

# **Hunting Bags and Shooting Accessories**

## **in Virginia & North Carolina,**

### **A Pictorial Mini-book in 3 Parts**

#### **Part 3**

**By**

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Around 1830, percussion-cap ignition systems were well on their way in replacing flintlocks. Many original flintlock guns were converted to percussion, and most, but not all, new guns were built with percussion locks. With flintlocks, all the hunter needed for ignition of a powder charge was a gun flint that could be used for numerous shots, could be re-sharpened, and could be used for many additional shots. Gun flints were available commercially. They also could be knapped from a found flint cobble by the shooter in a pinch. Flintlock guns were a little slower in reloading than percussion ones, and priming powder in a flintlock pan was rendered useless when wet. Percussion caps were more water/rain resistant, but a shooter could not improvise for them in the field. They had to be purchased commercially in sufficient quantity to last for the duration of a hunting expedition. Percussion caps were available and often carried in small tins like those in Figure 23a. The small gutta-percha box at the bottom of Figure 23a was discovered with percussion caps inside.

Caps could be dispensed several ways. The slowest and most clumsy method was directly from a can with one's fingers. Figure 23b shows an improvised, leather, "speed loader" for percussion caps that would have been attached to the shoulder strap of a hunting bag. Four original caps are still in place.

The fastest and most convenient way to cap a percussion lock was with a capper. Five such cappers are illustrated in Figure 23c. All of these are brass and hold numerous percussion caps. The three, oblong examples are gravity fed and have a spring-loaded feeding mechanism. The long capper at the bottom is spring fed with a spring-loaded feeder. The round capper is a more complex, clockwork device that forces the percussion caps into its spring-loaded feeder.



Figure 23a





Figure 23b





Figure 23c



All muzzle-loaded, black-powder guns needed frequent cleaning. Gun worms or jags, attached to ramrods, were used in this task. Nine rifle worms are shown in Figure 24. The longest in the center is five inches. Ones for smooth-bore guns were similar, but larger.



Figure 24

The ability to start fires was an absolute necessity at home and on hunting trips. The most common period method was with a piece of flint, a steel striker, and tinder such as flax tow. This method dates back at least two thousand years.

The strikers in Figures 25a, 25b, and 25c were all recovered in Virginia, and some were likely made in Virginia. The sheet-iron (tin), tinder boxes in Figures 25b and 25c were repurposed British tobacco boxes dating to the eighteenth century. Spent gun flints are seen with the tinder box in Figure 25b and the bottom box in Figure 25c. Flax tow is also present in the bottom box in Figure 25c.

Obviously, a hunter with a flintlock gun could use his flintlock for starting fires. However, he would probably also have at least a striker, if not a complete tinder box, in his hunting bag as an option.





Figure 25a





Figure 25b



Figure 25c



All powder horns required filling with powder from a larger supply horn or a keg, either through the horn's spout or through a plug in the butt of the horn. Three funnels, two cow horn and a copper one, are shown in Figure 26. Funnels facilitated the filling process. While not generally expected in a hunting bag, a funnel certainly was associated gear.



Figure 26

Awls and gimlets are sometimes found in hunting bags. Two such gimlets and an awl are pictured in Figure 27. The pointed end of a gun hammer also served as awls (see Figure 14a).

One common piece of bag gear was a turkey call, fashioned from a turkey or other bird wing bone (Figure 28). These rarely survive.



Figure 27





Figure 28

The final piece of gear associated with hunting bags to be discussed in this article is the game hanger. Three are shown in Figure 29. They are made of forged iron and would have been suspended on a shoulder strap. Game hangers are interesting and quite rare artifacts. In fact, to our knowledge, none have been found in Virginia, North Carolina, or any other Southern state. In consulting with several of our colleagues, the consensus is game hangers were peculiar to Pennsylvania and possibly Delaware. Consequently, we debated about even including them in this article. We decided to do so, however, on the outside chance that someone reading this article has encountered a game hanger with a solid provenance of being made and/or used in the South.





Figure 29

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