

THE UNITED STATES MODEL 1839 CADET SWORD

BY RICHARD WAGNER

Pictured is the regulation U. S. Model 1839 sword for military cadets. The straight symmetrical blade is 26 ¼ inches long although a quarter of an inch may have been lost since the point is slightly rounded. The width is 1 inch at the hilt. There is a central fuller 11 3/8 inches long that starts about 1 ½ inches from the hilt. Blade decorations are legible but weak as the sword seems to have been extensively polished, as you perhaps would expect from a cadet sword. Decorations on one side consist of oak leaves and acorns at the base of the blade as well as other types of leaves in other areas, a U.S. shield, staff of Hermes, and a large U. S. in a sun burst. The other side has the same oak leaves and acorns plus other leaves, a U.S. shield over crossed cannons, a staff topped by a Liberty Cap, and a standing eagle with the end of a furred banner in its mouth. The words E Pluribus Unum are done in cursive with a dry needle on the banner. Surprisingly, it is known that the Ames Manufacturing Company made these swords but there is no Ames marking on this blade. However, the scabbard is stamped AMES MFG. Co / CHICOPEE / MASS on the reverse.

The brass hilt has some gilt remaining in protected areas. The pommel has the inspector's stamps RHKW (Robert Henry Kirkwood Whiteley who was active from 1854 through 1858) and JH (either Joseph Hannis or James Hawkins). The presence of Whiteley's stamp would indicate that this sword was one of 100 delivered to the U. S. Military Academy at West Point in 1856. No serial numbers or other markings could be found.

The iron scabbard may have been blued at one time, however it is now covered with the somewhat dull finish of early nickel plate. Since this model of sword was replaced sometime between 1870 and 1875, this nickel plating may have been done at the Academy. Unfortunately the scabbard throat is missing.





Details on the M1839 Cadet Sword are somewhat murky. Due to the special relationship of the Virginia Military Institute with the War Department at the time, the government ordered 12 of these swords for VMI in 1840. Supposedly the 12 were delivered on May 14, 1840. However, a tally in 1841 found only 8. Were 4 not delivered or, more likely, did 4 swords depart for reasons unknown? VMI received another 8 of these swords on May 1, 1841 and yet another 20 on April 15, 1847. West Point received 100 of these swords on November 30, 1849 and another 100 on July 25, 1856. All contracted from the N. P. Ames Company or the Ames Manufacturing Company as the name became in the late 1840s.

There is an unknown contract. A letter from the Chief of Ordnance to Ames dated April 14, 1840, states "Twelve swords, of the kind called "Cadet Swords" as such as have been furnished to the Military Academy, are required for the Virginia Military Institute". This is the only mention of these U. S. Military Academy swords that has been found. It is implied that Ames made these swords but it can not be said for certain. The swords were probably delivered in 1838 or 1839 since correspondence indicates the USMA was in dire need of cadet swords in 1837 and Ames would have had to tool up to produce a new pattern of sword. Of course, the number of swords delivered will remain unknown unless some record is found.

A rare grouping of swords that are seldom seen today.

REF:

**COLLECTORS' GUIDE TO AMES U. S. CONTRACT
MILITARY EDGED WEAPONS: 1832-1906**

Ron G. Hickox

THE AMERICAN SWORD 1775-1945

Harold L. Peterson

**CIVIL WAR ARMY SWORDS – A STUDY OF UNITED
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