Hats are head coverings with a crown and usually a brim. They are distinguished from caps that are brimless but may have a visor. Hats are important because they adorn the head, which is the seat of human rational powers, and they also frame the face. Women's hats have often been differentiated from men's headwear, although in modern times, many women's hat styles have been copied from men's.

Hats are material communicators that indicate gender, age, social status, and group affiliation. They also serve as ceremonial symbols and enhancers of sexual attractiveness. As a sculptural art form, hats may be described and interpreted in terms of shape, color, textured materials, adornments, proportion, and scale to the wearer.

While hats have been universally worn, their historical development within the Western European fashion world will be the focus here. Women's hat fashions began in the Renaissance and grew dramatically with the nineteenth-century industrial revolution, sometimes called the "Golden Age" of millinery, which lasted until the mid-twentieth century.

Origins of Hats for Women

The woman's hat may have its origin with a turbanlike head wrap or pointed cap as documented in Neolithic cave paintings at Tassili, Algeria (c. 8000-4000 B.C.E.) and later Mesopotamian sculptures (c. 2600 B.C.E.) Evidence for a variety of shaped hats comes from Crete (c. 1600 B.C.E.) via polychrome terra-cotta female figures wearing several types: the high sugarloaf style, the flat beret, and the tricorne with rosettes, curled plumes or ribbon decorations, which may have association with fertility rituals.

According to Classic, fifth-century B.C.E. painted vases, Greek women were more likely to wear their hair on top of the head secured by a bandeau or net caul. The Greek wide-brimmed straw petasos, worn by both women and men as a sun protector, was also adopted by Romans. Because of modesty and religious reasons stemming from Saint Paul's admonition to the Corinthians that women must cover their hair while praying, wealthy Christian women in the Middle Ages wore draped veils, hoods, or wimples indoors and practical wide-brimmed hats over the wimple for traveling. Peasants wore wide hats over skullcaps or hoods while working in the fields.

Renaissance Humanism: Fashion Begins

With the emergence of Renaissance humanism in fifteenth-century Italy came capitalism stimulated by overseas trade and increased bourgeoisie wealth accompanied by an appreciation of secular portraiture and clothing as art forms. Thus was born the phenomenon of Western fashion, whereby individuals aspiring to privileges enjoyed by nobles acquired clothing and hats.
not just for functional reasons, but capriciousness. Within a short time, this emphasis on individual materialism spread to many regions of northern Europe.

Some of the most elaborate hats women have ever worn appeared in the late-medieval and Renaissance courts of France, Flanders, and Bavaria, including the tall cone-shaped, silk-and-velvet steeple hat with draped veil (hennin), depicted in modern publications of medieval fairy tales, and the brocaded silk, stuffed bourrelet created into enormous horns, reproduced with proto-feminist writings by Christine de Pisan as *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405). Other contemporary styles included the large, round, beehive-shaped hat popular in Germany and an English silk-gold braid with pearls covered by a wired gauze wimple. Scholars have noted the possible cross-cultural source for these excessive headpieces as coming from Turkish styles at a time when the Ottomans were expanding their control into eastern Europe not far from Vienna. In response to these feminine excesses, Catholic churchmen were known to encourage Christians to yell insults aimed at humiliating women wearing such outlandish headwear. In some places, sumptuary laws were issued limiting the size, number, and materials that could be devoted to women's hats in an effort to control excesses and maintain class social structure.

Court Fashions

From the sixteenth century on, hat styles were largely influenced by royal tastes, from the English Tudor gable hood to the Elizabethan wigs and a wide variety of velvet, taffeta, silk, felt, leather, and beaver hats, many based on men's styles.

The seventeenth century saw a white lace wired or starched "Mary Stuart" hood as popular for indoors, and the wide-brimmed, plumed felt or beaver hat for outdoor riding associated with Queen Henrietta Maria. The English Restoration Queen Catherine of Braganza, Portugal, still wore this "cavalier" style for riding in 1666.

In portraits, court ladies during the reign of Charles II were frequently depicted in pastoral costume as "shep herdesses" holding contrived sun-protector hats made of heavy fabric, like velvet. A century later, the pastoral look was still in vogue, but the hats had changed to more realistic, broad-brimmed straw versions called bergère, decorated with ribbons, artificial flowers, and large plumes, reaching their zenith with Marie Antoinette as painted by Vigée Lebrun. Although many of these hats were made locally from country-style materials, the finest smooth straw was imported from Leghorn, Italy, to northern markets and widely used by fashion milliners.

During the late seventeenth century, France became Europe's fashion center under the leadership of Louis XIV. One of the most visually striking headpieces of this era was named for the king's mistress. Supposedly Mlle. Fontanges was out riding when her hair became caught on a tree branch. When she tied it up with ribbon (possibly her lace garter), the *fontange* was born. It metamorphosed into a complex tiered and ruffled architectural-like structure of muslin, lace, and ribbons built up onto a round wire base. Masked balls and carnival festivals provided a venue for women in Venice, Rome, France, and England to wear fantasy headwear, including tricornes, flower basket hats, and exotic Eastern turbans. After living in Turkey for two years as wife of Britain's ambassador, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was influential in popularizing the turban as an aristocratic women's style in England.

Throughout the eighteenth century, milliners competed with wigmakers for setting headwear fashions. This may be why in Georgian England, enormous crowned hats with stiff lining and gigantic plumes became the mode, copied from French styles set by Marie Antoinette. Some were associated with unusual events, such as the balloon hat, named for Vincenzo Lunardi who in 1784 ascended in a hot-air balloon. Nevertheless, interest in fashionable hats continued to be stimulated by the early hand-colored fashion-plate publications such as *The Lady's Magazine* (London, c.1760-1837) and *Galerie des Modes* (Paris, 1778-1787).

Middle-Class Fashions

With the social upheavals of the French Revolution, aristocrats lost their political, social, and economic privileges; those who survived were careful to distance themselves from the wigs and extravagance of the ancien régime. New, simpler hats associated with prevailing middle-class values became popular, although exotic turbans continued, with possible influences from African head wraps.

Throughout the nineteenth century, reflecting ideals of Romanticism, the ubiquitous chin-tied bonnet, with its numerous variations prevailed, from the calash and its folding hoops like a covered wagon, to the poke bonnet that extended far outward. With elaborate silk, lace, floral, feather, and artificial fruit trimmings, bonnets by mid-century reflected the married woman's status as queen of her home and symbol of her husband's financial success. The man's top hat communicated the same message, and added social status. This fashion persisted through the remainder of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.

Large emporiums such as Bloomingdale's in New York, Marshall Field's in Chicago, and Gorringes in London began to spring up in cities providing ready-made and custom-designed hats in their millinery departments to a growing middle-class clientele.
Rural dwellers in the United States could learn of new fashions from magazines such as *Godey's Lady's Book* (1830-1898) and obtain ready-made hats and bonnets at reasonable prices through mail-order catalogs, beginning with Montgomery Ward in 1872 and Sears Roebuck after 1886.

**Millinery Industry**

Beginning in the sixteenth century, "millinery" referred to fine artifacts for women, such as ribbons, gloves, and straw hats sold by men around Milan, Italy. By 1679, milliners were dressmakers who also made or sold women's hats, bonnets, headdresses, and trims. Newspaper advertisements indicate that millinery shops abounded by the eighteenth century in European and American cities, although owners were usually only known locally.

The first internationally recognized milliner was Rose Bertin (1744-1813), *marchande de modes*, whose luxurious salon, Le Grand Moghul, on rue Faubourg Saint-Honoré, Paris, became the focal place for attractive designs with ribbons, laces, and trimmings along with the latest social gossip. Her most important client was Queen Marie Antoinette until the royal execution in January 1793. Bertin's business records preserved at the University of Paris reveal clientele to include nobility from Russia and England.

The industrial revolution of the nineteenth century affected the millinery industry in many ways. A new sewing machine, introduced in America and sold abroad, meant large quantities of hats could be produced quickly at low prices. Manufactured hats could be stored and sent to wholesalers for sales in department stores or for overseas export. While trains and ships assisted mass-marketing distribution, overall Paris was still considered the center for elite, high-fashion hats. Wealthy women traveled to Paris for purchases, and store milliners from London and New York made annual pilgrimages to bring back the "latest" modes and trimmings for their home customers. Millinery ideas and advice were also made available to wide audiences from subscription magazines as *Harper's Bazaar* (1867- ) in the United States, *Townsend's Monthly Magazine* (1823-1988) in England, and *Le Follet* (1829-1892) in France.

**Folk Costume Hats**

Another clothing-and-hat trend took place in Europe outside aristocratic fashion circles during the nineteenth century. With the relaxation of sumptuary laws regarding clothing, particularly after the French Revolution, European peasant artisans, encouraged by nationalism, began to express their ethnic affiliation through elaborate outfits worn for Sunday religious services, dancing, and festivals. These colorful costumes and hats, still worn by villagers and townspeople, serve as visual representations of community and marital status to be worn on special occasions. The women's hats are usually straw, felt, or other natural materials, and because of their multi-colored festive styles, they have served as inspiration over decades for twentieth-century fashion milliners, who may recreate the styles with new, synthetic materials. Occasionally referred to as "ethnic-chic," examples include the bead-and-sequin velvet Basque beret, the Tyrolean felt sport hat, the "pakable" rayon knotted turban, Central Asian styled velvet-and-pearl pillbox, and the cellophane Breton.

**Unisex Sports Headwear**

Beginning in the 1860s, as the middle class was growing and enjoying increased leisure activities, men's tailoring techniques were first applied to women's dress. Slightly flared skirts replaced the older crinolines and were complemented by formal suit jackets. Likewise, the fanciful, highly decorated bonnet of earlier decades gave way to more simple, masculine-style headwear. These styles represented for the "New Woman" a sense of physical freedom through sports and political independence via the suffrage movement.

For outdoor sports, women wore the white linen peaked cap while rowing and yachting; and the plain flat-top, hard straw boater for cycling and later automobile driving. Boaters could be adapted for formal wear embellished with bird feathers or plumes.

Other hat styles shared by both genders included the stiff felt, round-crown bowler, or derby, and black silk top hat for horseback
riding; the woolen tam-o'-shanter for lawn tennis, badminton, or cycling; the fore-and-aft as a hunting cap; and the fedora for archery or golf. In winter, knitted stocking caps served for bobsledding, ice sailing, and skating. Indoors, the Breton was considered appropriate for bowling or roller skating, known as "rinking." This trend of women's involvement with sports by wearing unisex hats or caps continues to the present. As spectators, they wear the contemporary baseball cap to league games, and as golfers, on the links.

**Twentieth Century**

World War I (1914-1918) brought about dramatic changes in women's clothes, hairstyles, and hats, creating a lucrative environment for entrepreneurial designers. Throughout the 1920s, short skirts, bobbed hair, and the cloche, or bell-shaped hat, were the mode on both sides of the Atlantic.

Paris, however, remained the fashion center with trend-setting designers as Elsa Schiaparelli, Cristóbal Balenciaga, and Agnès introducing synthetic materials and abstract shapes. New York and Hollywood also began attracting millinery talent from Europe. Hattie Carnegie from Austria first worked in New York at Macy's before opening her own shop and eventually creating a millinery empire with a thousand employees. French-born Lilly Daché trained with Suzanne Talbot and Caroline Reboux in Paris before arriving in 1925 at New York, where she, too, worked for Macy's before opening her own salon, which led to a multimillion-dollar, international business and fame for her turbans, floral designs, and the "half hat." John-Frederic's hats resulted from the partnership of John Piocelle (who studied in Paris at École des Beaux Arts) and the businessman Frederic Hirst (1929-1947). Their designs gained notoriety through Hollywood stars like Marlene Dietrich, Gloria Swanson, and Greta Garbo who wore the slouch hat.

Oleg Cassini, son of a Russian count, first worked in Paris before a long career designing for Hollywood studios. While individual designers maintained their own salons for one-of-a-kind headpieces, they also mass-produced less expensive styles for sales through urban department stores.

Sally Victor also got her millinery start at Macy's and by the 1930s branched out into her own business with her husband, Victor Serges. Her hats combined fashion styling with modest pricing aimed at a wide middle-class clientele, including Mamie Eisenhower. A number of twentieth-century couturiers either began as milliners (Coco Chanel) or designed hats, purses, and handbags as complementary accessories to their clothing line (Christian Dior). Throughout much of the twentieth century, hats and gloves were required for attending social events.

During the World War II Nazi occupation of Paris (1940-1944), when rationing curtailed the fashion industry and sales abroad, French women boosted their morale by defiantly wearing outlandish structures on their heads made out of scraps. With the armistice came rebuilding and the renewed claim that Paris would again become the fashion center of the world. By the 1950s, a cadre of influential wholesale and retail millinery clients from abroad attended Paris fashion shows, purchasing rights to copy the latest hat designs for home markets at inexpensive prices.

In New York, Bergdorf Goodman was known to have the best millinery department; its custom-made Halston hats were top of the line. Roy Halston Frowick created the now-famous deep pillbox hat that Jacqueline Kennedy wore to her husband's 1961 inauguration. The hat, designed to be worn back on the head, accommodated the First Lady's bouffant hairstyle. Within months, the pill-box became the rage across America, boosting the millinery industry, and was thereafter known as Jackie's signature hat.

Some historians see President John F. Kennedy's predilection for hatlessness as leading the trend toward eliminating men's toppers for formal attire. Others see the civil rights movement also effecting this change since hats over centuries had served as visible symbols of the class system. Whatever the cause, in the late 1960s, the custom for both men and women of wearing hats to social events began to disappear. "Informality" became the key to clothing modes. Hats were seen as irrelevant, particularly to the younger generation bent on social change and personal independence. Milliners were replaced by professional hairdressers who created self-expressing new hairstyles such as the Afro and cornrows for African Americans. Simultaneously, middle-class women were introduced to the comfort of pantsuits that had no precedents or hat-wearing fashion requirements.
In contrast to the white community, urban African American women never stopped wearing hats. They continue the African tradition that survived slavery of adorning the head for worship celebrations. Combining glamour and holiness, their Sunday hats are colorful, flamboyant, enormous, and plentiful (some own up to 100), made of straws, felts, furs, starched fabrics, adorned with plumes, sequins, artificial flowers, and rhinestones extending the head upward and outward. Their designers, such as Shellie McDowell of New York, whose clientele includes Oprah Winfrey, understand the tastes of black women and their desire for recognition. This unique tradition of black women in church hats has been documented in the book *Crowns* (2000) and an off-Broadway production of the same title.

In England, after a two-decade hiatus, Princess Diana helped to repopularize the wearing of attractive hats in the 1980s. Her London-based milliner John Boyd and others (Simone Mirman and Graham Smith) continued designing hats for royal family members, while also producing popular ready-to-wear lines; and the talented Stephen Jones struck out into another surrealistic, trend-setting direction related to the shocking punk styles of colored Mohican-spiked hair and the rock generation.

Festivals have also helped popularize hats. From the 1880s to 1940s, supported by the millinery manufacturers, Easter Sunday parades were held in American cities. These encouraged American women to annually buy or retrim their Easter bonnets, dress-up their daughters, and walk down main streets. The Hollywood film *Easter Parade* (1948) had Fred Astaire and Judy Garland participate in a reenactment of this New York Fifth Avenue event.

In England, the historic Ascot, weeklong series of horse races, held annually in June and featured in the musical *My Fair Lady*, still reaches its peak of excitement on Gold Cup Day, known since 1807 as Ladies Day, when the men wear traditional top hats, and the Queen, along with hundreds of women from all classes wear spectacular chapeaux. Large picture hats (also called “cartwheels”) are the most common, but what gets attention and appears in press coverage are photos of the most novel hats, featuring intriguing images, such as a dartboard, cellular telephone, flying saucers, Astroturf, or a birdcage.

Paris celebrates Saint Catherine of Alexandria, patroness of maidens and milliners, on 25 November. Unmarried women, especially those working in the millinery trade, who are known as "Catherinettes," wear extravagant hats to parties held in their honor. In earlier times, their goal was to catch a husband with the saint's assistance.

A notable effort at reigniting interest in millinery was the 1983 opening of the Hat Making Museum in Chazelles-sur-Lyon, France, center of the former hair felt hat industry. Its permanent exhibition presents a chronological display of hats from 1850 on, and temporary shows include the results from its biennial International Contest of Hat Designers, which in 2003 drew 176 hats from 16 countries, including Canada, the United States, Australia, and Japan.

See also Beret; Hairstyles; Men's Hats; Headdress; Turban; Veils.

Bibliography


Was this page useful?  ✔  Yes  ❌  No
A hat is a head covering which is worn for various reasons, including protection against weather conditions, ceremonial reasons such as university graduation, religious reasons, safety, or as a fashion accessory.[1] In the past, hats were an indicator of social status.[2] In the military, hats may denote nationality, branch of service, rank or regiment.[3] Police typically wear distinctive hats such as...
many official records of hats before 3000 BC, they probably were commonplace before that. Annotated Bibliography on Women's Hats and the Millinery Trade 1840-1940. by Christina Bates Ontario Historian Canadian Museum of Civilization. Occupational Guides and Studies. Short article in women's journal on the suitability of the trade to women; skills required; divisions of work; types of establishments. Brissenden, Paul F. Progress and Poverty in Millinery Manufacturing. Chicago? History of Hats. Hat started as just one more protection from elements. It stayed that way but at the same time it developed into something more. As if it almost gained a character. Or better - thousands of characters. Find more about history of hats here. Facts about Hats. Read more about history of wigs here. History of Men's and Women's Hats. Bowler hat was invented in 1849 as a hat for gamekeepers by Edward Coke, British soldier and politician. It was made to be strong and to fit well on the head so it can protect wearer from the low hanging branches and it won't fall off when wind blows. It was made from hard felt, had narrow brim and a low crown. It was accepted very quickly in all economic classes (it even sold better than any other hat on the Wild West) and stayed popular until 1960s.