Flintlock Muskets

Flintlocks were imported from Europe and widely distributed in New France for hunting and warfare.

THE FRENCH Flintlock

The French invented the flintlock musket in the early seventeenth century to replace earlier weapons. This technological innovation employed a flint for ignition. The trigger is held by the jaws at the end of a one-piece mechanism called the frizzen. When the trigger is pulled, the frizzen strikes the flint to produce a spark that ignites the gunpowder, propelling a musket ball or lead shot out of the barrel. Most production was done by French manufacturers in Tulle and St. Etienne, although the English and Dutch also made similar guns.

Memorandum of work by Chatelet in partnership with Dehaires have done on the Kings account by order of Messrs. De Ceborum and Coulon, in connection with the Civil War in July 1739.

To WJ

July 11th, 1739
For having reissued a pistol and attached a spicul for Leton, Nepasongue.

June 13th

For having made a pair and repaired the Tanke for Chocelote, Nepasongue.

Same day

For having repaired a Tomawerk for Manacapul.

14th of same

For having made a main spring for Nagachee.

15th of same

For a gunstock for Lac, Canadian.

For a light lead and bored.

For a Tomahawk.

For a Tomawerk for Mica, Canadian.

For bear for Le Coteau, Fiehnemans.

For a screen.

For two adobe pieces.

For a repaired plane for the son of Blainc.

For a pipe for Le Corbeau.

For the Saint-Las of Le Corbeau a spool.

For a pipe for Le Las.

For a screw for Manitous.

For a screw for Chocelote.

For two compass.

Monseur Rambaut's musket.

Done at the St. Joseph River on the 7th of August 1739.

Signed Antoine Dehaires, Michael Durivage Balbonou.

From Payper (1787) Fort St. Joseph Manuscript: Chronological Inventory and Translations.

Flintlocks at Fort St. Joseph

Primary sources provide archaeologists with further information about gun repair and use. On August 7, 1739 a memorandum was signed detailing the work of a gunsmith at Fort St. Joseph. The memorandum confers the possession of a musket at the fort, and includes a list of repairs conducted. In this instance, two guns were being repaired and replacing gun parts, eight beds, haddings, springs, screens, and plates, among other hardware. A few of these items have been found during the excavations at the fort. In 2022, over one hundred gun parts were recovered from a cache at the site. It included guns, cockes, frizzens, breech plugs, and a lock plate, among other components. In addition, excavations have led to the recovery of musket balls, lead shot, and numerous gun flints throughout the site.

Flintlocks Muskets Today

Flintlock muskets were replaced in the early nineteenth century by rifles and other more efficient and effective firing weapons. The flintlocks encountered today are used for sport and by reenactors in the public and private sector, rather than hunting for subsistence and in warfare. Their use in the twentieth-first century assists archaeologists in understanding fur trade era technologies at Fort St. Joseph and how they were essential for survival on the frontier.