

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, July 27, 2015

**Taking a Daily Shower:** Most of us do it, so why should it be a topic of interest? Because while modern people assume it was always done, my father never took a shower, my mother very seldom, and almost no one in their generation bathed in that way. With the coming of indoor plumbing, built-in bath tubs with hot and cold running water and a bottom drain were commonplace in most homes by the 1920s. How did people keep clean before that? As we know personal hygiene today, they really didn't.

Carried over from earlier times, proper women wore several layers of clothing on the hottest summer days, and men and their bosses with office jobs wore white shirts with stiff, starched, detachable collars and neckties under full business suits, often black or dark blue. This created a lot of perspiration with no ventilation, and an accompanying odor known as "B.O." How was this alleviated? Women had special scents, and men used talcum powder and sweet-smelling hair tonics. To bathe, someone in the family carried buckets of warm water to a large tub in the middle of a specified room, which often served as the bathroom in addition to its other uses. Except in extreme weather conditions, hot or cold, baths were taken once or twice each week. With the coming of built-in bath tubs with running water, a designated room in the house became the bathroom and also contained a water closet (flushing toilet) and a small wash basin that was usually set on top of a porcelain pedestal. Fancy houses such as Auburn Heights had two built-in bathrooms in 1897, but these luxuries did not reach the average American home until after World War I. In fact, in the 1920s an early ceramic-tile shower with a primitive shower head was built in one of Auburn Heights' bathrooms, supplementing the separate bath tub, but it was seldom used.

As I grew up, I never took a regular shower until 1937, when I was 13, unless it was at Wilmington's YMCA after a swimming lesson or under a cold outdoor shower at Rehoboth to wash off the salt. Tub baths were scheduled regularly for Wednesday and Saturday before climbing into bed. At the Dayton-Biltmore Hotel in the Ohio city of that name, every bedroom had a private bath when I stayed with my father in 1936, but there were no showers. Most of the shooters attending the Grand American Trapshooting Tournament 10 miles away stayed at the older Hotel Miami, or Hotel Gibbons with rates under \$3 daily, but their room was without a private bath.

At first, primitive showers with only cold water were regarded as fun for camping out or for "roughing it." When my father pitched a large tent with iron cots at the Yorklyn Gun Club for the August trapshooting week, there was a cold-water metal-stall shower in a nearby storage building. It was used sparingly by the younger shooters, but most tent-dwellers preferred to take only a face-bath in the regular men's room.

In the summer of 1937, my parents added 1½ baths at Auburn Heights between my bedroom and the newly decorated north bedroom, and a shower was installed over the bath tub! That marked the end of tub baths for me. What an improvement this made!

For servicemen during World War II, showers were readily available on most domestic military bases and other training facilities. In the antiquated dormitories at Brown University in 1943, there was one primitive shower, one toilet, and one wash basis for 12 of us. At M.I.T., the dormitories were more modern, with a large bathroom including several shower stalls on each floor. At Air Force bases in the southwest, officers' temporary barracks had basic bathrooms on each floor with adequate showers. At Guam and at Okinawa as the war was winding down in 1945, our squadron enjoyed screened-in shower buildings with cold water only. We didn't need hot water on Guam, but cold showers on Okinawa in October were chilling.

As a new series of hotel-motel chains came into being following World War II, all of them featured not only rooms with private baths exclusively, but all bathtubs had showers above. With a few hot tubs and other modern amenities, most bathrooms are built that way today, and everyone is expected to take a shower almost daily. At

Auburn Heights, the current bathrooms that numbered six plus by 1988, all have showers over the tub. B.O. is almost a thing of the past.