

Donation of the Month

Permanent Wave Machine
Accession #: 1975.12.1
Donated by: Anita Jameson



Ah, the things we do for beauty! This is a permanent wave machine and was used to curl hair in the early decades of the twentieth century. In 1906, Karl Nessler, also known as Charles Nestle, invented his permanent wave machine. Before home perms were perfected and widely available, the permanent wave machine used chemicals and electricity to curl hair and recreate the look of naturally curly or wavy hair. In 1928, Marjorie Joyner patented her permanent wave machine, which also created a longer lasting curly hairstyle. Joyner was also the first African-American woman to receive a patent in the United States.

Originally, the machine had clips that hung from above and heated hair up to 200 degrees Fahrenheit. Customers were hooked up to the machine as the beautician secured each curled section with the metal clips. Dampened hair would then steam as it was heated into curls. Unfortunately, this process left the hair with a stiff, brittle surface, not to mention potential heat burns. Thankfully the process was improved enough over the next 20 years that the machines became standard in many beauty shops.

This machine was used in Mrs. Willer's beauty shop in Rogers. It is a Rilling Deluxe Model C, made by Rilling and was in use in the 1930s-40s. On the label, it boasts a power of 110-115 volts and has two settings for different curl styles with a timer built into the back. It was bought by Mrs. Jameson from Mrs.

Willer, and was donated to the Museum in 1975.

Credits:

“Invention to Innovation,” From the exhibition at Museum London, online exhibit:
www.digitalhistory.uwo.ca/i2i/artefact%20pages/PERMWAVE.HTML

“Tress Codes” from Vintage Fashion Guild, online article:
<http://www.vintagefashionguild.org/content/view/12/75/>

Thomas, Pauline Weston. “Beauty and Make-Up History
Make Up Fashion History Before 1950 Part 1,” online article:
http://www.fashion-era.com/make_up.htm