

Let's Get the Music Right

Thomas H. Romine

The Sons of the American Revolution takes pride in requiring historically accurate genealogies in order to become a member. They have recently broke ground for a new museum in Louisville, Kentucky, for the purpose of developing historically accurate displays. The S.A.R. Color Guards strive to present proper uniforms for the period. There are several reasons for this. First, we want to represent an image of patriot ancestors that is accurate and respectful. Second, there is the commitment on the part of the Color Guard member to find the suitable uniform and to outfit himself. We shouldn't find blue jeans and tennis shoes as part of a Revolutionary War presentation.

The music for the Color Guard should be taken just as seriously as the Regimental Coats, hunting frocks, breeches, hats and period muskets or rifles. The S.A.R. has guide lines concerning Color Guards and the specific use of fifes and drums. ***"How to Create and Train Your Color Guard Unit 'Drum and Fifes – Sounds of Victory.'"***

"The memories of American's Revolutionary War beginnings, reverberate each time the martial strains on the 'Drums and Fifes' are heard. Each time this stirring music reaches the ears of the American public they envision General George Washington and his Continental army and the liberty and freedom they sacrificed to achieve for us. When the Drums and Fifes are accompanied by colorful flags carried by a fully uniformed Revolutionary War Color Guard the American public no longer has need for their imaginations all the sights and sounds are there to excite them to renewed patriotic vigor and pride in Country."

Following these guidelines and the available resources on the use of fifes and drums with the American army during the Revolutionary War we learn that fifes and drums were exclusively used during this period. There is no historic evidence of the use of any other instruments in the Continental Army. It follows that coming into the present day the same custom should be practiced. When I started researching this topic and began asking questions relating to the use of other instruments including bagpipes on the American side I received some very interesting answers from scholars who have knowledge of this.

Susan Cifaldi is an historian with the Company of Fifers and Drummers, in Ivoryton, Connecticut. This organization promotes the fife and drum tradition internationally. Ms. Cifaldi says:

“In all my work I have never come across bagpipes (or bagpipers) as an official part of the Continental Army. I haven’t read any orders permitting and/or appointing them and/or regulating their use. I have found as Raoul has already proven, that they were in use in certain Highland regiments, but that’s about it.” (Emphasis added.) (Reference to Raoul Camus’ ***Military Music of the American Revolution; 2nd edition Westerville, Ohio: Integrity Press, 1993***)

Kate Van Winkle Keller makes several references to bagpipes in the colonies in her book, ***Dance and Its Music in American***. One reference is to “1773, Philip Fithian, in Winchester, Virginia.” reports—“every Sound is Martial! Drums beating, Fifes and bagpipes playing, & only sonorous & heroic tunes.”

David Hildebrand of the Colonial Music Institute believes that this would a regional thing at best, probably a militia outfit, and since the reference was in 1773, it would pre-date the Continental Army and therefore the Revolutionary War. Kate Van Winkle Keller adds, “*I would think bagpipes were so solidly associated with the British army and definitely here during the*

*American Revolution, that to play them in a Continental camp would be somewhat **treasonable**. It would certainly cause confusion.*” Treason at that time was dealt with seriously and severely. Confusion in a camp could create disastrous conditions.

Confusion at that time is one issue but it might also create confusion today with the general public being basically uninformed about the Revolutionary War. Compatriot

Robert Hall of the Plano (TX) Chapter S.A.R. agrees and comments:

“I am pretty sure no American bagpipes were used in the Revolution on the American side. I believe that quite a lot of the Scots immigrants to the United States just after 1745 were political prisoners, refugees, etc...and the Proscription Act covered them: owning or making tartan, wearing kilts, playing bagpipes, and several other culturally related activities were punishable—quite severely punishable. I know the British 42nd (Royal Highland Regiment) was in America and used bagpipes but I have not found anywhere that the Americans used bagpipes, since this was a Scots trademark, and very British to Americans.....that to place a Kilted Bagpiper in a Color Guard or parade for the public would be very confusing, especially since most people have no idea the Uniform types of the American Revolution.....Even our own sar.org (website) under color Guard has a section on Drums and Fife and no other instrument.....the use of the bagpipe would be strictly a British army institution.”

The SAR guide lines mentioned previously suggests as a last resort, without fifer or drummer, to position the Color Guard close to a Highland Bagpipe Band because “their step is the same as a colonial unit.”

The tradition of the Scots immigrants to this country is a noble traditional as is the use of the bagpipes by Highland and other British re-enacting units. To include them as part of a Sons of the American Revolution, however, is not historically accurate and should not be encouraged or permitted.

My suggestion is to locate a unit from the Company of Fifers and Drummers or a unit with the Brigade of the American Revolution and request a fifer and drummer to help out. The re-enactors with The Brigade of the American Revolution would already be outfitted in uniforms of the period. This seems to be the one solution that was used for SAR Color Guards in the past. We should not overlook the possibility of using fifes and drums from Civil War re-enactors. Their pace is also similar and much of the music is the same.

This brings up the historically accurate use of the music of the time period. For example, the well-known hymn, "Amazing Grace," is often closely associated with bagpipes. The practice of using this song in parades is almost an exclusively twentieth century idea, particularly for police and fire fighter funeral parades. We need to examine where the words and tune originated. The words were written by John Newton (1725-1803), a British slave trader, who converted to Christianity following a near death experience in fierce storm. In 1779, Newton and William Cowper combined their efforts and produced the *Olney Hymns* hymnal. "Amazing Grace" was from the collection. However, it is not known what melody was used for the hymn. The melody we hear today was put with Newton's words as an American melody from the *Carrell & Clayton's Virginia Harmony, 1831*. That would be fifty years after the Yorktown surrender. Hollywood has not been of much help in this regard. In the movie, ***Amazing Grace***, the melody is played toward the end of the film after Newton's death and following William Wilberforce's battle to eliminate the slave trade in England. Wilberforce died in 1833, two years before his efforts were realized.

There is another example that should be a little better known to us. Fifes and drums would have never played ***The Star Spangled Banner*** during the Revolutionary War. As school children are still taught ***The Star Spangled Banner*** was written during the War of 1812. However, it was made the official national anthem of United States by an act of Congress in 1931. ***Hail Columbia*** was used as an unofficial national anthem from the Revolutionary War, through the War of 1812, the Civil War and even into the First World War.

Finding music to accompany a S.A.R. Color Guard is not difficult with the resources available. The Company of Fifers and Drummers has numerous books available for fife and drum music including the ***American Rudimental Method for Field Drumming***, and ***The Muffled Drum***, a book with fife and drum music for funerals. The Colonial Music Institute has several books available including, ***Music for the First President, Fife Tunes from the American Revolution*** (from Giles Gibb's manuscript music book) and ***Benjamin Clark's Drum Book, 1797*** compiled and edited by Susan Cifaldi. Both Benjamin Clark and Giles Gibbs were participants in the Revolutionary War.

The Brigade of the American Revolution has just completed a revised version of its music book, ***Military Music of the American Revolution***. All of the signals and calls of the Continental Army are notated as well as a nearly 90 fife and drum tunes. The Brigade of the American Revolution has produced two CDs with all of this music recorded.

All of the books mentioned above have historically accurate music appropriate for most occasions.

As an experience drummer and sometime fifer, I am offering my services for any S.A.R. Color Guard for information, instruction and as a drummer for their events. Color Guard Commanders and Chapter Presidents may feel to contact me for information on the resources that I have mentioned. I am happy to make available an audio presentation on CD that reinforces the information in this article. My e-mail address is: romine1t@gmail.com and my phone number is 740-541-3861.

(Biography)

Thomas Romine is a member of the Ewings Chapter, SAR and a plural member the Marietta and Hocking Valley Chapters, SAR. He has played drums over 55 years. He served in the U.S. Army Bands at Ft. Meade, Maryland, Vietnam, and Salt Lake City, Utah. He holds Bachelor and Masters Degrees in Music from the University of Utah and Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Ohio State University. He is a life member of the American Legion, the VFW and the Company of Fifers and Drummers. Tom has performed as a "Revolutionary War Drummer" in parades with Color Guards from Veterans' Organizations and with Sons of the American Revolution Color Guards and at Brigade of the American Revolution events.