

JOHN CALFE'S POWDER HORN

What is this object?

This object is a powder horn from the Revolutionary War that belonged to John Calfe, who was a soldier in the Continental Army. Powder horns were made from hollowed-out animal horns, and soldiers used to carry gunpowder for their muskets.

Before each shot of a musket, the soldier had to pour a little bit of gunpowder into the barrel of the musket, drop a bullet into the gun barrel, and then use a long rod to carefully push the gunpowder and bullet to the back of the gun barrel. Then the soldier could fire a single shot. Soldiers could usually fire 2 or 3 shots per minute with muskets.

Powder horns were very important to soldiers during the Revolutionary War because they kept the gunpowder dry. A musket wouldn't work if the gunpowder was wet.

Fun Fact:

Soldiers often used sharp tools to carve designs, words, or even maps onto their powder horns.

John Calfe drew a house and decorated the edges of his powder horn with flowers. He even wrote a poem that reads "What I Contain Shall Freely Go: To Bring A Haughty Tyrant Low."



Notice & Wonder

- Look at the poem. Who do you think the "tyrant" was?
- Look closely at the designs on this powder horn. Why do you think John Calfe went took the time to carve these designs on his powder horn?