

A Practical Past Shapes the Present

A dog grooming contest takes place somewhere in the United States just about every month.

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It wasn't long before "practical" became "style," French style. The Poodles, which had grown popular with the public throughout Europe, were primed and scissored into elaborate coat patterns by French groomers. During the reign of Louis XVI (1774—92), groomers worked their magic along the banks of the Seine and in Paris streets, according to *The Complete Poodle Clipping and Grooming Book* by Shirlee Kalstone (Howell Book House, 1981). The French public was crazy over the Poodle and trimming its coat into outrageous patterns.

Although grooming initially began with the Poodle, it eventually interested many other canine enthusiasts. In 1861, author John Meyrick (*House Dogs and Sporting Dogs*) spelled out general bathing advice. *The Book of the Dog* by Vero Shaw (1879) stresses the importance of a well-kept appearance. In 1891, *The American Book of the Dog* by G.O. Shields included an illustrated pattern for clipping a Poodle.

Blanche Saunders, trainer, breeder and handler who died in 1964, is credited with popularizing pet grooming in the United States. According to *The Stone Guide to Dog Grooming for All Breeds* by Ben and Pearl Stone (Howell Book House, 1981), Saunders worked to popularize Poodle pet trims through writing and personal appearances. She wrote a booklet called "The Poodle Chart." It is undated but believed to be first published in the 1940s.

Today, grooming is a sophisticated profession keeping an estimated 25,000 groomers busy bathing, fluffing and trimming the nation's dogs. They style all breeds of dogs precisely and accurately using state-of-the-art technology. You won't find groomers alongside riverbanks, but you will find them working in private salons, veterinary clinics, pet supply stores and kennels.

It's amazing to look back at grooming's history — the changes, fads and advances. But what's most amazing is that grooming a dog, regardless of its breed, is still as sensible and practical today as it was to 16th century hunters.