

“The History of Cleanliness”

The people that settled and formed our country did not live in a time in which there were high standards of cleanliness. People did not have running water in their homes. Water had to be brought into the house, from a well, a pump or a stream – then it had to be heated for bathing or washing clothes.

People at that time also believed that washing or bathing too often was unhealthy. Soap, toothpaste, creams and ointments had to be handmade by families – so when they were available it was important not to waste them and to make them last as long as possible.

Soap was made from animal fat and lye. Hair was washed with soap instead of shampoo. It was washed as seldom as possible. Women wanted to have long hair and it was known as their ‘crowning glory’ and it was brushed every day, but it was believed that washing damaged it, so they would usually only wash it once or twice a month. If someone had dandruff – they would rub bran into their scalp, and if they were bald they would rub their head with onions. But people usually washed their feet every night before bed, maybe because they had to rely on their feet for transportation, work and most every other task.

The water that was used to clean or to do laundry and scrub the floor was thrown outside the door of your house. The dirty water seeped into the ground and contaminated the water in the wells nearby. Sometimes, small animals and rodents would fall into open wells – all of which would lead to spreading disease; unbeknownst to the home maker.

Toothpaste was made from bark, myrrh, chalk, orris root, and sugar. People did not brush their teeth every day. Before tooth brushes were made, people brushed their teeth with a piece of wood that was splintered or frayed at the end. To get their teeth extra clean, the splinters were dipped in gunpowder. Not many people had teeth left after the age of the thirty. Mouthwash was made of lemon juice, wine, quinine, and cologne water.