



A “Sock It To Me” History

by Wayne F. Trickett

While working on my LEEBRICK genealogy I was impressed by the fact that three or four consecutive generations of our ancestors had spent their lives involved in the cloth making and/or sock making trades or guilds.

My interest grew as I perceived these several ancestors apparently quite successful socially and politically. The simple sounding occupation of “sock making” being able to drive a profitable industry for several generations caused me to satisfy my curiosity.

The following historical information comes from the internet and resolves some of my questions:

“When most people think of hosiery, they simply think of the typical nylon and mesh stockings that cover most women's feet and legs today. Hosiery is essentially any kind of knitted covering designed specifically for both the legs and feet, but it was not always simply for women, and was not always just to create a fashion statement.

Even in prehistoric times, mankind learned how to use materials to cover their legs for warmth through the use of animal skins held up by a leather belt or girdle. As early as 400 AD, socks and other forms of hosiery were used, and this is thought to be the first proof of this type of clothing being developed. Socks were found in Egyptian tombs, worn on the feet of kings. Around 771 AD, Charlemagne the Great had been seen wearing leg coverings. Greek men and women also wore socks, known as asoccus.



By the 12th century, socks had graduated into stockings and became a very popular clothing item within Europe. They were tied or woven through holes in the shirt of the wearer to keep them up. Garters were used by women to hold the stockings which only reached as high as the upper calf.

They were fashioned to fit closely to the leg out of some of the finest materials available. Silk, cotton, and wool were all used. In the 1400's in some areas of Europe a fashion emerged where hose were slashed up and down the leg to reveal contrasting fabric underneath. They were stuffed at the top with horse hair or other material in order to support the heavy fabrics which were used. At this time hose were not only the tight fitting leggings we think of today, but also breeches. Depending on the size and location of the puff on the hose the names at the time of these articles of clothing varied. For pants that had very short puff they were called trunk hose, if they had puffs to the knee they were called canions, and puffs past the knee were called venetians.



These were popular until the 1700s. The part of the hose that we think of as tights were called netherhose or nethersocks. The netherhose were connected to the upper half of the hose with ribbons or other ties or with garters at the knees.

Around the mid 1500's, hosiery began taking on an ornate tone, with colored patterns and silk weavings. A clergyman named William Lee made the first

knitting machine in 1589, which paved the way for hosiers to begin mass-producing their wares. Both silk and cotton were commonly used fibers and made excellent stockings, socks, and other forms of hosiery.

Men and women both wore hosiery during the Renaissance period, and the hosiery was often dyed bright colors to represent the person's lineage or to show others where they came from. Some popular colors of hose included blue, yellow, violet, green, grey, white, black, but most of all red.

Silk stockings would often be layered to help protect the legs from cold winter weather. Peasants and other common people wore hosiery made of cotton, while the royalty wore silk. As fashion changed and women wore boots, hosiery would incorporate lace to give socks and stockings a more feminine look and feel. By the time of Queen Elizabeth, multicolored hose were no longer in fashion. Hose were mostly solid colored."



Photos:

From the top page down:

Charles IX of France in 1566, Sir Walter Raleigh and his son in 1602, Waist to toe red "socks".

Last page left to right:

Front and back view of waist to toe "socks", A Grand "Seigneur", Blue and Red pairs of 18th century silk stockings.