

1971

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Recommended Citation

Mowbray, E. Andrew (1971) "A Sword from the Taunton River," *Northeast Historical Archaeology*: Vol. 1 1, Article 10.
<https://doi.org/10.22191/neha/vol1/iss2/9> Available at: <http://orb.binghamton.edu/neha/vol1/iss2/10>

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A SWORD FROM THE TAUNTON RIVER

by

E. Andrew Mowbray

Through the years the rivers of Europe, particularly England, have disgorged an amazing storehouse of swords covering every period from the bronze age to modern times. It is possible that the early fording places and bridge sites of the Northeastern United States and Canada may yet, to a greatly lesser degree, release artifacts of considerable informational value. It is unfortunate, but perfectly obvious, that stratification is of no value in these instances and any attempts at dating must be drawn exclusively from stylistic sources.

Recently, an outstanding example of a horseman's sword was recovered from the Taunton River, in Southeastern Massachusetts, by a utility worker toiling under a fairly modern bridge spanning a fording point which dates back to early Colonial times.

The style of sword in question enjoyed an unusually long period of favor, early examples being in use as far back as King Philip's War. A nearly identical sword was still being forged by the English smith, Harvey, late in the second quarter of the 18th century.

Description

Style: Cavalry sword; a marriage of the so-called mortuary hilt of the English Civil War with the Highland basket-hilted broadsword.

Condition: Heavily rusted but largely intact; missing only the wooden grips with their doubtless wire-wrapped leather covering.

Marks: None presently visible.

Statistics: Length of blade— 35½"; Width of blade at hilt— 1-3/8"; Length overall— 41"; Weight— 2 lbs. 4 oz.

Technical Description: An iron mounted backsword with a blade of suitable length for mounted use and having a narrow fuller next to spine supplemented by a medium width fuller centrally located on the blade axis. The former beginning 5¼" from hilt and extending for 19", the latter beginning at the same location and running off point. A full dished counterguard supporting a triangular knucklebow in turn reinforced by two branches attached at base of half-round pommel with prominent capstan.

Period: *circa* 1690-1745.

E. Andrew Mowbray is Chairman of the Publishing Committee for The Council for Northeast Historical Archaeology, Chairman of the Rhode Island Foundation for Historic Archaeology, and a Fellow of the Company of Military Historians. His soon to be published study of the American sword will include a discussion of swords from archaeological sites.

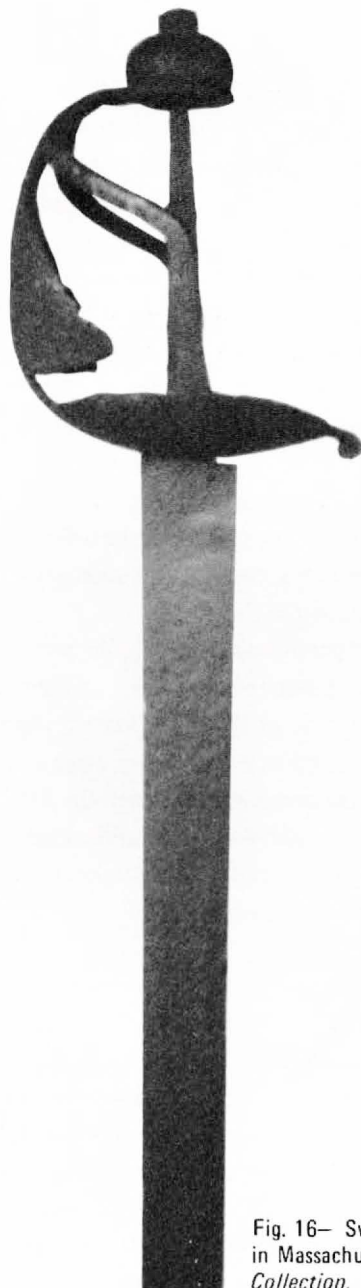


Fig. 16— Sword from the Taunton River in Massachusetts. —*E. Andrew Mowbray Collection.*