

Star of the Republic Museum

NOTES

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Grooming with a Lick and a Promise

EARLY TEXIANS WERE VERY CREATIVE IN FINDING A SOLUTION!

Without today's plethora of personal grooming products, early Texas settlers had to be resourceful to satisfy their grooming needs. Yes, they had pesky whiskers, dirty hair, chapped lips and hands, rotten teeth and bad breath, but they had few manufactured goods to alleviate these problems.

Francis Sheridan, an Englishman who visited Galveston in 1839, observed that the "ceremony of the toilet appeared to be a matter of little importance" to the Texians, conducted on the principle of a pirate's wash – or "a lick and a promise."¹ The term "lick" in this sense means a "quick and casual cleaning," and "promise" likely refers to the promise to do a better job the next time.

The practice of self-shaving did not become commonplace until after the invention of the Gillette safety razor in 1895. Prior to that, the straight razor, or cut throat razor, was the tool to use, and many preferred to let a barber handle the task. Sheridan attempted a self-shave while staying at the



The Barber Shop by George Elgar Hicks (1824-1914), private collection

Tremont House in Galveston. He wrote: *The small glass at which we "took turns" to shave had a crack through it, so that when I advanced razor in hand and commenced, I nearly cut my nose off by mistake. Alarmed by the perils environing those who attempted to shave at this treacherous mirror, I postponed the operation till after breakfast...[when I] proceeded to search for a Barber.*²

In the early to mid 19th century, bathing was encouraged once a week, and it usually was only with water and a sponge. The only soap that was available was lye

soap, which was very harsh on the skin and was best left for washing laundry. The barbershop that Sheridan sought out had a sign posted which read: *Gentlemen that washes in this shop & does not get barbered at the time must pay 12 ½ cents to the shop.*³

The first commercial deodorant was produced in 1888, known by the brand name "Mum." Before then people relied on strong perfume, when available, to cover

up their natural body odor. Nevertheless, since most everyone smelled, it was not considered offensive.

There was no such thing as shampoo until the 20th century. Prior to that, some men would use lye soap on their hair, but it left a dull film behind. Women rarely washed their hair, rather brushed it often with a conditioning oil. Mixing an ounce of borax with half an ounce of camphor powder, then dissolving it in a quart of boiling water would make a solution that, when

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cooled, would provide a nice rinse for hair. Some women believed that blonde hair was a reflection of high moral standards and would try to bleach their hair with various mixtures, such as a combination of diluted barium, potassium hypochlorite and lemon juice. Dying hair a darker color could be achieved with the use of henna, or after 1856, a synthetic dye produced from coal tar.

The first manufactured toothbrushes were made with an ivory or bone handle with bristles from natural material such as boar hair. Patented in 1857 by H.N. Wadsworth, the natural bristles attracted bacteria and

the bristles easily fell out. Many people simply chewed on a thin stick with a frayed end to clean their teeth. Francis Sheridan reported seeing a “gentleman reflectively picking his teeth with a Bowie knife.”⁴ Pure pulverized charcoal mixed with honey was recommended to whiten teeth, and Peruvian bark mixed with limewater was a good cure for bad breath.⁵

A stigma was attached to the use of cosmetics and skincare products. Makeup was deemed inappropriate for everyone except prostitutes and actors. Women were encouraged to rely on “moral cosmetics,” which included sleeping and avoiding sinful pastimes such as gambling and drinking. Pale skin was desirable, especially among the upper class. Egg yokes, honey and oatmeal were used to soften the skin, and lemon juice was used to naturally bleach the skin.

Since most Texas women spent a lot of time outside, they wore wide-brimmed bonnets to protect their skin from the harsh sun. Dilue Rose Harris, a young girl who came to Texas with her family in 1833, relied on a tablecloth for her beauty needs—When her family visited the San Jacinto battleground just days after the battle, she was mortified to have lost her bonnet in the Runaway Scrape, and was not able to dress properly for visiting. Knowing that she would encounter some young men, she was “compelled to wear a tablecloth” on her head. On another occasion, she had to ride to a neighbor’s house to get her brother. She wrote: *My dress was very much worse for wear. It was pinned up the back, my shoes were down at the heels, and my stockings were dirty. I was greatly embarrassed, for I knew all the boys were at the Point. I did all the primping that the circumstances would permit, plaiting my hair, etc, I had had my face wrapped in a table cloth till it was thoroughly blanched.*⁶

Chapped lips? No problem! Everyone had a natural supply of lip balm—ear wax! Chapped hands? Just mix sweet almond oil with melted wax and rosewater. Whatever the problem, early Texians were very creative in finding a solution!

- ¹ Willis W. Pratt, (ed.), *Galveston Island, or A Few Months off the Coast of Texas: The Journal of Francis C. Sheridan, 1839–1840* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1954), 41.
- ² Pratt, 41.
- ³ Pratt, 42.
- ⁴ Pratt, 74.
- ⁵ Lydia Marie Child, *The American Frugal Housewife* (Boston: Carte, Hendee, and Co., 1832), 114.
- ⁶ George P. Garrison, (ed.), “The Reminiscences of Mrs. Dilue Harris,” *The Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association* 4, no. 2 (October, 1900): 178.



STAR OF THE REPUBLIC MUSEUM

Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site

Open Daily
10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

936-878-2461 (fax) 936-878-2462

www.starmuseum.org

www.txindependence.org

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ARTIFACTS FROM THE MUSEUM COLLECTION

Toothbrush



Lice Comb



Folding straight razor with case



Patent medicine bottle for Barry’s Tricopherous for the Skin and Hair—used to remove warts, soothe skin blisters, and treat hair loss and dandruff

Black HISTORY MONTH

Throughout the month of February, the Star of the Republic Museum will recognize Black History Month with a special exhibit opening and featured weekend activities. February 1 will mark the opening of "Enduring Spirit: African Americans in 19th Century Texas," an exhibit that highlights some of the most pivotal events that influenced the history of African Americans in Texas. Events planned for February include:

- Sunday, February 1: Exhibit opening, free admission all day
- Saturday, February 7: Speaker: Dr. Fred McGhee, adjunct professor of Anthropology at Austin Community College and owner of Fred L. McGhee & Associates, "The Revolution that Wasn't: the 1836 Texas Rebellion in Historical Perspective," 2 p.m. in museum theater, free admission all day
- Saturday, February 14: Showing of episode 1 and 2 of PBS series "African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross" in the museum theater, 2 p.m. in museum theater, free admission all day
- Saturday, February 21: Speaker: Dr. Bernadette Pruitt, associate professor of history at Sam Houston State University, "The Other Great Migration: The Movement of Rural African Americans to Houston, Texas," 1900-1941, 2 p.m. in museum theater, free admission all day

NIGHT AT THE *Star of the Republic Museum* MUSEUM

Over 300 people took advantage of the opportunity to explore the museum by flashlight during our annual "Night at the Star of the Republic Museum" on November 1. Many thanks to our cast and volunteers who made the exhibits come to life for the record-breaking crowd! From left to right: Keith Barker, John Burns, Denise Campbell, Ketra Williams, Marie Meizis, Cathy Nolte, Brandy Thomason, Cheryl Dowdy, Alain Holderer, Debbie Gau, William Wright, Mark Sanders, Kellie McKenney, Jeff Bolich, Barb King, and Ben Baumgartner.



Genealogy Workshop

Twenty-eight genealogy buffs, many of them descendants of the signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence, came to Washington-on-the-Brazos on October 11th to learn more about their favorite passion from librarian and genealogist, Heather Kramer. She walked participants through the basics of genealogy, sidestepping periodically to provide tips and tricks for locating those hard-to-find ancestors. Kramer said, "The workshop went very, very well! Many gave compliments as they were leaving about how much they enjoyed the day and what they would like to do if there was a next time."



ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

UPCOMING EVENTS

DEC. 13

Christmas-on-the-Brazos

Make an old-fashioned Christmas craft at the Museum from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Visit Independence Hall for readings from Charles Dickens Christmas Collection throughout the day. Enjoy a candlelit tour of Barrington Farm from 5 - 9 p.m.



DEC. 24 - JAN. 1, 2015

Museum Closed

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

JAN. 10 & FEB. 14

Texas Pioneers: Girl Scout Day

On the second Saturday of each month, Girl Scouts can earn a "Texas Pioneer" patch during this three-hour interactive event. Call 936-878-2461, ext. 236 for details and reservations.

JANUARY 16

REGISTRATION DEADLINE

Brazos Valley Regional History Fair

FEB. 1

Exhibit Opening:

"Enduring Spirit: African Americans
in 19th Century Texas"

FEB. 13

Brazos Valley Regional History Fair

Regional competition for students in grades 6-12, which culminates with National History Day.

FEB. 28 - MARCH 1

Texas Independence Day Celebration

Join us for a giant party celebrating Texas' 179th birthday, to recognize the adoption of the Texas Declaration of Independence. All admission fees waived.

Brazos Valley Regional History Fair

Plans are underway for the tenth annual Brazos Valley Regional History Fair, hosted by the Star of the Republic Museum on February 13, 2015. The regional fair is one step on the road to National History Day, a year-long, non-profit education program dedicated to improving the teaching and learning of history. Students in grades 6-12 choose their own topics of study related to an annual theme, conduct extensive research, and choose the best method for displaying their findings.

The theme for 2015 is "Rights and Responsibilities in History." Students can choose to enter historical papers, documentaries, exhibits, performances or websites. Projects can be done individually or as a group with up to five members. Students compete for the privilege of advancing to the state contest and for special monetary prizes from our sponsors. Last year, over \$1000 in prize money was handed out at the regional fair. The top two winners in each category at

the state contest advance to National History Day.

Volunteers, sponsors and judges are still needed. If you or your organization would like to help, please contact Anne McGaugh, Regional Coordinator, at 936-878-2461, ext. 237 or amcgaugh@blinn.edu.

NATIONAL HISTORY DAY 2015
LEADERSHIP & LEGACY
in history