

Examination of the Construction of a Confederate Drawstring “Poke” Sack in the 16th Regiment Museum of Confederate History

The city of Greenville, South Carolina has one of the best small museums I have ever seen. The 16th Regiment Museum of Confederate History [1] has a great display of weapons, relics and artifacts. They range from the 16th South Carolina Regimental Flag to several homespun work dresses. The 16th South Carolina reenactment group and Curator Bert Miller, with the untiring support group of local reenactors, Sons of Confederate Veterans members and interested citizens have achieved an outstanding success. The arms collection is undoubtedly the best I have seen in a museum of this size. If in the area, please stop by, view the fine collections and make a donation to a very worthy effort.

Thanks to Bert, I was able to view a Confederate drawstring “poke” sack that belonged to Private William Watson of the 16th South Carolina Regiment in Brigadier General States Rights Gist’s Brigade, Army of Tennessee. The sack and original letters are on display under a Plexiglas case. Directly behind the case are transcripts of the letters that William carried in the sack. William was killed in the charge at Franklin and family lore has this sack with his correspondence returned to the family shortly thereafter. The sack has stains and damage that the family attributes to William’s wounds at the time of his death. I was very honored to view this piece.

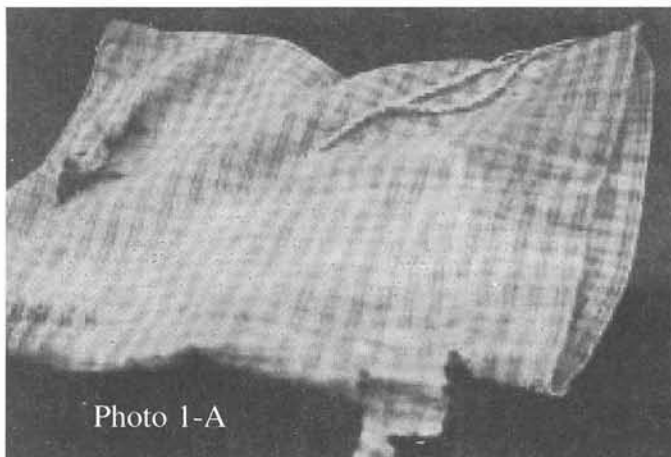


Photo 1-A

Just the facts

The sack is eight inches by twelve inches and made of what appears to have been a blue and red alternating check on a light background. The material is cotton with the checks being approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ inch apart and the widths being $\frac{1}{4}$ inch for the horizontal blue check and $\frac{1}{8}$ inch for the vertical red check. The check threads themselves appear to have two dark, possibly brown, threads as defining borders (Photos 1-A through 1-E). The material now has a light brown cast, but probably was a lighter color, perhaps white or cream. The interior has the raw

edges folded into themselves and single stitched (very tight, almost backstitched) down to form a noticeable seam on the bottom and side (Photos 1-C and 1-B). [2] The collar has been folded in approximately two inches with the selvedge edge left exposed. The collar is then stitched down with small stitches at $\frac{1}{8}$ inch intervals $\frac{1}{4}$ inch from the selvedge edge (Photo 1-D). The thread is medium weight white cotton. The drawstring is a medium weight cotton twine that has been doubled, and drawn through two hand stitched eyelets $\frac{1}{4}$ inch from the side seam about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch from the top of the collar (Photos 1-A and 1-B). The twine appears to have been strung and the two inch lip turned down and stitched into place.

Conclusions

The sack appears to have been made of a cotton fabric manufactured commonly in the South during the war. It might have been shirting material. I have seen this type of material used in depot jacket linings also. It is impossible to tell who did the actual sewing. The stitching is good and even and fairly uniform. I would guess that this size sack was always used for personal items as it had no food stains. I can not identify the stain in the collar area or assess the reason for the damage.

Implications

This is just one example of “poke” [3] bags that I have viewed. I have seen a variety of fabrics and closure methods. Reproducing any of them should be correct. The size of the sack could vary as long as construction is consistent with originals. The use of twine doubled is very interesting, as I have recently been using cotton twill tape for drawstrings. This particular sack would appear to be made of either shirting or lining material. Not a bad sewing project for the recycling of that old and trusted shirt.

Charles McCulloh

NOTES:

[1] 16th Regiment Museum of Confederate History, 15 Boyce Ave., Greenville S.C. 29607 and (864) 421-9039. Open Wednesday from 10 AM –3 PM for school tours, Friday from 5-9 PM, Saturday from 10 AM –5 PM and Sunday from 1-5 PM.

[2] This is commonly known as a French seam.

[3] The word “poke” means a pocket or a small bag. As such the word can be used alone. From *A Dictionary of the English Language*, abridged from Noah Webster’s American Dictionary of the English Language, by F. J. Huntington, New York, 1854

Charles McCulloh is a 47 year old Landscape Architect and Land Surveyor for the City of Birmingham Alabama Urban Planning Department. He has been reenacting for the last six years with Rambo’s Battalion in the 1st Confederate Division. He tells the DOG, “I am a ‘high’ private in the 22nd Alabama Infantry Regiment and am proud to galvanize as the 9th Indiana..... AND after several years of uniform research I have discovered that the more I learn, the less I know.”

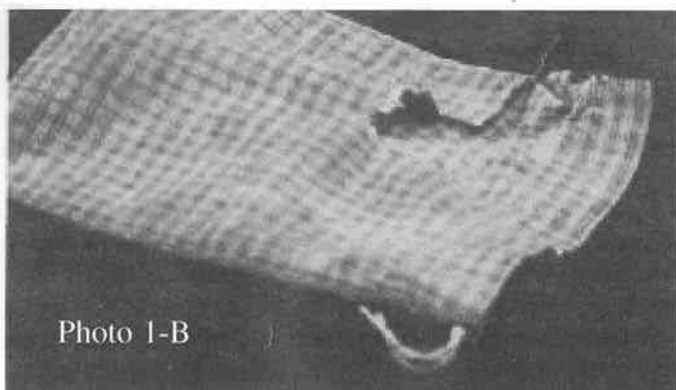


Photo 1-B

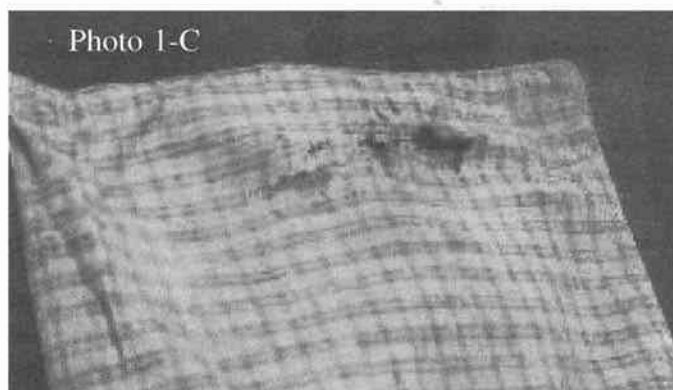


Photo 1-C

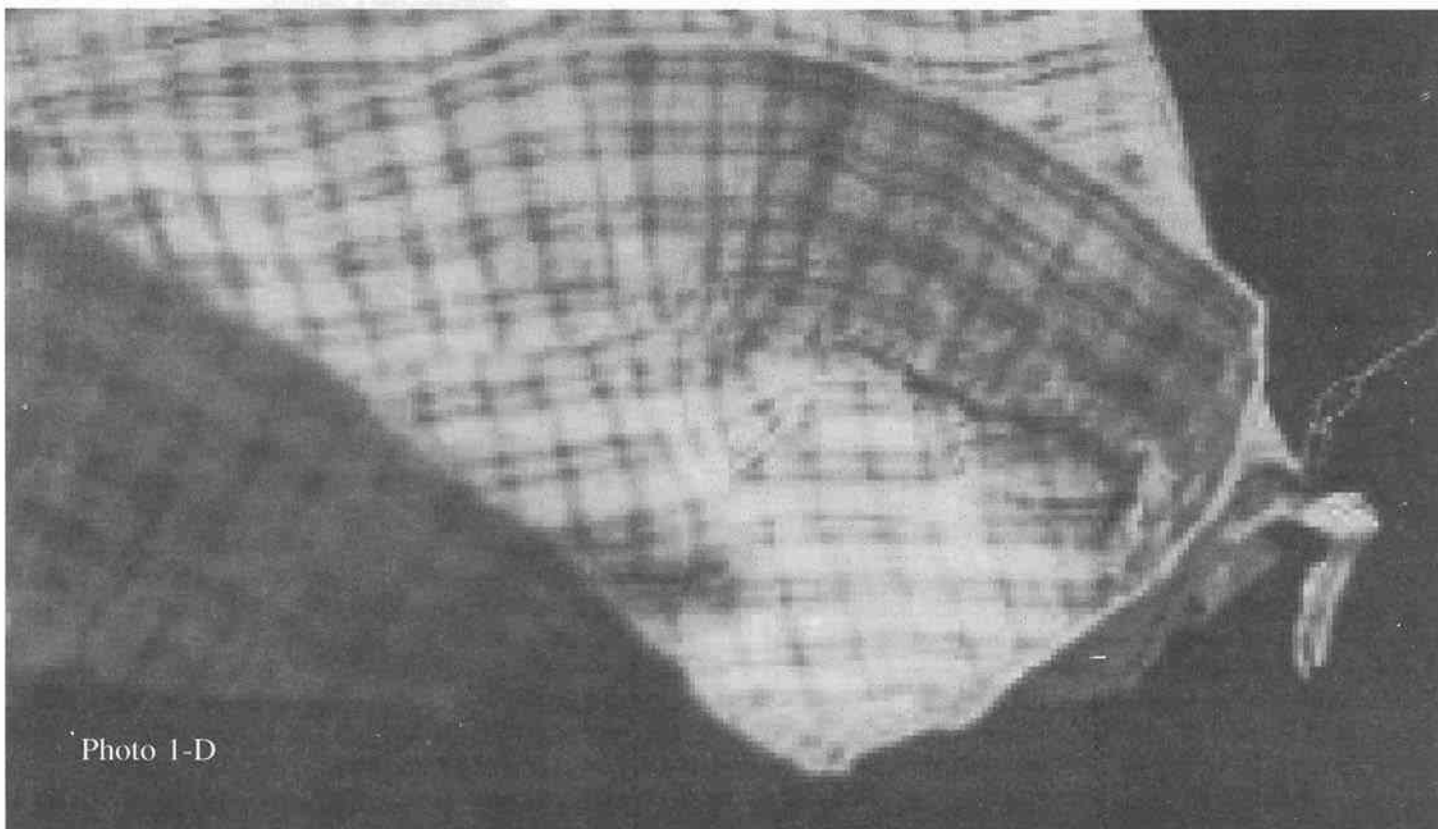


Photo 1-D

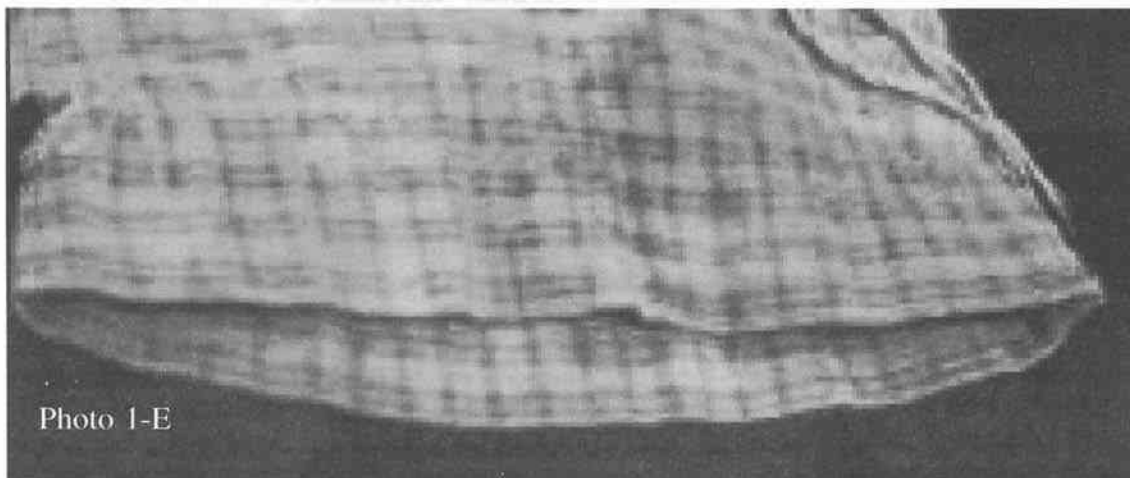


Photo 1-E

All the photographs were taken by Charles McCulloh with the permission of the 16th Regiment Museum of Confederate History. The **DOG** will make sure that all of Mr. McCulloh's fine color images of the William Watson poke are posted on our website.