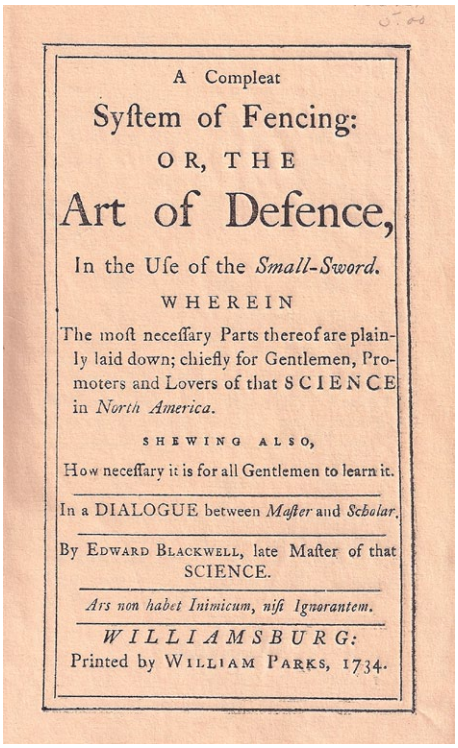
Fencing in Colonial America and the Early Republic: 1620 – 1800

by Ben Miller 2009

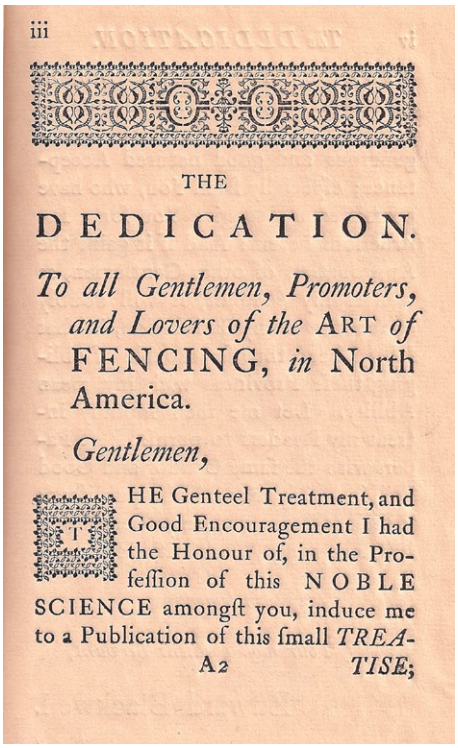
During the last two centuries, books written about the history of fencing have tended to focus solely on Europe and have ignored the less-populous colonies that flourished on the other side of the Atlantic. This comes as no surprise, considering that the North American colonies had little, if any, historical impact upon the progress of the art of fencing as it continued to evolve in Europe. As a result, modern historians have tended to overlook the important traditions that existed in the United States during the colonial and early federal periods. For instance, Carl Thimm, in his voluminous nineteenth century fencing bibliography, makes no mention whatsoever of the earliest known American fencing treatise, written by Edward Blackwell and published in 1734. Part of the blame, no doubt, also rests squarely on the shoulders of American historians, many of whom have outright dismissed the existence of their own traditions. In an 1884 history of Philadelphia, Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott declared that

> It is a singular fact that the native American, in every part of the Union, though he be ever ready to fight his battles with the knife, the pistol, or the rifle, and he may on an emergency strike with his fist, has never taken kindly to scientific fisticuffs or the small-sword exercise. (1)

Although American duelists as a group certainly preferred the pistol and bowie-knife to the small-sword in 1884, this was not always the case. In fact, if one examines the original, primary sources set down during these eras, it becomes apparent that a rich, vibrant, and diverse fencing tradition existed in America since the early days of the colonial era.



A Compleat
Syſtem of Fencing:
OR, THE
Art of Defence,
In the Uſe of the *Small-Sword.*
WHEREIN
The moſt neceſſary Parts thereof are plainly laid down; chiefly for Gentlemen, Promoters and Lovers of that SCIENCE in *North America.*
SHEWING ALSO,
How neceſſary it is for all Gentlemen to learn it.
In a DIALOGUE between *Maſter* and *Scholar.*
By EDWARD BLACKWELL, late Maſter of that SCIENCE.
Ars non habet Inimicum, niſi Ignorantem.
WILLIAMSBURG:
Printed by WILLIAM PARKS, 1734.



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THE
DEDICATION.

To all Gentlemen, Promoters, and Lovers of the ART *of* FENCING, *in* North America.

Gentlemen,

THE Genteel Treatment, and Good Encouragement I had the Honour of, in the Profeſſion of this NOBLE SCIENCE amongſt you, induce me to a Publication of this ſmall *TREA-*

A2 *TISE;*

The first fencing treatise printed in America was written by Edward Blackwell. This facsimile edition was hand set, printed and bound in 18th century style, at the Printing and Post Office in Williamsburg, Virginia, 1976.

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FENCING IN EARLY NEW ENGLAND

In seventeenth century New England, the colonists lived under a near-constant threat of violence, which could come from any number of sources: Indians, the French, marauding pirates, criminals, or rebels within their own community. Soon after the founding of the colony, laws were passed requiring all adult males to bear arms (2), and up until the outbreak of King Phillip's War in 1675, the sword, ax and pike were the preferred weapons of the colonial New England militia. Firearms were so scarce and unreliable that some soldiers did not even know how to use a gun, as one Massachusetts soldier recounted in 1686: "I thought a pike was best for a young soldier, and so I carried a pike, and…knew not how to shoot off a musket." (3). As late as 1666, one-third of the militia still had no firearms. (4) In such an environment, knowledge of swordsmanship was paramount. During the Pequot War in 1637, colonists assaulting an Indian fortress fired a single volley of shot, cast aside their guns, "tooke their swords in their hands…& fell upon the Indians where a hot fight continued about the space of an houre." (5) Indians battling the colonists were "slain with the sword, some hewed to pieces, others run through with their rapiers, so as they were quickly dispatched…"(6)

Military companies in New England regularly performed exercises of arms (7), presumably during which soldiers were taught how to fence with pike, sword and ax in the military fashion. Civilian fencing-schools appeared in the region as well, as evinced by a work published in London, in 1673, entitled *Observations Made by the Curious in New England*, which informs us that, "in Boston there are no musicians by trade. A dancing-school was set up but put down; a fencing-school is allowed."(8) An Englishman visiting America in 1685 mentioned in his journal that an ex-soldier named Malinson now taught "young gentlemen to fence in Boston" at the Royal Exchange. (9) In 1686, another fencing-school was set up by Richard Crisp, who stated to a local council

> That whereas there are several gentlemen in this town, that are desirous your petitioner should instruct them in the use of weapons, and whereas there is a law, that forbiddeth the building of any edifice with wood, above such a bigness as the said law permits, I humbly pray your honours, that you will please to grant me liberty to build a low, slight house for that purpose, of about twenty feet broad and 24 or 25 feet long, and about 10 feet high, with a flat roof of wood for that use, at the lower end of my garden, a convenient place for that purpose, being a great distance from any house, so that it can be neither dangerous for fire, nor offensive to any neighbors. (10)

The council granted Crisp's petition, and the first physical description of a New England fencing-hall was set down in writing. Not all fencing masters, however, met with such approval. In 1681, a "Frenchman dancer and fencer" named Henry Sherlot was expelled from the "Towne of Boston" for being, as the selectmen noted, a "a person very insolent and of ill fame that raves and scoffes at religion, of a turbulent spirit, no way fitt to be tollerated to live in this place." (11) Such strict enforcement of moral conduct, which the Puritans were so famous for, evidently did not succeed in ridding the locals of their capacity for violence. In 1680, a Dutch visitor named Jasper Danckaerts observed, "Drinking and fighting occur [in New England] not less than elsewhere; and as to truth and godliness, you must not expect more of them than of others." (12) Danckaerts's comment about fighting was certainly correct; during the late 1680s, fencers in Boston are recorded as taking part in bloody, gladiatorial "stage-fights" similar to those held at the Bear Gardens and Figg's amphitheater in London. (13)

Among the towns of the New Haven colony, public fencing bouts of a less brutal nature were held. Soldiers in the colonial militia were expected to be skilled in the art of cudgeling, as evinced by a government order issued in 1656, which decreed that "each town provide a good pair of hilts for soldiers to play at cudgels with; and that they exercise themselves in playing at backsword, &c.; that they learn

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how to handle their weapons for the defence of themselves and offence of their enemies…" (14) Six times a year, these militias would be called out for a "general training," near the marketplace, during which old men, women and children were invited to serve as spectators for the performance of military exercises and the athletic contests which would accompany them. The activities included bouts of "cudgel, backsword, fencing," and, additionally, "running, leaping, wrestling, stool-ball, nine-pins, and quoits." Such events were "enhanced by sharing the spectacle with the multitude, meeting old friends, and making acquaintances with persons of congenial spirit." (15)

FENCING SCHOOLS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

In 1774, a child named William Dunlap visited New York City for the first time. Years later, after becoming a successful actor, playwright and theatre producer, he recounted his initial impressions of the place:

> The first visit to the great city was of course all wonder to me. I remember that preparations for hostilities were making. Horsemen's helmets, swords and belts, with other equipments, were displayed at the shop-doors and windows. In a walk taken with my father out of town, on the new road, he was attracted by preparations for supplying the city with water from the Collect, or fresh-water pond…and entering among some mounds of earth on the east of the road, where Franklin-street now is, we saw a company of Gentlemen practicing, with an instructor, the small-sword salute. (16)

Although Dunlap himself did not bother to pursue the small-sword, during the mid to late part of the eighteenth century, anyone seeking to learn the art did not have to look far, as the great northern cities literally abounded with fencing schools. To study swordsmanship was not only in the interest of would-be-duelists and military men. To be a graceful and skillful fencer was the ambition of nearly every gentleman, and was considered one of the best aids to "graceful carriage, ease of movement, and courtly manners." (17) It also promoted physical fitness, as evinced by the words of Bostonian Jonathan Belcher, who, in 1731, wrote a letter to his son, advising him "to intersperse your tasks & labours with proper recreations; walking, riding, bowling and billiards are wholesome exercises. Therefore use them for your better health, and to these I wou'd add fencing, which will extend all the parts & members of your body, open your breast, & make you more erect and give a greater advantage to your growth. I shall be pleas'd to hear you have put yourself under a good master of this gentlemanly science..." (18) Likewise, in 1772, Dr. Benjamin Rush, a Philadelphia physician and future signer of the Declaration of Independence, went as far as to recommend the activity to prospective patients:

Philadelphia physician Benjamin Rush, who in 1772 recommended fencing for its mental and physiological benefits (Library of Congress)

> FENCING calls forth most of the muscles into exercise, particularly those which move the limbs. The brain is likewise roused by it, through the avenue of the eyes, and its action, as in the case of music, is propagated to the whole system. It has long been the subject of complaint, that the human species has been degenerating for these several centuries…we grant that rum—tobacco-tea—and some other luxuries of modern invention, have had a large share in weakening the stamina of our constitutions, and thus producing a more feeble race of men; yet we must attribute much of our great inferiority in strength, size and agility to our forefathers, to the disuse which the invention of gun-powder and fire arms hath introduced of those athletic exercises, which were so much practiced in former ages, as part of military discipline. (19)

Additionally, one anonymous fencing instructor, advertising in New York, asserted that practice of the art imparted a "share of manly confidence," "a bold and martial air," and that "the study of it in a scientific manner, tends to constitute a powerful invention, a quick conception, a penetrating judgment, and lively

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imagination." (20) But perhaps it was the Virginia fencing master, Edward Blackwell, who summed up the various physical and social advantages best:

> But was a Man never to fight with his Sword, no Exercise is more wholesome, and delightful to the learner, than this of Fencing: For, by working all Parts of the Body, it strengthens the Limbs, opens the Chest, gives a good Air, and handsome Deportment to the Body, a majestick Tread; and makes him active, vigorous, and lively; and also enables him to serve his Friend, and Country: In fine, Air in Wearing, and Skill in Using a SWORD, are such additional Accomplishments to a Gentleman, that he is never esteem'd polite and well bred without them… (21)

Here it must be mentioned that all these statements are in keeping with the sentiments of how fencing was thought of in Europe. Many modern historians have referred to the fencing practiced during this era as a "sport" but this author has found no single instance of a fencing instructor or student describing the art as a sport or game. Teachers referred to fencing as the "noble science of defense," the "true art of defence," the "art of fencing," or simply "self-defense," while at the same time emphasizing both protection of oneself and one's country.

While the duel is not implicitly discussed, it is obliquely referred to. Edward Blackwell touches upon this notion in the opening pages of his fencing treatise, wherein he states,

> Since Men do not all Times truly exercise their Senses, it is highly necessary that a Gentleman should be qualified to defend himself from the Ignorance and Insults of abusive Persons, which, in my humble Opinion, cannot be completely done without this noble Art. (22)

In this passage, when Blackwell talks about defending oneself, he is actually referring to the context of the duel. This is a very important point, which perfectly echoes the comment by Philadelphia master John de Florette that those without knowledge of fencing "have to put up with insults of the grossest nature… whereas, were they masters of self-defense, they would be able to resent it in a genteel manner." (23) In the prevailing mentality of the era, when reputations were so highly valued, insults and defamation of character were themselves considered forms of assault, which, sometimes, could only be legitimately rectified by resorting to a ritual armed combat. As one author explained in 1704,

> You must not invade your Neighbours Honour, nor make any Attempt upon his Reputation: A good Name is no contemptible Treasure; the Wise Man prizes it above an Estate; it sets off Birth, and gives an Air even to Poverty; it shines brighter than Wealth, and sparkles more than all the Tinsel Gawdry of Fortune; it supports Grandure, and sweetens Misfortune. A Bankrupt that has lost his Coin, if he has not forfeited his Honour, has Resource at Command. Though his Fortune be fallen, he has a Fund to rebuild it on: But a Man without Honour is dead to all the Offices of Society and Commerce; now when his moral Capacity lies in the Grave, his Physical one alone creates Misery and Contempt to himself, Sport for Some, and Pity for Others. (24)

If a man's good name was called into question, his very identity was considered under attack. Thus, the duel itself was regarded as a form of self-defense. Since the legal system could not be relied upon to protect a person's reputation, dueling was viewed as "the only means…by which a man who has been injured by someone who possesses no rights over him, can wash away the stain left by the injury he has received." (25) The Philadelphia fencing master Jean Baptiste Lemaire emphasized the importance of being prepared for such encounters:

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> In case of accident, or of those outrageous attacks which even politeness and attention cannot always avoid, a knowledge of the sword often prevents an abuse of it, as men who feel superior in strength and skill are generally cool, deliberate, and steady, and by this means they would gradually arrive at proper notions of courage, temperance, honour and justice. (26)

Certainly not all Americans agreed with such notions of "honour and justice;" some, in fact, took issue with the very idea that fencing was a wholesome endeavor:

> I should be glad to know in what the rationale of Fencing consists, or of what use it is? Perhaps we will be told it is of use to enable a man to avenge himself when insulted… If our youth learn to fence, they must wear swords; because it is a folly to learn a thing for which they will have no use. Thus provided with swords, they will soon find an opportunity of reducing their theory to practice; either by insulting some other person, or conceiving themselves affronted upon the slightest occasion…How contemptible and ridiculous it is to see a nation, in profound peace, with every one his sword to his side, as if they were a nation of Ishmaelites where every man's hand was raised against the hand of his neighbor! (27)

Obviously aware of such criticism, however, Blackwell makes clear that would-be duelists should exercise the utmost caution and restraint when engaging in these affairs:

> The nicest Part of Fencing consists in the Defensive, and particularly against the Bold Ignorant…No Person ought ever to make any other Use of his Skill in Fencing, than in his own Defence; and then in such a cool and temperate Manner, as neither to be exasperated by Passion, or afraid to exert his judgment; then a Gentleman will reap the benefit of his instruction.

Blackwell also refutes the idea that acquiring skill with a sword was apt to make men more rash or prone to violence:

> the Knowledge of this Art made always a very different Impression on a very discreet Person, from what they imagined; for, knowing the Danger and dismal Consequences attending the rash Use of it, they will rather put up an Affront, and dispense with a little ill Treatment, than imprudently rush themselves, or send others, into Eternity.

Thus, he concludes, knowledge of fencing "mollifies Heat and Passion, instead of exciting Rage and Fury." (28)

The masters who taught these arts had several things in common. They were often, but not always, of foreign extraction, with most hailing from France, and a few from Italy and the British Isles. They taught weapons as diverse as small-sword, backsword, broadsword, spadroon, dagger and cudgel, as well as boxing. In addition to fencing, these masters often provided instruction in finer arts such as dancing (by far the most common), music, foreign languages and horsemanship. This diverse artistic curriculum was by no means a recent innovation, but was in keeping with a long tradition of chivalric education that had roots stretching back to the Middle Ages. (29)

NEW YORK

Between 1754 and 1787, New York City was a veritable hub for American fencers, with at least fourteen fencing schools total, eleven of which operated in a concentrated area of lower Manhattan that could

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be spanned during a twenty-minute walk. By way of comparison, Paris, traditionally thought of as the Mecca for European fencing, contained about eighteen fencing schools during the same period. (30) The oldest New York fencing school of which we have record opened sometime prior to July 12, 1731, when the New York Gazette noted that

> The Noble Science of Fencing with Small Sword is taught by Charles Malone at his School-House in Smith-Street next door to the Three Pideons in New York, at the usual Prices given to neighboring Professors. His Hours during the Sultry-Season are from Five to Six in the Morning and likewise in the Evening. (31)

That same month, Malone wrote a letter to the Gazette lambasting the professed skills and excessive advertisements of various "Dancing-Masters, Linguists and Masters of other valuable Arts and Sciences" teaching in New York City. Malone also mentioned a dilemma that was undoubtedly faced by many other fencing masters:

> I hitherto have not advertised tho' (for ought I know) such a Thing might have been necessary, yet I was some-what timorous of appearing so Publick, fearing the Consequence would not prove so favourable as I might expect; but now am by Emulation compell'd, lest my Benefactors and others should Point at me as uncapable.

Malone had also evidently been involved in a duel, for he noted that "Tho' Mr. Brownell's Discourses concerning me to a Gentleman of eminent Characters, have put me to the Sword which ought to have been a Man's last Resort; yet he may expect a Pupil or two (by me recommended) in order to be taught something contained in his &c. which I understand not." (32)

During the 1750s and 1760s, the number of fencing schools in the city rose significantly. The first of these new schools was announced in 1754, and was run by John Rievers, "a Hollander." This school, which offered instruction in both fencing and dancing, was situated on the corner of Whitehall and Stone Street, a location which may have been chosen for its proximity to the nearby British garrison, a potential source of customers. (33) Three years later, Rievers was still teaching "the noble science of Defence" and the art of dancing on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. (34) In 1756, the opening of another school was advertised in a local newspaper:

> These are to give notice to all gentlemen who desire to learn the right Method and true Art of Defence and pursuit of the small sword in its greatest Perfection, and extraordinary quick and speedy with all the guard, Parades, Mounts and lessons thereto belonging, fully described, and the best Rule for Playing against Artists or Others with Blunts or Sharps; that they may be taught the same by me Richard Lyneall, Professor and Master of the said Art, who is to be spoke with at the House of Mrs. Elizabeth Parmyster in Beaver St. Note, he teaches gentlemen in Private or Publick by the month or by the whole. (35)

The same year, Lyneall also appeared at the Tun Tavern in Philadelphia, where he was mentioned as a professor of "small-sword and self-defense." (36)

Other fencing masters in the area included the Frenchmen Saint Pry and Du Poke, who opened a fencing, dancing and French language academy on Little Dock Street (now Water Street) in 1775; William Turner, who had a salle over the Royal Exchange (on Broad Street near Water Street) in 1764; Thomas Varin, who taught the small-sword near the Fly-market in 1760; Thomas Berry, who opened a school for the small-sword in 1761 opposite Bowling Green; Peter Viani, an Italian who lived near the Royal Exchange

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and taught fencing and dancing from 1762 through at least 1769; Archibald McElroy, who taught fencing with Viani at a house adjacent to the Queen's Head (Fraunces Tavern) in 1764; and William Charles Hulett, who ran an academy for small-sword fencing, dancing, flute, guitar and violin "according to the present taste both in London and Paris" on French Church Street (now Pine Street) from 1752 thru at least 1786. (37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43) Additionally, Alexander Graydon, in his memoirs, mentions an instructor named Benson, who taught in the New York area during the revolutionary period. (44) Several of these schools seem to have been located in, or in close proximity to, the Royal Exchange, a large building located at the intersection of Broad and Dock (now Pearl) streets.

The Royal Exchange in 1752, the site of William Turner's New York salle

Local New York newspapers also announced the services of instructors who, for whatever reason, wished to remain anonymous, such as the following 1758 advertisement:

> GENTLEMEN that incline to be instructed in the Use of the SMALL or BACK-SWORD, by applying at the House of the Widow HUBBELL, near the Ship-Yards, they will meet with a Person sufficiently qualified to instruct them in that noble Science, on reasonable Terms. (45)

Another nameless fencing instructor advertised in 1774 that he "would be glad to instruct some gentlemen in the science," and directed any interested parties to apply to "J.L.C. Roome, Esq." (46) And in 1782, an anonymous individual "duly qualified to teach the Science of SMALL SWORD" announced that he would open a school in October of the same year, in which he would teach the art "conformable to the newest and most approved manner, practiced in London, Paris, and other European Academies." The school, it was noted, would also provide "elegant Engravings, representing every material attitude of the art." The next year, a "Mr. Wall" noted that he would give lessons at "the Theatre," every day, in "Fencing, or small sword play," and "initiate Gentlemen in those much esteemed Principles laid down in Mr. [John] McArthur's Treatise on that noble Science." (47)

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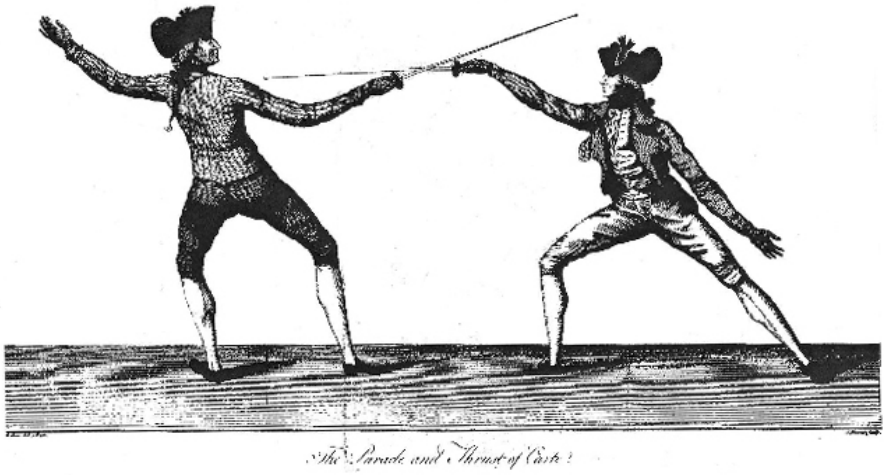

J. McArthur's treatise, *The Army and Navy Gentleman's Companion* (published in London in 1780 and 1784) was mentioned in advertisements by a New York fencing instructor.

The period after the Revolution saw the birth of a new crop of fencing schools in Manhattan, run by instructors such as Thomas Turner (who taught at "the Assembly-Room in the broadway") and Giles Barrett, both former residents of Boston. (48, 49) One of the last school to open in eighteenth-century New York was mentioned in 1787 among the columns of the Daily Advertiser:

> FENCING SCHOOL.
> M. Vilette has the honor to inform the gentlemen of this city, that he has opened his School on Golden-hill, No. 37, where that noble art will be taught every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, from ten o'clock A.M. until two.
> 24th Sept. 1787
> An EVENING SCHOOL is opened for the accommodation of such Gentlemen as cannot make it convenient to attend in the day. (50)

Villette had recently come from Philadelphia, where he had taught fencing and the French language alongside the Paris-educated master Jean Baptiste Lemaire. (51) In 1789, Vilette moved his school from Golden Hill (now John Street) to Cortland street, two doors down from Greenwich street. (52)

BOSTON

The Boston area also attracted its fair share of fencing masters, with at least ten schools offering instruction during the late eighteenth century. One such master was Donald McAlpine, who had come to the city in 1769 with "Captain Gorham from Nova Scotia." (53) That very same year he set up a school, and announced its existence in a local newspaper:

> *To lovers of the noble Science of Defence.*
>
> Gentlemen who chuse to be instructed in the Art commonly called the Back-Sword, are desired to apply to Donald McAlpine, formerly Serjeant in the 78th Regiment, who will instruct them in said Science to their entire Satisfaction, for Ten Shillings Sterling per Month, at his Room in Mr. Carne's House near the Meeting-House, New Boston, from Hours of One until Five in the Evening. Any Gentlemen who chuse to be instructed in said Science privately, may be waited upon by applying to said McAlpine.

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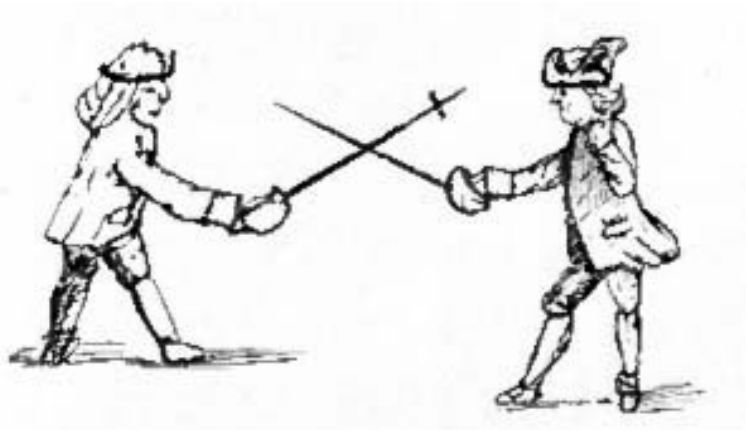
> –- Likewise said McAlpine will instruct Gentlemen and Ladies in French, in a most concise Manner and on reasonable Terms. (54)

The "Meeting House" which McAlpine mentions as the site of his school was the West Church at Lynde and Cambridge Streets. (55) The backsword that McAlpine taught consisted of a heavy, single-edged blade with a basket-hilt to protect the hand, and was the indigenous weapon of the Scots. Some evidence of McAlpine's instruction still survives among the journal notes of a Woburn schoolboy named Benjamin Thompson, who was apprenticing to a dry goods dealer in Boston at the time. Thompson, who would one day marry into royalty and become the famous Sir Benjamin Thompson Rumford, left a series of sketches which are currently the only known illustrations of eighteenth century fencing technique in the American colonies. He also transcribed some of McAlpine's elementary instructions:

> Directions for the Back Sword:
>
> I. To put yourself in a proper posture of Defence, viz., hold your Sword firm in your Right hand, with your point elevated as high as your Antagonist's head, and your hilt a little depressed, bringing your sword to range with your Antagonist's body and with his eyes: then step forward with your right foot about a foot, forming a square with your two feet: then stand upright and take your distance, just so as to touch your Antagonist's breast: then bend your left knee, which will bring your body in a proper Posture of Defence. (56)



Backsword fencers *en garde*, according to Boston fencing master Donald McAlpine (from The Memoir of Sir Benjamin Thompson)

These directions (taking one's distance) are consistent with fencing techniques that are still taught to this day, and Thompson's sketches of the combatants' postures closely resembles illustrations in Scottish backsword treatises of the period, such as those written by William Hope and Donald McBane. McAlpine's school seems to have fared well, for in 1771 he was still teaching at the Green Dragon Tavern on Union Street, where he warned his students that "they must begin [instruction] very soon, as [McAlpine] has a Call to teach in another Town, and this Quarter is the last he intends to teach in Boston." (57) He returned to the city, however, by 1775, when he announced that he would once again teach the backsword at "the Sign of the Two Gladiators" on the north side of King Street (now State Street) near the Long Wharf. (58) What became of McAlpine after this is uncertain; however, he was still teaching in 1778, during the Revolutionary War, when New Hampshire loyalist Enos Stevens recorded that "Capt McAlpian came for to instruct the gentlemen the broad sword &c. I enterd as one of his scollars at the rate of one guinea per month. Now the chief of our exercise is in the school." (59)

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The Green Dragon Tavern in Boston, where Donald McAlpine taught fencing with the backsword

Another interesting figure of the era was the aforementioned William Turner. The son of Ephraim Turner (a well-known Boston fencing master and fourth generation colonist), William had moved for a time to Manhattan, where he taught both fencing and dancing in 1764. (60) Turner's tenure in New York was cut short by the untimely death of his father in 1765, announced in the Boston Evening Post:

> Last Thursday Night died Mr. Ephraim Turner after a languishing illness. He for many Years taught Dancing and Fencing in this Town. (61)

That same year, William returned to Boston, where he took over his father's school and continued to teach "those polite Accomplishments in the newest Taste, and most approved Method, at the usual Price." (62) In 1769, with a mortgage from John Hancock, Turner purchased Concert Hall on the corner of Queen and Hanover streets. (63) Here, Turner taught fencing, dancing (Cotillons), music, and held numerous balls and musical concerts, such as the following, advertised in 1773:

> Mr. Turner respectfully begs leave to acquaint his subscribers that his last concert for this season will be on Tuesday evening the 27th current, at which time will be performed a variety of music received from London by Capt. Scott, which never has been performed in this place—compos'd by the most eminent masters in Europe. (64)

Turner also traveled to London in the early 1770s, possibly to receive further instruction in fencing and dancing, since he mentioned this trip in his advertisements. (65) His school must have done well initially, as he had several other fencing instructors teaching under him. One of these was William Pope, who arrived from Bermuda in 1766, and was teaching "Dancing, Small-sword, Backsword, and the French Language," out of Turner's school in 1770. (66) Another was Bontamps Fartier, who taught small-sword in Turner's dancing room one year later. (67) Turner's brother, Thomas, also opened a school for fencing and dancing in 1774. (68) Unfortunately for William Turner, this apparent prosperity was not to last the upheavals which occurred during the outbreak of the Revolution. Turner had been intimate with Joseph Warren and Paul Revere, both of whom were leading members of the Sons of Liberty. Among Turner's dancing students were two of Revere's daughters, Maria and Harriet. (69) Also, John Singleton Copley, who painted the famous portraits of Revere and Warren, painted both Turner and his wife, Ann Dumaresq. (70) In 1774, during the British military occupation of Boston, Warren wrote the following letter to Revere:

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> I have now a matter of private concern to mention to you, by the desire of Mr. Pitts. Our friend, Mr. William Turner, has, as you know, been persecuted for his political sentiments, and ruined in his business. The dancing and fencing master, named Pike, in Charleston, South Carolina, is about leaving the school, and has invited Mr. Turner to take his place. I am myself, and I know you are, always deeply interested for the prosperity of persons of merit, who have suffered for espousing the cause of their country. If you can, by giving Mr. Turner his true character, interest the gentlemen with you in his favor, you will do a benevolent action, and oblige Mr. Pitts, Mr. Turner, and myself. If they could be induced to write to their friends, and know what encouragement he might expect, it might save him the expense of a journey which he can ill afford to take. (71)

The request for help was made through John Pitts, who had taken part in the Boston Tea Party. The fact that Turner was intimately acquainted with three prominent rebels strongly suggests that he was involved in revolutionary activity. Whatever the case, Turner remained in Boston, working for a time as a shopkeeper on Cornhill. He was still teaching dancing in 1785, when a young John Quincy Adams visited Concert Hall and recorded in his diary,

> Went…to see Mr. Turner's scholars dance. Once every fortnight, there is such a forenoon ball, from 1 o'clock to three there were a number of minuets & country dances performed pretty well, and all the beauties of Boston seemed to be assembled there in one bright constellation. (72)

In 1789 Turner finally sold Concert Hall. Two years later he sailed for England, where he died at Mile End Creek, London, in 1792. (73)
Thomas Turner, William's brother, served in the Revolutionary War as the first lieutenant in Col. Henry Jackson's Continental Regiment. In 1779 he was promoted to Captain, and served in various Massachusetts regiments until 1783. Less than two months after the British evacuation of Manhattan, Thomas advertised the opening of a "Dancing and Fencing Academy" in the city, and noted that he

> retains a grateful sense of the favours conferred on his brother (who moved with considerable reputation in this line, some years before the revolution) by the polite circle in this city, and by his attention and abilities in his profession, he flatters himself they will extend their protection and favours to him. (74)

After settling briefly in New York, Thomas moved to Charleston, South Carolina, where he opened an academy in Beresford's Alley (now Chalmers Street), teaching both fencing and dancing from 1785 thru at least 1786. (75) According to the recollection of a family friend, Thomas was "a tall, fine figure, altogether a handsome man, was generally north in the summer, and made it very merry—played the violin and the flute…Resembled his father [Ephraim Turner]." (76)

Other instructors in the Boston area included Regnier, "a Pupil from the French and English Academies of Paris and London," who privately taught fencing, the French language and horsemanship near Newbury Street in 1773. (77) Also about the same time, Robert and St. George de Viart gave notice that they would "take scholars" to learn fencing, dancing, music and French in Salem and Marblehead. (78, 79) In 1774, George de Viart appeared in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where he announced the opening of another "Fencing-School" in the local Assembly-Room, and noted that he had taught at Salem, Marblehead and Gloucester for the past three years. (80) Fencing schools continued to flourish after the Revolution as well. In 1790, James Vila offered instruction in the small-sword and backsword at an academy in Concert Hall (81), and from 1793 thru 1796, Robert Kendall taught the backsword at his

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fencing school on State Street. (82, 83) Also in 1793, St. Pol was teaching fencing in the "well-arched… spatious Hall" of Charlestown Academy, and, it was noted, had previously exhibited with the master Placide at Salem. (84) In 1796, Giles Barrett began giving lessons in "fencing and in the manly art of self-defense [boxing]" at the Haymarket. Three years later, he removed to New York City, where he continued to teach the "elegant accomplishment" of fencing with the foil, broadsword and small-sword. (85) According to the recollection of former pupils, Barrett was "a perfect gentleman, somewhat vain, perhaps, as men of superior capabilities are apt to be, but therefore pardonable." (86)

PHILADELPHIA

Philadelphia also played host to numerous fencing schools. One of the earliest appeared in 1729, when the American Weekly Mercury announced that "The Art of Dancing is Carefully Taught (as it is now Practic'd at Court) by Samuel Perpoint, at his School…where for the Recreation of all Gentlemen and Ladies: There will be Country Dances every Thursday Evening; likewise he teaches small Sword." (87) The 1740s saw the opening of several additional schools. In 1742, a master named Richard Kynall was teaching both fencing and dancing in the city, and in 1746, Kennet, a "professor of the small-sword" gave instruction in fencing and the art of Terpischore [dancing]. (88) The same year, Thomas Skittirn announced his intention to erect a school for fencing and dancing in the city, provoking outrage from a pious patron of the local gazette:

> I was indeed surprized at the Contents of [the advertisement], but more at the audacity and brasen Impudence of the Author, in giving those detestable Vices, these high Epithets, viz. "The noble Art and Science of Defence," and "Pursuit of the Small Sword, and the Accomplishment of Dancing;" Contrary to which Titles, they may be proved to be of infernal Race and diabolical Descent. This he is not ashamed to publish to the World to be his Calling, to teach People to spend their precious, irrevocable Moments, in the most unprofitable, profuse Manner imaginable; for besides these particular Vices above mentioned, they are accompanied with a Train of other Evils, such as Pride, Emulation, Lasciviousness, Luxury, Idleness, & c. & c. and all this covered with the specious Colour of Noble Arts and Accomplishments; O HORROR! …Now let me make my humble Address to, and beseech the Supreme Authority of the Province of Pennsylvania, who bears the Christian Name, to consider how inconsistent with Christianity such heathenish Practises are, and provide that the free People of this City and Province may not become slaves to such impious Sensualities. (89)

Such tirades did not, evidently, succeed in ridding the city of fencing masters. Six years later, John Ormsby, who had "arrived lately from Newark College," advertised he would teach fencing and dancing three days per week at the house of Mr. Foster in Market Street. Ormsby must have been a true Renaissance man, for, on alternate days, he also offered instruction in

> vulgar and decimal arithmetick, vulgar fractions, and the extraction of the square and cube roots; how to measure all sorts of superficies and solids by the pen, various ways, and by Gunterscale, sliding rule and sector; merchants accounts after the Italian manner; geometry, trigonometry, gauging, surveying and dialling; practical navigation, teaching how to keep a ship way with or without the assistance of books or instruments, and how to take a celestial observation divers curious ways; also several other branches too tedious to mention. (90)

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The next decade saw the arrival of several new masters in the city, many of whom set up shop in the vicinity of Second Street and Carter's Alley. In 1763, the French fencing-master John De Florette notified the public that he taught broadsword, backsword, spadroon and dagger at the Prince of Orange on Second Street. Lest anyone mistake his brand of fencing for a mere exercise, De Florette noted that "Young men without it [knowledge of fencing] have to put up with insults of the grossest nature, and much to their dishonor, whereas, were they masters of self-defense, they would be able to resent it in a genteel manner." (91) During the 1760s, the Italian John Baptist Tioli and the Frenchman Martin Foy, both fencing-masters, taught small-sword and dancing in the area. (92) Tioli's school had opened in 1763, and, it was noted that he had performed in London, Dublin, and at several of the courts in Germany, France, Portugal, and Italy. Tioli was still teaching in Philadelphia as late as 1768, and may have continued to do so until his death in 1771. (93) Martin Foy taught his arts in the assembly room of the Pennsylvania State House (now known as Independence Hall) as late as 1769, when it was announced that

> He proposes teaching a few Gentlemen the use of the small sword, in the most approved method, which he acquired by practice and experience, under the instruction of the most judicious swordsmen in Europe, and will give due attendance of Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, in the forenoon. He also teaches the violin and guitar. (94)

Independence Hall, circa 1770, where Martin Foy taught fencing with the small-sword

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Other masters in the area included Michael Bontamps, who taught the small-sword in 1768 (95), and Louis De Lile, a "Professor of Gymnastick" who taught on Second Street between Walnut and Chestnut Streets. De Lile would begin his lessons "with a gentleman sword in hand, whom he has instructed but one fortnight;" (96) he also offered to instruct privately, as one student recounted:

> This day I was visited by Mr Lewis Delile a french young Gent. [age] 23. born at Hispaniola—educated eight years in the Univy in Bourdeaux Old France—understands & writes Latin well: but knows not Greek or Hebrew. He is well acquainted with the belles Lettres, and has studied the Politics & Constitutions of antient & modern Empires. He proposes to teach French & Fencing. (97)

One of the most celebrated fencing-masters teaching in Philadelphia during the revolutionary era was Thomas Pike. An Englishman by birth, Pike had immigrated to Charleston, South Carolina, in 1764, where he became a leading master of fencing, dancing, music and "manners." Plagued by financial difficulties, he was finally forced to leave Charleston for Philadelphia in 1774, where he established a school at the northwest corner of Second Street and Lodge Alley. There he taught the small-sword for seven hours a day (from six in the morning until one in the afternoon) three days a week, and gave private fencing lessons from two to five in the afternoon. Every evening, from five to nine, he also taught gentlemen dancing, or, if they preferred, "a genteel address with a proper carriage." (98) In 1778, a soldier of the Continental Army named Alexander Graydon studied under Pike, and recounted that his master

> certainly had a knack of close pushing, which I have never met with in any other; that is, in the exercise of quarte and tierce, by placing the point of his foil near the guard of his adversary's, he could disengage and thrust with such quickness, as with certainty to hit the arm of the assailed. I laboured in vain, for six or eight months to acquire this dexterity; from continued practice, however, the slight of hand came at last, upon which I valued myself not a little, and was equally valued by others… (99)

There was some irony in the fact that Pike was training American soldiers how to fence. Secretly, he was a loyalist and a British spy. Pike's numerous activities aiding the Crown were, he said, arranged at "very considerable expense, as well as risque of being hanged had I been found out." Eventually Pike's sympathies were suspected, and in 1777 the Continental Congress had him arrested and confined as a prisoner. The next year Pike escaped, and continued to aid the loyalist cause in British-occupied Philadelphia, where he was made a captain in the army. His fencing business, however, was ruined, and in 1781 he returned, destitute, to London, where he applied to the government for financial relief. (100)

Two other notable masters appeared in Philadelphia towards the close of the century: M. Micolin, former fencing master to the Prince de Guimenée, and Jean Baptiste Lemaire, a Frenchman educated at the Royal Academy of Paris. (101) In 1786, the latter opened an "Academie pour Les armes" in Pewter-Platter alley (on the west side of Front Street between High and Mulberry Streets). (102) Three years later, Lemaire moved his school to no. 28 Carter's Alley, where it was noted

> Politeness and decorum will scrupulously be maintained in the academy. Mr. Lemaire hopes that his attention to his scholars will procure him the approbation of their relations and friends who commit them to his instructions; he professes an art whose object is the protection of our honor and country, and which is a part or even the foundation of military sciences; this beautiful accomplishment gives also grace, ease, and vigour to the body, as it gives motion to every limb and throws the frame into the most noble attitude. (103)

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Academie pour Les armes.

FENCING ACADEMY

FOR

GENTLEMEN.

MR. LEMAIRE (*who was educated at the Royal Academy of Paris*) *proposes to open his Fencing School on TUESDAY the 8th of September, for the season. The said school shall be kept every TUESDAY, THURSDAY and SATURDAY from 10 o'clock, A. M. till 2, at the usual place in Carter's-alley. Politeness and decorum will scrupulously be maintained in the academy.*

Mr. LEMAIRE *hopes that his attention to his scholars will procure him the approbation of their relations and friends who commit them to his instruction; he professes an art whose object is the protection of our honor and country, and which is a part or even the foundation of military science. This beautiful accomplishment gives also grace, ease and vigor to the body, as it gives motion to every limb and throws the frame into the most noble attitude.*

GENTLEMEN *desiring to be taught at their lodgings will be waited upon at such hours as will not interfere with the school.*

N. B. Mr. LEMAIRE *may be seen at the house of Mr.* BRUNOT, *Walnut-street, and at his school on the days and hours before mentioned.*

Philadelphia, August 31, 1789.

Advertisement for Jean Baptiste Lemaire's Academy of Arms.

- From Early American Newspapers, an Archive of Americana Collection, published by Readex (Readex.com), a division of NewsBank, inc.

Classes were held three days per week, four hours per day. Lemaire also periodically held "General Assaults," in which other "Lovers of this noble Art" were invited to come and try their skills with his pupils. (104, 105) Although, as far as we know, no eighteenth-century account of an American assault exists, the following description of a fencing contest, held two decades later in New York City by another French master, probably bears close resemblance, at least in terms of procedure:

> [The master] shall choose four persons with whom he is acquainted as judges, in matters of fencing, which persons, with himself, will compose an unequal number. These judges will be placed in a convenient situation for observing minutely the assaults, so as to be able to decide on them. At each hit which the fencer shall demand by saying, "I claim that," the [master] shall advance to the judges, and collect the opinion of each. If the judges be unanimous in their opinion that it was a good hit, it shall be declared as such by the [master] or his aid to the assembly in these words: "A good hit, in favor of Mr. —." If the opinions of the judges should be equally divided, the opinion of the [master] shall decide. Care shall be taken to announce, in declaring the hits, who the combatants are; one to one, two to two, &c, the third always deciding the assault. The fencers shall be dressed in a white waistcoat, with a red sash at a certain height round the waist, which marks the place above which the hits must be made to be good. (106)

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In 1794, Lemaire moved his academy to Walnut Street between Third and Fourth Streets. Having been "impressed with the utmost gratitude for the former generous encouragement he experienced," he continued to teach in Philadelphia until at least 1799, holding classes on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. (107)

MARYLAND

In nearby Maryland, several fencing masters set up schools in the city of Annapolis and advertised their services in the popular Maryland Gazette. As early as 1745, the paper noted that fencing was being taught at the Kent Country School in Chestertown by "very good Masters." (108) The first instructor to be named in the pages of the Gazette was one Thomas Stanley, who gave notice in 1752 that he would teach fencing to "all gentlemen who are desirous to be Proficients in that Art." (109) The next was James Frazier, a "fencing master" from Queen Anne, who advertised that he had lost a pocket book "and some other papers of Use to any Person but the Owner." (110) In 1756, Julius Caesar Parke, a "noted master of the sword," who had recently arrived from Barbados, mentioned that he would teach "the Use of the Foil" at Annapolis, Upper Marlboro and Baltimore. Parke had published a treatise containing his particular "Method of Teaching," about which he stated, "it is diametrically opposite to that in Use (and even an Improvement on Lord Marcar's safe Method), by which he has brought Gentlemen in Barbados, Antigua, &c. beyond Expectation forward." In addition to fencing, Parke offered to teach "Globes, Geography, Mathematics, and Natural Philosophy, with several other Things useful in Life, &c." (111) Unfortunately, Parke was not able to offer his services for long, as he died of an illness the following November. (112) In 1757, John Ormsby, who had previously taught in Philadelphia, opened a dancing and fencing school in "Upper-Marlborough Town," wherein he offered instruction in

> the Noble Science of DEFENCE and Pursuit of the SMALL-SWORD, with all the favourite Thrusts, Guards and Parades; the Method of Disarming, and Fencing against rash Men (who are not skilful in the Science) with Blunts or Sharps, as now practiced in the City of London; a Science very necessary for every Gentleman to know, especially in this Time of imminent Danger. (113)

Ormsby also opened a school in Annapolis during the same year, at which he taught both dancing and fencing "at a reasonable rate." (114) In 1774, George James L'Argeau announced the opening of another school in the same town, at which he would teach dancing, fencing and "the Musical Glasses." (115) In 1778, he was mentioned as a "Master of Musick, Fencing and Dancing" residing in Cecil County, Maryland. (116) According to his obituary, L'Argeau was also known as an eminent professor of music and science, and had taught in many parts of the state, including Baltimore. (117) In 1784, another instructor named "Mr. Wall" (undoubtedly the same who had taught in New York) advertised that he would teach gentlemen the rudiments of the small-sword, noting that "his desire being rather to oblige, and assist in rendering this fine accomplishment more universal…than for any pecuniary advantage, will take no entrance, and his terms for teaching will be found reasonable." (118) Jacques Pinaud, a fencing master "of Paris and London" who had fled the slave rebellion in Santo Domingo, also offered instruction in Baltimore during the 1790s. (119)

A few other characters that resided in Maryland during this period deserve mention. Thomas Macoun, originally from Ireland, was both a fencing instructor and an indentured servant of Robert Chesley, who owned land on the Potomac River in St. Mary's County. In colonial America, especially in Maryland and in the south, employers often paid for European workers' passage across the Atlantic, in exchange for which the workers would sign contracts (papers of indenture) legally binding them to the employer for several years of intense labor. At best, this service amounted to an apprenticeship; at worst (which

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was often), workers were treated as little more than white slaves. Whatever the case for Macoun, in 1739 he decided that he had had enough, and escaped, along with a black slave named Robin. Chesley immediately advertised a reward for the two men's arrest:

> Macoun is a slender, neat made impudent Irishman, of a middle Stature, brown Complexion, very dark Eyebrows and Beard, a nimble upright Walk, and can speak broad Scotch. He professes Dancing, Fencing, Writing, Arithmetick, drawing of Pictures, and can play Legerdemain, or slight of Hand Tricks…he also took with him a Linnen Coat, and it's suspected, a Silver hilted Sword, 2 ruffled Shirts, one red Cloth Wastecoat, and one blew Ditto, and several other Things. The Negro is a Native of Madagascar, a nimble Fellow, short and slender, has lost his Fore Teeth, and has a long Cut on one of his Shins…They went away in a 16 Foot Boat, with Schooner Sails, the Fore-sail very ragged, the Rudder painted red, and a Pair of red Oars. (120)

Macoun was not the only fencer to find himself in such a predicament. In 1756, George Graham, alias Thomas Clunis, a "Scotchman," was reported in Charles County as a "runaway convict servant man, who pretends to teach fencing." (121) And one year later, just across the bay in Stratford, Virginia, a wealthy planter advertised the escape of

> Charles Love, a tall thin Man, about sixty Years of Age; he professes Musick, Dancing, Fencing, and plays exceeding well on the Violin and all Wind Instruments; he stole when he went away, a very good Bassoon, made by Schuchart, which he carried with him as also a Dutch or German Fiddle, with an old Hautboy and German Flute, which are his own… (122)

The fates of all of these men remain unknown. However, as no further mention of them appears among the records of their respective colonies, it is likely that their escape attempts were successful.

FENCING SCHOOLS OF THE SOUTH

Although the American south is renowned for its former dueling culture, its cities do not seem to have attracted nearly so many fencing masters as the north did during the colonial era. Throughout the entire eighteenth century, only seventeen fencing masters are recorded as having resided in the South (not including New Orleans)—only one-third of those recorded in the north. Nevertheless, fencing was still popular in the region among the young, gentlemanly class. In 1774, Philip Vickers Fithian, a tutor at Nomini Hall, observed that "any young gentleman traveling through the Colony [of Virginia]…is presum'd to be acquainted with Dancing, Boxing, playing the Fiddle, & Small-Sword, & Cards." (123) And later in the decade, a contemporary noted that the South Carolinians "discover no bad taste for the polite arts, such as music, drawing, fencing and dancing…" (124) Considering this testimony, it is something of a mystery that so few fencing masters are recorded as having taught in the south during this period. Yet the fact of their scarcity seems to be confirmed by the words of one Virginia fencing master, probably foreign-born, who warned his students,

> I hope you'll keep in Practice what you have learnt, while you have the Opportunity of your present Master; for when you are depriv'd of him, it is probable another Professor of this Science may not think these Parts of America worth his Attendance. (125)

The first fencing master known to have offered his services in the south was Edward Blackwell, and were it not for the treatise he left behind, published posthumously in 1734, we would have no knowledge of his existence whatsoever, as his name appears nowhere in the official records or in any other known

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surviving account. His book, entitled *A Compleat System of Fencing, Or, The Art of Defence, in the Use of the Small-Sword*, is currently the oldest known fencing treatise penned in the American colonies. In its pages, Blackwell states that he had practiced "in sundry Parts of America," and had "met with much difficulty in Introducing this ART of the SMALL-SWORD." Eventually having succeeded in becoming "instrumental in the general Admittance [that the small-sword] now has in these Parts of America," Blackwell composed his book of instruction "for the Benefit of [his] Scholars, that they may the sooner and better be perfect in their lessons," dedicating it "to all Gentlemen, Promoters, and Lovers of the ART of FENCING, in North America."

In his treatise, Blackwell covers many rudiments of the art in great detail, such as how to hold the weapon, taking one's distance, advancing, retiring, lunging, parrying, etc., and more advanced techniques such as disarming and grappling. Additionally, he offers several sober observations about dueling, clearly gleaned from first-hand experience:

> I experimentally know, that the better a Man is acquainted with this Art, the less Occasion he will have to use his Sword. Besides, there is something shocking in the character of a good Swordsman, especially to the Ignorant, allowing even his Cowardice to be expos'd: For, as it is not impossible to provoke a reputed Cowardly Artist to draw his Sword, so it is very possible for him to get the better, as many Instances have shewn us, at the Expence of his Adversary's Life; therefore it is not safe to insult such a Man's Cowardice. (126)

All we know about Blackwell's end comes from an advertisement in his treatise, which states that the "eminent" Professor passed away sometime prior to 1734, leaving a widow and some children. (127) For the next eighteen years, no fencing instructor was mentioned as teaching in Williamsburg, until the following advertisement appeared in the Virginia Gazette:

> March 20, 1752. THE Subscriber, who lodges at Mr. Finnie 's [Raleigh Tavern], in Williamsburg, teaches the Art of Fencing, Dancing, and French Tongue; and is ready to begin as soon as he can get a reasonable number of Scholars.
> Le Chevalier de Peyronny. (128)

And later, in 1775, a "Doctor De Sabb" notified the public of

> his service to those gentlemen who have an inclination to learn the manly art of FENCING, with the small-sword, and begs leave to inform them that he intends taking a room in Williamsburg and York; in the first of which places he will attend four days each week, in the latter two. His price will be a guinea entrance money, and fifteen shillings per month. The doctor does not by the above intend to decline his practice as a physician, but would be still glad of the favour of the public. (129)

The year 1779 saw mention of three fencing instructors living in Williamsburg. That summer, John K'dore, "lately from France" advertised his intention to keep a school at the King William courthouse, where he would teach fencing, dancing, French, and the minuet "in the neatest and newest manner." (130) And in November, a Monsieur Jean Cadou announced the opening of his dancing school "in this city," where he would likewise teach gentlemen to fence "in all its different branches" (it should be noted that John K'dore could be an Anglicization of Jean Cadou, and that these names might represent the same individual). (131) The Gazette also mentioned the death of the Irish fencing master Claudius Peter Cary, a well-known character in Williamsburg, who was "endeavouring to get out of the enemies way, [and] died with fatigue in the Dismal Swamp." (132, 133)

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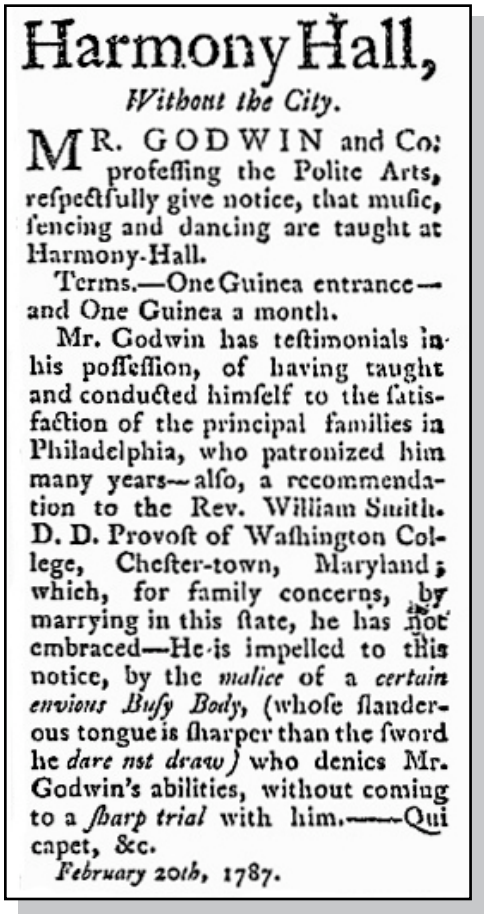
The only other southern city that contained a significant number of fencing masters during the era was Charleston, South Carolina. The first instructor in the area, judging by the records, appears to have been William Yearwood, an "extremely expert fencing master" who immigrated to Charleston from England sometime around 1730 or 1740, and "taught the youth of his city that art," reportedly living to the ripe old age of ninety. (134) The next master to appear was the aforementioned Thomas Pike, who taught fencing, dancing, manners and orchesography at Charleston, South Carolina, in a spacious long room on Church Street, between 1764 and 1774. A letter published in the South Carolina Gazette in 1773 declared that, at the time, Pike "had the charge and tuition of most of the young people in this town." (135) During the 1760s, another "fencing master" named Edmund Egan, described as "a newcomer with no reputation or references," offered instruction in the art of the sword. His main profession, however, seems to have been that of a brew master; in 1765 he opened a brewery in the city, and advertised the sale of "Doubled brewed Spruce beer, table and small beer." (136) In 1786, Mr. Godwin, a "dancing and fencing master by trade but actor by ambition," arrived in Charleston and began performing at Harmony Hall. Godwin had already performed in Jamaica, Philadelphia and Savannah. When his theatrical endeavors in Charleston failed, Godwin converted the Hall into a school, wherein the "Polite Arts" of music, fencing and dancing were often taught. He also seems to have made a few enemies in Charleston, as evinced by the following statement in one of his advertisements:

> He is impelled to this notice, by the malice of a certain envious Busy Body, (whose slanderous tongue is sharper than the sword he dare not draw) who denies Mr. Godwin's abilities, without coming to a sharp trial with him. (137)



Harmony Hall,

Without the City.

MR. GODWIN and Co: professing the Polite Arts, respectfully give notice, that music, fencing and dancing are taught at Harmony-Hall.

Terms.—One Guinea entrance—and One Guinea a month.

Mr. Godwin has testimonials in his possession, of having taught and conducted himself to the satisfaction of the principal families in Philadelphia, who patronized him many years—also, a recommendation to the Rev. William Smith. D. D. Provost of Washington College, Chester-town, Maryland; which, for family concerns, by marrying in this state, he has not embraced—He is impelled to this notice, by the *malice* of a *certain envious Busy Body*, (whose slanderous tongue is sharper than the sword he *dare not draw*) who denies Mr. Godwin's abilities, without coming to a *sharp trial* with him.——Qui capet, &c.

February 20th, 1787.

Advertisement for Godwin's school in Charleston. Note the challenge at the bottom.

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A decade later, Godwin publicly proposed, "to give intuition in fencing and dancing during the period of his acting at Augusta and Savannah." (138) In 1787, another "Fencing Master, from Paris" named Lewis Morelle opened a school at No. 4 Beresford's Alley (now Chalmer's Street), where he taught fencing every day of the week except Thursday. Morelle also claimed that his reputation was "known as well in Europe as in Canada, where he has exercised the said art with general success and approbation; his letters of recommendation are an indubitable proof of it." He also gave special notice that

> Mr. Morelle, fond of the emulation of his scholars, invites any gentleman who is skilful in the Art of Fencing, to honor him with their presence, and will give a general Assault every fortnight. The room will be well illuminated. (139)

Other fencing instructors in the area included John Olivier, who taught fencing at the Republican Coffee House on Tradd Street (140), Mr. Clifford, who opened a public school for "that polite art of defence" in 1794 (141), and Bostonian Thomas Turner (previously mentioned), who taught fencing and dancing at an academy in Beresford's Alley. (142) An instructor "from Carolina" named Charles Francis Chevalier also taught fencing and dancing in Savannah, Georgia, during the 1760s. (143)

Occasionally these masters found the opportunity to utilize their skills on the field of honor. During the 1790s, a notable duel was fought in Charleston between Alexander Placide, a theatrical manager, and Douvillier, a ballet dancer. Both were "expert swordsmen" who served "occasionally as fencing masters." The two had quarreled over the affections of a lady, and Placide thus determined "to wipe away his disgrace by the sword." The event occurred at high noon, and was attended by the multitudes of Charleston. A resident Englishman described the ensuing combat:

> The attack was begun by Placide, who furiously rushed upon his antagonist, determined to put him to death in an instant. I learnt from those who were present, that the science displayed by Douvillier in defending himself from this imminent danger, added to his coolness and activity, interested the spectators for the moment, though he was known to be the offender. Having parried the deadly thrusts, and sustained the shock of the onset, he maintained his ground, and the science of fencing was, in good earnest, displayed for some minutes, without intermission, till Placide was disarmed. He affected now to smother the disappointment of revenge, and to hide his chagrin, until suddenly springing upon his antagonist, he recovered his sword, and before the other could put himself on his guard, was run through the body.

After committing this despicable act of foul play, Placide returned to his lodgings "in triumph," but was disappointed when the object of his affections "proceeded to her vanquished lover, whose wound she dressed, and who recovered to live many years with her for whom he had fought." Honorable conduct, it seems, was not without its rewards. (144)

GENTLEMEN SOLDIERS

Although the men of the Continental Army were provided instruction in the military forms of fencing with sword and bayonet, they often found it useful to train under civilian masters as well. George Washington took lessons in "fencing and the sword exercise" from Jacob Van Braam, a Dutch soldier of fortune, (145) and indeed, during the Revolutionary period, the commander-in-chief was, according to one contemporary witness, "constantly equipped with an elegant small-sword." (146) Also, Washington's chief of intelligence was Major Alexander Clough, who originally hailed from the New Jersey line, and had been a pupil of the legendary French fencing master Domenico Angelo and "others of the best

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masters in Europe." (147) Alexander Graydon, a soldier from Pennsylvania, studied the small-sword under masters Thomas Pike and Colonel Menzies, and left an account of the training he received. (148)

French print showing George Washington, circa 1777 or 1778, with his small-sword (Library of Conress)

Often these men found occasion to test their skills in battle. Solomon van Rensselaer, a New Yorker who was, according to a contemporary, skilled with the backsword, once remarked that "the full uniform and dragooner's heavy sword always carry their peculiar charm; perhaps it is owing to the satisfaction felt in knowing how nicely they can slash through the wily Indian skull, just like cutting into a round ripe pumpkin in successful warfare." (149) The effects of such heavy weapons in the context of a duel could be devastating. When, in 1781, Captain John Smith of the Maryland line and Colonel Stuart, a rival British officer, met on a South Carolina battlefield, they decided to settle their long-standing grudge. The two "singled each other out, and, panting with revenge, engaged furiously with the sword. Smith 'drove the edge of his heavy sabre through the head of the British Colonel, cleaving him to the very spine.'" (150) Another source noted that the two combatants had "particularly attracted the attention of those around them" during the battle, and recounted:

> They had met before (at Cowpens), and had vowed that their next meeting should end in blood. Regardless of the bayonets that were clashing around them, they rushed at each other with a fury that admitted of but one result. The quick pass of Stuart's small sword was skilfully put by with the left hand, whilst the heavy sabre of his antagonist cleft the Briton to the spine. (151)

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It is important to note that, although the small-sword was a civilian sidearm, it was nevertheless sometimes used in earnest on the field of battle. In addition to the previous passage, two anecdotes illustrate this fact with particular vividness. The first involves Colonel John Laurens, the son of duelist Henry Laurens, and pertains to an incident that took place during the battle of Germantown:

> When…the American column on the right became embarrassed by the party who occupied Chew's house, Laurens requested of Wayne forty volunteers to join him in the attempt to force the door or windows. The request was readily complied with, and such was his chivalrous character in the army, that volunteers promptly offered to accompany him. They moved on as briskly as possible up to the house, and Laurens gave his horse to a serjeant-major, who, in emulation of his bravery, had kept pace with him. An officer, at this time, was holding the door ajar, that his men might use their muskets through the opening. Laurens made at him with his small-sword, and they actually exchanged several passes before the door was shut by some person of more discretion than the officer opposed to Laurens. Turning round, he then perceived that not a man of his command was on his legs, and at that instant, a musket fired perpendicularly down from a window, put an end to the brave man who held his horse. Nothing but his own very near approach to the house had hitherto saved him from the same fate. (152)

Other American swordsmen were not so fortunate. One such example was Captain John Stokes, a twenty-seven year old native of Pittsylvania County, Virginia, who engaged in hand-to-hand fighting during a battle with Colonel Banastre Tarleton's troops:

> Early in the sanguinary conflict he was attacked by a dragoon, who aimed many deadly blows at his head, all of which by the dextrous use of the small sword he easily parried; when another [soldier] on the right, by one stroke, cut off his right hand through the metacarpal bones. He was then assailed by both, and instinctively attempted to defend his head with his left arm until the forefinger was cut off, and the arm hacked in eight or ten places from the wrist to the shoulder. His head was then laid open almost the whole length of the crown to the eyebrows. After he fell he received several cuts on the face and shoulders. A soldier passing on in the work of death, asked if he expected quarters? Stokes answered I have not, nor do I mean to ask quarters, finish me as soon as possible; he then transfixed him twice with his bayonet. Another asked the same question and received the same answer, and he also thrust his bayonet twice through his body.

Amazingly, Stokes recovered from all of these wounds, survived the war, married, and upon the adoption of the Constitution of the United States was rewarded by a seat on the Federal Bench. In 1789, the state of North Carolina formed a new county and named it after Stokes. According to a doctor who knew him, Stokes "received twenty-three wounds, and as he never for a moment lost his recollection, he often repeated to me the manner and order in which they were inflicted." (153)

In conclusion, it is important to note that the numerous fencing masters and schools mentioned throughout this article do not, by any means, represent a complete picture of what existed in America during the periods covered. The fact is that many masters (such as Malinson, Frazier, Blackwell, Yearwood, Cary and Benson) never advertised their services as far as we can tell, and were it not for a few obscure references in old diaries and memoirs, their names would be utterly lost in oblivion. Moreover, the colonies of French Louisiana and Spanish Florida produced far fewer printed records during these eras, and so it is difficult to know exactly what transpired there prior to the nineteenth

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century with regard to fencing. (154) One of the earliest histories of Louisiana mentions that several French refugees from Santo Domingo taught fencing in New Orleans as early as 1791; unfortunately, the author offers no additional details about who these individuals were or what they taught. (155) It is also likely that fencing instruction was available in Louisiana prior to this date, considering the statement made in 1768 by a colony official that "half of the population" had been destroyed by "drunkenness, brawls and duels." (156) Undoubtedly there existed additional masters and instructors in America during these times who have escaped the eye of history altogether. It must be understood, therefore, that the corpus of surviving records represents a window through which one can glimpse only a part of the historical reality that, unfortunately, will never be fully known.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY TRANSITION

During the early decades of the nineteenth century, fencing continued to be taught in America in the same martial, deadly tradition. In the south, the number of sword-duels literally exploded, especially in cities such as New Orleans, which, according to some authors, soon became the de facto dueling capitol of the western world. As a result, the demand for fencing masters in the south increased tremendously; we find, for instance, that at least fifty maitre d'armes operated fencing schools in New Orleans from about 1830 until the time of the Civil War. (157) Although the sword was in decline as a dueling weapon in the north, the ancient, martial fencing traditions were still maintained in various northern schools and salles des armes. One incident that occurred in the north is particularly worth recounting: in 1809, in Salem, Massachusetts, an advertisement appeared announcing a public event, to be held at the Military School in Washington Hall by "Messrs. Tromelle & Girard, Fencing-Masters of the Military School of Col. De le Croix." The two masters went on to

> respectfully inform the Gentlemen of Salem and its vicinity that they propose a Fencing Exhibition, at which several amateurs will be present, and during which they will play the Small-Sword, Cut-and-Thrust, Broad-Sword, and Cudgel or Cane Fighting.

The event was to close with a combat that was true to the spirit and violence of the old Boston stage-fights. The two masters, presumably friends, were to fight a duel before the audience, "at first…with Sabres, and afterwards with Small-Swords, until one of the parties falls weltering in blood." (158) The old tradition, it seems, was still alive.

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Some might wonder why dancing was deemed such an important part of a young man's education throughout these periods. In his 1589 book Orchesography, the Frenchman Thoinot Arbeau provides some insight: "I much enjoyed fencing and tennis, and this placed me upon friendly terms with young men. But, without a knowledge of dancing, I could not please the damsels, upon whom, it seems to me, the entire reputation of an eligible young man depends… if you desire to marry you must realize that a mistress is won by the good temper and grace displayed while dancing, because ladies do not like to be present at fencing or tennis, lest a splintered sword or a blow from a tennis ball should cause them injury…And there is more to it than this, for dancing is practiced to reveal whether lovers are in good health and sound of limb, after which they are permitted to kiss their mistresses in order that they may touch and savour one another…therefore, from this standpoint, quite apart from the many other advantages to be derived from dancing, it becomes essential in a well ordered society." (Arbeau, Thoinot, Orchesography. New York: Dover Publications, 1967. pp. 11-12)

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