

About Us

Travellers have a right to insist upon dependable clothing that can withstand whatever the world has to offer. Function is important also, but not at the expense of comfort, and we've made sure all our Tilley's age ever so gracefully. Simple to clean, too. We aim for clothing you can launder in a hotel sink in the evening, hang to dry, and wear neat and ready to go to breakfast. Not all Tilley's wash 'n' wear this well - but most do.

Everything with our name on it is made in Canada where we can keep a watchful eye. Some exceptions are the world's best socks, made to our UNHOLEY specifications in Iowa, and the water bottle created out west for us in Washington.



Ode to the Tilley Hat

or

"A Hobby Gone Haywire"

In which we oblige the occasional person who has asked how our modest Canadian company came to be.

About twenty years ago I came across one of the loves of my life: a homebuilt, 30'-long sailboat which I bought and renamed Karmananda. (Ananda means bliss, or such.)

I had searched throughout Ontario to find her; all the while she had been *there at my own club*, the National in Toronto, out in the yard, resting on her cradle, waiting...

To most people, I guess she didn't look like much, but she was beautiful to me. She needed work but her lines were elegant and except for her hull being covered by fiberglass that was slowly peeling away, she was made mostly of wood, including lots of mahogany and teak.

You should have seen her mast; it didn't rise vertically like ordinary masts! No, it was "raked" noticeably backwards in a most jaunty manner. And this tall, stout, Sitka Spruce spar even had wooden belaying pins arrayed around its base!

I fixed her up over several years. In the winter, when I couldn't work in the yard, I varnished her parts down in my basement. Coat after coat of varnish. Heck, one year I even had her anchor chromed! In time, she became more beautiful.

But there was still something missing. I couldn't find a cotton sailing hat in keeping with the quality of my lovely sloop. Sailors need hats and there wasn't a good-enough one anywhere. Realizing that others besides myself needed one too, I decided, in January 1980, to oversee the making of a proper one.

Three months later we had prototypes that my family and I could test on a sailing charter in Belize, and a couple of months after that we had succeeded in making some that we could attach our name to. By and by we were providing Tilley Hats to people who would drive to our home in suburban Toronto.

How did they first hear about them? I had traded some Hats for an ad in "Gam," a Canadian sailing magazine. And that fall, "Yachting" magazine gave us a third of a page editorial (I had sent the editor a Hat). Within a year we were selling Tilley Hats at boat shows throughout North America - *sometimes selling them in the hundreds!*

Because I had received so many pats on the back for the Hat, I decided to try for even more the next year (1981) by making proper sailing shorts. Knowing nothing about making clothing, I called on the services of a designer. When that didn't work out, I tried another, then another. Three different designers over a 9-month period!



Ask and ye shall be told where to go - and whom to see

With a simple phone call I received material help from the Pentagon's clothing consultants (I figured, correctly, that they would know what would last, be comfortable, and be easy to wash and fast to dry, and seldom need ironing). The gentlemen at Genco, a chandlery in Toronto, suggested the marvelous marine-quality, stainless steel, welded-shut D-rings, which we still use (and before that, Hat material and grommets); finding Murray Barrett's (my late dear friend's) wallet lying on the foredeck gave me the idea of incorporating a Velcro-closed security pocket in case the wearer found himself unexpectedly turned upside down; Toronto sailor John Reekie gave me the idea of a flank pocket (he kept important extra stuff in one that he'd sewn in his own shorts).



The "Double-Bum" Shorts

Common Sense said that for strength use the strongest of thread (polyester, but wrapped in cotton so it wouldn't cut through the material), and to sew in lots of stitches (lockstitches, not easily unraveled chain stitches), then bar-tack the heck out of any place that would be stressed - and to double-layer the material in the seat so that friction would be between the two layers, and not between the cloth and a deck, which would wear out the seat quickly.

The time came to drop my shorts

I found a small company to cut and sew them, and because they were (and are) so expensive to make, tried to sell Tilley shorts for \$45, But because other shorts at that time were only \$30 or so, and because people didn't understand what went into them, sales languished.

By the summer of 1983, two things were apparent: 1: to my surprise and delight, I'd come to realize that the Hat and Shorts were actually the best of their type in the world; 2: I'd had enough; people just didn't seem to want the Shorts so it was time to drop them. I would just stick to the Hats, still selling them mostly from a neighbour's home, and at boat shows. (My "real" work? I had my own business, renting and selling quality works of art to businesses in Toronto. It was boring but doing well, and left me time to mess about with my sailboat, and sell hats at about 16 boat shows a year.)

The Last Hurrah

But first, since Canada was represented in the 1983 America's Cup races, I presented the team with Tilley Hats, and a special edition of white (not the usual khaki) Tilley Classic Shorts. Then I stopped making them, concentrating on improving the Hat.

But by the fall of 1983, the word about the Shorts had gotten around and at the Annapolis Sailboat Show, people asked for them, and for pants of a similar quality and practicality - not for sailing BUT FOR TRAVEL!

It occurred to me that if I made trousers with a security pocket for a wallet, they would be excellent travel pants. So why not add a secret pocket for a passport?

"By George, Waldo! I've got the makings of a small business. I'll make travel clothing! I'll make it the best in the world! And then I'll make it even better!"

In January, 1984, I set up a small mail-order company. Alex Tilley and Family's Nautical Gear became Tilley Endurables, Inc. and we prospered nearly immediately. (And no, it has not always been easy).

Tilley Endurables

Tilley Hats and the finest travel clothing in the world

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