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The distribution of drinking, or potable, water is one of the most important infrastructural needs of any home or institution. From 1855 to until around the 1890s, many buildings would have their own cistern, or a water-tight tub that collects rain or well water for long-term storage and use. CAP archaeologists found and documented a historic cistern on the south side of Cook Hall in 2014. Their archaeological and historical study indicates that cisterns at the College would have been large, brick lined metal drums connected to a faucet in the basement. The first cisterns would have been open, allowing rainwater in, but also allowed refuse and other garbage into the water supply. Eventually College decide to add metal caps to the cisterns and to instead pump water in from wells in the area. The cistern infrastructure fell out of favor at MSU in the 1900s because the expense of adapting the system to fit the needs of the growing college. It cost $25,000 to alter the cistern in Station Terrace so it could provide water to the second floor (Harrison 2014)! [[1]](#footnote-1)

<img src= "https://i2.wp.com/campusarch.msu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/20140617\_120031.jpg" alt= "Photograph of the bottom of the Cook Hall cistern. Both the metal drum and the brick lining are visible" style= "width:55%">

<div class="center"> Photograph of the bottom of the Cook Hall cistern. Both the metal drum and the brick lining are visible</div>

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By the 1890s a water pipe network would eventually connect all of the buildings on campus to external water sources, but this network began in much earlier. In the 1870s, some of the plumbing on campus used wooden water pipes to move water from wells and other sources to various buildings (Kuhn 1955:105, 188). Excavations in 2008 at [[**Faculty Row]]** uncovered a segment of a “Wyckoff” wooden water pipe produced by Wyckoff Pipe and Creosoting Company. This pipe was likely manufactured at the Michigan Pipe Co. in Bay City, Michigan, one of the largest producers of wooden pipes in the entire country during the 19th century (Biggs 2019). [[2]](#footnote-2)

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<img src= "https://i0.wp.com/campusarch.msu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/wyckoff-ad.png?resize=768%2C915" alt= “Wyckoff Wooden Water Pipe advertisement an 1896 edition of ‘The Michigan Engineers’ Manual’. Note that the advertisement describes the Wyckoff as the “Cheapest and Best Water Pipe on The Market”. style= “width:100%”>

<div class="center"> Wyckoff Wooden Water Pipe advertisement an 1896 edition of ‘The Michigan Engineers’ Manual’. Note that the advertisement describes the Wyckoff as the “Cheapest and Best Water Pipe on The Market” <a href= “https://archive.org/stream/michiganengineer1896michuoft#page/n391/mode/2up”> Original image</a></div>

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<img src= "https://i2.wp.com/campusarch.msu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/wp\_model.png?resize=1024%2C757" alt= "Different views of a 3D model of the Wyckoff wooden water pipe found during Faculty Row excavations. The full model can be viewed on CAP’s Sketchfab account. This model was created by Jack A. Biggs using Agisoft PhotoScan." style= "width:100%">

<div class="center">Different views of a 3D model of the Wyckoff wooden water pipe found during Faculty Row excavations. The full model can be viewed on CAP’s Sketchfab account. This model was created by Jack A. Biggs using Agisoft PhotoScan</div>

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During the 1870s until 1900 the Land Grant funding from the Morrill Act was used to firmly establish the College, constructing new buildings quickly. Cheaper materials were favored to facilitate this growth. In addition to the lower initial costs of wooden pipes, especially compared to cast iron, the Michigan Pipe Co. claimed that the Wyckoff pipes were cheaper to maintain, resistant to freezing and frost damage, and maintained cleaner water. This claim may have been true, but the college decommissioned all of the wooden pipes on campus by the first decade of the 20th century and replaced them with iron ones. This was prompted because it was become clear that the wooden popes were no longer safe. In 1902 a medical doctor argued before the Boards of Trustees that the pipes allowed bacteria into the water during the warmer months, posing a danger unless the water was boiled first (Raslich 2016; Biggs 2019).[[3]](#footnote-3) This call was echoed in 1903 when the wooden water main collapsed during a fire at Station Terrace, hindering the efforts to put the fire out (Board of Trustees 1903:122). It seems that benefits of wooden pipes did not outweigh the health and safety costs.

The earliest buildings on campus, like **Saints’ Rest**, did not have plumbed toilets, and instead most people living on the College grounds from the 1850s until the 1890s would use chamber pots and outdoor toilets, or privies. Chamber pots allowed people living in Saints’ Rest to use the facilities without leaving the building or even their room, a huge convenience during cold Michigan falls and spring months. Chamber pots were often stored under beds or in cabinets and then emptied into designated dumping area (Biggs 2018). [[4]](#footnote-4)

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* <img src= "https://i0.wp.com/campusarch.msu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/chamberpot.jpg" alt= "Saints’ Rest chamber pot lid. A: exterior surface; B: interior surface. The exterior of the lid was decorated with a floral motif, possibly a thistle and leaf pattern. While the ceramic looks a dark blue color, this is an effect of the fire that destroyed Saints’ Rest. The chamber pot would have originally been white." style= “width:400%”>
* <div class="center"> Saints’ Rest chamber pot lid. A: exterior surface; B: interior surface. The exterior of the lid was decorated with a floral motif, possibly a thistle and leaf pattern. While the ceramic looks a dark blue color, this is an effect of the fire that destroyed Saints’ Rest. The chamber pot would have originally been white </div>
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* <div class="column"><img src= "https://i1.wp.com/campusarch.msu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Chamber-Pot.gif?fit=1024%2C576" alt= “GIF of the chamber pot excavated from Saints’ Rest dormitory in 2005. The full model can be viewed on CAP’s Sketchfab account. This model was created by Jack A. Biggs using Agisoft PhotoScan.” style= “width:100%”>
* <div class="center"> GIF of the chamber pot excavated from Saints’ Rest dormitory in 2005. The full model can be viewed on CAP’s Sketchfab account. This model was created by Jack A. Biggs using Agisoft PhotoScan </div>
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In addition to their use as toilets, privies were often places where people would dump trash and the human waste from privies was also used as fertilizer for campus farms (Board of Trustees 1883:442).[[5]](#footnote-5) Although many privies would have been scatter across campus in those years, only one has been found and excavated by the Campus Archaeology Program. In 2015 CAP survey crews excavated a privy at the site of Saints’ Rest, inside they found the **Mable** doll head and a doll figurine, as well as inkwells and other **instructional artifacts**, combs, bottles, and animal and plant remains (Kate Myers Emery 2015).

To find out more about the archaeology and apparitions at MSU, click the HOME button below!

### <div class="center">[[Home|HomePage]]</div>

### <div class="center">[[References|Other References]]</div>

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1. Harrison, Ian 2014, “Cisterns: MSU’s History of Water”, Blog, June 19, 2014, <http://campusarch.msu.edu/?p=3093> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Biggs, Jack, 2019 “Just a Pipe Dream: The Use of Wooden Water Pipes at MSU”, Blog, March 13, 2019, <http://campusarch.msu.edu/?p=7225> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Raslich, Nicole, 2016, “Water Sanitation at MSU”, Blog, February 3, 2016, <http://campusarch.msu.edu/?p=3974> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Biggs, Jack, 2018, “Precursor to the Porcelain Throne: The Camber Pot Lid from Saints’ Rest”, Blog, May 1, 2018, <http://campusarch.msu.edu/?p=6067> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Board of Trustees, 1883, <https://onthebanks.msu.edu/Object/157-544-259/meeting-minutes-1883/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)