Men's Wear
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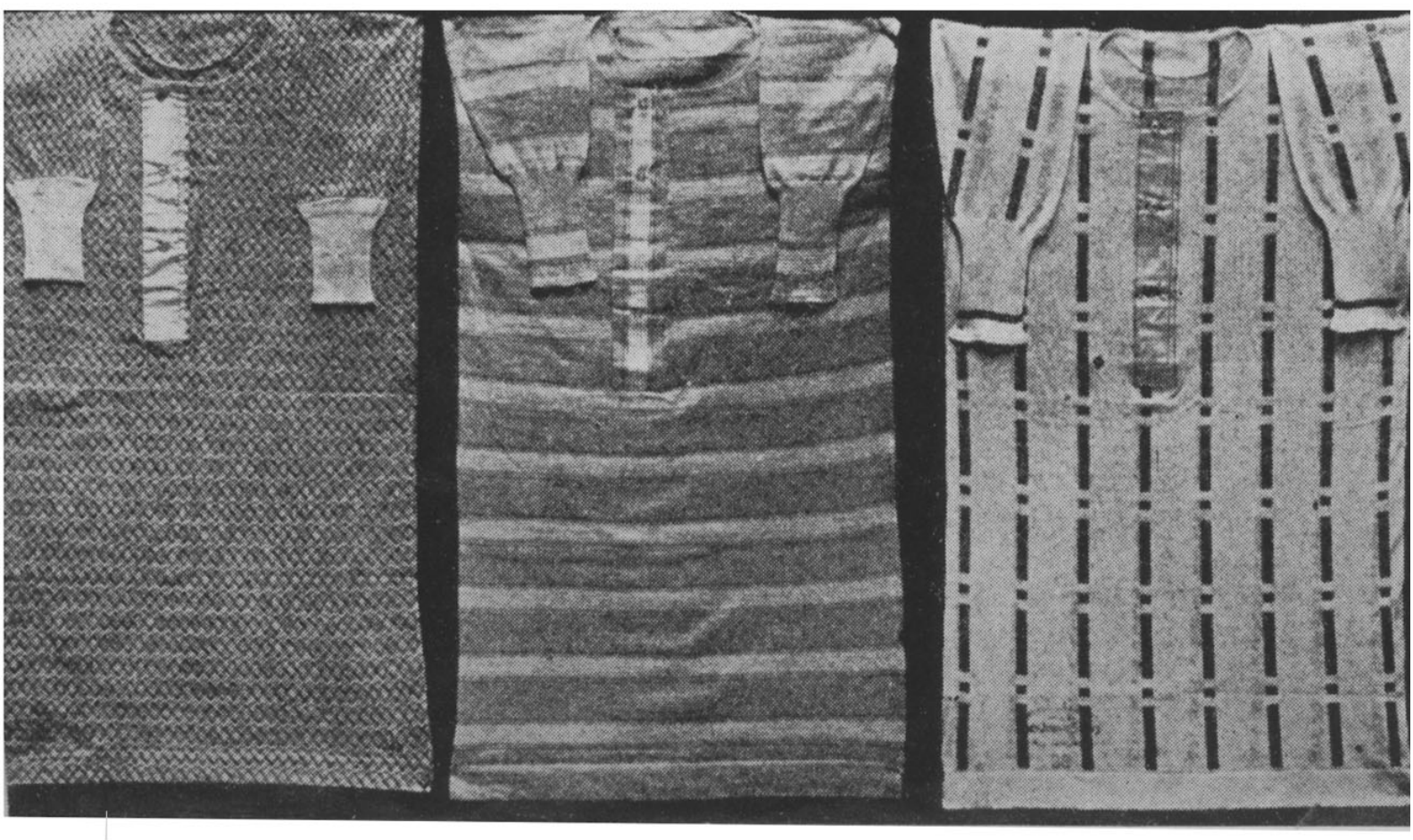
Underwear



UNDERSHIRTS had fancy designs and full length sleeves with ribbed cuffs. Reprinted from MEN'S WEAR of 1900.

WOMEN were years behind men's styles, for in the 90's a well-dressed dandy's wardrobe included black silk underwear. Although fleece-lined underwear was in demand in 1899, lighter, closely woven suitings were gaining popularity. The introduction of cut-and-sewn underwear in 1904 preceded the woven athletic union suits brought out by BVD in 1905 and muslin athletic suits which made their appearance in 1907.

Except for a negligible amount of expensive woven silk underwear, wool and cotton dominated this field until the early 1920's when rayon was introduced. The rayon athletic union suit of this period gave the feeling of silk at $3.50 instead of $10. Another change came in 1926 when the Blue Streak Underwear Co. adopted a hookless fastener.

During the 20's college boys started wearing their gym suits for underwear, a fad that was capitalized on by Robert Reis who promoted Jim pants and Jim shirts.

By 1926, the men's cotton union suit business was going from bad to worse. Manufacturers who found their market for women's underwear being displaced by rayon, brought additional competition to those already making men's underwear. And a few years later, during the depression, BVD of specialized fame diversified its line to add knit shirts, cut-and-sewn shorts, swim trunks, pajamas, and sportswear. In 1935, Cooper's Jockey shorts established their name. Seven years later boxer shorts were introduced by the Moses-Rosenthal Co., credited with originating covered Lastex waistbands in shorts.

Only about 15 percent of men's underwear is manufactured under national brand labels. Most of the output comes from volume manufacturers such as Union Underwear Company *and Hansley Mills, which* are not generally known to the ultimate consumer. In 1948, some 7,000,000 dozen of woven shorts alone were produced.

While the quarter-sleeve knit undershirt with crew neck had been around for some time, its popularity increased manifold during and immediately after World War II. Also called the T-shirt, the quarter sleeve undershirt took to the high seas as prescribed "uniform" in the U. S. Navy. Soon, all branches of the service adopted it.

While the average G.I. broke speed records in discarding his uniform, the T-shirt was one garment that never hit the mothballs. Most of the men in the service liked the idea of quarter sleeves on their undershirts, and this preference gave rise to a boom in T-shirts. Sales of T-shirts levelled off after a year or so, but then they showed signs of increasing again. Today, the T-shirt is still growing in popularity.

Though comfort has classically been the main consideration in men's underwear, interest has been shifting to appearance in recent years. Pastel colored undershirts have made their debut, and met with mixed reactions.

In the shorts department, color and pattern made a big splash in recent years. Since the war, novelties have made quick killings. Bright colors and bold patterns seemed to rub consumers the right way, especially during holiday buying seasons. Newest in underwear is the advent of nylon.

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