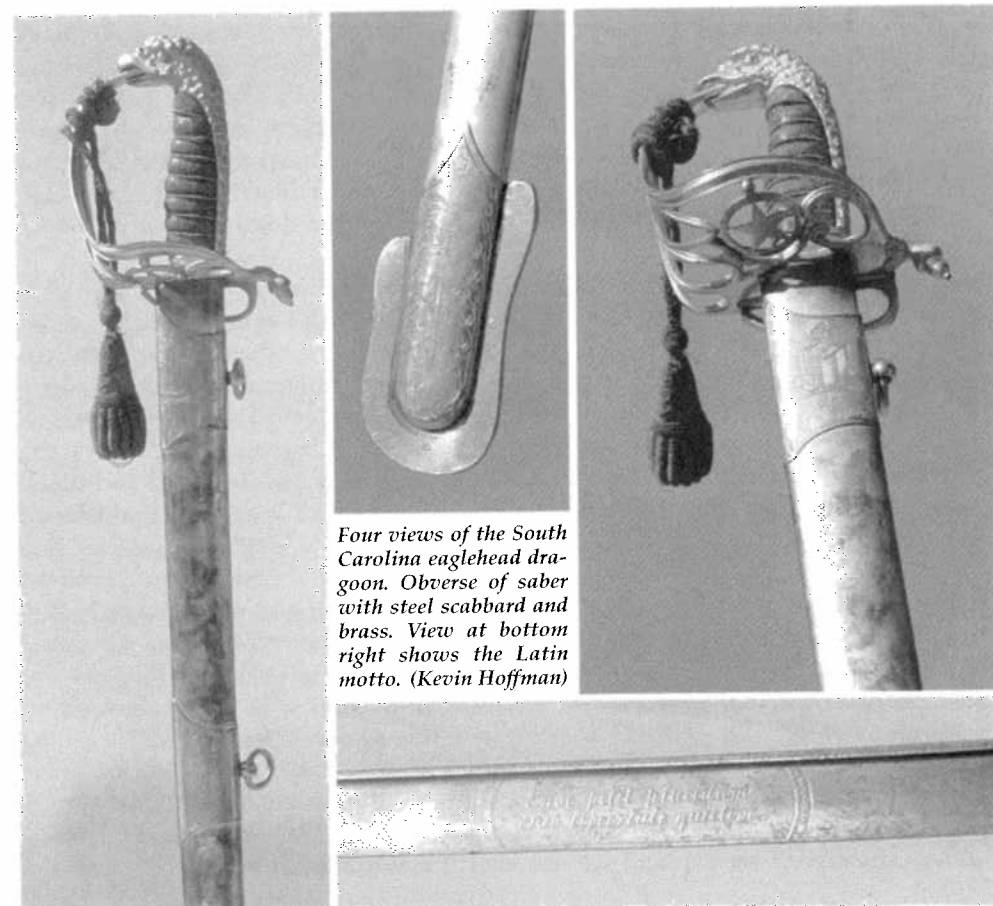
#### South Carolina Non-Regulation

##### Dragoon Officer's Saber With Eagle Pommel

This Ames dragoon officers' saber was clearly a special order saber by a State Militia officer. The blade is regulation at 34 inches overall and 1 1/8 inches wide, thus meeting the basic dragoon dimensions. The hilt, on the other hand, has an eagle pommel designed and made by Ames for their regulation naval sword and has a folding counterguard where the eagle head is part of a solid backstrap. The quillon terminates in an acorn (not a disk) but it does not have the disk with a naval fouled anchor in the guard; rather, there is a cut-out 5-pointed star denoting its militia use. The hilt, while not the accepted model of 1833 design, is nonetheless on an 1833 dragoon quill back blade. This sword is definitely a state militia-used dragoon saber and is therefore presented as an example of the variety of the type that may be seen. This piece is a high-grade example of its type and seldom seen. It was made almost 20 years after the







Four views of the South Carolina eaglehead dragoon. Obverse of saber with steel scabbard and brass. View at bottom right shows the Latin motto. (Kevin Hoffman)

dragoon saber was introduced as the new federal regulation, as evidenced by the post-1847 Ames address of Chicopee, Mass. on the blade. Another late feature is that the blade tang is peened over on this hilt without the recessed spanner nut.

The blade etching begins on the obverse with the Ames Chicopee blade address, foliate, panoply of arms with the liberty cap on a pole in the center of flags, ending in foliate. The reverse begins with foliate, panoply of arms of crossed cannons and a shield etc, then to a panel wherein is etched: *Ense Petit Placidum Sub Libertate quietem*, Tecumseh, and foliate to the end.

The brass scabbard is engraved overall and has a 5-pointed star and sword device on the body and drag. The reverse is engraved at the throat with an Ames Mfg. Co./Chicopee/Mass. address. In the center front is a palm tree in a panel and a pineapple in the corner of the panel.

#### Georgia Hussars Dragoon Officer's Saber

An example of this saber was not available for examination. However, one is pictured and described in Hamilton's book *The Ames Sword Company* on page 40.

#### Republic of Texas Dragoon Sabers

These sabers are being treated separately because while Texas became the 28th state on December 28, 1844, it was still a Republic at the time they purchased the dragoon sabers from Ames in 1840. Secondly, these

sabers were used in federal service in 1846 during the war with Mexico. During the U.S. Civil War, they would have been in Texas armories or perhaps with families of militia officers at the beginning of the war, and either way many would have seen Confederate service.

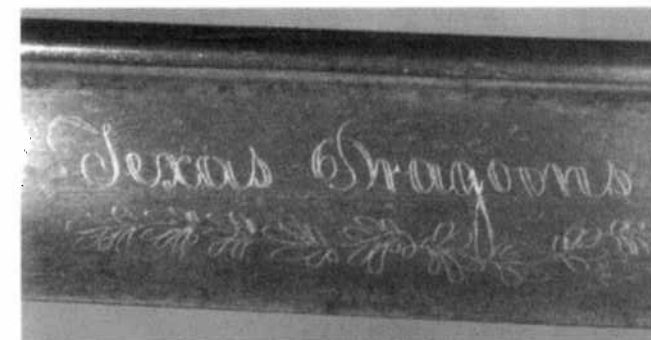
These sabers are extremely rare, only 18 officers and 280 enlisted having been made. In a survey of some of the foremost sword collectors in the country, only one Texas officer's saber has been identified and 5 enlisted sabers are known. They are extremely rare, as would be expected of a weapon that was continuously used for at least 25 years on the frontier, in the war with Mexico and in the U.S. Civil War. These sabers were not militia drill sabers, but an everyday tool of hard fighting cavalry.

At the Texas Archives, in the papers of Henry Dangerfield, the Commissary of Purchases for the Republic of Texas, is a copy of the contract dated at Springfield February 4, 1840, and signed by N.P. Ames on February 25th, stating that payment had been received. Included is the following certificate by the inspector:

*I hereby certify that I have this day inspected and approved two hundred and eighty Dragoon Sabers and scabbards and forty Artillery Swords and scabbards manufactured by N. P. Ames of Springfield Massachusetts. And I do further certify that the said arms have been inspected in accordance with the regulations of the United States Ordnance Department, are equal in quality and workmanship and are of*



(top) Republic of Texas Dragoon enlisted saber, (middle) officers' saber, and (bottom) a Republic of Texas diplomatic sword. (Courtesy Bob Owens)



Republic of Texas Dragoons enlisted blade etching. Note there is no date under the inscription, just a foliate spray. (Bob Owens)

#### REPUBLIC OF TEXAS MODEL 1833 DRAGOON OFFICERS' SABER

TYPE: Model 1833 Officer's Saber made for the Republic of Texas

BLADE LENGTH: 33½  
BLADE TYPE: quill back  
BLADE WIDTH: 1½  
FALSE EDGE: 8½

QUILLON WIDTH: ¾

BLADE INSCRIPTION: TEXAS  
(with star points separating letters)

ADDRESS: etched N.P. AMES  
obverse CUTLER  
SPRINGFIELD

INSPECTIONS: WS on quillon disk

BLADE ETCHING: (obverse) Ames address, foliate, panoply of arms eagle at center, foliate panoply of arms, of canons and flags liberty cap on pole, TEXAS in a circle around a star surrounded top and bottom by clouds with lightening bolts on the bottom toward the hilt and sunrays above toward the tip, foliate to the end

(reverse) same as above but a vine and rose in the place of the lower panoply of arms

SCABBARD: steel, steel split rings, steel mounts ¼ wide, scabbard 1¾ wide at lower mount.

HILT: brass guard, blade tang peened over, no recessed spanner nut, ¼" wide ferrule with horizontal lines, sharkskin grip, dragoon wire

All dimensions expressed in inches

#### REPUBLIC OF TEXAS MODEL 1833 ENLISTED DRAGOON SABER

TYPE: Model of 1833 U.S. model made for the Republic of Texas

BLADE LENGTH: 34  
WIDTH: 1½  
QUILL THICKNESS: ¾  
FALSE EDGE: 10

BLADE INSCRIPTION: Texas Dragoons  
dry point needle etched (foliate)

RICASSO MARK: N.P. AMES  
CUTLER  
SPRINGFIELD

BLADE DATE: 1840

GUARD INSPECTOR: WS  
on quillon disk

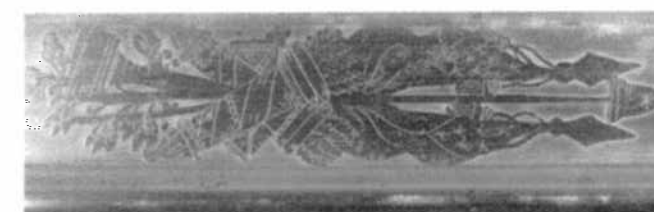
HILT: standard model 1833 hilt of brass with backstrap, grips of wood, leather covered, and wrapped in brass dragoon wire, 7 turns around the grip, recessed spanner nut at tang, brass ferrule ¼ wide & horizontal line engraving.

SCABBARD: suspension rings missing, steel mounts ¾ wide, scabbard 1¾ thick at lower ring mount.

All dimensions expressed in inches



The Texas Dragoon officers' blade has the Texas star instead of the blade inscription at the ricasso. (Courtesy Bob Owens)



Blade detail from the Texas Dragoon Officer's saber. Note the Ames dry point needle work showing an American flag. (Courtesy Bob Owens)

the same pattern of those made for the United States service with the exception of the word "Texas Dragoons" on the blades of the sabers and a five pointed star on the hilts of the swords. The letters W.S. are stamped on each sword and saber as an inspection mark.

Given in triplicate at Springfield this 22<sup>nd</sup> day of January 1840.

William Smith  
United States Inspector of Arms

The payment order identified 18 officers' sabers as well as the enlisted sabers and artillery swords. The total order of sabers cost Texas \$15.00 each or \$270 total for the officers' sabers and \$8.00 each or \$2,240 total for the enlisted sabers. There were other costs for boxing and shipping and interestingly, payment was on the U.S. Bank of New York paid for on February 25th.

#### Dragoon Officers' Saber, Presented in 1843 to a Texan

Subsequent to the admission of Texas as a State in the Union, state militia officers would have required sabers that could not be supplied from those ordered in 1840. This saber, which could not be illustrated here, is one of those and is extremely rare. It may be the only Texas dragoon saber with a presentation. It is etched on the blade:

*Presented to Capt. Smith P. Bankhead  
1843*

The blade on this saber is 32 inches and is etched in the usual style, but also has etching on the quill back. It has the funeral urn etching then to a foliate, Tecumseh, foliate, American eagle and foliate. On the reverse the urn and foliate is at the bottom, then the presentation panel, which has sunrays around it, a panoply of native American arms and foliate to the end.

The hilt is the usual type, but the grip wire is the type with a bundle of gilded brass wire that is braided and twisted, and not the standard dragoon wire. The scabbard is iron with ¼-inch-wide bands and split rings. It is inspected on the drag obverse with HKC in a cartouche and ORD directly under; the reverse has a WS.

#### AMES MODEL 1840 CAVALRY SABERS

The Ames model 1840 sabers were a follow up to the first contract U.S. model 1840s by Schnitzler & Kirschbaum, which had been manufactured in Solingen and imported by the U.S. government in 1841. The Ordnance Department was not impressed with the ability of Ames to manufacture this new heavy cavalry saber, because of Ames' earlier difficult experience with manufacturing and satisfying the Ordnance Department with the model 1833 dragoon saber. However, it is also clear from early examples of the Ames model 1840 that they were successful in producing the required saber —

perhaps because of the 1840 trip report of the officers that visited Prussia, France and England. In their report, which was presented to the U.S. Congress by the Ordnance Department, they detailed the processes used by the saber manufacturers in those countries.<sup>21</sup> The report of the saber manufacturing processes and proof techniques used in those countries represented the highest technology of arms manufacturing at that time and must have been of some considerable assistance to Ames.<sup>22</sup> The workmanship on the model 1840 Ames is excellent, although not quite the same standard as that seen on the rare first contract S&K sabers.

The first edition of the Ordnance Manual

was submitted to the Secretary of War on February 21, 1841. The title reads: ORDNANCE MANUAL for THE USE OF THE OFFICERS of the UNITED STATES ARMY. Washington: 1841.

On page 131 under the heading "Swords and Sabres" is the description of the model 1840 cavalry saber.

#### *Cavalry sabre-Model of 1840—Plate 11*

*Blade. Shoulder, back, edge, bevel, point, curvature, large groove; small groove, tang; riveting.*

*Hilt. Surmounting (brass,) notch for guard, back, rivet cap, hole for the tang of the blade—gripe, wooden body (birch or maple,) leather covering (calf skin blackened), wires (brass,) notch for the guard, ridges, shoulder, hole for the tang of the blade—guard: front branch, hook; back branch; middle branch; plate, mortise for the tang, flange, beed, lip.*



*This trooper looks very proud of his model 1840 saber. (Author's Collection)*