

Barbers, Beauticians, Bath Attendants

For centuries, massage has been linked to the personal grooming culture, available everywhere from barbershops to manicure salons.

*Figure 1.
Barbers give
facial massage
with a shave.



*Used with permission from: *The History of Massage: An Illustrated Survey from Around the World*. Robert Noah Calvert, Healing Arts Press, Rochester, VT 05767 Copyright: 2002, Robert Noah Calvert, www.InnerTraditions.com.

Massage has been a healthy pleasure associated with personal grooming for centuries. The connections are natural—scalp massage with hairstyling, facial massage with cleansing or shaving the face, hand and arm massage with nail trimming, and a rub-down after bathing. Superficial massage given during grooming helps promote healthy hair and skin and is relaxing and pleasurable.

In the past, personal grooming services have been performed by individuals themselves, family members, local tradesmen, and—for the well-to-do—by servants and slaves. In more modern times, the barber and beautician professions have evolved for personal grooming, and retain some simple forms of massage within its scope. Full body massage has become the province of massage therapists with their own knowledge and skill base, as well as their own licensing requirements.

Past Times

Records from ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome describe personal grooming for men, especially related to shaving, haircutting and trimming beards. It is said that, “No people were better patrons of the barbers than the Romans. They

Figure 2.
Fingertip and palm techniques for scalp massage from *Everyday Beauty Culture*, c. 1945.

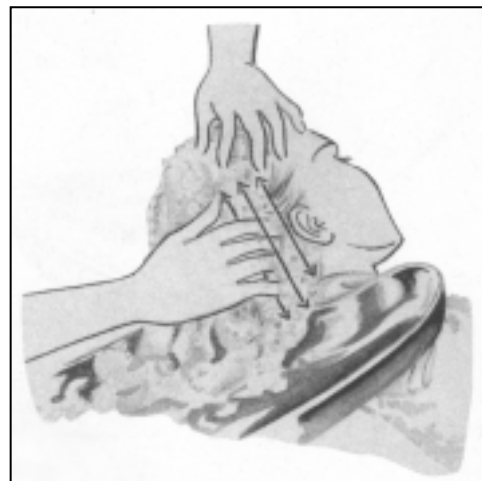
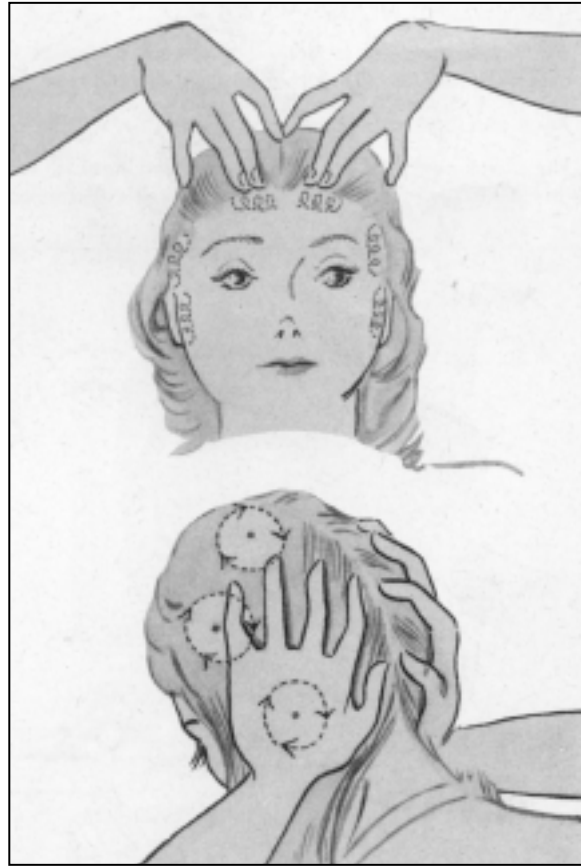


Figure 3.
Scalp manipulation during a shampoo, *Everyday Beauty Culture*, c. 1945.

often devoted several hours each day to tonsorial operations, which included shaving, haircutting, hairdressing, massaging, manicuring and the application of rare ointments and cosmetics of unknown formulas.”¹ (Tonsorial is an old term for barbering from tonsor or clipper.)

In the 1700s and 1800s, European travelers to the Orient brought back descriptions of personal grooming from China, India and Egypt. These travelogs offer a glimpse of ancient personal care practices replicated today in beauty and barber shops and spas.

In China in the late 1700s, barbers plied their trade on the streets of major cities. They cut hair, trimmed nails, cleaned ears and offered a form of percussive body massage.²

In India in the 1800s, a grooming practice called shampooing included a hot, soapy bath followed by percussion and friction massage, joint cracking and applying sweet scented oils or perfume. It was said that the recipient experiences “ineffable happiness and energy” and that “the Indian ladies seldom pass a day without being thus shampooed by their slaves.”²

In a Turkish bath in Egypt in the mid-1800s, male patrons were first scrubbed with soap and hot water, and then a barber appeared to trim whiskers and moustaches. This was followed by another hot bath and a form of vigorous massage. The barber then reappeared to trim fingernails and toe nails. The operation was described as “extremely luxurious” and “productive of a delicious thrill.”³

These are just a few examples of personal grooming practices from around the globe and in different time periods. Their purpose was not simply utilitarian. The aim was also pleasure and rejuvenation.

Barbers

The word barber comes from the Latin word *barba*, meaning beard. Barbers have a long and fascinating history of their own, and have been variously priests and medicine men in ancient times, and barbers/surgeons and dentists in the middle ages. In fact, the modern red and white-striped barber pole originated when bloodletting was one of the principle duties of the barber-surgeon. The red stripe was a symbol for the bandage used after bloodletting.¹

By modern times, surgeons and dentists had split off and developed their own professions, and barbers today specialize in grooming for men—mainly haircuts, beard trimming and shaving. A hot towel over the face, followed by a face massage was a favorite part of the tonsorial experience. (See Figure 1, page 152.)

Beauty Culture In The United States

By the early 20th century in the United States, beauticians (a.k.a., cosmetologists) had their separate schools, and in most states, separate licenses to practice. The first U.S. licensing laws for barbers and beauticians appeared around 1900.

Beauty culture was the term for the art and science of grooming women’s hair and nails, and applying makeup. It was culture in the sense of cultivation or refinement. Just as the term physical culture was used at the time to describe the cultivation of health and fitness, beauty culture was refining the health and appearance of hair, skin and nails.

A vocational school textbook from 1945 provides wonderful descriptions of how soft tissue manipulation had been integrated into the scope of beauty culture. In *Everyday Beauty Culture*,⁴ massage was limited to the head and neck in conjunction with hairstyling, to the

scalp during a shampoo, to the face as part of a cleansing facial, and to the arms and hands related to manicures. Hot and cold towel wraps were applied to the face before a facial massage, and to the hand and arm before cleansing and manipulating. Electric vibrators were used in scalp and hair treatments.

The massage described in *Everyday Beauty Culture* was relatively superficial, with emphasis on light stroking and circular friction. It was intended to be “skin deep” and often performed while applying some cleansing agent. A few joint movement techniques were incorporated into arm and hand manipulation. The words massage and manipulation were used to describe the procedures, also called treatments.

The illustrations in Figure 2 (opposite page) show some of the fingertip and palm techniques for massage of the scalp. Note that the second and third fingers are used for most of the light circular motions, and the palm for broad contact with the scalp. The instructions also call for “rolling the head” three times clockwise and counterclockwise to loosen the neck.

The scalp was massaged during a hair shampoo. Today, the term shampoo is usually reserved for lathering

Beauty culture was the term for the art and science of grooming women’s hair and nails, and applying makeup.

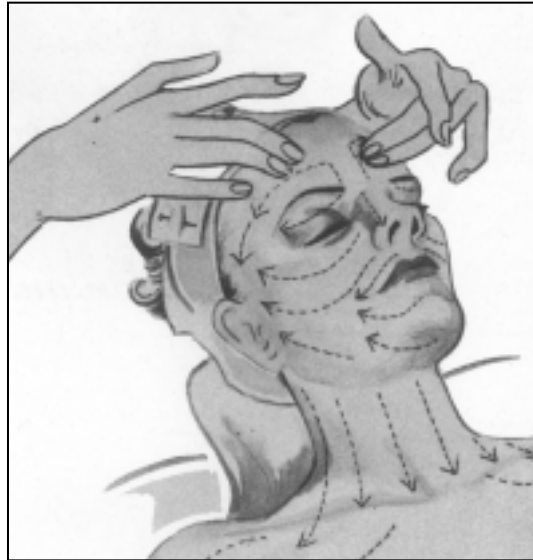
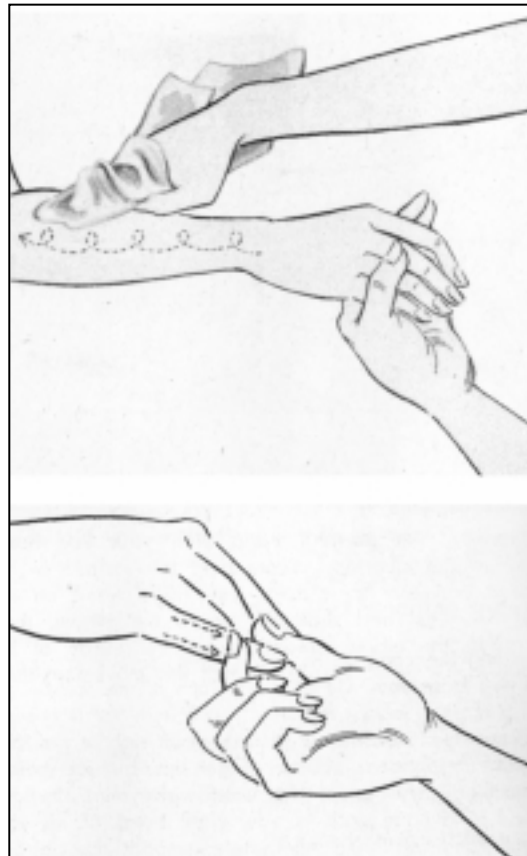


Figure 4.
Direction of
techniques for
a simple facial
massage,
*Everyday Beauty
Culture*, c.1945.

Figure 5.
Arm and hand
massage
techniques for
manicure,
*Everyday Beauty
Culture*, c. 1945.



up the hair on the head, unlike the past when the whole body was shampooed. The elements are the same though—hot soapy water, manipulating the skin and a rinse. Figure 3 (page 154) illustrates a scalp manipulation during a shampoo.

The “plain facial” described in *Everyday Beauty Culture* involves applying a cleansing cream, face and neck manipulation, and then removing the cleansing cream. Figure 4 (left) shows the direction of techniques in the facial massage with light stroking around the eyes, nose and mouth. Very light strokes are performed over the eyelids and down the front of the neck. Also included was light stroking along the tops of the shoulders.

In addition to a nail trim, a manicure involved a hand and arm massage up to the elbow. It started with the application of a wet hot towel prior to applying cleansing cream. Each finger is circled and “tapered,” i.e., sliding the thumb and index finger from the hand to the fingertip in a smooth motion. Wrist movements precede light sliding strokes on the forearm. Figure 5 (left) illustrates some arm and hand massage techniques.

Bath Attendants

In past times, bath attendants provided the scrubbing and rubbing associated with a hot soapy bath, and the soft tissue and joint manipulations afterwards. In more recent times, in baths and mineral spa facilities, bath attendants might give a surface-type of massage more like a superficial rub down. Today, the most direct occupational descendant of the bath attendant is perhaps the salon or spa worker who applies treatments such as herbal wraps, helps patrons into and out of the mineral or mud bath, or operates the Vichy shower. The occupational designation of bath attendant was incorrectly associated with massage therapists in government occupational codes until the 1980s.

But well before that time, massage therapists were developing a separate profession specializing in full body massage for health and healing. By the 1920s, massage in personal care settings was being performed by operators trained in Swedish massage. A catalog from 1939 shows massage in salons (Figure 6, right) as “dignified, fascinating work.”⁵

By the 1940s, upscale salons, such as Helena Rubenstein and Elizabeth Arden, hired graduates of colleges of Swedish massage, which were found in cities throughout the United States. Swedish massage operators combined aspects of health and fitness, as well as relaxation massage. They also specialized in reducing massage, thought at the time to help women slim down,⁶ and bust massage, thought to develop “firmness and plumpness of the bust.”⁷ Beauty culture and physical culture overlapped somewhat in massage services in these settings.

Today, massage remains a mainstay of salons and spas. But the public is now more aware of the broader wellness benefits of massage therapy, and expects more from full body massage than a “fluff and buff” treatment. Massage therapists working in personal care settings bring the full force of their training to help clients achieve the relaxation and rejuvenation they seek. ❏



Patricia J. Benjamin, Ph.D., is the co-author of *Tappan's Handbook of Healing Massage Techniques and Understanding*

Sports Massage. She has been writing and teaching about the history of massage therapy since the early 1980s. She can be contacted via E-mail at: pat_benjamin@sbcglobal.net.



Figure 6.
Massage in
salons is dignified
and fascinating
work, College of
Swedish
Massage Catalog,
Chicago, c. 1939.

Today the public is more aware of the broader wellness benefits of massage therapy.

References

1. “The Art Of Barbering Through The Ages.” Author unknown. Available at: www.barberpole.com/artof.htm. Accessed 30 Nov 2004.
2. Benjamin, Patricia J. “Shampooing – A Journey To The East.” *Massage Therapy Journal*. 41, 2 (Summer 2002):140-144.
3. Blundell, J.W.F. *The Muscles And Their Story: From The Earliest Times*. London: Chapman & Hall, 1864.
4. Livingston, Helen and Ann Maroni. *Everyday Beauty Culture*. Bloomington, Illinois: McKnight & McKnight, 1945.
5. College Of Swedish Massage. Catalog. Chicago, 1939.
6. Benjamin, Patricia J. “Genuine Swedish Massage Applied To Slim Down.” *Massage Therapy Journal*. 40, 2 (Summer 2001): 152-154.
7. Benjamin, Patricia J. “Breast Massage: Old Becomes New Again.” *Massage Therapy Journal*. 41, 1 (Spring 2002): 154-158.