

**PIN BACK BROOCH FROM THE WARNER SITE  
20LV334  
BRIGHTON, MI**

Tim Bennett



**Abstract**

*Excavations at the historic Warner site, 20LV334, have yielded a large pin back brooch dating to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.*

**Introduction**

The Warner site, located in Brighton Township, MI, was homesteaded by Timothy Warner after the purchase of eighty acres in 1841. The site has yielded thousands of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century artifacts related to the occupation by multiple generations of the family for over 170 years. Included in this assemblage are hundreds of artifacts related to clothing such as buttons, buckles, snaps, and pins. One item in particular is worthy of specific discussion, a gold plated brooch, found in the sheet midden adjacently south of the 1855 Greek Revival home.

The brooch was recovered from unit 515 475 W on the last day of 2011 field season by volunteer Catherine Devereaux. The base is formed from sheet metal, possibly of a cuprous alloy, with a stamped checkered design. The face is decorated with cloverleaf stylized bows in each corner of a rectangular section at center. Curve-sided triangles with smooth interiors appear at



*The brooch was found on the last day of the 2011 excavation season. Photo by author.*

horizontally opposite sides. Like metal attachments further adorn the surface providing for a sense of depth including a pair of twisted ropes, an oval inset, and what might be best described as a dragonfly inspired motif. These embellishments were attached by a hand utilizing a hot metal process similar to soldering. Two oval cutouts have been removed from the base allowing the rope adornment to drape through originating from the oval inset. The brooch weighs 30.3 g (1.06 oz) and is 73.26 mm in length by 51.04 mm wide. It is in relatively good condition, bent slightly from left to right and is missing an inset or inlay in a small oval setting above the larger oval opening. No maker's marks are present and the back exhibits a hook and pin style clasp with most of the pin portion missing.

Closer inspection, especially on the edges of the outer perimeter of the base, suggests that it is plated, possibly in gold, as small flakes are found missing sporadically along the edge. No gold content stamp is apparent, likely unnecessary due to the insufficient amount used. A process known as "flashing" may have been used to apply a thin coat of gold (similar to electroplating) over the entire surface.

Original theories regarding functionality include use as a hatpin, with the large oval hole serving as an entry point for the tip of a large feather commonly worn in women's hats during the 1870s to 1880s. However, a former president of the American Hat Pin Society has suggested that it is not a hatpin, but a brooch based on the pin back design, possibly made of brass that may have been gold flashed (Woodbury 2012). Others have also suggested that it is a brooch, worn by women at the collar of a blouse. Age estimates range from the middle to late 19th century to the early 20th century.

One researcher who posts regularly on the Antique Jewelry University forum has also suggested that the item is a brooch, dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. She suggests that the oval inset may have also held a freshwater pearl, popular from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The researcher posted the following comments (Antique Jewelry University 08/22/2012):

"Full scale production of stamped/die struck jewelry was underway and this example looks like it would have been produced in such a manner. Based on the overall shape I would say it is a stylized bow motif with an overall checked "fabric" texture. The applied "Art Nouveau" style bit is what makes me think late nineteenth century as opposed to 1860-1885 ish. The oval cut out does not strike me as a place for a gemstone, more like a place that allowed the fabric of the garment it was pinned on to show through.

They used large brooches at that time both pinned at the waist to hold decorative sashes and near the neck or on the bodice (usually on top of large floppy lace neck/blouse decoration.) It could also have been intended for wear on a coat where larger jewelry is often intended to be worn. My feeling is that this was designed to look like a bow so that it could become an integral part of the garment it was fastened to. Many fashion jewelry items were copied from their more valuable counterparts, but I could not find anything quite like your brooch to link it to an exact time period."

## **Discussion**

Although other decorative items typically associated with clothing such as small gold pins with mother of pearl inlay have been recovered, this brooch is easily the largest and most striking example of the

clothing item assemblage. The condition of the brooch is relatively good with the exception of a missing inset on the front and broken pin on the reverse. The inset may have held some type of semi-precious gemstone, however, it lacks tabs that were typically used to hold cut glass or gems. A more likely candidate would be the use of mother-of-pearl or a freshwater pearl. The detachment of a large portion of the pin rendered the brooch unusable as a clothing accessory though it would seem that a new pin could have been fairly easily replaced to bring it back to working order. The substantial size of the brooch would likely have made it readily found if lost. The item may have been considered not worthy of repair and simply discarded.

## **Conclusions**

The brooch may have been used to make a bold statement for accenting and complimenting a variety of garments/accessories used in women's attire. It was made from mass produced parts, assembled by hand, and thinly plated in gold. The design elements are suggestive of the Art Nouveau period. The brooch was intended for regular use, possibly inspired by designs used in jewelry containing more expensive materials. The detachment of the pin portion of the clasp on the reverse ended its use and given its modest value may have simply been discarded.

Although the exact owner is impossible to attribute, the style and late 19<sup>th</sup> century time frame makes Lucretia Warner (1828 – 1900) a strong candidate. Lucretia was the pioneer wife of Timothy Warner who lived at the site since their marriage in 1846. The couple had enjoyed a comfortable middle class lifestyle beginning in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Other adult female members of the family who lived at the Warner household at that time, such as Elvira Lawson-Warner (1849-1907), seem less likely given her adherence to her Quaker upbringing which shunned elaborate garb. Third generation member, Ora Warner-Morgan (1886-1957), might also be considered for the early 20<sup>th</sup> century timeframe.

The gold plated brooch is a unique item among tens of thousands of artifacts recovered at the site. It may provide evidence in support of a middle class lifestyle enjoyed by the family as well as a small glimpse into fashion choices around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Acknowledgements**

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