

13 Colonies Cobbler

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This page describes the work of a colonial cobbler. Did you know that colonial cobblers used the same patterns to make shoes, rendering the left and right shoes exactly the same?

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Shoemaking was one of the earliest industries in the original 13 colonies. Shoemakers may have been with John Smith on one of the maiden voyages to the New World that resulted in the establishment of the Jamestown colony. At the latest, shoemakers arrived in the New World in 1610. Shoemakers made shoes first by making wooden “lasts,” or blocks of foot-shaped wood carved into different sizes. Next, a leather “upper” was stretched over the last and fastened with glue until it was ready to be fastened to the sole. The sole would be pounded with metal tools and an awl was used to cut holes. Then the upper was removed from the last and the sole and upper were sewn together before the shoe was cleaned, polished, and fitted with a heel. Finally, the shoes were hung in the shoemaker’s store. A standard pair of shoes would take between eight and ten hours to make. Early shoemakers used the same pattern to make a pair of shoes, meaning the left and right shoes were exactly the same.

