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History of Hose

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When you hang up your Christmas stocking this year take a little time to notice this garment in detail. Stockings, the last article of wearing apparel made by man, have had a long history from the crude foot coverings of the Greeks and Romans to the sheer nylons women enjoy today. Not only have there been countless changes and improvements in hosiery through the centuries, but these changes are still taking place.

Before the Eighth Century B.C. no concept of stockings was found in writing or drawings. Early hose developed from leg bindings made with narrow strips of woolen cloth to stockings which were tailored, cut and sewn up the back.

Concealed Legs

Although long gowns concealed the legs of women from public view, they have no doubt worn hosiery as long as men. Even as late as the 17th Century, public mention of women's stockings or legs was frowned upon. A Spanish ambassador, who was given a pair of machine-knit stockings to present to the queen of Spain went so far as to say, "Take back thy stockings, and know, foolish sir, that the Queen of Spain hath no legs."

The 20th Century arrived, however, bringing change in both the standards of public decency and the hosiery world. In 1900, cotton knit claimed over 88 per cent of women's stockings. Silk hose took up only one per cent of the market.

As hemlines gradually raised, women sought attractive hose, and lustrous silk stockings held great appeal. By 1929 hose of silk had soared to the top. A pair of silk hose was quite a purchase and tender loving care kept them wearable for many months.

Another hosiery material popular at one time was rayon. Rayon hose looked well in a box and were even quite presentable on the leg if the wearer were an inactive person who never moved. As soon as she bent her knee, however, the rayon hose bagged at the knees and ankles.

Yarns Thinner

On May 15, 1940, nylon stockings were introduced and immediately accepted. The first heavier nylon hose were very durable, but as the consumer continually demanded sheerer hose, the nylon yarns became thinner and weaker. Once again women learned to handle their hose with care.

Since nylon stockings came on the market manufacturers have constantly worked for variety. There are knee length hose, seamless hose, red hose, green hose and stretch hose. An interesting development which was one of the first ways of making hose stretchier was the pleated hose. The pleats were permanently set in the nylon with heat. One of the newer styles for formal evening wear is hose that sparkle.

If the holiday season finds you in sheer seamless, colorful blue or sparkling golden hose, stop to appreciate the many improvements made in them since man first wore the crude woolen leg bindings.