

Outhouses through the Ages

It is believed that outhouses originated from Europe in the 15th century. An outhouse was constructed like a small shed, and the toilet seat could have a variety of holes to accommodate both children and adults.

On the front of an outhouse one would have found a cutout in the wood. This could have been a half moon or a sun. It was used by innkeepers to identify the designated outhouse for men and women. The cutouts were also used for ventilation and light inside the outhouse.

As time went on, it became apparent that the upkeep of both male and female outhouses was very difficult and time consuming, so outhouses became free of labels and were left for anyone to use.

Eventually the sun cutout on the outhouse became non-existent and a half moon became the norm to show that the outhouse could be accessible by both genders. The choice of the half moon over the sun is still unknown. There are many theories ranging from which gender kept their outhouse cleaner to that the moon offered an easy grip to close the door.



The most noticeable feature of an outhouse was their scent. When waste is broken down, it emits two gases: methane and hydrogen sulfide, which smelled like rotten eggs. Since the scents of outhouses were very noticeable, outhouses were built around 50-150 feet away

from the main home, in close walking distance, and to avoid having to smell the unpleasant fumes.

On cold winter nights when walking to the outhouse was undesired, many people kept a chamber pot or bedpan under their bed.

In 1872, the first flush toilet was invented and since then, flush toilets have become a necessity in the everyday home and chamber pots have become obsolete. It is assumed that the first toilet paper was invented in China, circa 1300's and the modern commercial roll was patented in 1871.

As said before, an outhouse is designed like a shed, but instead of holding tools it holds a toilet. The toilet seat inside of an outhouse was once just a raised hole above the ground, but then it became more. Some were built to accommodate both adults and children so the seat was built with varying hole sizes.



The above outhouse was a replica built on the grounds of the Fultz House Museum.

Since outhouses had such a pungent smell, many were built with lids to help moderate the smell and to try to keep the flies at bay. Unfortunately, not all outhouses had a lid and so many people would

bring lime powder with them when they went to the washroom to sprinkle down the hole. This helped with the flies and also offered a more pleasant smell.

Once outhouses were built, it was discovered that an outhouse did not need to fit only one person, but instead could hold many. Soon trenches were dug and outhouses built on top to accommodate multiple users.

Then came the two-story outhouse. The bottom toilet was installed like any ordinary outhouse, but the upstairs one was pushed back so the waste would fall down behind the bottom toilet instead of landing above the lower room. It had a separate entrance.



The above two-story outhouse is located in Nevada City, United States.

Outhouses remained in rural areas well into the 20th century because indoor plumbing was a luxury for the wealthy, and costly to purchase and install. In Sackville, the outhouse started to be phased out by the 1940's/1950's.

The Fultz House Museum has a replica outhouse on the property beside the Grace Cooperage and the Blacksmith Shop to display how far one would have needed to walk to use the toilet from a house back in the day.



The outhouse pictured beside the Blacksmith Shop on the grounds of the Fultz House Museum.