



Men's bowler hat, ca. 1900s.
Toronto Metropolitan
University FRC1986.09.007.
Donated by Mrs. D. Lewis.

Toronto Metropolitan
University

THE BOWLER HAT

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Hats can serve as a signifier of status as well as a functional purpose. The bowler, which was the first hard, round-crowned hat for men, was ordered in the 1850 by an Englishman by the name of William Coke, who apparently requested it to avoid having to continually replace his gamekeeper's soft hats that were so easily damaged. Originally called a Coke hat by Lock's of St. James who designed the hat for Mr. Coke, over time it came to be known as the bowler (or the derby in the United States) and is considered one of the most successful and enduring hats ever designed.

This men's felted wool bowler hat (FRC1986.09.007) carries the label of *Churchill & Co. Marlborough St London* inside the crown. It is dated to approximately 1900 and the felted wool is tearing at brim. It was well worn by its owner as the leather lining is heavily aged from wear.



In this undated cabinet card by photographer Geo. A. Snider of Brantford, Ontario, Charles Taylor is dressed in a dark wool suit. The jacket has piping on the edges and a small pocket square is visible in the upper pocket. He stands holding his bowler hat in his right hand. Mr. Taylor is probably a country farmer, dressed in his Sunday best. His jacket is more finely tailored than his pants, and the open jacket and awkward pose suggests that this is likely the first time he has had his photograph taken. This cabinet card (FRC2002.04.348) has gold edging along one-side and has been trimmed, perhaps to fit in a frame. The date is estimated to be approximately 1885, when such mounts were popular.

Dating Victorian photographs can often be done through a close examination of the clothing worn during the sitting. Although it was possible to rent clothing from the photographer's studio, the subtle details of dress during the Victorian era make dating relatively easy as long as the image has not faded with the passage of time.

Cabinet card, ca. 1880s.
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