

1945 December 24-31

We Have Nylons!



—Tribune Photo

Hundreds of Persons formed a line from the Montgomery Ward store north on Fifth avenue to Main and west on Main early Friday in an effort to secure nylon stockings, which had been advertised by the establishment. Mrs. Tom O'Brien, 210 North 21st, was the first to make a purchase. She arrived at 7:30 a. m. to start the line.

(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 December 28, page 5)

When we see news stories about people waiting in line for concert tickets, the latest iPhone, or Black Friday shopping, have you ever said, "The only thing I would ever wait in line for is [fill in the blank]."

On December 28, 1945, hundreds of people lined up for the chance to buy nylon stockings in La Crosse. This may be hard for us to understand, with our store shelves overflowing with almost everything imaginable (we are not even going to bring up online shopping), without some context.

[Wallace Carothers](#) and a team of inventors at DuPont created nylon yarn in 1935. Part of the process for "Polymer 66" was steaming, which gave the fiber a sheer finish. Originally called "No-Run" stockings, the name had to change because prototypes were plagued with lots of runs. The name "Nylon" was made up during a brainstorming session. Production started in secret in 1937, and nylon stockings were demonstrated at the [New York World's Fair](#) in April 1939. When they first went on sale on October 24, 1939, women flocked to the few stores that stocked them.¹



Nylon stockings, 1939

(crfashionbook.com)

The anticipation of better female hosiery created great demand before nylon stockings were generally available. Hosiery was a huge part of the women's fashion market. Before nylons, women were spending \$400,000,000 a year for silk stockings.²

NYLON STOCKINGS TO BE ON MARKET SOON



THOSE spider-webby stockings made basically from coal, water and air — du Pont's nylon — about which there has been so much talk during the past year, will reach the retail stores of the country probably in May.

The hosiery, the latest application of this achievement of industrial chemistry, will be available at first in light sheer weight. Nylon hosiery will be in the high-quality group comparable to the finest hosiery now on the market. To prevent any possible confusion, the word "nylon" as well as the brand name of the hosiery manufacturer will be plainly marked on every pair of the stockings.

All sorts of reports have been circulated regarding the new stockings. Especial emphasis has been given to their long-wearing qualities. The company, however, has limited its comment to the statement that they will "wear at least

as long as other high quality hose of the same weight."

Erroneous statements have been printed that nylon stockings will not snag or "run." Nylon threads are stronger and more elastic than any other hosiery fiber and therefore more resistant to breakage, but if the snag is sufficient to cause a thread to break, a "run" will result. As in the case of any fine hosiery, reasonable care should be taken to avoid contact between the hosiery and rough surfaces that might cause a snag.

Nylon stockings are easily laundered. They dry quickly. They keep their shape, color and "newness"

practically throughout their usable life. They do not spot readily from water splashes.

Nylon already is on the market in other forms. These include sewing thread, man-made bristles for use in tooth, hair and clothes brushes, which are unusually long-lived, fishing lines and leaders and surgical sutures. Small quantities of nylon yarn are also being introduced in ladies' gloves and undergarments.

Experiments indicate that in time nylon in various forms will have a great variety of uses in the home and wardrobe.

When "Nylon Day" finally came on May 15, 1940, there was a nationwide rush to stores. In what was described as "the event they have awaited for more than a year," women crowded two or three deep at counters to buy nylon hosiery. Buyers were limited to two pairs the first day because supplies were limited. Nylons were touted to have these advantages over silk stockings:

- would not snag or run as easily
- keep their shape longer
- "they are entrancingly sheer"
- not as susceptible to spotting³



Happy stocking shoppers, 1940

(crfashionbook.com)

In the 1940s, hosiery on women was as ubiquitous as hats on men. A person was not really dressed without it.



(The Knoxville Journal, Knoxville, Tennessee, 1940 April 5, page 1)

The popularity of nylon stockings grew rapidly.



FOR YOUR
Valentine

Beautifully Sheer
NYLON Stockings

*—In A Gift Package
Wrapped Ready To Give*

\$1.50
Pair

In A Lovely New Spring Shade—
"RUMBA"

You know she'll appreciate a gift of NYLON Stockings, especially when they are so beautifully sheer . . . She'll like the rich coloring of Rumba, the newest shade in stockings . . . It's a color to wear with her new Spring wardrobe. Because of limited quantity not more than two pairs to each purchaser.

(Greenville Daily Advocate, Greenville, Ohio, 1941 February 13, page 12)

Women were able to enjoy this innovation for only about two years before it was no longer available because World War II even affected women's clothing. By March 1942, nylon stockings disappeared from stores. After April 1, almost all women's hosiery was made from cotton or rayon.⁴

During the war, nylon was needed for multiple military uses. Parachutes, glider tow ropes, rescue ropes, tire fabrics, flak and fragment protection body vests, plasma filters, anti-blackout suits for pilots, and mosquito netting were some of the items made out of nylon.⁵

Women were encouraged to give up the nylons they had for recycling into war material.



Besides wearing cotton and rayon stockings, women resorted to "liquid stockings" applied from a bottle (much like the sunless tanning lotion available now).



Liquid stockings from a bottle

(Glamourdaze.com)



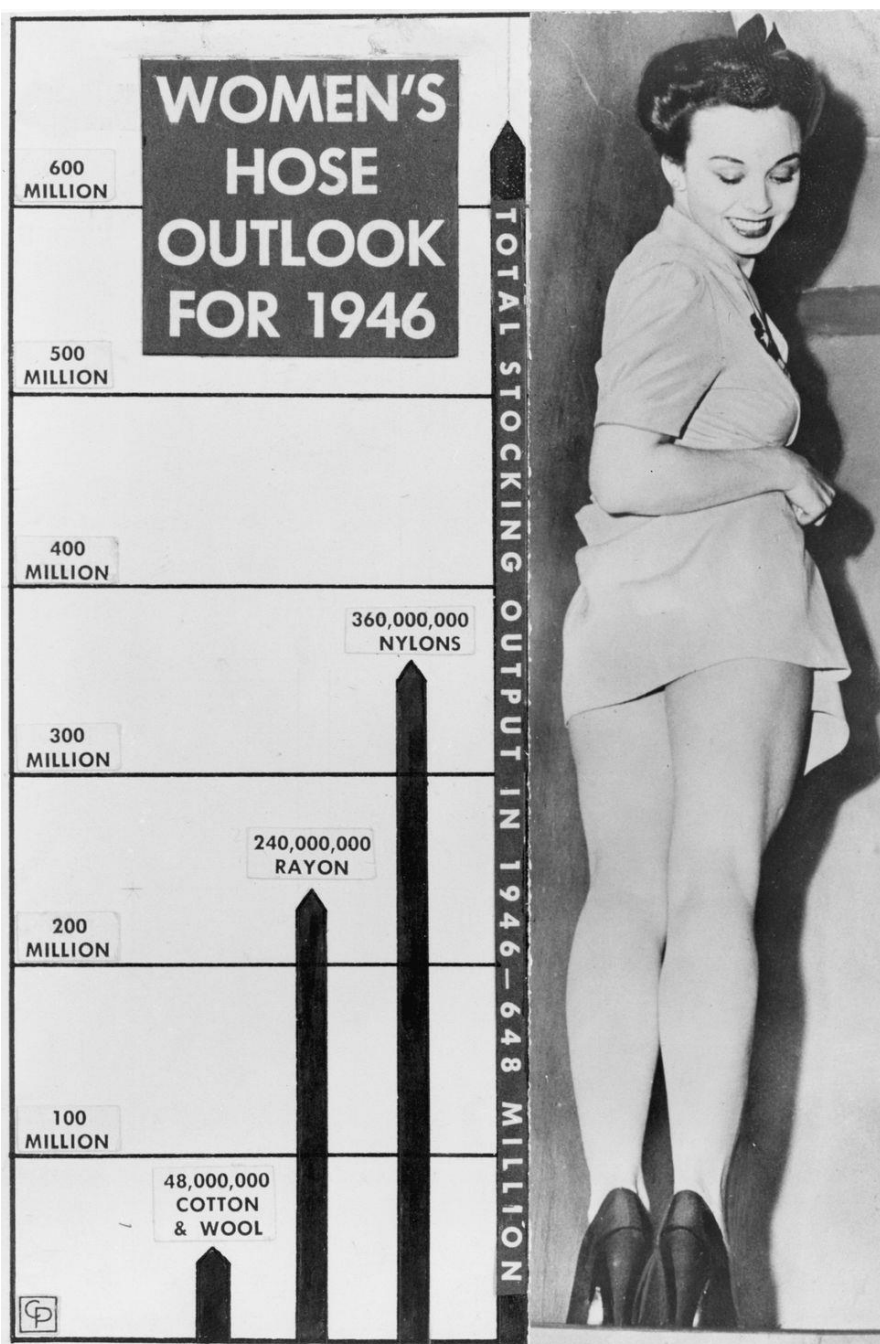
Drawing a simulated stocking seam with eyeliner

(Glamourdaze.com)

When hostilities ended in August 1945, E. I. DuPont De Nemours company announced that plants in Seaford, Delaware, and Martinsville, Virginia, had already started full capacity production of nylon yarn for civilian use. The company said it could make enough nylon to manufacture 360 million pairs of hosiery for the stocking-starved women of the United States.⁶

On December 28, 1945, the first appearance of nylon stockings in La Crosse caused a frenzy similar to the initial large-scale sale of them on May 15, 1940. We do not know how long the Montgomery Ward nylon stock lasted that day.

Like nylon stockings, housing in La Crosse was in such short supply that one veteran offered six pairs of nylon stockings as a bonus for renting him any structure to live in.⁷



(crfashionbook.com)

Although there were still shortages of some goods for a while, American industry geared up to produce the items that civilians had been conserving or doing without during the war years. Nylon stockings were a sign that things were getting back to normal after four very long years.

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Sources & Notes:

¹ "The True Story of the Debut of Nylon Stockings," *Glamour Daze*, 2020 April 15, <https://glamourdaze.com/2017/06/the-true-story-of-the-debut-of-nylon-stockings.html#more-15281>.

² *Glamour Daze*.

³ Katherine Blanck, "Women Crowd Stores As Nylons Go on Sale," *The Brooklyn Eagle*, Brooklyn, New York, 1940 May 15, page 18.

⁴ "The Home Front," *The Fairmount News*, Fairmount, Indiana, 1942 March 19, page 7.

⁵ "Capacity Civilian Production Of Nylon Yarn Begins In U.S.," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 August 23, page 13.

⁶ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 August 23.

⁷ Vee, "A Letter From Home," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 December 30, page 4. The site of the Montgomery Ward store is now a parking lot for the La Crosse County complex.