

## **The Development of the Waistcoat and the c.1780 Joseph Nourse Waistcoat**

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The waistcoat dates back to the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Purportedly, the first waistcoat was introduced to the English court by King Charles II in 1666. By 1680 the attire, which was introduced by Charles II, a long coat that hung to below the knees, accompanied by a waistcoat underneath of approximately the same length, if not slightly shorter, worn over a shirt and breeches, became the standard attire for both the English and French. Both the coat and waistcoat had full-length sleeves.

SLIDE 1 – King Charles II

SLIDE 2 – Charlecote Park by un-known artist, 1696

Take notice to the gentleman on horseback

SLIDE 3 – detail – Here in a detail of him, you can see that he is wearing a full-length waistcoat underneath his coat

SLIDE 4 – c.1690 waistcoat, the type that would be worn for close to half a century before becoming modernized to what is more commonly thought of as a waistcoat in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

By the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the waistcoat started to be worn both with and without sleeves. It was not until around 1750 that the full-length sleeves on a waistcoat were all but disposed of for the more popular and stylish sleeveless form of a waistcoat. Common practices in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century lead to men wearing the waistcoat and

outer coat outside the house with a waistcoat, and a waistcoat in more of a casual manner within ones own home without the covering of an outer coat.

By the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century the length of the waistcoat finally became shorter, more as we would think of a waistcoat or suit vest today; but not quite. Leading up through the latter part of the 17<sup>th</sup> and into the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries waistcoats were made of similar or complementing colors.

SLIDE 5 – Dressed Fashion Print c.1710 – dressed with actual pieces of fabric. Here we can see the use of the same material for both the outer coat and the waistcoat.

(change slide talk later on it)

As fashion styles progressed, the waistcoat played a more prominent role. The decoration became richer, more luscious, more appealing and the center of attention for men's attire. Gone were the days of matching the waistcoat to the outer coat with the same color and material. Silk with contrasting satin were becoming more common, the used of glass, gems, silver and gold thread.

SLIDE 6 – Enoch Seeman painting of Sir John Cust and his wife Anne and daughter Dorothy to his left, c.1743. To his right is a slightly later style matching coat and waistcoat compared to his most fashionable white waistcoat with gold brocade.

SLIDE 7 – George Lucy, portrayed by Batoni in 1758, like Sir John Cust in the previous slide, is seen in the most fashionable of attire including a satin waistcoat with gold thread and embroidered with sprigs of tiny flowers. This image is a great

example of how the outer coat became a “frame” to show off the elaborate detail of the waistcoat.

SLIDE 8 – The Angling Party by Edward Smith, c. 1773, demonstrates how not only fashion was presented at an event, but also that the latest in fashion, like today, is not accepted by everybody. Let’s take a closer look at the details.

SLIDE 9 – AND SPECIFICALLY

SLIDE 10 – (shadowed) Notice the short waistcoat, left of the screen, with the framing of the outer coat on the young gentleman while the older gentleman retains the more conservative look of decades earlier with the longer coat and waistcoat.

By the end of the third quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the waistcoat became more of a worn panel of fabric, by this I mean the front was specifically for display, while the backs were often made of plain cotton or linen. The end of the century started a new trend in waistcoats, for the first time they were actually longer than the outer coat, usually be two inches or so; this was to display the waistcoat even when the coat was closed. Another fashionable change was the addition of a collar. The collar was to stand up, again above the coat.

With an understanding of waistcoats up to and through 1780, we can finally take a look at one of our own – the c.1780 gentleman’s printed silk and satin waistcoat with linen back and lining once owned by Joseph Nourse. The accession number of this garment is M65.237 and its provenance is from Joseph Nourse by descent to Mrs. John W. Stenhouse, NSCDA member with the District of Columbia Society and gifted to Dumbarton House in 1965. The current exhibition, Preparing for the Ball,

Costume of the Early Nation is the third exhibition that this waistcoat has been involved with since becoming part of the Dumbarton House collection. In 1994-95, it was displayed in the exhibition titled, In Search of Joseph Nourse: 1754 – 1841, and in 1997-98 it was on loan to the Museum of American Financial History in New York, NY, for the exhibition, Rags to Riches, The Financing of America 1776 – 1836.

This waistcoat, unlike many others of the period, is printed and not embroidered. The most fashionable trend of the day was to have elaborately embroidered waistcoats with flowers and sprigs throughout and often trimmed with swags. Joseph Nourse took the more economical route; instead of spending money on expensive embroidery and brilliant additions such as glass and gems, and gold and silver thread for a more common everyday waistcoat, Mr. Nourse went for a printed waistcoat with everything that would ordinarily be found on the more expensive examples shown earlier. Why use embroidery when only those who intimately study the piece even realize that it is not?

But do not be fooled, a printed waistcoat is not of a lesser class. Surprisingly, this specific waistcoat is actually quite a rare piece. With diminutive design details, it is often hard to even see that it is printed.

SLIDE 11 – Here we can see the great difficulty associated with printing one-off pieces. Each button is printed individually, flat, before being made into a button. The number below each button corresponds with the button position on the waistcoat counting from the top.

The buttons are just the beginning in printing this waistcoat. This waistcoat was printed flat as opposed to al a disposione, or in the round. Even thought the left and

right panels are nearly identical mirror images of each other with their trimmings, the sprigs are all printed in the same direction. In woodblock printing, yes this piece is woodblock printed as opposed to stenciled as the label upstairs says; in woodblock printing register marks are used to guide for proper positioning of the woodblock on the material to be printed; in this case a textile. Looking at a mapping of the textile, marking each register mark, we gain an understanding of how this waistcoat was printed.

SLIDE 12 - First, we will look at a single panel of the waistcoat

SLIDE 13 - Now, if we zoom in to the area on the front and below the arm, register marks are abound. Starting with the tear as our reference point, the register mark for the red buds of the flowers are marked off below.

SLIDE 14

SLIDE 15 – a map of all the register marks for the red bud on a single panel of the waistcoat reveal quite a repetitive pattern.

SLIDE 16 – again using the tear as a reference point, this time we will look at the green stems and leaves.

SLIDE 17

SLIDE 18 – Mapped out, notice the difference in block shape as opposed to that used for the red

SLIDE 19 – By overlapping the two mappings, and looking back at the waistcoat, first notice the reference point again, and note how the two blocks actually overlap one another using the same line for the edge of the block.

More research needs to be completed to figure out exactly how the block was used to print the buds of the sprigs, but the block for the stems was set up on a grid of 8 by 8.

SLIDE 20 - The overall outcome ends up being quite pleasing to the eye, and yet at a distance one can not tell that the waistcoat is even printed as opposed to embroidered.