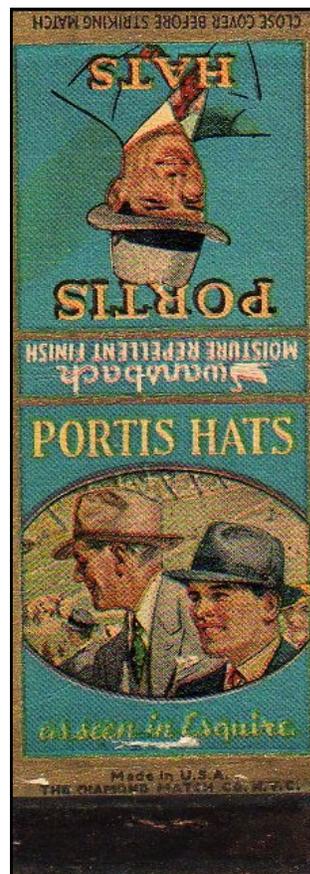


When Hats Were Cool!

by
Mike Prero

I was born in 1945, and as I grew up I don't remember men wearing hats, except in the movies. My father never wore a hat. Perhaps I was just too young to take note, but up to the early 1950's hats were certainly in vogue. Where would the likes of James Cagney, Edward G. Robinson, and George Raft be



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without hats? Even gas station attendants were wearing them for a time. And yet, by the beginning of the 1960s, they were virtually gone as standard attire for men. That must have been very painful for the hat manufacturers! Just when you think you have it all...it all disappears.

Hats evolved as protection from the sun and rain, of course, but somewhere along the line, it just became cool to wear a hat...and, as time passed, certain periods had certain types of hats. In Lincoln's time, top hats were in vogue; in the early 1900s, the straw hat was popular; today, the most commonly seen type of hat is the baseball cap (!). While most hats existed simply for the sake of fashion, other hats had, and have, other functions. Some are designed for more direct protection (hardhats); some are 'badges' of profession (soldier's helmet, bellman's cap); some provide sensory enhancement (miner's hat); and so on.

Hats have also had a number of unintended consequences: animal populations decimated for their fur, people going mad ('mad hatter').

Sometimes, no matter what the type of hat, how the wearer wears it gives off additional signals—tipped to one side or the other, worn low on the head or high, or, in the case of baseball caps, even worn backwards. A hat can be meant to say you're tough, you're upper class, you're a rube; you're a nerd... I wonder if the originators of the hat back in prehistoric times could ever have envisioned just what they were starting!