

# Fashion and Equestrian Activities at the Clark Tenant Site: A Case Study in Negative Data

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# Fashion and Equestrian Activities at the Clark Tenant Site: A Case Study in Negative Data

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## INTRODUCTION

As part of the Phase III of the Clark Tenant site (7SC108), the author undertook an analysis of clothing and horse-related artifacts to better understand the nature of the site's occupational activities. Artifacts that fall into these categories are extremely sparse, amounting to a grand total of n=35, 27 of which are buttons. Because of the dearth of artifacts present, this report focuses as much on negative data as it does on the material that is present. In the context of common period clothing and equestrian activities, the paucity of material is indicative of intermittent non-domestic activity of some kind. Furthermore, if this intermittent activity involved agricultural work, it did not involve the use of horses, carts, wagons, or the like in any appreciable way that would leave artifacts behind as a natural part of wear and tear. There is nothing in the clothing or horse-related assemblage to indicate that people lived at the site while undertaking daily domestic activities. What there is of the assemblage suggests that people only visited and/or worked at the site while wearing outerwear, particularly coats.

The following report is divided into two sections: clothing and equestrian activities. First each section will present the artifacts that fall into these categories, including some that might have other applications such as scissors and pins. This will be combined with temporal data from other artifacts at the site to help establish the period of occupation. Then the dominant trends in fashion and equestrian activities will be summarized, with an emphasis on the artifact types that are not present at the Clark Tenant site in an effort to identify negative data. Finally, this analysis will wrap up with a summary of the interpretive possibilities to explore what this small assemblage might mean.

## CLOTHING

The possible clothing related artifacts recovered from the Clark Tenant site are relatively few given the level of data recovery. These consist of 27 buttons, one minuscule buckle frame fragment, two straight pins, two scissor fragments, and one sad iron that is missing its handle. Of necessity, this analysis therefore rests primarily on the buttons.

Button assemblages can be misleading because lack of organic preservation and curation of buttons are factors that limit the number of buttons that archaeologists find or significantly separate the period of deposition from the date of manufacture. Many popular button styles could be made entirely of thread or wooden molds covered by fabric or thread and these buttons rarely survive archaeologically. Furthermore, buttons are not something that people always throw away when the underlying garment wears out. In the pre-industrial era, textiles were valuable, so clothes were passed down or sold until they could no longer be worn, and even then they were often used as rags. Viable buttons were useful enough to be removed and retained when clothes were dismantled, especially if they were expensive or remained in style. As a result, buttons recovered archaeologically typically represent accidental losses or buttons deposited long after they were manufactured.

Buttons are therefore an artifact type that requires the consideration of reuse. The original manufacture date of a button and the type of garment it originally adorned may have nothing whatsoever to do with the button's eventual deposition at an archaeological site. People kept extra buttons, old buttons, and interesting buttons stashed away just in case. These artifacts entered the realm of craft supplies where they could be adopted for any number of uses like a rag doll's eye, a makeshift poker chip, or a fastener for a costume in a child's school play. Such idiosyncrasies are notoriously hard for archaeologists to interpret, but it is essential to keep them in mind in order to avoid drawing unfounded conclusions.

For example, the affiliation of buttons with clothing and clothing repair tends to land them in discussions of sewing-related activities in archaeological reports, but areas where sewing took place were likely to be areas where buttons were handled carefully as they were sewn onto clothes or purposely removed and retained. Slippery fingers could certainly lose some buttons in such places, but since sewing activities tend to lead to button hoarding, the affiliation of lost buttons with sewing is relatively weak. People who sew see value in keeping buttons; they do not spread them about the yard like chicken feed. One need only go to yard sales, flea markets, antique stores, and their relatives' houses to see this in the form of a button tin, a mason jar full of buttons, or a sewing basket with mismatched buttons tossed in.

The buttons that do end up scattered across sites are much more likely to have resulted from activities that led to wear and tear. Labor intensive activities that put stress on clothing would result in button losses in settings where people may be too distracted to notice, or too tired from their labors to care when a button is lost. It is therefore worthwhile to look at the distribution of buttons on archaeological sites in case high concentrations might point to laundering or other labor-intensive activities like butchering, gardening, wood chopping, etc. This idea also holds true for other fasteners such as hooks and eyes and buckles.

The distribution of buttons at the Clark Tenant site is not terribly helpful because only 10 come from controlled provenances, so there are too few to map in a meaningful way. Interestingly, however, it is this rarity of clothing-related artifacts that offers the most insight into how the site was—or perhaps more to the point, was not—used. The following discussion of clothing artifacts describes the few finds from the Clark Tenant site that relate to personal adornment with a focus on the buttons. Based on the timeframe established by examination of the buttons, general trends in fashions are then outlined and illustrated. Finally, the artifact data and background context are combined in a discussion and interpretive analysis of what the clothing evidence suggests about site use.

### The Clark Tenant Site Button Assemblage

The primary artifacts at the Clark Tenant site that represent clothing are 27 copper alloy buttons. Based on the button attributes, manufacturing dates could range from c. 1680-1930, but as an assemblage the buttons are most likely to represent a main occupation date in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

One button, a sew-through pants button with a front mark of "ACE BUTTON" has a likely manufacture date ca. 1860-1930, representing an outlier (Figure 1). This style of stamped sew-through button would most likely have adorned late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century work pants, either fastening flies or attaching suspenders (Gauthier 2019). Metal sew-through buttons did appear on earlier garments, but after consultation with several members of the National Button Society about its form, the consensus seems to be that the form of this button is later (Simone Kinkaid, electronic communication 2020). Other later artifacts have been recovered at the site and the button was not recovered from a feature, so it does not



Figure 1: A Pants button recovered from Sample Unit 107, Stratum I, Level 1. The front maker's mark is highlighted here using Photoshop, as it requires magnification under raking light to see. This style of button is made by machine stamping of various copper alloy and white metal alloys. It likely dates to c. 1860-1930 and would have been used as a waist attachment either for flies or suspenders.

(Figure 2A) is a cast two-piece button that is rather crushed, but appears to be of a variety that was nearly filled with solder to ensure a strong join. Two additional two-piece buttons are hollow, with the backs having one or two holes for the release of hot gases to ensure a better join at the soldering points (Figure 2B-C). After conservation, the silvery sheen of the solder can be seen on the interior of both buttons.

seem to be representative of the primary period of activity at the site. This button is therefore not included in the temporal analysis that follows.

In terms of the provenience of the rest of the buttons from the site, one was recovered in the plowzone of a Phase II test unit, and a mere four buttons were found in the 36 5x5 sample units (SUs) excavated during the Phase III. Feature 12 had two buttons. One button each was recovered in Features 22 and 23. An additional three buttons were recovered in Locus A as metal detector hits. Finally, the assemblage also includes 15 unprovenanced buttons. Fortunately, barring the outlier "ACE" button already mentioned, the buttons cluster well in terms of time frame and clothing styles, so it is possible to use the buttons to discuss fashions present at the site regardless of provenience.

#### Pre-1800 Buttons

Five buttons found at the Clark Tenant site have a manufacturing style that fell out of use by 1800 (Figure 2, Table 1). One button



Figure 2: Buttons recovered at the Clark Tenant site that were made in styles with an end date of 1800. See Table 1 for details on manufacture types, dates, function, and decoration.

Table 1: Detailed information about the buttons shown in Figure 2. Date and type designations derived from Hinks 1988 and Hughes and Lester 1991.

Label	Provenience	Count	Type	Date Range	Size	Function	Decoration
A	MD 2	1	3B1 or 3B2	ca. 1680-1800	23mm	Coat	None
B	TU15, I-1	1	3B3	ca. 1700-1800	16mm	Waistcoat, Coat, or Breeches	None
C	No Prov #3	1	3B2 or 3B3	ca. 1700-1800	21mm	Coat	Molding
D	No Prov #15	1	6A1; 18th-century copper	ca. 1770-1800	30mm	Coat	Stamped front decoration
E	F12, STP, I-1	1	6A1; 18th-century copper	ca. 1770-1800	34mm	Coat	Engraved and/or chased sunburst

The final pre-1800 buttons are known to collectors as “18<sup>th</sup>-century copper” buttons. These are rather large, flat disc buttons with no back mark and engraved or chased front decoration (Hughes and Lester 1991). Such buttons enjoyed popularity for use on coats at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

#### Unmarked Buttons, T.P.Q. c. 1800-1820

Eight buttons in the assemblage have a T.P.Q that falls between 1800 and 1820 (Figure 3, Table 2). These include cast pewter or tombac buttons (Figure 3A-C) and copper alloy disc buttons with “alpha” shanks and no back marks (Figure 3D-H). One tombac coat button (Figure 3B) has a subtle circle of engraved decoration, and one copper alloy slightly oblong button (Figure 3H) has decoration that is too deteriorated to identify.

#### Buttons with Back Marks, Ca. 1795-1830

Ten of the Clark Tenant site buttons are copper alloy disc buttons with “alpha” shanks and back marks (Figure 4, Table 3). While English and American buttons of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century sometimes had specific manufacturers named by the back marks, many had relatively generic designations such as city of manufacture (i.e., London), or desirable selling points (i.e. gilt, plated, and quality) interspersed with artistic add-ons like asterisks, arrows, wreaths of foliage and the like. All 10 of the Clark Tenant site’s marked buttons bear these generic marks.

Tice (1997:13-14) describes four different types of back mark, all of which were recovered at the Clark Tenant site (See Table 3): depressed back mark (dm); depressed mark in a depressed channel (dmdc); raised mark (rm); and raised mark in depressed channel (rmdc). Unfortunately, Tice (1997:13) offers no dating information about the different back marks except to say that many buttons made between 1810 and 1861 have raised marks in a depressed channel. Two of the buttons in the assemblage fall into this category (Figure 3C-D).

Of the 10 buttons with back marks, four say “LONDON” and one has a crown, so at least half can be assigned English manufacture. This probably has little meaning though, as American button manufacturing was in its infancy in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and largely limited to New England (Tice 1997). Imported buttons would not have been a notable luxury, but simply what was most readily available in many areas.

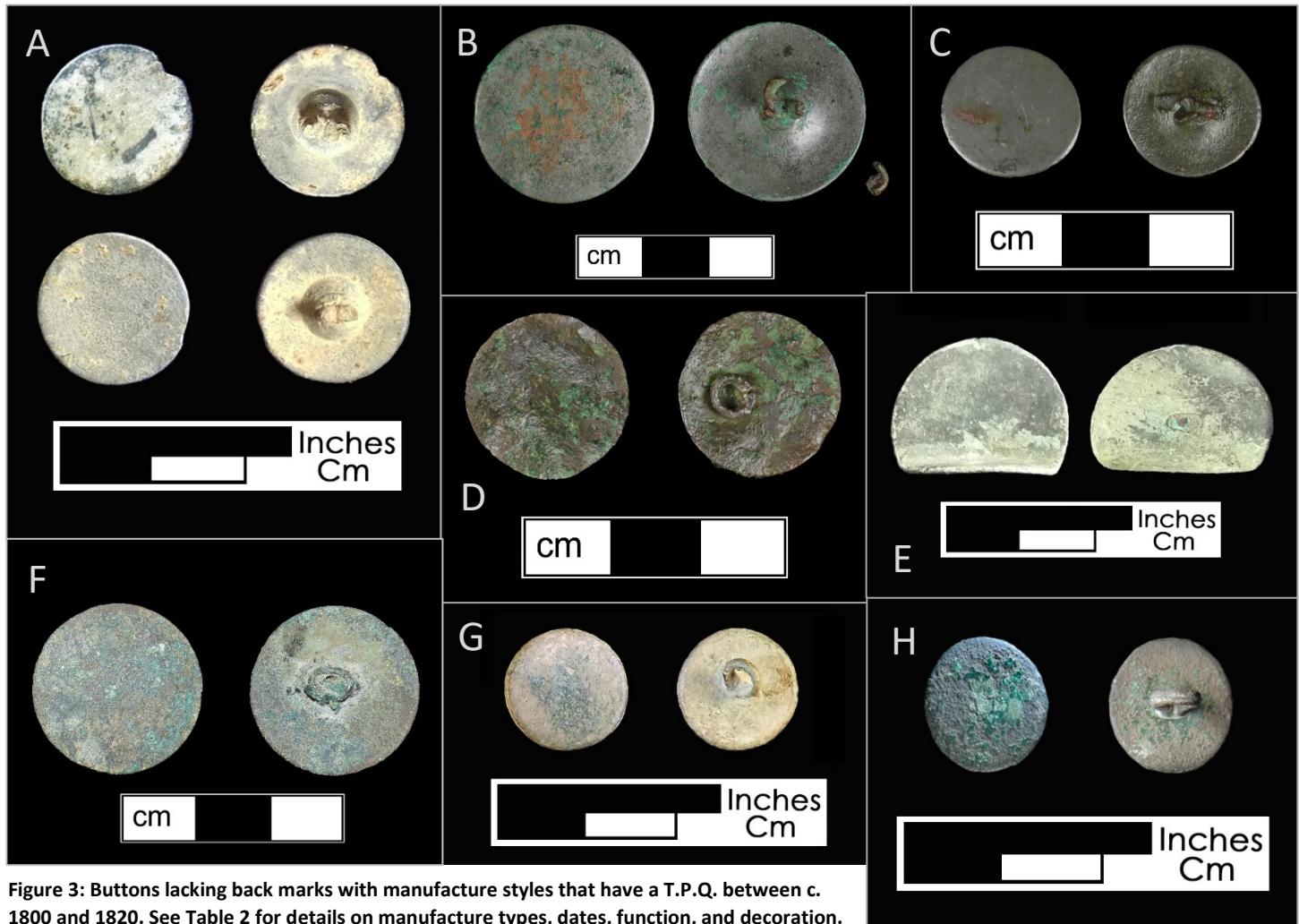
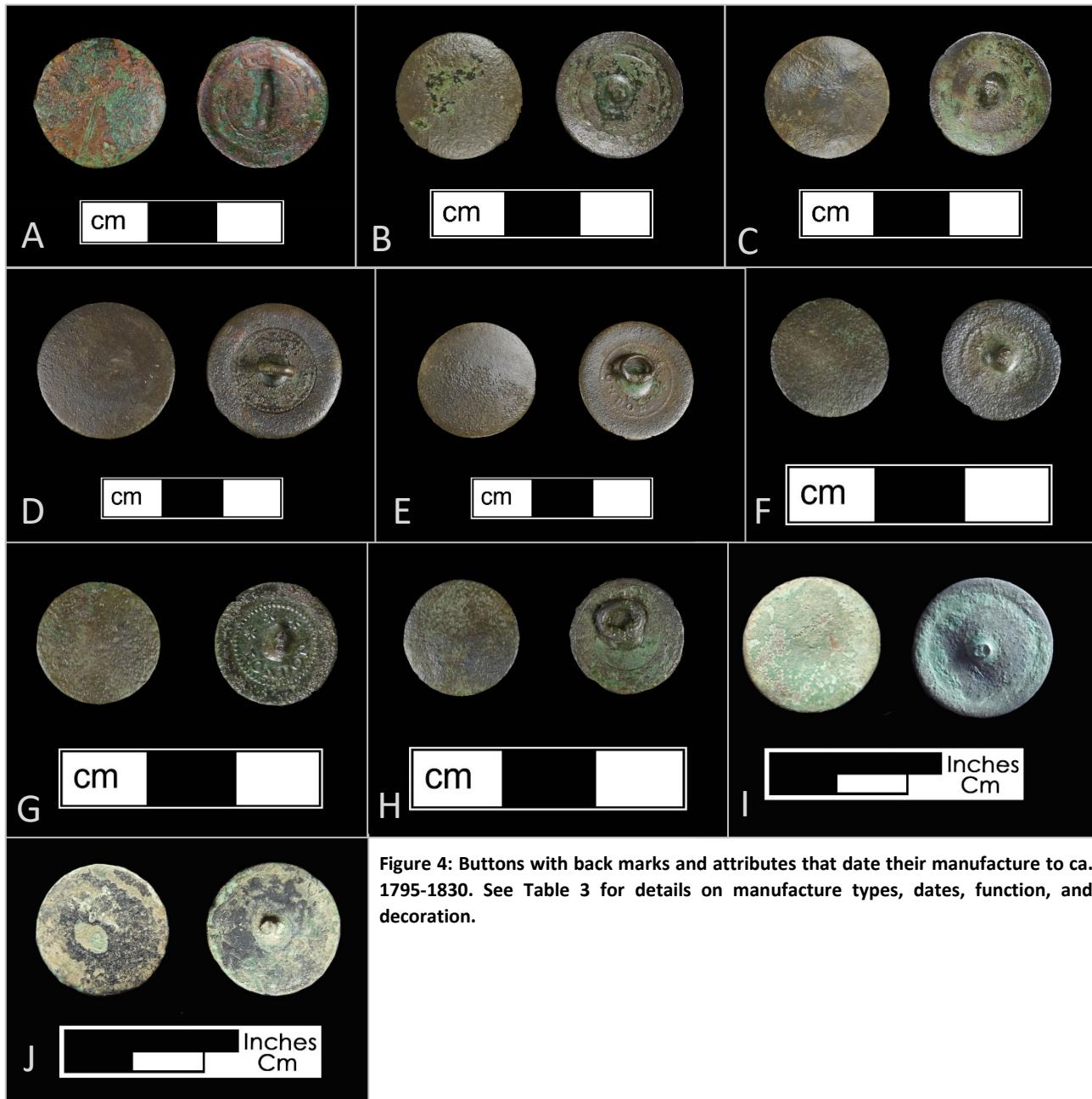


Figure 3: Buttons lacking back marks with manufacture styles that have a T.P.Q. between c. 1800 and 1820. See Table 2 for details on manufacture types, dates, function, and decoration.

Table 2: Detailed information about the buttons shown in Figure 3. Date and type designations derived from Hinks 1988 and Hughes and Lester 1991.

Label	Provenience	Count	Type	Date Range	Size (mm)	Function	Decoration
A	No Prov #9 & #10	2	2A2 or 2C1	ca. 1730-1820	17	Waistcoat, Coat, or Breeches	None
B	MD 37	1	2C1	ca. 1760-1810	28.5	Coat	Circle of simple engraving
C	SU104, I-1	1	2C1	ca. 1760-1810	16 x 16.8	Waistcoat, Coat, or Breeches	None
D	MD 58	1	6A1	ca. 1780-1815	14	Coat Cuff	None
E	F12, SW, I-1	1	6A1	ca. 1780-1815	19.3	Coat	None
F	F22, N1/2, I-1	1	6A1	ca. 1780-1815	23.7	Coat	None
G	No Prov #11	1	6A1	ca. 1780-1815	24	Coat	None
H	No Prov #13	1	6A1	ca. 1780-1815	13.5 x 14.5	Coat Cuff	Unidentified



**Figure 4:** Buttons with back marks and attributes that date their manufacture to ca. 1795-1830. See Table 3 for details on manufacture types, dates, function, and decoration.

Table 3: Detailed information about the buttons shown in Figure 4. All have a manufacture date ca. 1795-1830. Date and type designations derived from Hinks 1988 and Hughes and Lester 1991. Mark types derived from Tice (1997:13-14).

Label	Provenience	Count	Type	Size	Function	Mark	Mark Type	Notes
A	F23, S, I-1	1	6B2	20mm	Coat	-->*<--PLATED-->*<--LONDON"	rm	Slightly convex
B	No Prov #1	1	6B2	18mm	Coat or Waistcoat	Appears to be a wreath and "*****" but illegible	rmdc	Convex
C	No Prov #2	1	6B2	18mm	Coat or Waistcoat	Only legible letters are "LITY" probably for QUALITY	rmdc	Probably meant to be flat
D	No Prov #4	1	6B1	23mm	Coat	A crown and "TREBLE GILT"	rm	None
E	No Prov #5	1	6B1 or 6B2	21mm	Coat	"***LONDON"	rm	None
F-G	No Prov #6-7	2	6B1 or 6B2	14.3mm	Coat Cuff	"***LONDON"	rm	None
H	No Prov #8	1	6B1	13mm	Coat Cuff	"GILT" with a wreath	dm	None
I	No Prov #12	1	6B1	20.5mm	Coat	Evidence of a wreath, otherwise illegible	dmdc	None
J	No Prov #14	1	6B1	20mm	Coat or Waistcoat	Wreath and illegible writing	dm	None

#### "Gilt," Ca. 1830-1850

Two of the buttons recovered at the Clark Tenant site are of a type known to collectors as "gilt" (Figure 5, Table 4). These are two-piece buttons with stamped front decoration and a thin gold coating (Luscomb 1967:78-79). Excepting the outlier of the pants button, they are the only two artifacts in the clothing-related assemblage whose manufacture probably post-dates 1830.



Figure 5: Small "gilt" with stamped front decoration.

Table 4: Detailed information about the buttons shown in Figure 5. Both have a manufacture date ca. 1830-1850. Date and type designations derived from Hughes and Lester 1991 and Luscomb 1967.

Provenience	Count	Type	Size	Back Mark	Decoration
SU100, I-1	1	2-Piece Gilt	13.5mm	Marked but illegible	Stamped decoration of dots or stars on a striped background
SU133, I-1	1	2-Piece Gilt	13.7mm	PLATED and possible CE, otherwise illegible	Stamped wreath on a striped background, possibly with additional center decoration obscured by corrosion

#### Temporal Analysis of the Buttons

When the date ranges based on Hinks (1988) are averaged, the entire button assemblage (excluding the pants button as an outlier) yields a mean date of 1797 and a median date of 1797.5. However, it does not follow that this should be used as a primary date of activity at the site. As previously discussed, buttons might have been worn for years. Clothing was an investment and expense that would not be abused or discarded lightly, and buttons were often reused. It is therefore likely that the pre-1800 buttons in the assemblage adorned clothing that had been made well before the buttons were lost. For example, the likelihood that a coat made in 1790 was still in use in 1800 is quite high, especially if the material was durable and the coat able to survive long enough to enjoy secondhand use.

Additionally, the activities at the site could influence how much of a lag time existed between button manufacture and deposition. The harder or dirtier the work undertaken at the site, the greater the likelihood that the individuals performing that work would have worn their oldest, least valuable clothing. Thus, the harder and dirtier the work at the site, the more lag time one would expect between button manufacture and deposition. By contrast, if those individuals who lost buttons at the site were living there full time or engaged in travel and just stopping at the well to fill up their canteens, then the lag time from manufacture to deposition might be less. Full time inhabitants would have a complete wardrobe represented, presumably including some newer pieces, and travelers might have preferred not to wear their worst or oldest coat since keeping up appearances had more importance when visiting or doing business than when engaging in hard labor.

Given these temporal considerations, and the date ranges of other artifacts found at the site, this report will examine clothing that one might find on a site dating from 1790-1850.

#### Other Potentially Clothing-Related Artifacts

In addition to the button assemblage, the Clark Tenant site also yielded two straight pins and one tiny probable buckle frame fragment that may represent clothing fasteners, and two pairs of scissors and one sad iron that might have been used for clothing manufacture or care (Figure 6).

Of these artifacts, only the buckle would have been unlikely to have a use that was not related to clothing in some way. Unfortunately, despite the slight banded decoration surviving, the fragment it is too small to allow for dating or the determination of function (i.e. shoe, knee, etc.).

The straight pins recovered at the site, both from Feature 12, have wound heads. Pins with wound heads were used until the invention of new pin-making machines around 1830 (Beaudry 2006:21). Straight pins were sometimes used as clothing fasteners in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 7), but they were also used for sewing and fastening non-textiles like papers in an era before the invention of paper clips and staplers.



**Figure 6:** Non-button artifacts from the Clark Tenant site that could be related to clothing. Like the large scissors fragment, the pins were recovered from the Feature 12 STP. The small scissors and iron were found in the northeast quadrant of Feature 12, Stratum I, Level 1. The tiny buckle fragment shown at the bottom right has no provenience.



**Figure 7.** Ca. 1800 bib-front dress that attached with straight pins (Vintage Textile 2014). Pin holes are visible at the corner of the drop front.

Similarly, scissors can be related to sewing or maintaining clothes, but they could also be used for cutting other things like paper, twine, hair, horse manes and tails, etc. While the two scissors at the site vary in size, this does not sufficiently narrow down potential functions to allow for any consideration of possible clothing manufacture. The smaller scissors might be useful for such activities as embroidery, mending, or trimming one's fabulous mutton chop sideburns, while the larger scissors would be up to bigger jobs like cutting fabric, paper, or hair. Few sources exist to help archaeologists differentiate scissors by intended function, so lumping them into the category of "sewing tools" is an unfounded presumption, especially on non-domestic sites. For example, an 1816 catalog of wares manufactured in Sheffield England illustrates 10 pages of different scissors, with three examples labeled "Paper & Tailor's Shears," eight examples of "Shop & Shaping Scissors," 19 examples of "Shaping & Barbers" scissors, and 56 pairs under the non-specific headings of "Scissors" or "Polished Steel Scissors" (Smith 1816). The Clark Tenant site scissors do not match the forms listed for paper and tailor's shears, but they could represent any of the other categories, many of which appear to be available in multiple sizes (Figure 8). There is therefore

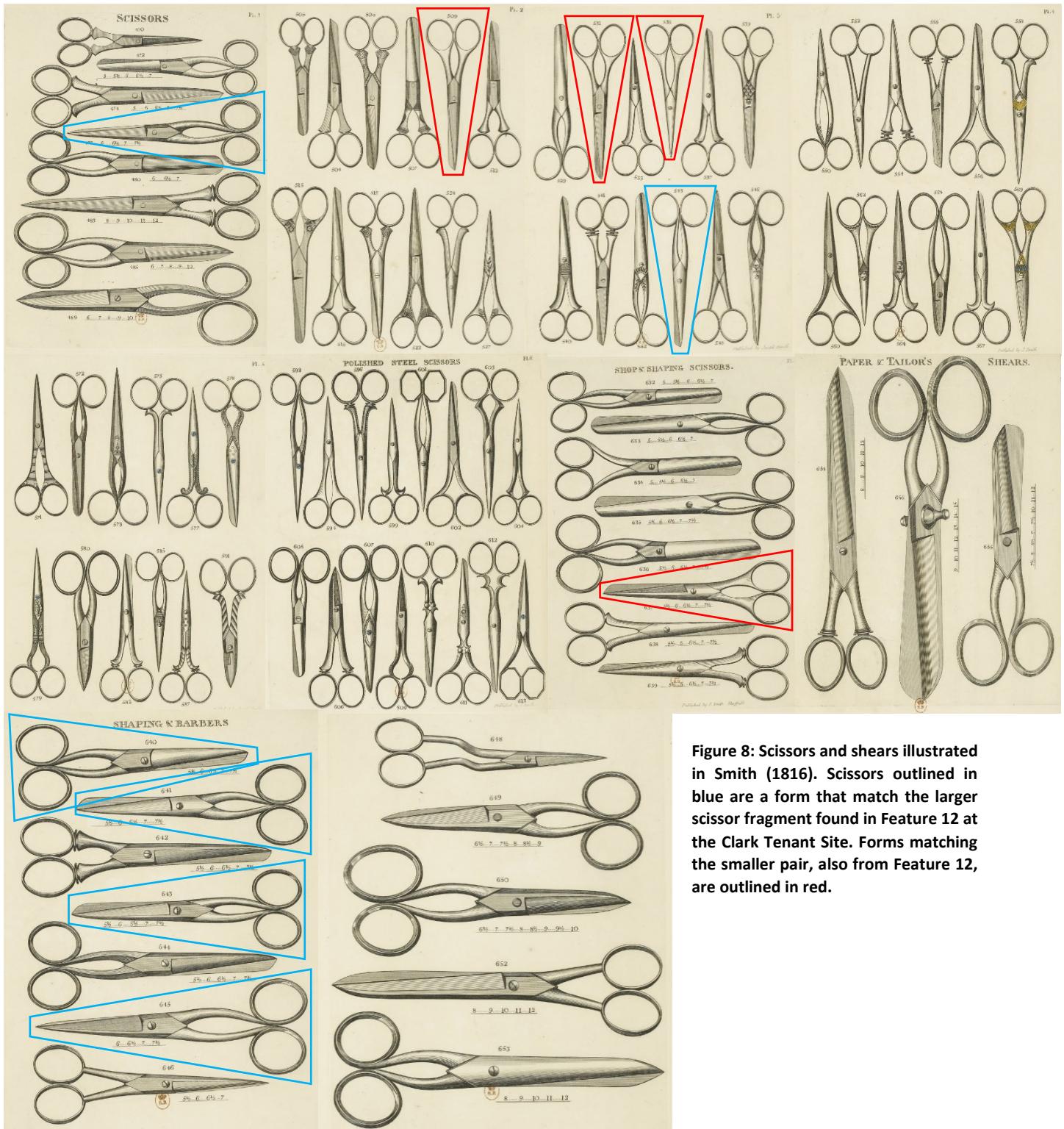
nothing about Clark Tenant site scissors to suggest that they were exclusively for sewing as opposed to grooming or general purpose uses.

Rather more definitively associated with clothing care is the presence of the sad iron, which was unquestionably manufactured for purposes of ironing. As will be discussed in more detail below, however, there is no further evidence of laundering taking place at the Clark Tenant site. For example, at another Delaware site that was occupied in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Houston-LeCompt, buttons were more plentiful, and those that were most likely to be for undergarments clustered somewhat around an area of the backyard that had evidence of fire burning, a tripod of posts to hold a vessel of boiling water, and possible clothesline postholes (Rivers Cofield 2016). The Clark Tenant site lacks all of these, including any buttons that would be found on the most heavily laundered parts of one's wardrobe, the undergarments. The absence of any other evidence of laundering suggests that the iron might have been reused after the handle broke. Such a heavy iron object might have been used as a doorstop or weight, but there are also other possibilities.

One practical reuse of a sad iron would be to continue using it as a heat source. For example, to keep cooked food warm in transport from kitchen to diners, one might heat up the iron, wrap it in a cloth to protect from scorching, and place it with the food. The iron might also serve in lieu of a hot brick by one's feet on a cold night. This reuse might fit the site well given that no archaeological evidence was found for a heat source such as a hearth or stove parts. The broken iron could be a means to transport heat from elsewhere.

The iron content might be also have made this broken artifact useful as an apotropaic device. Various folk beliefs from both African and Western traditions attributed iron with protective qualities (Kelly 2012; Uunila 2019). The context of the sad iron fragment in the well Feature 12 could support such as use, as iron was used to keep the influences of witches' curses away, and some folk practices concentrated on water sources.

The non-button artifacts that might be associated with clothing in some way are therefore rather inconclusive. It is interesting that the scissors, iron, and pins all cluster in Feature 12 though. This relatively clustered association does increase the possibility that the artifacts are related, such as part of a sewing kit or similar. Since Feature 12 is a well, however, the likelihood that people were sewing there or using it to store a sewing kit is minimal.



**Figure 8: Scissors and shears illustrated in Smith (1816).** Scissors outlined in blue are a form that match the larger scissor fragment found in Feature 12 at the Clark Tenant Site. Forms matching the smaller pair, also from Feature 12, are outlined in red.

## GENERAL FASHION SUMMARY CA. 1750-1850

Diagnostic buttons from the Clark Tenant site offer a probable date range of c. 1790-1850, so to understand what they mean it is necessary to review overarching fashion trends of that time. The last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century represented a transitional period in Western fashions for men and women as major changes occurred in society and governance, such as American independence, the French Revolution, and the increased adoption of industrial manufacturing. Still, because all people did not adopt new fashions uniformly as soon as they appeared on the scene, the following discussion follows changes in fashions for men and women from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century on.

From the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century until the 1780s, typical attire for a man was a suit that included a coat, waistcoat, and breeches, all of which fastened with buttons (Figure 9). Underneath this suit men wore a long shirt that tucked well down into the breeches where it served as a barrier between the skin and the suit (Lynn 2010:14). Shirts closed with linked buttons at the wrist and sometimes at the neck (Figure 10). Drawers as a separate undergarment were not in universal use, though many men did have them (Willet and Cunnington 1992). Breeches typically stopped just below the knee where they fastened with buttons and a knee buckle that could serve to keep the breeches tight to the leg and to hold up stockings that covered the leg from knee to shoe. Men often wore a stock at the neck which was essentially a band of fine fabric that held tight to the back of the neck with a specialized buckle (Figure 11). Cravats were also



Figure 9: These ca. 1788 portraits of Mary Kimberly Thomas Reynolds and James Blackslee Reynolds by Reuben Moulthrop show their fashion sense as the end of the century approached. She wears a mantua made of a printed fabric that is open in the front to reveal a darker petticoat. Her accessories include a sheer apron, a lace-trimmed fichu, lace cuffs known as engageantes, a choker of black ribbon, a finger ring, and a prodigiously ruffled cap. Mr. Reynolds boasts a navy blue coat with enormous buttons, a pale waistcoat with much smaller buttons, a shirt with ruffled sleeves and a ruffled front, and a collar held high by a wide stock. His accessories include a walking stick, an ovoid watch fob at the waist, and a snuff box on the table nearby. American Folk Art Museum accessions 2013.1.1 and 2013.1.2.

worn in this period, which were essentially neck cloths that tied at the front according to one's personal taste. Accessories varied greatly by time of day, occupation, and wealth. Headwear ranged from plain wool or knit caps to elaborate tricorn hats over expensive wigs. Virtually all men from slaves to gentlemen wore linked buttons at the sleeve (Rivers Cofield 2012), and those who could afford more expensive jewelry carried watches with decorative watch fobs (Figure 12).

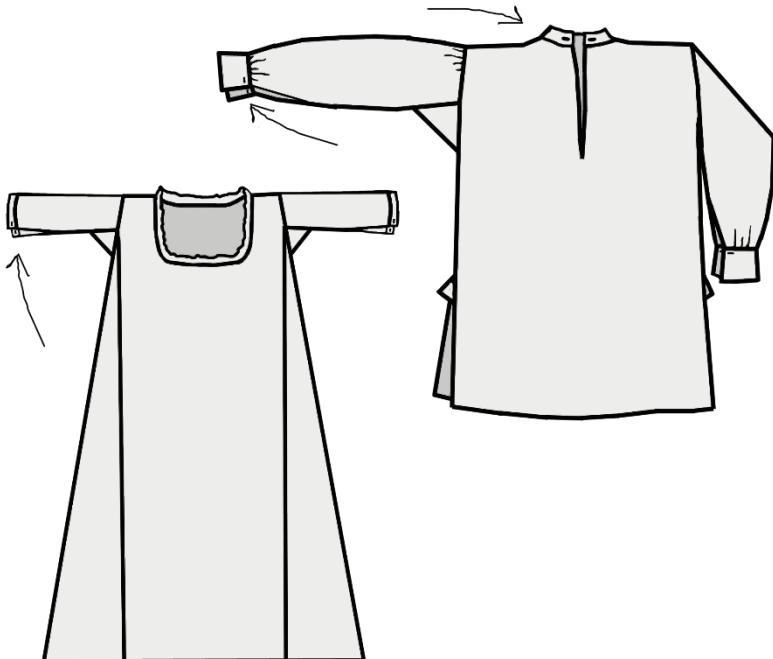


Figure 10: Ladies' shifts (left) and men's shirts (right) typically attached with linked buttons in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Towards the end of the century and into the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, these were increasingly replaced using thread-covered buttons such as Dorset buttons.

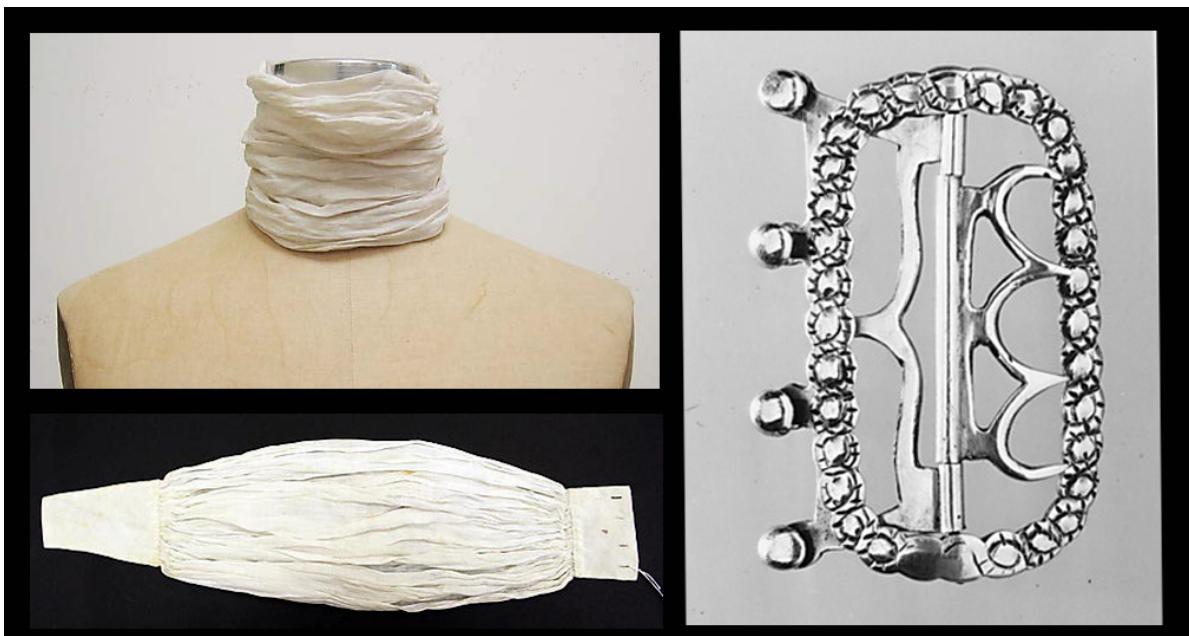


Figure 11: Man's early 19<sup>th</sup> century stock and ca. 1765-1785 stock buckle. Metropolitan Museum of Art Accessions 40.125 (buckle) and 2006.407 (stock).



**Figure 12.** The 1789 portrait of Elijah Boardman by Ralph Earl is a perfect illustration of male accessories near the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Wikimedia Commons 2011). His coat has very large buttons of decorated brass, gilt, or woven gold thread, and he wears gold linked buttons on his shirt sleeves. A gold watch fob hangs from Boardman's waist, matching the gold trim of his waistcoat. At the knee his buttons are fabric covered (probably with bone button molds inside) to match the material of his breeches, and he wears a decorative gold and silver tone knee buckle. Finally, very large openwork silver buckles curve over Boardman's plain black shoes.

Women of the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century typically wore a gown or mantua with full skirts that opened at the front to expose a petticoat underneath. At the time, the petticoat was not necessarily an undergarment, but instead would be expected to be viewed when the length of the gown stopped at the knee or long gowns were tied back. Petticoats fastened with ties, drawstrings, or hooks and eyes. Gowns attached at the center front of the torso with straight pins or they might be designed to leave a triangular opening at the front for a stomacher, which also attached with pins. These were worn over stays, which were the heavily boned and quilted undergarments that later gave rise to the corset. Like petticoats, stays were not necessarily just undergarments, however. Some 18<sup>th</sup>-century women could leave off their gowns while laboring at tasks like laundry and cooking, and many works of art show women wearing their stays on view in public without alarming society's sense of propriety (Styles 2007:70).

The innermost garment for women, and the counterpart to the male shirt, was the shift (Lynn 2010; Styles 2010; Willet and Cunnington 1992). Like men's shirts, shifts with sleeves might have two buttonholes at the cuff for the attachment of sleeve links. Long lacy cuffs known as engageantes attached to shift or gown sleeves with pins, ties, or basting stitches. Under their petticoats, ladies wore stockings and garters, and sometimes bumpers, paniers, or other padding to increase the fullness of one's skirts (Takeda and Spilker

2010; Willet and Cunnington 1992). Ladies employed any number of accessories to dress up each ensemble according to their means and tastes.

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this formula for proper dress changed dramatically for both men and women, and the shift was inspired in part by archaeology. The 18<sup>th</sup>-century Enlightenment was characterized by scientific experiments and pursuits, and archaeology was among them. Deliberate excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum, the ancient Roman cities made famous for their fall after the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in A.D. 79, resulted in unprecedented exposure to ancient Roman art and fashion.

The last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were also characterized by upheaval and revolution in Europe and its colonies. The American Revolution, the French Revolution, and successful slave uprising that overthrew French rule in Saint Domingue (Haiti) all impacted the last two decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Since the emphasis for these uprisings was on freedom and equality, Greek and Roman ideas of democracy and republic served as potential models for governance when monarchical rule was overthrown. Not surprisingly, both costume and decorative arts emulated the ancient societies that had been exposed by archaeology. The neoclassical style was adopted in furniture, art, and architecture, and ladies costume emulated togas with flowing diaphanous gowns (Johnston 2009). Changes in France, in particular, set trends across the Western world as fashion was historically one of its major exports (Takeda and Spilker 2010).

Between 1780 and 1800, ladies' gowns changed significantly. Natural waists cinched by stays gradually moved higher until the waistline was just below the breasts and some women stopped using stays or adopted short stays similar in coverage to a modern bra (Baumgarten 2002; Lynn 2010:82). Skirts narrowed as the waistline moved up, so panniers became obsolete. In fact, with high waists at the ribs, ladies must have enjoyed their own sense of liberty in having nothing attached to their natural waist to cinch their guts into a narrow silhouette. Various fasteners were employed on the new style gowns, including hooks and eyes, small buttons up the back, small buttons at the front for "bib" front gowns, and pins. Women could no longer easily shed their gowns to labor in stays and petticoats, nor was it considered acceptable to do so. Undergarments still consisted of shifts, stockings, and garters, though drawers and pantalets started to appear in ladies' wardrobes during this period as well (Willet and Cunnington 1992:110-114). Shoes gradually shed their heels and buckles in favor of flat slipper styles that sometimes attached with crisscrossed ribbons, emulating the sandals of ancient Greece and Rome (Baumgarten 2002). Wigs were also abandoned.

For men the transition that took place was less literally neoclassical, as toga-like garments and sandals were not adopted for daily wear. Instead, menswear shifted in such a way as to subtly reflect an increased respect for equality and disrespect for the excesses of aristocratic finery (Willet and Cunnington 1992:99). Throughout most of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the finest men's suits were embroidered and decorated as much as, if not more than ladies' wear. Embroidery rendered in silk, silver, or gold thread—literally made with precious metals, not just thread with a silver or gold color—was popular for men who could afford it, and paste jewels and sequins were often incorporated into embroidery and threadwork buttons (Hart and North 1998). Frilled cuffs, lace, and jewelry also fit the masculine ideal and set the upper classes apart. Much of this conspicuous dandyism was shed as the century closed, however. Embroidery first became more simplistic, again adopting neoclassical motifs, and then faded out of style. Lace cuffs were shed, and linked buttons were largely replaced by white sew-on buttons, though ruffles at the shirt front were still seen (Willet and Cunnington 1992: 126).

The definition of masculinity changed in this era, as men were increasingly expected to dismiss fashion as superficial, insignificant, frivolous, and a concern of women, not men (Kuchta 2002). When men cared about appearances, they might avoid doing so outwardly so as not to seem “effeminate.”

Men’s clothing was particularly influenced by military styles, especially during periods of war, so men at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century often adopted boots for daily wear instead of just for riding or uniforms. Boots with brown tops, or tall black boots that became known as Wellingtons, were adopted while shoes with large buckles were on their way out. Perhaps the most notable change in menswear, however, was the shift from breeches that stopped below the knee to trousers that extended to the ankle. The transition occurred first for daywear, and eventually spread to eveningwear as well. This change in men’s suits persists to today. Like ladies’ wear, men’s waistlines also changed as coats and waistcoats that previously extended down over the hips shortened at the front to create the tailcoat (Figure 13). This transition was



Figure 13. Man's tailcoat ca. 1835 with stamped geometric brass buttons. Victoria and Albert museum, Acc# T.18-1918.

likely behind the widespread adoption of drawers as undergarments, since bunching up a shirt in one’s trousers could create undesirable bulkiness that would no longer be hidden by long waistcoats. The silhouette was generally more form-fitting. Wigs and tricorn hats gave way to bicorne hats and a new fashion for top hats (McClellan 1904; Takeda and Spilker 2010; Willet and Cunnington 1992).

For both men and women, the last two decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw a shift away from heavy decoration with metallic embroidery, lace, and metal fittings such as fancy buttons and buckles to less conspicuous finery. France and French fashion plates continued to influence costume despite major upheavals in governance, and when Revolutionaries adopted the habit of sending the aristocracy to the guillotine, the aristocracy learned to abandon the costumes that they had adopted to set them apart. Silver and gold embroidery with paste jewels gave way to white-on-white embroidery that could still be costly without being gauche. Certainly the cut of one’s clothes and the quality of the fabric remained important, and individuals were still able to recognize one’s social status by looking at the packaging, but in light of the social cry for less hierarchy and more equality, fashions adopted more subtle clues to indicate class.

The neoclassical styles that arose at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century dominated the first 20 years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as much of Europe became embroiled in the Napoleonic Wars, and Napoleon himself drew inspiration for his quest to build an empire from the example of ancient Rome (Johnston 2009; Takeda and Spilker 2010). By 1820, the Napoleonic wars had subsided and changes in fashion began that had less to do with large international events than with idiosyncratic trends. Between 1820 and 1840, ladies' waistlines migrated down again, and hem diameters increased, adopting more of an A-line shape (Figure 14).

The short puffed sleeves of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century began an odd metamorphosis of their own, expanding

to enormous bubble-like proportions at the shoulder that required specialized padded undersleeves by 1830 (Lynn 2010:168). These lengthened into long gigot or leg-o-mutton sleeves for a few years before the voluminous portion of the sleeve gradually moved down the arm from shoulder, to elbow, to forearm until finally, by 1840, it disappeared as if it fell off once it reached the cuff (Johnston 2009).



**Figure 14.** This 1827 watercolor of a woman and child by Adam Buck shows the popularity of gauzy flowing white gowns, puffed sleeves, girdle buckles, and slipper-style shoes. The waistline is just starting its descent back to natural levels and sleeves are getting fuller at this period. Note that other than the buckle and a finger ring, neither the woman nor the child in this image appears to be wearing anything that would survive in the archaeological record. The British museum, Acc# 1987,0307.10.

At the close of the 1830s, dresses once again had cinched natural waistlines that required stays or corsets, and skirts were once again full. Form-fitting bodices typically closed with hooks and eyes (Figure 15). Early 19<sup>th</sup> century stays sometimes had small bone grommets (Figure 16). The invention of metal eyelets (grommets) in 1828 allowed tighter corset lacing without harm to the fabric, so narrow waists were easier to achieve (Takeda and Spilker 2010:21). The hourglass or bell-shaped silhouette this created dominated ladies wear into the 1860s (Lynn 2010).



**Figure 16:** Iron or brass hooks and eyes were frequently used as attachments for female clothing in the early 19th century. Iron hooks and eyes were often prone to rust as shown on the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century black bodice above (from the author's collection).



**Figure 15:** Early 19<sup>th</sup> century corsets and stays sometimes had bone grommets that look like small donuts with an outer groove when found archaeologically. Corset c. 1815 from The Museum at FIT, Acc#2009.1.1.

Menswear did not change quite as dramatically in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The three-piece suit continued to consist of trousers, a coat, and waistcoat, which became known as a vest. Menswear also remained plain compared to the excesses of 18<sup>th</sup> century adornment (Johnston 2009:7). Tails continued in use between 1800 and 1850, as did long frock coats with a narrow waist and skirt-like fullness from the waist that ended just above the knee (Figures 17-19; Davis 1994). Narrow waists were desirable for both men and women to create an hour-glass silhouette. The fashion-minded men of this period employed corsets to cinch the waist and strategic padding for areas deemed worthy of emphasizing, such as the shoulders, underarm, chest, and calves (Davis 1994; Takeda and Spilker 2010; Willet and Cunnington 1992). Trousers were no longer as tightly fitted to the leg, but collars were so high and tightly fitted they flirted with the ears (Willet and Cunnington 1992). Boots again fell out of popularity in favor of shoes, but the top hat continued to dominate headwear for men.

Major changes in how clothing was manufactured were underway during this period. The invention and spread of the sewing machine in the mid- 19<sup>th</sup> century revolutionized the clothing industry and home sewing (Takeda and Spilker 2010:12). Models patented in the U.S. in the 1840s and 1850s launched companies like Singer and made sewing machines affordable and accessible for personal use. Although hand-work continued to be popular and necessary for buttonholes, embroidery, and other tricky stitching, sewing machines sped up the process of sewing straight seams immensely by the 1860s. Instead of just hurrying up the process of making clothes, manufacturers used this opportunity to make clothes more complicated and ornate (Takeda and Spilker 2010).

Buttons enjoyed a boom as American manufacturers, such as the Scovill company in Connecticut, began mass production of metal buttons that dominated the American market by the 1830s (Luscomb 1967: 174; Tice 1997). The Prosser technique for making high-fired ceramic buttons was developed in the 1840s, and Goodyear was making hard rubber buttons by 1851 (Fink and Ditzler 1993; Luscomb 1967:91; Sprague 2002). Thus the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was dominated by hand-made garments, but the period from 1850-1865 was one of transition as fashion and industry joined forces to dramatically change what people wore.

The language of clothing changed in this period as well. "Stays" became "corsets," "shifts" became "chemises," "waistcoats" became "vests" and so on. It is possible that the names of clothing changed in part because of a shift in thinking about what was, and was not, decent and proper to see or discuss. A marked shift in society's sense of propriety took place in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century that continued through the Victorian Era. Anything that could be seen as relating to sexuality was closeted, including references to undergarments deemed 'vulgar.' Willet and Cunnington (1992: 97) cite a prudish fear of sex in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the reason why, "Underclothing, especially women's, came to be shrouded in a moral fog of reticence." Changes in terminology seem to be connected with this attitude; stays and shifts could be visible, but corsets and chemises were most decidedly undergarments in need of full coverage. The garments still served the same purpose, but their milieu shifted from public to private.



Figure 17: Coats c. 1785-1810s. Top left: Wool and silk coat c. 1785 (Acc#1999.105.1). Top right: Checked cotton coat c. 1790s (Acc#1979.346.42). Bottom left: Wool coat c. 1810 (Acc#C.I.39.13.24). Bottom right: Black wool coat with fabric-covered buttons, c. 1810-1820 (Acc#08.187.1). All from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 18: Assorted coats c. 1820s-1830s. Top left: Ensemble c. 1820 (MMA Acc#1976.235.3a-e). Top Center: Wool coat, c. 1820s (MMA Acc#C.I.50.8.3). Top right: Linen coat, early 1820s (Acc#1996.227). Bottom left: Silk twill coat c. 1835-1845 (LACMA Acc#CR.265.63-147). Bottom right: Linsey woolsey work coat c. 1830 (Monmouth County Historical Association Object Number 1037).



Figure 19: Examples of coats from the 1840s. Left: Ensemble with a wool tailcoat with brass buttons, c. 1845 (LACMA Acc# 2007.211.958). Right: Wool frock coat with blackened metal buttons, c. 1840 (Acc#C.I.38.23.39).

## The Role of Buttons and Buckles

Throughout most of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, buttons and buckles served as both fasteners and showy accessories. Men wore buttons on coats, waistcoats, shirts, and breeches, and buckles on shoes, breeches (at the knees), and stocks. Women did not wear as many buttons as men, but they did wear buttons at the sleeve, as trim decorations, as fasteners for gathering up skirts and sleeves, and on buttoned jackets and coats for activities such as hunting and riding. Women also wore shoe buckles and some other accessory buckles such as girdle and hat buckles. These buttons and buckles varied greatly in material and size.

At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, coats and waistcoats generally had a very high number of very small buttons, but by the end of the century coats boasted larger buttons in smaller quantities. The general rule at this time period was that the further the clothing layer was from the body, the larger the button. The largest buttons of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century were found on coats, while waistcoat and breeches buttons were smaller, and shirt buttons for the sleeve and neck (whether sewn on or detachable links) were smallest of all (See Figures 9 and 12).

In terms of materials used, the fasteners depended on the style of garment and the preference of the wearer. In general, the cost of the button was tied more to the material it was made of than the labor needed to manufacture it (Takeda and Spilker 2010:18). In descending order of value, metal buttons and buckles of gold, silver, silver plate, brass, and pewter were among the options available, but that does not mean that the wealthy always opted for precious metals (Rivers Cofield 2012). For example, pewter or copper alloy buckles could be mounted with paste jewels, dressing up one's look without using expensive materials.

Buttons had even more variations. The elaborately embroidered silk suits available to the upper classes often had buttons made to match. These buttons, known by the French term *passementerie*, were made from wood or bone molds covered in embroidered silk or woven thread patterns to complement the decoration of the garment (Fink and Ditzler 1993:16-17; Hart and North 1998; Luscomb 1967:145). Such buttons boasted of conspicuous consumption in that the delicate needlework, sequins, paste jewels, and metallic threads that could adorn these mini-works of art did not make for the most durable of fasteners, nor would they ever be practical for reuse when it came time for a new coat. The same was true for plain coats with fabric-covered buttons to match. Metal buttons would be more durable, but since textiles were expensive and less durable, having cloth-covered buttons could be less economical, and therefore more of a luxury.

Buttons that were made entirely of metal came in plain and decorative forms. Some late 18<sup>th</sup> century buttons consisted of thin gilt metal with stamped decoration over a bone mold to give the appearance of a solid metal button without the expense. Composite buttons that combined metal, mother-of-pearl, painted porcelain, glass insets, enamel work, and cut steel were also available in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Fink and Ditzler 1993; Luscomb 1967).

The early 19<sup>th</sup> century represented a decline in the popularity of showy decorative buttons and buckles. Over-accessorizing in general was *passé*, so menswear shed its enormous coat buttons in favor of modestly-sized buttons that were plain brass or covered in textiles to match the coat, waistcoat, or trousers so as to blend with the garment (Fink and Ditzler 1993). When ladies wore buttons for riding habits and the like similar rules applied. In keeping with the theme of modest buttons, the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was the heyday of the Dorset button; a small threadwork button rendered over a metal ring that was typically used for white clothing such as shirts, infant gowns, and ladies' muslin and lawn gowns (Figure 20). The main exception to the modest use of buttons of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was the popularity

of the military look inspired by the Napoleonic wars. Ladies' garments such as pelisses and spencers saw an uptick in the use of buttons as decorative trimmings and fasteners during this period as they mimicked the uniforms of the men (Johnston 2009).



**Figure 20:** This ca. 1800 infant gown has Dorset buttons at the shoulder for fastening a sleeve-gathering string. It closes at the back with two ties and one Dorset button. Similar fasteners were used on ladies' gowns and various undergarments as well. From the author's collection.

Buckles simply went out of style in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Women wore slipper style shoes without buckles, and men's shoes dropped buckles soon thereafter. As menswear shifted from breeches to trousers, knee buckles left the scene as well.

From 1830-1850 men continued to fasten coats, vests, and trousers with buttons while women tended to wear buttons as decoration on outerwear. Undergarments increasingly attached with buttons for both men and women, even on petticoats and pantalettes where drawstrings or hooks and eyes had previously dominated. The gradual adoption of braces or suspenders in menswear also increased the number of buttons employed. Plain bone, shell, or Prosser ceramic buttons were used for suspenders and undergarments that would not be visible when one was fully dressed. Both underdrawers and trousers often exhibited sew-through buttons with great frequency (Figures 21-22).

Changes in children's clothing also started to necessitate more plain utilitarian buttons. Miniature pantaloons, petticoats, and shirts for children employed buttons at the waist to keep everything together under whatever outerwear the children wore. No doubt the secure buttoning of everyone in the family into their many layers was a technique for maintaining the full coverage that social mores of the Victorian Era deemed essential.

## CLOTHING INTERPRETATION

Given the assemblage described from the Clark Tenant site and the contextual background on fashion history above, it is possible to make some generalizations about what was and was not present at the Clark Tenant site, and draw some conclusions about what was happening at the site based on the clothing signature.

### The Buckle Fragment

First, the only buckle present at the site is so tiny that it offers little in the way of interpretive potential. What is significant, however, is the absence of buckles. A site occupied by the 1790s should have more buckles present. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, most men still wore knee buckles for breeches, large buckles for shoes, stock buckles at the neck, and strap adjustment buckles at the back of some breeches and waistcoats. Some women probably still wore shoe buckles, though the trend from the 1790s was to wear slipper-style shoes that lacked metal hardware. When women did wear decorative buckles, it was typically for accessories, such as belts and hats. Only the most fashion forward individuals would have eschewed all traditional 18<sup>th</sup>-century uses of buckles by c. 1795. There is no evidence that such high fashion existed at the site.

This begs the question of whether people at the site represented the lowest rung of the economic ladder and simply could not afford buckles, such as those living in a state of poverty or enslavement. However, contemporary assemblages and historical documents indicate that even the poorest individuals and slaves tended to follow overarching trends in clothing, albeit with cheaper or secondhand examples. Buckles were available at many price points depending on their metal content, with gold and silver being the most expensive, silver plate and gilt copper alloys in the middle range, and pewter and iron on the low end of the price spectrum. By acquiring "meaner" buckles or obtaining out-of-style buckles second-hand, most people could afford to fasten their clothing according to the broadly accepted trends. Not to do so would have signaled a most extreme poverty, either on the part of the tenants, on the part of the slave owners, or on the part of slaves who often engaged in trade and private purchases to supplement the necessities they were allotted.



Figure 21: Examples of drawers from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with shell buttons, bone buttons and Dorset buttons shown in detail views. Top left: Wool drawers with two buttons at the waist, probably made of shell, c. 1800-1825 (Acc#2009.300.7684). Top Right: Early 19<sup>th</sup>-century drawers with three Dorset buttons at the waist (Acc#08.187.9). Bottom Right: Linen trousers with several bone buttons and metal grommets at the side for drawstrings, c. 1830s-1840s (Acc#1973.202.2). All examples from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA).



**Figure 22: Assorted early 19<sup>th</sup>-century trousers with details of button flies shown.** Top left: Early 19<sup>th</sup> century cotton trousers with fabric-covered buttons and bone sew-through buttons (Acc#1988.261.2). Top right: Cotton trousers with sew-through bone buttons and matching cloth-covered buttons, c. 1800-1810 (Acc#1976.148.2). Bottom left: Leather breeches with sew-through bone buttons at the waist and flies and shell buttons at the knee, c. 1800-1820 (Acc#1976.81.11). Bottom right: Linen trousers with bone buttons and fabric-covered buttons, c. 1800-1825 (Acc#2009.300.6276). All examples from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA).

For example, the c.1750-1800 NAVAIR site in St. Mary's County, Maryland yielded six buckles or buckle fragments, primarily made of copper alloy (Watts and Tubby 1998). This site was not close enough to the main house to suggest that it housed domestic servants or those who might be expected to dress in fine livery to satisfy the conceits of the plantation owners. Instead it is likely that NAVAIR was occupied by field and farm workers. Runaway ads also describe buckles regularly, whether reporting on enslaved Africans or other bound laborers such as convicts and indentured servants (Figure 23).

Altogether, the absence of buckles at the site is less likely to have implications about class or poverty than it is to have temporal meaning; it points to a post-18<sup>th</sup> century period of occupation because buckles had fallen out of use by then.

The image contains two side-by-side newspaper clippings from 1794. The left clipping is titled 'Runaway Slaves!' and describes two逃跑奴隶: 'Negro David' and 'Negro Tom'. David is described as being five feet eight inches tall, about 21 years old, with an old wool hat, a red, white, and black striped vest, and brass buckles. Tom is described as being five feet eight inches tall, about 20 years old, with a blue doublet of Negro cotton, a red white and black striped worsted vest, and brass buckles. Both descriptions mention brass buckles. The right clipping is titled 'STEPHEN, a runaway Negro. Eight Dollars Reward.' It describes a young NEGRO MAN named Stephen, who is yellowish in complexion, about five feet, eight or nine inches tall, and well made. He is described as having an old hat, two coats (one blue broad cloth with covered buttons, one dark country cloth), a jacket of nankin, a linen shirt, a pair of old tow linen trowsers, and a striped linen ditto with a pair of shoes and buckles. The ad offers a reward of 8 Dollars. Both ads are signed 'Tobias Butler, Sheriff' and dated 'Jan. 9, 1794'.

**Runaway Slaves!**

**C**OMMITTED to my custody as Runaways, Negro David, five feet eight inches high, about 21 years old; had on, when committed, an old wool hat, old lightish coloured cloth coat with reddish stripes, red, white and black & lined worsted vest, a pair of lightish coloured cloth breeches, pair of new woolen stockings, good shoes, with brass buckles, and a tow linen shirt. Says he belongs to Robert Clarey, living in Charles county, near Benedict-Town.

Negro Tom, 5 feet 8 inches high about 20 years old, had on, when committed, a new wool hat, with a band and brass buckle, an old lightish-coloured cloath coat, a blue doublet of Negro cotton, a red white and black striped worsted vest, pair of black and white striped linsey breeches, old pair of woolen stockings, a pair of new shoes, with brass buckles, and a tow linen shirt; says he belongs to John Ross Adams, living in Charles county, near Benedict-Town.

**Tobias Butler, Sheriff.**  
Jan. 9, 1794.

**STEPHEN, a runaway Negro.  
Eight Dollars Reward.**

**R**AN AWAY, from the subscriber's farm, in the Garrison Forest, near Mr. Samuel Owings's Mill, on Monday night last, a young NEGRO MAN, named STEPHEN, of a yellowish complexion, about five feet, eight or nine inches high, and well made;—had on and took with him when he went away, an old hat, two coats, one of which a blue broad cloth, with covered buttons, the other a fustian—one jacket, of dark country cloth, and one of nankin.—a country linen shirt, a pair of old tow linen trowsers, and one pair of striped linen ditto, with a pair of shoes and buckles. Whoever takes up and delivers the said Negro to the Subscriber in Baltimore Town, or to the overseer on the Farm, shall receive a Reward of 8 Dollars, including what the Law allows.

**NICHOLAS OWINGS.**  
Baltimore, September 26, 1792.

Figure 23: Examples of runaway slave ads describing clothing that including shoe buckles, some of which are specified as being made of brass, and a brass hat band buckle (Butler 1794; Owings 1792).

### The Buttons

While trends in clothing and buttons are described above, the fact that buttons are really the only evidence of clothing at the site necessitates and examination of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century button trends in more detail.

Size is one characteristic often used by archaeologists to narrow down the types of clothing represented. For example, Hinks (1988:90-92) says that metal buttons ranging in size from 18.5-35mm are "coat"

buttons, which he defines as having been, “used on great coats, coats, frock, and some of them on breeches and trousers.” In his analysis, metal buttons ranging from 14-19.5mm in diameter are “waistcoat” buttons which were for, “waistcoats, breeches and trousers, and probably banyans and some jackets.” Unfortunately for this analysis, Hinks (1988) concentrates on the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and despite the presence of some pre-1800 buttons the Clark Tenant site seems to have more of an early 19<sup>th</sup>-century concentration. That means that the dramatic transition in fashions of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century would have taken effect, and the generalities that fit the traditional coat-waistcoat-breeches suit of the 18<sup>th</sup> century do not really apply.

A survey of extant examples of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century clothing in digital collections available online offers information about how plain brass buttons were used after the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Clark Tenant site buttons could represent coats (Figures 13, 17-19), waistcoats (Figure 24), or trousers (Figure 25) for men, and possibly some children’s clothing like the skeleton suit popular for little boys. More rarely, such buttons might have adorned ladies’ riding spencers or pelisses. Interestingly, however, *all* the buttons recovered at the site could be from men’s coats, meaning that no other garments are definitively represented in the assemblage. This is the opposite of typical 19<sup>th</sup>-century domestic assemblages, which tend to be heavy on undergarment buttons with fewer losses from outerwear.

Again, one of the most telling attributes of the button assemblage is what’s missing. Like with the lack of buckles, the lack of certain button types can have temporal implications. For example, no Prosser buttons were recovered, indicating abandonment prior to the 1840s. Perhaps more interesting, however, is the absence of buttons for garments other than coats or other forms of outerwear. The early 19<sup>th</sup> century was a relatively sparse era for durable fasteners compared to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but undergarments were not universally lacking in buttons. It is possible that many shirts had thread buttons, and drawers might have used wood buttons, and these simply did not survive. However, one would still expect some bone buttons, shell buttons, or little copper alloy rings for Dorset buttons to have been present along with thread and wood buttons. Shell and bone are sometimes subject to loss in the archaeological record when soils are particularly acidic, but faunal and shell did survive at the site well enough to rule out the likelihood that underwear buttons disappeared for lack of preservation.

Other notable absences include hooks and eyes, which were very common on women’s clothing in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 15). The assemblage also lacks bone and metal grommets for stays or underpants, and girdle buckles that were popular for women in the 1820s and 1830s (Figure 14). There is also no evidence of accessories of any kind for men or women (i.e. umbrella parts, watch fobs, purse fragments, fan blades, and jewelry fragments).

While it is true that 18<sup>th</sup>-century and post-1840 sites tend to yield more durable clothing fasteners and accessories than early 19<sup>th</sup> century sites, this alone does not seem to explain the assemblage because so many metal buttons are present. Why then aren’t the underwear buttons, hooks and eyes, and other fasteners common to the era equally well represented?

One part of the story seems to be that women were not using the site with any degree of regularity. All of the buttons present are of a type that was the norm for menswear. Without women, one would not expect hooks and eyes, parasols, purses, fans, etc.



**Figure 24: Examples of period waistcoats.** Top left: Red wool with brass buttons, c. 1800-1825 (MMA Acc#1979.346.33). Top right: Silk waistcoat with small brass buttons, c. 1800-1825 (MMA Acc#1979.346.34). Bottom left: Black wool waistcoat with fabric-covered buttons, c. 1800-1825 (MMA Acc#08.187.2). Bottom right: Silk waistcoat with matching fabric-covered buttons, c. 1810-1820 (Monmouth County Historical Association Object Number 114).



Figure 25: Examples of plain metal shank buttons on trousers. Left: Fitted fall-front trouser with buttoned legs for a tight fit, c. 1793 (Acc#1988.342.3). Center: Fall-front trousers, early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Acc#1988.262). Right: Fall-front trousers c. 1835 (Acc#C.I.39.87). All examples from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA).

Not all of the missing artifacts can be explained along gender lines though. For example, the sew-through bone buttons so common to men's undergarments and trousers are completely absent, and there are no button molds for use with fabric-covered buttons that were common on menswear in this era. This could have interpretive implications since fabric-covered buttons wore more easily and were therefore less durable than metal buttons. Fabric-covered buttons probably would not have been preferred for settings where work or labor was taking place.

The idea that the assemblage resulted from work or labor is further supported by the variety of garments represented. While all of the buttons could have come from men's coats, very few of the buttons match each other well enough for it to be assumed they come from the same piece. Reuse of different buttons resulting in some mismatched examples falling off the same piece could explain some of the variety, but the sizes vary too much to suggest that only one or two garments are represented. Instead the button assemblage is indicative of multiple accidental losses from different pieces, none of which are underwear.

The metal buttons present could have adorned coats, waistcoats, breeches, or trousers, but they also could have all come from coats, with the smaller ones representing cuff buttons (Figure 26). Many coats of this era, such as frock coats and work coats, have full skirts that cover the waist and offer protection to the trousers. Such coats might be better represented at the Clark Tenant site than tailcoats because if trousers were losing buttons with regularity, one would expect to see bone and other sew-thorough buttons that were perhaps even more common than brass disc buttons on trousers in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 22). Alternately, men at the site might have been wearing aprons to protect their clothing (Figures 27-28).



Figure 26: Example of a tailcoat from c. 1830. Note that the chest and rear buttons are quite large, but the cuff exhibits small gilt buttons similar to those recovered at the Clark Tenant site. Metropolitan Museum of Art Acc# 1986.179.2.



**Figure 287: Portrait of Thomas Archibald, 1826.**  
Australian National Portrait Gallery,  
<https://www.portrait.gov.au/image/87688/87984/>.



**Figure 27: The Baker, 1805, by W.H. Pyne.** Bristol Libraries, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/bristol-libraries/3368039022/sizes/l/in/photostream/>

When men's coats are definitely present, but no other clothing can be conclusively connected to the site, this suggests a non-domestic use of some kind. This is not to say that people were at the site without wearing pants or underwear, but rather that activities undertaken at the site seem to have only impacted the outer garments. People who live at a site for any length of time would regularly dress and undress, use chamber pots and the privy, wash themselves, and do their laundry. All of these activities tend to result in the loss of underwear buttons such as brass rings for Dorset buttons, linked buttons for shirtsleeves, button molds for thread-covered buttons, and sew-through bone and shell buttons for drawers and trousers. For a site to exhibit outerwear buttons but no other varieties is indicative of non-domestic activity or labor.

The presence of "small gilts" demonstrates that the site had activity at least until the 1830s. Based on the button assemblage alone, and given the presumed long-term use of coats and/or reuse of durable buttons, it is even possible that all of the buttons were lost in a brief period in the 1830s rather than over a period of decades.

It is also possible that the site was used primarily in colder months when it would not have been desirable to shed one's outer garments to stay cool. That is difficult to confirm though, as the retention of coats could also indicate a desire to maintain propriety or a type of labor or activity that was not strenuous enough to cause overheating.

## EQUESTRIAN ARTIFACTS

The Clark Tenant site yielded only two possible equestrian artifacts. The first is a horse or mule shoe broken in half (Figure 29) and the second is a possible "English nail" for a saddle. Neither artifact has any provenience.

The fragment of the horse or mule shoe has a break at the top which is common for shoes that are badly worn and might have been thrown from the animal (Figure 29). The fragment is quite straight while most horseshoes are more rounded. Straight sides are more indicative of use on a mule, but without the complete shoe the overall shape is not definitive. Five nail holes and fullering are visible on the x-ray, and four nail fragments remain in their respective holes. The heel appears thicker than the rest of the shoe on the x-ray, but the heel does not appear to curve up to form a calkin. The web, or width of the shoe iron is relatively narrow, indicating a 19<sup>th</sup>-century date (Figure 30: Chappell 1973; Noël Hume 1969). While this fits the primary era of activity at the site, the nature of the shoe as a surface find prevents its definite inclusion in a discussion of the site's activities. It could have been lost by an animal in passing after the site was abandoned.

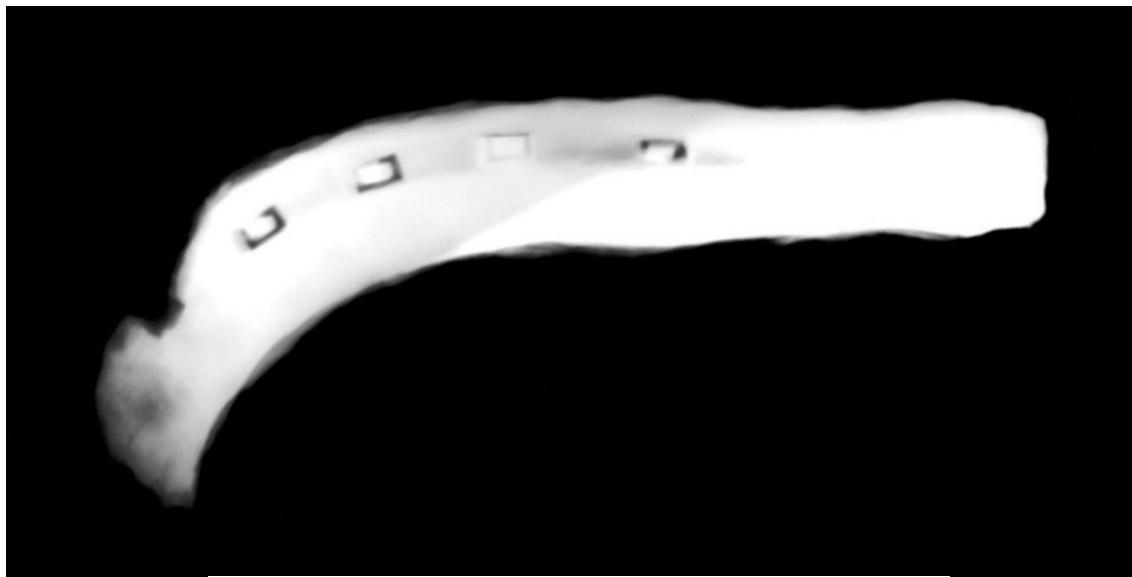


Figure 29: X-ray of the horse or mule shoe from the Clark Tenant site.

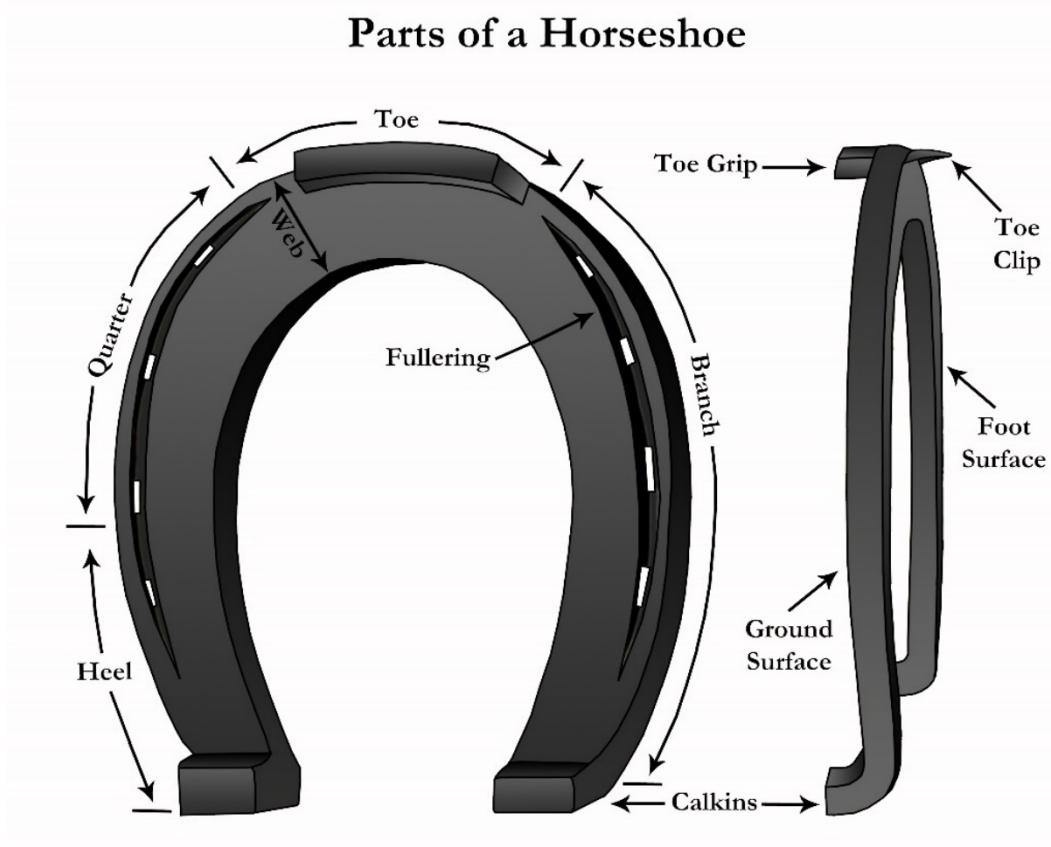


Figure 30: Diagram by the author showing the different parts of a horse or mule shoe.



Figure 31: Possible “English nail” for a saddle.

The possible English saddle nail is a decorative convex brass button-like artifact (Figure 31). The difference between this artifact and a button, however, is that instead of a wire shank, the back has a rectangular recess for an iron shaft, thereby creating what is, in effect, a nail with a wide copper alloy top. While the author has yet to confirm the ID of these artifacts beyond doubt by examining surviving period saddles, the artifact fits an 18<sup>th</sup>-century description of the construction of English saddles using English saddle nails on each side at the front

and back, and riveting these in place under the saddle (Figure 32: Garsault 1774:115-116).

Several of these are present in the collections of the Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory, including both plain and decorative examples from 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century sites (Figure 33). Some of these examples appear in assemblages that have few other equestrian artifacts, but this does not preclude their likely use on saddles. When a horse or mule is equipped for riding it is entirely likely that one of these nails would be disturbed by the rider’s leg, mounting or dismounting, or by something being carried by the rider, like a sack or hunted game. Losses of such nails while saddles were in use could reasonably be

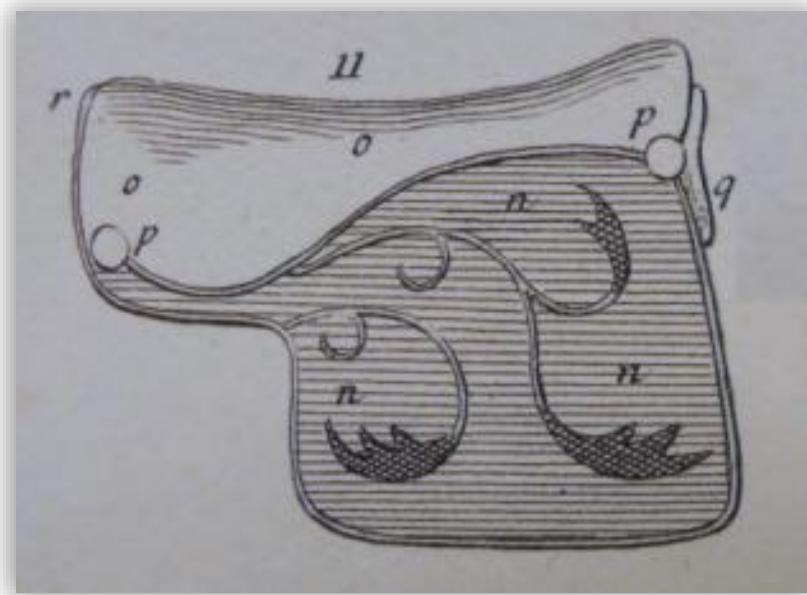


Figure 32: This diagram of an English saddle from Garsault’s (1774: Plate X) *L’Art du Bourrelier et du Sellier* shows two “English nails” labeled *p*. In Garsault’s (1774: 115-116) description of the construction of this saddle, he says, “...you will stop each quarter with two English nails *p, p*, one in the front, the other behind, which you will rivet underneath” (translation by the author with help from Google translate).

expected to go unnoticed more so than the loss of a buckle, bit, or other piece of horse furniture. As a result, such nails stand a better chance of ending up randomly deposited on the landscape than other equestrian artifacts.

The presence of the English saddle nail at the Clark Tenant site indicates the presence of a horse or mule specifically used for riding as opposed to agricultural uses, such as plowing, or animal-powered vehicles, such as wagons. Not enough of these have been identified to determine a chronology of styles, but the Clark Tenant site does closely resemble an example of the War of 1812 site Caulk's Field in Kent, County, Maryland (Figure 33, bottom center), supporting the possibility that the brass nail was lost during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century occupation.



Figure 33: Examples of probable English saddle nails from the collections of the Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory.

## EQUESTRIAN INTERPRETATION

The two probable equestrian artifacts offer very little in the way of interpretive potential, except to say that at some point a horse or mule and an English saddle were at the Clark Tenant site. Like with the clothing-related artifacts, the site is more notable for what is missing. There is nothing related to harness or vehicles. There are no bits, ornaments, or headstall buckles. Regular use of horses or mules should have yielded more horseshoes at the very least. In short, nothing is present to suggest that horses or mules were at the site on a regular basis or as a part of whatever activity was primarily undertaken there.

## DISCUSSION

The study of clothing and equestrian activities at the Clark Tenant site is an interesting exploration of the importance of negative data in archaeology. Clearly people changed the site; digging and using wells and

leaving behind artifacts. However, unlike most domestic archaeological assemblages, the Clark Tenant site clothing and equestrian signatures suggest more “visiting” than “living.”

As an example of what this assemblage might represent, the historical background of the Clark Tenant site indicates that an orchard was present somewhere on the property. Activity such as seasonal apple picking in the fall could easily have created such a clothing assemblage as various men gathered in their old work-ready coats to pick fruit and haul heavy containers around that could easily have caught on buttons, causing losses. Such a seasonal harvest would be expected to wear on coats but not undergarments, creating a very interesting and unusual non-domestic assemblage resulting from intermittent labor. Further, one might expect only occasional losses of equestrian artifacts at an orchard, as horses or mules visited the site to deliver laborers or meals, haul supplies and crops, and otherwise come and go from time to time without actually living at the site. While some farm labor would have incorporated horses, such as plowing, fruit harvests are the kind of thing that might require keeping a hungry horse at a safe distance.

Whatever the activity was that created this unique assemblage, it is clear from the clothing and equestrian artifacts that the Clark Tenant site is not a typical domestic home site. Instead it offers a glimpse of some other element of a working farm; something with an ephemeral archaeological signature, but important enough to require a well and upkeep for many years. It is a site where a variety of men’s coats shed buttons, but underwear did not, suggesting that whatever people were doing, they stayed fully dressed to do it.

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