

The Forgotten Accessory

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"From its place as simply a useful accessory, the decorative pin has become a most important detail of dress. It still performs the old function of enhancing the beauty of the person and adding distinction and dignity, but today it does more than that. The jeweled pin or bracelet, appropriately worn, forms the last in the perfection of the completed costume." -1928 Baird-North Jewelry catalog.

When we think of Model A era jewelry, what comes to mind? Necklaces are usually at the top of the list, closely followed by earrings and bracelets. But how often do you think about wearing a brooch or pin? The jewelry catalogs of the time have pages and pages devoted to pins of all types. The materials range from platinum and diamonds to paste and pot metal. There are cameos, mosaics, gemstones, pearls, and even coral and jade.

So why such a dearth in visibility? One of the reasons we tend to overlook this jewelry is its size. Pins and brooches are relatively small and do not show up well in pictures. I didn't realize this fact until I started researching the subject and quickly noticed how hard it was to find pictures with these details. With a lot of searching, I was able to round up a few pictures of ladies wearing pins for this article. Most of these are from advertisements or movie magazines.



A La Salle Car ad shows a bar pin matching our lovely lady driver's outfit-Good Housekeeping May 1930



These three actresses from a 1928 Metropolitan Studios publicity shot demonstrate three different styles of pins.



Ethel Barrymore wearing a brooch on her dress strap-Cosmopolitan magazine October 1929



A housewife with a circle brooch holding the draped accent on her dress-Good Housekeeping June 1928.



Notice the petite bar pin at the neckline in this illustration-Carson Pirie Scott & Co. 1928 Jewelry catalog.

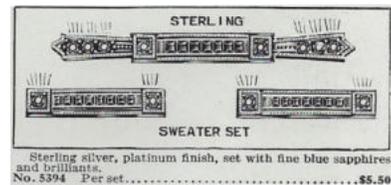


Actress Polly Moran wears a lovely brooch on her coat-Picture Play magazine July 1928



Polly Moran wearing a stylized brooch-Silver Screen Magazine December 1931

Continuing my research, I pulled out a number of era jewelry catalogs. In just one 1931 catalog, I counted over twenty-five pages dedicated to pins and brooches, and many more pages with pins as part of other collections. In reviewing multiple catalogs, I discovered an unforeseen variety of brooches and pins. Here is a small selection of what I found:



Sweater sets consisted of one large and two small matching bar pins. I'm not sure how these were worn but I find them interesting.

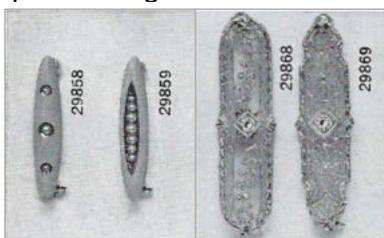
Bar pins could be fine jewelry or costume and the variety and size was endless. Pierced or filigree, diamond or rhinestones, or just engraved metal, they seemed to be very popular.



Beauty pins were a small version of bar pins, usually sold as a set. Don't confuse these with lingerie clasps which although about the same size, don't have a pin backing.



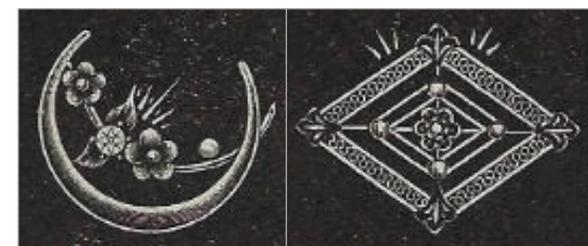
Semi-precious stones such as lapis, chrysoprase, and even rose quartz were often found in era jewelry.



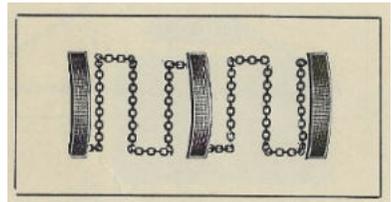
Handy pins were tiny pins named because of how handy they were for everything. Sometimes they were also called dress pins. I have found versions that range from 1/2 inch to 1 1/2 inches long. But small size didn't always mean small price. The ones above on the right are platinum and gold, with sapphires (left) or diamonds (right.) Adjusted for inflation, they would cost \$200 and \$500 today! So, these were not just fancy safety pins!



True rock crystal was a unique material well-liked in this timeframe. Imitation glass crystal was often used for less expensive versions of the more luxurious pieces.



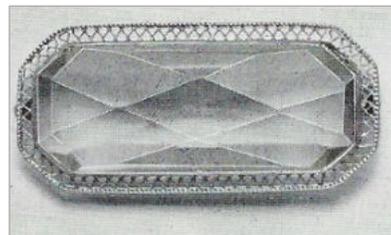
A few more interesting shapes! These were gold, with diamonds and pearls.



Chain pins are also an item I'm not sure how were worn but they seemed prevalent in the catalogs.



Cuff pins were a surprise to me. I couldn't find any reference to them outside the jewelry catalogs, but I assume they were used instead of cuff links for ladies' blouses as they are quite small and were always sold in pairs.



Precious gemstones such as amethyst and aquamarine were used often, sometimes with accent stones and sometimes plain. Synthetic gemstones were also routinely used.



Jade was always fashionable, especially as the interest in Oriental art grew in the 1920s.



Coral is another natural material used. This pin is carved coral with seed pearls and green gold. Green gold is yellow gold with a slightly greenish hint. It's made from an alloy of pure yellow gold and pure silver.



Pearls were not always just an accent. This brooch is made of genuine seed pearls with a 14kt white gold setting.



According to one source, circles are called friendship brooches because of their unbroken lines.



Filigree or "pierced" designs were the most widespread style if the pages in the catalogs are an accurate



The finest cameos were carved from shell. But you can also find some from onyx or other stones. And in the Model A years with the new plastics being introduced, I'm sure there were some made from that also. An often-found design element of the era was a real diamond on a chain.

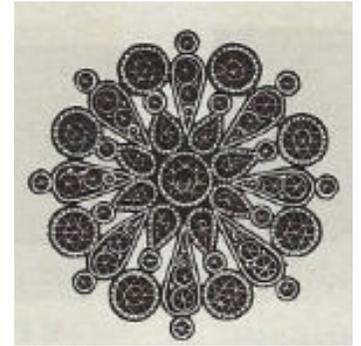
Classic designs were still prevalent, but a few reflected the new modern style. See the bottom two cameos; both have bobs, with the one on the right wearing a cloche.



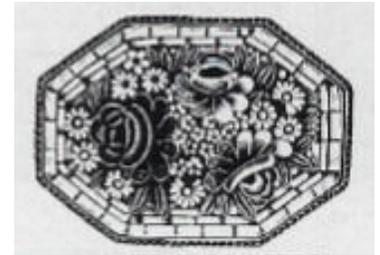
Abalone shell, with pearls on silver in a beautiful bar pin.



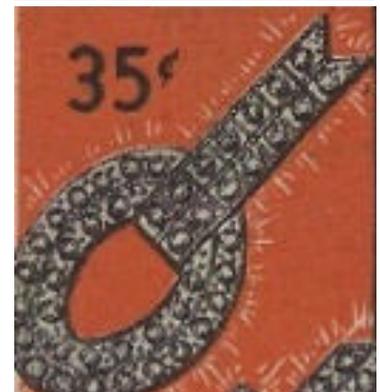
These brooches are called pendant brooches. These are filigree style, with gemstones. The top chain loop folds down when worn as a brooch.



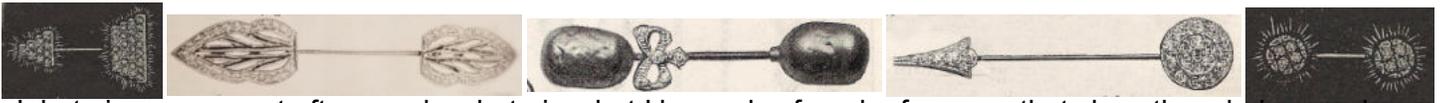
Red Bohemian Garnets were a beautiful stone often used for elegant brooches of all sizes.



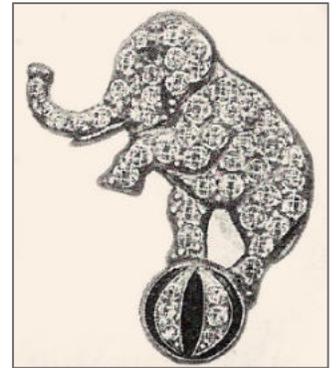
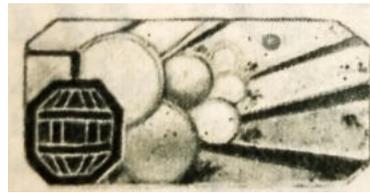
Italian mosaics were delicate little pieces of art. They were made by arranging tiny pieces of glass into pictures.



Rhinestones with a white metal base were part of the rising popularity of costume jewelry in the 1920s and beyond. Quality varied and many were cheap and easily available. But they were sold in both fine jewelry catalogs and general catalogs such as Sears and Roebuck.



Jabot pins were most often used as hat pins, but I have also found references that show them being used as dress brooches. These pins are two-ended. One end twists off so the pin stem can pass through whatever material it is fastened to. Like most other pieces we have looked at, they were available as both fine and costume jewelry.



It wasn't all about grace and elegance—some pins were just for fun! Some of the above are cheap costume jewelry, some are a little better quality but still costume. The dog pins are a good example of this. Although both are costume, the top one, from Montgomery Wards, sold for 19¢. The bottom one was \$3.35, sold by the Jason-Weiler-Baird North Jewelry catalog. That's about \$3 and \$52 in today's money. Sterling silver appears to be considered somewhere in the middle of the fine jewelry-costume jewelry mix as an affordable option. The "aeroplane" and the art deco "bubble" pin in the middle is also sterling silver with cloisonné. The elephant is rhinestones with enamel.

This is a fun one! The unique monkeys on the left are "non-tarnishing metal," set with "whitestone" (rhinestone) with simulated ruby eyes, and faux pearls. It sold for the equivalent today of over \$100. It may be costume, but it's not "cheap jewelry" by any means!



Most pins and brooches of this era used a "C" clasp to secure the pin. The reason for its name is obvious as it simply wire or flattened metal formed in a "C" shape. A trombone clasp was also available but not as common. A trombone clasp had a little pull-push button which locks the pin in place. Safety clasps were in their infancy and were handmade if used, and therefore extremely rare.

As with most things, these styles of clasps were used over a large stretch of time, and some have never gone out of style. The "C" style can still be found today on cheaper jewelry. As such, the clasp is not the only determining factor to consider when accessing age. Materials, design, and the manufacturing processes used also need to be reviewed when trying to decide if a piece is "era." If you plan to wear a pin or brooch in original judging, your safest bet is a "C" fastening!

As you can see, the variety is endless. Of course, there are designs that "look" more vintage to our modern eyes, but in reality, there was a myriad of choices to choose from. I hope these examples inspire you to add more brooches and pins to your Model A outfits. Think of them as the last sparkling details of a well-crafted outfit.

References:

- A.C. Becken Co. 1930 Catalog
- Bellas Hess Spring/Summer 1931 Catalog
- C.R. Hettel Jewelry Co. 1931
- Carson Pirie Scott & Co. 1928 Jewelry Catalog
- Chas. L. Trout Co. 1931 Jewelry Catalog
- Fort Dearborn gift Book 1929
- Jason Weiler-Baird North Co. 1930 Catalog

- Keen's Diamond Merchants 1928 Catalog
- L&C Mayers Co. Inc. 1930
- Montgomery, Wards & Co Fall/Winter -1928-29
- Marshall Field and Co. Counter Sales Book 1928-29
- Richter & Phillips Co. 1931 Catalog
- S.H. Clausin & Co. 1931 Catalog
- Worldcentricitycharm.com

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