

# HUZZAH or HUZZAY



What is the Right Way  
For people Today  
To properly Say  
The most popular Cheer  
Of our forefather's Day?



Being an investigation into the preferred pronunciation  
of the one word that is probably the most spoken,  
most heard and most remembered  
at Eighteenth Century Living History programs  
and reenactments of the Twenty-first Century



Taken from  
PRIMARY SOURCES

By  
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# DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all those American Revolutionary War period Living Historians and Reenactors who strive for the highest degree of authenticity in all that they do.

Williamsburg  
Norman Fuss  
12 June, 2006

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# INTRODUCTION

Virtually everyone in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Living History/Reenactment community has accepted that the popular cheer “Huzza,” is to be pronounced “Huzzah.” Go to any 18<sup>th</sup> Century event and you will hear “Huzzah, Huzzah, Huzzah!” shouted repeatedly. Few, if any have questioned the conventional wisdom that says that “Huzza” is properly pronounced “Huzzah.”

Some time ago the author and his wife were rehearsing a short afterpiece by the renown 18<sup>th</sup> Century playwright and actor David Garrick entitled *The Farmer’s Return from London*.<sup>1</sup> The piece is written in rhyming couplets reminiscent of a Dr. Seuss story. Every pair of lines ends with a clear rhyme – except one. The single anomalous couplet occurs in the following passage.

WIFE But was’ t thou at court, John? What there has thou seen?

FARMER I saw ‘em, heaven bless ‘em! You know who I mean.

I heard their healths prayed for agen and agen,

With proviso that one may be sick now and ten .

Some looks speak their hearts, as it were with a tongue.

Oh, Dame! I’ ll be damned if they e’ er do us wrong:

Here’ s to ‘em, bless ‘em boath. Do you take the jug.

Would’ t do their hearts good, I’ d swallow the mug. (*Drinks*)

(*To Dick*) Come, pledge me, my boy.

Hold, lad; hast nothing to say?

DICK Here, Daddy, here’ s to’ em! (*Drinks*)

FARMER Well said, Dick, boy!

DICK **Huzza!** (emphasis added)

If “Huzza” is pronounced “Huzzah” the way most living historians and reenactors pronounce it, the free flow of rhyming couplets is jarringly interrupted in a way that one can hardly reconcile with a writer and actor of the skill and reputation of David Garrick. But if “Huzza” is pronounced “Huzzay,” it fits and the flow of rhyming couplets continues uninterrupted.

This anomaly started a search for other primary source examples that would indicate the proper 18<sup>th</sup> Century pronunciation of “Huzza,” many of which were published in *THE BRIGADE DISPATCH*.<sup>2</sup> Those examples, together with additional examples discovered since, have been reorganized and are presented here for the information of all interested parties so that they may decide for themselves how they wish to pronounce “Huzza.”

The author wishes to recognize with thanks Ronald W. Poppe, Hardie Menagh, Mark Hilliard, and Barbara Fuss, who each contributed a number of the examples that are cited in the following pages.

Williamsburg, 12 June, 2006  
N. H. F.

# METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this effort was simple and straight forward.

First, a search of contemporary 18<sup>th</sup> Century dictionaries was conducted in the Rare Books and Special Collections of the New York Public Library, the Swem Library at the College of William and Mary, and the Rockefeller Library of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation to find as many examples as possible of dictionary entries in which the pronunciation of “Huzza” was indicated. A surprising number of such dictionaries was discovered. Some (e.g.: Johnson) indicated pronunciation by citing passages of rhyming poetry. Others (e.g.: Sheridan) included remarkably complete and detailed pronunciation guides in their introductions, with the proper pronunciation of the words indicated by small numerals or other symbols above or below the vowels.

Second, 18<sup>th</sup> Century books, newspapers, magazines, play scripts, song lyrics and other primary sources were searched for examples of poetry containing the word “Huzza” in a rhyming scheme that would clearly indicate the intended pronunciation. This yielded numerous examples of the use of “Huzza” in contexts in which the pronunciation that was apparently intended was evident.

Finally, a number of 19<sup>th</sup> Century dictionaries were consulted in an attempt to discover when the transition from “Huzza” to “Huzzah” in both spelling and pronunciation occurred.

## DICTIONARY REFERENCES

Eighteen dictionaries published between 1702 and 1818 were consulted.<sup>3</sup> All spelled the word “HUZZA.” All had accent marks indicating that the stress should be placed on the second syllable.

Seven of those dictionaries also indicated pronunciation,<sup>4</sup> six by pronunciation guides, one by citing passages from poetry. Space limitations make it impractical to reproduce here all of the pronouncing guides and word entries. However, the following abridged examples are provided to illustrate the ways in which 18<sup>th</sup> Century lexicographers indicated proper pronunciation.

The 1796 edition of Thomas Sheridan’s dictionary<sup>5</sup> (first published in 1752) gives the following “Scheme of the Vowels” and entry for Huzza.

### Scheme of the Vowels

	FIRST	SECOND	THIRD
a	h <sup>1</sup> át	h <sup>2</sup> áte	h <sup>3</sup> áll
e	b <sup>1</sup> ét	b <sup>2</sup> éar	b <sup>3</sup> éer
i	f <sup>1</sup> ít	f <sup>2</sup> íght	f <sup>3</sup> íeld
o	n <sup>1</sup> ót	n <sup>2</sup> óte	n <sup>3</sup> óose
u	b <sup>1</sup> út	b <sup>2</sup> úsh	b <sup>3</sup> úe
y	love-l <sup>1</sup> ý	l <sup>2</sup> ýe	

Huzza, h<sup>1</sup>úz-z<sup>2</sup>á’ Intrej. A shout, a cry of acclamation  
To Huzza, h<sup>1</sup>úz-z<sup>2</sup>á’ v. n. To utter acclamation  
To Huzza, h<sup>1</sup>úz-z<sup>2</sup>á’ v. a. To receive with acclamation

The 1798 edition of John Walker's dictionary<sup>6</sup> gives the following "Scheme of the Vowels" and entry for Huzza.

A table of the Simple and Diphthongal Vowels referred to by the Figures over the Letters in this Dictionary [Excerpts]

1	<sup>1</sup> a	The long slender English a as in <i>f<sup>1</sup>ate, p<sup>1</sup>aper, etc.</i> (73)
2	<sup>2</sup> a	The long Italian a as in <i>f<sup>2</sup>ather, m<sup>2</sup>ama, p<sup>2</sup>apa, etc.</i> (77)
3	<sup>3</sup> a	The broad German a as in <i>f<sup>3</sup>all, w<sup>3</sup>all, w<sup>3</sup>ater, etc.</i> (83)
4	<sup>4</sup> a	The short sound of the Italian a as in <i>f<sup>4</sup>at, m<sup>4</sup>at, m<sup>4</sup>arry, etc.</i> (81)
		↓                      ↓                      [Other Vowels Omitted]                      ↓
1	<sup>1</sup> u	The long diphthongal u as in <i>t<sup>1</sup>ube, c<sup>1</sup>upid, etc.</i> (171)
2	<sup>2</sup> u	The short simple u as in <i>t<sup>2</sup>ub, c<sup>2</sup>up, s<sup>2</sup>up, etc.</i> (172)
3	<sup>3</sup> u	The middle or obtuse u as in <i>b<sup>3</sup>ull, f<sup>3</sup>ull, p<sup>3</sup>ull, etc.</i> (173)

SELECTED NOTES

73 The first sound of the first letter in our alphabet is that which among the English is its name.

173 This middle sound of u, so unlike the general sound of the letter, exists only in the following words: *bull, full, pull*, words compounded of *full* such as *wonderful, dreadful, etc., bullock, bully, bullet, bullwark, fuller, fulling-mill, pully, pullet, push, bush, bushel, pulpit, puss, bullion, butcher, cushion, cuckoo, pudding, sugar, hussar, huzza*, and *put* when a verb, but few as they are, except *full*, which is a very copious termination, they are sufficient to puzzle Englishmen who reside at any distance from the Capital and make the inhabitants of Scotland and Ireland (who, it is highly probable, received a much more regular pronunciation from our ancestors) not infrequently the jest of fools.

**Huzza** <sup>1</sup>hüz-zā<sup>1</sup> A shout, a cry of acclamation.

The 1800 edition of Caleb Alexander's dictionary<sup>7</sup> gives the following "Scheme of the Vowels" and entry for Huzza.

Scheme of the Vowels

<sup>1</sup> ball	<sup>2</sup> bät	<sup>3</sup> bäte	<sup>4</sup> wäs	<sup>5</sup> pärt	<sup>6</sup> liär	<sup>7</sup> bäre
<sup>1</sup> mēte	<sup>2</sup> mēt	<sup>3</sup> thēre	<sup>4</sup> hēr			
<sup>1</sup> climb	<sup>2</sup> din	<sup>3</sup> pique	<sup>4</sup> mirth			
<sup>1</sup> dōte	<sup>2</sup> dōt	<sup>3</sup> dōff	<sup>4</sup> mōve	<sup>5</sup> rōök	<sup>6</sup> dōve	
<sup>1</sup> cūbe	<sup>2</sup> cūb	<sup>3</sup> push				
<sup>1</sup> view	<sup>2</sup> now					
<sup>1</sup> mý	<sup>2</sup> glory	<sup>3</sup> hým	<sup>4</sup> martyr			

**Huzza**, <sup>1</sup>hüz-zā<sup>1</sup> v, a & a, To receive with acclamation, To utter acclamation. Intrej. A shout of joy.

Samuel Johnson chose to use literary citations to illustrate both meaning and pronunciation. The following is the entry from an 1818 edition<sup>8</sup> of his famous dictionary.

**Huzza'** . n. s. A shout; a cry of acclamation.

The *Huzzas* of the rabble are the same to a bear as they are to a prince.

*L' EStrange.*

You keep a parcel of roaring bullies about me day and night; *huzzas* and hunting horns never let me cool.

*Arbuthnot*

All fame is foreign, but of true desert;

Plays round the head, but comes not to the heart:

One self-approving hour whole years outweighs

Of stupid starers and loud *huzzas*.

*Pope*

The poetry citation from Pope indicates the pronunciation – *huzzas* is to rhyme with *outweighs*. It should be noted that this late edition of Johnson’s Dictionary contains numerous additions and changes from the original, all of which the editor carefully annotated. The entry for *Huzza* has no such annotation, suggesting that the pronunciation in Johnson’s original dictionary, ca. 1776, was still current in England in 1818.

Although the means differed, all seven period lexicographers who specified pronunciation indicated that the preferred pronunciation was the same – “huzz-AY,” in which the “a” rhymes with the “a” in day, say, way, hay, etc. Two American dictionaries (Perry, 1788 and Webster, 1806) also included a secondary pronunciation in which the “a” may be pronounced to rhyme with the “a” in “ask.”

## Examples from Poetry and Song

In addition to the poetical example from David Garrick’s *The Farmer’s Return From London* and the example from Alexander Pope that Samuel Johnson used in his dictionary to illustrate *huzza*, a number of other examples of *huzza* in rhyming poetry and song lyrics were discovered which give additional examples of how *huzza* was pronounced in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

An early example is the ballad in couplets *English Courage Display’d, or Brave News from Admiral Vernon*, written by “a seaman on board the Buford, the Admiral’s [flag]ship, and sent from Jamaica” was published as a broadside in England about May of 1741.<sup>9</sup> It rhymes *huzzaying* with *displaying*.

While trumpets they did loudly sound and colours were displaying,  
The prizes he with him brought away while sailors were huzzaying.

In a poem titled *An Ode to Peace*, by an anonymous author styling himself “Crito,” in *The General Magazine* of Newcastle on Tyne for October, 1748<sup>10</sup> *huzzas*, is rhymed with *ways*. The rhyme scheme is abab and the pertinent passage is:

While we wait thy warm Caresses  
Urge us on in loyal Ways  
Not in formal trite Addresses,  
Not in Riot and Huzzas.

In the song “American Freedom,” published in 1775,<sup>11</sup> *Huzza* is rhymed with *away* and *delay*.

Hark! ‘tis Freedom that calls, come Patriots awake;  
To arms my brave Boys and away;  
‘Tis Honour, ‘tis Virtue, ‘tis Liberty calls,  
And upbraids the too tedious Delay.  
What Pleasure we find in pursuing our foes.  
Thro’ Blood and thro’ Carnage we’ ll fly;  
Then follow, we’ ll soon overtake them, huzza!

About February, 1779, following the acquittal of Admiral Keppel, the song “Keppel Forever”<sup>12</sup> was published. It contains the following lines in which *huzza* is rhymed with *play*.

Bonfires, bells did ring; Keppel was all the ding,  
Music did play;  
Windows with candles in, for all to honor him:  
People aloud did sing, “Keppel! Huzza!”

Another example is in a song that appeared on an engraved song sheet published about 1780<sup>13</sup> titled “The Drum,” *huzza* is rhymed with *away*. The rhyme scheme is aabbcb and the pertinent verse is:

Now over the bottle, our valor we boast,  
While the drum, hark the drum, hark the drum rolls every toast.  
For America now, Huzza!  
The work’ s ne’ er done, we’ ll dance, sing, and play,  
And the drum we’ ll unbrace, and the drum we’ ll unbrace,  
Till a war again calls away.

In song honoring Washington’ s Birthday, published in 1784,<sup>14</sup> *Huzza* is rhymed with *day*. The rhyme scheme is aabcccb and the pertinent passage is:

Fill the glass to the brink,  
Washington’ s health we’ ll drink,  
’Tis his birth-day.  
Glorious deeds he has done,  
By him our cause was won,  
Long live great Washington,  
Huzza! Huzza!

The song titles simply “A Song,” published in 1787,<sup>15</sup> *huzza* is rhymed with *obey* and *sway*.

Thus no longer with stocks and pillories vex’ d  
Nor with work, jail or sheriff perplex’ d, perplex’ d,  
The mobmen shall rule, and the great men obey,  
The world upon wheels shall be all set agog  
And blockheads and knaves hail the reign of King Log;  
Under his sway,  
Shall Tag, Rag, and Bobtail,  
Lead up our decorum, Huzza!

In “The Echoing Horn,” published in 1798,<sup>16</sup> we have *huzza* rhymed with *delay*.

The morning is up and the cry of the hounds,  
Upbraids out too tedious delay.  
What pleasure we feel in pursuing the fox!  
O’ er hill and o’ er valley he flies;  
Then follow, we’ ll soon overtake him; huzza!

Later in this same tune *huzza* is also rhymed with *gay* and *day*.

An early 19<sup>th</sup> Century ballad honoring Nelson’ s victory in the battle of Copenhagen<sup>17</sup> rhymes *huzza* with *fray*.

Three cheers of all the fleet  
Sung Huzza!  
Then from the center, rear, and van,  
Every captain, every man,  
With lion’ s heart began  
To the fray.

The ballad “Rogers & Victory. Tit for Tat,”<sup>18</sup> published in 1807, rhymes *huzza’ d* with *scar’ d*, in what might be a regional variant or an early transitional phase.

Our cannon roar’ d, our men huzza’ d  
And fir’ d away so handy  
Till Bingham struck, he was so scar’ d  
At hearing doodle dandy.

The victory of the USS Constitution over HMS Java in the War of 1812, was celebrated in “Glorious Naval Victory”<sup>19</sup> by James Campbell, “A Boatswain’s Mate on Board the *Constitution*.” It was published as a broadside upon the *Constitution*’s return to Boston, and rhymes *huzza* with *away*.

It was at two o’ clock the bloody fray begun,  
Each hardy tar and son of mars was active at his gun,  
Until their fore and mizzen-mast was fairly shot away,  
And with redoubled courage, we gave them three huzzas.

At about the same time, “Perry’s Victory”<sup>20</sup> celebrated the 1813 victory of Oliver Hazzard Perry on Lake Erie, which gave us the phrase “We have met the enemy and they are ours...,” gives us an early example of *huzza* apparently pronounced *huzzaw*.

Up went the Union Jack [i.e.: union of States], never up there before,  
“Don’t give up the ship,” was the motto it bore;  
And soon as that motto our gallant lads saw  
They thought of their Lawrence and shouted, “Huzza!”

Even as late as 1840, we hear *huzza* rhymed with *away*<sup>21</sup> in this tribute to Napier’s victory over the Egyptians.

Hear what has happened lately along the Syrian coast:  
The downfall of the Egyptians, of which we made our boast.  
So here’s a health to brave Napier, to brave Napier huzza!  
Who conquered the Egyptians and made them run away.

So it appears that the accepted and preferred pronunciation of *huzza* among lexicographers, poets and song writers, both the educated and the less educated in America and in England was, with a few exceptions, *huzzay* in the mid to late 18th Century and well into the 19th Century.

## Evolution of other Pronunciations

But *huzzay* is not the preferred pronunciation today. Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary (1987)<sup>22</sup> gives both the *huzzah* and the *huzza* spellings with the pronunciation *h-zä* indicating that the last syllable is to be pronounced *ah*. Webster’s New World Dictionary (1988)<sup>23</sup> gives the same two spellings and the same pronunciation, defining it as a variation of HURRAH. The Oxford English Dictionary,<sup>24</sup> originally published in installments between 1882 and 1927, shows it the same way. Clearly the accepted 20th/21st Century pronunciation and spelling of *huzza* is *huzzah*.

In an attempt to determine when the change took place, three popular dictionaries published in the 19th Century were studied: Noah Webster’s Dictionary (New York, 1828)<sup>25</sup>; Thomas Wright’s Dictionary (London, 1852)<sup>26</sup>; and Joseph Worcester’s Dictionary (Boston, 1860)<sup>27</sup>.

In the 1828 edition of his Dictionary, Webster defines *huzza* in a substantially different manner than he did in his 1806 edition:

**HUZZ`A**, n. A shout of joy; a foreign word used in writing only, and most preposterously, as it is never used in practice. The word used is our native word *hoora* or *hooraw*. [See *Hoorah*]

**HUZZ`A**, v. t. To utter a loud shout of joy, or an acclamation in joy or praise.

In rule VI of his Direction for the Pronunciation of Words, Webster indicates that the mark ` before a vowel indicates that the vowel is to have the sound of the words `ask, b`ar, f`ather, and m`ask, and that in words of two or more syllables, it also indicates the accented syllable. Hence Webster's indicated pronunciation in 1828 was something like *huzz-AW*, while in 1806 his preferred pronunciation was *huzz-AY* with a secondary pronunciation of *huzz-AH*.

Twenty-four years later in England, Wright says the following in the 1852 edition of his dictionary:

**HUZZA**, huz`zā, s. A shout of joy, triumph or approbation. – v. n. To utter a loud shout of joy or an acclamation in joy or praise. – v. a. To receive or attend with shouts of joy.

Wright uses phonetic spelling to indicate pronunciation in most cases. However, he indicates that when the mark ˇ is used in conjunction with the letter “a” it indicates a pronunciation as in *řather*, *řather*, &c. Hence Wright's indicated pronunciation is something like *HUZZ-ah*, with the accent on the first syllable.

Worcester's 1860 American Dictionary gives the following:

**HÜZ-ZÄ´** v. n. To utter acclamations or huzzas.

**HÜZ-ZÄ´** v. a. To receive or attend with acclamation or huzzas; to applaud.

In his pronouncing guide, Worcester indicates that Ä is to be pronounced like the “a” in *FÄR*, *FÄTHER*, and *FÄRTHER*, and Ü is to be pronounced like the “u” in *RÜLE*, *RÜDE*, and *BRÜTE*. Hence Worcester's indicated pronunciation is something like *hoozz-AH*.

## Summary

It appears from the primary source examples presented above that from the middle to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century the preferred and most popular pronunciation of *HUZZA* both in England and in America was *huzz-AY*. Late in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century it seems that an alternate pronunciation of *huzz-AH* was beginning to make its appearance, apparently earlier in America than in England, with its first noted appearance as an alternate pronunciation Perry's American Dictionary of 1788. Subsequently, other pronunciations such as *HUZZ-ah*, *huzz-AW* and *hoozz-AH* made their appearance, first as alternate pronunciations, coexisting with *huzz-AY* until at least the 1840's in England, and later gaining increased popularity until *HUZZAH* displaced *HUZZAY* in about the third quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, around the time of the American Civil War. Both *HUZZAY* and *HUZZAH* subsequently evolved into the *HURRAY* and *HURRAH* of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

## An Alternate Point of View

Some authorities argue that it is not possible for us to know with any degree of assurance how words were pronounced in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, or indeed how words were pronounced in any historical period prior to the advent of audio recording. True, we have pronouncing guides that give rules for pronunciation, but they suffer from two fatal weaknesses.

The first weakness is that these rules are *prescriptive*, not *descriptive*. That is, they set down how the educated, literary class of people determined how words were to be properly pronounced. But they give no indication of how the great masses of people, most of whom were illiterate, actually did pronounce them. And, given the number of regional and local dialects that existed then (and to some extent still exist) in England and in America, almost any pronunciation of any given word could be heard in the British empire and in America.

The second weakness is that, even if we restrict ourselves to the prescriptive pronunciations of the educated, literary class, we still cannot have any real certainty that the pronunciations we derive from the written record are, in fact, the pronunciation that those people actually employed at the time. Even today, the English pronounce many words differently than we do here in America, even though they are spelled the same way. And there is evidence that proper, polite pronunciation in England and in America has changed substantially in the past 200 years. Eighteenth Century lexicographers and writers indicate, for example, that *huzza* should rhyme with *day*, *away*, *hay*, *say* and similar words. We interpret that on the basis of the way in which we pronounce those rhyming words today. But did the people in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century pronounce them that way? Or did they, for example, pronounce *day*, *away*, *hay* and *say* as *daw*, *awaw*, *haw* and *saw*? Or perhaps they pronounced them as *dah*, *awah*, *hah*, and *sah*. We can never know. At best, we can only speculate.

Hence, according to these authorities, any attempt to determine and express proper 18<sup>th</sup> Century pronunciation is futile. Since, in the absence of audio recordings, we cannot know with certainty how printed words were pronounced by real people 200 years ago, any pronunciation of a word is just as valid as any other pronunciation.

## Conclusions

It seems clear from the primary source evidence presented that at least the majority of the educated, literate class of people in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century thought that *huzza* should be pronounced to rhyme with words like *day*, *say*, *hay*, and *away*. There is even evidence in the song lyrics attributed to seamen and bo' suns mates that many of the less educated thought so too. Although other pronunciations undoubtedly could be heard and were growing in popularity in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, particularly in the young United States of America, the *huzza* spelling and indicated *huzzay* pronunciation appears to have remained in use, at least in England, as late as 1840.

But it seems equally clear that in the absence of audio recordings from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century we cannot be certain how anything was actually pronounced by people back then.

So it seems that each individual is faced with a number of possible courses, among which are:

- Attempt to be consistent within our 21st Century pronunciation standards by rhyming *huzza* with the modern pronunciation of the words that the 18th Century lexicographers and writers said it should rhyme with.
- Attempt to determine how 18<sup>th</sup> Century people pronounced the words that period lexicographers and writers say should rhyme with *huzza*, and pronounce those words, and *huzza* in that manner.
- Pronounce *huzza* in whatever way feels comfortable.

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