

# Handout on Buckles, Buttons, and Clothing Fasteners

By Sara Rivers Cofield for DAACS Summer Institute, 2022

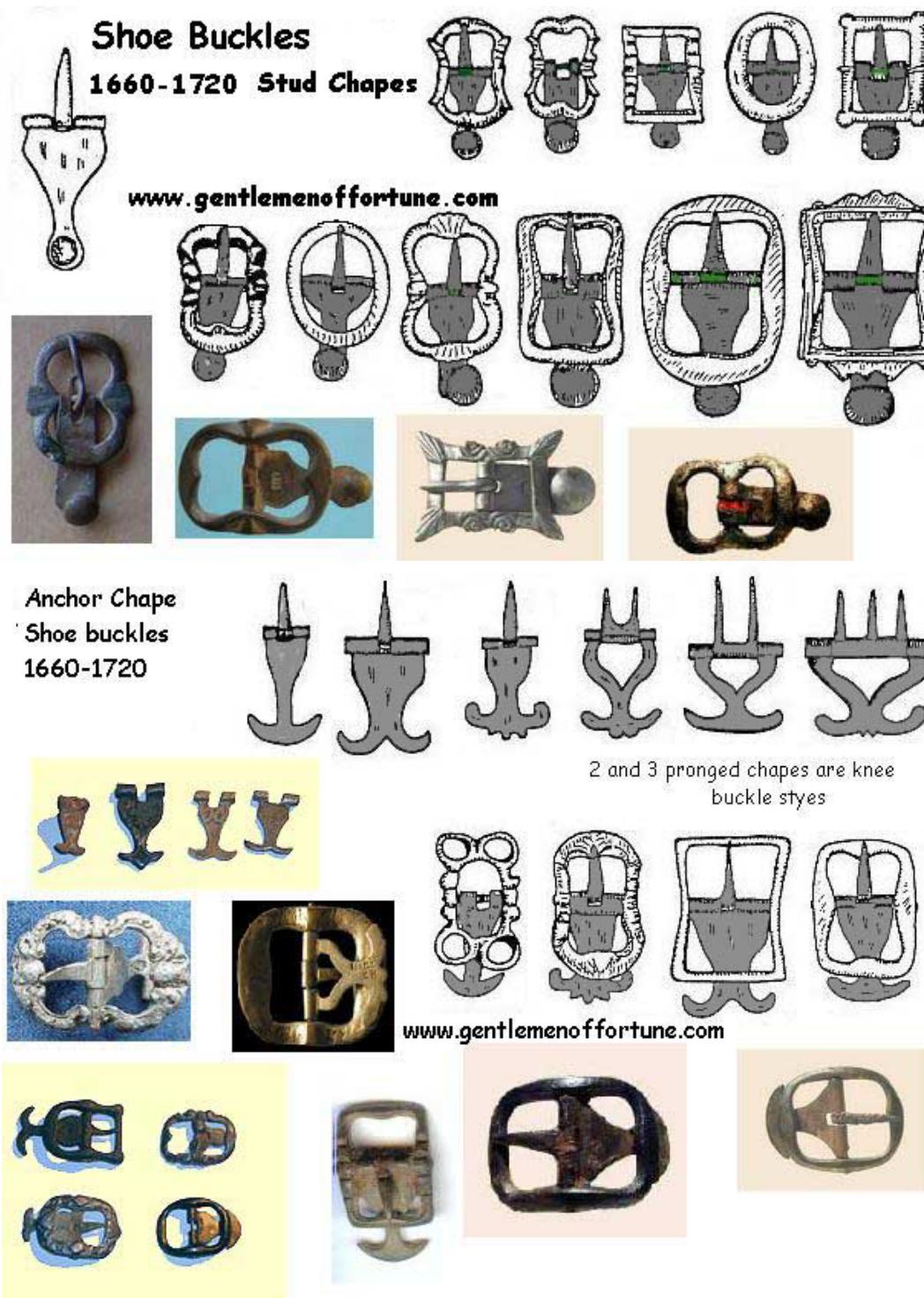
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## Personal Adornment Buckles

### Shoe Buckles:

Shoe buckles become popular for elite men and women in England in the 1660s, at which time they are fairly small, and worn high on the foot, near the ankle. They became more widely popular by the end of the 1680s (Gentle and Feild 1975: 51). They usually attached with stud or anchor chapes, in the 17th century.



These diagrams come from a website designed to help people who want to dress up like pirates ([gentlemenoffortune.com](http://gentlemenoffortune.com)). They are good illustrations, but I wonder if all of the buckles shown absolutely had to be for shoes. Stud and anchor chapes allowed attachment to any strap or small buttonhole. I suspect those buckles that are 2-piece buckles with finely finished backs and a curve to fit the foot are for shoes. Anything that lies flat or has an unfinished back showing the casting surface is harder to ID.

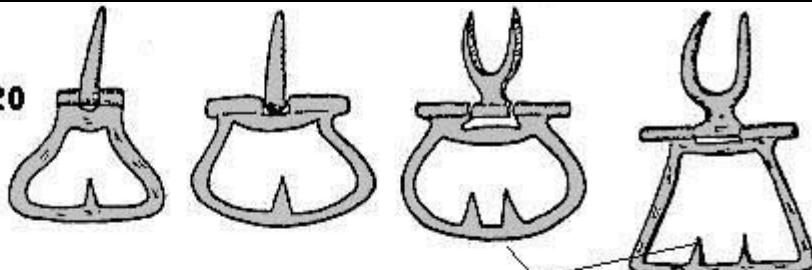
Knee buckles typically have an anchor chape, and the squarish buckle shown in the second diagram with the black background looks like a "knee" buckle to me.

Loop chapes are a distinct indicator that you have a shoe buckle. The earliest loops (also known as a roll) had a single tine to hold them in place and later ones had two, but I don't know if the pirate website ([gentlemenoffortune.com](http://gentlemenoffortune.com)) can be trusted on the ca. 1720 transition. It seems reasonable though. The caption about buckles not getting to be 1" until after 1720 is not trustworthy though. We absolutely have 17<sup>th</sup> century shoe buckles in our collections that are 1" or more long.

## Shoe Buckles

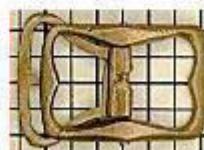
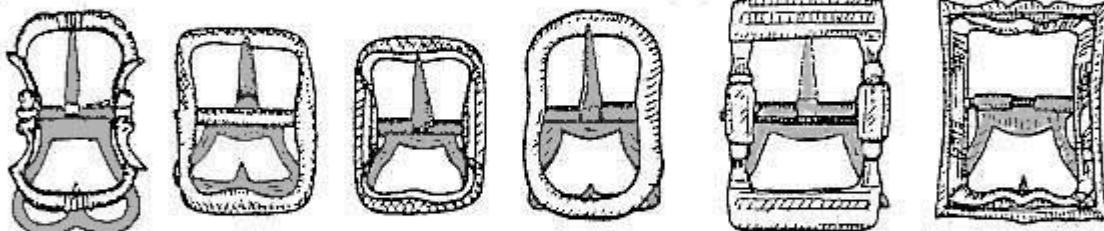
### Loop Chapes 1690-1720

loop chapes with single spike and tongue come in around 1690



[www.gentlemenoffortune.com](http://www.gentlemenoffortune.com)

double spike in use AFTER 1720



Copy of shoe buckle from Spanish Wreck. Grid Paper is 1/4". Latch would be 1/2".

Buckles were smallest around 1660 and progressively got larger. By 1720, they could be 1"

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, shoe buckles gradually moved down the foot, from the ankle area, to the upper part of the foot, then the middle part of the foot. Size and curvature varied, but 17<sup>th</sup> century buckles are smallest, while late 18<sup>th</sup> century buckles got pretty huge. Most buckles between 1720 and 1790 fall somewhere in the middle size-wise.



1678 fashion plate



1707



ca. 1740 woman's shoe



1757



1781, woman's and man's shoes

1783 Women's Shoe



1790 HUGE shoe buckles

**Knee Buckles:** Knee buckles fastened the cuff of breeches at the knee for men in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Not all men wore them though; buttons or ties could also be used for this purpose. Knee buckles were removable, and typically had an anchor chape. In general, small to medium sized buckles that have a pin along the long axis (as opposed to the short axis like most shoe buckles), are knee buckles. BUT hat and stock buckles also have pins along the long axis, so the ID is best made if the anchor chape is present. Also, some knee buckles could be aligned on the short axis, looking a lot like shoe buckle frames if the chape is missing.



1764



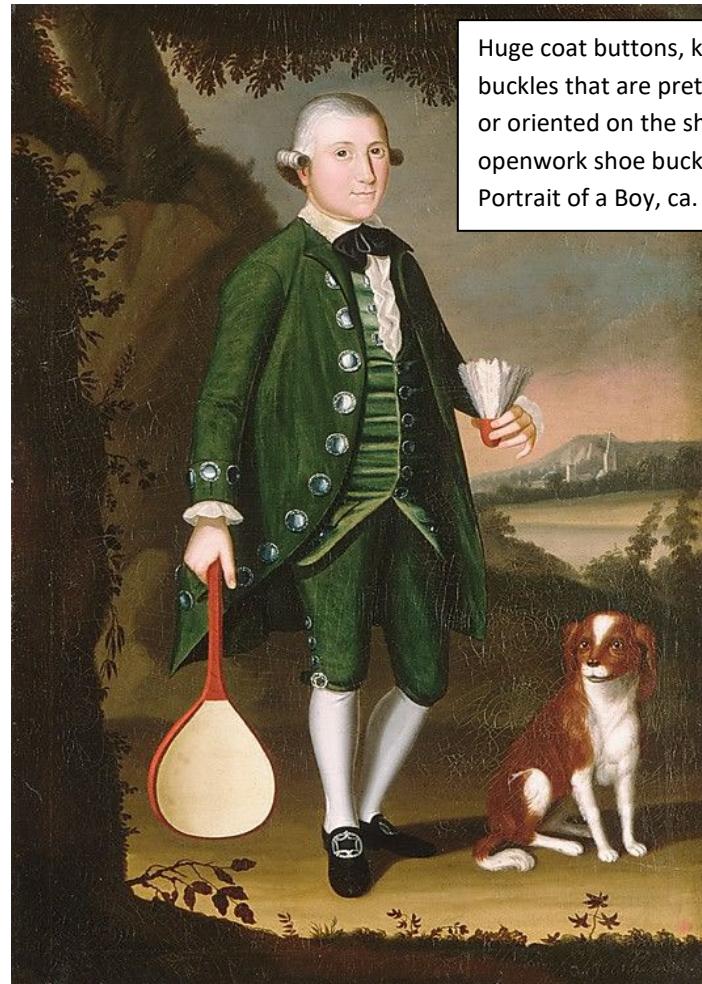
1775



1790



1792



Huge coat buttons, knee buckles that are pretty square or oriented on the short axis, openwork shoe buckles.  
Portrait of a Boy, ca. 1770–75.



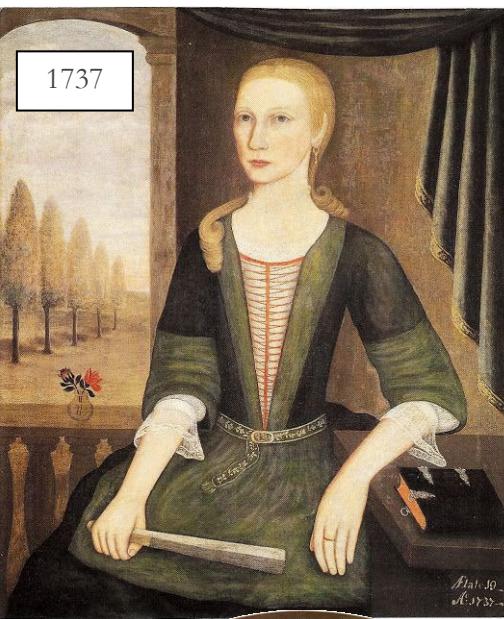
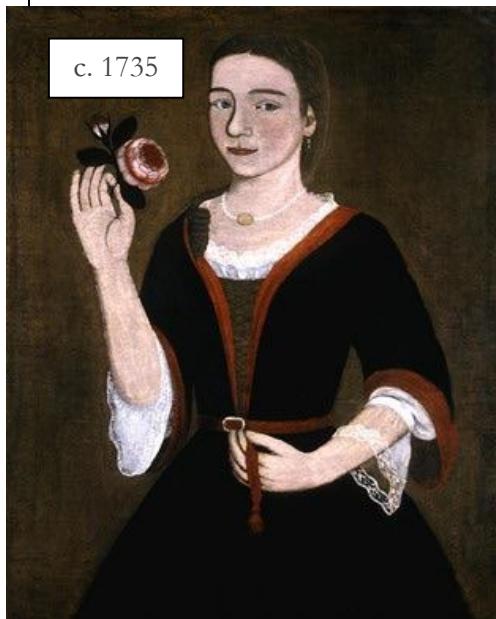
Stock clasps for leather stocks, typical of military dress, look less like a buckle and more like a riveted piece of metal with holes or a clasp hook.



### Buckles for shoulder straps for guns and swords (also known as baldric buckles):

These are typically long (like 3" or so) and relatively narrow, with the center bar along the long axis. They are cast in one piece, so the center bar doesn't pivot like on shoe and knee buckles. These may or may not be filed finished on the back.

**Other Kinds of Buckles:** There are other kinds of buckles, so it isn't wise to jump to function unless there is a really good defining characteristic like a distinctive shape. I don't know how to tell you to recognize these and set them apart from other buckles, I just know they existed, so they should be considered.



- **Girdle buckles:** These are ladies' belt buckles that were popular in the late 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century. They are mentioned in documents (like bills of lading, import records, etc.), and shown in portraits. I have no idea if their form differed from shoe buckles though. It needs more research.

- **Buckles for gown fronts:** I don't know what people called these, but they occasionally show up in portraits. Some might be stationary decorations on stomachers, others might be functional.



Portrait of Unknown Lady by George Beare (ca. 1740-1750)



1772

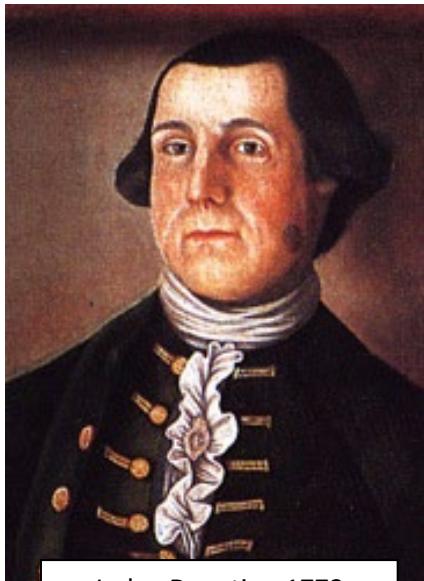


The CITIZEN RETIRED, or BUSINESS at an END till MONDAY.

Printed for Carington Bowles, May & Pivell, No 68 in St Paul's Church Yard, London. Published as the Act directs July 1772.

- Garter buckles: Carolyn White has written about these (*American Artifacts of Personal Adornment 1680-1820*, 2005, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers), but there are no sources cited, so it gives me pause. A lot of garters didn't have buckles in the 18<sup>th</sup> century; they just tied. Boot garters did have buckles, but I think more research is needed to identify them properly.

- Sleeve buckles: I've seen these mentioned in 18<sup>th</sup> century records for stores where buckles are sold. I have no idea what a sleeve buckle would look like though, or how it was used. That's part of the reason I feel non-committal about calling small rectangular buckles with a couple of tines garter buckles; how do we know they weren't for sleeves?



Judge Devotion 1772

- Hat buckles: These were apparently oriented along the long axis, though the attachment mechanism is uncertain. They don't seem to have been terribly common though. Many hats had ribbon or other millinery as decoration, not buckles.
- Shirt Buckles: Sometimes used to close the front of a man's shirt, in combo with a shirt ruffle or cravat. All examples I've seen have a heart shape of sorts, though I've never seen one in an archaeological collection. They do show up in historic documents.

ca. 1790

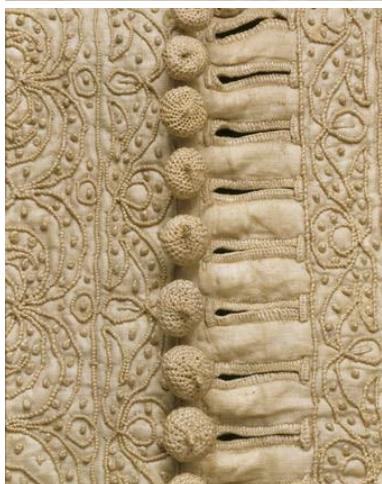


## General Notes on Buttons: 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Century



### 17<sup>th</sup> Century- ca. 1720

- Buttons tend to be squat and/or bulbous.
- The diameter is typically small, like  $\frac{1}{2}$ " give or take
- Domed button fronts for hollow buttons are frequently found without backs.
- Shanks are often long, so that the buttons seem more likely to point downward than forward when fastened
- Materials that survive include pewter, copper alloy, silver plate, silver, and glass (especially black glass bulbous buttons that sometimes have painted decoration). Thread buttons were also popular though.
- Popular motifs include plain domes, domes with carved decoration, domes with a raised center point, and Tudor roses
- Large linked buttons can be used for breeches at the waist; smaller linked buttons come into use for shirt necks and cuffs. The dome shape is popular for linked buttons.



## 18<sup>th</sup> Century

- Buttons flatten into disc shapes; bulbous shapes much less common.
- Diameters are typically wider, though this varies by garment. Waistcoat buttons are smaller than coat buttons, for example. Coat buttons get huge towards the end of the century.
- Plain, undecorated metal disc buttons are most common archaeologically.
- Thread-covered buttons with elaborate patterns or embroidery, known as passementerie, are very popular, though all that typically survives are single-hole bone button molds that had been covered with thread or fabric. Wood button molds were also used, but these don't survive often.



- When metal buttons are decorated, motifs vary greatly but often imitate the look of passementerie buttons.



- Very thinly stamped metal buttons with bone backs come into use; the bone backs typically have 4 holes for cat gut that served as a means for sewing the buttons in place.



- Lathe-turned patterns were another popular form of decoration on metal buttons.



- Linked buttons are used by men, women, and children at shirt/shift cuffs, and often at the neck of shirts. These are small with extremely diverse treatments; they exhibit decoration of all kinds, glass insets, political statements, initials, etc. See <http://www.jefpat.org/diagnostic/SmallFinds/LinkedButtons-Cufflinks-Studs/index-linkedbuttons-cufflinks.html> and this article: <http://www.jefpat.org/diagnostic/SmallFinds/LinkedButtons-Cufflinks-Studs/Linked%20Buttons%20by%20Rivers-Cofield.pdf>
- Sew-through metal buttons are not yet a thing, and in general, you just don't see sew-through buttons on 18<sup>th</sup> century garments. If they were present, they were meant to be hidden.

#### Ca. 1800-1850

- Metal disc buttons remain popular in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but often have back marks designating the manufacturer, city of manufacture, or quality (phrases like "Best Quality," "Treble Gilt", etc.).
- Sew-through bone buttons that are not just molds for fabric buttons or backs for stamped buttons become more common, and continue in use until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- By the 1830s, major button manufacturing is happening in the U.S., especially in Connecticut with companies like Scovill's Manufacturing.

#### Ca. 1850-1900

- Innovations in button manufacture ratchet up mid-century, with many patented machines that make composite buttons with sandwiched layers of metal, sometimes with paper products like cardboard as layers.
- High-fired ceramic buttons are introduced in 1841 when Thomas Prosser patented a method for making these from compressed powdered clay. They are referred to as Prosser buttons, porcelain buttons, "agates," and small chinas, though they are often also catalogued as glass. They quickly become a ubiquitous button used on all of the many layers of undergarments that Victorian-era people wore (drawers, chemises, corset covers, night shirts, men's shirts, etc.), but they could also appear on clothes that weren't undergarments.
- Glass buttons, especially black glass, are very big mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> century in conjunction with mourning attire and the general popularity of wearing black. These can be molded in elaborate patterns and are often called "jet" even though they are glass.
- Shell buttons are popular on all kinds of clothing in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Hard rubber buttons appear around 1850, often marked with a Goodyear 1851 patent.
- Sew-through metal buttons can be stamped by machines; used on heavy work clothes and trousers.



- Buttons that are riveted to fabric instead of sewn appear towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (like buttons for jeans today). They are popular for work clothes and are found a lot archaeologically because they can't be saved in the family button tin for later reuse when the garment wears out.
- Buttons boasting brand names and advertising also appear towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially for work clothes.



Work clothes buttons from the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century are often riveted to fabric. Sew-through metal buttons were also used by this time period.

## Assorted Late 19<sup>th</sup>-Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Clothing Fasteners

- Metal Grommets/Eyelets: Invented in 1828; used on corsets, shoes, etc.
- Snaps: Appear at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, very popular by the 1910s.



- Slot-and-Stud corset closures: Patented in 1848 by Joseph Cooper. Consists of two metal (usually iron or steel) strips; one with studs and the other with key-hole-shaped slots to catch them.



## Suspenders



Ca. 1890



Late 19<sup>th</sup>  
Century



Ca. 1890



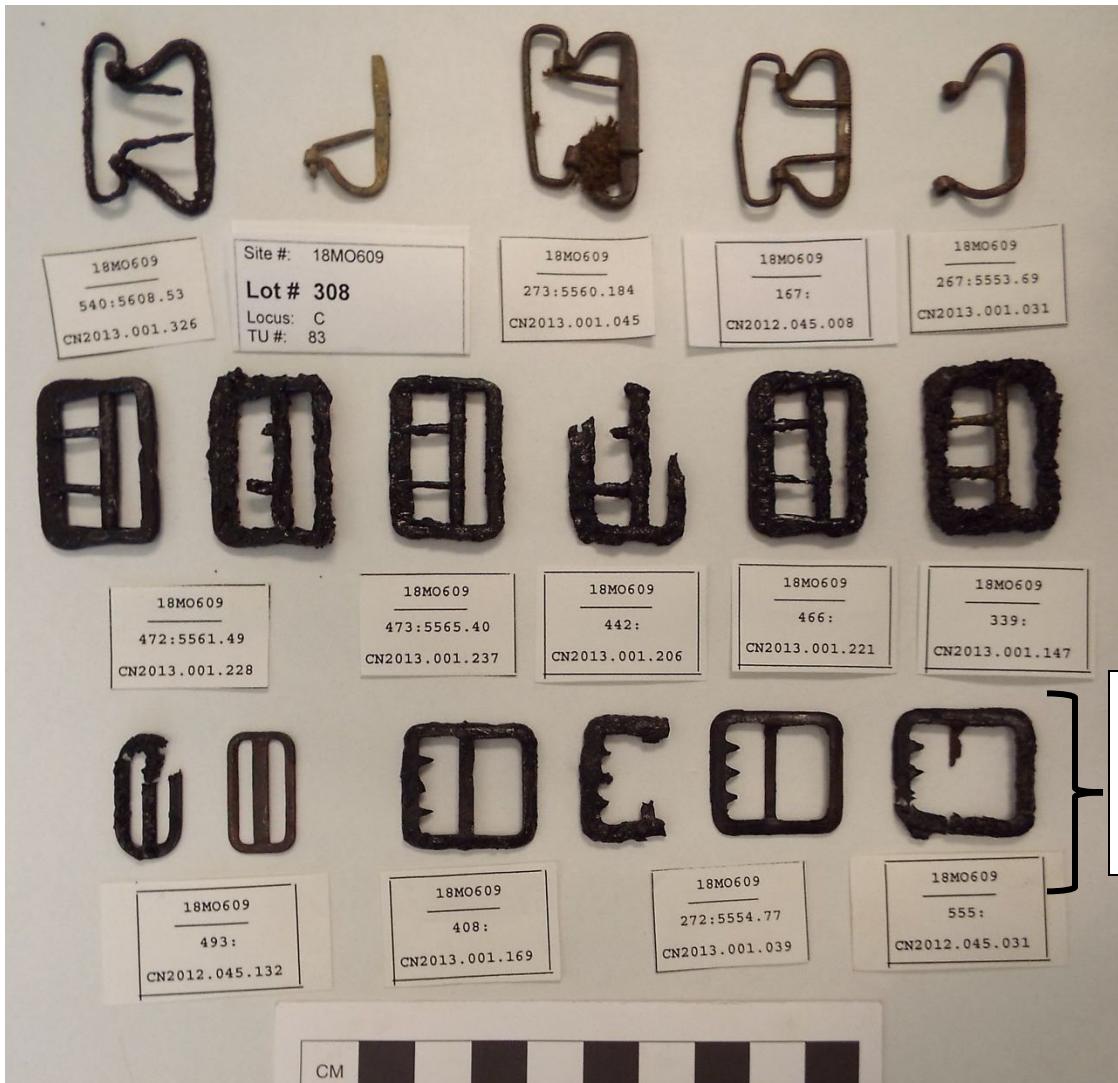
Suspenders, Late 19<sup>th</sup>-Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

CN2013.001.120

CN2012.045.106



Ca. 1890



### Post 1850 Multi-Purpose Strap adjustment buckles:

I've seen them on:

- Straps used to tighten the back of vests and pants
- Any belt-like strap for underthings from jock straps to crinolines
- Clip-on necktie straps (the small ones at bottom left)

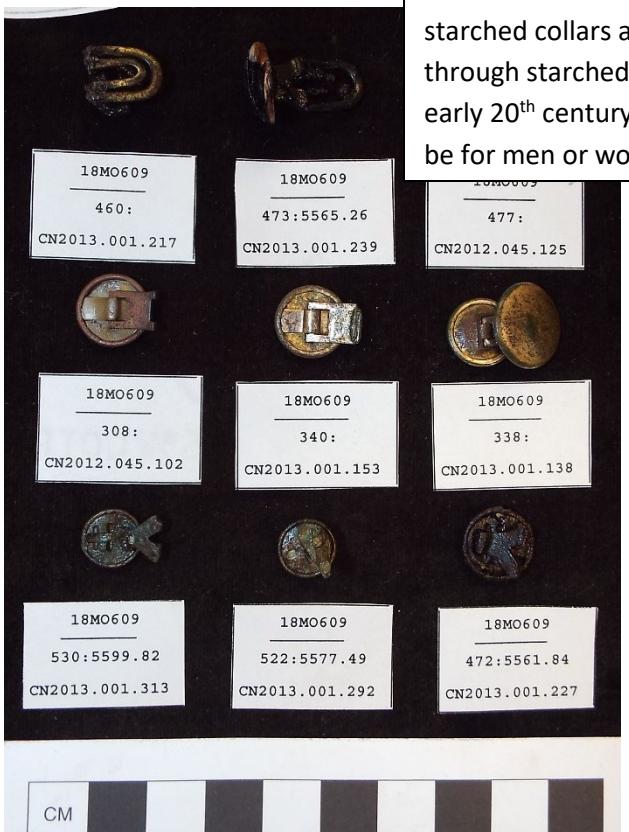


**Garter Hardware:** Studs slide into the clip, trapping the stockings.



5 cents.  
**Our 19 and 42-Cent Hose Supporters.**  
 No. 18R4769 Hooks on bottom of corset, giving the body a graceful appearance. The pac is made of satin, with slide in center for adjustment. Good quality silk overshot frilled elastic, with the rubber button catch. Colors, black, light blue, pink, red or yellow.  
 Price, per pair.....19c  
 No. 18R4773 The Marlowe Hose Supporters, same as above, but finer grade of satin. An all silk fancy frilled elastic; very beautiful design, and having the flexo grasp button fasteners. Each pair put up neatly in a box. Colors, black, light blue, pink, red, or yellow. Price, per pair.....42c  
 If by mail, postage extra, per pair, 3 cents.  
**Fancy Frilled Side Carters, 16 Cents per Pair.**  
 No. 18R4777 Fancy Frilled Side Garters. Made of good quality silk overshot elastic. Nickel buckle in center, and pin top. Rubber button catch. Colors, black, pink, light blue or cardinal.  
 Price, per pair.....16c  
 If by mail, postage extra, 3 cents.  
 No. 18R4781 Fancy Frilled Side Garters. Made of high grade imported fancy frilled silk elastic. Very attractive buckle in center with flexo grasp fasteners. Colors, black, red, light blue, heliotrope or yellow.  
 Price, per pair.....41c  
 If by mail, postage extra, 3 cents.  
 No. 18R4785 Fancy Frilled Side Garters. Our best quality. Made of fine imported all silk frilled elastic. Special fancy pattern. Gold filigree buckle in center, and gold pin top, with slide in center. Flexo grasp fasteners. Colors, black, light blue, cardinal, pink, heliotrope or yellow.  
 Price, per pair. ....(Postage extra, 3 cents.)....59c





**Collar studs:** The late 19<sup>th</sup>-Early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the introduction of detachable starched collars and studs, including metal studs that hinged for ease of entry through starched buttonholes. Collars and studs can be found in any of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century catalogs like Sears and Montgomery Ward. Detachable collars could be for men or women.

**SEARS, ROEBUCK & CO., Cheapest Supply House on Earth, Chicago**

**Celloid Waterpoof Collars and Cuffs.**  
The following are the best Waterproof Collars and Cuffs made. Will not break or tear at buttonholes. Order collars half size larger than shirt worn.

<b>ROYAL.</b> Front, 1½-in. No. 34 R 3 0 0 Style Royal, Celloid Collars. Sizes, 12½ to 20 inches. Each.....\$0.11 Per dozen.....1.32	<b>CLERICAL.</b> Front, ½-in. Back, 1½-in. No. 34 R 3 0 2 Style Clerical, Celloid Collars. Sizes, 12 to 19½ in. Each.....\$0.11 Per dozen.....1.32	<b>RUBBER COLLARS AND CUFFS FOR MEN AND BOYS.</b> In polished or dull finish. State kind in your order. Choice of any style, 18 cents each or \$2.16 per dozen.
<b>IMPERIAL.</b> Front, 2½-in. Back, 1½-in. No. 34 R 3 0 4 Style Imperial, Celloid Collars. Sizes, 13½ to 18½ in. Each.....\$0.11 Per dozen.....1.32	<b>MONARCH.</b> Front, 2½-in. Back, 1½-in. No. 34 R 3 0 4 Style Monarch, Celloid Collars. Sizes, 12½ to 18½ in. Each.....\$0.11 Per dozen.....1.32	<b>Front, 2½-in. Back, 1½-in.</b> No. 34 R 3 3 0 Stylish Turn Down Rubber Collars, polished or dull finish. Sizes, 12 to 18½ in. Price, each.....\$0.18 Per dozen.....2.16
<b>SAVOY.</b> Front, 2½-in. Back, 1½-in. No. 34 R 3 0 8 Style Savoy, Celloid Collars. Sizes, 12½ to 18½ in. Price, each.....\$0.11 Per dozen.....1.32	<b>FIFTH AVENUE.</b> Width, ¾-in. No. 34 R 3 1 0 Style Fifth Avenue, Celloid Collars. Sizes, 12 to 18½ in. Price, per pair.....22c	<b>Front, 2½-in. Back, 1½-in.</b> No. 34 R 3 3 1 Stylish Turn Down Rubber Collar, polished or dull finish. Sizes, 12 to 18½ in. Price, each.....\$0.18 Per dozen.....2.16
<b>EXCELSIOR.</b> Width, ¾-in. No. 34 R 3 1 1 Style Excelsior, Celloid Cuffs. Sizes, 9 to 11½ in. Price, per pair.....22c Do not forget size when you order collars and cuffs.	<b>Celloid Shirt Front.</b> Front, 2½-in. Back, 1½-in. No. 34 R 3 1 2 Style Celloid Shirt Front, interlined, medium length. Price, each.....27c	<b>Front, 2½-in. Back, 1½-in.</b> No. 34 R 3 3 2 Stylish Wing Rubber Collar in polished or dull finish. Sizes, 12 to 18½ in. Price, each.....\$0.18 Per dozen.....2.16
<b>Celloid Shirt Front.</b> Front, 2½-in. Back, 1½-in. No. 34 R 3 3 3 Straight Space Standing Rubber Collar in polished or dull finish. Sizes, 12½ to 17½ in. Price, each.....\$0.18 Per dozen.....2.16	<b>SHORI.</b> Front, 7 in. Width, No. 34 R 3 3 4 S. Celloid Shirt Front, interlined, medium length. Price, each.....27c	<b>Front, 2½-in. Back, 1½-in.</b> No. 34 R 3 4 0 Straight Band Rubber Collar in polished or dull finish. Sizes, 12 to 18½ in. Price, each.....\$0.18 Per dozen.....2.16
<b>Celloid Shirt Front.</b> Front, 2½-in. Back, 1½-in. No. 34 R 3 4 2 Low Space Rubber Collar in polished or dull finish. Sizes, 12 to 18½ in. Price, per pair.....37c	<b>Front, 2½-in. Back, 1½-in.</b> No. 34 R 3 4 3 High Turned Down Rubber Collar, polished or dull finish. Sizes, 12 to 18½ in. Price, each.....\$0.18 Per dozen.....2.16	<b>Front, 2½-in. Back, 1½-in.</b> No. 34 R 3 4 4 Round Wing Rubber Collar in polished or dull finish. Sizes, 12 to 18½ in. Price, each.....\$0.18 Per dozen.....2.16

**SOLID GOLD COLLAR BUTTONS.**

No. 4R4720 Ball top, medium. Each.....90c	No. 4R4723 Ball top, high. Each.....\$1.00	No. 4R4726 Flat top, low. Each.....90c	No. 4R4730 Flat top, medium. Each.....90c	No. 4R4742 Flat top, high. Each.....\$1.00	No. 4R4745 Lever top, medium. Each.....90c	No. 4R4748 Lever top, large. Each.....\$1.10	No. 4R4751 Lever pointer. Each.....1.10
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**GOLD FILLED COLLAR BUTTONS.**

Flat Top. No. 4R4754 Rolled plate. Each.....10c No. 4R4757 Gold filled. Each.....32c	Ball Top. No. 4R4760 Rolled plate. Each.....10c No. 4R4763 Gold filled. Each.....32c	Lever Pearl Back. No. 4R4766 Rolled plate. Each.....12c	Lever Medium. No. 4R4769 Rolled plate. Each.....10c No. 4R4783 Gold filled. Each.....32c	Lever High. No. 4R4770 Rolled plate. Each.....10c No. 4R4773 Gold filled. Each.....32c	Lever Pointer. No. 4R4781 Rolled plate. Each.....10c No. 4R4784 Gold filled. Each.....32c	Separable. No. 4R4787 Gold filled. Each.....15c	20087 Stationary Top, solid gold. \$1.55. 20088 Same in gold filled. \$0.30
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**COLLAR BUTTONS GOLD AND GOLD PLATED.—Prices, Each.**

Nos. 20087 to 20093 are solderless, one piece buttons.

20087 Stationary Top, solid gold. \$0.29. 20088 Same in solid gold. \$1.10	20089 Stationary Top, gold filled. \$0.25. 20090 Same in solid gold. \$1.05	20090 Stationary Top, gold filled. \$0.25. 20091 Same in solid gold. \$1.05	20093 Stationary Top, gold filled. \$0.20. 20094 Same in solid gold. \$1.00	20095 Lever Top, Roll plate. \$0.25 20096 Lever Top, Roll plate. \$0.10 20097 Same in solid gold. \$1.00	20096 Lever Top, Roll plate. \$0.10 20097 Same in solid gold. \$1.00	20098 Lever Top, Roll plate. \$0.10 20099 Same in solid gold. \$1.00	20100 Lever Top, Roll plate. \$0.10 20101 Same in solid gold. \$1.00
20102 Separable Stone Set. \$0.15	20103 Separable Gold Front. \$0.35. 20104 Separable Silver Back. \$0.15	20105 Separable 22c. Gold. \$1.25	20106 Ladies' Roll Plate Tie Holder. \$1.25 20107 Gold Diamond Set. \$1.50 20108 Roll Plate Tie Holder. \$0.15	20109 pearl. \$0.10 Per doz. \$1.00. 20110 Same in solid gold. \$1.25	20111 Pearl back. Shoe front. \$0.13 Aluminum. \$0.10		



**Collar studs:** Some collar studs were made of high-fired ceramic (like Prosser buttons).

## Some Clothing-Related TPQs:

- Ca. 1817- Perfectly spherical beads (Dubin 1987)
- Ca. 1825- Flexible shank buttons with a hole in the back for a cloth shank (Luscomb 1967)
- 1828- Invention of metal grommets (Takeda & Spilker 2010)
- Ca. 1830- Machine-made pins. Prior to 1830 look for wound heads (Beaudry 2006)
- Ca. 1840s- Prosser buttons (Sprague 2002); out of style by the 1920s
- 1846: Sewing machine patented (Takeda & Spilker 2010)
- 1848- Slot & stud closure for corsets invented (Takeda and Spilker 2010)
- 1849-1851- Hard rubber buttons patented by Goodyear (Luscomb 1967)
- 1856- Metal crinolines (Takeda & Spilker 2010); see also Google patents for TPQ info on specific brackets/models
- 1870s- Celluloid introduced (Fink and Ditzler 1993)
- Ca. 1890s- Snaps (Montgomery Ward & Co. 1895); not in popular use until ca. 1910 though
- 1930s- Zippers

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2006 *Findings: The Material Culture of Needlework and Sewing*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

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1993 *Buttons: The Collector's Guide to Selecting, Restoring, and Enjoying New and Vintage Buttons*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Courage Books.

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Sprague, Roderick

2002 China or Prosser Button Identification and Dating. *Historical Archaeology* 36(2): 111-127.

Takeda, Sharon Sadako, and Kaye Durland Spilker

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