

Curator's Choice

Lyon Kathairon Hair Tonic

By: Rebecca Harris and Amanda Ortiz,
students of Huntingtown High School's
Historical Investigations Class

Emanuel Thomas Lyon was the founder of "Lyon Kathairon for the Hair," which began production in the early 1850s and claimed to "effectively promote the luxuriant growth and beauty of the hair." Lyon graduated from Princeton College and later became a chemist working on many products such as his Magnetic Powder for pest control and his own Lyon Kathairon hair tonic. The hair tonic was manufactured in New York City and exported to many other cities along the east coast, including Baltimore, when the company expanded. Although Emanuel passed away shortly after the start of production, the company continued sales throughout the 19th century, successfully competing against other hair tonic products, such as Vitalis Hair Tonic.

Vitalis Hair Tonic contained a number of ingredients, including Benzyl Benzoate, a treatment for lice and scabies infestations. It is believed to be absorbed by the lice and destroy them through their nervous system. Lyon tonic likely contained similar ingredients, since they advertised similar messages to Vitalis hair tonic. Claims that Vitalis was a cure for lice and reverse head baldness are two examples of messages sent to customers. Still, Lyon Kathairon Hair Tonic had customers purchasing it throughout the 19th century, more frequently after Lyon's death.



Vitalis Hair Tonic Advertisement found at *Gallery of Graphic Design*. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 May 2013. <http://gogd.tjs-labs.com/gallery-view?keyword=HAIR%20TONIC&match=EXACT>.

Lyon Kathairon's popularity was mainly due to its memorable advertising and notable feedback from satisfied customers. Advertisements had quotes of customers saying they went from baldness to a full head of hair. The statements and images produced were merely propaganda; in the end all it really gave the customers was a head of shiny hair.



Images found at "Lyon Kathairon." *Hair Raising Stories*. http://www.hairraisingstories.com/Products/LYON_K.html.

Ingredients for the tonic mainly consisted of alcohol, castor oil, and fragrant oil. Since the Lyon hair tonic was sold prior to the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act of 1938, the modern regulations to list ingredients and have medically proven claims were not required. Therefore, a claim such as, "The most excellent and popular preparation for the hair ever made," and Lyon's declaration on advertisements that millions of hair tonic bottles had already been sold were believed to be true by the customers. Without the listings of ingredients, and a scientific guarantee, customers were buying what they thought was a miracle worker. People would continue to buy this product in hopes of a good head of hair, in order to cure their self-consciousness and fear of going bald.

There is no scientific evidence that these products work. These are simple products that lead customers to believe they are fixing a part of themselves, when the product is having very little to no effect. However, Rogaine, a hair loss and regrowth treatment is a product sold today that is similar to the Lyon hair tonic. Men and women purchase it with a goal of having a healthy head of hair, with questionable results. Just like the hair tonic, there are many customers purchasing the product on a regular basis.



This partial bottle once contained a tonic known as Lyon Kathairon for the Hair. Emanuel Thomas Lyon was the founder of Lyon Kathairon for the Hair, which began production in 1850 and claimed to "effectively promote the luxuriant growth and beauty of the hair." Hair loss is still an unresolved beauty issue today. One of the most popular modern hair tonics is Rogaine.

References Cited

- "Benzyl Benzoate." *Drugs.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 May 2013. <http://www.drugs.com/cons/benzyl-benzoate-topical.html>.
- Cruz, Stephanie. "Life and Vigor to the Hair." 2007. PDF file. <http://www.stanford.edu/group/marketstreet/cgi-bin/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2007/04/Cruz.pdf>.
- Lyon Kathairon for the Hair*. 1892. Amazon. Web. 25 Feb. 2013. <http://www.amazon.com/Lyons-Kathairon-Print-Memorabilia-49256/dp/B004G47IIS>.
- "Lyon's Kathairon." *Hair Raising Stories*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Feb. 2013. http://www.hairraisingstories.com/Products/LYON_K.html.
- "Lyon Kathairon." *Hair Raising Stories*. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 May 2013. http://www.hairraisingstories.com/Products/LYON_K.html.
- "Lyon's Kathairon Hair Product Bottle." *Odyssey's Virtual Museum*. Odyssey Virtual Museum, 2013. Web. 21 Feb. 2013. <http://odysseysvirtualmuseum.com/products/Lyon%27s-Kathairon-Hair-Product-Bottle.html>.
- Odyssey's Virtual Museum*. Odyssey Marine Exploration, n.d. Web. 14 May 2013. <http://odysseysvirtualmuseum.com/products/Lyon%27s-Kathairon-Hair-Product-Bottle.html>.
- Samuels, T. M. "Dual Action Cleanse Ingredients." *Live Strong*. Demand Media, 23 May 2010. Web. 14 May 2013. <http://www.livestrong.com/article/96679-dual-action-cleanse-ingredients/#ixzz2T88qeSgl>.
- "6 Useless Infomercial Products Still Being Sold Today." *HubPages*. HubPages, n.d. Web. 14 May 2013. <http://brettmw.hubpages.com/hub/6-Useless-Infomercial-Products-Still-Being-Sold-Today>.
- "Vitalis Hair Tonic." *Medshop Express*. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 May 2013. <http://www.medshopexpress.com/682762.html>.
- "Vitalis Hair Tonic Advertisement." *Gallery of Graphic Design*. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 May 2013. <http://gogd.tjs-labs.com/gallery-view?keyword=HAIR%20TONIC&match=EXACT>.



10515 Mackall Road
St. Leonard, Maryland 20685
410-586-8501 www.jefpat.org

Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum is part of the Maryland Historical Trust, and agency of the Maryland Department of Planning, Baltimore.

