

# Clip on Some Elegance

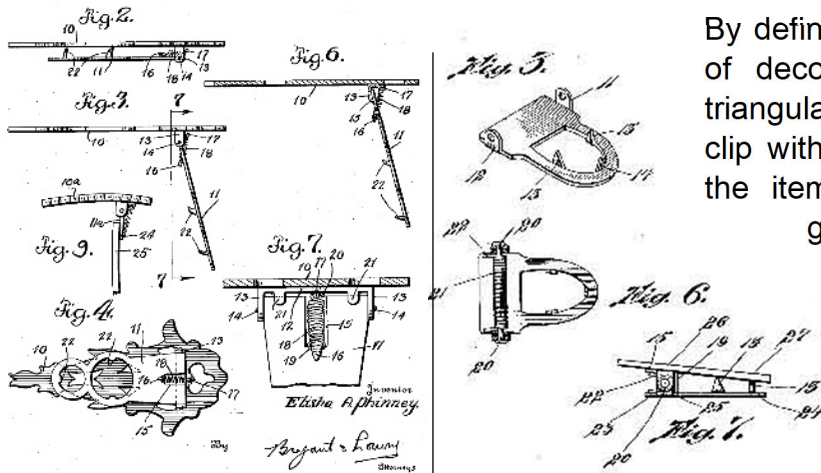
By Sherry Winkinhofer, Northwest Missouri Model A Ford Club

“When a woman can’t afford a new dress, she buys new costume jewelry to brighten up her old ones.” I found this quote in a 1930 article discussing fashion. To me, it highlights the austerity of many of the working-class women of the Model A years. While a working woman could not afford to buy a new dress frequently, she could be a master at changing her looks with accessories. Dress clips were a new fashion embellishment that could be purchased inexpensively to bring new life to last season’s wardrobe.



A "whitestone" dress clip from the Chas. L. Trout 1931 catalog

Dress clips, also known as clip-pins or pin clips, appeared in the late 1920s as the concept of costume jewelry was just becoming fashionable. Before the twenties, only the rich had access to “real” jewelry, with gemstones and precious metals. But due to new manufacturing methods and the social and economic factors following WWI, costume jewelry entered the market and grew trendy quickly among the public



By definition, a dress clip is a piece of decorative jewelry that has a triangular or elongated spring back clip with spikes. The spikes secure the item to the underside of the garment. The pictures below are from 1931 patents showing clip mechanisms.



The wealthy appear to have embraced the concept of dress clips first. The earliest pieces I have found are from Louis Cartier. He also patented a design for a double dress clip/brooch in 1927, although I do not believe it was put into production until after Model A days.



A Diamond Clip Brooch set by Cartier circa 1928.



A Cartier Clip Brooch, with sapphires, rubies, emeralds, and diamonds. Circa. 1928.




Diamond Clip-Brooch, Cartier, London, 1929



Cartier Diamond, Ruby, Sapphire and Emerald dress clip, circa 1930.

The only examples of dress clips in costume jewelry I have found are from 1931. Perhaps it took a while for the style to reach down to the working class. Dress Clips were made from many materials, but rhinestones and crystals were a stylish option, with some type of pot metal, or perhaps silver as a base.



**Dainty Clip**  
For dresses, hats, etc. Spring clip back for fastening. Large (Chanel) crystal stone and glittering rhinestones set in non-tarnishable white metal. Size, 1 1/8 in. length; 7/8 in. wide at top.  
**25E5131**  
Each, Postpaid, **45c**

Bellas Hess Catalog Spring/Summer 1931



**New Dress or Hat Ornaments**  
Spring Clip on Back-Fasten Anywhere

**20 B 7287 CLIP ABOUT 1-IN. 25¢**

**20 B 7232 CLIP ABOUT 1 1/2 IN. 65¢**

**20 B 7288 CLIP ABOUT 1 1/8 IN. 48¢**

Montgomery Ward & Co. Spring/Summer 1931



**Newest CLIP-PIN**

**\$1.00**  
POSTPAID

**26W321**—Clip Pins are the rage in Paris—wear them on your shoulder, your hat, or where you will. Three baguette shaped brilliants and two large full cut stones in a background set entirely with sparkling white rhinestones. **\$1.00** Postpaid.

Sears, Roebuck & Co. Spring/Summer 1931

Cloisonné or Enamel could also be found in novelty clips. These have a non-tarnishing chrome finish.



**EC505**—Clip ornament, French enamel front with genuine Cloisonné enamel decoration, non-tarnishing chrome finish. .... **\$3.00 ea.**

Cloisonné dress clips from the Chas. L. Trout 1931 catalog



**EC506**—Clip ornament in modernistic design, French enamel with egg shell effect, non-tarnishing chrome finish. **\$1.50 ea.**

Dress clips were often worn as a pair.



**VERY NEWEST "PINCLIPS"**  
ANY TWO FOR **65¢** EACH **35¢**

**FOR HAIR HATS DRESSES**

**13F1902**—Charming New Style. "Platinoid," white metal, clips that will not discolor. Do not confuse this high grade with cheap inferior clips. Mounted with tiny white brilliants. Make ideal Christmas gifts. Specify style by letter. Shpg.

Sears, Roebucks, and Co. Fall/Winter Catalog 1931-32. "Any Two for 65¢."



A pair of Cartier diamond clips, circa 1930



**Costume**

Wear two of these exquisite Clasp-Ons says fashionable Paris. One perched on the hat, the twin gracing the frock. White metal with sparkling imitation diamonds. Clasp them anywhere. Postpaid. **14K608A** Price, each, .... **79c**

Montgomery Ward & Co. Spring/Summer 1931 "Wear two of these exquisite clasp-ons says fashionable Paris."

The prevalence of dress clips was helped by their visibility on Hollywood stars. In the 1920s, going to the moving pictures was a favorite leisure activity in the United States. Seeing all those sparkling items on the screen or in the movie magazines and then being able to go to Sears and buy a similar one for 35 cents helped dress clips surge in popularity.



Carole Lombard on the cover of the "Motion Picture Magazine", November 1931.



Another publicity shot of Carole Lombard from 1929. Note the dress clips on the wrap-around collar.



Claudette Colbert wearing dress clips on her straps. From "The New Movie Magazine", July 1931



Carole Lombard wearing a dress clip as a hat ornament, 1931.

Dress clips could be worn in many ways. While they looked wonderful on the neckline, especially on a square collar, they were also at home on a lapel, a shoulder strap, or even as a hat ornament.

The widespread wearing of dress clips lasted into the late '50s, and as such, they are still an easy item to find in antique stores, or online sites such as eBay, and Etsy. Be aware that they are often misidentified as shoe clips, but dress clips usually have a much larger clip, with more aggressive spikes to secure them. Look for classic art deco designs, and you will have a nice accessory for your Model A wardrobe.



Several antiquing and eBay finds from my collection.

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