

Carriage Museum of America-Library

ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

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DRIVING IN THE RAIN.

We imagine that many people don't go driving with horses in the rain now days unless they have some event already scheduled, but for 19th century drivers it was probably just another day--with the rain aprons close at hand. It was standard practice to have a carriage equipped with rain aprons and the earliest mention of this is in William Felton's *A Treatise on Carriages* in 1794 He says:

"KNEE-BOOTS OR APRONS.--Are coverings for the knees of the passengers in a chaise or phaeton; they are made of a fine grain leather, the same as the head, and lined with linen or light woollen serge, with a flap made of the same materials as the lining, which turns over and ornaments the top; they are made to extend from the foot-board to which they are fixed, to the top of the elbow in front, with cheeks sewed and welted on the sides, and are fastened to buttons fixed on purpose for them.

"At the top of some knee-boots, an iron-jointed rod is sewed in the leather, which fixes in spring sockets on the elbow rail; the particular use of the rods is to support the knee-boot straight and free from the knee of the passenger, and to preserve them from the chance of falling out by violence of any jolt the carriage may meet with.

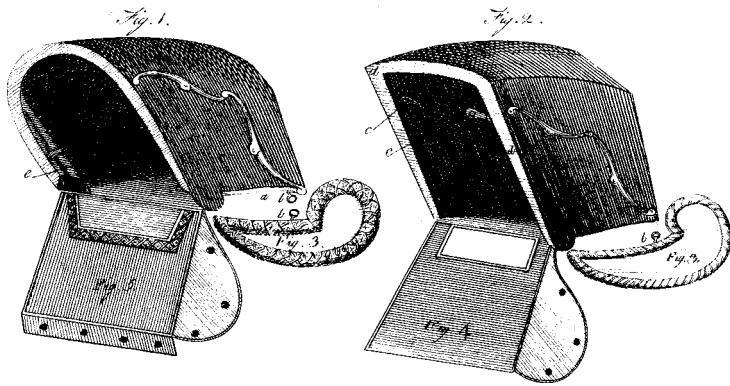
"Fig. 4, A knee-boot made to fix on the foot-board, and to hitch on at the top with a ring or leather loop to a button; the rings are most convenient.

"Fig. 5, A knee-boot, which takes off occasionally, being only hitched on to buttons fixed in the footboard, having also an iron frame at the top for safety."

For driving in bad rainy weather other arrangements on carriages and coaches have dashes and fenders to keep the mud and water from being thrown on the passengers, umbrella baskets and umbrella holders for



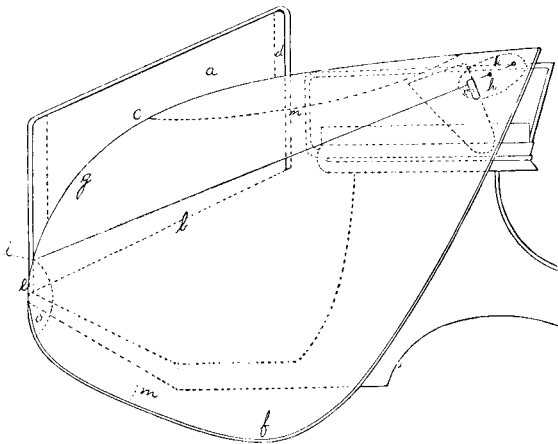
A GUSTY DAY IN APRIL. Drawn by A. Berghaus. *Harper's Weekly* April 5, 1884.



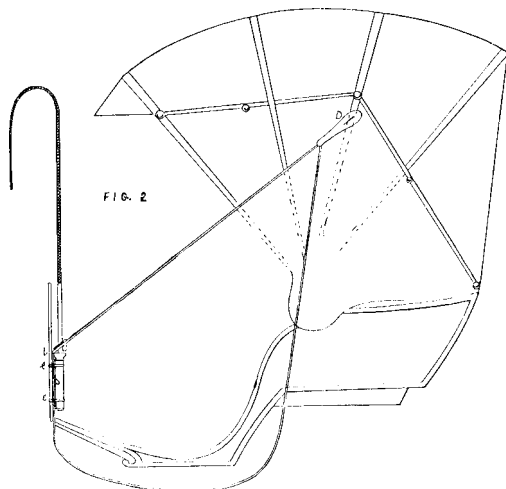
KNEE-BOOTS or APRONS. *A Treatise on Carriages.* 1794.

keeping umbrellas handy, standing and folding tops for vehicles, and if you really don't like driving in the rain there was the storm buggy for the total protection of the driver.

According to the *Private Stable* by James Garland, page 354, a properly appointed stable also had on hand rain coats and hats or hat coverings. Rain coats were referred to as Mackintoshes and Upper Benjamins. The word Mackintosh comes from a Scottish inventor of rubberized cloth in 1823 named Charles Mackintosh. The name Mackintosh stayed although several modifications were made over the years to make a more practical waterproof cloth. Garland has this to say: "The material of these storm coverings should be of a cloth texture in preference to those with a shiny surface. The coat should be single breasted and with pockets in the sides with flaps. The coat is usually made so as to fall with in about ten inches of the ground. The hat cover should be of the same material as that of which the coat is made.

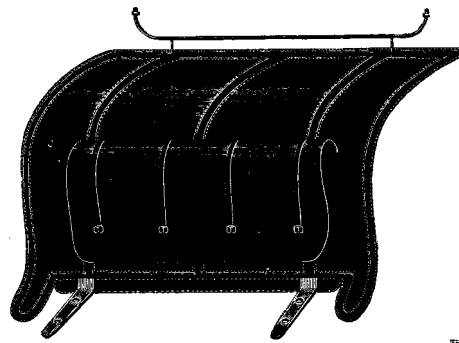


Apron for the Dickey Seat that Fastens to the Knobs on the Seat Rail.
Hub 1884.

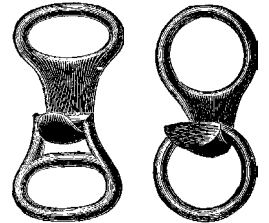


Apron for a Close Top that Fastens by a Leather Strap to the Inside Top Bow.
Hub 1884.

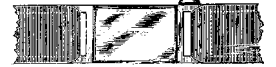
APRON FLAPS AND FASTENERS.



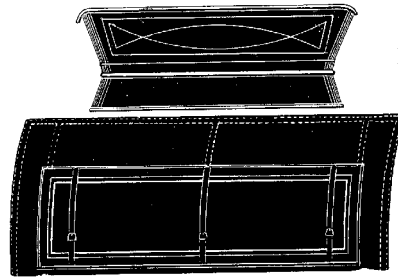
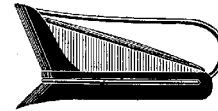
Apron Flap with Fasteners on the Back of Dash.



S. D. Kimbark catalog
1888.

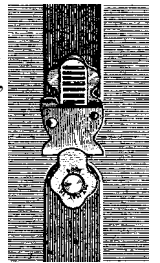


Snell's Patent.



End and Back of Dickey Seat, and Dash
with Apron Flap.

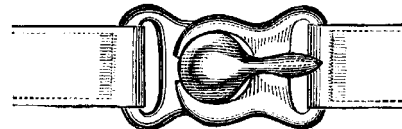
Sold by Mitchell
Buckle Mfg. Co.,
Boston, MA.



Elm City
Pattern.



Osborn
Pattern.



Thomas & Parker's Patent.



Littlejohn's Apron Fastener.



Pray's Patent
Apron
Fastener.



CHRONOLOGY OF APRON FLAP FASTENERS.

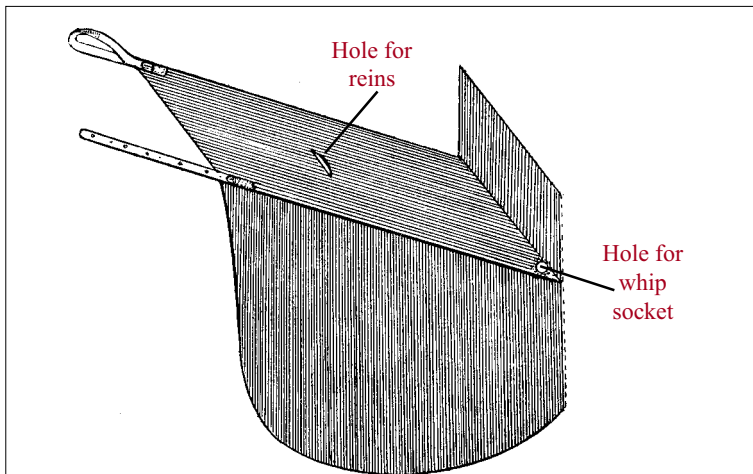
- No. 103,142, May 17, 1870. Robert Clingen, Boston, Massachusetts.
- No. 147,861, February 24, 1874. William K. Parker, Boston, Massachusetts.
- No. 159,717, February 9, 1875. Chauncey Thomas & William K. Parker, Boston, Massachusetts.
- No. 160,020, February 23, 1875. John A. Kincaid, Boston, Massachusetts.
- No. 213,256, March 11, 1879. Adolphus G. Snell, New Haven, Connecticut.
- No. 231,048, August 10, 1880. James Ives, Mount Carmel, Connecticut.
- No. 234,301, November 9, 1880. Charles F. Littlejohn, New Haven, Connecticut.
- No. 268,723, December 5, 1882. William K. Parker, New Haven, Connecticut.

United States Patents

Upper Benjamins, *i. e.*, coats with a series of capes of waterproof box-cloth, are frequently used in place of the simpler forms of waterproof coverings." Under the subject of hats Garland says: "the cassimere one to take its place in threatening weather." In *Driving for Pleasure* by Francis T. Underhill he refers to this hat as the "storm hat," page 86.

We can not think of any class of vehicles that would not have made use of the rain apron. If a vehicle did not come with a rain apron there were speciality companies that sold portable rain aprons to be used with horse drawn vehicles. For rain aprons on Victorias and similar carriages the arrangement of the rain apron was done with style. A patent leather flap/pocket was arranged on the dash board or behind the driver's seat. This flap/pocket was kept closed with three or four leather straps and fasteners. Once the rain apron was unfolded there was a means provided in which to fasten it open by straps or knobs. With this type of unfolding rain apron the lower edge was permanently attached inside the flap/pocket.

MATERIALS FOR THE RAIN APRON.



Jacket Apron for a Four-Passenger Coupe-Rockaway.
Hub June 1883, page 227.

The jacket apron is specially designed for this class of work, as the front seats are usually low, and the intention is to keep the apron as much as possible from the knees. We, therefore, extend the jacket on the inside of the dash only to the top of the whip-socket.

In cutting and fitting this apron, we cut a piece of sufficient size to cover the entire front of the dash, also making ample allowance for shrinkage and hems. The remainder of this apron consists of one piece only, which is measured and cut from the roll or piece.

These aprons are usually made of rubber, and the material is of ample width to extend from the top of the dash to the socket, to form this half jacket and the whole apron. We allow for shrinkage and hem, and cut the goods down at the sides of the dash, to the height of the socket; then draw up the material to its place, and trim off to the desired shape. A circular hole is punched at the turn, over the socket, for the whip. Patches of leather are therefore required at these points for this purpose, and also for stays. A rein-hole is added, and at the upper corners we add buckles and straps, which slip through a ring made fast to the door-pillar. The front covering of the dash is joined to this, and bound in at the sides and top, as shown by the dotted lines. For medium-price work, however, this binding is often omitted, the edges of the rubber being then turned in and stitched.

When not in use, this apron is neatly folded, and sets against the dash, where it is held in place by straps.

James Garland in 1899 has this to say about the material for rain aprons: "A very serviceable wet weather aprons made of a soft dark water-proof material with a woollen lining.

From the *Carriage Monthly* February 1885 page 298: "There are but two general materials used for aprons namely, leather and gum. The latter is, however, divided in various different kinds; we have the gum drill, gum duck, and what is known to us as simply gum (such as gossamers are made from.) The gum drill is perhaps the best, as the gum duck is sometimes found to peel, while

the gum is so very thin that not much strength is left it. The leather is very good, but it comes high and requires lining." We believe gum refers to probably a varnish like substance being painted or baked on the cloth. We have seen leather aprons lined with bright orange flannel or blue plaid.

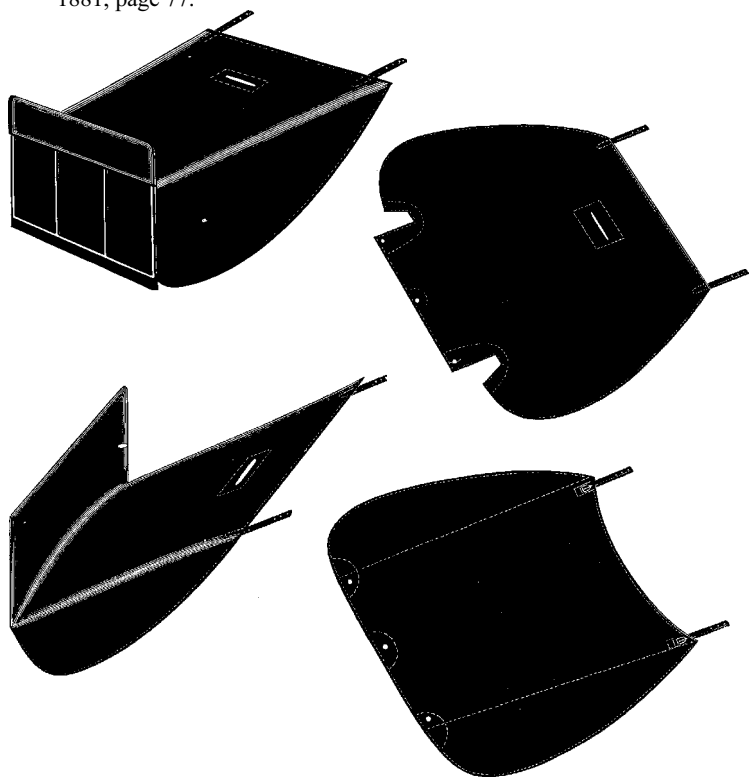
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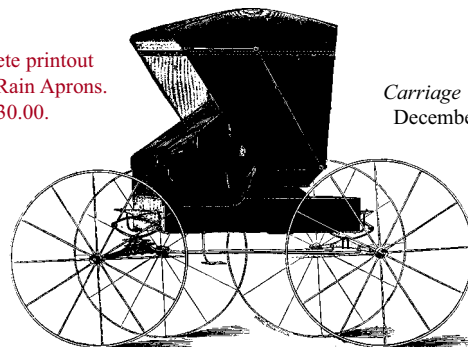
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Carriage Monthly
 December 1882

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