

# **Instructions for Constructing the 5<sup>th</sup> Connecticut Regiment Coat of 1778**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Recently uncovered information on the clothing of Col. Burr Bradley's Fifth Connecticut Regiment has caused a reexamination of the clothing of the current recreated unit, and the adoption of a uniform consistent with this new information. The instructions below are intended to help members and those assisting them to construct the new regimental coat.

The coat is similar in its design and construction to coats in use by other New England and New York units during the first three years of the war, and may be representative of the type of uniform coats being made for the fledgling army. It is similar to its antecedent, the Massachusetts Bounty of 1775 in that it was unlined except for a facing strip along the front edge of the breast, and a skirt facing, which in the case of the 5<sup>th</sup> Connecticut appears to have been the same red or scarlet cloth that was used for the coat's false collar, cuffs, and lapels. To speed production and reduce the amount of cloth required, the collars, cuffs, and lapels were made of a single thickness of cloth, and were sewn directly to the body of the coat. As a result, there was no need for buttonholes, with the USA buttons (found in 1778 Connecticut campsites in Redding and other areas) pushed through the cloth facing and body, and fastened to the inside of the coat with strips of scrap wool, linen tape, or leather cord.

These coats were supplanted in the early months of 1779 by the French-made Contract Coats, the so called "Lottery Coats" that had been issued to much of the rest of the army the fall of 1778. These coats unlike those they replaced, had full linings of wool serge, were longer, and had functional buttonholes in the lapel, allowing it to be buttoned over for warmth. From 1779 onward, coats, whether made in the United States or abroad, appear to have followed the functional details of these French Contract Coats.

## **GUIDE TO STITCHES** (see attached)

Appended to the end of this set of instructions you will find a set of instructions on how to make the various types of stitches used in constructing late 18<sup>th</sup> century military clothing.

The instructions given below are for construction of a garment entirely by hand. Given the relatively simple construction of the garment, this might be a good project to try for the learning experience.

If you chose to use a sewing machine to assemble the interior seams, set your stitch length to stitches per inch (spi) indicated in the instructions for best results. Hand stitching all visible stitching on the exterior of the coat is highly recommended, and will yield a finished garment with the appropriate appearance.

## ASSEMBLING THE COAT

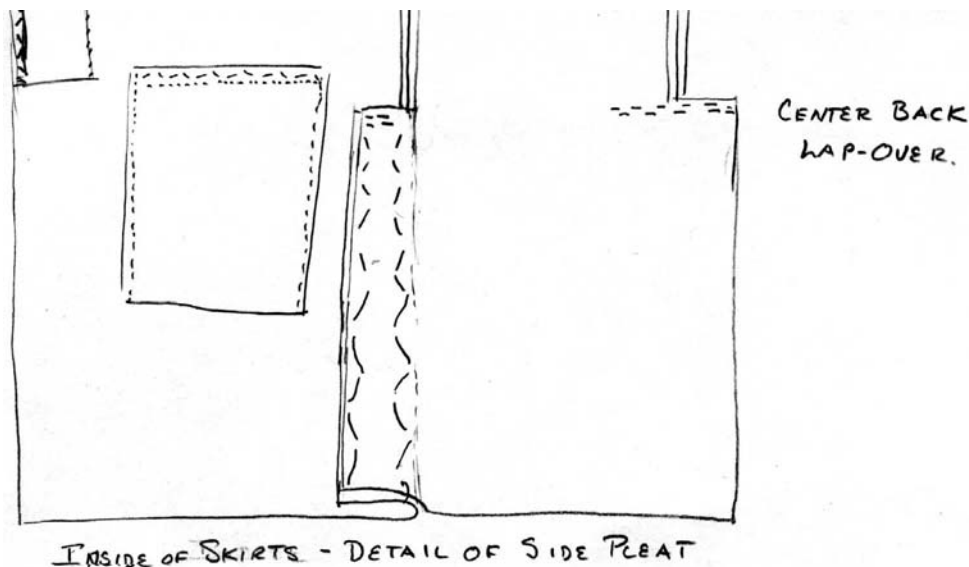
The coat assembly instructions are based on starting with a “kit” of cut out coat parts. A subsequent edition of these instructions will give directions for cutting out the coat.

### Coat Body

- Pin right sides of back panel together from neck down to top of center back vent (where the lap-over notches out). Stitch the seam  $\frac{1}{4}$ ” from the edge, with a back stitch 10 stitches per inch.
- Pin the side seam of each front panel to the corresponding side seam of each back panel. Stitch the seam  $\frac{1}{2}$ ” from the edge with a back stitch, 10 stitches per inch.
- Pin the shoulder seams of each front panel to the corresponding back panel, stretching the front shoulder to fit to the back shoulder if needed. Stitch the seam,  $\frac{1}{4}$ ” from the edge with a back stitch, 10 stitches per inch.
- Press the resulting seams open with a steam iron set for wool. This is heavy cloth and will need a bit of steam to make the seams lie flat.

### Pleats

- While pressing open the side seams, continue down the seam and press the pleat on the front panel towards the center front of the garment. At the bottom of the pleat, the fold is about  $1\frac{1}{2}$ ” from the back edge of the pleat. Repeat for the other front pleat.



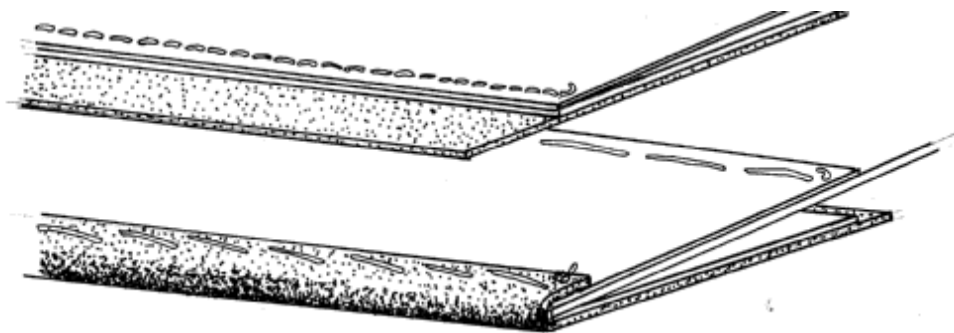
- With the coat open, lay the pleat of the back panel over the pleat you just pressed forward, and pin the two together.
- Tack the back pleat to the front pleat with a running stitch, 1-2 stitches per inch. Repeat for other side. **Note:** If you are sewing the interior seams by machine, do this tacking by hand.

### Collar

- Pin the two halves of the collar together along their back-seam [this is the seam that ends in a point, and when sewn will form an arrow shape]
- Back stitch the seam  $\frac{1}{4}$ " in from the edge, 10 stitches per inch.
- Press the seam open as you did on the coat body.
- Pin the lower edge of the collar against the neck edge of the coat body, with the underside of the collar against the outside of the coat, matching the edges, and matching the center back seam of the collar to that of the coat [the seam allowance of the collar will be against the outside of the coat.
- Back stitch along the neck seam,  $\frac{1}{4}$ " in from the edge, 10 stitches per inch.
- Press the resulting seam down into the coat body.
- Whip stitch the cut edges of the neck seam to the body of the coat, 8 stitches per inch.
- Leave the remaining edges of the collar free until after the lapels are attached.

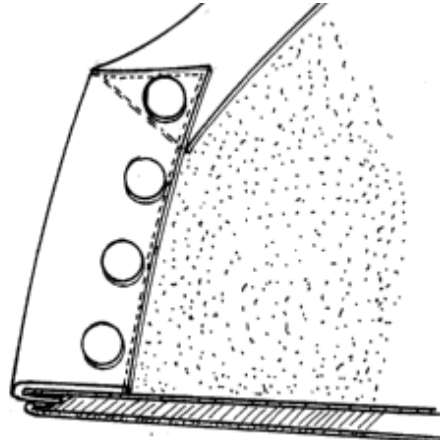
### Lapels

- With your steam iron, press under the center front edge of the lapel by about  $\frac{5}{8}$ "
- Lay the lapels over the center front of the coat, with the front edge of the coat sandwiched within fold you just created, the fold on the inside of the coat.



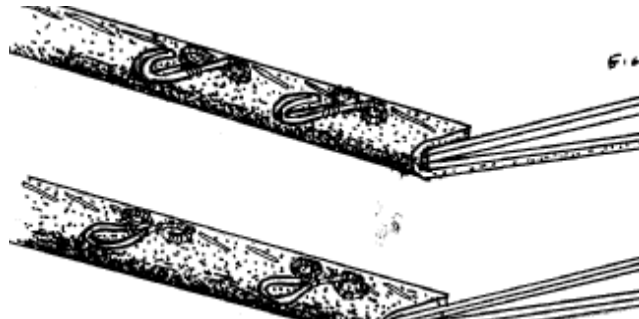
- Pin the lapels to the coat so that the upper curved & pointed edge is against the collar seam, and the narrower lower side is on a level with the tops of the pleats.
- Fasten the lapels to the body of the coat with a running stitch, 8 stitches per inch, on both the lapel and the fold-under on the inside of the coat.
- Fold the collar down over the top of the lapel and pin in place. Pin the back of the collar, aligning the back seam of the collar with the back seam of the coat, and

allowing the back of the collar to rise about 1" above the neck seam at the center back. Running stitch the free edges of the collar to the body, 8 stitches per inch.



### Setting Hooks & Eyes

- With your coat open before you, place hooks on the proper right lapel [the right side of the coat as it appears to you as you wear it] with the hooks extending just over the folded edge of the underside of the lapel. The uppermost hook is placed just below the collar seam, with the second hook about 6" below the first. Stitch the hooks to the underside of the lapel enough stitches through the loops to hold it securely in place.
- Place the eyes against the underside of the proper left lapel and opposite to the corresponding hooks, with the large loop extending just beyond the folded edge. Stitch in place as directed above.



### Pocket Flaps

- With your steam iron, press under the top edge of the pocket flap  $\frac{1}{2}$ ".
- Place the pocket flap on the outside front of the coat, centering it between the back of the lapel and the side seam, with the top of the pocket flap on a level with the bottom of the lapel and the top of the side pleats.
- Stitch the pocket flaps to the body of the coat with a running stitch, 8 stitches per inch.

## **Sleeves**

- Lay out the upper sleeves in front of you [these have the upward curve at the top – this is the sleeve cap] with the curved front edges facing one another.
- Place the corresponding under sleeves [with the serpentine curve along the top] against the upper sleeves, matching the front and back seams and the elbow points, and pin the under sleeve to the upper sleeve along the front and back seams.
- Back stitch the front and back seams,  $\frac{1}{4}$ " from the edges, 10 stitches per inch.
- Press the sleeve seams open with a steam iron.
- Lay out and assemble the sleeve linings in the same manner as the sleeves, and set aside.
- Take each sleeve and, with right sides together, pin the sleeve into the armhole, matching the front and back seams to their corresponding marks in the armhole. [Note: If you lost your marks, you can locate the back seam of the sleeve to the back of the coat by finding the mid point of the armhole seam of the back panel and make a mark]
- Before stitching the seam, make sure you have each sleeve in its proper place, with the elbow pointing toward the back of the coat, and the convex upper portion of the sleeve running along the shoulder of the coat body.
- Stitch the sleeve into the armhole with a backstitch,  $\frac{1}{4}$ " in from the edge, 10 stitches per inch. Press seams open with a steam iron.

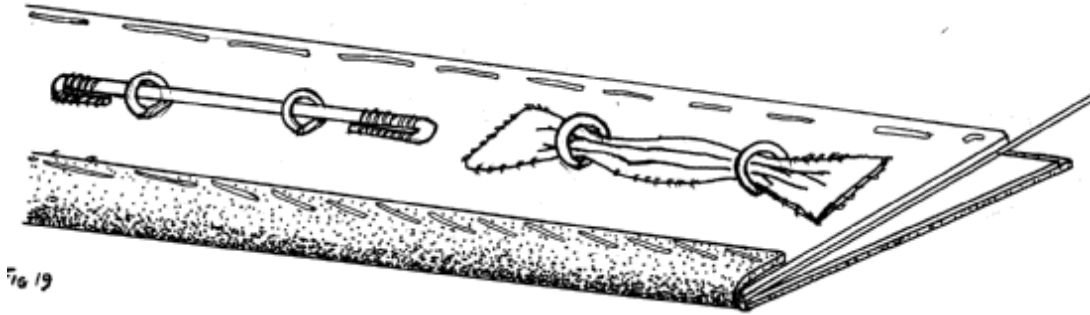
## **Cuffs**

- Fold the cuff upon itself, matching the back seams, and stitch the back seam of the cuff with a back stitch, 8-10 stitches per inch.
- Press the cuff seam open.
- Press under the lowermost 1" of the cuff. This will go over the bottom of the sleeve.
- Pin the cuff on the sleeve, so that the backseam of the cuff matches the backseam of the sleeve, and the bottom of the sleeve is sandwiched within the fold at the bottom of the cuff.
- Stitch cuff to sleeve with a running stitch, 8 stitches per inch.]
- Tack the folded under portion of the cuff to the inside of the sleeve with a whipstitch, 4 stitches per inch.

## **Setting Buttons**

- Mark the locations of the buttons on the lapels, pocket flaps, cuffs, and at the top of the side pleats.

On the lapel, locate the lowermost button 1" up from the bottom of the lapel, and  $\frac{1}{2}$ " in from the edge. Place the uppermost button 1" down from the top of the lapel, roughly in the middle of the front edge of the collar. Space the remaining six buttons evenly between the top and bottom on each lapel.



On the pocket flaps, locate the outermost buttons 1" in from the sides of the flap, and  $\frac{3}{4}$ " up from the bottom. Center the middle button over the center point of the flap, and  $\frac{3}{4}$ " up from the bottom.

On the cuffs, locate one button over the front seam of the sleeve, and  $\frac{3}{4}$ " down from the top edge of the cuff. Space the other two buttons on each cuff at the same distance as on the lapels, and  $\frac{3}{4}$ " down from the top of the cuff.

- Using an awl or bodkin, make holes at the button placement locations, and push the shank of the button through to the inside of the coat or sleeve.
- Thread a piece of leather cord, linen tape, or cloth strip through the hole in the shank of the button. Tack down this fastener at its ends and between the buttons to insure that it won't pull out.

### Setting Pockets in Skirt Facing

- Lay the skirt facings into the inside of the coat, matching the front and bottom edges. Mark the location of the pocket in each skirt facing, locating it as follows: Measure down 2" from the top of the skirt facing, and mark an 8" long horizontal line with its center located about the middle of the front panel [roughly underneath each pocket flap]
- Remove the facings from the coat. Cut the slit open along its length.
- Take your pocket bag and fold under one end of the bag by  $\frac{1}{2}$ ".
- Pin the folded edge of the pocket bag against the underside of the slit you just made, matching the folded edge of the pocket bag to the lower edge of the slit.
- Turn the skirt facing over, and working from the outside, backstitch the folded edge of the pocket bag to the lower edge of the slit, about  $\frac{1}{8}$ " in from the edge of the slit, 8-10 stitches per inch.
- Turn the skirt facing over to the underside. Fold up the other end of the pocket bag and pin it against the top edge of the slit, with the top cut edge of the pocket bag extending about  $\frac{1}{2}$ " beyond the edge of the slit.
- Turn the skirt facing back to the front, and backstitch the upper part of the pocket bag to the slit,  $\frac{1}{8}$ " up from the slit, 8-10 stitches per inch.
- Reinforce the ends of the slit with a bar tack (see Stitch Guide)
- Pin the sides of the pocket bag together, and stitch with a running stitch, 12 stitches per inch.

- Repeat the above procedures for the other pocket.

### **Setting in Breast & Skirt Facings**

- Place skirt facings back into body of coat as described in the pocket section above. Notch the facings as needed to fit into the lap-over at the center back. Pin in place along edges of each skirt facing.
- Stitch the skirt facings along the cut edges of the coat with a running stitch 6 – 8 stitches per inch.
- Stitch along the top edge of the skirt facing with a running stitch 8 stitches per inch, being careful to make your stitches so the won't show on the outside of the coat.
- Pin the top edge of the breast facing against the neck seam, with the front edge of the facing inset from the folded edge of the lapel by about 1/8" This will cover over most of the hook and eye. Make sure the "beak" of the hook extends back over the facing so you can use it. When you get to the waist, mark that portion of the facing that extends over the skirt facing, and cut it off.
- Stitch the breast facings to the front of the coat with a running stitch, 6-8 stitches per inch.
- Turn the coat to the outside, and pin down the lap overs to the body of the coat. When viewed from the outside, the lap over on the outside of the coat should be extending towards the right. Stab stitch the lap overs to the body in two rows, 8 stitches per inch. The first row of stitching should be about 1/8" down from the top of the lap over, and the second row about 1/4" below the first.

### **Setting Sleeve Linings**

- Place sleeve linings into sleeves, making sure you put the right sleeve lining into the right sleeve, and the left lining into the left sleeve. The seam allowances of the sleeve and lining should face one another.
- Turn under 1/4" at the top of the sleeve lining, and pin it against the armhole seam, matching front and back seams to their corresponding points on the sleeve.
- Whip stitch along the folded edge, 8 stitches per inch.
- Fold under the lower edge of the sleeve lining 1/4", and pin to the inside of the cuff, about 1/2" up from the bottom. Whip stitch to the cuff, 8 stitches per inch.

**With any luck, you now are possessed of a new 5<sup>th</sup> Connecticut 1778 regimental coat.**

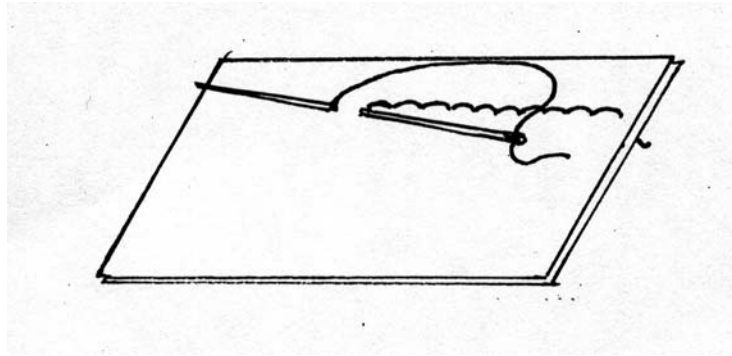
**Congratulations!!**

## *Stitching Techniques for Historic Costume Reproduction*

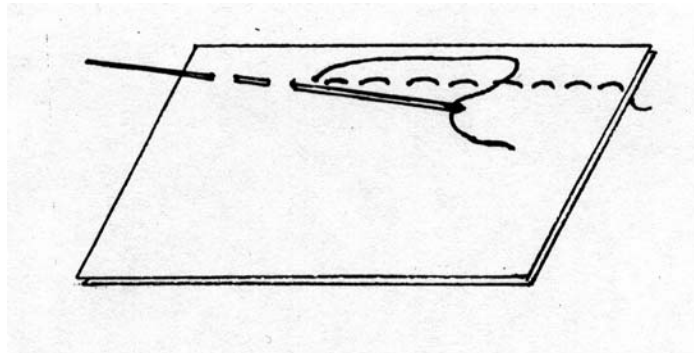
*Henry M. Cooke , Historical Costume Services*

All clothing produced prior to the Civil War was constructed entirely by hand. Therefore, one should have a familiarity with the types of stitches used to construct them. Coats and jackets, vests and waistcoats, breeches and trousers were largely constructed with four basic stitches, plus the buttonhole stitch. In addition, beginning in the 1790's, coats and outer garments utilized pad stitching to attach interfacing and interlinings to give shape to collars and lapels. If desired, the parts of the garments that were assembled with a backstitch can also be assembled by machine.

**Backstitch** – Working from right to left, take up (traditionally) six threads of the fabric on the needle, pull your needle through, then carry your needle and thread back from left to right, and insert needle three threads back from the point at which it just emerged. Insert needle and move six threads forward and repeat. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, each backstitch met the preceding stitch. That is why machine stitching and backstitching look identical.

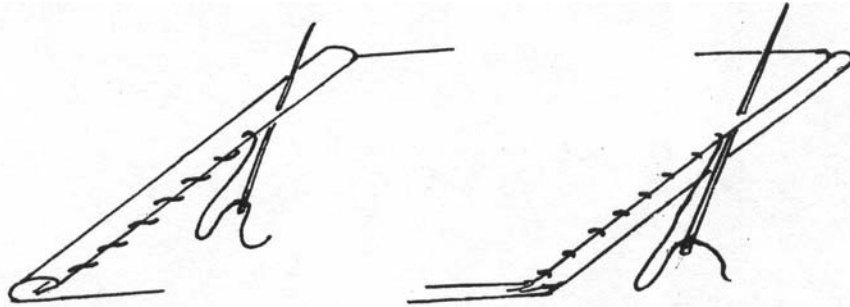


**Running Stitch** – Pass the needle in and out of the fabric at regular intervals. Draw up thread.



**Whip Stitch** – Fold edge to be hemmed a little less than 1/8” from cut edge, then fold again 3/16”-1/4” to encase the cut edge. Take stitches, picking a few threads just next to the folded edge and a few threads on the folded edge, draw the needle through.

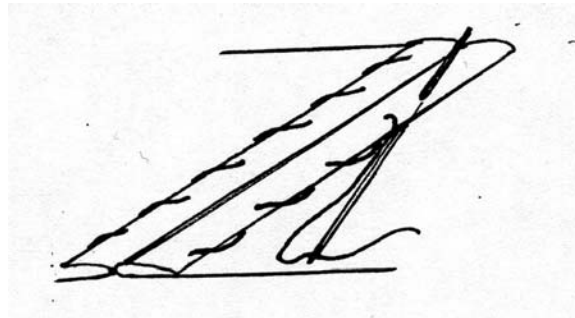
A variation on the whip stitch is used to join facings or linings to the edge of the body. Diderot refers to it as “*point a rabattre sous le main*”, roughly translated as an underhand stitch, though it does not appear by that name in English texts. [Baumgarten, Watson & Carr, **Costume Close-Up: Clothing Construction and Patterns, 1750-1790**, (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1999) p.8].



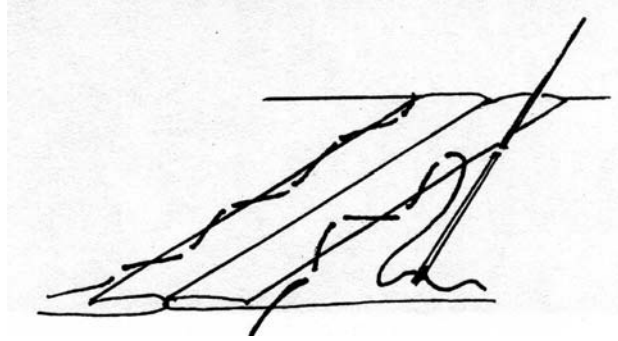
Whip Stitch

*Point a Rabattre Sous le Main*

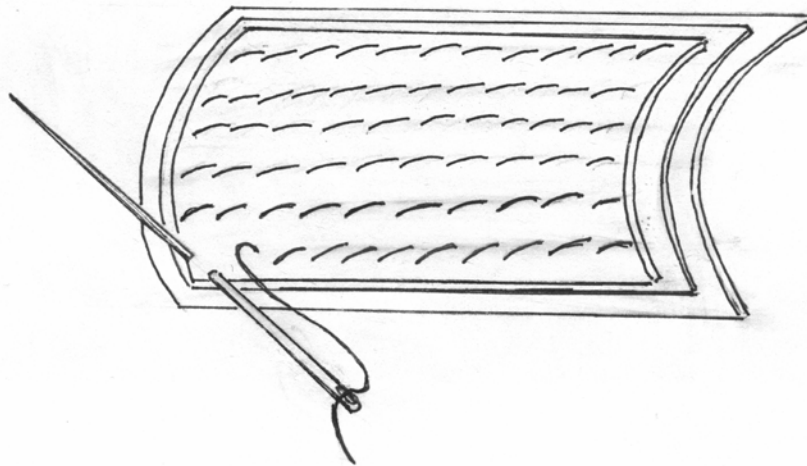
**Overcast Stitch** – This stitch is used to bind the cut free edges of a piece of cloth, or to bind the cut edges of two pieces of cloth together to prevent shifting or raveling, as in a buttonhole.



**Ladder or Zigzag Stitch** – Working from right to left, pass needle through a thread or two of body of garment. Move diagonally to the left across the cut edge of the seam allowance approx 1/8”, and take a second stitch, then move diagonally to the right back across the cut edge of the seam allowance and take another stitch. The resulting row of zigzag stitches will fasten down the seam allowance and preserve it from raveling.



**Pad Stitching** - Working from right to left, take a short diagonal stitch upwards through all layers of interfacing and cloth, just catching into the lowermost layer. Move over to the left about  $\frac{1}{4}$ "-  $\frac{1}{2}$ " and take another stitch as before. Repeat this process to the end of the area you wish to stitch down, then reverse and repeat. Alternately, you can work one row of pad stitch, then return and start a new row. Spacing between the rows is between  $\frac{1}{4}$ " and  $\frac{1}{2}$ " – the closer together the rows, the more firmly the finished roll will be. If you are using this stitch to shape the layers of cloth, make sure that you roll the cloth over your fingers as you are applying pad stitches. The end result is that you will have a herringbone pattern or a row of angled stitches visible on the interfacing side, inside the garment, and rows of tiny picks showing on the outside of the garment.



**Buttonholes** – Mark the location of the buttonholes on the outside of the coat. Using a running stitch, outline the buttonhole approximately  $\frac{1}{16}$ " from the line. Slit or cut the buttonhole open, and overcast the cut edges of the buttonhole. Using a single thread of waxed 20/2 linen or similar weight of cotton, run a couple of stitches along the edge of the

buttonhole to the back end, then begin to make buttonhole stitches, one alongside the other, drawing each stitch up to form a small knot or purled edge.

- To make the buttonhole stitch, form a counterclockwise loop of thread flat against the surface of the garment. Run the needle under the cut edge of the buttonhole and bring it up just beyond the row of stitching, then draw it back towards the slit. This should cause the loop to close and form a loop with a small knot along the edge of the slit.

Work the buttonhole stitch along one side of the slit. Then run the needle across the end of the buttonhole one stitch and take a couple of loops over the end, bringing the needle up at the start of the opposite side of the buttonhole, then bar tack over the stitch and bring the needle back up to where you began the bar tack. Work buttonhole stitches along the remaining edge of the buttonhole and return to your starting point, taking a couple of looping stitches across the end and finish with a bar tack, running the needle and thread up inside the buttonhole and clip it close to the stitching.

