

Mad As A Hatter!

In the 19th century, craftsmen who made hats were said to be excitable and irrational, as well as to tremble with palsy and mix up their words. Such behavior gave rise to the familiar expression “Mad as a hatter.”

With most such lore, there’s usually at least a kernel of truth behind the story, and with this one there was indeed not only truth in the initial observations, but an actual explanation for such eventually discovered. The disorder, called “hatter’s shakes,” was found to be caused by chronic mercury poisoning from the solution used to treat the felt used in hats. Attacking the central nervous system, the toxin did indeed lead to the odd behavioral symptoms noted above.

And one could easily carry over that theme to the hats, themselves, over the years. Whether hats were currently in vogue for everyday fashions or not, they were always in use within the other facets of society, just as they are now. Hats range from gang paraphernalia to religious accouterments; they’re a part of every uniform, and no costume is complete without one; sports figures have made them popular with the younger set, while the military has proved that they can be life savers.

There are a few collectors who save hats, but all those that I’m aware of specialize in a certain type: chefs’ hats, or top hats, etc. ...but wouldn’t it be interesting to put together a collection of different hats: a Napoleonic two-pointer, a Revolutionary tri-tip, a ten-gallon Stetson, a war bonnet, and so on. I’ll bet they’re all right there, on covers. Start keeping an eye open for hats as all those covers pass through your hands, and you just might get the fever—just don’t get mad as a hatter!

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