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## Hats for Gentlemen

In colonial America head coverings often represented one's social status; the more elaborate, the greater the wealth of the wearer. Colonial hatters produced a variety of hats including knitted caps, broad-brimmed hats (the most popular), or upturned brim-tricorne hats (three-cornered hats) made from beaver skin, wool, cotton, or straw. Beaver furs were so numerous in the New World that the hat industry captured business from England, and resulted in the near-extinction of the beaver. Danbury, Connecticut, became the epicenter of hat production in the colonies, producing five million hats in one year.

Hat-making included "carroting" or washing furs with a steaming hot liquid containing mercury. It attacked the central nervous system when it became airborne. Hat makers experienced blurred vision, loss of balance, delusions, and uncontrolled twitching of the muscles. Known as the Danbury Shakes, this would give rise to the statement "mad as a hatter."

From the 1770s through the early 1800s a multitude of hat styles appeared: round-crown, broad-brimmed felt or beaver hat; hats with flat or narrow brims and high, tapering crowns; and the top-hat with varying contours to the sides of the crown, and the roll of the brim. Cocked hats worn by gentlemen retained their popularity during this period, varying in size, angle, and style of the cocked brims.

The hat which inspired this sign represents what might be considered "The Wellington" style, popular in 1812.

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