



Stained glass, gingerbread, and Dutch-oven effects in the tiling in the bathrooms of the '80's no doubt helped to rent the mansions thus adorned.

Bathtubs, Early Americana

BY FAIRFAX DOWNEY



HISTORIC as is the Potomac River, Fame has given it a pretty raw deal. The jade has held out on it with her choicest favor, the bestowal of a resounding sobriquet, an endearing nickname which fixes any haunt of history in a prominent niche for all time. On the Mississippi she conferred the accolade of "Father of Waters." Faneuil Hall she christened "The Cradle of Liberty." But she has failed miserably in her duty of dubbing the grand old Potomac "The Bathtub of Presidents."

Neither history nor a tale of tubbing can neglect the mighty stream which washed Washington, both George and D. C., and in all probability laved all succeeding Presidents up to Millard Fillmore, who when he came into office caused the first bathtub to be installed in the White House. That was in 1850. The Fillmore facility remained the sole modern convenience of that type until the

Cleveland administration increased the equipment thirty-five years later.

President John Quincy Adams particularly must have wished vaguely for something of the sort. It was his habit to take his plunge in the Potomac at the foot of his garden daily between daybreak and sunrise, "weather permitting," the chronicle states. How the weather permitted or how it forbade is not specified. Rain perhaps was regarded as a shower-bath, and a walk in the garden became then all that was necessary.

President Adams persisted in his outdoor rite in spite of several untoward incidents. Once somebody swiped the presidential raiment lying on the bank and the august bather was forced to hail a passing lad and despatch him for more attire. On another occasion, a woman newspaper correspondent, a pioneer in her craft in more than one respect, caught the Chief Executive of these United States at his matutinal ablutions. John Quincy had previously refused to give her an interview, being strongly opposed to woman

reporters. But when she got him cornered in the Potomac, his views perforce were altered. She would not go away and let him out until he reciprocated by releasing something for publication. That was her ultimatum, and she stuck to it. Neck deep in the river, the President expostulated and threatened the hussy on the bank, but she camped right down there until the interview was forthcoming. Alas! what its content was does not appear. One can only hope that she asked him about domestic entanglements and inland waterways and that her story led off: "Although ordinarily shy, modest, and retiring, President John Quincy Adams dropped his habitual reticence to-day and talked freely to a representative of this paper, whom he received most informally," etc., etc.

Nowadays the White House has its hot and cold running water and its silence. No longer does the interviewer find books, as it were, in the running Potomac.

The initial bathtub of the Executive Mansion was not the trail blazer in this country. Conservatism would not have permitted it to be. It had been antedated by eight years by a contrivance into which with astounding fortitude one cold December morning in Cincinnati, Ohio, stepped a gentleman, Adam Thompson by name. It is related that he derived the big idea from Lord John Russell, who had been doing that sort of thing in England for a dozen years every day when sea-bathing, of which he was very fond, was not feasible. The American visitor had tried the British tub and characteristically decided that it could be improved upon.

On his return to the United States, Mr. Thompson supplied plans and specifications for the new-fangled contraption to workmen, chief among whom was a cabinetmaker. That began the cabinet era of the American bathtub. Its products always gave the bather a slight feeling of being crated, but undeniably art was served and combined with utility, more or less. Some of the results really ought to be collected as early Americana.

The Thompson tub was encased with mahogany and lined with sheet lead, and it weighed in at about a ton. From the old family pump in the back yard water was piped to the attic, whence one pipe-

line led it cold to the tub, and another, coiled down the chimney, provided it hot, if only there was a big enough fire in the hearth. The bath went across big, and is said to have been the chief feature of entertainment at a Christmas party given by the inventor to his friends. One can picture each daring guest trying the thing in his turn while the others gathered outside the door and carolled: "God rest you, merry gentleman. Let nothing you dismay."

The reputation of the new bathtub, of course, spread rapidly. After that, the deluge. But hadn't it been a long time coming? For years, for centuries, Americans had made out with what Nature offered in the way of ablutions, and that offer was hardly enticing in the winter. They had supplemented that with portable tubs, mere basins which were all very well if you had enough help in the irrigation project, but could hardly be said to be a light undertaking to be entered into at a moment's whim.

Benjamin Franklin is recorded as having taken while in southern France the celebrated slipper-bath, so-called because the tub was of shoe shape. One entered at the top of the affair, if humanly possible without the aid of a shoe-horn, and one was very snugly encased and submerged to the neck. Perhaps Franklin was first wrapped in a sheet; in view of the rough interiors of the tubs, that concession to epidermis was often made in polished France. At any rate, he took the bath in that case and numerous others, causing a commentator to remark that "Franklin differed from the rest of his generation in not dreading water internally or externally."

When bathtubs became self-filling and hence stationary, Yankee ingenuity ran riot in their design. Bathing left the hardship class and approached that luxury to which it had been an utter stranger since its Roman days, that luxury which it was to attain and surpass, though it has never equalled the sociability of bathing in the time of the emperors. There was the sofa-bath, of which it might have been written, had it not appeared in a pre-slogan era: "Bathing made comfortable." Such a catchword might also have applied to the tub which boasted a raised seat at the head end, doubtless to permit

a more dignified posture, and it might have fitted the triumph inspired by that divinity which shapes our ends, the model with a semicircular enlargement at one extremity to afford plenty of room for stout bathers.

Fearful and wonderful was the sea bathtub, which was designed in the shape of a wave; in fact, of several of 'em. The convolutions of the thing were supposed to induce the water to undulate gently about you. Presumably you added a pinch of salt and served. A little imagination along with that, plus a liberal sprinkling of sand in your eyes and hair, and you were virtually disporting in the surf right in the home. Another innovation, but one which was destined to survive, was the then-called "rain-bath." The inventor, who had been caught out in a thunder-storm and thoroughly soaked, merely reproduced his experience under more auspicious and private conditions. A bucket of water was hoisted on to a ledge above the bather, then tipped into a perforated drain, through which it ran down on his head, and there you were with a shower-bath. For a while these showers were well thought of as a treatment for insanity. But that was before people began to sing in them.

It needs no old-timer to recall the early type tin tub, with its broad wooden rim. Many of them are yet in use in old manses, and they are far from having attained the repose and dignity of museum pieces. In respect to them, a treatise of the period of their prime advises: "After some use, copper and zinc tubs may be made to look quite inviting by painting the inside with a special bath enamel paint."

Mind you, it makes the point that the tubs must be broken in first; you could not expect them to be very inviting at first blush.

The painted and galvanized tubs developed into the porcelain enamel inside tub with a wooden frame. True, the surface would peel and chip and be transferred to the surface of the bather, but he or she did not seriously mind that, having attained that cleanliness once so nearly "next to impossible."

The steel-clad all-copper tub, with iron reinforcing bands and a hardwood frame, the predecessor of the porcelain variety, was a veritable heavy-armored tank.

The earlier American tubbers would have greatly preferred that type, for their activities were not infrequently stealthy and surreptitious, both under the fire of the medical profession and under the ban of laws of commonwealths.

Doctors predicted all manner of deadly ills for the sybarites who persisted in indulging in the debilitating habit of bathing to the alarming extent of once every day. People thought "there ought to be a law against it," and in several States and cities there was. Legislators went into action. The common council of Philadelphia turned down a proposed ban on bathing from the first of November to the middle of March by two votes, but Boston (in 1845) proscribed bathing except on medical advice. Virginia proceeded to slap a tax of \$30 a year on every tub imported into the State. The cities of Hartford, Wilmington, and Providence indicated disapproval by boosting their water-rates.

With baths so widely regarded as not at all to the common weal, it is not surprising that no public baths were established in this country until 1891, long since bathing had been made easy. All the opposition current had tended to keep baths private; in fact, almost bootleg. Of course, if you had a pre-prohibition bathtub in Virginia you were entitled to indulge, but just try and import an extra one, so the rest of the family would not have to wait in line so long, and that would cost you money. It is not impossible that in Boston certain of the citizenry who liked their little bath now and then were able to find friendly physicians who were generous with and not over-conscientious about their bath prescriptions. And no doubt in Hartford, Wilmington, and Providence people who could take their bath or leave it alone managed now and then to take it in spite of hell and high water-rates.

For the law to step in and put hazards in the course of true laving was most discouraging. The evolution of our national tubbing had been slow enough without legislatures denying it. As for the income of the bath—well, the first pumping-station started to make tub-filling easier only a little more than one hundred years ago. The facility of outgo dates back to 1855, when Chicago put in operation the

first sewage system of any account. Not until Civil War time did guests at the larger hotels have much prospect of bathing at all in the modern manner; and not until after Spanish War time could a guest ask for a room-and-a-bath in the fond hope that the latter was going to be his very own. Foreign travellers complained as late as that period that three rings of the bell at the most would summon a masterpiece in the way of cocktails to your hotel room, but you must ring nine times and then come to arrange for an indifferent bath.

A foreign visitor could have had no strong ground for being snobbish about our bathing equipment at that date. The vicissitudes of bathing abroad had and have long been known to travellers from our shores. They continue to exist, barring England, land of the portable tub, Lord John Russell, and the Order of the Bath.

Though the statutes of the last-mentioned advantage date back to 1752, it cannot be denied after reading them that the ceremony its initiation prescribed was regarded as an experience, an adventure. It was typical of the status of bathing of that day. The rite demanded a "proper Barber to make ready a Bathing-Vessel, handsomely lined on the Inside and Outside with Linnen, having cross Hoops over it, covered with Tapestry, for Defence against the cold Air of the Night." It seems to have been rather like a perilous trip through an unknown country in a Covered Wagon.

After a hair cut and a shave, the candidate knight was undressed to "Musick" and placed in the bath, where he was instructed by grave knights, who splashed water over his shoulders to make it harder. It is interesting to note that King George I appointed that "our dear entirely beloved Grandson, Prince William, shall be the first and principal Companion and shall be placed next unto the Sovereign within this most honourable Order. And since by reason of the Tenderness of his Age, he is not able to bear the Fatigue of Bathing, and the Vigils attending it, . . . we do hereby dispense with him in these." Read that and think on our modern spectacle, Baby's Bath, being conducted daily in millions of homes before an enthusiastic feminine cheering section.

The bathtub has multiplied in the United States until it bids fair to become as exclusive an affair as the individual drinking-cup. The hotel announcement of "every room with a bath" is no longer pretentious. Amazing as they would have seemed a few years ago, we now find nothing extraordinary in apartments of six rooms with a quota of three baths. With only three out of those six rooms bedrooms, it may be realized that nowadays time and tub make no man wait for them, and you may go right ahead and hew to the line, let the towels fall where they may. Even guest-rooms, those proverbially uncomfortable recesses, now are apt to have attached little bathtubs all their own. The hardships and complications of a week-end are thus considerably reduced.

In the modern tale of a tub, the only reference to previous instalments is the blossoming out of color schemes again. That is a return to the old cabinetwork days when the decorative tiling of the tub and the wash-stand let them vie with the Dutch fireplace. Now we may have our bathrooms done in soft rose or warm brown tiles, with the frame of the tub tiled to match. Marble, carved woodwork, and ornate fixtures are making their appearance; in short, the bathroom is being interior-decorated over and above the conveniences of modern plumbing. Even in the simple little bathroom of the flat or the bungalow we have grown to expect much—soap recesses to hold the cake we once groped for or slipped on—fixtures made from such china as is used in dinner-plates—grab-rods by which we emerge from our tubbing with less danger of skidding—showers aloft, mirrors roundabout, and plate-glass shelves at hand; and also a fine, stout door with a lock on it, something that the goddess Diana wished she had at her bath once.

Greece's was the glory of the gracefully sculptured bird-bath effect, Rome's the grandeur of her ponderous thermæ. To the tent-folding Arabs belongs the credit of the discovery of the sand plunge, while the Turks early went into steam. Combine the best of all their devices into one small, compact item and you have the present triumphant development of that fine old nineteenth-century piece, the American bathtub.

Hometown

BY BADGER CLARK

Our town has history enough.
Across the railroad, on the bluff,
Prof scans the record of our age
And reads it, page by stony page.
Desert, he says, and swamp and sea
And glacier in turn were we.
The three-toed horse, he says, was here;
Rhinoceros and six-horned deer
And other strange and varied meats
Snorted and stamped about our streets
Back when the first town site survey
Was still a million years away.
And then the red man's pedigree,
With pigeon-toed solemnity,
Stalked through our annals in a string
And ate their feasts beside our spring
Till old Jed Towner built his hut
With one hand on a pistol butt.
Can Pontiac,
Kish or Karnak
Push their backgrounds further back?

Our town has sights as fine to see
As any in geography.
Why, when the early sunlight spills
In summer down our eastern hills,
They look like heaven's parapet.
From Eighth Street, when the sun has set,
The high school on the hill in line
Looms like a castle on the Rhine,
And twisted pines along the crest,
Backed by the lemon-colored west,
Would make Jap artists praise their gods
And plant their easels here by squads.
Some summer nights I have to lie
In the front yard and watch the sky,
And let my fancy climb and play
Through lacework of the Milky Way
To deeper heights all silver fired,
Until both eyes and brain are tired.
Oh, never Nome,
Hongkong or Rome
Could show me finer sights than home!

SOUTH DAKOTA