I used to dream of the day when I would have enough time and money to visit all the archives and libraries in which 18th-century newspapers are held nowadays, then go through all the newspapers looking for references to the recorder. Recently, my dream came true, but not in the way I expected.

First, I had access to a database that includes facsimile pages of virtually all surviving London newspapers, reporting the findings in my article “The Recorder in English Newspapers, 1730–1800” (AR, March 2012). Then I worked my way in a matter of weeks through three databases that include facsimile pages or transcriptions of most newspapers from colonial North America and the early U.S.

As we will see, these databases yielded some fascinating social material about the history of the recorder in early America—also confirming that the instrument did not die out around 1740, as the modern myth has it.

**Terminology**

Before we can look for the recorder in historical sources, we need to know what the instrument was called at the time. The original name for the recorder in English, first documented in 1388, was actually “recorder,” clearly distinguished from the transverse flute (“flute”). Complications set in when the Baroque style of recorder—made in three pieces, with elaborately turned joints—was introduced from France in 1673. The instrument then took on the French name *flute douce*, soon abbreviated to *flute*. References to “flute” between the 1670s and at least the 1740s, therefore, almost always mean the recorder, not the transverse flute.

The switch in terminology was possible only because the Renaissance style of transverse flute was almost obsolete in England in the 1670s. When the Baroque style was imported from France around 1700, it was given a new name, “German flute,” a translation of the French *flûte allemand* or *flûte d’Allemagne*.

In colonial North America, recorders are mentioned under that name, along with shawms, in inventories from plantations in New Hampshire as early as 1633 and 1635. The two instruments were probably played by the same men, who had some ceremonial function on the plantation.

In Beverwijk, a Dutch settlement (later Albany, the state capital of New York), Jan Gerritse van Marcken, a Dutchman who emigrated in 1654, became “farmer of the excise” in 1662. In 1664 he made an inventory of his possessions that included “10 houte fluijten” (10 wooden fluijten, line 4, at left), probably small recorders for his children. His tale was recounted by...
Benjamin Franklin recorded approvingly that Brownell “was a skilful master....”

Susan Thompson in the November 2004 AR, which also included her photo of the detail taken from his inventory.

The colonies did not react instantly to a change of terminology in England. The estate inventory (1679) of Judith Parker, Surry County (VA) still uses the older terms to distinguish between “1 Recorder [and] 2 flutes.” The inventory of John Dyer, an ironmonger and member of the Artillery Company in Boston (1696), lists “2 flutes 2s.” The instruments were probably fifes that he was selling to other militiamen.

By 1716, when instruments were imported to Boston from England by Edward Enstone, an organist who had emigrated two years earlier, he used the term “flutes,” which presumably now designated the recorder.

“English flute” for recorder is first documented in 1743, two years ahead of British sources. In 1749, the alternative name “common flute,” first documented in England in 1722, also turns up. Sometimes both terms appear in advertisements by the same store about the same time, even presented as alternatives (“English, or common Concert Flutes,” New York, 1773) or combined (“English common Flutes,” Baltimore, 1785). A “concert” instrument seems to have been one pitched in the customary key: thus F for an alto recorder. “Flute doux,” a garbled rendition of *flutes douces*, occurs in New York in 1794.

Recorders are mentioned in the estate inventories of two men in Boston: Walter Rosewell, sea captain, 1717 (“1 Flute & book”); and James Scolley, shopkeeper, 1721 (“1 flut”). The “flute” is also found in several estate inventories of wealthy Virginia gentlemen between 1736 and 1791. At least through the 1750s, these are likely to have been recorders, and one reference is explicit: Colonel Henry Fitzhugh, Esquire, plantation owner, Stafford County, 1743: “a case containing a German and an English flute.”

“German flute” for the transverse instrument first appeared in an advertisement for a New York concert in 1736, and was used into the early 19th century. By the 1740s, as in England, references to plain “flute” had become ambiguous. The double meaning of recorders/flutes for “flutes” is implied by its alternation with “German and English flutes” or “common and German flutes” in advertisements from five stores in Boston, Charleston (SC) and New York over the period 1746–75. The usage of “flutes” for flutes was not firmly established until the 1780s.

Finally, in the mid-1790s, “common flute” came to mean the one-keyed transverse flute, as opposed to one of the newer varieties with up to six keys; by the first decade of the 19th century, “English flutes” began to signify flutes sent from England.

In American sources of the second half of the 18th century, “voice flute” did not mean an alto recorder in D, as it had in England around 1700, but some kind of low transverse flute.

Teachers, Players, Instruction

Twelve men and one woman in five cities advertised their ability to teach the recorder over the period 1713–71. In 1713, at the Boston house of George Brownell, “where scholars may board,” they were taught “Dancing, Treble Violin, Flute, Spinnet &c.” In addition to two of the 3Rs (“Writing, Cyphering”) and several styles of needlework. Brownell was actually the first dancing master permitted to teach in Boston. The reference to needlework suggests that girls were being taught as well as boys, and that his wife, Pleasant, was involved in the school. Brownell’s distinguished student Benjamin Franklin recorded approvingly that Brownell “was a skilful master, and succeeded very well in his profession by employing gentle means only; and such as were calculated to encourage his scholars.”

In 1713, King’s Chapel in Boston accepted the bequest of an organ and hired Edward Enstone from London to play it, on the understanding that he could supplement his income by teaching. Alas, his petition to teach music and dancing was disallowed by the city in February 1715 and again in April 1716. Only two weeks later, Enstone placed an advertisement: “there is lately sent over from London a choice Collection of Musickal Instruments, consisting of Flagelets, Flutes, Hault-Boys, Bass-Viols, Violins, Bows, Strings, Reads for Hault-Boys, Books of Instructions for all these Instruments,” to be sold at his dancing school. He added: “Any Person ... may be taught to Play on any of these Instruments abovementi’d....”

Besides Enstone’s “Books of Instructions,” tutors for the recorder were advertised for sale in Boston, Charleston, New York, Philadelphia, and Williamsburg between 1759 and 1773, all apparently imported from London.

Another Boston dancing master, Increase Gatchell, also described as “schoolmaster,” had “flutes” in his inventory when he died in 1729, and may have taught them to his students. He advertised violin strings for sale in 1724, so perhaps he also sold recorders.

In 1744 in Philadelphia, “Mrs. Dickson, from Scotland” announced her intent “to teach young ladies to draw in every kind, and to paint upon silk, and Japan upon glass or wood, and varnishing, or to play on the flute.”

By contrast, in New York the following September, “a gentleman lately arrived here” made his pitch to “young gentlemen, or others, inclined to learn,” offering that those “who are
willing to divert or improve a tedious hour ... may be taught by a very easy method, the violin and flute.” He offered to wait on gentlemen “at their respective lodgings” and undertook “to teach the meanest capacity (on strict application) two tunes in the first fortnight, and so on in proportion.” The reference to practicing is a nice touch.

In Charleston in 1749, Frederick Grunzweig, perhaps a recent immigrant, gave notice to a broad potential clientele—“all young gentlemen, ladies and others, in town and country”—that besides the spinnet, “German flute, &c.” he taught the English or common flute and violincello ... carefully ... at a very cheap rate”—both during the day, presumably at his students’ houses, and at his house every Wednesday and Saturday evening.

That same year, John Beals of Philadelphia, “musick-master, from London,” proposed to teach “the violin, hautboy, German flute, common flute, and dulcimer, by note” at his house or to “attend young ladies, or others, that may desire it, at their houses.” As a bonus, “He likewise provides musick for balls or other entertainments.”

Probably the music business was slow; three years later he advertised himself primarily as a maker of nets, only adding at the end: “Gentlemen and others may be carefully taught the violin, hautboy, German-flute and common flute, by book, as formerly.” “By note” and “by book” both mean “from written or printed music,” not just by ear.

Charles Love, “musician from London,” advertised in New York in 1753 that he had set up a school “in Mr. Rice’s consort room in Broad-Street” and was “teaching gentlemen musick on the following instruments, viz. violin, hautboy, German and common flutes, bassoon, French horn, tenor, and bass violin, if desired.” Evidently, Love did not find enough students to make a living, moving on to become a servant of Philip Ludwell Lee, a plantation owner and a member of one of the richest families in Virginia. When Love ran away in 1757, Lee offered a large reward, describing his servant as: “Charles Love, a tall thin man, about sixty years of age; he professes music, dancing, fencing, and plays extremely well on the violin, and all wind instruments; he stole when he went away a very good bassoon, made by Schuchart, ... as also a Dutch or German fiddle, with an old hautboy and German flute, which are his own....”

“Charles Love, a tall thin man ... plays extremely well on the violin, and all wind instruments; he stole when he went away a very good bassoon, made by Schuchart, ... as also a Dutch or German fiddle, with an old hautboy and German flute, which are his own....”
A man ... left an alehouse “befuddled but in a good humor with a big flute in his pocket.”

servant of John Leathes, aged about 27, Philadelphia, 1753: “He plays pretty well on the common flute.”

In Philadelphia in 1763, a “limner” (painter) named William Williams announced that, “being lately returned from the West Indies,” he had set up business in his former residence, “viz. painting in general. Also, an evening school, for the instruction of polite youth, in different branches of drawing, and to sound the hautboy, German and common flutes....”

In 1771, Francis Russworm begged leave “to inform the young gentlemen in and about Williamsburg, that he shall open a school ... to teach the violin, German and common flutes”; he also taught dancing to young ladies.

Jacob Hood and Philip Hartunoz informed the public of Charleston in 1772 “that they teach at home and abroad [away from home], all musical instruments of every denomination whatsoever, particularly the violin, violoncello, harpsichord, hautboy, bassoon, German and English flute, French horn, & etc. Any gentleman, a lover of music, may have his Negroes taught upon every reasonable terms.... All musical instruments tuned, repaired, and rectified.” Hood was presumably the man of that name advertising in Newport, RI (1765), and Charleston (1770) as teaching gentlemen the violin, violoncello and German flute.

Hood and Hartunoz soon had competition in Charleston. In 1773, John William Beck confidently advertised “that he teacheth to play on the following instruments, viz., clarinet, flauto traverso, flauto a bec, hautbois or oboe de Simon [lower oboe?], bassoon, violin, tenor violin, and bass violin as perfectly as any master in America.” He added that students “may depend on his assiduity and punctual attendance on very reasonable terms, either at their own houses or at his house....” The mixed-language term *flauto a bec* for the recorder is also documented in Germany in the late Baroque.

Besides teachers and students, the references to players of the recorder are to amateurs. The earliest is in 1660 in Beverwijck, where a man is reported to have left an alehouse “befuddled but in a good humor with a big flute in his pocket.” The flute is far more likely to have been a *fluit*, or recorder, than a large flute, an instrument that was scarcely played by amateurs in Europe.

**Sellers**

We are fortunate that American stores often itemized their wares in their advertisements. No fewer than 53 sellers in 11 cities—Baltimore, Boston, Charleston, New York, Newburyport (MA), Newport, Norfolk (VA), Philadelphia, Providence (RI), Salem (MA) and Williamsburg—advertised recorders between 1716 and 1815, exactly a century. Throughout this period, the main sellers were stores for general goods (9), hardware (9), books (6) and housewares (4). Less than 10 percent of the sellers were in the music business: music stores (5), non-woodwind instrument makers (2), music publisher/store (1) and music teacher (1). Other sellers included two silversmiths and one each of bookbinder, clock and watch store, cutler, ivory turner, mathematical instrument maker, picture store, post office, and printer. No makers’ names are given.

The average number of sellers per year offering recorders crept up:

- 0.2 in the 1730s
- 0.3 in the 1740s
- 1.4 in the 1750s
- 4.0 in the 1760s, an abrupt rise
- 2.1 in the 1770s, now falling.

The number stayed steady at around 0.6 through 1804, ending with 2 in 1815. The bulk of the advertisements lie in the period 1752–77, with a peak of 7 sellers per year in 1766–67.

In the 1760s and ’70s, recorders were imported from London in sizes from “all” to “various” or “different.” Only three times are sizes specified:

1. “Common Flutes, from a Concert to an Octave” (Philadelphia, 1762): from alto to soprano
2. “English, or common Concert Flutes ... English, second Concert Flutes ... English, third Concert Flutes ... English, fourth Concert Flutes” (New York, 1777): alts, and other recorders pitched a second, a third, and a fourth above
3. “English or Shepherd Flutes, 2d, 3d, 4th, 6th and 8th” (Boston, 1815).

Two London dealers—George Astor and Goulding, Phipps, & D’Almaine—advertised similar sizes in 1799–1800.

Despite the apparent generosity of “all sizes,” these references reflect a further shift in the history of the recorder. In the 16th century, a wide range of recorders had been available, from extended great bass through great bass, bass, bassett, tenor, discant, soprano and sopranino. Over the course of the 17th century, especially with the advent of the Baroque style of recorder, the lowest sizes dropped out, leaving bassett, tenor, alto, soprano and sopranino—along with a new size, the voice flute, around 1700. During the 18th century, as the new evidence shows, even the bassett and tenor were gradually discarded, as players concentrated on the smaller sizes, from alto to sopranino.

The only price we have for recorders is the “common Flutes of all sizes at a Dollar each, and upwards” advertised by a “gentleman from London” selling instruments in New York, Philadelphia, Newport and Boston in 1762–64. His beginning price for flutes was $3. A gentleman in New York was also selling flutes at $3 in 1759.
Makers

At first, recorders were imported from England, as mentioned in the above advertisement by Enstone (1716). The primary London makers in the early 18th century were Peter Bressan (1663–1731), John Hall (born c.1655; fl. 1729), and Thomas Stanesby Senior (c.1668–1734).

Between 1743 and 1795, several stores in Boston, New York, Newburyport, Newport and Philadelphia stated that their recorders had just been imported via London or Bristol, sometimes even citing the importing ship and its captain.

The instruments must have stemmed in part from those London woodwind makers mentioned by name in American advertisements for other instruments who are known to have made recorders: Thomas Collier (d. 1785), Caleb Gedney (1729–69), John Mason (fl. 1754–78), Richard Potter (1726–1806), and John Just Schuchart (d. 1759) and his son Charles (d. 1765). Gedney advertised in 1754 that he made "the nea[r]est and best Travers or German Flutes of all Sizes, Eng lish Flutes ditto.... Orders out of the Country shall be punctually obey'd." Mason advertised in 1765: "He makes the most curious German and Common Flutes, Fifes, Hautboys, Clarinets, Bassoons, Vox Humanes, &c. his Work being well known, and used through all Parts of his Majesty's Dominions Abroad and at Home." Recorders by Collier, Schuchart and Thomas Cahusac Senior (1714–98) survive in American collections, although of course they may not be of American provenance.

The earliest known woodwind maker in colonial North America came from Germany rather than England. Gottlieb Wolhaupter advertised in New York in 1761 that he "continues to make and mend, all Sorts of Musical Instruments, such as German Flutes, Hautboys, Clareonets, Flageolets, Bassoons, Fifes...." Nine years later, a turner named David Wolhaupter—the same man or a relative—announced to "his friends and customers" that he had moved his business to Broadway, "where he makes and mends all sorts of musical instruments, such as bassoons, German flutes, common d[itto] haut-boys, clarinets, fifes, bagpipes, &c...." By 1773, perhaps a sign of the impending Revolution, he emphasized that he made "drums, trumpets, fifes, and all sorts of musical instruments." In his final year of advertising, 1775, the recorder is mentioned again: "He also makes Clarinets, Hautboys, German and common Flutes...." None of his instruments have survived.

In Philadelphia in 1772, Jacob Anthony issued two parallel advertisements, in German and English, "to acquaint the Public, that he makes and sells all Sorts of musical Instruments; as German Flutes, of all Sorts, com-

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“all sorts of turner’s work is executed in the compleatest manner; also German and common flutes, hautboys, fifes, &c. of all sorts and sizes; all sorts of musical instruments repaired...” Furthermore, “He has opened an evening school for musick, at Mr. John Hepburn’s, where he teaches the most modern and approved methods of playing the German flute, hautboy, clarinet, bassoon, &c. Having been educated in that science, under the care of some of the greatest masters in England.” Perhaps he had picked up such training by stopping off in London on the way to America. Was the recorder included under the “etc.”? An oboe by him has survived, dated “November 1771” (presumably made while he was still in England), as well as an octave bassoon, but no members of the flute family.

Postscript

The newspaper advertisements that form the basis of this article furnish a wealth of information about recorder teachers, players, sellers and makers that has been virtually unknown to recorder researchers. These advertisements confirm that, as in England, the recorder played a role in musical life as an amateur and educational instrument throughout the 18th century and into the 19th.

As interest in the recorder waned toward the end of the 18th century, the flageolet took its place. Ironically, the so-called English flageolet, invented in England in the 1790s, was a recorder in everything but name, having seven finger holes and a thumb hole. Through various patents, or otherwise, it underwent rapid development over the next 20 years, largely to reduce the tendency for the windway to clog with moisture, to extend the range, and to make producing the octave easier for amateurs by reducing or eliminating the thumb hole. Keywork was also gradually added, as on the flute.

The flageolet in the 19th century achieved an even greater popularity than the recorder in the 18th, for the same reasons: it was portable and one could easily learn to play a few tunes on it, with or without a teacher. This instrument kept the family of duct flutes alive and well among American amateurs—and later in the 19th century, developed a significant body of touring professionals.

Resources

Accessible Archives (available on subscription at www.accessible.com).
America’s Historical Newspapers including Series 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5; 1690–1922 and Hispanic American Newspapers, 1808–1980, publ. by Readex, a division of NewsBank; available on subscription from http://infoweb.newsbank.com.
The Life of Dr. Benjamin Franklin, Written by Himself, 2nd American ed. (Philadelphia: Benjamin Johnson, 1794).
Phillip T. Young, 4900 Historical Woodwind Instruments: An Inventory of 200 Makers in International Collections (London: Tony Bingham, 1993).