

I Put My Foot into It (part one)

For the past ten years I have been collecting photographs (CdVs in particular) for a visual reference library of men's clothing from 1850 to 1870. Among the thousand or so images, about two-thirds of the poses show the subject's footwear. In the majority of those images the men appear to be wearing boots or shoes with sides that extend well over the ankle. Very few of my images (less than ten percent) show evidence of low-cut shoes. Due to the small image size and often limited image resolution, construction and design details are hard to discern even with magnification in the majority of cases.

Based on this particular image data source I conclude that civilian men wore boots more often than low-cut shoes. Both armies issued bootees, and therefore the military is a separate population group not included in this discussion at this time.

There is also a practical component to this conclusion. The streets and roads of the period were dusty, dirty, muddy, and garbage and manure filled; just plain rough transportation venues. Transportation on foot, by horse or mule and by wheeled vehicle resulted in exposure to physical elements in the barnyard, livery stable or on the road surface. A citizen of the pre-automobile world needed sturdy foot coverings that came up high on the leg for protection against the rubbing of stirrups. Boots had to keep moisture and dirt out. With about eighty percent of the US male population being of the laboring class few men had the luxury of spending the day in the store or office where the environment was friendlier to footwear. Perhaps the term "house shoe" might describe the function of a low shoe...something that can easily be slipped on at home, or when behind a desk, counter or a clerk's window.

Out of six hundred images showing footwear, only three show boots being worn with trousers tucked into them. As for low shoes there are only a few photographic examples in my collection. Several well-known published images show low cut shoes, bootees (low boots) and brogans in everyday use during the 1860s.

With these thoughts in mind I want to begin examining the state of men's footwear in the 1860s. I only intend to set the stage for detailed study. This article will be in at least two parts, and longer if more material is gathered.

The Shoe and Boot Industry in 1860.

According to the Federal Census of 1860 [1] there were 11,864 shoe and boot manufacturing establishments in the United States and its territories. These were distributed in four geographic regions as follows:

Northeastern States [2]	2,554
Middle States [3]	5,389
Western States [4]	2,963
Four Southern States [5]	958

In 1860 there were 127,427 people (96,287 men and 31,140 women) employed (on average) in these manufacturing establishments. In 1860 these people were paid about 31.7

million dollars. The cost of raw material including fuel was just over 43.6 million dollars. The capital outlay was twenty-four million dollars. The estimated value of goods produced was nearly ninety million dollars.

The population of the United States in 1860 was slightly over 31.4 million (roughly a million less than the population of California in 1990). The means that less than one percent of the population was involved in manufacturing footwear for the entire country. An investigation into the amount of imported shoes and boots is also warranted. Once I discover how many people were over fifteen years of age, I might be able to judge the percent of cordwainers and shoemakers of the entire working population.

Compared with other industries, the shoe and boot manufacturing business employed more people than any other single branch of American industry. The largest production of any one town was in Philadelphia. Other centers were in Massachusetts (Lynn, Haverhill and Plymouth) and New York City. The largest factories were using steam power.

Considering that millions of boots were required, mass production was the only way to keep up with demand. Based on examination of a small sample of original boots one could also surmise that many repairs were made before boots were replaced...thus the need for cobblers. An interesting side note appears to be a lack of shoe and boot manufacturing concerns in the southern states in 1860 [see note 5]. Could this be a possible factor in the scarcity of Confederate shoe and boot supplies during the war?

As I have run out of conclusions based solely on the census, a logical additional step would be for someone to examine the shoe and boot manufacturing business history and economic records. It appears that New England plus New York and Pennsylvania would be prime sources for such information.

Just a Few Photographs to Started on the Right Foot.

Returning to the photograph sample data source [6] mentioned at the beginning the first CdV (FIG 1) is one of three single poses that show a man in the photographer's studio with his trousers tucked into his boots. My conclusion is that when indoors or not involved with transportation or occupational constraints most men wore their boots under their trousers. A study of candid outdoor group



FIG 1.



FIG 2.

The next image (FIG 2 and its detail) shows three young men who have exposed their boots by rolling up or pushing up their pant legs. This may be a “pose” rather than a practical record. One of the young gentlemen who has rolled up his trowser leg gives us a good look at the lower pant leg linings. This [7] along with linings found on original trowsers indicate that fabric wear due to boot leather rubbing was a concern.

Shoes are clearly shown in three photographs and their details. One image (FIG 3) clearly shows a low-cut shoe and a light colored sock. The other two images (FIG 4 and FIG 5) show what appear to be “brogans” or ankle boots. Given enough time and magnification, a statistical study of randomly selected CdVs might allow a more precise conclusion about boot and shoe usage in the general male civilian population with consideration of age, geography and perhaps social status based on clothing. Any photographic study will have biases. Studio poses and situations do not necessarily reflect everyday usage. [8]



FIG 3.



FIG 2 (detail).



FIG 3 (detail).



FIG 4.



FIG 4 (detail).



FIG 5 (detail).



FIG 5.

Looking at Originals.

I am fortunate to be able to access a primary source for studying shoes and boots typical of the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Phillip Whiteman (my partner in the Aurora Clothing Collection) and I purchased a group of original men's shoes and boots from that period. The lot consisted of fourteen items: a pair of elastic-sided shoes (Congress gaiters), one low-cut shoe and eleven boots. None of the boots were matching pairs. All the boots were similar in construction. We had two experienced boot makers examine three of the boots. Based on that feedback about construction, our originals can be dated to the third quarter of that century.

For this study I will examine the low cut shoe and two of the boots. I welcome any observations of other original footwear for inclusions in this series. The next installment will have detailed descriptions and photographs of these originals. Only brief summary of their appearance is included here.

The Low-cut Shoe.

The shoe is low-cut (the sides come up 2½ inches above the sole at the ankle). The upper is made of three pieces (vamp and right and left quarters. The vamp is sewn to each quarter along its entire length. There is no tongue, but there is evidence that one might have been attached. The upper is lined with leather inside only as far forward as the joint with the vamp. The vamp area is lined with a woven fabric (probably cotton) attached at the same joint. The counter is sandwiched between the lining and quarters. It is sewn to the uppers only at the vertical heel joint. The leather is no more than 1/16 inch thick.

The soles are pegged and the heel is nailed with twenty-four small, square-cut nails. There is an insole and an outer sole. The heel lift is ½ inch thick. It is 2½ inches long (from back of the heel toward the front of the shoe. It was made from a right-hand last.

The shape of the toe is flattened, but not square. The shoe is dark brown and shows some evidence of having been blackened. The color may also be the result of usage and age. There are four holes for laces on each quarter. No laces are present. Comparing the show with a modern one, the shoe size is approximately a Size 9 or 10, medium width.

The Boots.

All three boots have similar construction. The uppers are two pieces of leather (a front and a back). There is a counter sewn in with a line of stitching parallel to the sole from around the back piece of leather. Two of the boots have cotton webbing (1¼ to 1½ inches wide) boot straps sewn inside, and one boot has leather straps sewn on the inside and outside. All three have thin leather linings sewn at the top. The linings are three, five and 5½ inches deep. One lining is reddish Moroccan leather. The sides of all the boots are twelve inches high.

The sole are all pegged, with heels that have been nailed. The number of nails around the perimeter leads me to believe that the heads of the nails acted as protection from wear. One of the other eleven boots does have a fragment of a heel plate. Heel height ranges from ¾ to 7/8 and may have been one inch considering the amount of wear. Heel length is 2 ½ inches

The boots narrow at the toes to slightly rounded flat toes. The shoe leather is thin (no more than 1/16 inch. Two of the boots have had half soles added one with pegs and nails. There is a pegged patch on the front sole of the other boot. That boot also has sewn patches on the entire toe of the boot and also near the little toe. A similar patch is found on one of the other boots. The color is much the same as the shoe...age and wear has worn the blacking off to a dark brown color.

Samples for Review.

In the next installment I will report on items of footwear so far received and now on our inspection table. They are...

...from **Tom Mattimore**:

One pair boots (seventeen inches tall) with pegged soles and nailed heels.

One pair low-side shoe. These are prototype copies of the original shoe mentioned above. They are constructed in the same manner. Tom's craftsmanship is first rate. The only thing that catches my eye is that the leather is slightly thicker than the originals. More to come on that general subject also.

One pair booties with pegged soles, nailed heels and copper rivet on quarter to vamp seam. This is the New York or Donaldson shoe (Colorado State Historical Society circa 1858 photograph of a miner named Donaldson). He also offers a hand sewn welted shoe.

One pair of "oxford" shoes (or brogans) based on the Page Laphan shoe in the Museum of the Confederacy. It is similar to shoes found on the *Arabia*, in the Fort Laramie Museum and in *Echoes of Glory*: CS, page 175.

...from **Fugawee**:

One pair issue "artillery" boots (12½ inches tall) with pegged and sewn soles, nailed heels, fully lined.

...from **MJN Boot & Leather Shop**:

One pair light mounted boots (nineteen inches tall) with pegged soles, nailed and pegged heels. These are based on private purchase original shoes studied by the owner, Nick Nesseim.

I welcome other submissions, and as is our policy they will be compared to originals not each other.

Mr. Christen

NOTES:

- [1] Kennedy, Joseph C. G., *Preliminary Report of the Eighth Census, 1860*, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1862.
- [2] Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut
- [3] New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, and the District of Columbia
- [4] Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Kentucky, Utah and Nebraska
- [5] Virginia, Louisiana, Tennessee and Georgia
- [6] My base men's clothing study CdV collection consists of over one thousand CdVs that can be dated to the period between 1860 and 1870. Images used in this article: FIG 1, CdV, no backmark, ca 1860-4; FIG 2, CdV, M.B. Yarnell, Phoenixville, PA backmark, ca 1863-4; FIG 3, CdV, no backmark, ca 1863-4; FIG 4, CdV, no backmark, ca 1866-8 and FIG 5, CdV, no backmark, ca 1860-4.
- [7] A few photographs are sharp enough in detail to show the outlines of boot linings without having the pant legs rolled.
- [8] Phillip Whiteman and I have started more detailed research in this and other areas of men's clothing for our proposed book, *The Uniform of the Citizen, 1855-1870*.