Men and Wigs

by Jackie Brooks

Men wanting to appear youthful could discreetly purchase a full wig or toupee. There were several companies that manufactured hair pieces. The Hyman & Oppenheim Company of New York City was established in 1878. They were providing services to beauty salons, barber and specialty shops well into the Model A era. They also manufactured wigs of all kinds, holding several patents.

They put out a handbook, which they referred to as, “More than a catalog” in 1928, consisting of 150 pages of Beauty Shop essentials. Their trademark was reputed to be, “Known the world over to be the dealer in hair goods, [H] for quality, style and value.” They also distributed furniture, equipment, appliances, novelties, cosmetic supplies and hair goods.

Long hair was more common in Europe and highly valued to be used in wigs. Many women sold their
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long hair which was processed, sometimes dyed and curled. It was then hand tied into a silk net base which was then used to form wigs and hairpieces (also known as “Transformations”) of various sizes and styles for men, women and dolls.

The local barber could take the required measurements and pictures. He would then forward the information to the company.

A ventilated wig, in brown or black, cost $30 wholesale. In grey and what was referred to as “Rare” shades it was $35. The expected markup could be as much as 100%. This was a pretty penny for the day when a man on the Ford production line was paid $20 a week. Toupees’ wholesale cost ranged from $30 to $50.