

Donation of the Month

Political Campaign Buttons

Donated by Mr. and Mrs. Cass Hough, Betty Fischer, Amy Cawley, and Nancy Robbins



In an election year, political campaign propaganda comes in many forms. Today, much of the campaign advertising is seen on television; however, staunch supporters still wear their candidate's face or slogan on campaign pins and buttons. What they may not realize is that political buttons have been around almost as long the Presidency!

In 1789, George Washington, America's first president, wore the first political button at his inauguration. His supporters also wore buttons; they were clothing buttons made of brass and reading, "G.W.-Long Live the President." Political memorabilia like buttons, ribbons, even china, were made to commemorate the early presidents but campaign buttons as we know them were not used until much later.

In 1860, the development of photographic daguerreotypes and tintypes allowed actual images of the presidential candidates to be placed on campaign memorabilia. Buttons featured Abraham Lincoln's face for the 1860 and 1864 elections. Most were not actual buttons but were small tintype photographs with metal rings and holes punched into the top where a ribbon was used to wear the photo.

The first campaign button like we think of today was popularized by the 1896 presidential elections. The buttons were made with a metal backing; a printed photograph or slogan was placed on the backing and a thin piece of transparent celluloid plastic was placed on top. All of these parts were put together by a machine and a metal pin was attached to the back.

The pins shown here include two similar early campaign buttons for the 1900-1901 election. Each features a photo of presidential candidate William McKinley and vice-presidential candidate Theodore Roosevelt. One of the buttons is marked with patent information for the Whitehead and Hoag Company who were known for making the 1896 campaign buttons as well.

Two pins are from the presidential campaign of Dwight D. Eisenhower, who served as president from 1953 to 1961. One features the slogan "I Like Ike," using Eisenhower's nickname while the other is a brass pin shaped in the letters of "Ike." Also shown are pins from the presidential campaign of John F. Kennedy with Lyndon B. Johnson, who took office in 1961, and from the campaign for Richard Nixon, who became president in 1969.

Source Information:

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