

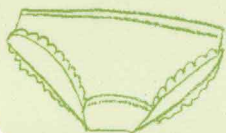
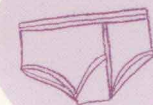
How

Underwear

by
KATHY
SHASKAN



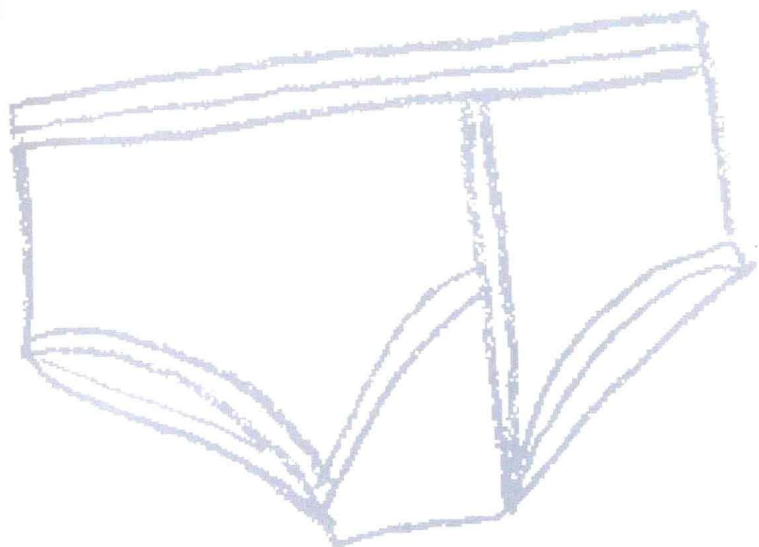
Got **UNDER THERE**



A
Brief History

illustrated by
REGAN
DUNNICK



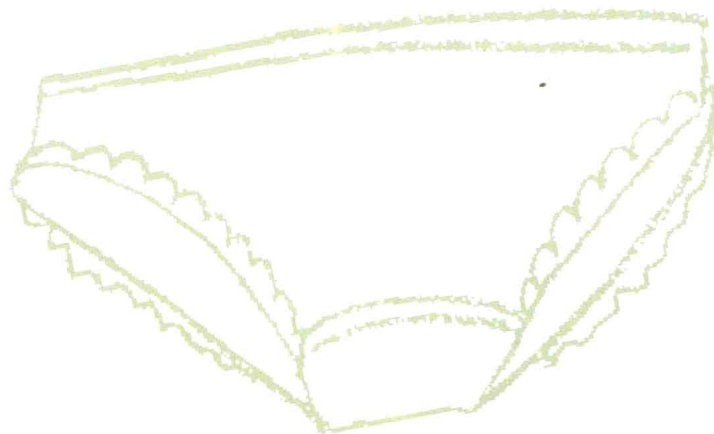


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**HOW UNDERWEAR GOT
UNDER THERE:**

藏书章

A Brief History



How *Underwear*

Got **UNDER THERE:**

A Brief History

KATHY
SHASKAN

illustrated by
REGAN
DUNNICK

**DUTTON
CHILDREN'S
BOOKS**

DUTTON CHILDREN'S BOOKS A division of Penguin Young Readers Group

Published by the Penguin Group • Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A. • Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3 (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.) • Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England • Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd) • Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd) • Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi - 110 017, India • Penguin Group (NZ), Cnr Airborne and Rosedale Roads, Albany, Auckland 1310, New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd) • Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa • Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

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CIP Data is available.

Published in the United States by Dutton Children's Books,
a division of Penguin Young Readers Group
345 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014
www.penguin.com/youngreaders

Designed by *Irene Vanderveert*

MANUFACTURED IN CHINA First Edition

ISBN 978-0-525-47178-3

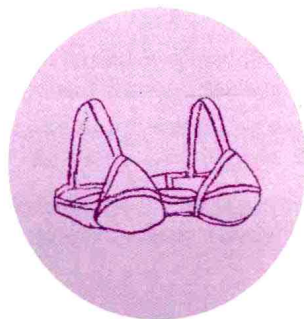
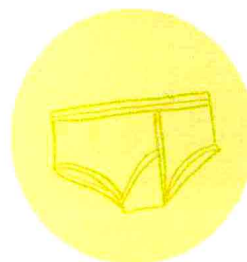
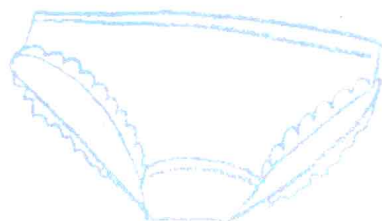
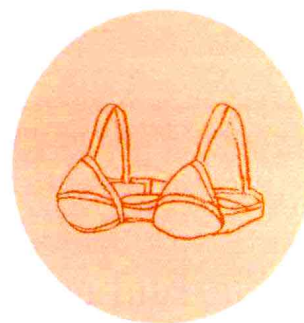
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IMAGE CREDITS: pages 15, 16, 26 (bottom and top), 33, 34: Warsaw Collection of Business Americana—Underwear, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Behring Center, Smithsonian Institution.
page 19: Warsaw Collection of Business Americana—Ladies Clothing, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Behring Center, Smithsonian Institution.
pages 23, 25 (bottom), 29: Warsaw Collection of Business Americana—Corsets, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Behring Center, Smithsonian Institution.

The page features a white background with several large, overlapping circles in various colors: a yellow circle at the top center, a large orange circle at the top right, a pinkish-orange circle on the left, a yellow-green circle at the bottom center, and a light blue circle at the bottom right. A vertical dashed line runs along the left edge of the page.

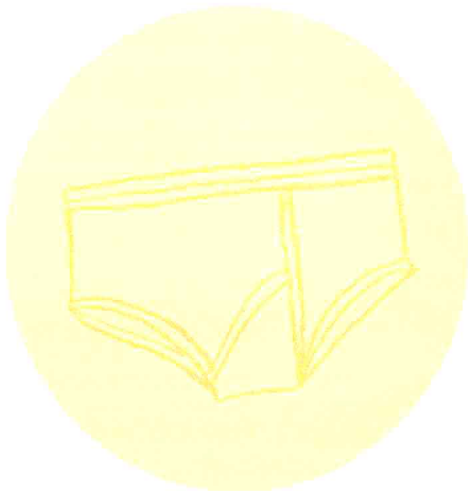
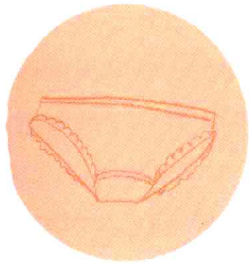
To Paul and Noel, who make the journey fun—K.S.

To Debbie, Brandon, Jean, Perry, Joyce, Ed,
and my good friend Stretch
—R.D.

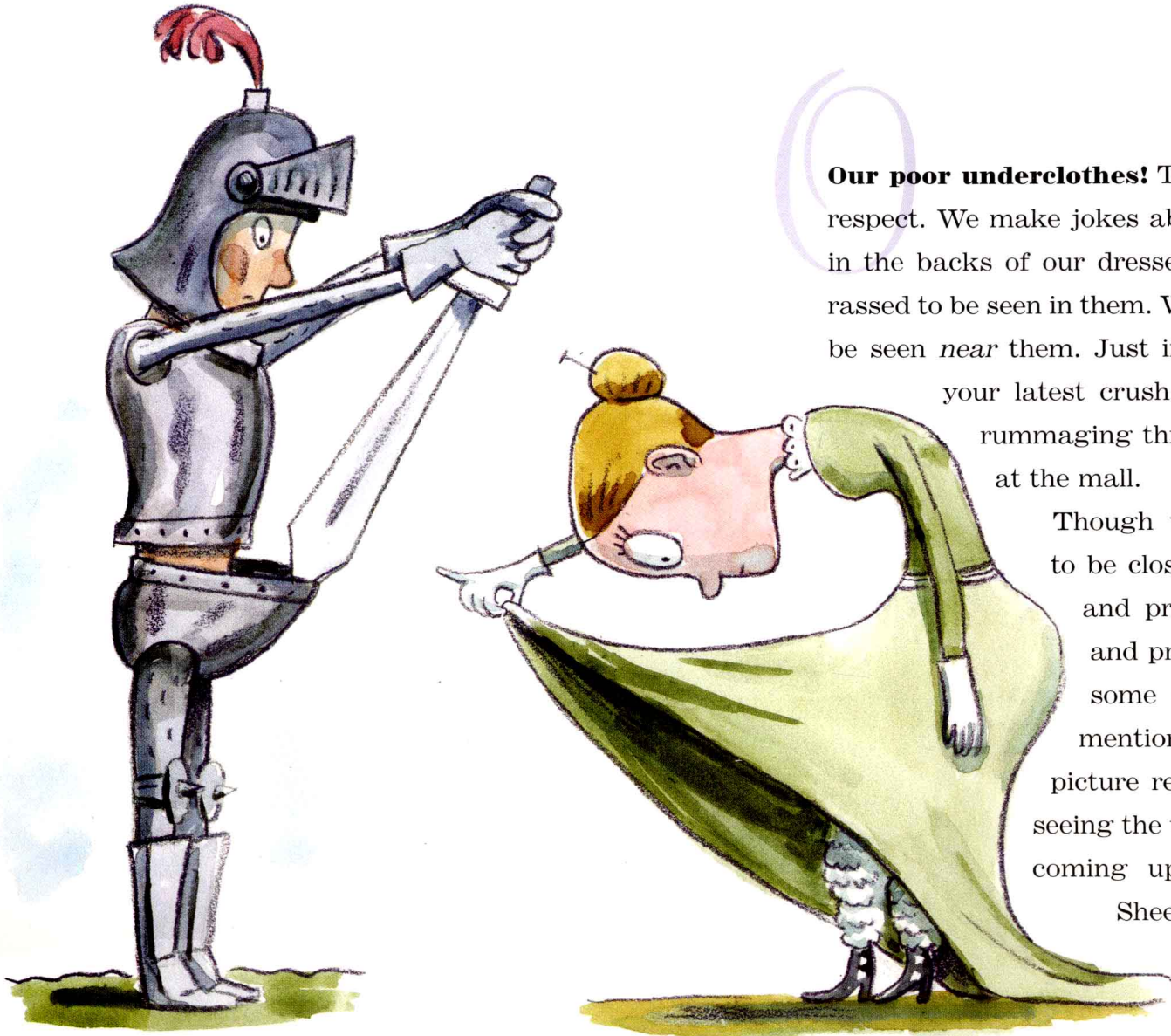


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A "BRIEF" INTRODUCTION



Our poor underclothes! They can't seem to get any respect. We make jokes about them and stuff them in the backs of our dresser drawers. We're embarrassed to be seen in them. We're even embarrassed to be seen *near* them. Just imagine how you'd feel if your latest crush walked by as you were rummaging through an underwear rack at the mall.

Though we trust these garments to be closest to our skin, shielding and protecting the most tender and private areas of our bodies, some of us blush at the mere mention of underwear. (Can you picture reading aloud in class and seeing the word *underpants* or *thong* coming up in the next sentence?

Sheer torture!) Centuries ago, people whispered about their "unmentionables"

when they absolutely had to talk about their underwear.

Even though the human race has been looking down on its underwear for centuries, these humble garments can teach us a lot about the way people lived, their beliefs, and the type of technology they used to manufacture their clothing.

Imagine that an antique trunk is found in a historic house, and you've been given the job of studying the underwear found inside. If you were to examine those old-time undies and find that they were machine-sewn, you'd immediately know that they were made after 1850. Why? Because that's when sewing machines came into general use. And let's say those same undies are made of a rough linen fabric. You can use that bit of evidence to assume that the original owners weren't rich. Linen rubs uncomfortably against the skin, so most rich people preferred softer, more expensive materials like silk.

Even historians who study clothing have to work hard to "uncover" information about under-



Before the mid-1800s, there was no such thing as sizes in underwear. Clothing was hand-sewn and custom-fitted for a particular person.

wear. Consider this: When someone in your family preserves an item of clothing for future generations, or has a photo taken in a unique outfit, or writes about clothing in a diary, it is usually some special *outer* garment—a prom dress, a wedding tuxedo, a graduation gown. Hardly anybody saves or writes about their own underwear.

The same held true for our ancestors. We know what they wore to coronations, weddings, inaugurations, and balls, because they mentioned these special outfits in their letters and memoirs. Some people even had their portraits painted in them. They didn't bother to write about their underclothes because they just didn't think they were important.

But what we *do* know about our ancestors' underclothes is fascinating. So let's take a peek beneath the skirts of history.

The only images we have from the days before the invention of photography are drawings and paintings. When people took the time to sit for portraits, they wore their best clothes. That's why underwear and everyday clothing are harder to document.

PROTECTION

Modern underpants are the descendants of a funny little garment called the loincloth. You've seen it—it's that weird diaper-like thing that Tarzan wears as he swings through the jungle.

The loincloth has a very interesting history. People from all over the world who never met and never had the chance to compare fashion notes all came up with very similar types of loincloths. At first glance that might seem amazing, but really, it makes perfect sense. If you lived back then, how many times would *you* need to walk naked past a patch of sticker bushes or cacti before you decided that it might be a good idea to grab some fabric and wrap it around your bottom? Most ancient people managed to figure that out, too.

Some early people tied simple pieces of cloth or animal skins around their waists, skirt-style, and left it at that. Others (perhaps the ones



who had to walk through tall, sharp grasses) decided that their private parts could use a bit more protection. They started tucking pieces of the material through their legs as well.

But the original loincloths weren't underwear. They were only-wear. Later, as people began to layer their clothing, the loincloth and its descendants became the garment closest to the skin.

The loincloth is just one example of how underwear has been used as protection for the body. Another protective undergarment from the past is the gambeson. It was a long jacket-style undergarment that was worn by knights under their suits of armor. Thick, puckery, and stuffed with fiber or horsehair, the gambeson felt something like the quilted bedspreads we use today. It prevented the sharp edges of the armor from rubbing against the skin. But that wasn't its only job. The gambeson was also meant to cushion the knight from the blow of an enemy weapon. The armor couldn't do that, because its hard surface was designed mainly to keep the weapon from piercing the skin.

Mongolian warriors serving under

Genghis Khan in the

thirteenth century also

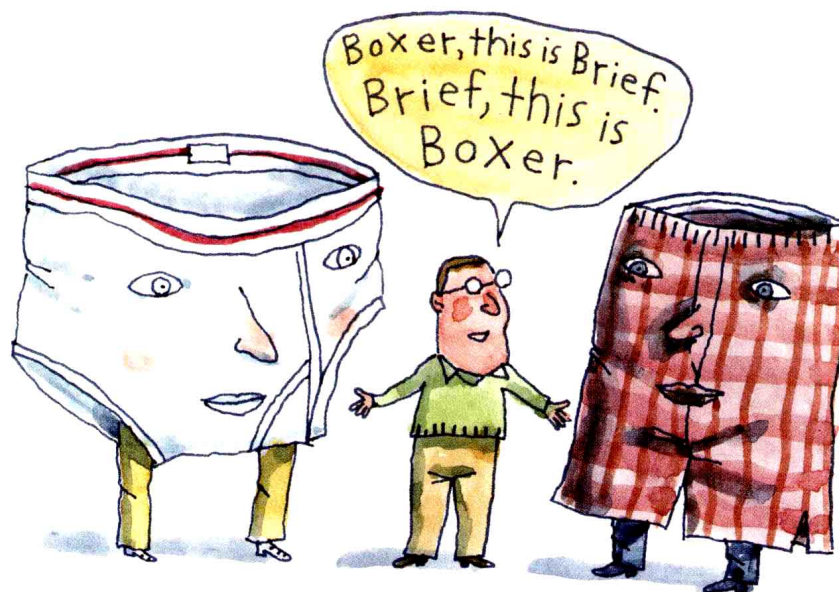
knew the value of protective underwear.

Since the bow and arrow were their

primary weapons,

they became experts in

When the Disney film *Tarzan* opened in Israel, some religious groups objected to the advertising posters that went up around the city. Calling the depiction of Tarzan in a loincloth offensive, they demanded their removal. Disney refused, and the movie went on to become a big hit.



Seventy-five percent of American men choose briefs over boxers.

removing arrows from the body. They designed densely woven silk undershirts that arrows could not tear easily. The fabric was then grasped and twisted to help remove the arrow.

Have you ever gotten hit with a baseball or a hockey puck in one of your...um, *sensitive* areas? Then you know why protective underwear is so important in sports—and there are more types than you'd ever imagine.

In order to learn to spin and jump, figure skaters practice constantly and keep falling



Protective undergarments are a necessity in the sports world: a hockey player's athletic cup takes the sting out of a fast-moving puck; chest protectors shield female fencers; fireproof underwear can save a race-car driver from a fiery death; padded underwear protects cyclists.

down until they get it right. So they need special undergarments with extra padding on the thighs and rear. Female fencers use metal breast protectors that look like twin pie plates tucked into their jackets. Men wear protective cups over their genitals in many different sports. Professional cyclists develop “saddle sores” on their rears if they don’t wear cushioned shorts or underpants. (How sore do you think your “saddle” would be if you rode the 2,000-mile Tour de France bicycle race without some kind of padding?)

Sometimes protective garments are job-related. Firefighters, race-car drivers, and others who need to shield their skin from burns can wear flame-retardant undershirts and pants. People who work around dangerous chemicals can wear underwear that protects their skin from accidental spills. Business travelers in dangerous parts of the world sometimes choose to wear bulletproof underwear beneath their clothing.

Sometimes people wear special undergarments in search of a different, otherworldly



type of protection. Some might call it superstition, but the idea of sacred undergarments goes back at least as far as the ancient Babylonians. Often these garments had fringe, which has a long history as a symbol of God's protection.

Religious garments may start as outerwear but move underneath. In the past, Orthodox Jewish men wore the *tallit*—a fringed prayer shawl—around their shoulders all day. Nowadays a smaller fringed shawl, called a *tallit kattan*, is worn under the clothes, and the larger *tallit* is typically worn just for morning prayers.

Some Mormons also place great faith in the protective abilities of their sacred undergarments, which they consider the “armor of God.” Consisting of white cotton undershirts and underpants that come down to the knees, “temple garments” are said to shield the wearer from all types of harm. They are worn day and

night, throughout life, and many believe that these garments have saved them from fire, bullets, or just the negative influences of society.



“King Tut” is the nickname we use for Tutankhamen, Egypt’s famous Boy King, who ruled from age nine until his death at about eighteen. Many lovely linen garments were buried with the young king: tunics, shirts, gloves, socks, and 145 underpants!

In recent years, textile experts around the world have been making reproductions of King Tut’s clothing so that we can see them in their original colors. At first they wanted to dye the fabrics in the same way as the ancient Egyptians.

After they found out that one of the red colors was produced by soaking the thread in sheep poop and rotten olive oil and then drying it for six months, they decided to use modern red dye instead.

WARMTH

I'm freezing my butt off!" is an expression you've probably heard on a cold day. Though it *is* actually possible to "freeze off" a body part through extreme frostbite (usually toes, fingers, and noses—not butts), we have *lots* of choices when it comes to keeping our bodies warm: moisture-wicking underwear, insulated pants, fleece sweaters, high-tech thermal jackets, even electric socks!

We can get these great cold-weather fashions at the nearest mall, but in earlier times it wasn't that easy. Knowing how to dress for

cold weather could be a matter of life or death.

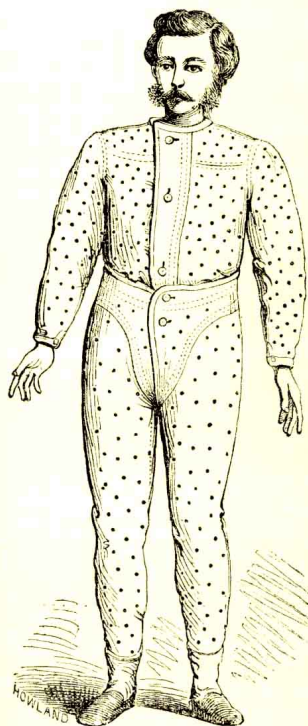
And anything you wanted to wear, you had to make yourself! If you lived in a hunting society, you would have to track and kill a

Would you like to have lived in a time where you had to tan the hides you would use to make your own clothing?



deer, then soften, smoke, and dry the skin to make your clothes.

One of the earliest ways discovered for keeping warm was to wear multiple layers of clothing.



This hilarious garment was sold as Smith's Patented Perforated Buckskin Undergarment. Marketed to both men and women, it was covered with tiny holes that allowed sweat to escape while keeping heat close to the body.

Different people used different methods of layering, but the idea was the same: to trap warm air between the layers and insulate the body from cold weather. We do the same thing today by putting on T-shirts, sweaters, and jackets in layers.

People in really cold climates had a lot

of incentive to develop warm underwear. Traditionally, the Inuit people, also called Eskimos, had to lie still on the ice for long periods of time while hunting seals. Not surprisingly, they found some very inventive ways to stay warm. The Inuit created undershirts out of bird skins, leaving the feathers on and facing them in toward the body. The shirt was worn loose to trap warm air close to the skin, and a fur garment was worn on top of it.

A person could sweat heavily in this outfit and still remain dry.

The bird skin pulled the moisture away from the body and onto the outside fur. When it

hit the cold air, the water froze, and the wearer would just beat it off the outer layer of clothing with a stick.

Many other animal skins have been used throughout history for warmth, including walrus, caribou, goose, and polar bear. Today,

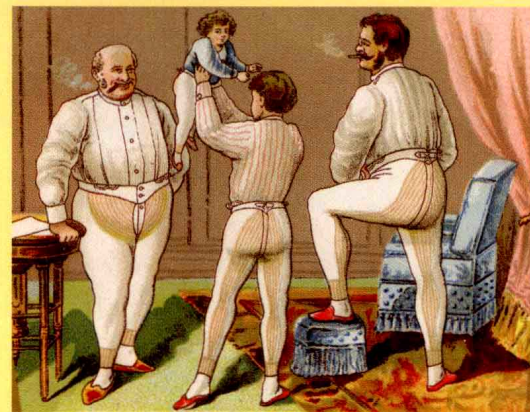
Some early American settlers had themselves sewn into their underwear for the winter. This was more comfortable than having buttons all over the body, but it also meant that they didn't bathe until spring rolled around—whew!



The Inuit bird-skin undershirt, with the feathers facing in, worked like a down jacket to conserve heat.

many people wear leather, suede, sheepskin, and fur, and they use goose down and other feathers as filling to make warm jackets and blankets. However, these materials are no longer popular for undergarments.

Wool, a natural fiber that comes from sheep, is another material prized for its warmth. Wool can feel scratchy when worn directly against the skin, but in the days before central heating, people were a lot more willing to put up with a little discomfort in order to keep out the winter



Sometime during the sixteenth century, the word drawers came to be associated with undergarments.

A drawer is something that's literally pulled, or "drawn," and comes from the French word tirer (to pull).

The "drawers" shown in this picture from the 1800s were developed for sportsmen but found their way to many men's closets as underwear because of their warmth.