By ALTON BROUSSARD

The sunbonnet making a comeback.

This old time headgear until a generation ago ranked second to the apron as the most popular item of women's wear in American and European countries. Like the apron, it served a very utilitarian function and provided wide latitude for displays of creativity by the women who made them.

For centuries the garde-soleil, as it was called, was worn by women while performing their daily household and field functions and to many social and religious affairs, making it the most universally worn piece of apparel in the ladies' armories.

Before the design and adoption of women's hats, the sunbonnet protected the wearer's hair and face, the nap of her neck, and most of her face from the elements, a choice which is largely done today by cosmetics.

The Amorous English

In addition, the serviceable bonnet helped to preserve and protect the modesty of shy girls. It earned the same name for the sunbonnet, "kitchen," originated in Calais, on the English channel in France where English sailors and soldiers, and Englishwomen, frequently visited centuries ago.

Local lore has it that the amorous Britishers often tried to steal kisses from the bonnet-wearing French girls. To preserve their modesty or to make a reasonable show of doing it, the French girls would pull the thin strings of the bonnets tight and plead "kitchen," their approximation of "kiss me."

The garde-soleil was probably brought to Louisiana by hard-working Acadian women who needed the protection afforded by bonnet during hours in the garden and fields.

Refinements were added to the serviceable bonnet through the years until it became a popular decorative addition to women's wardrobes. The designs generally fell within four categories: those for babies and young children, household and field models, decorative designs for church and social functions, and a number black bonnet with only for mourning.

IS THE GARDE SOLEIL COMING BACK?

The Breaux Bridge Crawfish Festival, during which the emblem of that city, a pioneer dress, has given some impetus to the sunbonnet. For several years, one of the staff at the Breaux Bridge Simon's Shopping Center, Mrs. Ola P. Huger, has sold about a dozen bonnets regularly. The Breaux Bridge bonnets come in two types of recreation, especially for gifts and with strings, which were tied under the chin for more complete protection from the sun and amorous English soldiers.

Bamboo Sewn In

The Breaux Bridge bonnets are designed with interfacing or similar material to provide stiffness in the side panels. This eliminates ironing and starching. More elaborate designs still sew in silvers of bamboo in the "blinders" for added stiffness.

Mrs. Simon's staff, consisting of Mrs. Merline Moniot, Mrs. Helen Kosrun, and Mrs. Helene Roubin and Mrs. Theodore Doe of Parks, also sell sunbonnets for practical reasons and not often for formal wear. Although some do have fancy trimmed "kushnuts" for Sunday wear.

Concessions in Evangeline State Park at St. Martinville also stock and sell sunbonnets to visitors who are curious about the life, times and clothing of the Acadians of Louisiana.

A few area women, such as Mrs. Hugon and Mrs. Theodora Doe of Parks, wouldn't tend their flowers, shrubs and vegetable gardens unless they were wearing a garde-soleil. But the scarcity of sunbonnets on store shelves and in hat bars indicate there is no overwhelming demand for them. As one manager of a ladies boutique voiced her opinion, "There never was a time when sunbonnets would invade the U.S."

Toujours! Don't count on it!

WHAT BONNET? — This photo was meant to show the beauty of the old time sunbonnet, but with beautiful Bayou Techs, a charming piece of driftwood, and pretty Sun Broussard to work with, the photographer put his head. (Advertiser Staff Photo)