

## Brace Yourself

### Instructions for Constructing a Pair of Plain Braces.

In 1994 two fragments of braces were discovered in a circa 1845 log house. The James Meals house from Limestone County, Alabama was in the process of restoration at the Burritt Museum and Park in Huntsville, Alabama. During the on-site investigation of the building a number of interesting domestic artifacts were uncovered. They were found between a log wall and a panel wall erected sometime in the late 1840s or early 1850s.

Among these artifacts were two fragments of a pair of hand sewn cotton braces. The two fragments measured 13½ inches and just less than six inches in length respectively. Both fragments are 1⅜ inches wide. The material (cotton jean) has a white cotton warp and a light blue indigo cotton fill. The thread is a brownish blue linen about equal to modern 40/2 wet spun linen thread.

The existence of these braces fragments in part justify the recreations worn by many modern enactors. They do differ in several important aspects. The Meals fragments...

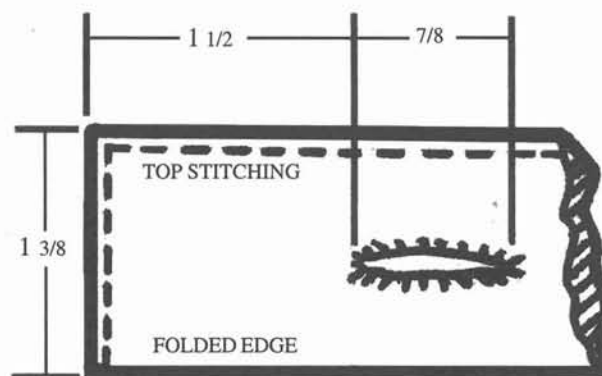
- ...are narrower than modern versions
- ...material is lighter weight
- ...are entirely hand sewn
- ...are not adjustable for length with multiple buttonholes
- ...do not have topstitching along all edges
- ...are likely parts of separate straps that were not sewn together in the center of the back

To make your own pair of braces, follow these steps (see also FIG 1, FIG 2, FIG 3 and FIG 4).

1. Wearing a pair of properly fitting period-style trousers (Note: the top waist button at your natural waist or navel and rear waistband buttons at least one to two inches higher), measure the distance from the center of one back brace button, over the opposite shoulder and down to the center of the front brace button.
2. Take this measurement and add ⅜ inch to each end.
3. Cut two straps four inches wide and at the length arrived at in step 2. The straps will have a ⅜ inch seam allowance on all edges. (Note: the fabric of the original straps was cotton jean.)
4. Press all edges in ⅜ inch.
5. Fold the straps in half and line up the pressed edges so that the underside edges are between 1/16 and 3/32 inch (or a couple of millimeters) inside of the outside edges. This will give the small amount of room necessary to do the fell stitching.
6. Press the folded straps.
7. Baste the straps along the three edges to be sewn. (Note: Since it is not known if the fragments are two pieces of the same strap, or a piece each from two straps, it is impossible to determine whether the sewn edges were on the same side of each strap. It probably does not matter.)

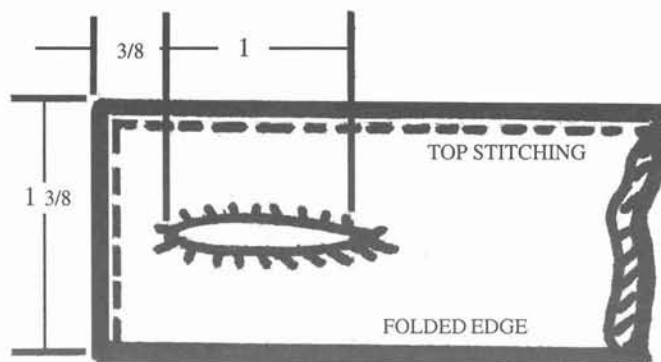
8. Using a single line thread, fell stitch the edges starting at one narrow end and proceeding around the strap. Try for seven stitches to the inch. Be sure the needle passes through the outer material so that there appears to be a top stitched edge.
9. Mark one buttonhole 1½ inches from one end of the strap.
10. Mark another buttonhole ⅜ inch from the other end of the strap.
11. Cut buttonholes open using a buttonhole chisel or a scissors. (Note: The original button holes were 7/8 inch and one inch. There is no apparent reason for this other than they were not accurately cut.) Make your buttonhole to fit your trowser buttons. A one inch hole should be sufficient. The author suspects that the end of the strap with the buttonhole farthest from it goes in the rear of the trowers. This is where the most stress occurs. There is no evidence one way or another.
12. Buttonhole stitch the holes with a double linen thread.
13. Repeat steps 8 though 12 on the other strap.

Tom Shaw, First Minnesota, Co. A



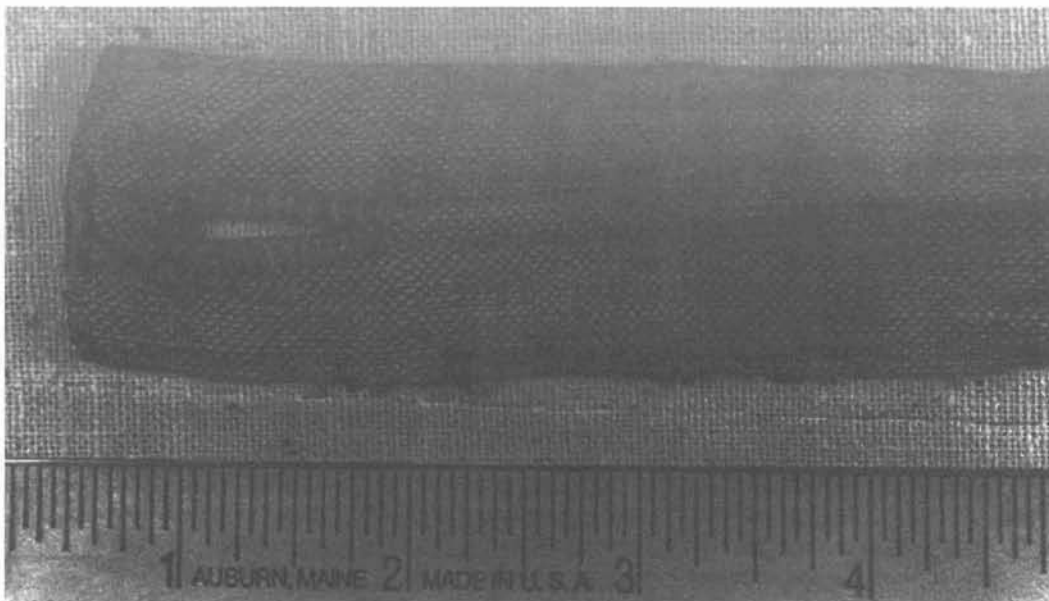
ALL DIMENSIONS IN INCHES

FIG 1. Facing View of Specimen "A," Side 2, Meals Braces Strap Fragment (length: six inches)

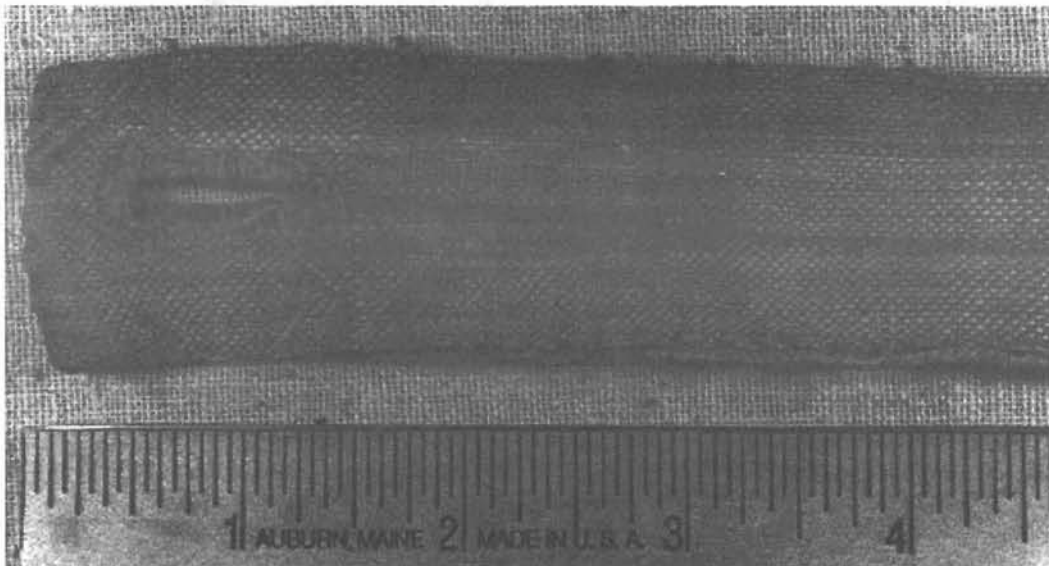


ALL DIMENSIONS IN INCHES

FIG 2. Facing View of Specimen "B," Side 2, Meals Braces Strap Fragment (length: 13.5 inches)



**FIG 3. Photograph (Enlargement) of Specimen "B," Side 2,  
Meals Braces Strap Fragment.**



**FIG 4. Photograph (Enlargement) of Specimen "B," Side 1,  
Meals Braces Strap Fragment.**

## **Jean Cloth Sources for Suspender Fabrics:**

### **Pat Kline**

125 O'San Lane  
Red Lion, PA 17356  
(717) 246-5759  
patkline  
@familyheirloomweavers.com  
[www.familyheirloomweavers.com](http://www.familyheirloomweavers.com)

### **The Needle and Thread**

Darlene Grube  
2215 Fairfield  
Gettysburg, PA 17325  
(717) 334-4011

### **County Cloth**

Charlie Childs  
13797-C Georgetown St. NE  
Paris, OH 44669  
(330) 862-3307  
CRChilds@bright.net  
[www.bright.net/~crchilds](http://www.bright.net/~crchilds)

### **Tart, Brantley, & Benjamin**

Ben Tart  
PO Box 28  
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[www.bentart.com](http://www.bentart.com)

### **Wooded Hamlet Designs**

Mary & Kenneth Wagner  
4044 Coseytown Road  
Greencastle, PA 17225  
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[www.woodedhamlet.com](http://www.woodedhamlet.com)

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