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*A visual guide
to the cut and construction of a
Man's Coat, 1730–1750
providing the basic information*

This visual guide to the cut and construction of mid-18th-century men's coats provides the basic information necessary to make a coat suitable for the period from 1730 to 1750. The 1/4-scale pattern and the construction techniques illustrated are based on original examples of mid-18th-century coats in Canadian, American, and European collections.

The usual attire for men during the 18th century consisted of a coat, vest, and breeches. By the second quarter of the century the coat had evolved from a straight, simply cut garment into the full-skirted, wide-cuffed, many-buttoned coat we associate with the court of Louis XV.

Throughout the century, clothing styles worn by the aristocracy of the French court dominated fashionable society throughout Europe and, to a lesser degree, England. These styles influenced not only the aristocracy's clothing, but also that of the merchant and professional classes, who wore similar but more practical versions of the same styles. Even people of the lowest social status might acquire fashionable clothing (somewhat worse for wear), either as castoffs from their employers or from secondhand clothes markets. In the far-flung French colonies like New France, fashionable society, such as it was, followed the styles closely. Fabrics, clothing, and accessories were imported from France, and fashionable clothing was worn with pride and pleasure from the Fortress of Louisbourg to Detroit.

A man's coat fit smoothly over the chest and back and widened into a full skirt that fanned out in pleats at the bottom of the side

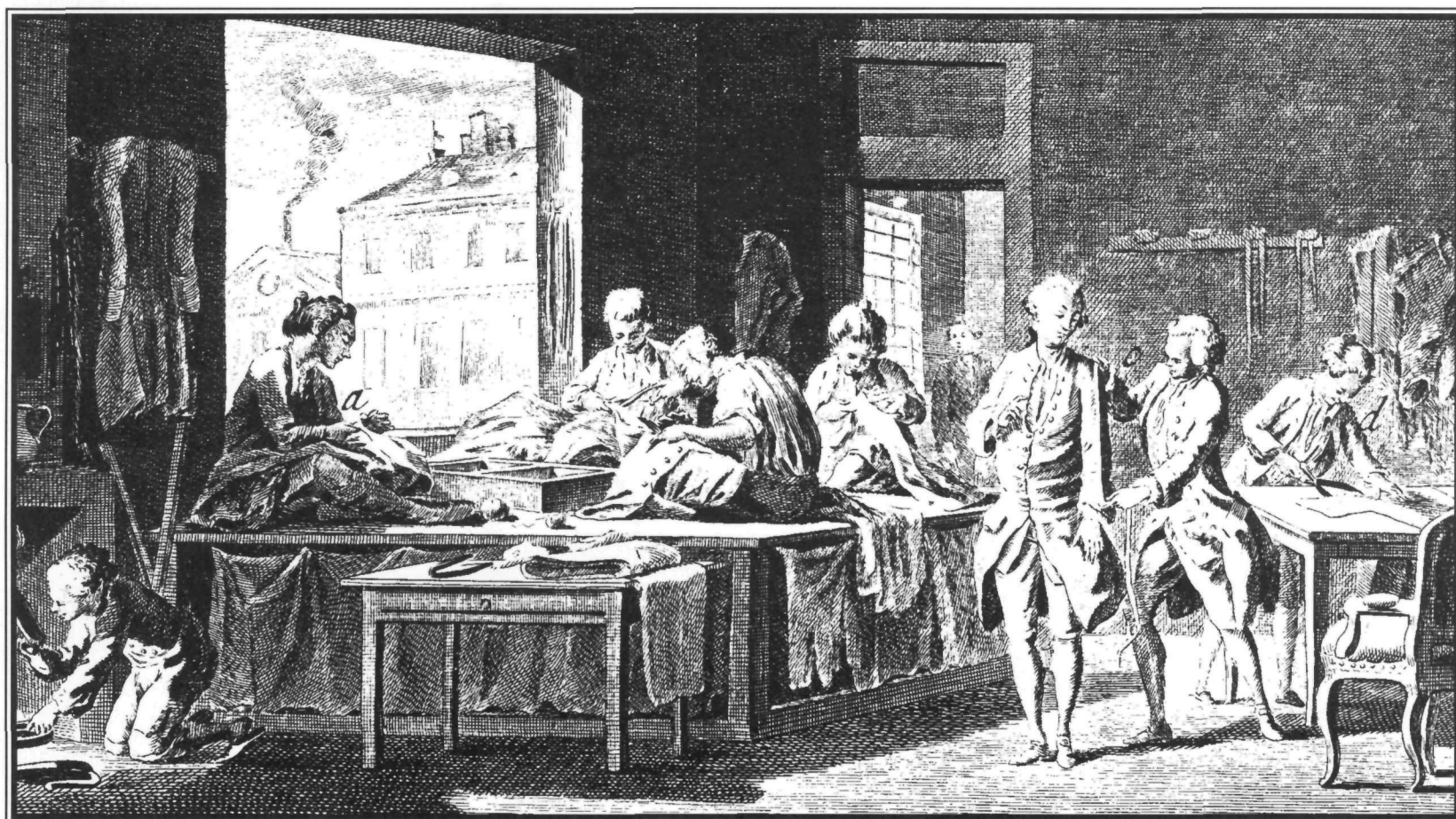
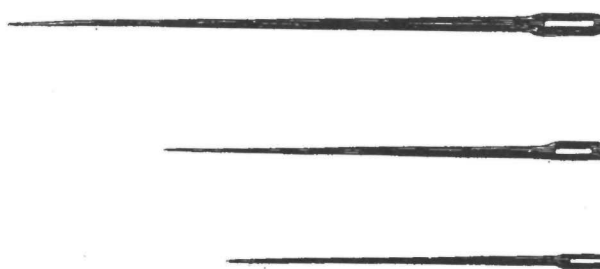
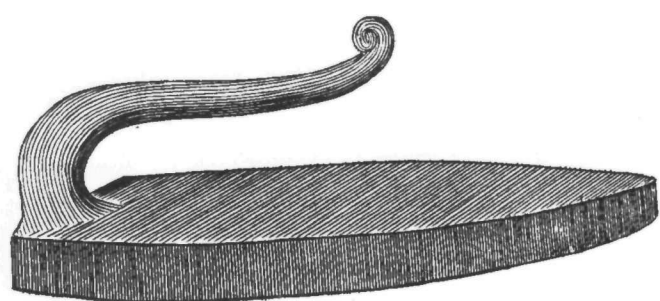
seam. The front edge curved away slightly from the centre front and closed with buttons and buttonholes, usually only to waist level. The centre back seam was open from the waist to the hem. On each side of the back skirt, roughly parallel to the centre vent, was a shallow pleat.

The sleeves were set smoothly into a snug armhole. Sleeves widened to the elbow and were finished with a wide, turned-back cuff held in place with buttons. The shape of the pocket flaps, which concealed the pocket opening, varied with the wearer's taste, as did the number and position of buttons on the coat front and cuffs.

At mid-century the three pieces of a man's suit were not necessarily of the same fabric, although the coat and breeches often matched. The most fashionable and costly coats were of silk brocade, lavishly embroidered, or patterned velvet with a cut or uncut pile. Coats were also made of plain-coloured wool, sometimes embellished with braid. Linings of silk coats were usually of silk, and wool coats were generally lined in lighter-weight wool twill. The backs of both silk and wool coats were often lined with linen above the waist. Sleeves, too, were often lined in linen. Interfacings of heavyweight canvas and horsehair in the coat's chest and skirt helped to create the fashionable silhouette.

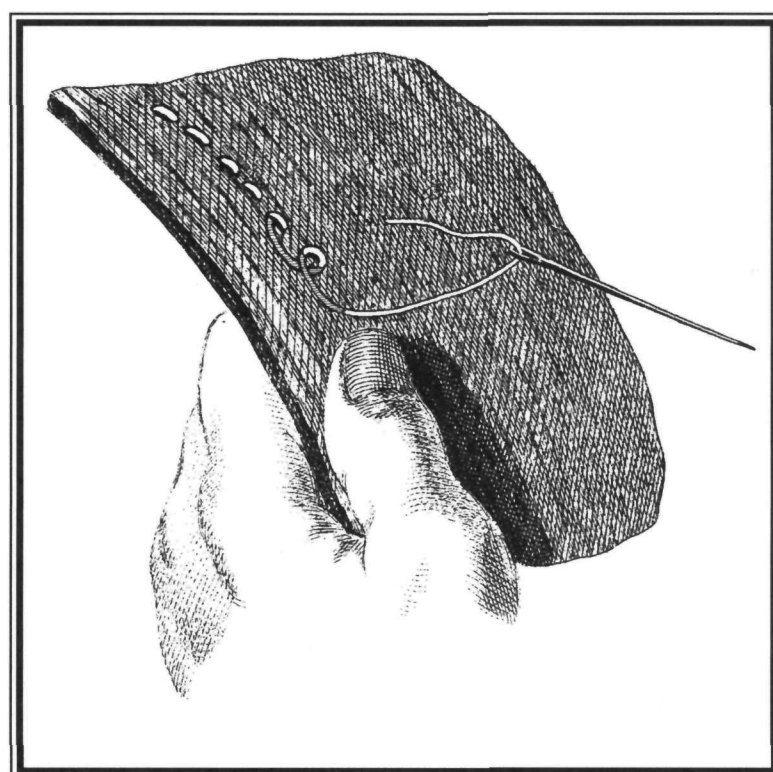
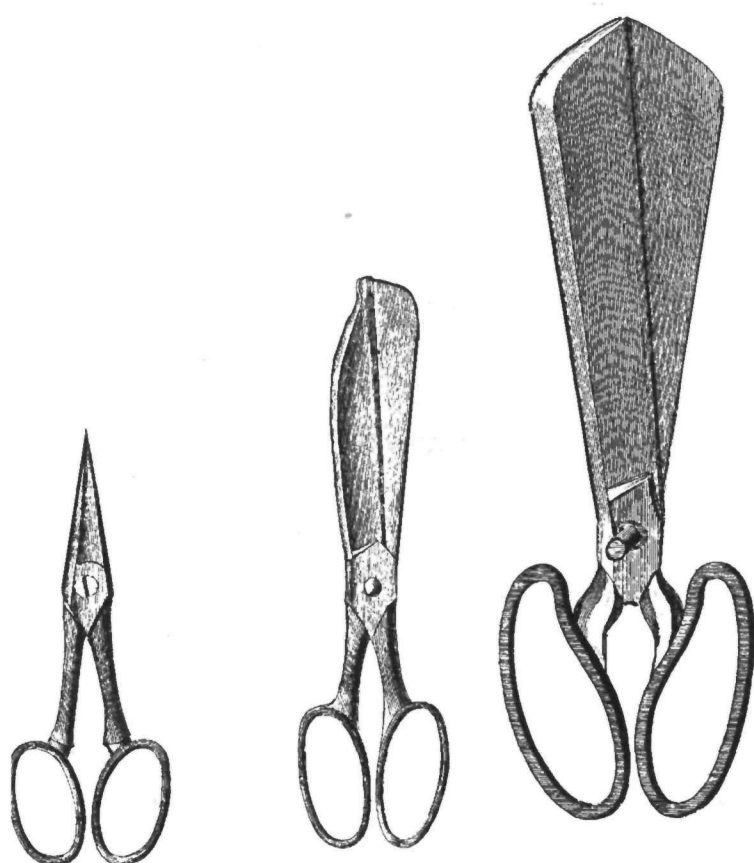
Military clothing was regulated by ordinances governing colour, fabric, and buttons, but differed little in style from the clothing civilians wore. Details of the coats worn by the Compagnies franches de la Marine, the French military force stationed in New France at mid-century, is provided on pages 10 and 11.





Although the art of tailoring did not reach its pinnacle until the 19th century, the techniques 18th-century tailors used would not be alien even to today's tailors. All stitching was done by hand, since the sewing

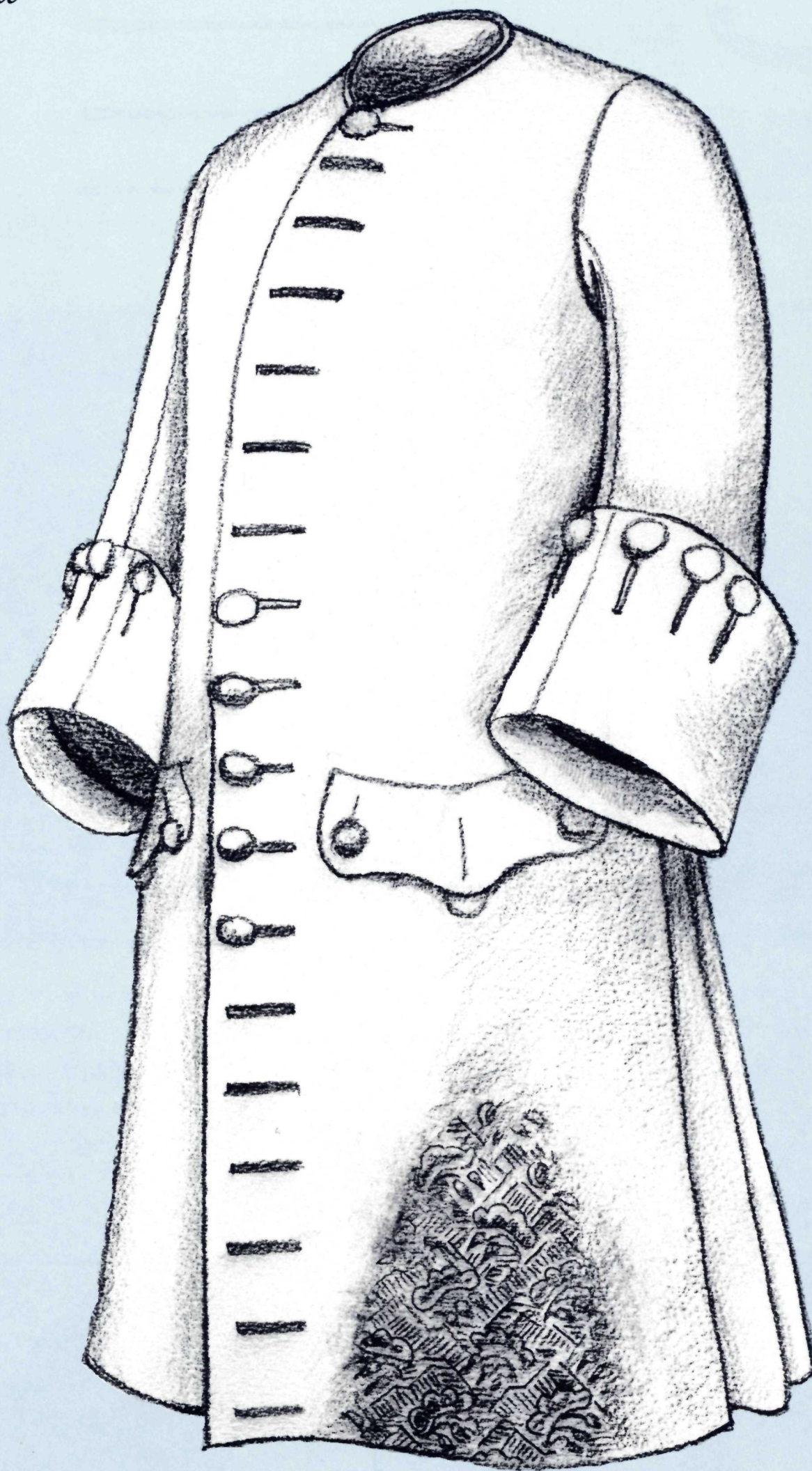
machine would not make its appearance, in any practical form, for another century. The techniques illustrated on the following pages will produce an authentically styled and constructed garment.



The backstitch was the stitch most commonly used for garment construction in the 18th century.

Man's Coat, 1730–1750

Front View



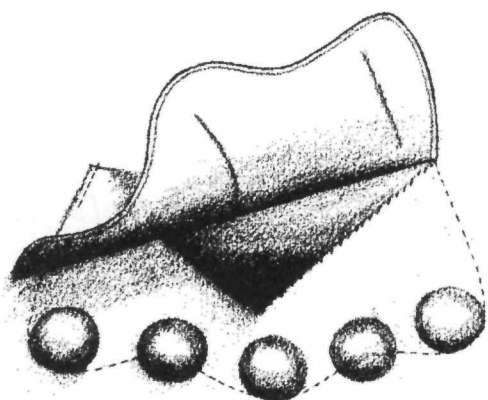
This coat is a conservative style suitable for a merchant or professional man. The skirt reaches to knee level. The sleeve ends above the wrist, exposing the shirt cuff and the bottom of the shirt sleeve. Coats were usually worn unbuttoned. In fact, often only the top button and a few buttons at waist level were functional. The sleeve length can be adjusted by refolding the cuff. The cuff buttonholes were usually non-functional. The armhole is high

and snug but not tight. The sleeve cap is eased smoothly into the armhole. Fashion and individual taste dictated the number of buttons on the front, cuffs, and pocket flaps, and the shape of pocket flaps.

By reducing the number and size of the pleats the same coat would be suitable for a soldier. Other military coat details are given on pages 10 and 11.

Man's Coat, 1730–1750

Front Details



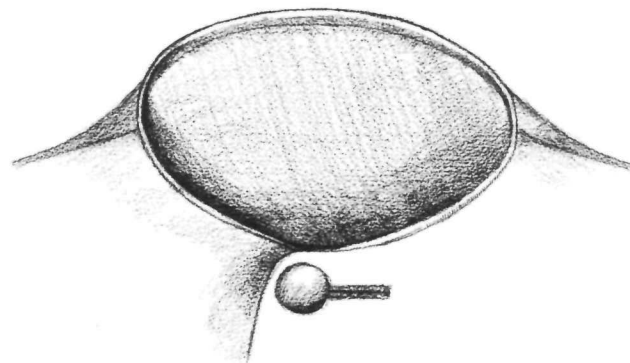
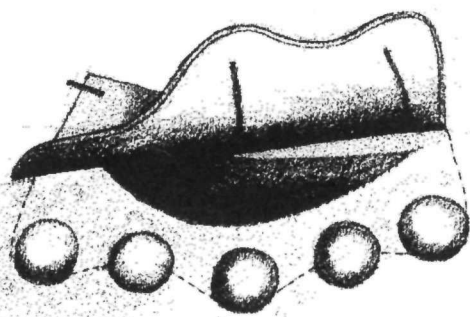
Pocket openings
Triangular or crescent-shaped pocket openings are concealed beneath the pocket flap. Stitch the flap to the coat above the pocket opening (the most common method) or inset the pocket flap into the top of a pocket opening cut to the width of the flap.

Pocket flaps

Vary the shape of the flap according to personal taste. Most common are three- or four-lobed flaps with three to five buttonholes.

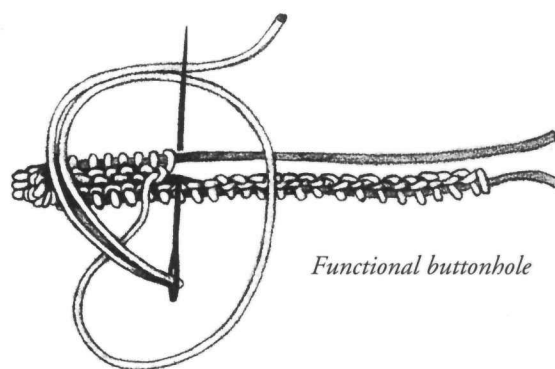
Usually only the outermost

buttonholes are functional. Sew buttons to the coat front to correspond with the non-functioning buttonholes, but position them even with the edge of the flap. Reinforce the ends of the flap with bar tacks or back stitches.



Neckline binding

Sandwich a narrow folded strip of straight-grain coat fabric between the coat and the lining to prevent the neckline from stretching and the shoulder seam from tearing.

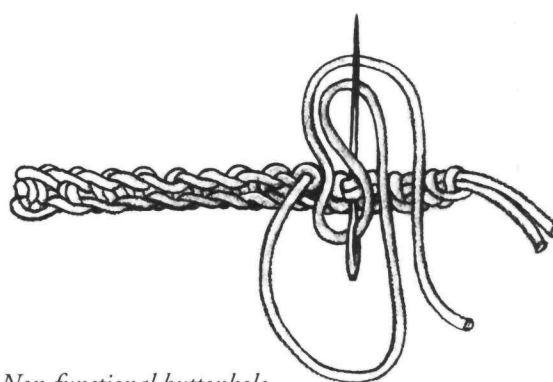


Functional buttonhole

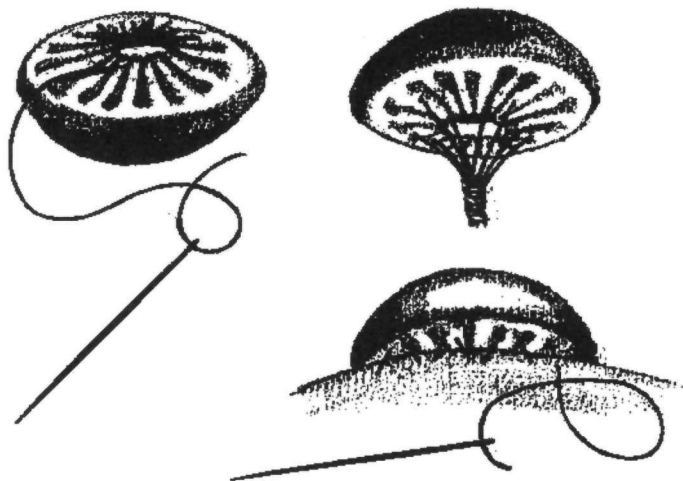
Buttonholes

Use silk, linen, or wool thread for handworked buttonholes. Make the buttonholes at least twice the length of the button diameter.

Buttonholes can be functional or purely decorative. Cut functional buttonholes open only enough to fit the button. Decorative buttonholes are left uncut.

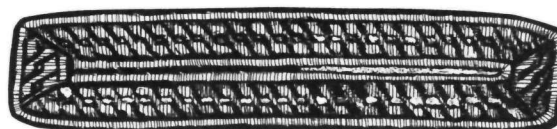


Non-functional buttonhole



Buttons

Coat buttons range from 5/8 to 1" (1.5 to 2.5 cm) in diameter. Cover unshanked, domed wooden blanks with the same fabric as the coat. Attach functional buttons with a thread shank. Attach non-functional buttons flat against the coat. Shank metal buttons were also used.



Decorative braid buttonholes

Simulate or decorate buttonholes with simple or elaborate metallic braids mitred at the corners. This technique can be used to disguise machine-made buttonholes.

Illustration scales vary.

Man's Coat, 1730–1750

Materials and notions

45" wide: 4 3/4 yds with nap (115 cm: 4.3 m)

60" wide: 3 1/2 yds with nap (150 cm: 3.2 m)

Lining to correspond.

Interfacing: approximately 1 1/4 yds (1.1 m)

depending on coat length. May be pieced if necessary.

Canvas and wadding for skirt: approximately

1 5/8 to 3 1/4 yds (1.5 to 3 m) depending on how

heavily the skirt is interfaced.

Pocket fabric: 1/2 yd (50 cm)

Buttons: 5/8 to 1" diameter (1.5 to 2.5 cm); number

according to taste for front, cuffs, flaps, and side

pleats.

Thread: cotton for machine sewing, silk or linen for

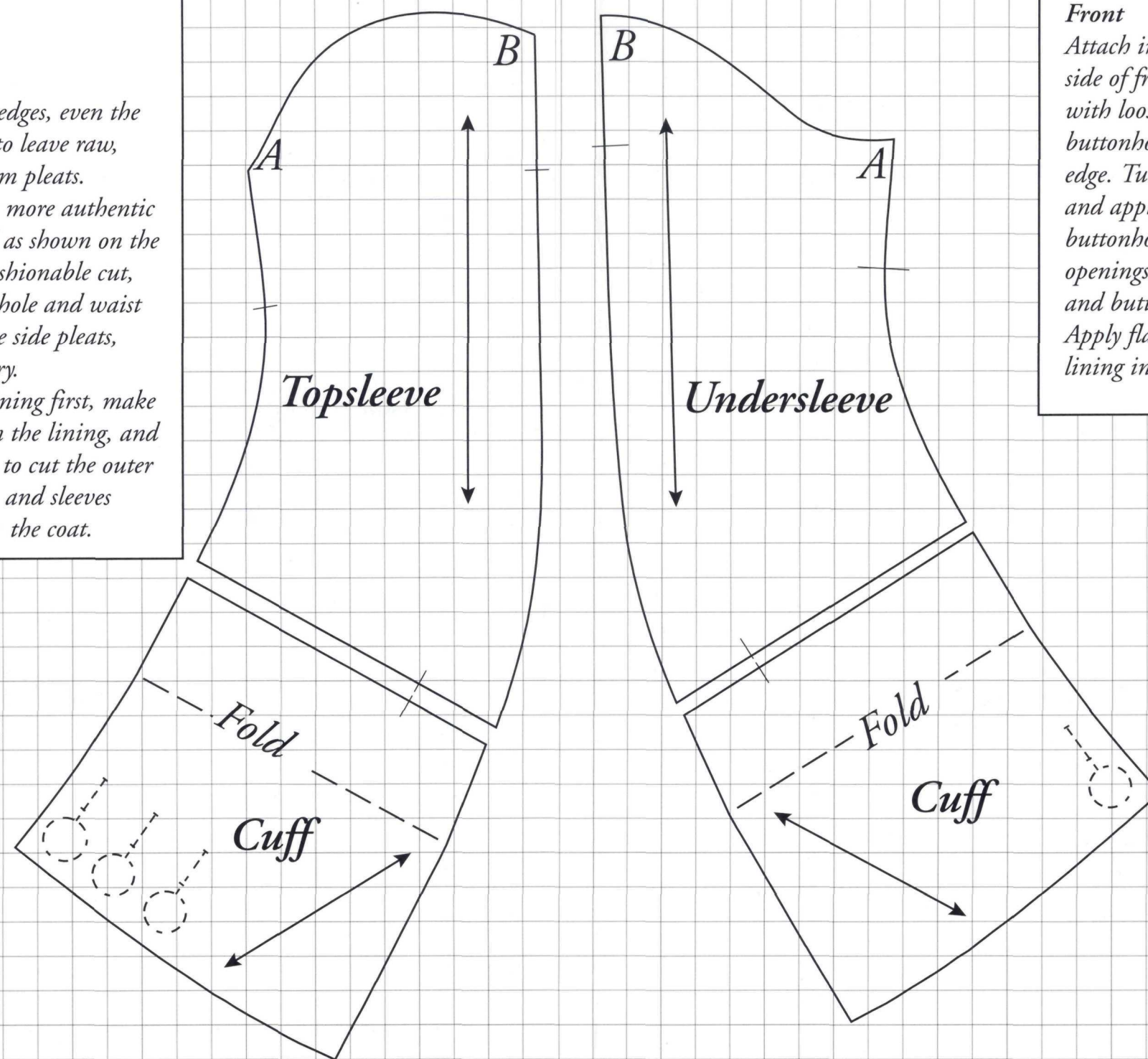
hand sewing. Buttonhole twist: silk, linen, or wool.

Basic assembly

Add seam allowances to all edges, even the edges you may be planning to leave raw, except the top of the side seam pleats.

On narrower fabric or for a more authentic look the skirt may be pieced as shown on the pattern. To create a more fashionable cut, narrow the back at the armhole and waist and increase the depth of the side pleats, piecing the fabric as necessary.

To fit the garment cut the lining first, make the necessary adjustments on the lining, and then use the adjusted lining to cut the outer fabric. Line the front, back, and sleeves separately before assembling the coat.



Front

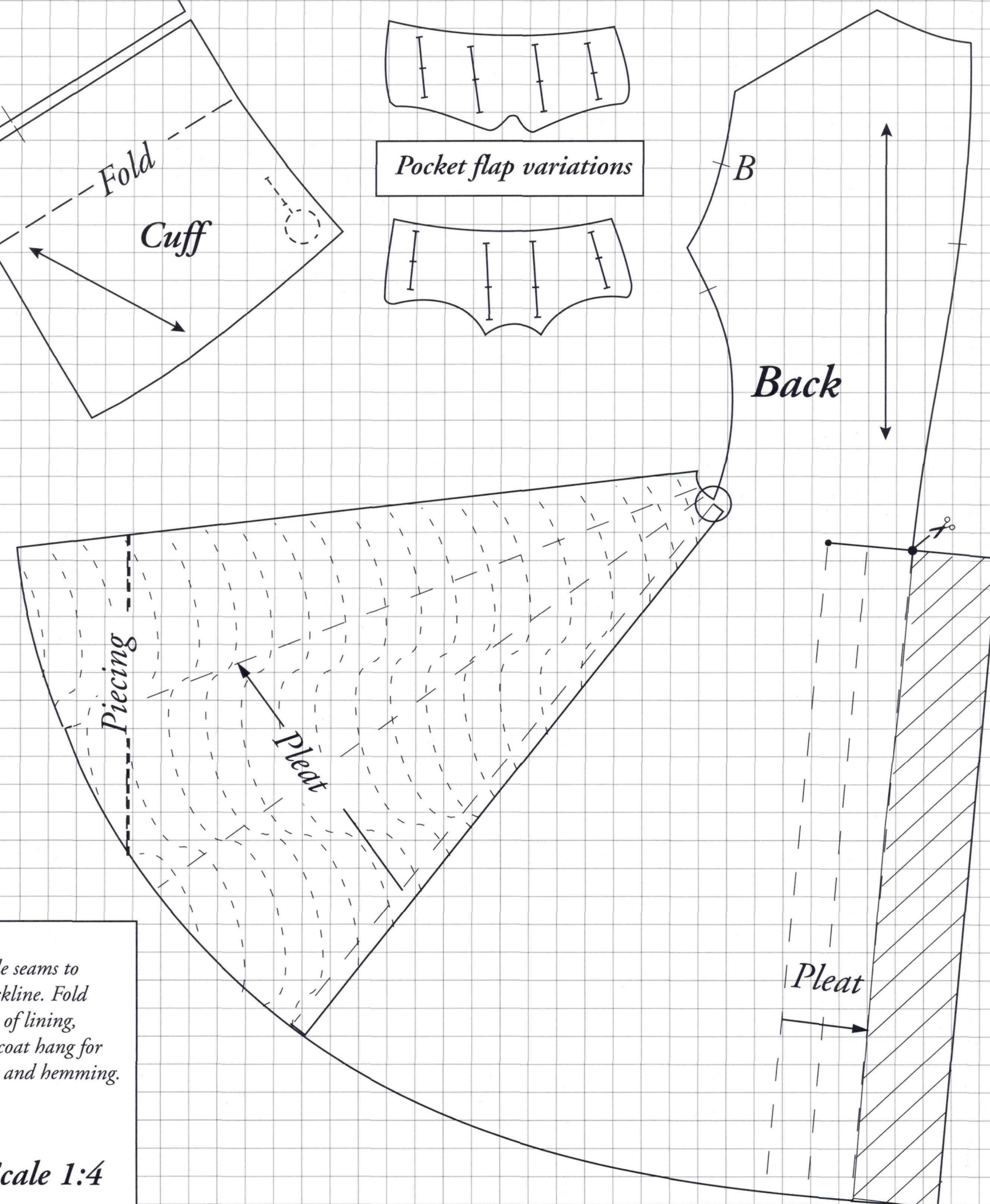
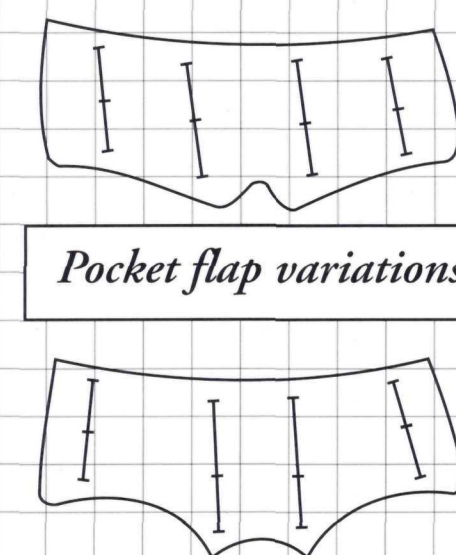
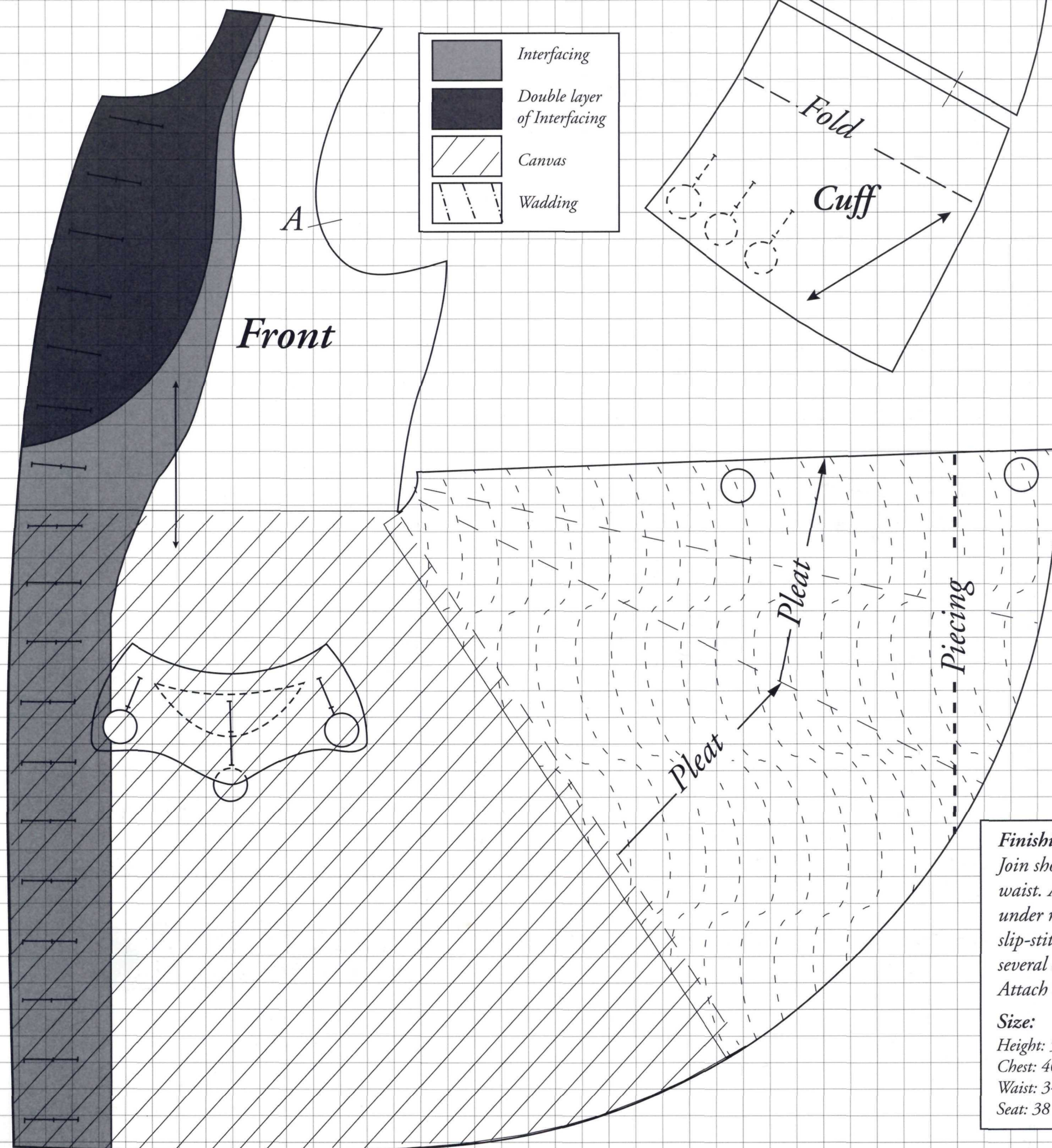
Attach interfacing to wrong side of front edge and skirt with loose stitches. Make buttonholes along left front edge. Turn under front edge and apply strip of lining to buttonhole area. Make pocket openings. Make pocket flaps and buttonholes on flaps. Apply flaps. Baste body of lining in place.

Back

Join the centre back seam to the waist. Clip diagonally through seam allowance to large dot, then straight to small dot. Finish edge of vent opening by turning under and stitching or leaving edge raw. Form pleats each side of centre back. Finish upper edge of back pleat. Form side pleats and press in place. Line back, basting lining in place.

Sleeves and cuffs

Join elbow and front seams of sleeves and cuffs. Line cuff, make buttonholes. Join right side of cuff lining to right side of sleeve. Line sleeve. Fold cuff edge of sleeve lining over raw edge of cuff. Stitch in place. Fold up cuff along fold line.



Finishing

Join shoulder seams and side seams to waist. Apply binding to neckline. Fold under remaining raw edges of lining, slip-stitch in place. Let the coat hang for several days before marking and hemming. Attach buttons. Press.

Size:

Height: 5'10" (178 cm)

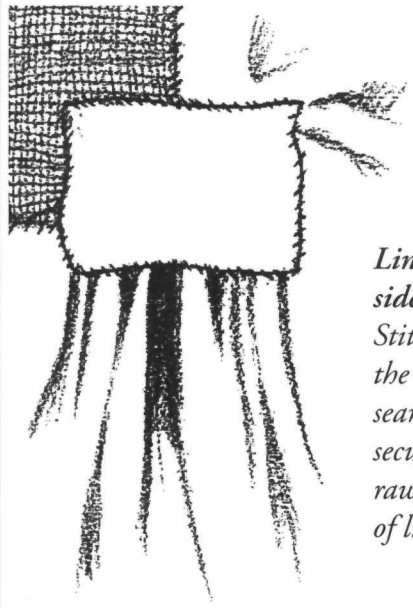
Chest: 40" (102 cm)

Waist: 34" (87 cm)

Seat: 38" (96.5 cm)

Scale 1:4

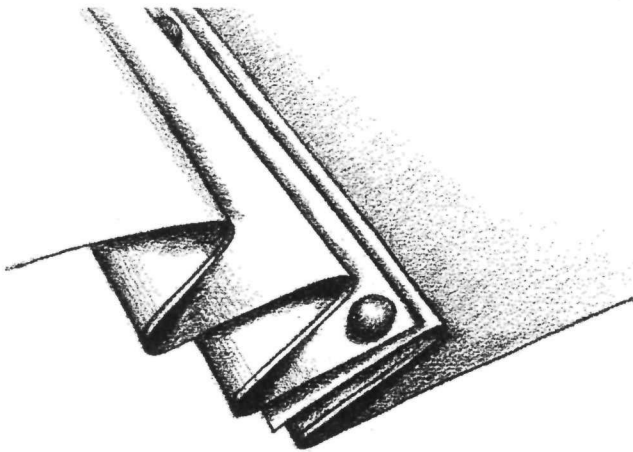
Man's Coat, 1730–1750 Back Details



Lining patch at top of side pleat (interior)
Stitch the raw edges of the tops of the side seam pleats together to secure them. Cover the raw edges with a patch of lining fabric.

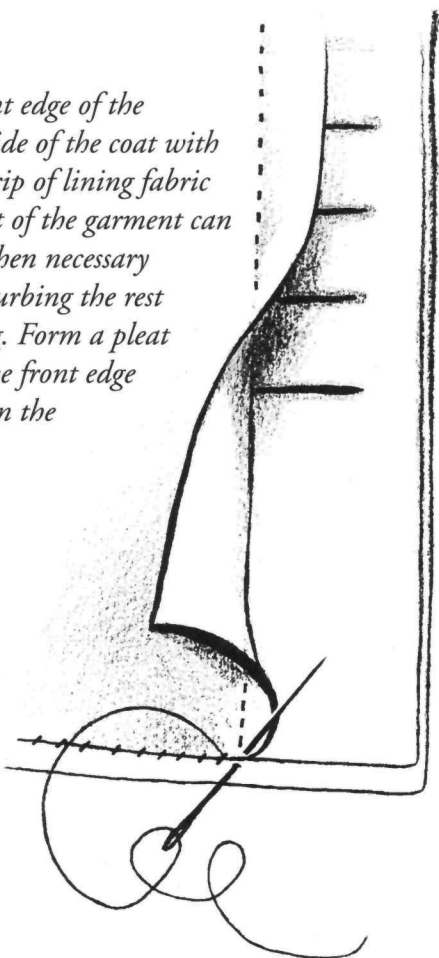
Pleats secured with buttons

Secure the side pleats permanently with buttons, usually non-functioning, at the hem edge and halfway along the length of the pleat. Stitch the inner folds of the pleats loosely together at the same points.



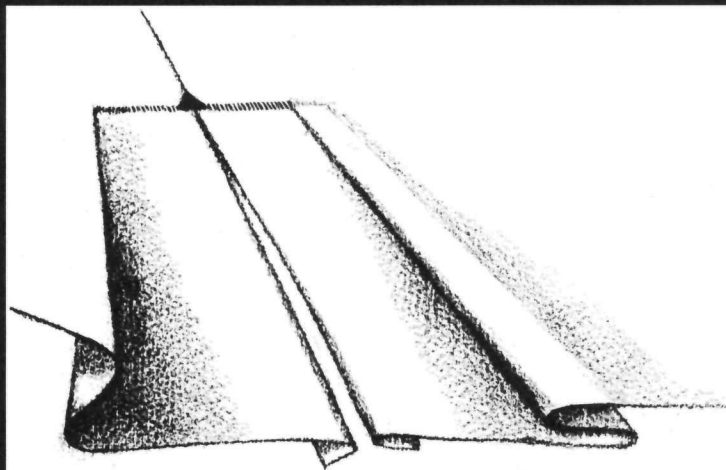
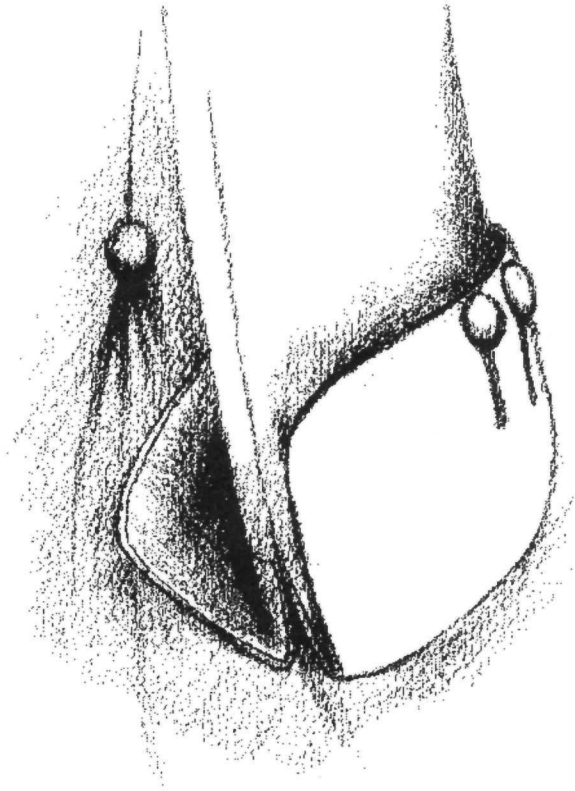
Lining

Line the front edge of the buttonhole side of the coat with a separate strip of lining fabric so either part of the garment can be relined when necessary without disturbing the rest of the lining. Form a pleat parallel to the front edge of the coat in the body of the lining.



Open cuffs

A variation to the barrel cuff is the open cuff. Line the cuff, leaving the back seam open. Attach the cuff to the sleeve, leaving the elbow seam of the sleeve open to a point above the fold of the cuff.

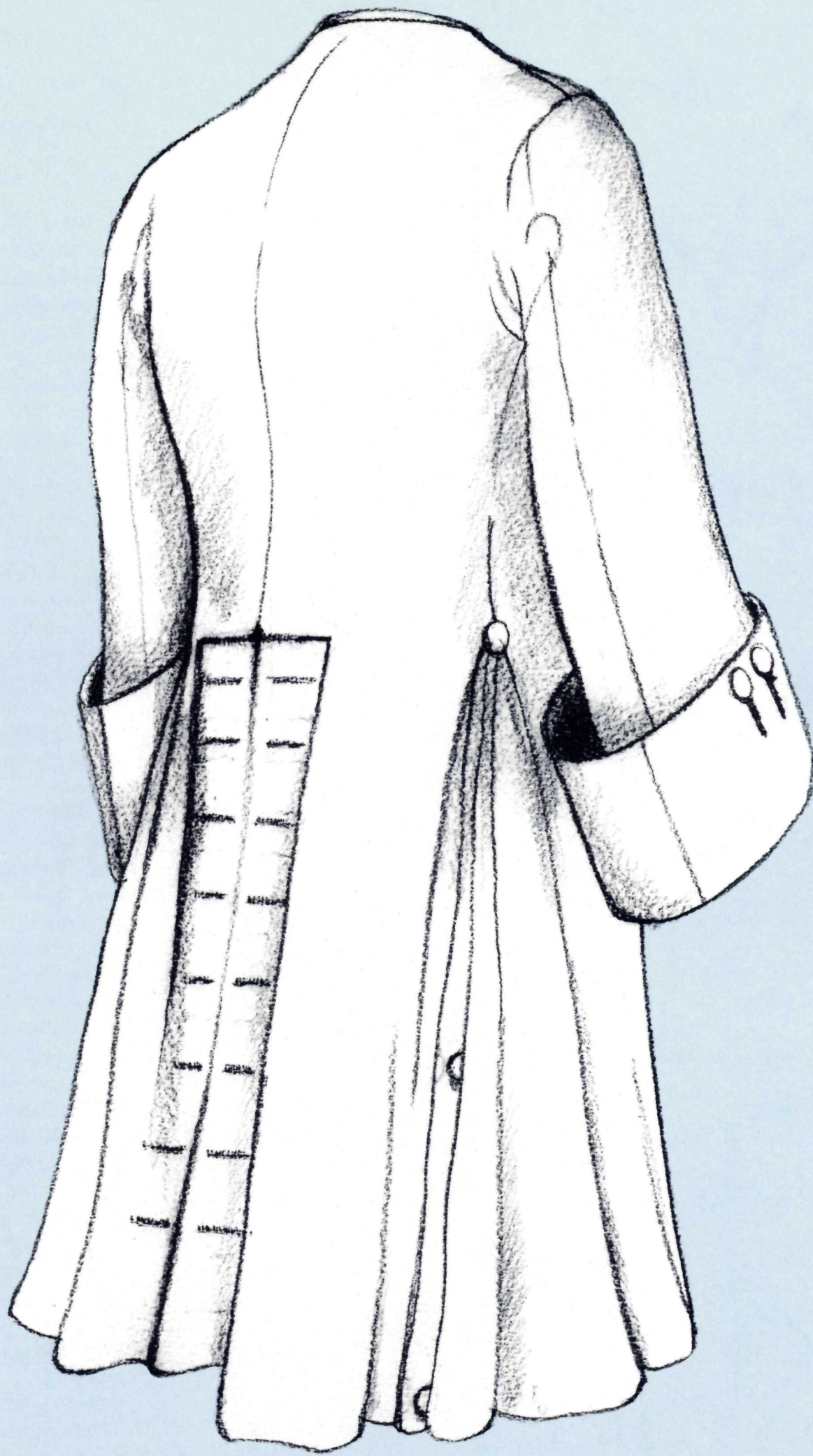


Back vent

Form the vertical pleat on each side of the back vent opening. The back will overlap the seam allowance at the top of the vent. Finish the raw edge at the top of the vent with buttonhole stitches or a fine running stitch, or cover it with braid to simulate a buttonhole. Reinforce the bottom of the centre back seam with a buttonhole-stitched arrowhead.

Man's Coat, 1730–1750

Back View



Silk and velvet coats were lined in silk, and wool coats were usually lined in wool serge. The sleeves and the back from the waist up may be lined in linen. In silk or velvet coats the edge of the lining is folded under and slip-stitched to the turned-back edges of the coat. If made in wool the edges of the coat front, hem, back vent, flaps, and cuffs could be left raw. The pieces are cut with a seam allowance that is trimmed away just outside the seam line once the layers of fabric are stitched together on the seam line. A strip of heavy linen canvas interfacing is placed

along the front edges. The cuffs and pocket flaps may be interfaced with a lighter canvas. The skirt fronts may be interfaced with one or more layers of canvas and wadding. The side pleats, front and back, may be padded with a thin layer of cotton or wool batting to give the skirt the fashionable swing. The top of the side pleats and back vent may be reinforced with small patches of linen on the wrong side. Buttonholes down the back pleats are optional.



Re-creating the Coat of the Soldiers of the Compagnies franches de la Marine

From 1683 until 1760, soldiers from the Navy Department garrisoned France's possessions in North America. Usually called "Troupes de la Marine" or the "Compagnies franches de la Marine," these men formed the regular force defending places like Louisbourg, Québec, Montréal, and Détroit, and also forts like Saint-Frédéric, Chambly, Niagara, and Duquesne. From 1716 until 1760 their uniform changed little. The data given here can help you re-create the coat (or justaucorps) these soldiers wore during that period.

Since no original coat from the Compagnies franches has survived, the details are based on careful analysis of original documents describing coats issued to troops in Canada, of French army regulations and practices, and of period illustrations of army and navy troops.

Soldiers', sergeants', and cadets' coats were made of grey-white well-filled wool cloth (drap) with a lining of blue wool serge. Officers' coats were made of very fine white drap similar to what we know today as "doeskin." The barrel cuffs were of fine blue drap. The exact shade of blue used for the uniforms is open to debate. The correct colour is likely darker than a modern royal blue, but not as dark as navy blue.

The buttons were of stamped sheet brass with shanks soldered to the backs. They were slightly over one inch in diameter. Until about 1750 there were 3 on each cuff, 5 on each pocket flap, 1 at the top of each set of side pleats, and 18 down the front.

Soldiers' coats did not have functional pockets. Sergeants' coats had pockets made of unbleached linen. The total length of the coat was to be one ponce (slightly less than 1 1/16 inch) above the ground when the soldier was kneeling. The sword belt marked the waist while resting on the top of the side-pleat buttons.

Until about 1750 there was a small vertical pleat on each side of the back vent, as shown in the pattern. After 1750 the pleats disappeared and the vent overlapped slightly. All buttonholes were functional, except maybe the ones on the pocket flaps.

Re-creating the Coat of the Soldiers of the *Compagnies franches de la Marine*

Officers' uniforms did not become mandatory until the 1730s although uniforms were worn earlier by some officers. There were 5 gilded buttons on each cuff, 5 on each pocket, 1 at the top of each side pleat, and 3 along the length of these pleats. "Lace" (braid) in any form on the coat was forbidden. Officers' coats followed civilian fashion, with padding and stiffening in proper areas. They did not change after 1750.

Sergeants' coats were made of a finer drap than soldiers' coats. The buttons were gilded. Sergeants wore gold lace on their cuff buttonholes until 1750, when this was changed to gold lace edging on the cuffs and pocket flaps.

Cadets were officers' sons who served as soldiers while waiting for openings in the officers' ranks. They wore the same uniform as soldiers, but on their right shoulders they had aiguillettes, or shoulder knots, of steel-tipped white and blue silk.

Drummers wore blue coats with red cuffs and red serge lining. All seams were outlined with King's livery lace: a white chain on a crimson or red background. This lace was expensive to make and explained in part why a drummer's coat was worth almost twice as much as a soldier's coat.

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The pattern and construction details are based on original 18th-century garments in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum, New York; the David M. Stewart Museum, Montréal; the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto; and other European and North American collections.

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