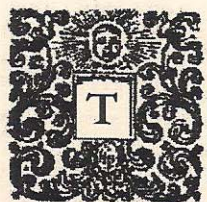


## A Bed of Your Own by Richard Toone



he use of folding furniture was not uncommon in

18th Century homes or before that time. Houses were small - families were big. Beds that folded, and shared at night, were not uncommon. Travel accommodations might well require a bed of your own if your station in life was above sharing a bed with strangers at a wayside inn. Major relocation travel and military campaigns required a portable bed for gentry, officers and wives (Brawer, p.19, and 34)

The uniqueness of this travel accessory varied only with the imagination of the purchaser and producer. The Crusades are thought to have been the genesis of the folding tester: frame from which bed curtains are suspended propped up by the tall head and

foot posts. The noble knights required their security from the cold drafts in their stone castles, as well as privacy for dalliance, and so they took the portable beds they used in the cold climates of Europe to the deserts of the Middle East.

Fast forward a few centuries and portable beds varied greatly and were refined in size, but still the use of bed curtains prevailed. The American Colonies emulated what was the norm in the mother country. People required to travel a lengthy time that could afford a bedstead took one. Remember in the 18th Century, the dark night vapors were thought unhealthy and dangerous. Ben Franklin was unusual in that he slept with the windows open; he also took "air baths"!

A bed was the original name for a mat one slept on. Called a tick in the 18th Century, the bed was placed on the bedstead (bed frame) and thus offered the luxury of not sleeping on the uncertainty of what the ground provided.

The most well known folding bedsteads to us in America are those preserved from General Washington. One at Mount Vernon, the property of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, now on display with full bed clothing, a second at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, and a third owned by the New York Historical Society in their Manhattan building facing Central Park - all are different. There are other folding bedsteads on display at historical parks in the United States, and in other countries, for example, the British Museum in England.

The Washington folding bedstead most familiar to re-enactors is the Mount Vernon example shown in the *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution* by George Neumann and Frank Kravic (Neumann and Kravic, p.34). The second most recognized example is on

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display at the Henry Ford Museum. This one is complete with its tufted tick and folds out of a hide covered trunk. The trunk lid becomes a headboard and a support for curtains to be draped. The New York Historical Society example consists of three large canvas covered oak stools arranged in a row and held in place with forged hook and eye fastenings.

I had duplicated the first and third examples with permission, but the Henry Ford Museum bedstead was made of iron, and not a medium I work in. I did not know of any wooden framed examples that folded out of a trunk until I was provided the ubiquitous cell phone pictures of one in Spain by re-enactor Jose Lopez Reyes while he was on vacation there. The pictures confirmed my suspicions that a wooden framed example existed. There being no standardizing of design in the 18th Century, I felt inspired to engineer and build a folding bedstead using the wood materials I was familiar with. The iron forgings of hinges, handles and leg latches are from master ironsmith Jeff Miller. I used known period correct wooden joints and selected woods - oak for strength and walnut where seen fully dressed. The frame is both sturdy and of a size that a person of contemporary size can be comfortable on. The luxury cotton bed curtains and the tick covers were made by my wife Regina. The open bed is 6 foot 1 inch long and 32 inches wide: strong enough for a 300 pounder or a couple of skinny lovebirds.

Hide bound trunks are not something I normally make and when needed to fill a historical site's order I always relied on Steve Freede at the Trunk Shoppe. Steve is no longer building trunks now,

preferring to starve farming than one trunk at a time. He graciously passed on a few tips of the trade and sold me several hundred dollars worth of cast brass nails (tacks) required to fasten the raw goat hide in place (about 600 +/-). This would have been a difficult trunk for Steve to make absent the frame. The front of the trunk opening is relieved downwards to allow for sag in the canvas foundation with body weight. The trunk lid has a matching protrusion to fully seal when closed as per the two originals sited. The interior is fully finished with green Baize. The foundation is made of heavy linen canvas sailcloth with brass rings sewn in by master sailmaker Frank Rodriques of New Bedford, Massachusetts.

The end result is a striking travel trunk that though sized large to allow for the bed frame provides additional space for a three section folding tick, an inflatable backpacking mattress, pillow, blankets and curtains. It is a contemporary motel room sans bathroom in a 30" high x 34" long x 21" wide package in proper character for 1770, a safe sleep from prying eyes and demons of the dark.

### Author's Note:

PS With 6 months lead time for materials and over one hundred fifty hours of thought and labor, the project took nine months to make.



Photos of the Mr. Toone's traveling folding bed are located on Page 7.

### Editor's Note:

Richard Toone is a master craftsman, specializing in 18th Century

travel furnishings and equipage. He works in close collaboration with historic sites, as well as the Smithsonian Museum, to research and reproduce unusual and challenging examples of historic technology specific to the 1740-1790 time period. Mr. Toone resides in Columbus, New Jersey; more information on his work can be found at [www.livinghistoryshop.com](http://www.livinghistoryshop.com).



### Bibliography and Resources:

Brawer, Nicholas A., *British Campaign Furniture Elegance Under Canvass, 1740-1914*, NY: Harry Abrams, 2001.

Neumann, George C., and Frank J. Kravic, *Collectors Illustrated Encyclopedia of the American Revolution*, PA: Stackpole Books, 1977.

Mount Vernon Ladies Association, The Donald W. Reynolds Museum and Education Center, Mount Vernon, VA.

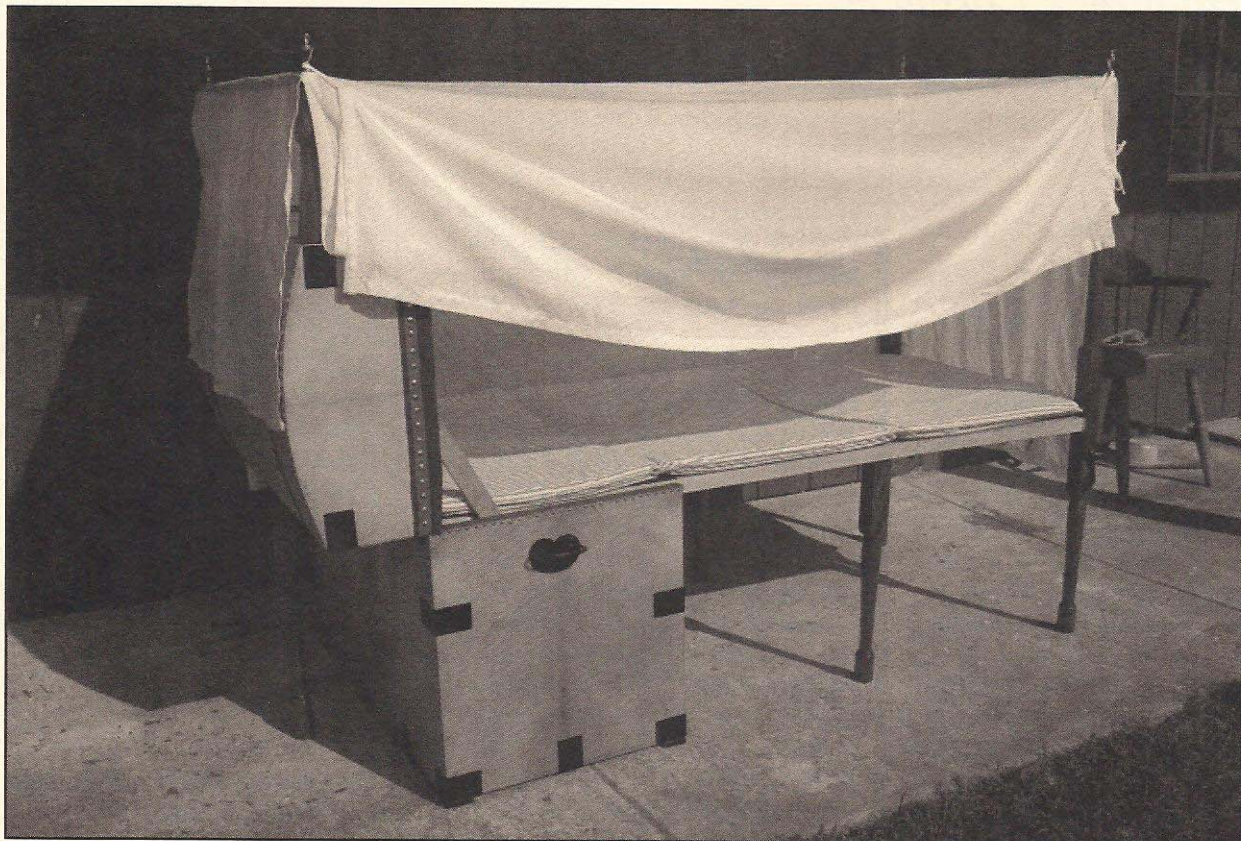
The Henry Ford Museum, 20900 Oakwood Blvd. Dearborn, MI 48124-5029 [www.thehenryford.org](http://www.thehenryford.org)

New York Historical Society, 170 Central Park West, New York, NY 10024

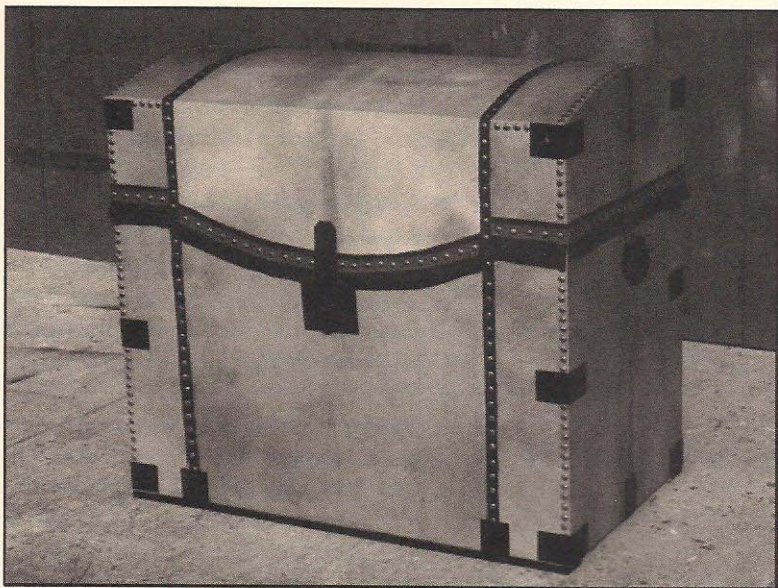
Jeff Miller owner operator of Flintlock Forge, 244 Orff's Corner Road, Waldoboro, ME 04572 [flintlockforge@roadrunner.com](mailto:flintlockforge@roadrunner.com)

The Trunk Shoppe (business For Sale) RR2 Box 77, Harrisville, WV 26362 [www.thetrunkshoppe.com](http://www.thetrunkshoppe.com)

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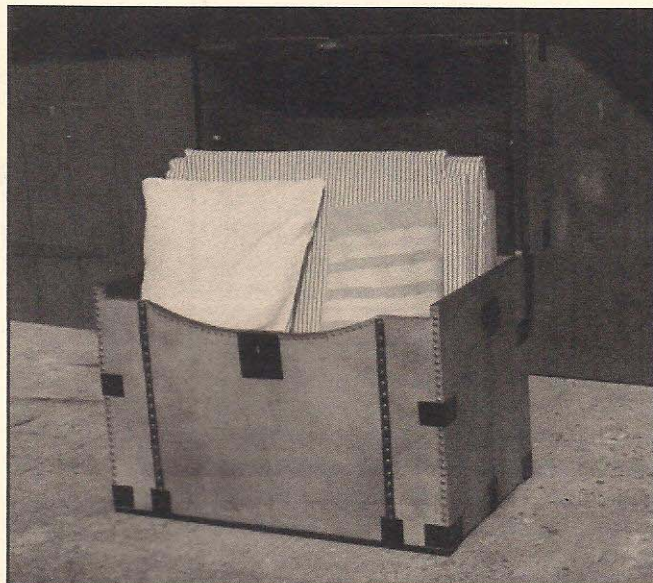


Above: Folding bedstead open out of the trunk and dressed with bed clothes.



Left: Folding bedstead completely enclosed in its trunk.

Below: Lid of trunk opened showing all the bed clothes that can be stored inside along with the folded bedstead.



*Photographs taken by the author.*