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“The First Silk Top Hat”

The first official recorded history of what we now refer to as a silk top hat made from silk plush in England, was in 1793. The hatter George Dunnage of the county of Middlesex, made the style of hat from silk shag (a form of plush).

At the time it was never called a top hat, hats of the style were frequently called beaver hats. Dunnage's silk hat was initially described as “imitation of beaver” thus the silk hat, was born in England. The common use of the adjective “top” hat came into our written vocabulary later on, around the middle of the 19th Century.

Dunnage' s father Benjamin was in the ribbon trade, which gave Dunnage access to knowledge of the silk trade. Subsequently George, worked with his business partner Thomas Larkin, at Dunnage & Larkin, patented silk hat manufactory until their partnership finally disbanded in 1818.

The first silk top hats were made with silk plush usually covering a felt underlay though other underbodies were used. In time a shellac and calico gossamer shell was designed giving greater waterproof abilities and reducing the weight. Lincoln Bennett, a major hat manufacturer of the era is cited to have first produced hats using the gossamer method in first half of the 19th Century.

By the middle of the 19th century hats made from shellac and calico covered with silk plush were all the range, their popularity at the time affirmed by Prince Albert's patronage.

For more information please contact:

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