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# American Artifacts of Personal Adornment, 1680–1820

## *A Guide to Identification and Interpretation*

Carolyn L. White

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stripped cotton Jacket, grey Yarn Stockings, a pair of new Pumps, and brass Buckles."

Buckles were important accessories to dress in the late seventeenth to late eighteenth centuries and, to some extent, into the early nineteenth century. They were important in the sense that they were both functional dress accessories and items of status that were a visible component of dress that conveyed information about a person to others. Buckles were objects that were worn by almost everyone across gender, status/class, age, and race/ethnicity lines and were valued within all of these groups. Buckles came in a vast array of forms, styles, and materials. The variation found in this object allowed it to signify the position of a person within a socially constructed group, through the form, material, size, and decoration of the buckle.

## BUTTONS

In 1659 Samuel Pepys described buttons twice, detailing buttons attached to new articles of clothing. He wrote on July 1, 1659, "This morning came home my fine camlett coat, with gold buttons, and a silk suit, which cost me much money," and on July 5, "This morning my brother Tom brought me my jackanapes coat with silver buttons." The prominent place of buttons in Pepys's description of his clothing suggests their importance to the overall appearance of a garment. Buttons were more than functional fasteners; they were a primary way of embellishing a garment of clothing, particularly for men.

Buttons are the most common type of personal adornment artifact recovered on historical-period archaeological sites; they are found in great numbers and in multitudinous designs, materials, forms, and sizes. Buttons have been enthusiastically studied by collectors, and they have received a considerable amount of attention in archaeological studies.[86] Stanley South's typology provides a good guide for identifying buttons according to manufacturing techniques, materials, and design, though the dates of the button types are somewhat misleading since they are in reference to the layers in which South recovered these buttons.[87] Consequently archaeologists apply narrow manufacture dates to buttons that were made and worn over far broader periods of time. My own classification incorporates these typologies but streamlines them into broader categorizations. This discussion considers how buttons were made, changes in style and technology, and how buttons were worn. Like buckles, these small and functional objects have great potential for understanding not only what people wore in the past but also what was communicated through appearance.

### *Button Manufacture History*

Sculptural evidence in the twelfth century provides the first European evidence of buttons; documentary references exist from around the early fourteenth century. Archaeological excavations by the Museum of London recovered buttons from the medieval period; the finds consisted mainly of plain metal buttons thought to belong to people of little means. It was not until the sixteenth century, however, that buttons became common clothing fasteners.[88]

Most of the buttons worn in America through the eighteenth century were made in England, though some were imported from Holland and France.[89] England's button production grew from a cottage industry in the seventeenth century to a major industry in the eighteenth century, though there was variation in production levels according to button type. In the seventeenth century, buttonmakers made thread-covered buttons of silk, hair, or twill over a ring of wire, and Dorset was a center of buttonmaking.[90] The vitality of this industry was actively protected by the crown, and a variety of governmental acts were passed in England in the seventeenth century to protect English buttonmakers from competition from cheaper imports and textile-covered buttons.[91] William IV imposed a penalty on the cheaper imported buttons. Queen Anne forbade wearing cloth-covered buttons at a penalty of £5 per dozen.[92]

Metal-buttonmaking became a major industry in England in the eighteenth century, contrasting with the cottage industry of the thread-covered buttons in the seventeenth century.[93] The industry was centered in Birmingham, and Matthew Boulton ran the largest and most well-known manufactory, though there were many other successful buttonmakers. In 1761 there were eighty-three buttonmakers in Birmingham who manufactured and plied their own specialty buttons. They made gilt, plated, silvered, lacquered, pinchbeck, inlaid glass, ivory, pearl, horn, and brass buttons.[94]

The metal-button industry was also protected through parliamentary efforts prohibiting the domestic manufacture of textile-covered buttons and the importation of French textile-covered buttons.[95] Although these buttons were smuggled into England, the button industry remained successful and continued to thrive even after the demise of the buckle industry in the late eighteenth century.



The American buttonmaking industry did not fully develop until the nineteenth century, and most buttons were imported until then. There was small-scale American buttonmaking in the eighteenth century in New England by 1706, and by the late eighteenth century, Connecticut became a center for button manufacture. In 1774 the provincial congress of Massachusetts recommended using papier-mâché buttons to reduce imports. Bone and pewter buttons were made by individuals at home, and itinerant peddlers carried button molds to make buttons for customers.[96]

Cabinetmakers were also frequently buttonmakers in the eighteenth century. Benjamin Rudolph, the Pennsylvania cabinetmaker, advertised on March 15, 1770, "a quantity of wooden buttons, of various sorts" in the *Pennsylvania Journal.* John Gaines II and Thomas Gaines of Ipswich, Massachusetts, were chairmakers, and their account book mainly describes the chairs they made but also includes transactions of "button mols [molds]" and "butens" sold by the dozen.[97]

By the end of the eighteenth century, American button production had a firm start making metal buttons. In 1790 Samuel, Henry, and Silas Grilley opened a shop that manufactured pewter buttons in Waterbury, Connecticut. By 1798 Massachusetts had established two buttonmaking centers in Plymouth and Bristol. In 1802 the firm of Abel Porter and Company was formed in Waterbury, Connecticut; it made gilt buttons from sheet brass. Before long, the War of 1812 created a demand for brass buttons for military uniforms. The Waterbury Button Company in Connecticut was one of the companies formed to meet this demand.[98]

The brass button industry was centered in Birmingham, England, and was one of the major sources of American buttons in the last half of the eighteenth century. The process of making brass buttons involves multiple technical steps described by White in detail.[99] I offer only a brief summary of the processes here. Button blanks were cut from metal strips, and if the button was to be flat, the blanks were rolled between two pieces of steel to round off the edges. If the button was to be domed, the blanks were placed in a separate press to create the concavity.[100]

A second die was used to press the design on the blank; the master dies were engraved with engine-turned designs. There were frequently two complementary dies used for each button, one convex, the other concave. Buttons also were chased using hand tools since it was often less expensive to add fine details by hand than to impart the details onto the button mold.[101]

Shank production was a separate operation in Birmingham. It was less expensive to buy shanks from smaller industries than to produce them in-house, so the shanks were procured from outside sources.[102] The *New and Complete Dictionary of Arts and Science of 1819* describes the method for attaching shanks to buttons, where shanks were attached to the button back by a wire clamp, and solder and rosin were applied to the shank. Both were then heated on an iron plate until the solder ran and the shank was thus fixed to the button (figure 3.19F).[103] As production increased, the omega shank was developed, as it had a greater surface for soldering on the shank (figure 3.19G).[104]

Once the button shank was attached, the button was ready for finishing. The surface of the button was cleaned, burnished, and prepared for gilding. The button was coated with a cupric mercury mix that helped the gilding amalgam adhere to it. The gilding amalgam itself was prepared by heating gold powder mixed with mercury, which was then mixed with nitric acid. The button was plunged in the mix, and the acid and the copper reacted, and the mix adhered to the button surface. The button was then heated in a large open pan (releasing noxious fumes) and then poured into a felt bag—called a gilder's cap—to remove the mercury. In the early nineteenth century, a closed hearth method for gilding was developed, reducing the severe health risks of the process.[105]

The form of the shank can be a guide to dating copper alloy buttons. In the first half of the eighteenth century, copper-alloy buttons had a shank that was cast with the body of the button; the eye was drilled after the button was cast (figure 3.19A–C). In the second half of the eighteenth century, two different kinds of shanks were featured. The first was the cone shank in which a loop of wire was inserted into a cone of metal that was molded on the back of the button (figure 3.19D). The second was a simple wire shank brazed or soldered to the button back in two different shapes, alpha and omega (figure 3.19F, G).[106]

### *Button Prices*

Account books from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries recorded transactions of buttons with great frequency (see table 3.3). Many of these transactions simply list the amount sold (e.g., "1 doz 3 buttons") with the price and provide no further detail. Prices for buttons varied greatly, and although few

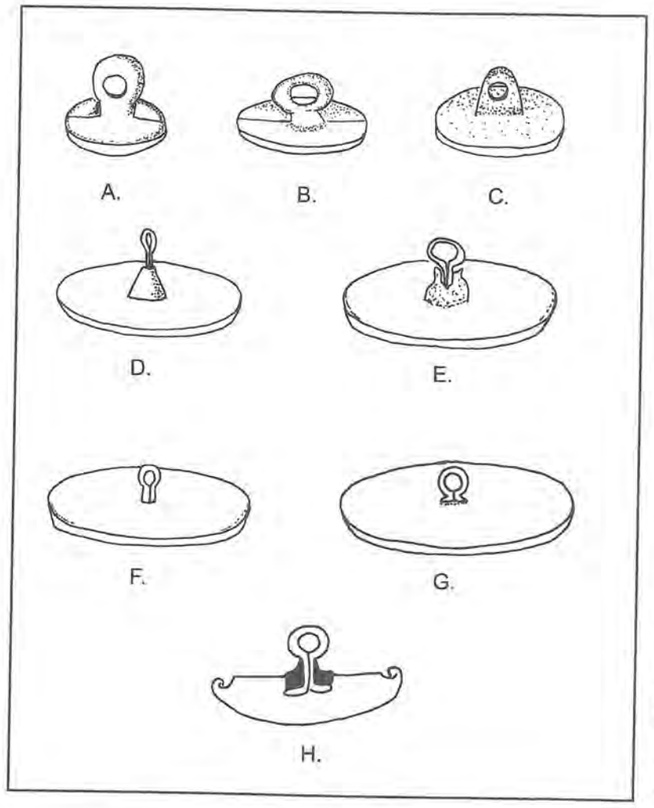


FIGURE 3.19. Metal button shank forms. A, B, C. Shanks cast with button and drilled. D. Cone-shaped shank. E. Wire eye set in metal. F. Brazed alpha shank. G. Brazed omega shank. H. Cross section of "Saunders"-type shank showing inserted shank pin and two-piece button in which the face of the button is crimped over the back. (Drawing by the author)

details are recorded generally, the range of prices reflects the broad assortment of buttons available for sale. For example, an anonymous account book from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, recorded many transactions for buttons. Here buttons ranged in price from £0-3-9 per half dozen to £0-18-0 per half dozen.[107] Other accounts show that buttons could be as inexpensive as £0-0-6 per dozen and, as just noted, as expensive as £0-18-0 for half a dozen buttons.[108]

Button prices varied according to material, which is occasionally described in account books. William Wood sold sixteen "brass buttons" for £0-16-8 along with other buttons and some fabric and thread. These were among the most expensive buttons sold by Wood.[109] Many other examples are listed in table 3.3. Merchants recorded selling, for example, gilt buttons, mohair buttons, washed buttons, death head buttons, and "buttons cover'd on Horn." Other accounts name link buttons (sleeve buttons), shirt buttons, and coat buttons, to name several examples (see table 3.3).

*Button Availability*

Buttons were imported from Europe and sold by merchants in dry goods stores as well as from warehouses. Buttons could be sold to customers by the dozen, by the gross, by the bag, or by individually specified amounts. Buttons were also packaged by the card. For example, Elisha Ilsley of Newbury, Massachusetts recorded his purchase of a "coard [card?] of butons" for £0-2-4 in 1690.[110] The invoice of sundries shipped on board the *Whittemore* bound for Virginia in 1737 listed "2 cards brass buttens."[111] The transactions included in table 3.3 illustrate the variety of quantities in which buttons were sold.

Inventories of New England merchants list the range of buttons that, alongside other dry goods, were available to the New England consumer. The inventory of Richard Buckley of New Castle or Portsmouth, a "lesser merchant," recorded on January 7, 1706/7 buttons grouped with other sundries: "mettle + glass buttons" are listed with knitting needles, scissors,



TABLE 3.3. Account book references to buttons

| *Name, occupation, and location* | *Transaction date* | *Transaction* | *Price* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nicholas Thomas<br>Merchant and brewer<br>New Hampshire | August 10, 1681 | Sold two dozen "butuns" | £0-0-4 |
| Elisha Ilsley<br>Weaver and farmer<br>Newbury, MA | 1690 | Purchased a "coard [card?] of butons"<br>Purchased four dozen "gilt butons" | £0-2-4 £0-3-4 |
| William Wood<br>Merchant<br>Dartmouth, MA | October 14, 1738 | Sold "buttons mohaire" | £0-8-2 ea. |
| | May 1739 | Sold "1doz 3 Buttons" | £0-3-0 |
| | May 1739 | Sold "1doz 3 Buttons" | £0-5-3 |
| | May 1739 | Sold "1doz 3 Buttons" | £0-3-9 |
| | March 2, 1740 | Sold "1 pare buttons" | £0-6-0 |
| | March 1740 | Sold "9 buttons" | £0-6-8 |
| | November 1740 | Sold one dozen buttons | £0-1-0 |
| | May 30, 1741 | Sold "1 pare buttons" | £0-2-1 |
| | June 6, 1741 | Sold one dozen buttons | £0-1-8 |
| | June 6, 1741 | Sold 4 buttons | £0-0-8 |
| | June 1741 | Sold "buttons moles" | £0-1-3 |
| | October 1741 | Sold "tape + buttons molds" | £0-1-0 |
| | March 1742 | Sold "link buttons" | £0-3-0 |
| | March 1742 | Sold a set of "pare buttons" | £0-6-0 |
| | November 1742 | Sold two dozen and four "Buttons" | £0-10-6 |
| | November 1742 | Sold one dozen "button molds" | £0-£0-6 |
| | November 1742 | Sold three dozen buttons | £0-4-6 |
| | June 1743 | Sold "shirt buttons" | £0-1-9 |
| | June 1744 | Sold "40 mohare buttons" | £0-13-0 |
| | October 11, 1745 | Sold three dozen "Jack Buttons" | £0-6-6 |
| | October 11, 1745 | Sold two dozen "Cote" buttons | £0-10-5 |
| | September 1746 | Sold 16 "brass buttons" | £0-16-8 |
| Nathaniel Sherman<br>General merchant<br>Portsmouth, NH | 1741 | Sold two pair of buttons to Thomas Handson of Dover | £0-3-0 |
| | 1741 | Sold buttons to Mr. Jn. Moses, carpenter from Portsmouth | £0-4-0 |
| | 1741 | Sold "2 duzn mettle buttons" to Mr. Nathaniel Doe | £0-16-0 |
| | 1741 | Sold a pair of (sleeve?) buttons to Mr. Nathaniel Doe | £0-4-0 |
| | 1742 | Sold "shirt buttons" to Samuell Dun of Portsmouth | £0-1-6 |
| | July 1744 | Sold Mr. William Eliot "7 pair buttons" | £0-5-0 |
| Anonymous<br>Portsmouth, NH | June 2, 1752 | Sold four and a half dozen buttons | £0-9-0 per dozen |
| | January 6, 1753 | Sold two dozen buttons to Nat Wallis | £0-12-0 per dozen |
| | July 5, 1753 | Sold a dozen coat buttons to Peter Hayes | £0-15-0 |
| | July 5, 1753 | Sold a half dozen jacket buttons to Peter Hayes | £0-3-9 |
| | July 5, 1753 | Sold five dozen coat buttons to Peter Hayes | £0-14-0 per dozen |
| | October 15, 1753 | Sold 20 buttons to Samuel Sherburne | £0-7-6 per dozen |
| | October 15, 1753 | Sold one dozen jacket buttons to Charles Rundlet | £0-18-0 |
| | December 15, 1753 | Sold two and a half dozen "coat washed buttons" to John Langdon | £1-18-3 |
| | December 15, 1753 | Sold two dozen jacket buttons to John Langden | £0-17-0 |
| | February 16, 1754 | Sold 14 jacket buttons to Captain Caldwell | £0-8-9 |
| | April 1754 | Sold half dozen coat buttons | £0-18-0 |

*Continued*

TABLE 3.3. Account book references to buttons (*Continued*)

| *Name, occupation, and location* | *Transaction date* | *Transaction* | *Price* |
|---|---|---|---|
| | December 10, 1754 | Sold two dozen buttons to Deacon Wentworth | £1-8-0 |
| | December 10, 1754 | Sold one dozen jacket buttons to Deacon Wentworth | £0-7-0 |
| Johnathan Griffin<br>Merchant<br>Londonderry, NH | April 6, 1753 | Sold "buckram mohair and buttons" | £6-8-6 |
| | June 24, 1754 | Sold "Duzzon of shurt butons" | £0-0-9 |
| | July 14, 1768 | Sold one dozen brass buttons to Stephen Chase | £0-5-6 |
| Nicholas Thomas<br>Weaver<br>Rehoboth, MA | May 30, 1763 | Purchased "one dozen of jacot buttons and a quarter of a yard of buckram" | £0-1-1 |
| John Langdon<br>Merchant<br>Portsmouth, NH | December 4, 1766 | Sold "1 doz. Jacoat buttons" to Joseph Alcock | £0-0-7 |
| | June 2, 1767 | Sold "buttons and twist blue" to Joseph Alcock | £0-2-0 |
| | 1756 | Purchased a dozen breast buttons from Thomas Wiband | £0-6-0 |
| | 1784 | Purchased a half dozen plated buttons from Stephen Hardy | £0-6-0 |
| | 1784 | Purchased two and a half dozen "Buttons Cover'd on Horn" from Stephen Hardy | £0-1-2 |
| George Shove Potter<br>Dighton, MA | October 1789 | Purchased one and a half dozen buttons | £0-2-3 |
| | March 1790 | Purchased one and a half dozen "Cot Buttons" | £0-4-6 |
| | June 1792 | Sold one dozen buttons and one stick of twist | £0-1-6 |
| Parish, Potts, Shields, and Company<br>Merchants<br>Philadelphia, PA | October 1783 | Purchased one gross vest buttons | £0-2-6 |
| | October 1783 | Purchased one gross "metal buttons" | £0-17-6 |
| | October 1783 | Purchased one bag "Death head Buttons" | £0-17-6 |
| | October 1783 | Purchased one gross "vest buttons" | £0-6-0 |
| | October 1783 | Purchased one gross "brass sleeve Buttons" | £0-8-0 |
| Samuel Jackson<br>Store operator<br>Pennsylvania | April 26, 1792 | Sold buttons to Samuel Walter | £0-0-6 |
| | May 1792 | Sold a "pair Buttons" | £0-0-4 |
| | May 15, 1792 | Sold "4 small Buttons" | £0-0-3 1/2 |
| | August 1792 | Sold 16 buttons | £0-1-0 |
| | November 17, 1792 | Sold four dozen coat buttons to Abraham Smith | £0-1-2 per dozen |
| | November 17, 1792 | Sold four dozen jacket buttons to Abraham Smith | £0-2-8 |
| | June 15, 1794 | Sold two pairs of "sleave buttons" to Polly Rone, employee | £0-0-8 |
| | September 1792 | Sold two pairs of "sleeve buttons" | £0-0-4 |
| | May 1794 | Sold a pair of "sleave buttons" | £0-0-4 |
| | May 16, 1796 | Sold a pair of sleeve links | £0-0-4 |
| | July 1796 | Sold a pair of sleeve links | £0-0-4 |
| | January 13, 1796 | Sold a dozen buttons and "2 large" buttons | £0-1-6 |
| | April 1796 | Sold 13 buttons | £0-2-8 1/2 |
| | April 1796 | Sold three "large buttons" | £0-0-5 |
| | April 1796 | Sold "6 small ditto" | £0-0-5 1/2 |
| | April 1796 | Sold "1 douzen shirt buttons" | — |
| | April 1796 | Sold "1 douzzen jacet buttons" | — |



TABLE 3.3. Account book references to buttons (*Continued*)

| *Name, occupation, and location* | *Transaction date* | *Transaction* | *Price* |
|---|---|---|---|
| | April 1796 | Sold "2 douzen of Coat Buttons" | £0-4-6 |
| | October 1800 | Sold one and a half dozen coat buttons | £0-2-6 |
| Samuel Philbrick Potter<br>Exeter, NH | June 5, 1798 | Purchased mohair from Mr. Lamson | £0-1-2 |
| | June 5, 1798 | Purchased "butons" from Mr. Lamson | £0-2-4 |
| | 1802 | Purchased "1 duz. butens" from Mr. Gilamer | £0-1-2 |
| | 1812 | Purchased "2 duzen butens" from Samuel Gilman | £0-1-6 |
| | 1809 | Purchased "butens and silk" from Mr. Bordman | £0-5-4 |
| Nathaniel Ambrose<br>Merchant<br>Concord, NH | March 25, 1812 | Sold a dozen coat butons to Widow Gile | $0.43 |
| | June 15, 1812 | Sold one card of "butons" | $0.17 |
| | June 15, 1812 | Sold two single buttons | $0.50 |
| | June 31, 1812 | Sold one dozen large buttons | $0.12 1/2 |
| | June 31, 1812 | Sold a half dozen small buttons | $0.04 |
| Charles Osbourn<br>Jeweler<br>New York, NY | February 28, 1815 | Sold one pair of "sleeve links" | $0.50 |
| | 1816 | Inventoried pearl sleeve buttons | $3.00 per pair |
| | 1816 | Inventoried four pair gilt sleeve buttons | $0.75 per pair |
| | 1817 | Inventoried "conk shell sleeve buttons" | $0.12 per pair |
| | 1817 | Inventoried "conk shell sleeve buttons" | $0.18 per pair |
| | 1817 | Inventoried "fine gold sleeve links" | $0.24 per pair |
| | May 1817 | Purchased thirty pairs of silver sleeve buttons from Seth Gares | $4.58 |
| | June 1819 | Purchased twenty-eight pairs of silver sleeve buttons from Abram L. White | $3.50 |

buckles, spectacles, chalk lines, and combs.[112] Theodore Atkinson's inventory from New Castle, New Hampshire, recorded on December 3, 1719, lists "shop goods" to include several different kinds of buttons: a "parcel of Hore [horn] Buttons," and a "parcel of Small buttons," and fourteen and a half grosses of "buttons at 12 d pr. gross."[113]

Advertisements demonstrate the range of choices an individual could make when purchasing buttons, and often a wide assortment of buttons was available from a single merchant. For example, in the *New Hampshire Gazette* on November 15, 1757, Robert Trail listed imported goods that included standard covered buttons, porcelain buttons, and all sorts of metal buttons. He offered "mohair buttons, cloth ditto, horn ditto, mohair, twist, red, blue, green, scarlet and crimson coloured china . . . yellow and white mettle buttons gilt and ungilt, plain and wrought, round and flat, of various prices, [and] shirt buttons." Table 3.4 details the range of buttons advertised in the *New Hampshire Gazette.*

Buttons were also made locally by jewelers and buttonmakers. In Portsmouth, New Hampshire, John Nelson sold buttons and sleeve buttons (advertised on June 15, 1759, in the *New Hampshire Gazette*). Some merchants plied specific sorts of buttons and made buttons to order. Augustus Genter advertised covered buttons made to order in the *Federal Gazette* on June 1, 1789, "to match any colour cloth, stuff, or silk.—Those, who will favor him with their commands, will be pleased to send him the number of the sample button they fancy [from a sample card], and a piece of the cloth or stuff." The Wholesale and Retail American Button manufactory advertised in the *Pennsylvania Packet* on December 4, 1792, that "any Cyphers or devices that may be wanted on the Buttons, will be executed in the neatest Manner and shortest Notice."

### *Button Sizes*

Button sizes range from a few millimeters to over 35 mm. For the sake of accurate description, the sizes are

TABLE 3.4. Advertisements for buttons.

| *Date*<br>*Newspaper* | *Seller* | *Description* |
|---|---|---|
| November 18, 1756<br>*New Hampshire Gazette* | Thomas Durant | "Sewing Silk, Buttons, and Mohair," "black Horn Buttons, Jett ditto" |
| September 30, 1757<br>*New Hampshire Gazette* | Stephen Deblois | "coat and breast buttons, sleeve ditto" |
| November 15, 1757<br>*New Hampshire Gazette* | Robert Trail | "mohair buttons, cloth ditto, horn ditto, mohair, twist, red, blue, green, scarlet and crimson coloured china . . . yellow and white mettle buttons gilt and ungilt, plain and wrought, round and flat, of various prices, [and] shirt buttons" |
| May 26, 1758<br>*New Hampshire Gazette* | William Temple | "Black and coloured horn buttons [and] . . . deth head buttons" |
| August 11, 1758<br>*New Hampshire Gazette* | William Morland | Stolen "half card stone sleeve Buttons set in silver, sundry Papers Glass ditto set in Brass" |
| June 15, 1759<br>*New Hampshire Gazette* | John Nelson | "mohair and buttons" and "sleeve buttons of all sorts" |
| August 31, 1759<br>*New Hampshire Gazette* | Joseph Whipple | "wire and horn mould shirt buttons," "wire waistcoat buttons," "mohair, silk, and hair buttons," and "Laquid [laquered], guilt, and plaited buttons" |
| November 9, 1759<br>*New Hampshire Gazette* | John Penhallow | "Stone Sleeve Buttons" |
| March 7, 1760<br>*New Hampshire Gazette* | — | Offering a one dollar reward for "A STONE BUTTON set in Gold dropt from a Person's Sleeve" |
| July 11, 1760<br>*New Hampshire Gazette* | Hugh Hall Wentworth | "mohair buttons" and "silk and hair twist" |
| July 18, 1760<br>*New Hampshire Gazette* | Benjamin Parker | "white and yellow buttons," "Mohair and Horn ditto," and "Wire Shirt Buttons" |
| January 16, 1761<br>*New Hampshire Gazette* | Daniel Wentworth | "coat, wastecoat, metal, horn, and glass buttons, shirt and sleeve ditto" |
| April 10, 1761<br>*New Hampshire Gazette* | Hugh H. Wentworth | "flat Death Head Buttons," "Shirt Buttons, and "white and yellow Metal Coat and Breast Buttons" |
| August 21, 1761<br>*New Hampshire Gazette* | Pierce Long | "flat metal buttons of different sorts, silvered breast ditto" |
| April 8, 1763<br>*New Hampshire Gazette* | Archbald Cunningham | "Shirt Buttons, black and dyed Horn Ditto, Studs and gilt Sleeve Buttons," and "plaited Coat Buttons" |
| February 3, 1764<br>*New Hampshire Gazette* | Benjamin Goldthwait | "double gilt and common Mettal Buttons, Silk Twist, Buttons of all colours" |
| August 3, 1764<br>*New Hampshire Gazette* | Samuel Griffith | "Mathewman's Buttons for Leather Breeches" |
| April 5, 1777<br>*Pennsylvania Evening Post* | James Gorhman | "ivory Buttons, which are both neat and substantial" |
| June 1, 1789<br>*Federal Gazette* | Augustus Genter | "to match any colour cloth, stuff, or silk.—Those, who will favor him with their commands, will be pleased to send him the number of the sample button they fancy [from a sample card], and a piece of the cloth or stuff" |
| December 4, 1792<br>*Pennsylvania Packet* | Wholesale and Retail American Button Manufactory | Gilt, plated, and "Fancy Line" buttons; "Any Cyphers or devices that may be wanted on the Buttons, will be executed in the neatest Manner and shortest Notice" |
| February 8, 1797<br>*Pennsylvania Packet* | Wholesale and Retail American Button Manufactory | "Neat gilt and plated coat and vest Buttons, Stamped with a civic wreath, and an inscription, 'Long Live the President'" |



roughly divided into three categories: small, or less than 12 mm; medium, or 12 mm to 18 mm; and large, or more than 18 mm. Coat buttons tend to measure between 18 to 35-plus mm. Waistcoat buttons are 14.5 to 19.5 mm in diameter. Sleeve buttons are usually between 13 to 17 mm.[114]

*Types of Buttons by Garment*

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, buttons were worn primarily by men; women began to wear buttons more frequently in the nineteenth century. Buttons were a popular embellishment for men's clothing, used for both functional and decorative purposes. They were worn on coats, waistcoats, breeches, stocks, cloaks, sleeves, and handkerchiefs. Women's clothing, on the other hand, did not generally employ buttons and was instead fastened with lacings, pins, or hooks and eyes for edge-to-edge closure (see "Hooks and Eyes and Clasps" below). The exception to this was in the realm of riding habits, where women's clothing emulated men's in cut and included the use of buttons.

Like all forms of personal adornment, buttons varied in price, and the expense of a person's buttons tended to correlate with his or her own personal wealth. This meant that some kinds of buttons became affiliated with different economic sectors, according to expense and fashion. For example, pewter buttons (discussed below) were common in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in all economic strata. By the mid- to late eighteenth century, however, pewter was associated with people of low economic means, and the wealthy sought different types of buttons. This association of pewter buttons with working-class fashion was so firmly rooted that in the late eighteenth century manufacturers marketed them as "hard-white" buttons to avoid the stigma. The clothes of enslaved African Americans were often constructed of the least expensive materials available, thus when George Washington ordered supplies from England for his slaves at Mount Vernon, he specified a particular kind of button—white-washed waistcoat buttons and coat buttons—to go along with the buckles, hats, and textiles he purchased.[115]

As mentioned above, from the late seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries, most buttons were worn on men's garments. There is a vast body of literature detailing the evolution of men's dress during this period, and I offer only a cursory overview in hopes of placing the use of buttons into this context. Most of this literature is focused on the "fashionable" garments of the period—meaning, of course, the fashions of the wealthy. The clothing worn by people from other echelons for the most part retained these basic forms, although the cut and styling likely changed more slowly, and their clothing was both manufactured and embellished with less expensive materials. As in any overview, this brief description does not capture the wide variation that clothes and appearance had in practice, and I present it here with that caveat.

In the late seventeenth century, the basic garments for men consisted of a long waistcoat, a long-skirted coat, and narrow, tight-fitting breeches. This basic costume for males was introduced by Charles II in 1666, and essentially endured until the late eighteenth century (figure 3.20).[116] Initially, the coat was loose, waistless, hung to the knees, and fastened from the neck to the hem by a row of buttons (though it was worn unbuttoned). The vents of the coat were trimmed with buttons and buttonholes. The waistcoat was cut on similar lines to the coat, and it also fastened with buttons down the front. After 1690 the waistcoat ended above the knee and fastened with a few buttons at the waist. Breeches were tight-fitting and closed at the knee with a strap and buckle (see "Buckles," above), with buttons, or with ties. Breeches fastened at the waist with falls and were buttoned or tightened with a strap and buckle in the back.[117]

Until around 1790, the coat, waistcoat, and breeches continued to be the standard suit for those who could afford it. There were many subtle developments and changes in the cut of the coat, waistcoat, and breeches throughout this period, and I can offer only a very brief description of the garments here.[118] The coat buttoned down to the hem, and only some of the buttons were functional. Some coats had sham buttonholes and only buttoned at the neck. After about 1760 the skirt of the coat shortened and the coat was close fitting. Coats also had buttons at the vents in the back and at the pockets and on the sleeves of the coat.[119]

The waistcoat was closely fitted, and in the early part of the eighteenth century, the skirt ended above the knee and the garment had side and back vents. The coat and waistcoat were often made of the same fabric or contrasting fabric. The buttons on the waistcoat were smaller than those of the coat. The lower buttons of the waistcoat never fastened and were ornamental.[120] In the last half of the eighteenth century, the waistcoat was hip-length and buttoned to below the waist, and in the 1780s and 1790s it was cut at the waist.

Breeches, which were narrow and tight-fitting, were secured at the knee with buttons and/or buckles and fastened down the front using a turned-down flap or

FIGURE 3.20. Portrait of Jonathan Bentham by an unknown artist, 1710. Bentham wears a long waistcoat under a long-skirted coat and narrow, tight-fitting breeches and buttons on the coat and waistcoat and buckles on his shoes. (Gift of Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch; Image © Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.)

fall, typically having four main pockets and two fob pockets.

As noted above, the clothing of the rich, the impoverished, and those in between varied tremendously. Clothes worn by the rich were made of expensive textiles in bright, vibrant colors; were tailored to fit closely on the body; and were embellished with embroidery, ruffles, and lace. In contrast, working-class garb was much looser and simpler and more functional in design, although working men still wore some distinctive garments.[121] The frock coat was worn in the first half of the eighteenth century by working men. This was an informal coat that buttoned down the front (figure 3.21). This garment was taken up by the elite in the second half of the eighteenth century. Trousers were also worn by working men. These were also taken up as fashionable in the late eighteenth century, following styles worn by French revolutionaries.

Men's garments changed dramatically in the late eighteenth century. The clothing of the common person, influenced by French fashion and neoclassical styles, became the fashion of the day. In the 1800s the coat was high-waisted and was frequently cutaway with tails in the back, cut to make the wearer look more slender. Buttons remained prominent elements, but decreased in number. Men continued to wear waistcoats, but they were cut straight across the bottom with a natural waistline.[122] Men wore trousers with narrow legs, which were essentially closely fitted breeches that extended farther down the leg, eliminating the need for buttoning at the knees (see figure 3.21).

**COAT BUTTONS.** Buttons were prominent embellishments on men's coats. Coats had buttons down the front, on the pocket flaps, at the top of the coat pleats, and at the wrist (see figure 3.9). Not all of these were necessarily functional, and in fact, many coats had false buttonholes with corresponding decorative buttons. A man's coat might have nine or ten buttons on the front, three on each pocket flap, more on the cuffs, and at the top and bottom of the back pleats. Fancy coats could be



FIGURE 3.21. Sailor wearing a frock coat and trousers, ca. 1776. (Drawing by the author)

embellished with embroidery, and often the coat buttons were embroidered to match (figure 3.22), although embroidered coats were not particularly popular in New England.[123] The portrait evidence suggests that New England elites favored solid-colored coats with both complementary textile buttons and contrasting metal buttons.

All manner of materials were used for coat buttons, and today it is difficult to pinpoint specifically which buttons were worn on these garments, apart from using size as an index. Nineteenth-century coat buttons were large in size (ranging from 18 to 35-plus mm) relative to the size of the waistcoat buttons. The most notable stylistic development in coat buttons was an overall increase in their size that correlated with that of all dress accessories in the 1760s through 1780s.

Coat buttons were recognizably different from other sorts of buttons, and are specifically named in account books and in advertisements (see tables 3.3 and 3.4). Presumably this results from a difference in size and in form, though today these characteristics can only be presumed. William Wood of Dartmouth, Massachusetts, recorded selling "Cote buttons" in his store on October 11, 1745, and George Shove, a potter from Dighton, Massachusetts, distinguished between coat buttons and other sorts in his ledger.[124] Sometimes they were simply described as large (for example, by Samuel Jackson in April 1796[125]). Hugh G. Wentworth specifically named coat buttons, among others, in his *New Hampshire Gazette* advertisement for goods imported from London onboard the St. Christopher; they included "white and yellow Metal Coat . . . Buttons."

**WAISTCOAT BUTTONS.** Men's waistcoats were another garment on which buttons were prominently displayed. In the seventeenth century the waistcoat had buttons that extended down the front of the garment; only a few of the buttons were functional, and the rest were sham and did not have corresponding functioning buttonholes. In the 1750s the double-breasted waistcoat was popular, and this waistcoat had two rows of buttons that ran down to the waist. These double rows of buttons were common through the 1780s.[126]

Waistcoat or jacket buttons were smaller than coat buttons and generally coordinated with coat buttons, either by complement or contrast. These identifying characteristics do the archaeologist no good since it is rarely possible to link two archaeologically recovered buttons together with certainty. One must rely on actual size, then, to identify waistcoat buttons. In general, waistcoat buttons measure 14.5 to 19.5 mm.[127]

Waistcoat buttons are also described by name and by the terms "Jack" buttons, jacket buttons, and "breasts buttons" in account books and advertisements (see tables 3.3 and 3.4). Such descriptions are brief, Stephen Deblois advertised "coat and breast buttons" in the September 30, 1757, issue of the *New Hampshire Gazette*. Occasionally the material is listed, as in Joseph Whipple's advertisement for "wire waistcoat buttons" on August 31, 1759.

**BREECHES BUTTONS.** Buttons were worn on men's breeches both at the knees (in association with buckles) and, to hold the garment tight at the waist, in the front. By the late eighteenth century, it was standard to have three buttons at the knee, though the number of buttons could vary up to nine or ten. The form

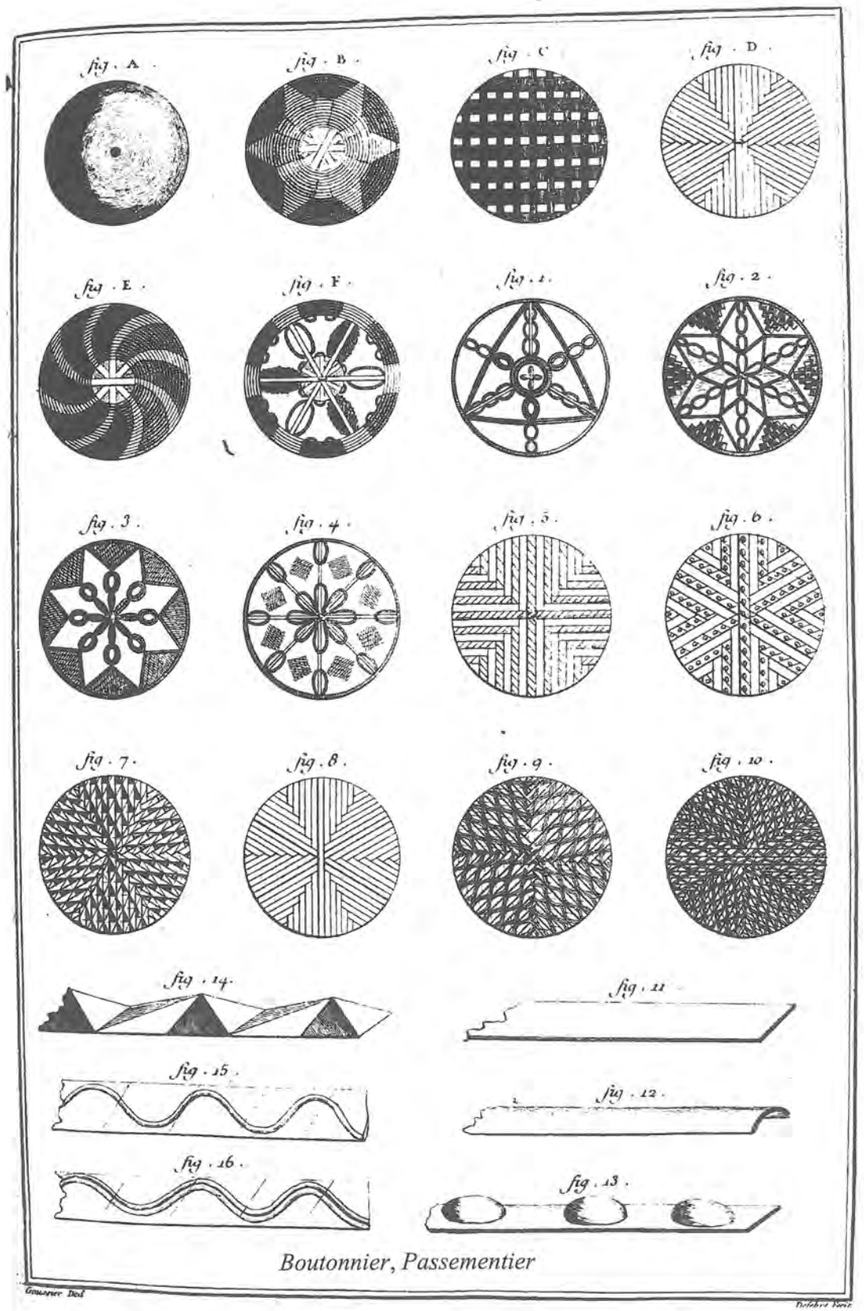


FIGURE 3.22. Patterns of worked-thread buttons depicted in Diderot's *Encyclopedia.* (Denis Diderot, *Encyclopédie* [Paris: Chez Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durand, 1751–1765]; Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University)



of the front closure dictated the placement and number of buttons on a given pair of breeches. Between 1700 and 1750 breeches were buttoned down the front without a fly. The buttons were sewn on the right side of the front opening, with corresponding buttonholes on the left. After 1730 the "fall," a central flap that buttoned at the waist, was popular. In the early part of the century, the waistband of the breeches was fastened with three buttons at the back. By 1745, however, the breeches waistband had a strap and buckle as well.[128]

Breeches buttons, like waistcoat buttons, could be coordinated with the fabric of the breeches, either to complement or contrast.[129] Breeches buttons were made in metal, bone, and wood and were made in a range of designs. It is very difficult to assign specific function to many of the buttons that are recovered since waistcoat buttons and breeches buttons were approximately the same size. Breeches buttons could be made of common materials such as bone and wood, and this can be a distinguishing characteristic.

**SLEEVE BUTTONS.** Shirtsleeves were closed at the cuffs with sleeve buttons. Sleeve buttons have a characteristic shape and are recognizable when intact. The sleeve button is composed of two small buttons that are attached by links. The button was inserted in a slit in each side of the cuff, and the tension between the two buttons held the cuff closed.

Sleeve buttons can be octagonal, round, or oval (figure 3.23). General trends in sleeve button form exist, but cannot be employed to securely date individual artifacts. Octagonal sleeve buttons were very popular in the early eighteenth century. By the mid-eighteenth century these were smaller in size, and the octagonal form was largely abandoned by around 1760. Round or oval sleeve links replaced the octagonal ones, though round sleeve buttons are known from the late seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries.[130]

The links that connect sleeve buttons can also be used to roughly date them. Flattened U-shaped shanks were used from the late seventeenth century to the first half of the eighteenth century. The pyramid-shaped and circular-eye shanks on the backs of the buttons themselves date from after 1750.[131]

Sleeve buttons are most commonly made of metal, usually of copper alloy and pewter. Brass examples were often plated. The buttons were usually cast and engraved with designs of varying complexity, though many of the archaeological examples are often crudely rendered. Sleeve buttons were also frequently set with pastes; these were usually in round brass settings.[132]

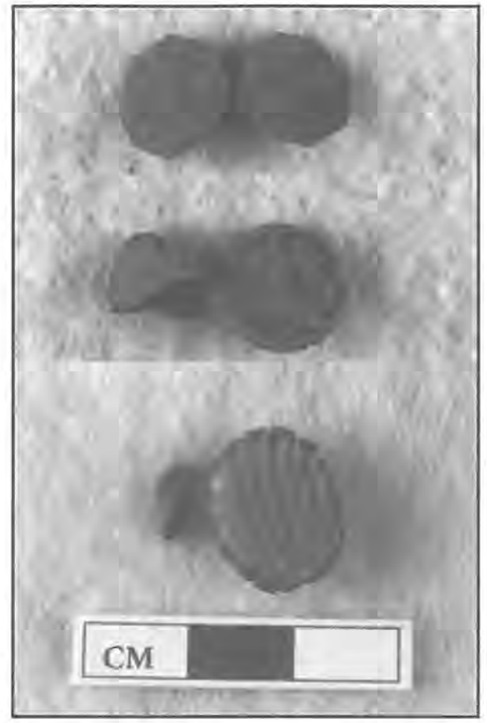


FIGURE 3.23. Sleeve buttons recovered in Portsmouth excavations showing octagonal, round, and oval shapes. The top and center sleeve buttons are made of pewter and copper alloy; the bottom sleeve button is made of copper alloy set with glass. (Photo by the author)

Charles Osbourn made or sold several different kinds of sleeve buttons in his shop, including gilt sleeve buttons, "fine gold sleeve links," "conk shell sleeve buttons," and silver sleeve buttons.[133] Advertisements in the *New Hampshire Gazette* list gilt sleeve buttons (advertised by Archbald Cunningham on April 8, 1763) and "Stone Sleeve Buttons" (advertised by John Penhallow on November 9, 1759), as well as "sleeve buttons of all sorts" (advertised by goldsmith John Nelson on June 15, 1759). On August 11, 1758, William Morland of Newbury, Massachusetts, offered a reward for information about the theft of items from his shop including "half card stone sleeve Buttons set in silver, sundry Papers Glass ditto set in Brass."

Sleeve buttons are only occasionally shown in portraiture, but these examples do illustrate their placement and role in overall appearance. Adam Winne's sleeve, in a portrait by Peter Vanderlyn (painted in

FIGURE 3.24. Portrait of Adam Winne by Peter Vanderlyn, 1730. Winne wears octagonal sleeve buttons as well as worked-thread textile-covered buttons on his coat. (Courtesy of the Winterthur Museum)

1730), is closed by a set of octagonal pewter sleeve buttons, typical of the kind recovered in Portsmouth (figure 3.24). Winne is wearing stylish clothing embellished with silver buttons and couched braid, though these sleeve buttons are rather pedestrian. In this case, since there is no cuff to cover the buttons, the links' decoration would be visible. Joseph Badger's portrait of Benjamin Badger, painted in 1758–1760, shows a boy wearing gold sleeve links (figure 3.25). These are round in shape and are worn perpendicular to the wrist, that is, these links do not lie flat against the wrist, but are worn like modern cuff links. Again, the tension of the links keeps the ruffled cuffs taut around the wrist.

The prices indicated in account books suggest that sleeve buttons were among the least expensive buttons available for purchase. Samuel Jackson, a store operator in Pennsylvania, recorded selling a "pair Buttons," "sleeve links," and "sleeve buttons," as they were called interchangeably, for £0-0-4, a price below that listed for other buttons (see "Button Prices" above).

Sometimes sleeve buttons were very costly, with more valuable materials costing more. Charles Osbourn sold "conk shell sleeve buttons" for $0.12 and $0.18 per pair and pearl sleeve buttons for $3.00 per pair.[134] Silver sleeve buttons were valued at between $0.12 and $0.15. It is unusual for the material to be described in accounts, making it difficult to accurately assess the value of particular sleeve button forms.

**MILITARY BUTTONS.** There has been extensive research on military buttons, and such buttons are easily identified. Two excellent sources for identifying military buttons are Alphaeus Albert's *Record of American Uniforms and Historical Buttons with Supplement* and D. Johnson's *Uniform Buttons: American Armed Forces 1784–1948*.[135] These volumes identify buttons worn by all branches of the armed forces and provide dates for their production and wear. The Johnson volume



FIGURE 3.25. Portrait of Benjamin Badger by Joseph Badger, 1758–1760. Badger wears round sleeve buttons and textile-covered buttons on his coat. (Courtesy of the Winterthur Museum)

offers an extensive classification system for military buttons. Warren K. Tice's *Uniform Buttons of the United States* provides a new classification system and extensive background for military buttons, as well as political and police buttons between 1776 and 1865.[136] Historical archaeologists have likewise devoted considerable attention to military buttons.[137]

### *Types of Buttons by Material*

Buttons are most easily identified by material. Buttons were made from all different kinds of raw materials—metals, organics, glass, ceramics—and the form of the button corresponds to the means of manufacture. In this section I discuss each type of button by material and include information on the form, mode of manufacture, design and decoration, and other details. The form of the shank is one of the main ways in which buttons can be identified and is often tied to the material used to make the button.

**METAL BUTTONS.** Buttons were made with a broad array of types of metal. This section reviews pewter buttons; copper, copper-alloy, brass, and gilt buttons; tombac buttons; hard-white metal buttons; and cut-steel buttons. The parts of buttons are shown in figure 3.26.

*Metal Button Shanks: A Summary.* Button shanks are one of the main ways of identifying metal buttons. Button shanks are the means by which buttons are sewn to garments, and the strength and durability of the shank is directly related to the button's efficacy as a fastener. As a consequence, button shanks change fairly rapidly over time, as buttonmakers attempted to improve the shank. New shanks and types were developed, used, and superseded throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The form of the shank steadily changed, making it stronger, longer lasting, and more efficient to attach and resulting in a traceable chronology. The shanks associated with particular button materials are also noted in the descriptions of buttons by material.

The first type of shank was cast with the button, and the hole was drilled after the button was cast

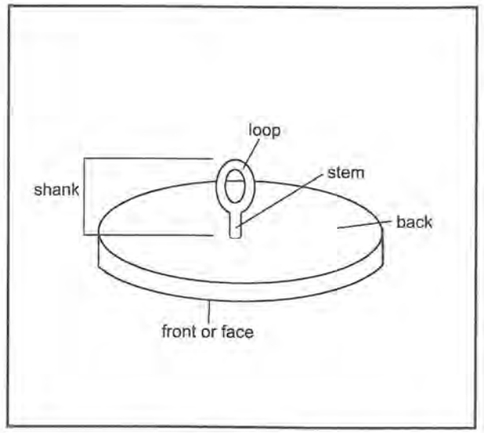


FIGURE 3.26. Diagram of button parts. (Drawing by the author)

(figure 3.19A–C). The shank was wedge-shaped or made of a bulge of metal with a circular hole drilled through it. This shank was used between 1700 and 1765.[138]

Cone-shaped shanks were used beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century (figure 3.19D). A loop of wire was inserted into a cone of metal that was molded as part of the button.[139] A second type of wire shank was set into a daub of metal on the back of the button (figure 3.19E). This type of shank is found on buttons that are spun to smooth the surface of the button on the reverse. These shanks were used between 1760 and 1785.[140]

The alpha shank has a brazed wire loop in which the ends of the loop meet at the base of the shank (figure 3.19F). This shank type was common through the eighteenth century.

The omega shank has a loop shank in which the ends of the wire loop are bent and flattened against the back of the button; it resembles the Greek letter omega (figure 3.19G). This type of shank was used in the late eighteenth century to about 1850.[141]

The Saunders-type shank was developed in the early nineteenth century (figure 3.19H). This shank type was a wire inserted into the button back and secured with resin. Benjamin Saunders patented the shank for making textile-covered buttons in 1813.[142]

*Pewter Buttons.* Pewter buttons were common in eighteenth-century America; in the early part of the century they were worn by people from all socioeconomic classes and in the mid- to late eighteenth century were worn mainly by people of low socioeconomic means. They were less expensive than buttons made of other materials. Pewter buttons, however, were not very durable as the shanks and eyes were weak, making them common archaeological finds.

Pewter buttons were imported from England and were also made locally—albeit on a small scale—in the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century, between 1800 and 1840, an extensive pewter-buttonmaking industry developed in Connecticut.[143]

Pewter buttons were usually cast in molds. The molds were available for purchase, which allowed pewter buttons to be made on a small scale in domestic settings. Eighteenth-century pewter-button molds had a flat-bottomed brass plate with four or five circular depressions that formed the button faces. The mold had two arms with deep vents to allow the metal to flow evenly into the mold. The molten metal was poured through the channel into the closed mold; after the metal hardened the arms of the mold were opened, the button castings were removed, and the uneven edges filed down. Designs were sometimes cast in the mold, but most cast pewter buttons were plain. Pewter buttons could also be chased or die-stamped after the buttons were cast.[144]

Pewter buttons also could be stamped out of flat sheets of metal and decorated with the use of dies. Stars, flowers, and other simple decorations were used.[145]

Shanks on pewter buttons were cast with the button body. The earliest type of shank was a flat or wedge-shaped protrusion from the button back with a hand-drilled hole (figure 3.19A–C). Pewter is such a soft metal that the shanks broke easily or were severed by the threads that held the buttons to garments. Later molds were made so that eyed shanks were cast into the button body. The shank was improved when it was changed to a loop of iron or brass inserted into a lump of metal on the button back in the last quarter of the eighteenth century (figure 3.19E).[146]

*Copper, Copper-Alloy, Brass, and Gilt Buttons.* Copper and brass buttons were very popular in the eighteenth century, and the physical qualities of these metals played an important role in their use. Copper and brass are both ductile and can be stamped, engraved, plated, or gilded with ease, and brass can be cast easily.[147]

Copper, copper-alloy, and brass buttons were fashionable particularly in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. In the 1770s and 1780s large buttons (35-plus mm for coat buttons, 21–26 mm for sleeve, waistcoat, and breeches buttons) were fashionable, and these were sometimes made of copper. Large buttons were worn into the 1810s. In the early nineteenth century, large, shiny gilt buttons were very fashionable, popularized by Beau Brummel's somber dress. Between 1810 and 1830 the plain gilt button was almost exclusively the one worn on men's coats. The gilt buttons of the nineteenth century were decorated with cut and chased designs (this process is described below).[148]

Plated buttons were worn in the eighteenth century by men from all levels of affluence. Silver-plated buttons are known from the first half of the eighteenth century when Sheffield plating came into practice. In this method of plating a thin sheet of silver was fused to a copper base.[149] Buttons were also plated with tin; the surfaces of tin-plated buttons are gray in archaeological examples.[150] Archaeologically recovered buttons frequently lack the original plating, though it occasionally is preserved, if only partially.

The surface treatment of buttons was the focus of technical innovation, and buttonmakers strove to develop techniques to make fashionable buttons. Buttonmakers finished buttons with a variety of methods, including gilding in red or yellow gold, silver and tin plating, or painting the buttons.[151] Gilding was the most common surface treatment. The backmarks were often stamped with words that describe the kinds of gilding applied to the button. For example, "gilt," "superfine," "extra fine," "best treble orange," or "double gilt" are just some of the backmarks used on gilt buttons. The type of surface plating was also used to describe buttons in wholesale and retail transactions. Buttons purchased by an American importer from a Birmingham button manufacturer are described as "Red Gilt," "S'Colour," and "plated." Another bill describes gilded and plated buttons as "being very prevailing took the opportunity of sending them," portraying their fashionability. "New plated coat buttons" and plated "breast" buttons, "extra strong dble Gilt all over Convex," "Best treble orange Gilt Convex coat," and "ditto breast" were listed in this shipment.[152]

Plated, gilt, and copper-alloy buttons of all sorts were advertised in newspapers. Joseph Whipple included "guilt, and plaited buttons" in one advertisement. Other advertisements listed white and yellow buttons, "Flat metal buttons of different sorts," and "double gilt and common Metal Buttons" (see table 3.4).[153]

Gilt brass buttons are an important element in the portrait of Colonel William Taylor painted by Ralph Earl in 1790 (figure 3.27). Taylor wears fashionable, large flat gilt brass buttons on his coat, down the front, on the sleeves, and above the vents in the back. These large gilt buttons are one of the main features in the portrait. He wears smaller contrasting buttons on his satin double-breasted waistcoat. The buttons are part of what was a very fashionable ensemble of the period.

*Tombac Buttons.* Tombac is an alloy of zinc and copper that has a pale yellow-white color and is similar in appearance to pewter. Tombac buttons were common in the eighteenth through early nineteenth centuries; large fashionable coat buttons of the late eighteenth century were often made of tombac. Tombac buttons were usually plated, and the face may be plain or decorated with engine-turned or hand-engraved designs. Most tombac buttons were cast, and the backs were finished on a lathe. Tombac buttons have a variety of shanks, but the most common type is a cone shank, though soldered alpha and omega shanks are common (figure 3.19D, F, G).[154]

*Hard-White Buttons.* Hard-white buttons were worn from around 1790 to the 1830s. Buttonmakers describe them as "hard-white buttons" to divorce the association between inexpensive pewter buttons and the working class. Hard-white buttons were made from pewter that contains a high percentage of tin, which made it far more durable than the pewter used in the early eighteenth century. Hard-white buttons were among the first type of button to be regularly backmarked, and the marks can be used to trace particular button manufacturers. The buttons are often worked with elaborate designs; star and pinwheel motifs are the most common. The shanks are usually steel or brass wire loop shanks fixed in a lump of metal (figure 3.19E).[155]

*Cut-Steel Buttons.* Cut steel was popularized in the 1770s, and Matthew Boulton established the cut-steel industry in Birmingham, England, by 1775. Cut-steel buttons were the foundation of Boulton's business. Small cut and polished steel beads in an assortment of patterns were attached to the button face (figure 3.28).

**COMPOSITE BUTTONS.** Buttons could be made of mixed media. Textile-covered buttons and stamped metal–covered buttons are two types that were common in the eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries. I discuss textile-covered buttons in the category of composite buttons, rather than organic buttons, since they are similar in construction and form to stamped metal–covered buttons.

*Textile-Covered Buttons.* Textile-covered buttons were a very popular form of button in the eighteenth century. Textile-covered buttons were made of wood,

FIGURE 3.27. Portrait of Colonel William Taylor by Ralph Earl, 1790. Taylor wears gilt buttons on his coat and covered buttons on his waistcoat and breeches and paste knee buckles. (Courtesy of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York)

bone, or cardboard molds covered with some kind of textile (usually to complement the garment), such as brocade, velvet, silk, gold or silver thread, twist, or mohair. Newspaper advertisements and account books indicate that mohair was very common in America (see tables 3.3 and 3.4).

Textile-covered buttons are sometimes called passementerie buttons, though the name refers specifically to buttons made with worked threads on silk or linen. The oldest textile-covered buttons were made with wire or wooden forms covered with thread or with simple wire molds covered with coarse threads. More commonly, cloth was embroidered and stitched over a cloth-covered mold. The cloth covering served as a backing for the fine part of the embroidery, both of which were gathered in the back and used as a shank for sewing the button to the garment.[156] The most common kind of textile-covered button in America was one in which the textile was simply wrapped over the surface of a bone or wood button mold. The textile served to provide color and texture to the button and also was used to sew the button to the garment. The textile was often made from the same cloth as the garment.

Textile-covered buttons were very common in the eighteenth century, and account book transactions and newspaper advertisements mention them often (tables 3.3 and 3.4). The transactions typically list button molds and the material to be used to cover the button. It seems that the parts would be assembled when attached to the garment. For example, William Wood, a Dartmouth, Massachusetts, merchant sold "buttons mohaire" on October 14, 1738.[157] Thomas Durant advertised "Sewing Silk, Buttons, and Mohair" in the *New Hampshire Gazette* on November 18, 1756. Buttons and mohair were commonly sold together.



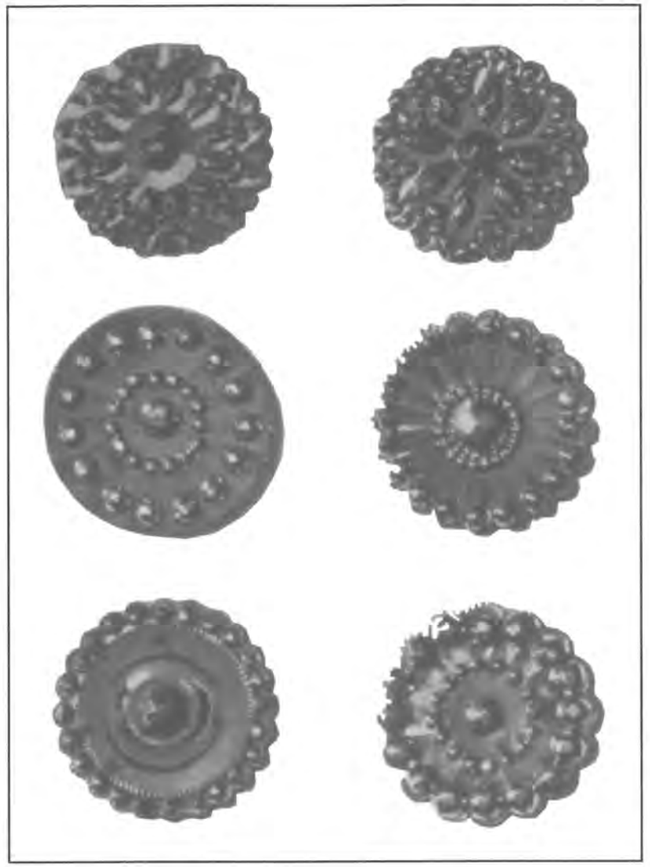

FIGURE 3.28. Eighteenth-century cut-steel buttons. (Courtesy of Elizabeth Hughes and Marion Lester, *Big Book of Buttons* [Boyertown, PA: Boyertown Publishing Company, 1981]; Photo by Peter Lester Studio)

A vast assortment of patterns was used on textile-covered buttons (figure 3.22). Some of the pattern names are known, such as the "death's head" pattern, in which the thread is worked to form quartered sections. Buttons trimmed with French knots were called "snails."[158] Basket buttons were covered with an interlaced pattern of thread. The design names were often used to describe buttons in business transactions, as in the case of the Philadelphia merchants Parish, Potts, Shields, and Company's purchase of a bag of "Death head Buttons" in October 1783. The shipping records of John Marsh listed "basket breast" buttons (textile-covered waistcoat buttons in the basket pattern) among the list of goods shipped from England to Portsmouth, New Hampshire.[159]

Textile-covered buttons are striking elements in the portrait of Job Perit by Reuben Moulthrop from 1790 (figure 3.29). Moulthrop wears worked-thread passementerie buttons in colors that complement his coat, and he wears smaller buttons covered with a white textile to match his waistcoat. The coat buttons are large and fashionable and are a focal point in the painting, indicating the prominent position buttons could hold in one's appearance.

*Stamped Metal–Covered Buttons.* Stamped metal–covered buttons were a common button form from the beginning of the eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century (figure 3.30). These buttons consisted of two parts: the stamped-metal cover and the button mold. British makers called them "shell buttons" because of the form of the thin stamped metal. The metal button covers were made of silver, silver plated copper, gilt copper, or brass, though sometimes a gray alloy of lead or pewter was also used. The most common

FIGURE 3.29. Portrait of Job Perit by Reuben Moulthrop, 1790. Moulthrop wears worked-thread passementerie buttons on his coat and textile-covered buttons on his waistcoat. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

materials were copper and brass. The metal cover is applied only to the face of the mold in early examples (figure 3.30A, B). Later examples have metal shells on the front and back of the button, and the wood or bone mold serves to add strength to the button (figure 3.30C).[160]

The metal covers were made in the following way: the metal was cast in small ingots, flattened into plates, and rolled into very thin leaves. The leaves were cut into small circles approximately the size of the molds they were to cover. The button cover was then shaped by beating or hammering it into a molded cavity with convex-headed iron puncheons—moving from shallow molds to deeper molds until the shell reached its desired form. The metal plates could be grouped with ten to twenty others in the process since they were so thin. After the cover was formed, it was placed in an engraved mold and struck with a hammer or punch press to apply the design.[161]

Patterns on the stamped-metal buttons imitate the woven patterns of passementerie buttons. The designs include single and double spirals, curved lines, concentric circles, and simple woven patterns (figures 3.29, 3.30B, C).[162] Plain metal faces are also common (figure 3.30A).

The method used to attach stamped metal–covered buttons to garments is a good aid to dating the button. The earliest molds (early eighteenth century) had four drilled holes that were equidistant from the center (figures 3.30A, B, 3.31). A loop of catgut was threaded through the holes and tied in the front of the bone or wood mold (figure 3.31). Cement or resin was placed in the metal cover, which then was set over the catgut knot and folded or crimped over the edge of the mold. The resin or cement served both to strengthen the button and to secure the catgut shank. The shank could not be disturbed without removing the cover. A second form that came into use at the end of the eighteenth century was a wire shank that was similar to those made of catgut. Thin wire was threaded through the holes of the button mold and tied in a knot. The latest shank form used in the eighteenth and early nineteenth



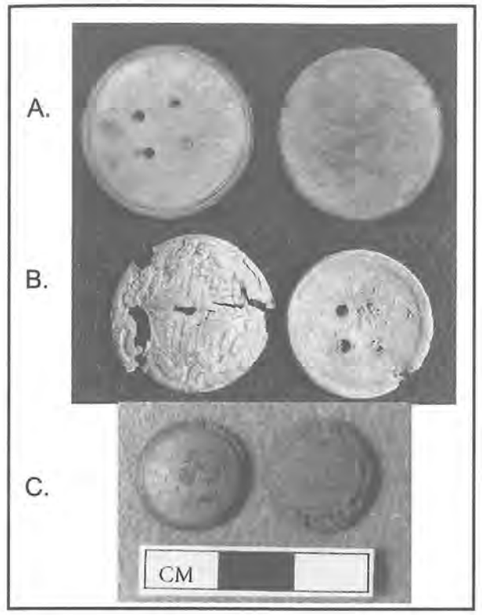


FIGURE 3.30. Stamped metal–covered buttons recovered in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. A. Back and front of intact plain stamped metal–covered button with four holes in button core for catgut shank. B. Two pieces of stamped metal–covered button with woven passementerie design and four-hole button core. C. Two pieces of stamped metal–covered button with single hole in button core. Cement resin is visible in the bone core. The bone core is used to strengthen the button. (Photo by the author)

FIGURE 3.31. Stamped metal–covered buttons. Top two rows are stamped-metal button faces in geometric patterns, spirals, and simple woven patterns. Bottom row shows catgut shanks threaded through four-hole button cores. (Courtesy of Elizabeth Hughes and Marion Lester, *Big Book of Buttons* [Boyertown, PA: Boyertown Publishing Company, 1981]; Photo by Peter Lester Studio)

centuries has a metal loop or eye fastened to the back of the mold.[163]

**ORGANIC BUTTONS.** A variety of organic materials were used to make buttons. This section reviews bone, wood, leather, shell, horn, and tortoiseshell buttons.

*Bone Buttons.* Bone was used to make two different button forms: button molds and sew-through buttons. Circular disks were cut from cow shin bones with a rotating tool with three projecting points. The center point on the tool made a hole in the center of the button, and the outer two points cut the edge as the tool rotated. The surface was smoothed by the intermediary surface of the tool between the points (figure. 3.32).[164] Waste from small-scale home button production is often recovered archeologically.

Button molds, discussed above, were used in textile-covered buttons and in stamped metal–covered buttons (figure 3.33A).[165] The textile-covered button molds have a hole in the center from button production, but it does not have a functional purpose. The edges of the textile-covered button mold are vertical and are only smoothed to prevent the mold from snagging or cutting through the fabric. Button molds for stamped metal–covered buttons are beveled at the sides to allow the metal covers to be crimped over the bone mold. The stamped metal–covered button molds have four or five holes used to make the catgut shank, although late eighteenth-century examples have a single hole to receive the wire shank. Button molds could be sold separately from the material used to cover the button; for example, William Wood sold "button moles" in June 1741.[166]

Sew-through bone buttons have two, three, four, and five holes (figure 3.33B).[167] Five-hole buttons were used on men's shirts and underwear in the eighteenth century. The buttons sold by Johnathan Griffen for £0-0-9 on June 24, 1754, were described as "Duzzon of shurt butons."[168] These were inexpensive buttons compared to other transactions recorded and were probably bone or wood sew-through buttons.

*Wood Buttons.* Wood was used to make molds for textile- and stamped metal–covered buttons (discussed above) and was also occasionally used for eighteenth-century sew-through buttons. Cabinetmakers sometimes made buttons as a side business. Benjamin


FIGURE 3.32. Plate I from Diderot's *Encyclopedia* showing the tools and process to make button molds. The tools used to cut the button mold from the larger piece of bone are depicted in the top row of tools. (Denis Diderot, *Encyclopédie* [Paris: Chez Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durand, 1751–1765]; Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University)



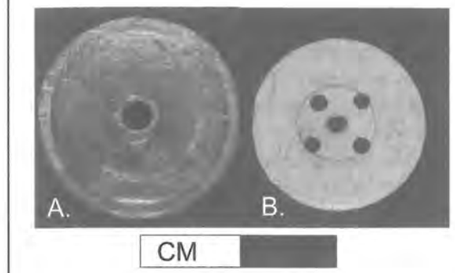


FIGURE 3.33. Bone buttons recovered in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. A. Bone button mold with beveled edge to receive stamped-metal cap. Lathe marks are visible on the surface of the button. B. Sew-through bone button. The center hole is a product of button production. (Photo by the author)

Rudolph, a Pennsylvania cabinetmaker, ran the following advertisement in the *Pennsylvania Journal* on March 15, 1770:

> Benjamin Randolph, Takes this method to inform his customers, and the public in general, that he has for sale, at this Ware Room, of carving and cabinet work, &c at the sign of the Golden Eagle in Chestnut-street, a quantity of wooden buttons, of various sorts, and intends, if encouraged, to keep a general assortment of them. He thinks it needless to say anything in their praise, or by way of recommendation of them, as he doubts not but every lover of his country will encourage the same, as well as all other American manufactures, especially at this time, when the importation of British superfluities is deemed inconsistent with the true interest of America. The people of New Jersey (in general) wear no other kind of buttons, and say they are the best and cheapest that can be bought, both for strength and beauty; and he doubts not but that they will soon recommend themselves to the public in general.

Wooden sew-through buttons were made in simple forms with sewing holes drilled through the button.[169] These were inexpensive buttons and were worn as fasteners on men's garments. Hard, close-grained woods like apple, holly, cherry, and maple were preferred.[170]

*Leather Buttons.* Thin leather was sometimes used to cover buttons in the same process used in textile-covered buttons.[171] Thick leather pieces were also used as buttons. These were punched with holes and sewn onto the garment.

*Shell Buttons.* Shell buttons, often called "pearl" buttons because of their pearl-like luster, are made of mother-of-pearl, or shell. Shell was an expensive raw material in the eighteenth century because each shell yielded only a small amount of desirable material (the area between the outer lip of the shell and the edge of the scar where the foot attached). The most desirable and most expensive shells were obtained from East India; other less expensive ones were obtained from Manila, the Red Sea, or the Persian Gulf. Beginning in 1800, shell buttons were made in Ohio and the Midwest. Claassen has traced the development of shell buttons manufactured in the Mississippi watershed from the mid-nineteenth to mid-20th centuries.[172]

Shell buttons could be made in two different ways. In the first method, the shells were prepared by washing them, treating them with acid, and sawing them into squares that were then rounded into button blanks. In the second method, the shell button blanks were cut from the shell using a tubular saw that was fitted with a shank. The waste material from buttonmaking was used for cutlery or for small shirt buttons.[173]

Shell button shanks were metal pins that were inserted into the back of the button into a drilled shank hole to form a loop shank (figure 3.34).[174] Alternately, two or four holes were drilled in the blank to make a sew-through button.

The design on shell buttons was engraved or cut into the button face, and the button was polished with soap and rottenstone. Shell buttons were sometimes decorated with cut steel, paste, or chased copper ornamentation or set with small seed pearls. The back of the button was frequently left in its natural state.[175]

Large shell buttons were fashionable in the late eighteenth century. These buttons typically measured approximately 36 mm in diameter.[176]

*Horn Buttons.* Horns and hooves were used to make buttons in the mid- to late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Horn buttons were not fashionable but were inexpensive. Horn was used to make molds for covered buttons or sew-through buttons; shanked horn buttons were not made until the mid-nineteenth century.[177]

The horn button industry was a sideline to the horn comb industry and was developed in America in Newbury, Massachusetts, in 1759 by Enoch Noyes.[178] When

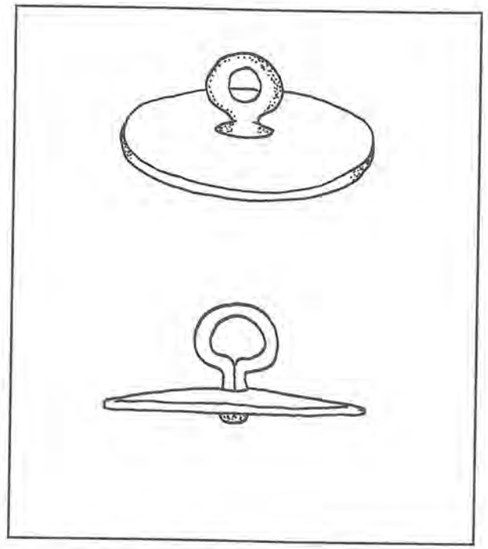

FIGURE 3.34. Top view and cross section of loop shank for shell buttons. (Drawing by the author)

horn is heated and softened, it can be bent into any shape and can also be dyed any color. In the early part of the nineteenth century horn buttons were molded by hand with a press that made six, eight, and twelve buttons. The press consisted of two iron plates attached to two long handles with steel dies for casting the buttons. The mold was heated, and a flattened piece of horn was placed over the dies in the mold. The mold was then closed and fastened with a screw press until the horn was softened by the heated mold. The mold was then pressed more tightly to impress the pattern of the dies on each button blank. The buttons were removed, placed in a lathe, and filed smooth. If the button was to be a sew-through button, four holes were made by a lathe with four parallel spindles. The buttons were finished by smoothing the roughness of the button by shaking the buttons together in a flannel bag.[179]

*Tortoiseshell Buttons.* Tortoiseshell was made into buttons in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In the process the shells were softened and flattened. Sometimes several tortoiseshell scales were molded together to achieve the desired thickness. Two heated dies were used to punch out and mold the button blank.[180]

**GLASS BUTTONS.** Glass buttons were worn occasionally in the eighteenth century, though most glass buttons are from the nineteenth century or later. Eighteenth-century glass buttons were usually faceted lead glass or flint glass. Rare eighteenth-century glass buttons can be distinguished from later, more common glass buttons by the presence of flat wire copper loop shanks and small tinned shank plates used to attach the button to the garment.[181]

**CERAMIC BUTTONS.** Ceramic buttons were not mass-produced until the nineteenth century. Josiah Wedgwood did make buttons and placed sprigged-clay medallions in metal mounts, but these are not a common type. In addition, hand-painted porcelain buttons were made in France in the eighteenth century. Ceramic buttons became commonplace after 1840 when Richard Prosser of Birmingham, England, patented a process of making ceramic buttons using a powdered ceramic, and mass production began.[182] Before this date, ceramic buttons are unusual.

**OTHER BUTTONS.** Buttons easily divide into separate categories by material, and most of the archaeologically recovered examples of buttons are utilitarian or common button types and fall into the categories discussed above. But there are a number of unusual buttons that do not fit into the preceding discussion, many of which were made using very expensive materials such as precious metals or rare raw materials.[183]

Buttons could also be jeweled and were sometimes sold as part of a parure. Brilliant and rose-cut diamonds were worn on buttons, as were topazes, sapphires, emeralds, and rubies. Crystal and paste as well as semiprecious stones such as cat's eye, scotch pebble, white and brown crystal, and elk's claw were also set in buttons. Buttons were also made of jet, jasper, enamel, and ivory.[184]

*Buttons: Important Items of Personal Adornment*

Buttons are one of the most commonly recovered artifacts of personal adornment on archaeological sites, and the documentary record conveys their importance both as a fastener and item of fashion. Buttons are prominently displayed in portraits of celebrated men, and are common and frequent subjects of transactions in economic records. Advertisements make apparent the broad range of buttons that were available for purchase and the range of materials, sizes, and forms in which buttons were made. Buttons could be items of great value and were prominent accessories to fashionable garments, and they could also be inexpensive and utilitarian items.

Abner Sanger's diary provides insight into the individual choices a person might make in selecting buttons as items of adornment. Buttons were purchased separately from the textiles used to make a garment, though they could be part of the same transaction. Over the course of three months, Sagner recorded seven separate entries detailing different tasks involved in procuring the materials and labor to make an overcoat, or surtout. The process began on October 24, 1778, when he went to "Nathaniel Halls shop for paper and mohair."[185] The paper was probably a stiff stock used to make a mold around which the mohair was wrapped. Sanger paid one person to cut out the coat and another person to stitch the coat. Finally on January 24, 1779, exactly three months after the first mention of purchasing buttons for the coat, Sanger proudly wrote, "I go to meeting and wear my blue surtout Esther Ellis made."[186] Later in that year Sanger had a "jacoat and britches" made, and again, the buttons were purchased separately from the textiles.[187] Later, Sanger wrote, "I go and spend some time at Eli Metcalf's and get some wooden jacoat and breeches buttons."[188]

Sanger's diary entries do not demonstrate a particular concern with the kind of buttons that he wore, but they do reveal that he spent a significant amount of time and effort to procure the buttons he purchased. Sanger wore buttons made of mohair and twist, as well as wound worsted buttons and wood buttons. His buttons were probably like those of his neighbors—common and utilitarian—but in each case individual buttons were chosen for specific garments.

Buttons were functional fasteners, but they were also one of the ways in which the status of an individual was made visible. The portrait of Daniel Boardman by Ralph Earl from 1789 is an excellent example of the way buttons were worn on men's clothing, and it also depicts buttons as important elements of display (figure 3.35). Boardman's large fashionable gilt buttons decorate his coat along the front closure, at the wrist, and at the pleats in the back of the coat. Boardman wears smaller gilt waistcoat buttons on his double-breasted waistcoat, as well as buttons at the knees, just above the buckles on his breeches. The placement of these buttons illustrates clearly the standard manner in which buttons were worn on the coat, waistcoat, and breeches.

What is equally notable about the portrayal of Boardman and his garments in this portrait is the way in which the painting conveys the status of the sitter. The buttons are part of a group of accessories used to emphasize Boardman's wealth: his impeccable and luxurious garments, buttons, hat, walking stick, watch seals and fob, gleaming shoe and knee buckles, as well as the vast landscape in the background that appears to belong to him. The care taken by the artist to depict the buttons in accurate detail shows how significant buttons could be in the overall presentation of self. The fancy large gilt buttons are one prominent component of the overall package of status rendered in this painting.

By contrast, people of middle or low socioeconomic status wore buttons in subdued textiles or less lustrous metals. Such buttons would not have been striking dress accessories. The buttons of people of low socioeconomic status often did not match, as an advertisement for a runaway laborer from the *Daily Advertiser* of October 26, 1748, indicates: "[He] had on a dark blue broadcloth coat . . . with brass moulded buttons, the brass of one button on his sleeve and hip are dropt off from the moulds; his waistcoat is camlet with some flat white metal and silk buttons; his breeches are blue-grey broadcloth and blue-grey mohair buttons." The physical characteristics of the buttons are one of the main characteristics used to identify this person.

Buttons were not only conspicuous elements of dress, but were also common objects worn in large numbers in the late seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries. Their frequent mention in account books and advertisements manifests the regularity with which they were purchased (i.e., with almost every new item of clothing). Consequently, they are recovered in large numbers in the archaeological record, making them particularly useful for understanding a variety of aspects of personal appearance. Buttons were worn on particular garments and can be used to identify the presence of certain kinds of clothing, particularly coats, jackets, breeches, and shirts, as well as underwear. Buttons are also associated almost exclusively with men's clothing, making them strong markers of gender. Buttons were available in multitudinous materials and forms and exhibited all manner of surface treatments and decorations and were obtainable in a wide range of prices, which meant that the form and style of buttons correlated closely with the economic background of the wearer. As the portraiture of the period so clearly demonstrates for elites, and advertisements for runaway servants and slaves illustrate for those of less means, buttons were one of the visual cues that defined a person's economic status. Though buttons often are considered the most mundane items of personal adornment, in many ways they are the most informative.

## HOOKS AND EYES AND CLASPS

Hooks and eyes and clasps were used to fasten clothing. These fasteners were far less visible than buckles and

48. C. Willett Cunnington and Phillis Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955), 156.
49. Whitehead, 97.
50. Mould, 3; Whitehead, 97.
51. Hughes and Hughes, 3; C. Willett Cunnington and Phillis Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), 229; Whitehead, 10.
52. Whitehead, 103; Mould, 3.
53. Whitehead, 103; Hughes and Hughes, 3.
54. Swann, 14.
55. Mould, 3; Hughes and Hughes, 4.
56. Whitehead, 11, 103; Hughes and Hughes, 3.
57. Swann, 14.
58. Mould, 4.
59. Hughes and Hughes, 4.
60. Whitehead, 96, 97; Swann, 2.
61. Mould, 3.
62. Whitehead, 103.
63. Hughes and Hughes, 2.
64. Meredith Wright, *Put on Thy Beautiful Garments: Rural New England Clothing, 1783–1800* (East Montpelier, VT: The Clothes Press, 1990), 83.
65. Nancy O. Bryant, "Buckles and Buttons: An Inquiry into Fastening Systems Used on Eighteenth-Century English Breeches," *Dress* 14: 27–36.
66. Cunnington and Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century*, 63.
67. Linda Welters, personal communication, 2001.
68. cf. Bryant; Phillis Cunnington, *Costume in Pictures* (London: Studio Vista, 1964), 103.
69. Whitehead, 111.
70. Cunnington and Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century*, 63, 211.
71. Whitehead, 111.
72. See Parsons, 27–28.
73. Beau Brummel, *Male and Female Costume* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1932), 109.
74. Cunnington and Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century*, 83; Whitehead, 113.
75. Whitehead, 114.
76. Cunnington and Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century*, 143.
77. See Henry Rene d'Allemagne, *Les Accessoires du Costume et du Mobilier* (Paris: Schemit, 1928), pl. XLII; Wallace, 824.
78. Scarisbrick, 358, figure 43.
79. Whitehead, 81–82; Noël Hume, *A Guide to Artifacts of Colonial America*, 85.
80. See Nicholas Luccketti and Beverly Straube, *1998 Interim Report on the APVA Excavations at Jamestown, Virginia* (Richmond, VA: Association for the Preservation of Virginia, 1998), 37; Alaric Faulkner and Gretchen Faulkner, *The French at Pentagoet 1635–1674: An Archaeological Portrait of the Acadian Frontier* (Augusta: Maine Historic Preservation Commission, 1987).
81. Lois K. Stabler, ed., *Very Poor and of a Lo Make: The Journal of Abner Sanger* (Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall, 1986).
82. Stabler, 140.
83. Stabler, 217.
84. Stabler, 473, 355.
85. Walter Stewart, *Papers*, Philadelphia, Col. 142, Downs Collection (Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library, Winterthur, Delaware, 1773–1796).
86. For example, D. P. White, "The Birmingham Button Industry," *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 11 (1977); Stanley South, "Analysis of the Buttons from Brunswick Town and Fort Fisher," *Florida Anthropologist* 17, no. 2 (1964); Stephen Hinks, *A Structural and Functional Analysis of Eighteenth Century Buttons*, Volumes in Historical Archaeology, vol. 32, 1988; Stanley J. Olsen, "Dating Early Plain Buttons by Their Form," *American Antiquity* 28, no. 4 (1963).
87. South.
88. Carl C. Dauterman, "Buttons: Historical Notes and Bibliography," *Cooper Union Museum Chronicle* 1, no. 6 (1940), 237; Egan and Pritchard, 280; White, 67.
89. Primrose Peacock, *Discovering Old Buttons* (Aylesbury, England: Shire Publication, 1978), 6.
90. White, 67, 68.
91. These were embroidered buttons on fabric over a bone or horn mold. See discussion of textile-covered buttons.
92. White, 68.
93. Wallace, 823.
94. Scarisbrick, 292.
95. Wallace, 823.
96. Dauterman, 239, 241.
97. John Gaines II and Thomas Gaines, *Account Book*, Ipswich, Massachusetts, Col. 409, Downs Collection (Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library, Winterthur, Delaware, 1707–1762).
98. Dauterman, 241, 243.
99. White.
100. White, 69.
101. White, 69; Lillian Smith Albert and Kathryn Kent, *The Complete Button Book* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1949), 17, 18, 22.
102. White, 69.
103. Described and cited in Albert and Kent, 10.
104. Elizabeth Hughes and Marion Lester, *The Big Book of Buttons* (Boyertown, PA: Boyertown Publishing Company, 1981), 216.
105. White, 69.
106. Albert and Kent, 8; Olsen, 552; Hughes and Lester, 216; Peacock, 14.



107. Anonymous, *Account Book*, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Doc. 1031, Downs Collection (Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library, Winterthur, Delaware).
108. Samuel Philbrick, *Account Book*, Exeter, New Hampshire, Doc. 588. Downs Collection, (Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library, Winterthur, Delaware, 1796–1820); Sherman.
109. William Wood, *Account Book*, Dartmouth, Massachusetts, Doc. 114, Downs Collection (Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library, Winterthur, Delaware, 1738–1747).
110. Elisha Ilsley, *Account Book*, Newbury, Massachusetts. Doc. 1, Downs Collection (Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library, Winterthur, Delaware, 1672–1740).
111. Anonymous, *Shipping Records*, Col. 245, Downs Collection (Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library, Winterthur, Delaware).
112. Rockingham County Probate Records, Exeter, New Hampshire, File #303, vol. 6: 127.
113. Rockingham County Probate Records, Exeter, New Hampshire, File #549, Book 1718–1727: 145.
114. Hinks; Hughes and Lester, 177.
115. McClellan, *Historic Dress in America*, vol. 1, 244.
116. James Laver, ed., *Victoria and Albert Museum, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Costume* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1951), 4; Diana DeMarly, *Dress in America*, vol. 1: *The New World 1492–1800* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1990), 52.
117. Bryant; Cunnington, 74; Cunnington and Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Seventeenth Century*, 136, 139, 152.
118. See Jane Ashelford, *The Art of Dress: Clothes and Society, 1500–1914* (London: National Trust, 1996); Linda Baumgarten, *Eighteenth-Century Clothing at Williamsburg* (Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1986); Nancy Bradfield, *Costume in Detail: Women's Dress 1730–1930* (Boston: Plays Inc., 1968); Cunnington; Cunnington and Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Seventeenth Century*; Cunnington and Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century*; Earle, *Two Centuries of Costume in America*; Earle, *Customs and Fashions in Old New England*; Laver; McClellan, *Historic Dress in America*, vols. 1 and 2; Aileen Ribeiro, "'The Whole Art of Dress': Costume in the Works of John Singleton Copley," in *John Singleton Copley in America*, ed. Carrie Rebora, Paul Staiti, Erica Hirshler, Theodore E. Stebbins Jr., and Carol Troyen (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995); Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1986); Edward Warwick, Henry C. Pitz, and Alexander Wycoff, *Early American Dress: The Colonial and Revolutionary Periods* (New York: B. Blom, 1965).
119. Cunnington, 78; Cunnington and Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century*, 43, 183.
120. Cunnington and Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century*, 61.
121. Peter F. Copeland, *Working Dress in Colonial and Revolutionary America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977).
122. McClellan, *Historic Dress in America*, vol. 2, 351; Cunnington and Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century*, 205.
123. Madeleine Ginsburg, "Buttons: Art and Industry," *Apollo* 6 (1977): 464; Wright, 74.
124. Wood; George Shove, *Account Book*, Dighton, Massachusetts. Mss. 605 (Baker Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1768–1810).
125. Jackson.
126. Cunnington and Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century*, 139, 205.
127. Hinks.
128. Bryant; Cunnington and Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century*, 75.
129. cf. Bryant; Cunnington and Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century*, 75.
130. Ivor Nöel Hume, "Sleeve Buttons: Diminutive Relics of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Antiques* 79, no. 4 (1961): 381, 383.
131. Noël Hume, "Sleeve Buttons," 383.
132. See Noël Hume, "Sleeve Buttons."
133. Charles Osbourn, *Invoices and Inventories*, Vol. 2, Col. 20, Northeastern Silversmiths' Records, 1778–1901, Downs Collection (Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library, Winterthur, Delaware, 1814–1819).
134. Osbourn.
135. Alphaeus Albert, *Record of American Uniforms and Historical Buttons with Supplement* (Hightstown, NY: Printed by the author, 1973); D. Johnson, *Uniform Buttons: American Armed Forces 1784–1948* (Watkins Glen, NY: Century House, 1948).
136. Warren K. Tice, *Uniform Buttons of the United States* (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1997).
137. Lee Hanson and Dick Ping Hsu, *Casemates and Cannonballs: Archeological Investigations at Fort Stanwix, Rome, New York* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1973); William L. Calver and Reginald P. Bolton, *History Written with Pick and Shovel* (New York: New York Historical Society, 1950); Emory Strong, "The Enigma of the Phoenix Button," *Historical Archaeology* 9 (1975); William A. Turnbaugh and Sarah Peabody Turnbaugh, "Alternative Applications of the Mean Ceramic Date Concept for Interpreting Human Behavior," *Historical Archaeology* 11 (1977); Roderick Sprague, "The Literature and Locations of the Phoenix Button," *Historical Archaeology* 32, no. 2 (1998).

138. Albert and Kent, 8; Hughes and Lester, 204; Olsen, 553.
139. Hughes and Lester, 216.
140. Olsen, 553.
141. Johnson, 13.
142. Hughes and Lester, 216.
143. Hughes and Lester, 204.
144. Albert and Kent, 6, 7.
145. Albert and Kent, 8.
146. Hughes and Lester, 204.
147. Albert and Kent, 8.
148. Hughes and Lester, 178; Peacock, 15.
149. Cunnington and Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century*, 50; Peacock, 16.
150. Noël Hume, *A Guide to Artifacts of Colonial America*, 90.
151. Hughes and Lester, 178; Noël Hume, *A Guide to Artifacts of Colonial America*, 90.
152. Anonymous, *Shipping Records*; Anonymous, *Printed Bills Collection*, Col. 71, Downs Collection (Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library, Winterthur, Delaware, 1727–1927).
153. August 31, 1759, *The New Hampshire Gazette*. Pierce Long, August 21, 1761, *The New Hampshire Gazette*; Benjamin Goldthwait, February 3, 1764, *New Hampshire Gazette*.
154. Peacock, 20, 29; Hughes and Lester, 203.
155. Hughes and Lester, 205; Peacock, 29; Tice, 2.
156. Albert and Kent, 41.
157. Wood, *Account Book*.
158. Cunnington and Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century*, 47.
159. James Sheafe, *Family Papers*, Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Acc. No. 1976-8 (New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, New Hampshire, 1745–1920).
160. Albert and Kent, 29; Hughes and Lester, 177.
161. Albert and Kent, 29.
162. Hughes and Lester, 177.
163. Albert and Kent, 30; Hughes and Lester, 8, 177.
164. Albert and Kent, 41.
165. Button molds could also be made of wood. See Wood Buttons.
166. Wood, *Account Book*.
167. Albert and Kent, 25.
168. Jonathan Griffin, *Account Book*, Londonderry, New Hampshire, Baker Library (Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1760–1773).
169. Albert and Kent, 26.
170. Hughes and Lester, 251.
171. Albert and Kent, 26.
172. White, 71. Hughes and Lester, 230; Cheryl Claassen, "Washboards, Pigtoes, and Muckets: Historic Musseling in the Mississippi Watershed," *Historical Archaeology* 28, no. 2 (1994).
173. Albert and Kent, 58; Hughes and Lester, 230.
174. Albert and Kent, 58.
175. White, 71; Albert and Kent, 58.
176. Cunnington and Cunnington *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century*, 202; Hughes and Lester, 230; Schramm, 7.
177. Cunnington and Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century*, 191; Albert and Kent, 64–65.
178. Hughes and Lester, 8.
179. Albert and Kent, 65.
180. Albert and Kent, 65.
181. Hughes and Lester, 143.
182. Peacock, 50; Roderick Sprague, "China or Prosser Button Identification and Dating," *Historical Archaeology* 36, no. 2 (2002): 113; Albert and Kent, 35.
183. There are some excellent sources to consult written by button collectors for identifying unusual buttons. Collectors are particularly interested in rare button forms and provide illustrations of curated examples. See Sally C. Luscomb, *The Collector's Encyclopedia of Buttons* (1967; repr., West Chester, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 1992); Hughes and Lester; Albert and Kent.
184. Scarisbrick, 292; Wallace, 825.
185. Stabler, 215.
186. Stabler, 227.
187. Stabler, 253.
188. Stabler, 258.
189. Cunnington and Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century*, 114, 228.
190. Pins are not considered in detail here because of their primary use as an article of needlework and an inability to distinguish pins used as garment fasteners from those used for sewing. The multiple uses of pins contribute to the overall difficulty of distinguishing items used specifically for women's dress. See Mary C. Beaudry, *Findings: The Material Culture of Needlework and Sewing* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, forthcoming), for an extensive discussion of various types of pins and their uses.
191. Linda Welters, personal communication, 2000.
192. Jackson.
193. Anonymous, "*French Peddler's*" *Trade Catalog*, Fol. 89, Downs Collection (Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library, Winterthur, Delaware, 1800–1830).
194. Bradfield 83; Nancy Rexford, personal communication, 2001.
195. Hoopes, 81–82.
196. Wood.
197. Cunnington and Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century*, 78; Noël Hume, *A Guide to Artifacts of Colonial America*, 255.
198. Walter Stewart.