

"The smell of burning hair and intense heat scorching the scalp is a nostalgic experience that many Black women are familiar with."

-Gabriele A. Williams

Cover Images: (Top) Hot comb; Kim Breyfogle, NCPTT(Bottom) Delores Sturgis and Dorothy Mae RuffinLathers, Photo booth photograph; Ruth Laney

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The smell of burning hair and intense heat scorching the scalp is a nostalgic experience that many Black women are familiar with. The singeing comb, more commonly known as the "hot comb," is a metal hair styling device that is used to straighten textured hair. It can be heated on a kitchen stove or plugged in and is traditionally used by Black women to flatten their hair.





Francois Marcel Grateau. (Getty Images)

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The hot comb's history is slightly unclear because many inventors in different areas were creating similar products at the same time. Nonetheless, the creation of the hot comb is credited to Frenchman Francois Marcel Grateau; however, the European Patent Office has Grateau on file for patenting a "hair waving iron" instead of a hot comb ("Sizzle"). This is contrary to the belief that Madam CJ Walker - the first self-made Black American millionaire - created the styling tool. She, instead, used the tool as a part of her "patented pressing system" when styling Black women's hair ("Hot Comb Evolution: Grateau's Start to CJ Walker's Mastery"). The technology that Grateau used is believed to have been eventually brought over to the United States by Elroy J. Duncan who marketed the tool to the public for men's facial hair (DIZZIAK).



One particular hot comb was found buried underneath the dirt and gravel of a roadway that runs through an area named Cherie Quarters. Cherie Quarters was originally a housing space for enslaved Africans that lived on Riverlake Plantation in Pointe Coupee Parish, Louisiana.



(Malvina Becnel Pickett)



Found hot comb.

(Kim\_Breyfogle)

(Left) Ms. Beckie Ruffin leaning out of the window of her house at Cherie Quarters.

### UNEARTHING HISTORY

Years later, the descendants of these enslaved people continued to live in the quarters working as tenant farmers. Similar to sharecroppers, tenant farmers are individuals who essentially rent land from a landowner and owe a portion of their earnings to the owner of the land they work on in exchange for providing living necessities. Sadly, little is known about the day to day lives of the inhabitants of the Quarters outside of the writings of famous Louisiana author, Ernest Gaines.

(Jason Church)

(Above) This building once housed enslaved workers at the Riverlake Plantation in Oscar, Louisiana.

It was in continuous use by enslaved families followed by tenant farmers until the 1990's. Four dilapidated houses were disassembled and used to reconstruct this one house that is now a part of Magnolia Mound complex in Baton Rouge, LA.



Shug's House Cherie Quarters
May 22, 1999. (Ruth Laney)

## CHERIE QUARTERS

According to "Cherie Quarters" by Ruth Laney, which is a biography on Gaines' life, and the lives of those in Cherie Quarters. Religion played a significant role in the lives of the people of Cherie Quarters. In her book, a man from the quarters mentioned that some church services on Sundays (called "Determination Sundays") were

specifically dedicated to people sharing their testimonies. These extensive services could last up to four hours long (Laney, 2023).

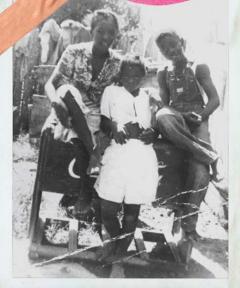
It is also noted that children were dressed in their "Sunday best" and the women of the Quarters would wear white to attend church. It is possible that the women of Cherie Quarters

of Cherie Quarters
utilized the hot comb as
a part of their morning
routine to get ready for
church. It is highly
unlikely that the women
used the hot comb for
styling their hair during
they would be outside and
sweat and heat would lead
to their hair reverting
back to its original

texture.



SCAN FOR AN INTERVIEW ABOUT CHERIE QUARTERS



Three residents of Cherie Quarters.

(David Biben's Collection)

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Because it cures the scalp of all diseases and slops thehair at once from falling out, and starts at once to growing. During may years of research, endeavoring to 8 do something to improve my own take, to preparations manufactured by others I was always unsuccessful, until through the livine Proudence of Goll was permitted in a dream to discover the preparation that I am now placing at the disposal of thiousands who are today. in the same condition that I was in just three years ago.

to the same condition that I was in just three years ago.

Piffers you're ago my hair beguing the anot failing out, and I tifed everything mentioned to me without any result, until I discovered the preparation that I am now planking on the market. This has proven to be the must wonderful preparation for the growth of the thair ever discovered and is joidified gugranted to grow and step the nait a cone from I aling out when used as directed.

There are thousabled persons in the United States using my perparation, all of whom a cone from I affect in the naive my and there he in which go if yellow young process the United States using my goods.

coming from all sections of the country.

The pletures alove show the improvement in my hair after three years use. These cuts were made from my own personal photographs. The one with short hair was taken before I ever creamed of of my discovery. The ones with the hair down show the improvemade after three years use.

Glossine.	**	10	- 41	45 cents
Shampoo,	144	7.99	39	
SW A Six	wee	ks'tri	al trea	tment sent to any address on receipt of \$1.70. No reduction

AGENTS WANTED EVERYWHERE: Write for Terms

Using the hot comb or any sort of hair straightening device on Black hair can signify that there is a special event coming up in this case, going to church. This is a tradition that Black American women and girls still practice to this day. Sadly, the reason behind this is not rooted in the acceptance of natural Black hair. Many Black women and girls are taught from a young age from close friends and family that natural hair

is not good enough for

must be altered to be

special events and

accepted and perceived as beautiful. This leads to many Black women and girls having to learn how to deal with the pain of manipulating their hair instead of being allowed to develop and foster a healthy relationship with their hair no matter what environment they find themselves in. With that being said, not every Black woman who uses straightening tools dislikes her hair. Creations like the hot comb have allowed Black women to be versatile, creative, and explore more options on how to style their hair on a daily basis. Along with going to church, the women of Cherie Quarters enjoyed spending their free time hanging out at juke joints, movies, and fairs.

### RGES AND GIVATIO

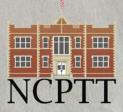
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