BACKGROUND BUTTONS #9:
EXAMING CHALLENGERS & FOOLES
Last in a Series Concerning Background Buttons
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As a final review, let's look at some buttons that might be backgrounds or might fool us into thinking they really are when they do not meet the qualifications to be a background button.

The first button features a stamped brass horse and rider leaping a fence. The celluloid behind the horse and rider is molded to depict the fence, crescent moon, stars, and vegetation. Do you know why this button would not qualify as a background button? If you realize that the celluloid is part of the pictorial composition, then you recognize that this example is not a background button.

Let's consider another stamped brass image that appears above celluloid. Here the dashing gentleman and floral detail are above cross-hatched and mottled celluloid. While the celluloid coloring attracts the eye, it is a pattern and not part of the pictorial image. This second celluloid example is a background button.

Our third example features a lovely enameled rose over a screen with an enameled rose border. The screen is not a separate part.
This bone button at first glance certainly appears to be a beautiful example. However, it also does not qualify. When you examine the back, you will see that it is a bone button with a metal front and rim. The bone is not set into a metal or other material back. This is a 19th century bone button with pierced and painted metal embellishment. NBS medium.

The center button is a lovely depiction of two cherubs or putti above a steel disk. This button, while beautiful, does not qualify as a background for the same reason.

Last is a lovely horn button with a silver overlay. The horn is not set in metal or another material, so again this example is not a background button.

At right is a familiar button depicting a brass mouse and fittings holding a cut steel “mouse trap.” We could consider whether the treatment of the material behind the brass image is “part of the pictorial or primary focus.” Flooring is itself pretty much “in the background” of what sits atop it! Remember too, that backgrounds can have texture or even wallpaper designs (in metal), just not pictorial in a focused manner.

Texture settled, why does this mouse example NOT qualify as a background button……..it is a solid pearl button with a brass round fitting with brass mouse and cut steel OME. The “floor” is part of the pearl button, not a separate piece.

The above example is included in this discussion to make a serious point. Often when studying our buttons we focus on one aspect or another, and can forget the basics! This is how those measles show up on fantastic button trays!

At right is a pierced stamped brass conventional design appearing above a colorful fabric background. This is a background button because the conventional design is pierced, allowing the fabric to show through, and because the fabric, while dramatic, is a pattern and not pictorial.
These three lovely NBS small buttons are paper buttons. However, they are NOT paper background buttons. Do you remember why? Because the paper in each example is PIERCED. If you are compiling a tray of background buttons, do these qualify? The paper is cut out, so they are not paper backgrounds, but in each case, there is a twinkle liner behind the paper.

If the twinkle decorates the central design, they are considered twinkle (metal) backgrounds. The bird button is not a good choice however, as the twinkle creates only a border, which is not valid as a background. All three are stamped, pierced and tinted brass images over paper. The pierced paper allows the twinkle backgrounds to shine through. The three birds on a branch are above black paper and a blue twinkle background. The arrow is pink tinted brass over pink paper and a silver twinkle background. The fence and foliage image tops tan paper above a rainbow twinkle background.

Here is another example of a very good fooler. This can help us understand why it is important to look at all aspects of the button back.

From the front, the stamped brass shoe and birds appear to be above a textured parchment background. The background is painted and worked in such a manner that it is almost impossible to discern that there is no paper present. However, if examined under a magnifying glass, you will find that there is no “edge” of a separate piece, or edge of paper. The decorative finish on the metal is amazing at imitating parchment or leather.

Turning the button over, we find that it is “repousee” or molded in place. The button is too thin to have a background material under the birds and, as the back shows, it is molded into place.

Our last example is a fable button. The stamped brass fox and bird appear above a white metal collet and textured, blackened or painted brass. While the coloring is different than the brass pictorial focus of the button, this is a decorative finish, not a separate material, so this example is not a background button.