



# The Musket Report



Newsletter of the Wiregrass Chapter, Alabama Society, Sons of the American Revolution

**ENTERPRISE, ALABAMA**

**September 2026**

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## TELLING TIME

Chapter Historian James Crabtree

I have a weakness for gadgets. I own at least three Minox spy cameras (including one formerly owned by Mel Blanc), a travel writing set with spaces for a candle and small inkwell, and a brass measuring coin. I also have a pocket sundial similar to one George Washington would have carried. At least according to the guy who sold it to me.

A little research tells us that George Washington *may* have had a proper pocket watch (or a “pocket clock,” as they were sometimes called) prior to the Revolution. One was certainly listed in a list of his father’s property prior to the death of the senior Washington. Logically, George would have been the one who would have inherited the device and there is evidence that he had a timepiece in hand at Mount Vernon.

However, when Washington went out to the frontier as a surveyor (or served on the ill-fated expedition which ended at Fort Necessity) he might have kept the watch someplace safe from the weather and used it to check the time when it was overcast or in the evening hours. This watch would have been different from modern timepieces.

Mechanical clocks had been around for hundreds of years but pocket watches only for about 150 years, and those were technically not pocket watches because they were worn around the neck on a chain. Invented in Germany, these watches were known as “Nuremburg Eggs.” Thanks to the use of mainsprings instead of the heavy weights employed in clocks at the time these watches could be carried anywhere, just not in pockets, because pockets were not a normal feature of men’s fashions at the time. The early watches were not particularly accurate and they only had one hand which made guessing how many minutes had passed between VIII and IX, but it was a beginning.

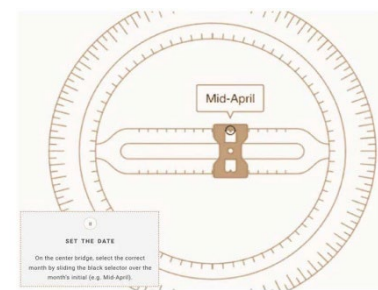
The watches of Washington’s time were smaller, but still much bigger and heavier than modern timepieces. They did not have a built-in stem to wind the spring but used a key which was normally attached to the watch chain. Since this was a handcrafted device requiring mechanical precision, it was relatively expensive and out of reach of most people at the time. Not surprisingly, watches even had small paintings on the face and elaborate designs on the case.

A pocket watch was a valuable item and the day-to-day timekeeping would have been done with a pocket sundial like this one. Less expensive than a watch and made of brass it would have been less susceptible to the effects of weather and rough travel. If it gets dirty, you wipe it off. If it gets wet, it will tarnish. If you keep it dry it will also tarnish, but not as fast. In any case, it will still work.

This colonial-era model had an outer ring for the latitude, a second ring for reading the time, and a date bar in the center. To operate it the device, you first set the outer ring to the latitude by sliding the Chain Ring to the right number... in the case of Enterprise, Alabama this would be 31 degrees. Surveyors and officers would either have maps with the number or would be able to extrapolate it. The ring would be locked at 31 by means of a small screw.

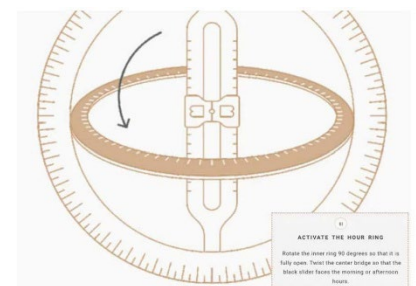
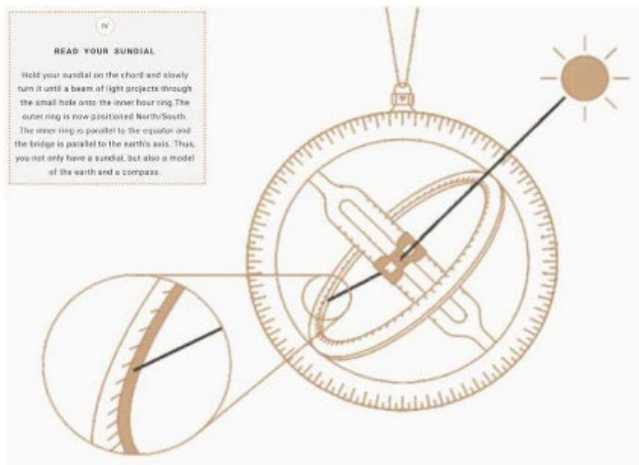


Next, the Date Bar is set by sliding the pinhole to the appropriate place according to the month, each month indicated by the first letter of the name of the month and divided in thirds. In this case it is August 22<sup>nd</sup> and that puts it in the beginning of the last third.



Finally, the second ring, or the Time Ring, is rotated on its axis 90 degrees where it should rest in place. This will tell you the time as you slowly rotate the chain until light enters the pinhole and shines through it to the inner ring where it can be read from the roman numerals there.

The time, as determined by the device, is the solar time. Solar time used to be the local time, set from solar noon, or when the sun is at its highest peak. Later, we would have railroad time, which in turn would evolve into the time zones we have today... irrespective of solar time.



What's really interesting about this device is that if you were lost but had a pocket watch as well as the pocket sun dial you could roughly determine the latitude by setting the date and sliding the Chain Ring along the latitude scale until the pinhole shows light on the correct time. Pretty smart, these colonials, even if this was one of the few gadgets of the time *not* invented by Benjamin Franklin!

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## Important Dates

**Next Chapter Meeting will be 17 September, 11:00am at the Enterprise Country Club.** This is the annual celebration of the signing of the Constitution hosted by the John Coffee Chapter DAR. The Constitutional Luncheon is a decades old tradition between our two chapters and this year the ladies of John Coffee have graciously invited us. Attendance is not mandatory. President Kitchens sent an email to all members discussing the details of this event. This is a **by reservation event only**. Reservations are \$15 per person and payment must be received by the John Coffee Treasurer **no later than 14 September**. Please check your email inbox. If for some reason you cannot find the email, please contact Compatriot Dallas and he will send you the reservation form.

**Chapter meeting 15 October, 11:30am at the Enterprise Country Club.** Nominations for 2027 officers will be discussed. If you are interested in being more involved in the SAR by serving as an officer, please contact President Kitchens. Many of our chapter members have decades of experience in the SAR and are more than willing to provide guidance for anyone seeking information.

**Pomeroy Sign Dedication. 6 November, Ozark-Dale County Library.** Details will follow as event gets closer.

**Chapter meeting 19 November, 11:30am at the Enterprise Country Club.** Officer elections will be held at this meeting. Compatriots are compelled to attend. Please schedule this meeting on your calendar.

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## 2027 Dues

Well fellas, it's that time of year again. This year we highly encourage you to pay online but checks will be accepted as always. If you are unsure about your membership status or how much you owe, contact Compatriot Dallas [jrd sar@gmail.com](mailto:jrd sar@gmail.com) How much do I owe? Annual dues amount varies depending on your membership status:

| <b><u>Member Status</u></b> | <b><u>National</u></b> | <b><u>State</u></b> | <b><u>Chapter</u></b> | <b><u>Total</u></b> |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Regular Member Dues:        | \$50                   | \$20                | \$15                  | <b>\$85</b>         |
| National Life Only:         | N/A                    | \$20                | \$15                  | <b>\$35</b>         |
| State Life Only:            | \$50                   | N/A                 | \$15                  | <b>\$65</b>         |
| National & State Life:      | N/A                    | N/A                 | \$15                  | <b>\$15</b>         |

\* Online payments can be made by clicking <https://onlinepayment.alssar.org/dues> (a small fee applies)

\*\* If you wish to become a life member, do not pay dues yet, contact Compatriot Dallas.

\*\*\* Please make one check payable to: **Wiregrass Chapter ALSSAR**      Mail to: Mr. John Cheney  
2019 Stonewood Dr.  
Dothan, AL 36301

Please email or text/call Compatriot Dallas when you pay online or mail a check. Thank you!

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The Sons of the American Revolution honors our Revolutionary War patriot ancestors by promoting patriotism, serving our communities and educating and inspiring future generations about the founding principles of our Country.