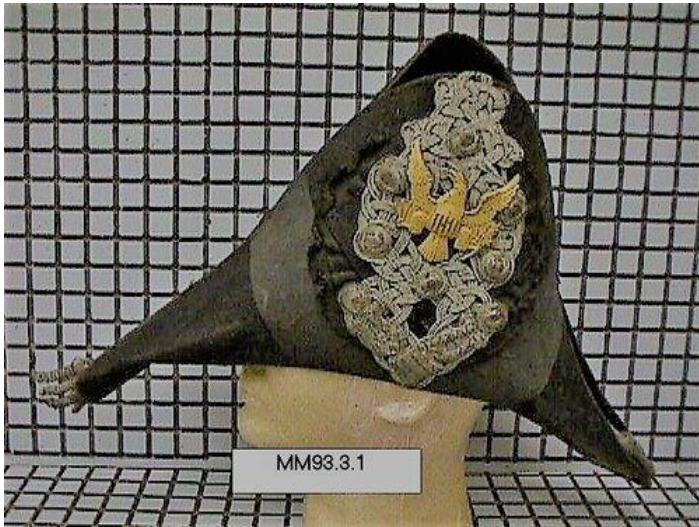


October 28, 2020

Circa 1830s-40s Militia Officer's Hat

(Pennsylvania Military Museum, J. Gleim, Museum Curator)



This circa 1830s-1840s hat was probably worn by Colonel Charles Allen Thompson of Mexico, Juniata County, Pennsylvania. Thompson served with the 73rd Regiment, 1st Brigade, 10th Division, Pennsylvania Militia. Pennsylvania's militia was officially organized in 1777 through the first militia act, which required compulsory service. By the 1840s, compulsory service had been replaced with an all-volunteer system. Colonel Thompson came from a distinguished military family; his grandfather Captain William Thompson fought with the Cumberland County Associators during the Revolutionary War.

The hat, known as a Chapeau de Bras (literally "arm hat") is a bicorne hat with a slim profile, designed to be compressed and carried under the arm. The style evolved from the familiar tricorne hat worn during the Revolutionary era. In Colonel Thompson's time, the hat was worn "fore and aft"; with one corner facing forward and one back, unlike the "athwart" style favored during earlier periods. Chapeau de Bras hats continued to be an optional dress item for the U.S. military into the twentieth century. It was not retired by the U.S. Navy until 1940.

Colonel Thompson's Chapeau de Bras is constructed of beaver fur and trimmed with feathers, silver bullion wire, and gold gilt decorations. It was purchased from and made by William H. Horstmann of Philadelphia. A native of Germany, William Horstmann learned the silk weaving trade in France and emigrated to the United States. He established his business in Philadelphia in 1815. In 1828, Horstmann expanded his business to include a department dedicated to the production of military goods ranging from hats to swords, which soon became the nation's preeminent military supplier. The firm remained in business until 1935.

Thompson's Chapeau de Bras is a striking contrast to the simpler headgear worn by the military today.