

A Sweet Bodkin Holder

DAWN COOK RONNINGEN



PIECEWORK®

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My collection of needlework tools includes many antique and vintage bodkin holders made from trim pieces. The bits of silk, cotton, and wool skirt braid in a variety of sizes were likely leftovers later stitched into useful needlework companions. You can use a variety of trims to make these bolster pillow-like bodkin holders, which work best for needle bodkins and narrow flat bodkins. The size of the holder can be adjusted by varying the width of trim and the number of widths of trim repeated and by changing the trim length.

In the September 24, 1887, edition of *Harper's Bazar*¹ the House-Keeping Made Easy column includes a list of contents for a properly equipped mending basket.² On the list is skirt braid, sold in rolls in a variety of colors. Skirt braid was a staple in many households from about 1870 onward. It was used in long lengths around the bottom of a long skirt to extend the wear of the skirt edge as it brushed the ground. Scraps of braid as small as 4 inches (10.2 centimeters) were used in this style of bodkin holder.

In the 1907 edition of *Moore's Rural New-Yorker*, a column titled Woman and Home includes a similar

project.³ It describes a small bolster-like cushion made of ribbon and stuffed to hold bodkins. “Every woman who runs ribbon through her lingerie needs a bodkin holder that will keep that little necessity handy.” The stitches are described as “herring boning” and “cat-stitching.” The writer confirms that the bodkins are easy to slip under the stitching, yet the stitching holds them in place.

Using modern floral trim and ribbon, I created a reproduction of an antique bodkin holder in my collection. Just like the makers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I believe bodkin holders make beautiful and practical gifts! Gather some decorative $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch (1-centimeter) ribbon or trim and have fun!

NOTES

1. The early spelling of *Harper's* was *Bazar*, which was later changed to *Bazaar*.
2. Christine Terhune Herrick, House-Keeping Made Easy, “XVI: Shreds and Patches,” *Harper's Bazar*, 20, no. 39, September 24, 1887, 663.



Skirt braid was a common workbasket necessity. Many of the antique bodkin holders Dawn has encountered were created with small pieces of similar braid. The original ribbon bodkin that inspired this project is shown at bottom.

3. Woman and Home, *Moore's Rural New-Yorker*, 66, no. 3010, October 5, 1907, 744.

Finished size: 2½" (6.4 cm) in circumference and 5½" (14 cm) long, including fringe.

MATERIALS

- ◆ 6" (15.2 cm) of 2½" (6.4 cm) double-sided cream-colored satin ribbon
- ◆ 24" (61 cm) of ¾" (1 cm) floral trim—four 6" (15.2 cm) pieces
- ◆ Cream-colored sewing thread
- ◆ Embroidery floss to coordinate with the floral trim
- ◆ Embroidery needle
- ◆ Straight pins
- ◆ Fiberfill
- ◆ Two 10" (25.4 cm) pieces of ½" (1.3 cm) silk ribbon for end ties

SPECIAL STITCHES

Buttonhole Bars: There are several ways of working buttonhole bars. Here, a single “thrown” thread is worked where the bar is desired and tightened to the size needed for your bodkin. Secure with a half hitch. Then begin working buttonhole stitch over the thrown thread. Secure when the thread is covered.

Visit pieceworkmagazine.com for a tutorial and further discussion of buttonhole bars and pieceworkmagazine.com/abbreviations for terms you don't know.



Pin the floral trim to the silk ribbon along the long edge and secure with a running stitch.



Pin center trim pieces to ribbon ½" (1.3 cm) from the ends. Secure with a running stitch.



Embroider between the floral pieces.



Close the long edge with an overcast stitch.



Use a running stitch around the end to close the bodkin holder.



Use embroidery floss to make buttonhole bars that hold a flat bodkin.



Tie a ribbon around the ends of the bodkin holder and ravel the ends of the trim to create fringe.



Store a flat bodkin under the buttonhole bars.

INSTRUCTIONS

Using the 6" (15.2 cm) piece of satin ribbon, pin a 6" (15.2 cm) piece of the floral trim $\frac{1}{8}$ " (3.2 mm) from one long edge of the satin ribbon, aligning the short edges. Place the first pin $\frac{1}{2}$ " (1.3 cm) from one of the short edges. The area $\frac{1}{2}$ " (1.3 cm) from the short edge is the fringe top.

Begin stitching at the $\frac{1}{2}$ " (1.3 cm) pin mark. Use a running stitch to sew the trim to the satin ribbon along each side of the floral trim, stopping $\frac{1}{2}$ " (1.3 cm) from the bottom short edge. The area $\frac{1}{2}$ " (1.3 cm) from the bottom short edge is the fringe bottom.

Repeat with another piece of floral trim along the opposite long edge of the satin ribbon.

Center the last two floral-trim pieces between the two along the edges. There will be more space between floral-trim strips than at the sides.

Again, beginning and ending $\frac{1}{2}$ " (1.3 cm) from the top and bottom edge, use a running stitch to sew the long edges of the floral trim to the satin ribbon.

When all four pieces of the floral trim are sewn to the satin-ribbon ground piece, use two strands of 6-ply embroidery floss to add herringbone stitching between the pieces of floral trim, starting and stopping $\frac{1}{2}$ " (1.3 cm) from the short edges. The bodkins slide under this stitching for storage. Vary the width in each row of stitching to accommodate various bodkin sizes. In this project, one row of stitching overlaps the floral trim, making a wider row of stitching. Two others are stitched only in the satin ribbon, forming a narrower band of stitches.

After the three rows of embroidery are completed, you need to join the long selvedge edges of the satin ribbon. Pin the wrong sides of the satin ribbon together along the selvedge edges. With matching cream thread, starting $\frac{1}{2}$ " (1.3 cm) from one end of the ribbon, use an overcast stitch to close the edge.

Stitch 12–15 stitches per inch. Stop sewing within $\frac{1}{2}$ " (1.3 cm) of the bottom. The side seam is now closed, and the bodkin holder top can be closed.

Sew a running stitch around the top end of the bodkin holder, $\frac{1}{2}$ " (1.3 cm) from the top edge, to gather the end closed. Pull the opening closed with the stitches and make a knot. Tightly wrap the extra thread around the gathers to add strength. Knot and cut the thread.

Fill the bodkin holder firmly with fiberfill to within $\frac{1}{2}$ " (1.3 cm) of the bottom.

Stitch three evenly spaced buttonhole bars over the side seam. Use 2 strands of the 6-ply floss in a color complementary to the floral trim. Hide the starting knot on the underside of the floral trim. Make the first bar $\frac{3}{8}$ " (1 cm) wide at the halfway mark. Make the $\frac{3}{8}$ " (1 cm) second and third bars 1" (2.5 cm) above and below the center bar. These bars will hold a $\frac{1}{4}$ " (0.6 cm) flat bodkin (wider than a needle bodkin). You can adjust the width of the bars as you stitch to accommodate the width of your bodkin.

Close the bottom end of the bodkin holder as you did the top end.

Use the $\frac{1}{2}$ " (1.3 cm) silk ribbon to tie a bow at each end of the bodkin holder. Slip your assortment of bodkins under the rows of stitching and buttonhole bars.

Fringe the ends of the bodkin holder by raveling the threads at each end.

DAWN COOK RONNINGEN is the author of *Antique American Needlework Tools* (Schiffer, 2018). To learn more about Dawn and her collections, visit collectorwithaneedle.blogspot.com. Also find her on Facebook and Instagram @collectorwithaneedle.