GOLDSMITH CHANDLEE'S "AMERICAN MANUFACTURE" COMPASS

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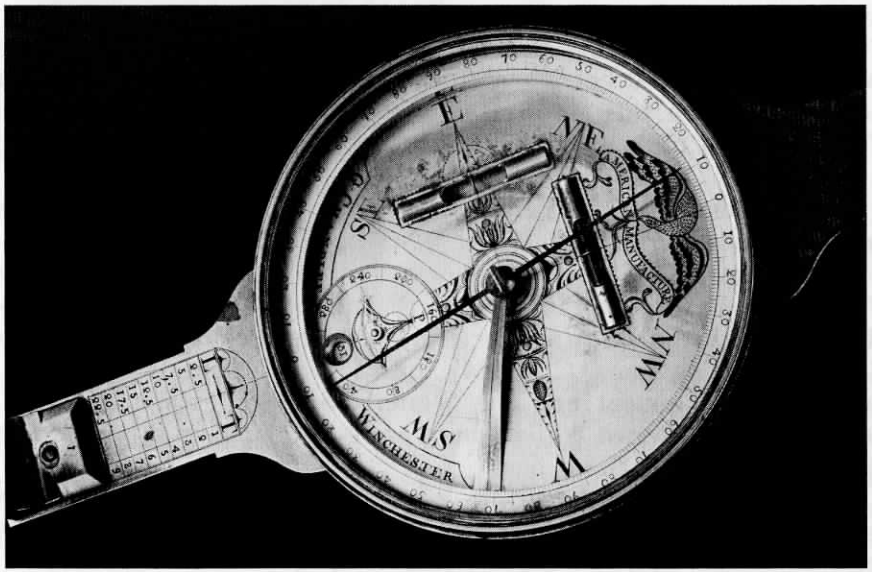
In the collections of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation there is an unusual surveyor's plain compass made by Goldsmith Chandlee of Winchester, Va. Although this compass is undated, the decoration--an eagle holding in its beak a banner proclaiming "American Manufacture"--suggests that it was made during the years when international trade disputes arising from the Napoleonic Wars were heightening Americans' interest in purchasing domestic, rather than imported goods. A sundial dated 1808 is the only other Chandlee instrument known to bear this inscription.[1] As the compass at Colonial Williamsburg does not carry an owner's name, Chandlee may have made it on speculation rather than to order. It is even possible that it was an exhibition piece.



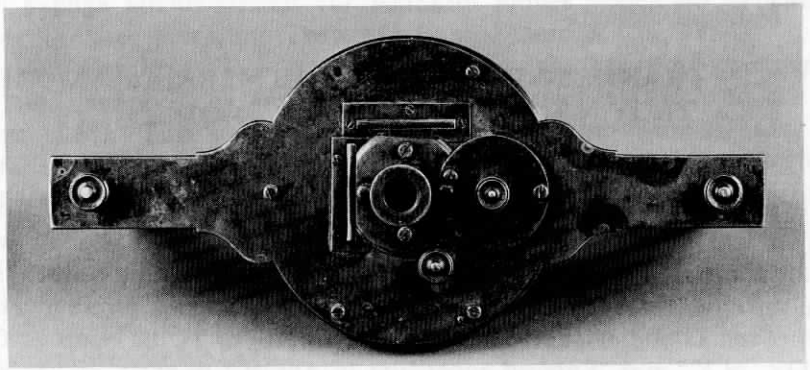
Chandlee's "American Manufacture" Compass
Photo courtesy Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

Only one other Chandlee instrument decorated with an eagle is known. This is a vernier compass in private hands. The banner held by that eagle announces the owner: John Orndorf.[2]

The south point of the Williamsburg compass face carries a "P" scale recording poles, and an outkeeper recording numbers from 1 to 16. There is an east-west level at north, and a north-south level at east. The southern arm carries a scale correlating "L" and "T". This "L-T" scale, which appears on most Chandlee compasses, has not been seen on other instruments except for the 1836 patent model for the surveyor's trigonometer invented by Francis Whiteley

of Standardsville, Va. No explanation of the "L-T" scale has yet been found in any surveying texts in common use in the 18th or early 19th centuries. The most logical explanation is that the "L" column lists "links" of chain, while the "T" column gives the equivalent distance in "tenths" of a pole. (25 links = 1 pole, therefore 2.5 links = 0.1 pole; 5 links = 0.2 pole; etc.)[3] This would have been a handy, though possibly superfluous, reminder when distances were being recorded in the field. The empty columns of the table, if they had any function beyond laying out the stamping, may have been used to tick off fractions of poles with pencil marks which could be easily erased with the pass of a finger.

1. James W. Gibbs, *Dixie Clockmakers* (Gretna, La., 1979), p. 93.
2. Silvio Bedini, "Collector's Corner," *Professional Surveyor* vol. 4, #6.
3. Silvio A. Bedini *Thinkers and Tinkers* (New York, 1975), pp. 317-8.



Bottom of Chandlee's "American Manufacture" Compass
Photo courtesy Colonial Williamsburg Foundation