

Gilford's Historical Society's Firearms Collection

2009

Written by: Fred Kacprzyński

The evening light on the displayed artifacts at the Meeting House elicits a powerful sense of history. To me none more telling than the collection of firearms, reflecting what must have been trying times to past residents. They elicit stories of Gilford soldiers in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars and the worries of their families back home. Not only do these historic items tell stories of Gilford's past but are real time examples of past technologies.

Enoch Hunt (1760-1824), of Gilford took what's commonly called a "Brown Bess" musket from a Hessian soldier at the June 28, 1778 battle at Monmouth, New Jersey, the last major engagement in the northern theater of the Revolutionary War when he was only 18. This gun gifted in 1961 to Gilford's Thompson-Ames Historical Society by Stanley E. Hunt is the anchor of a collection of five historic muzzle loading firearms displayed by the Society. With muzzle loaders, gunpowder, and shot, (or round lead ball) usually wrapped in a paper or cloth patch, are rammed down from the muzzle end with a ramrod stored under the barrel of the gun.

Enoch Hunt's "Brown Bess", the oldest firearm in the Society's collection is a 1756 Long land pattern version flintlock musket with bayonet. The flintlock had an open pan (flashpan) that was filled with fine gunpowder, the pan located at the breech connected to the main powder charge through a small hole (touchhole). The hammer, with flint locked in place (hence flintlock) is cocked and when the trigger is pulled the flint strikes the frizzen, a piece of steel in the priming pan lid, opening it and exposing the priming powder. The contact between the flint and frizzen creates a spark directed into the flash pan. The powder flames and the flames pass through the touchhole and ignite the main powder charge, firing the gun. Marks on the gun indicate it was made in Ireland about 1775, it has "Dublin Castle" and English Government ownership marks on the lockplate. It is reported the Hessian soldier's name, Cuss, is carved on the stock. This musket was the British infantryman's basic weapon from 1740 until the 1830's. The gun was converted from flintlock to percussion and the original

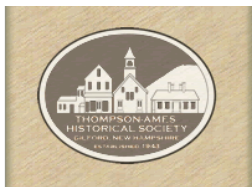
full length stock was half-stocked about 1860 (modernized) to meet the changing needs of the Gilford owner. The percussion rifle is easier to load, weather resistant and more reliable than the flintlock; the main powder charge ignites and fires when a factory made cap, placed on a tube connecting to the main powder charge, is impacted by the falling hammer

The Civil War guns in the Society's collection were fired by and at both Yankees and Rebels. Two of the Civil War era guns are from the Springfield, Massachusetts Armory. One of them is an unmodified Springfield Model 1840. The donor, Fred J. Potter in 1947 reported that



"this musket was left at the Wm. Goss house by a soldier of the Civil War". This was one of more than 30,000 guns produced and converted to percussion by the Springfield Armory and two subcontractors between 1840 and 1860. Another of the Civil War era weapons is a Model 1842 Springfield given to the Society by Mr. Samuel Smith. This was the first rifle built, rather than converted as a percussion cap, and the last 69 caliber (close to a devastating 3/4" in diameter) gun produced for the Army. It was produced in large quantities for the Union Army and the most widely used weapon of the Civil War.

Firearms displayed at the Meeting House, left to right: "Brown Bess", Springfield Model 1840, Springfield Model 1842, and English Enfield



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The fourth firearm at the Meeting House is an English Enfield Rifle. Thomas Hunt of Gilford may have brought this back from the Civil War battlefields. It is original, with no modification. The second most widely used weapon of the Civil War, especially for the Confederates, it was produced in large quantities in England under contract for the American Civil War for both sides. This rifle probably passed through Union blockades to get to the Civil War battlefields. This one, made by the Tower firm in Birmingham, England, represents one of about 900,000 imported during the Civil War.

Anyone interested in more information about Gilford's Thompson-Ames Historical Society can visit our web site (www.gilfordhistoricalsociety.org), the office upstairs at the Grange building in the Village (open whenever someone is working) or call (603) 527-9009 (leave a message and you will receive a return call) or by e-mail at thomames@metrocast.net

The final firearm in the Society's collection is displayed in the Homestead Room at the Grange. Although it has no decipherable markings there is evidence of being converted from a flintlock to percussion and the ramrod has been replaced. It is purported to be a gift of Samuel Smith (1876-1957) in 1943. The gun appears older than 1875 but was most probably used in the everyday life of the late 1800's on the Smith's High Maples Farm.