

Curator's Choice

Sergeant Jacob Huyett's Cavalry Helmet

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A short time ago, an object arrived at the MAC Laboratory for conservation treatment that provides a glimpse into the life of an officer during the time of the War of 1812. The cavalry helmet, in addition to a type of jacket called a coatee, is part of a significant early 19th-century uniform assemblage in the collection of the Washington County Historical Society that is connected to Jacob Huyett, a past resident of the county (Figure 1). Sergeant Jacob Huyett served during the War of 1812 and, according to family history, fought in the Battle of North Point and the Defense of Baltimore (Cueto 2020). Huyett was a member of the Maryland Militia's Light Dragoons and part of the cavalry unit known as the Hagerstown Blues.

As a member of the militia, Huyett would have been responsible for outfitting himself, paying for his uniform and equipment out of his own pocket (Kimmel 2020). The hardened leather helmet features a horsehair crest along with the comb and is decorated with copper alloy fittings (Figure 1). The leather chinstrap is covered by multiple copper alloy scales.

One end of the strap would have been covered by the round, copper alloy decorative boss featuring an eagle with spread wings (Figure 2). A metal plate was once attached directly to the front of the helmet and likely would have resembled the one in Figure 3 (Kimmel 2020). Huyett's helmet, with shiny metal fittings and flowing horsehair crest, would have added a striking and dazzling appearance to his uniform.

The pattern of Huyett's helmet was influenced by helmets being worn by British and other European cavalry units at the time (Chartrand 1992, Kochan and Rickman 2000). The cavalry helmets' design also takes inspiration from the Classical Revival style that was



Figure 1. Sergeant Jacob Huyett's cavalry helmet, before conservation treatment.

in vogue then, where aspects of architecture, art, décor, and fashion were copied from the ancient Greek and Roman worlds.

Tragically, Huyett died in 1840 from a horse and carriage accident while attending a political rally for William Henry Harrison (Cueto 2020). However, Huyett's memory and story lives on at the Washington County Historical Society. The cavalry helmet will return to the Historical Society once the conservation treatment is complete, where it will be reunited with and proudly displayed alongside the coatee Huyett wore during his War of 1812 service (Figure 4).



Figure 2: Detailed of copper alloy metal boss from the chinstrap.



Figure 3. Light dragoon helmet, ca. 1814, in the collection of the Smithsonian Museum. Photo: Howell and Kloster 1969: 10.



Figure 4. Sergeant Huyett's helmet and coatee on display at the Miller House Museum in Hagerstown, MD. Photo: Washington County Historical Society.

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