



Calico Jewels

By Jo and Bob Ferguson

Before we stray too far from the jeweled buttons, there is one more group which we feel should be discussed. It is the type which is most sought-after, and also the hardest to find. Because there has been very little, if any, written on them, many newer collectors are probably unaware of their existence. Therefore, we would like to present to you the calico jewels.

Prior to the discussion, perhaps we should go into the history of the numbering of the calico patterns, in order to better understand our calico jewels.

The patterns found on the calico jewels are identical to the patterns found on our china calico buttons, and

are identifiable by the numbers assigned to and illustrated by the late Wilfred B. Morgan of South Hanover, Massachusetts some forty years ago in his little calico check-list booklet. This booklet was copyrighted in 1939, and two supplements were copyrighted and issued the following year.

In his original booklet Mr. Morgan identified one hundred forty six cali-

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co patterns. In his supplement one (1940) he offered 51 additional patterns, and in his final supplement (No. 2, also 1940) he gave us 96 more, making an altogether total of 293 patterns — and all of them in numerical order.

In the ensuing thirty years others produced fewer than forty additional patterns, some of them questionably new, and they were published in a format which many collectors considered a nightmare — a maze of patterns and numbers, while Mr. Morgan's original research still stood as a beacon to all calico-pattern collectors, pointing them toward their ultimate goal.

Now, to the calico jewels. It should be understood that these buttons are not, in the strictest sense, china buttons, but instead, are metal buttons with porcelain-disk settings. The only similarity between these and the china buttons, and it is a very real one, is that they have the same identical patterns fired on them that you find on the china buttons.

Many collectors who collect both jeweled buttons and china buttons, these writers included, like to mount them with their china buttons. In whichever way you choose to mount

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them, you are sure to enjoy a few of these very special jewels.

Now to the case at hand. For this brief study there were nineteen specimens available for examination. Of 19, there were 17 which had colored designs on white porcelain disks, while two of them had colored disks. Of the colored-disk jewels, one was a medium brown with a darker brown calico pattern, while the other was a rather darkish green disk, also with a brown pattern.

On the white disks, there were blue, black, green, brown, and pink designs in about equal numbers, but one sole

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specimen had a purple design. Of course, a greater number of study specimens could change this frequency of colors, but probably not appreciably.

Construction of the buttons was about the same throughout, and except for two, had tinned backs. The buttons all had brass rims. The two mavericks had brass backs, and while one of those was plain on the back like the tinned ones, the other had a circle of six impressed, 5-pointed stars — the only backmark on 19 specimens.

The rims also were notable for their variety on such a small number of buttons. There were eight distinctly different rim designs, ranging from plain to very fancy. The plain rims were in the distinct minority, with only two examples noted. The others ranged from simple decoration to elaborate "double fluting", as seen in the illustration at the lower-right hand corner. The two colored-disk examples are in the top row of the picture.

The number of calico patterns represented in this study was an amazing ten different patterns, out of 19 examined. Their pattern numbers, and number of buttons listed by frequency of appearance are as follows:

Pattern	No. of Specimens
204	5
59	4
63, 112	2 each
18, 32, 58	
72, 77, 248	1 each

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Again, a larger number of study specimens could change this picture, but would not likely do so to any great extent.

The size of the calico jewels is much like that of any other type of jewel, perhaps only slightly smaller on the whole. They range from just over 8.5 mm. to 11.5 mm. in diameter, with a preponderance of the smaller size.

To sum up, the calico jewels are a delightful and colorful group of jewels, and they are so scarce that one should be content to have even a small grouping of them. And, for the purist, while they should be properly mounted with other jewels, it is interesting and attractive to mount them with your china calicoes, and one should feel no twinge of conscience to not be able to display even one of these charming, elusive jewels.

Readers Write

Regarding the "Faces on Bone" article in your March - April 1979 issue, as your article mentions, these buttons were used on garters.

Clara Bow, the original "IT" girl during the late 1920s wore a garter in one of her movies — that fad (a sort of an advertisement gimmick) caught on with the teens and I recall having made such a garter for a number of my friends.

I cannot tell you who made the buttons but I do know "why". Hope this may be a clue for you.

G. Mahon

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