



The Simsbury Powder Horns of the American Revolution



[Top to bottom] Powder horns belonging to Nathaniel Humphrey and Israel Wells

Introducing “The Simsbury Powder Horns of the American Revolution”

Few objects from colonial America maintain such a personal and temporal connection to their owners as the powder horns used by soldiers, settlers, and Native Americans. In a world where firearms were necessary tools for survival, the powder horn – made from the lightweight and hollow horns of cattle – stored gunpowder and served as the constant companion to thousands of frontier residents. Many owners recognized the smooth surface of their horn as the ideal place to leave their mark. They etched names, dates, maps, and war records, as well as purely whimsical figures, into the objects. Engraved scenes often provide us with an immediate and vivid connection to events in the soldier's life.

The Simsbury Historical Society is pleased to present “The Simsbury Powder Horns of the American Revolution,” an exhibit that examines the engraved powder horns of two Simsbury soldiers to uncover the stories of their time in the Continental Army and the life they left back home. Lieutenant Nathaniel Humphrey, answering the call from Lexington and Concord, experienced one of the earliest battles of the Revolution at Bunker Hill in April 1775 under the command of Colonel Samuel Wyllys in the 22nd Continental Regiment. Private Israel Wells would join the same regiment in January 1776, marching together from Boston, Massachusetts to Peekskill, New York in the following winter.

After the Revolution, the subsequent history of the Wells horn is difficult to follow. Carved twice onto the Wells horn is the name “HENRY ELY,” first son of Benjamin Ely and brother to Dudley Ely, whose powder horn is also on display at the Society. While Dudley Ely did not fight in the War, his father was instrumental in organizing new townships in Ohio during Westward Expansion in the same area Israel Wells would settle with his family in 1804. It is possible the Wells horn found its way into the Ely family's possession around the same time. Because all three of these powder horns are historically linked, the Dudley Ely horn became a part of the research process on campus and the report below.

Josh Picoult
August 2021

Inscription:

“Israel Wells his horn/made att[sic] Peekskill December/9 1776”

“WITH My/Powder Ball/AND GUN I WILL/MAKE THE H...”

[1] Israel Wells (1757-1831)

Despite centuries of wear having rendered the final letters of Israel Wells’ inscription inscrutable, his horn tells a vibrant story of a young man’s journey as a Revolutionary soldier and gives us insight into his later years as a town commissioner and father.



Powder horn belonging to Israel Wells of Simsbury. Served with other Connecticut volunteers in the American Revolution from January 1776 to January 1777 as a private in Colonel Wyllys’ 22nd Continental Regiment. After the war he continued to serve in the militia and became a Lt. in the 18th Regiment, 3rd Company under Capt. Job Case. At the age of 46, he chose to uproot his life and take his family to settle in Granville, Ohio between 1804-1805 to establish a new church with other Simsbury, Farmington, and Massachusetts travelers. He served as the town commissioner of Granville from 1808-1811.



Headstone of Israel Wells, Old Colony Burial Ground in Granville, Ohio.

What this tells us:

- Israel Wells was born on July 3rd, 1757 (in New London / Lebanon, CT).
- Israel Wells died on April 3rd, 1831 (in Granville, Licking County Ohio).
- Israel Wells was buried in the Granville Old Colony Burial Ground in Granville, Ohio.

CHECK TYPE REQUIRED (See Instructions attached)		APPLICATION FOR HEADSTONE OR MARKER (Please make out and return to duplicate)		ORIGINAL
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UPRIGHT MARBLE HEADSTONE	ENLISTMENT DATE 1 Jan 1776	SERIAL No. <i>Riv War</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CHRISTIAN (Check one)	
<input type="checkbox"/> FLAT MARBLE MARKER	DISCHARGE DATE <i>Jan 1777</i>	PENSION No.	<input type="checkbox"/> HEBREW	
<input type="checkbox"/> FLAT GRANITE MARKER		Sur: File No. 40,664	<input type="checkbox"/> NONE	
<input type="checkbox"/> BRONZE MARKER		STATE Conn:	RANK Captain	COMPANY
NAME (Last, First, Middle Initial) WELLS, ISRAEL		U. S. REGIMENT, STATE ORGANIZATION, AND DIVISION Pension applied from residence Licking Co. Ohio, says enlisted 1 Jan. 1776, Simsbury, Ct. He was Captain, Conn. State Militia.		
DATE OF BIRTH (Month, Day, Year) 3 July 1757	DATE OF DEATH (Month, Day, Year) 3 April 1831	LOCATION (City and State) GRANVILLE, LICKING COUNTY, OHIO.		
NAME OF CEMETERY OLD COLONY BURYING GROUND		NEAREST FREIGHT STATION (City and State) Granville, Licking County, Ohio.		
SHIP TO (I) CERTIFY THE APPLICANT FOR THIS STONE HAS MADE ARRANGEMENTS WITH ME TO TRANSPORT THE STONE FROM THE FREIGHT STATION TO THE CEMETERY		POST OFFICE ADDRESS OF COUSINEE Alexandria, Ohio		
SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT <i>R. L. Wells</i> R. L. Wells		I certify this application is submitted for a stone for the unmarked grave of a veteran. I hereby agree to assume all responsibility for the removal of the stone promptly upon arrival at destination, and properly place it at the decedent's grave at my expense.		
DO NOT WRITE HERE APR 3 - 1953		APPLICANT'S SIGNATURE <i>Scott H. King</i> 4/2/1953		
ORDERED BY MONT MARBLE CO. PROCTOR, VT. Rt. WY 2084799 III 1 1953		ADDRESS (Street, City, State) 1301 Prince Edward St., Fredericksburg, Virginia.		
SHIP TO		IMPORTANT—Complete Reverse Side		
DDMB FORM REV 8 FEB 48 623		10-11453-6 GPO		

Handwritten roll of foot commanded by Samuel Wyllie Esq^r May 18th 1776

Commissioned Officers & Names		
Abel Pettibone Capt.	Nathan Humphrey 1st Lt.	Benjamin Adams 2nd Lt.
Ezekiel Strall Corp.	Daniel Dyer Corp.	Angaria Williams Drum
Levi Torrey Corp.	Samuel Cope Corp.	on forlough
Reuben Hobb Corp.	Samuel Gwilt Corp.	Levi Thayer 2nd Corp.
Joseph Dyer Corp.	John Moore Corp.	
Joseph Williams Corp.	Robertson Corp.	
John Adams missing	John Hale	Joel Root 2nd Corp.
Thomas Andrews	John Dille sick & absent	William Ropke 2nd Corp.
Richard Andrews sick & absent	David Dille	Martin DeBost
Ezekiel Barber	Samuel Dyer Corp.	John Robinson
Samuel B. Bayles 2nd Corp.	Nathaniel Humphrey	Israel Duller
Thomas Bentley	Giles Humphrey	John Dyer 2nd Corp.
Levi Cope 2nd Corp.	Daniel Johnson 2nd Corp.	Daniel Warner Corp.
Joseph Cope	Thomas Jones	David Walling
Israel Cope	Stephen Long 2nd Corp.	Levi Williams sick & absent
Samuel Cotton		Israel Wells
		John Winchester

U.S. Revolutionary War Rolls, 1775-1783

What this tells us:

- Private Israel Wells served in the 22nd Continental Regiment under Capt. Abel Pettibone in May 1776.
- Nathaniel Humphrey is listed as the 1st Lt. of the 22nd Continental Regiment.
- Israel Wells likely spent some time in Boston after he enlisted, but would have been in New York with Nathaniel Humphrey by the time this war roll was written.

1804

Jan. 12	John Root--91--Old Age	S.E.
	David Jones--51--Fall from his horse	N.E.
Feb. 11	Almond Stow--2--Child of Jenjm. S.--Canker-Putrid F.) C.	
" 17	Capt. William Ellis--66	S.E.
" 27	Joel M. Bancroft--Dissenterly-1-Child of Enoch	N.E.
" 21	Hannah Dunham--77-Relict of Jabez D.-Fits	S.W.
March 4	Lucius Clark--3--Consumption Dropsical	
" 24	Esther Cooley--24-Wife of Charles C.-Consumption)	S.E.
April 15	Israel Wells---15-Died Happy--Baptized	N.W.
	Child of James Barlow--Inf.	S.E.
	Margaret Barlow--39--Suddenly-Wife of Jonathan)	S.E.
May	Polly Kellogg--5--Cankerrash	
May 18	Polly Jones--2--Canker rash	
" 21	Elizabeth Rowley--70--Dropsy	S.E.
July 22	Mary Phelps--58--Dropsy	
Aug. 26	Frances Bates--1--Dissenterly--Child of Nat'l.	C.
Sept. 2	Nathaniel Bates--27--Dissenterly-In Hope	C.
Sept. 17	(Alsop Stow--14--Son of Eliha S. Esq.-Dissenterly)	N.W.
Oct. 5	(Sallenda Gaines--20--Dissenterly--(Being asked	
	("Are you willing to die?"---"I must die!")	N.W.
Dec. 7	Abigail Gaines--50--Dissenterly	
18	Lovicy M. Dickinson--7--Dissenterly	C.

Massachusetts, Town and Vital Records, 1620-1988

What this tells us:

- Israel Wells began his move to Ohio with his family in 1804. His name was dropped from Simsbury tax rolls in 1803, meaning that he had sold his property.
- Israel Wells did not travel directly from Connecticut to Ohio in 1804, but rather travelled to Granville, Massachusetts first. It was common for newcomers to name newly discovered Western towns after distinguished Eastern towns, hence the name Granville, Ohio.
- His eldest son, Israel, would die here before the family made the trip to Ohio.

"We, the subscribers, ministers of the church of Christ, being at East Granville, a number of individuals, serious persons belonging to Granville, Massachusetts, and Granby, in Connecticut, and being about to remove to Granville, in the State of Ohio, requested to be formed into a regular church state previous to their departure. We attended to their request and formed them accordingly, and recommend them to the care and favor of the Great Head of the church. Likewise, at their request, we attended while they chose Timothy Rose and Levi Hayes for their deacons, and Samuel Everett, jr., their clerk.

[Signed]

AARON CHURCH,
NATHANIEL GAYLOR,
OZIUS ELLS,
TIMOTHY M. COOLEY,
JOEL BIRKER,
ROGER HARRINGTON."

The confession of faith, the covenant and articles of discipline adopted by the church, are about the same as were in general acceptance and use in the Calvinistic churches of New England, of that day. The male members present and signing the articles of agreement were Samuel Everett, Israel Wells, Joseph Simmel, Timothy Rose, Roswell Graves, Job Case, Samuel Thrall, Levi Hughes, Huron Rose, Samuel Everett, jr., Silas Winchel, and James Thrall.

Excerpt from the History of Licking County, O.

(Accessed from Google Books)

What this tells us:

- Israel Wells was a prominent figure in the establishment of a new Calvinistic church in Granville, Ohio in 1805. He joined other New Englanders from Simsbury and Farmington, Connecticut and Granville, Massachusetts in forming this religious community in one of the earliest occupied Ohio territories.

Israel Wells is listed as a resident of Granville, Ohio by the 1810 U.S. Federal Census.

(NO VISUAL AVAILABLE)

Milson	William	"	8	48	1 June 1818
Mells	Timothy	"	8	48	12 July 1819
Walter	Meshele	"	8	48	26 May 1818
Webster	Andrew	"	8	48	21 April 1818
Wadsworth	Israel	"	8	48	5 Mar 1820
Wadham	George	"	8	48	
Wells	Israel	"	8	48	7 Dec 1819
Warren	Edward	"	8	48	5 Oct 1819
Woodworth	Elizabeth	"	8	48	26 Sep 1818

U.S. Revolutionary War Pensioners (Application), 1801-1815, 1818-1872

Maximilian Robinson	do	96 00	2,124 88	Virginia cont'l	July 7, 1819	Ap'l 29, 1818	71	Died July 13, 1825.
William Smith, 3d	do	96 00	691 88	Delaware cont'l	July 7, 1819	Ap'l 29, 1818	71	
Lewis Stump	do	96 00	1,521 06	Virginia cont'l	Dec. 30, 1819	May 1, 1818	77	
Meshele Walker	do	96 00	170 57	N. J. continental	Sep. 17, 1819	May 26, 1818	69	Dropped from the roll under act May 1, 1820.
Thomas White	do	96 00	1,520 02	Virginia cont'l	Sep. 23, 1819	May 5, 1818	80	
Israel Wells	do	96 00	30 90	Conn. continental	May 30, 1820	Dec. 17, 1819	61	Dropped from the roll under act May 1, 1820.
Obadiah Wilson	do	96 00	799 76	Penn. continental	Jan. 19, 1822	May 6, 1818	76	
Eliel Wales	do	96 00	279 25	Conn. continental	Oct. 21, 1819	Ap'l 27, 1818	61	Died March 24, 1821.

U.S. Pension Roll of 1835

What this tells us:

- In the 1820s, Israel Wells filed for federal pension for his war service but never received it. He was dropped from eligibility for his pension in the Pension Act of May 1, 1820, a resolution instituted by President James Monroe's administration. The U.S. did not have enough money to support all Revolutionary War veterans, resulting in a cut to compensation for those who did not appear to be in need of financial assistance.

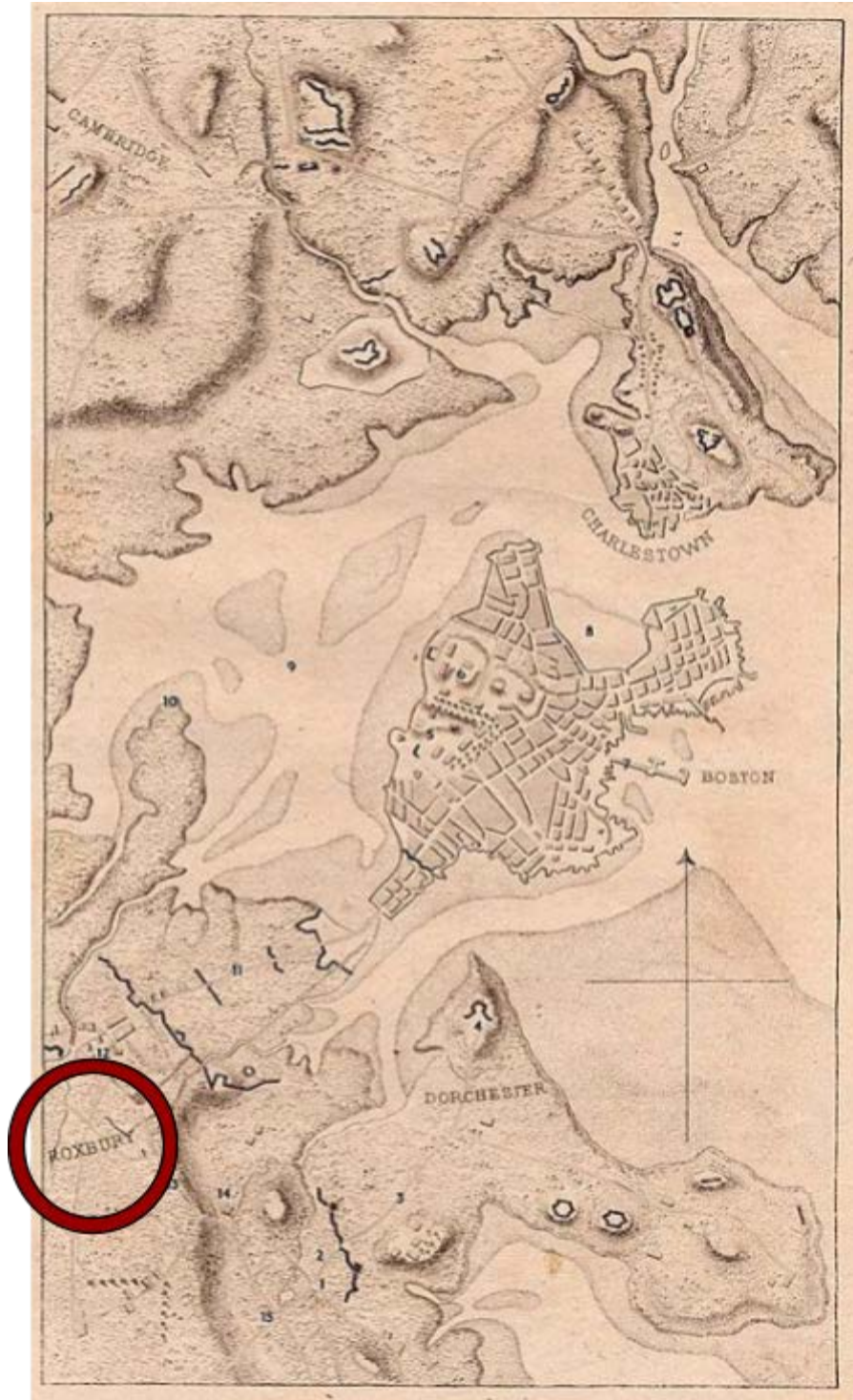
Inscription:

“Nathaniel Humphrey his horn/Made at Roxbury Nov. 1st 1775 In cp”

[2] Nathaniel Humphrey (1735-1822)



Powder Horn belonging to Lt. Nathaniel Humphrey, Simsbury, 2nd Regiment, 7th Company under Capt. Abel Pettibone, in Gen. Jos. Spencer's command in 1775 at Roxbury and the Siege of Boston. Also listed as 1st Lt. in the 22nd Continental Regiment (1776) under Capt. Abel Pettibone and Col. Samuel Wyllys.



A 1775 map of Boston Harbor, where Humphrey was stationed, with Roxbury circled.

Roxbury 17th June 1775

Sir I Recd. your ^{Dated} the 12th of this Instant Informing
you was well & yours & that things did not go for-
ward at New York as was expected, those Troops that
embark at New York are likely wided hear as
is some Troops come in some say to the amount
of 4000, but we do not believe it, They have some
Hors arrived, m^r Govin informed that they lost
six horses out of them that came in last
It is Reported the Regular Dring in last
the 17th June. we are ready to receive them
& after that we shall be able to give a better
account of the affairs, Jim^l Spencers Reg^t is at
Roxbury we are in hopes to get

June 17th

Last Night a party went on Dochester point & began
entrenching several Heavy Cannon were fired this
morning from the fort on Bacon Hill It is said at
a party on Rhode Island who are at work there
give my Love to all friends & to Azariah Piney &c.
Send me word how he does

Remember my Love to my family &c.

I am Sir yours to serve Nath^l Humphrey

N.B we expect to be in business every hour
Some think they will fall out but I do not believe
it if they do they will make a heavy Paper

(Letter transcribed)

Roxbury __th June 1775

Sir I Rec.^d yours dated the 12th of this Instant Informing
you was well & yours & that things Did not go for-
ward at New York as was Expected, those troops that
embark, at New York are likely arived hear as there
is Some Troops Come in some say to the amount
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stors arived, m.^r gordin Informed that they lost
six horses out of them that Came in Last
Tis Reported the Regulars Dring in Last
the 17th June we are ready to receive them
& after that we shall be able to give a better
account of the affairs General Spencers Regiment is at ~
Roxbury we are in Houses as yet ~

June 17th

Last Night a party went on Dorchester point & began
Entrenching several Heavy Cannon ware fired this
morning from the fort on Beacon Hill, Tis said at
a party on Noddle Island who are at work there
give my Love to all friends & to azariah Piney etc.
send me word how he Does ~

Remember my Love to my family etc. ~

I am Sir yours to serve

Nath.^l Humphrey

N:B we Expect to be in Business Every hour some think they will salley out but I do not believe it if they Doe they
will make a heavy Push ~

Note: Spelling is as it appears in the original letter.

Humphrey's letter was most likely written over the course of a week. While the date is ripped at the top of the letter, the first part of the note must have been written between the 12th (the date he mentions in the first section of the letter, and the same week that the Battle at Bunker Hill began) and the 17th, where the letter continues on a new dated entry. While Humphrey's regiment arrived in Boston to participate in the Siege of Boston, it is unclear whether Humphrey saw action on Bunker Hill. On June 17th, Humphrey recounts a "party... on Dorchester point" entrenching in anticipation of the British militia.

The Powder Horn Timeline

April 1775

Nathaniel Humphrey answers the call at Lexington and Concord and arrives in Boston with the 22nd Continental Regiment to participate in the Siege of Boston.

November 1775

Nathaniel Humphrey's powder horn is carved at Roxbury, Mass. on November 1st by the well-known Simsbury carver. The horn, more artistically sophisticated than Israel Wells's horn, features stylized flowers and a polish.

January 1776

Israel Wells enlists in January as a private in 22nd Continental Colonel Wyllys' Regiment under Capt. Abel Pettibone while Humphrey continues to serve in the same regiment and is promoted to 1st Lieutenant. The men march to Peekskill, New York that summer.

December 1776

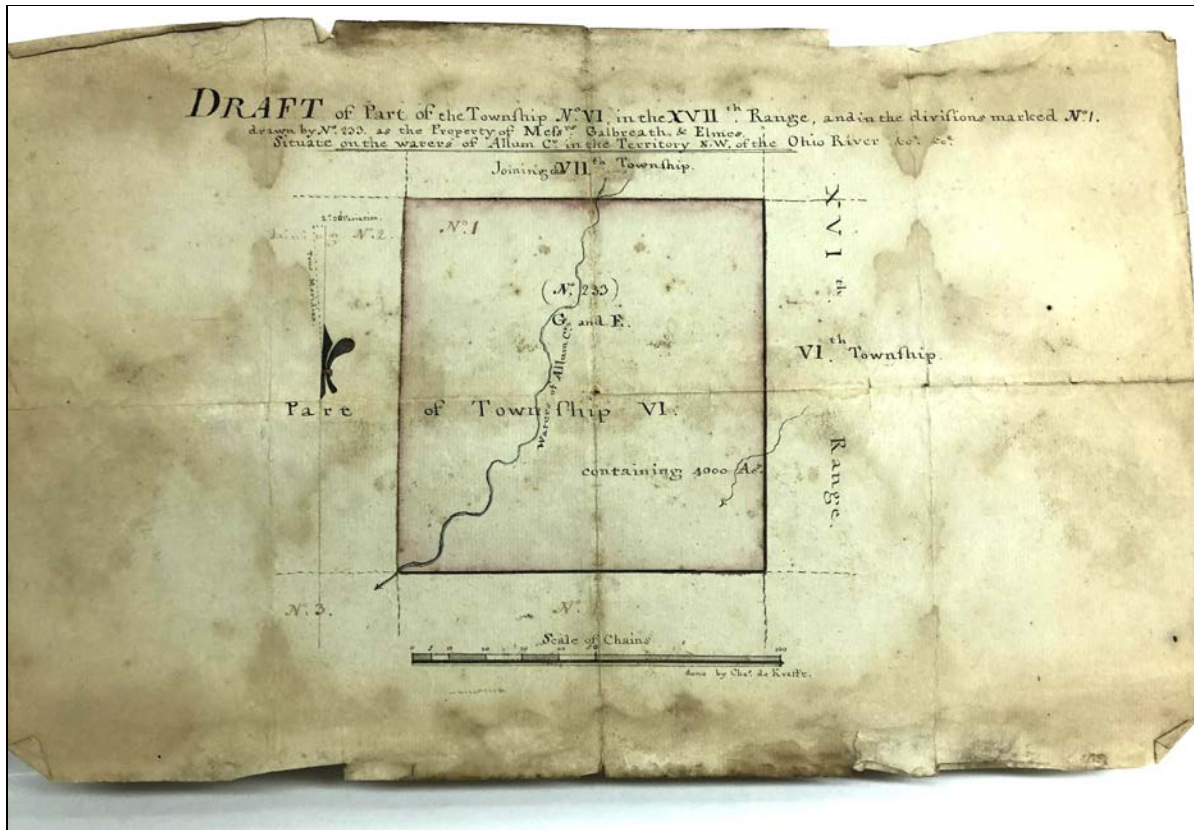
Israel Wells's powder horn is carved at Peekskill, New York on December 9th, though the carver is not known. The Wells horn presents a cruder aesthetic, with a fainter inscription that includes a short chant along with his name, date, and location: "With my Pow/der, Ball and/Gun/I Will make/My enemies/Disburse and run." The horn also boasts a drawing of a sailing ship with portholes for cannons.

The HENRY ELY Inscription



The name "Henry Ely" is inscribed on the Israel Wells powder horn twice.

The name "Henry Ely" is written twice around the Israel Wells powder horn. Henry Ely was the brother of Dudley Ely and the second son of Benjamin Ely. Benjamin, in addition to being a teacher, founding The Aquatics temperance group, and becoming the Simsbury town clerk in 1809, was a speculator for Ohio townships during the Westward Expansion movement in the early 19th century. Below is one of Benjamin Ely's work documents where he shows Township XVI and Township XVII bordering the highlighted Township VI. This area of land is 40 miles from Israel Wells' township where he settled with his wife in the fall of 1803.



1803 draft of Benjamin Ely's Township VI in Ohio, approx. 40 miles

northwest of where Israel Wells would come to settle just months later.

Dudley Ely (1817-1895)

Inscribed “Dudley P. Ely/Horn/Made in Simsbury/April 4th 1839.” Also inscribed is “With my Pow/der, Ball and/Gun/I Will make/My enemies/Disburse and run.” These inscriptions were common phraseology used by soldiers of the Revolution.



The Dudley Ely horn comes two generations after the two Simsbury horns of the American Revolution. Half as small as the war horns, and made of a darker and thicker ox horn, the Dudley Ely horn carried significantly less gunpowder and was designed for short hunting trips. The engraved date on the Dudley Ely horn is April 4, 1839 -- a bit old for this type of crude handcrafting, one might imagine. Dudley, unlike his brother Henry, did not spend his life in Simsbury and was a prominent figure in South Norwalk, CT.