An Analysis Of The Buttons Recovered
From Liberty Hall Academy And Other
Sites In Lexington, Virginia

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From the archaeological excavation of Liberty Hall Academy and other surrounding historical sites in Lexington, Virginia, many buttons have been discovered. Because of the large number of these artifacts and the wide range of types encountered an accurate classification system was sought after. Many previously established classification systems were found, notably those of Stanley South, Stanley Olsen, Alpheus Albert, Lyle Stone, and Jacob Grimm. While these are all fine button classification systems, no one in particular was sufficient for our purposes. A system that was much more flexible was necessary for our purposes. A system that was much more flexible was necessary in order to encompass the wide range of buttons that we encountered. In doing so, some aspects of the other systems were found to be appropriate for our classification system while others were not. Where they failed to include some of the more modern types of buttons we did not. All in all, we combined the better aspects of each system while including types that were not covered in any of their writings. While this is the culmination of our work, it should in no way be regarded as a final draft, as one of the purposes of this system is to remain flexible. So as new types of buttons are excavated they can be added to the existing system.

The majority of terms used in this paper will be defined as they are encountered, however, several will be defined at the outset. The terms one piece, two piece, three piece, and four piece were borrowed from Albert who listed them in a slightly different manner. The one piece button is generally cast or molded with the shank, or eyelet being formed as an integral part of the button.
The two piece button may be cast as well, but is not limited to such. The shank or eyelet is a separate portion that was either cast in or soldered on the reverse of the button. The three piece button is a type of button that was invented by Benjamin Sanders of Birmingham, England about 1813, according to Albert. This is made of two pieces, a front shell upon which a wire eye or loop shank is fastened, usually by brazing. The parts are fastened together by turning the edge of the front shell over the back piece. There are thus a total of three pieces in this button. The four piece button which is sometimes referred to as the Staff button was first produced by the Scovill Company in the 1830's for the Army Staff officers. It is somewhat similar to the two piece button except that the front shell and back piece are held together by a separate narrow flat rim. There are thus a total of four pieces in this button. Most modern day American military buttons are constructed in this fashion.

Several terms which will be used later to indicate the composition of metal buttons will be described here as well. The term White Metal will encompass buttons made of lead, pewter, and zinc. Since it is often difficult to distinguish between these different metals on buttons that were excavated the term White Metal will include all three. The term Yellow Metal will be used to include buttons made of brass, copper, and bronze, in a similar fashion. The term Rare Metal will include buttons made of precious metals such as gold and silver.
Class 1

The class 1 button is made of bone, and is generally plain. There are two different types of these bone buttons, burnt and green. Each of these types has several specific subtypes.

**class 1, type A, (burnt bone buttons)** - brownish in color.
- **Subtype 1** is a flat four hole undecorated button which can be found in various sizes. This is Stone's Type 20.
- **Subtype 2** is a flat five hole undecorated button which can be found in various sizes as well. The fifth hole is located in the center, and was created by the drill bit used to make the button. This is South's Type 19.
- **Subtype 3** is a flat or domed undecorated button with a metal shank or eyelet on the reverse.
- **Subtype 4** is a four hole decorated button. The decoration may be painted or carved on the button. Other forms of decoration may be encountered as well.
- **Subtype 5** is a five hole decorated button. Decorations are applied in the same fashion as indicated for Subtype 4.

**class 1, type B, (green bone buttons)** - white in color.
- **Subtype 1** is a flat four hole undecorated button. This as well may be encountered in many different sizes. This is South's Type 20.
- **Subtype 2** is a flat five hole undecorated button which may come in different sizes as well. This is Olsen's Type J, and South's Type 19.
Subtype 3 is a flat or domed undecorated button with a metal shank or eyelet on the reverse.

Subtype 4 is a four hole decorated button. The forms of decoration are indicated under Class 1, type A, Subtype 4. They are the same as these.

Subtype 5 is like subtype 4 except that it is a five hole decorated button. Types of decoration are the same as well.

Subtype 6 is flat single hole undecorated button.

Stone calls these "button blanks", which were replacement backs for metal buttons. These are South's Type 15, and Grimm's Type 15 buttons. They are often cloth covered.

Subtype 7 is a flat two hole undecorated button which can be found in various sizes.

Subtype 8 is a flat three hole plain button. It as well can be found in various sizes.

Class 2

The class 2 button is made of glass and is generally plain. There are two types of these glass buttons, clear and opaque. Each of these types has its own different subtypes.

   class 2, type A, ( clear glass buttons )

Subtype 1 is a two hole flat button. This may be found in several different sizes.

Subtype 2 is a four hole flat button which comes in various sizes as well.
Subtype 3 is a flat or domed button with a metal shank or eyelet on the reverse.

Class 2, Type B, (opaque glass buttons)

Subtype 1 is a two hole flat button. These and all other opaque glass buttons can be found in all most any color and size.

Subtype 2 is a four hole flat button.

Subtype 3 is a flat or domed glass button with a metal shank or eyelet on the reverse. This is South's Type 13. This falls under Class B, Type C, as well.

Class 3

The class 3 button is a ceramic or porcelain button. Most examples encountered will be glazed and of a white color, however, different variations may be found.

Type 1 is a four hole plain button. This is the same as South's Type 23.

Type 2 is a four hole decorated button. The decoration may be painted on or molded in the button.

Type 3 is a four hole transfer print button. The design was applied as a decal before the button was glazed.

Class 4

The class 4 button is a shell or mother of pearl button.

Type 1 is a flat two hole button which may or may not
have a depressed or countersunk center.
Type 2 is a flat four hole button which may or may not have a depressed or countersunk center. South's Type 22.
Type 3 is a flat or domed button with a metal shank or eyelet on the reverse.

Class 5
The class 5 button is made from wood and takes two different forms, flat, and barrel or toggle.

Class 5, Type A, (flat wooden buttons)
Subtype 1 is a flat one hole button which may be found in various sizes. This is Grimm's Type 16.
Subtype 2 is a flat two hole button which may be found in various sizes as well.
Subtype 3 is a flat three hole button which may be found in different sizes.
Subtype 4 is a flat four hole button which may be found in different sizes as well.
Subtype 5 is a flat or slightly domed button with a metal shank or eyelet on the reverse.

Class 5, Type B, (barrel or toggle wooden buttons)
Subtype 1 is a one hole button.
Subtype 2 is a two hole button.
Subtype 3 is a button with a drilled through eyelet.
Subtype 4 has an attached metal eyelet.
Subtype 5 has a full groove attachment.
Class 6
The class 6 button is one that is made from hard rubber, most of which were made by Goodyear.

- **Type 1** is a two hole button which may be found in several different sizes.
- **Type 2** is a flat button with a metal shank or eyelet on the reverse.
- **Type 3** is a 4 hole button which may be found in several different sizes as well.
- **Type 4** is a hard rubber button with a molded decoration on it.

Most of these hard rubber buttons will have the makers name molded on the reverse side, however, this is seen as a variation and not a specific type.

Class 7
The class 7 button is one that is made from hard plastic and may be found in many different sizes and several different colors.

- **Type 1** is a single hole flat button.
- **Type 2** is a two hole flat button.
- **Type 3** is a three hole flat button.
- **Type 4** is a four hole flat button.
- **Type 5** is flat or domed and has a metal shank on the reverse.
- **Type 6** has a decoration molded into the obverse side.
Class 8
The class 8 button is a composit one. That is, it consists of more than one type of material. There are almost unlimited possible combinations for this button class. Only those actually encountered by us will be dealt with here.

**class 8, type A, (metal and shell buttons)**
Subtype 1 is a flat button with a metal or wooden eyelet or shank on the reverse. Subtype 2 is a flat or semi-domed button with holes through it for attachment. The number of holes may vary. Generally, this button has a metal base with the shell portion laminated on for decoration.

**class 8, type B, (metal and cloth)**
Subtype 1 is usually flat or domed with the shank on the reverse. It is composed of two to three metal parts and is then covered in cloth.

**class 8, type C, (metal and glass)**
Subtype 1 is usually flat or domed with the shank on the reverse. The glass portion, usually decorated, makes up the obverse side while the metal portion makes up the reverse. South's Type 13 and Grimm's 12. Subtype 2 is similar to subtype 1 with the exception that it has holes instead of an eyelet.
Class 9

The class 9 button is one that is made of metal. Since this is such a general class it is the largest. The terms used to describe the types of metals and a few of the construction types were discussed earlier. As each new term is used it will be defined from here on.

_class 9, type A, (yellow metal buttons)_

Subtype 1 is a one piece button. Within this subtype there are four different subclasses. They are as follows:

Subclass aa is a flat button with holes. Within this subclass there are several different categories.

Category 1 is a plain undecorated button. The number of holes may vary.

Category 2 is a button like category 1 except that it is embossed with a design. The design may be applied during manufacture or after it.

Category 3 buttons are as the above except that they are plated with silver or gold. They may or may not be marked on the reverse.

Category 4 is a button which is stamped with up to four holes in a countersunk panel. This is South's Type 32.

Subclass bb is a button with the shank or eyelet cast on forming an integral part of the button.
**Category 1** is a plain undecorated button.

**Category 2** is just like category 1 except that it is embossed with a design which may have been applied before or after initial manufacture.

**Category 3** is again like the above except that it is silver or gold plated. These may or may not be marked on the reverse.

**Category 4** is a button with a spun back. That is the area around the shank was lathed off to form the eyelet. This can be determined by the presence of concentric rings around the shank or eyelet.

**Subclass cc** buttons are those with a wedge shank on the reverse. This is a shank that is cast on the button in the same fashion as an eyelet, but the hole is drilled through instead of cast in. Again, there are several categories.

**Category 1** is a plain undecorated button. This the same as Olsen's Type A and Stone's Class 1, series B, type 2, variety A.

**Category 2** is similar to category 1 except that it has been embossed with a design. This is the same as Stone's Class 1, series B, type 2, variety B.

**Category 3** is like the above except that it has been silver or gold plated.

**Category 4** differs from the above in that it has a spun back. This is South's Type 31.
Subclass dd buttons are the final one piece yellow metal buttons. They are overall buttons or studs. Most of these have makers logos stamped on the obverse side. These are still in use today.

Subtype 2 is a two piece button. Two piece was defined earlier. Within this subtype there are two different subclasses.

Subclass aa is a button with an iron shank or eyelet either molded in or soldered on the reverse side of the button. There are several different categories.

Category 1 is a plain undecorated button. This is the same as South's Type 9.

Category 2 is like the above except that it has an embossed design.

Category 3 is similar with the exception of being plated with silver or gold.

Category 4 has a spun back.

Subclass bb is a two piece button like subclass aa except that it has a brass eyelet rather than an iron one.

Category 1 is a plain undecorated button. It is the same as South's Type 9, Olsen's Type G, and Stone's Class 1, series D, type 4.

Category 2 is like the above except that it has an embossed design. This is Olsen's Type F.
Category 3 buttons are similar to the above with the exception that they are plated with silver or gold. This is South's Type 18 and Grimm's Type 30.

Category 4 buttons are those with a spun back. This is Olsen's Type D.

Subtype 3 is a three piece button. This term has been defined earlier as well. Within this subtype there is no real subclass, however, there are three categories.

Category 1 is a plain undecorated button. This is Grimm's Type 4.

Category 2 is again as the above except that it is decorated.

Category 3 is a military button. There are far too many different variations to include here. For additional information one should consult Albert.

Subtype 4 is a four piece button. The majority of these encountered will be of a military nature.

Category 1 is a plain undecorated button.

Category 2 is again like the above except that it is decorated.

Category 3 is a military button. Again, for more detail one should consult Albert.
class 9, type B, (white metal buttons)

Subtype 1 is a one piece button. Within this subtype there are four different subclasses. They are as follows:

Subclass aa is a flat button with holes. Within this subclass there are several different categories.

Category 1 is a plain undecorated button. The number of holes may vary. This is South's Type 40 and Olsen's Type K.

Category 2 is like the above except that it has an embossed design.

Category 3 buttons are similar to the above with the exception that they have been plated with silver or gold.

Category 4 buttons are those having four holes in a counter sunk panel.

Subclass bb is a button having the shank or eyelet cast on forming an integral part of the button. Within this subclass there are several categories.

Category 1 is a plain undecorated button. This is South's Type 11, Olsen's Type E, Grimm's Type 7, and Stone's class 1, series B, type 5.

Category 2 is of the same construction as the above, differing in that it is decorated. This is Stone's class 1, series A, type 1, variety D.

Category 3 is similar except that it is either plated with silver or gold.
Category 4 is of the same construction as the above differing in that it has a spun back.

Subclass cc buttons are those with a wedge shank on the reverse. This has been described earlier. Again, there are several categories.

Category 1 is a plain undecorated button.

Category 2 is as the above except that the obverse side has been decorated.

Category 3 is like the above except that it has been plated with silver or gold.

Category 4 is distinguished by a spun back.

Subclass dd are the last of the one piece white metal buttons. They are the overall buttons or studs. Again, many have makers logos on the obverse side. These are still in use today.

Subtype 2 is a two piece white metal button. The term two piece was defined earlier. Within this subtype there are two different subclasses.

Subclass aa is a button having an iron shank or eyelet either molded in or soldered on the button. There are several different categories.

Category 1 is a plain undecorated button. This is South's Type 29, Olsen's Type C, Grimm's Type 6, and Stone's class 1, series D, type 1.
Category 2 is like the above except that it has an embossed design.

Category 2 differs in that it has been plated with silver or gold.

Category 4 is distinguished in that it has a spun back.

Subclass bb buttons are just like subclass aa ones except they have a brass shank or eyelet instead of an iron one.

Category 1 buttons here are plain undecorated ones. This is South's Type 29.

Category 2 buttons have an embossed design on the obverse side.

Category 3 buttons are plated with either silver or gold.

Category 4 buttons are distinguished by a spun back. This is Olsen's Type D, and Grimm's Type 3.

Subtype 3 is a three piece button. This term has been discussed earlier. There is no subclass within this type, but there are three categories.

Category 1 is a plain undecorated button.

Category 2 is as the above except that it is decorated.

Category 3 is a military button. For more details consult Albert.
Subtype 4 is a four piece button. The vast majority of these encountered will be of United States military origin as with the yellow metal subtype 4. Again, Albert should be consulted for specifics.

Category 1 is a plain undecorated button.
Category 2 is a decorated button.
Category 3 is a military button.

Class 9, type C, (rare metal buttons)
Subtype 1 is a one piece button. Within this subtype there are three different subclasses.

Subclass aa is a flat button with holes. This type of button is encountered less in rare metal than in white or yellow.

Category 1 is a plain undecorated button.
Category 2 is as the above except that it has been embossed with a design.
Category 3 differs in that it has been plated with either silver or gold.
Category 4 is a button which is stamped and has two to four holes in a countersunk panel.

Subclass bb is a button with the shank or eyelet cast on thus forming an integral part of the button.

Category 1 is a plain undecorated button.
Category 2 differs in that it has an embossed design on the obverse side.
Category 3 is similar to the above with the exception that it is plated with gold or silver.

Category 4 differs in that it has a spun back.

Subclass cc buttons are those with a wedge shank on the reverse. Again there are several categories.

Category 1 buttons are plain and undecorated.

Category 2 buttons differ in that they have been embossed with a design.

Category 3 buttons are those that have been plated with either silver or gold.

Category 4 is a button that has a spun back.

Subtype 2 is the label for a two piece button. Within this subtype there are four categories. No distinction is made here as to the type of eyelet as with the other metals. Rare metal two piece buttons are encountered with eyelets of iron, brass, as well as of their own base metals, whether of silver or gold.

Category 1 is a plain undecorated button.

Category 2 differs in that it has been embossed with a design.

Category 3 is a button that has been plated with either silver or gold.

Category 4 differs in that it has a spun back.
Category 2 buttons are as the above except that they are decorated.

Category 3 is a military button and is the most frequently encountered of this subtype.

class 9, type D,( iron buttons )

Most all iron metal buttons are one piece buttons. All those encountered by us were of this type. For this reason we have only included the one piece type. There are six basic categories.

- **Category 1** is a flat one hole button.
- **Category 2** is a flat two hole button.
- **Category 3** is a flat three hole button.
- **Category 4** is a flat four hole button. This is the same as South's Type 30.
- **Category 5** is a flat or domed button with the shank on the reverse.
- **Category 6** is a stamped four hole button with a countersunk center panel.
Button Construction and Terminology

Reverse Side — Eyelet or Shank

Obverse Side

1. Piece
   - Eyelet cast on

2. Piece
   - Separate eyelet

3. Piece

4. Piece

Spin back (Note concentric circles)
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