

# ALPHABET SOUP:



## Fashion Points

By GYLES BRANDRETH

Jeans, in case you're wondering, were not named for a girl named Jean.

The word for this very American fashion has a very European ancestry. According to "Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary," "jeans" comes from "Genoa" and was part of the phrase "jean fustian." Fustian was a strong cotton fabric used for clothing and bedding, which came, in medieval times, from Genoa.

In middle English "Genoa" was spelled "Gene" or "Jene," which in turn came from the Middle French "Genes." "Jene fustian," then, was an Italian cotton fabric. We simply dropped the "fustian" and kept the "jene."

Fustian became a word meaning bombast, pretentious speech or an inflated style. Elizabethan actors, according to legend, used fustian fabric in making their costumes, and their melodramatic style of acting gave fustian a bad name.

Jeans are also called denims or Levi's. The word "denim" comes from "serge de Nimes," serge being another name for twilled cotton fabric, and Nimes the town in France where it was made.

The trademark "Levi's," of course, came from Mr. Levi Strauss, who went west in the Gold Rush days with a wagon full of denim fabric. He couldn't sell it, so he decided to make durable pants for the miners. He put copper rivets on to strengthen them so miners could put their samples in their pockets.

\* \* \*

I know all this about jeans, denims and Levi's because I have been looking into the international world of fashion — past and present — and I have made some startling discoveries.

Believe it or not:

\* Some of man's earliest clothes were made from animal hairs beaten into felt.

\* The Egyptians were the first to weave cloth to make clothes and the Chinese were the first to weave silk.

\* In 1785 Louis XVI issued a decree that handkerchiefs had to be square.

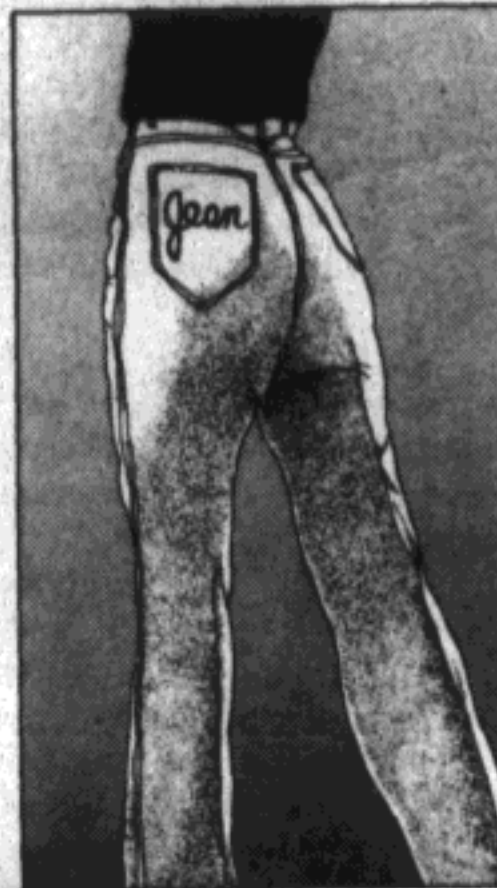
\* The button was developed in southern Europe first as a decoration. Its practical application was only realized later.

\* The ancient kings of

Assyria used to wear false beards in much the same way as 18th century European men wore wigs.

\* The Panama hat is made from the undeveloped leaves of the stemless screw pine and has nothing to do with Panama.

\* Bloomers are named after Mrs. Amelia Bloomer, who first wore them in New York in 1851.



\* The "flappers" of the 1920s took their name from young partridges and wild ducks.

\* Two days before Christmas 1931, Bud Macken of Mascot, Australia, ordered a new two-piece suit. From the fleece on the sheep's back it was transformed into the finished article in 1 hour 52 minutes 18.5 seconds.

\* The brassiere was first patented by an American debutante called Caresse Crosby in 1914.

Clearly, there's a lot more to what we wear than meets the eye.