Bodies, Moral Regulation and Modernity in Victorian & Edwardian Cities
DUITS DE QUALITE
Bathing in Victorian Toronto

- Established order frowned on public nudity
  - Required bulky and restrictive clothing
  - Everyone had to wear hats
- But men and boys could bathe in the nude, outdoors
  - In the lake, in rivers
  - Restricted to time of day
Ontario 1905
• Getting caught at Point Edward ON, 1911
Don River swimming class 1908
McGill St YWCA 1907
Broadview YMCA 1915
Broadview YMCA 1915
Bathing Culture Early C20th Toronto

- Prevailing culture frowned on nudity
  - Knee-to-neck swimsuits for both sexes
- But “inversion” permitted in certain situations
  - In deserted locations
  - In boys organized swimming activities
  - In women’s marathon swimming
- Inversion doesn’t challenge the established orthodoxy
Effect on Landscape

- Toronto creates spaces where different clothing standards prevail
  - Clothed bathing OK in swimming pools, beaches
  - Must be fully dressed for the street, workplace, school or church
  - Wool suit required in most places
  - Women cannot wear white gloves, shoes until Victoria Day
Informal Reality

• Standards relax a little in hot weather
  – Men can attend church without tie or jacket, roll shirtsleeves up
  – Duck or canvas suits, straw hats OK in summer
  – Boys bathed nude in local creeks
Odors in Victorian Toronto

• Before 1860: organic smells were widespread in the city, could not be controlled

• After 1860:
  – Railways lead to segregation of feedlots, meat processing, livestock trading, leather tanning
  – Improvements in water supply and sewerage allow the middle classes to create suburbs with plumbed bathrooms
The Great Unwashed

- Middle class suburbs created with plumbed bathrooms, regular bathing habits, laundry
  - Sewage dumped into the water supply
- Rest of the city unplumbed and smelly
  - Pit latrines, cesspools
  - Retards entry of sewage into water supply
Spatial and Social Segregation

• From 1870s odorous activities in urban space become segregated
  – Away from clean-smelling middle class suburbs
  – Confined to unpleasant working-class areas

• Victorian middle-classes talk about dirt as a class difference
  – The poor as the “Great Unwashed”
• Spadina & College 1899
Public Washrooms

• Urination, defecation a challenge for Victorian Toronto
• Middle class takes political control of the city from 1850s
  – Shows a desire to regulate bodily functions on the city’s streets and public spaces
  – Issues of gender and class
  – Desire to regulate working-class male urination
Suburbs

- Toronto’s suburban public space gets public washrooms from 1850s onwards
  - Parks and Exhibition grounds
  - Accommodates both sexes
Downtown

• Toronto mainly relies on washrooms on private property
• Middle class:
  – Men: washrooms regular workplaces etc.,
  – Women: washrooms in department stores etc.,
• Working class men often without washroom access
  – Often urinated in a convenient spot
No. 2449.

A By-law relating to Public Morals.

Passed 13th January, 1890.

The Municipal Council of the Corporation of the City of Toronto enacts as follows—

8. No person shall indecently expose any part of his or her person in any street or public place, nor shall the plea of answering the call of nature be considered a palliation of the offence.

Source: Toronto Chief Constable's Annual Reports, 1862-66.

Males Charged with Indecent Exposure

Source: Toronto Chief Constable's Annual Reports.
Downtown

- 1860s onwards
  - Urinals for men in the public markets
- 1880s onwards
  - Debate over public washrooms
- Mid 1890s
  - Urinals for streetcar crews
  - First public washrooms for men on the streets
The Micro-Geography of Sanitary Nuisance
King and Toronto Streets
circa 1899-1896


Photo circa 1900.

Pedestrians had access to extensive systems of back yards, lanes and alleys.

This passage was a favourite spot for male urination, in the late 1880s.

Planned site for an underground men's lavatory in 1895. Later abandoned.

Objectors to the men's lavatory
Covered Passages

RBA 1993
Washrooms for Women

- Department stores aimed at the middle and upper class woman
- The major department stores offered the most ornate women’s washrooms in Victorian Toronto
  - Eaton’s, Simpson’s
  - Eaton’s “Ladies waiting room and gallery”
Our store is so admirably planned and conveniently arranged that it makes those who visit it feel pleased and satisfied. The lofty ceilings, the large skylights, the ample sweep of floor, all give the idea of spaciousness and comfort.

**Ladies' Waiting Room.** Ladies, you come off the train; you are covered with dust, begrimed with smoke; you feel unrefreshed; you don't wish to beg anyone to allow you to make your toilet in their rooms without paying them for it; you possibly have a long day's shopping before you; probably you have a number of packages, wraps, etc.; you are getting disgusted. Listen! Get off your train, take a Yonge or Queen street car, as it may be, and bring your parcels with you straight to Eaton's. Why? In the south corner of Yonge and Queen street stores is an office expressly for you to consider as your own. Here you can leave your parcels and get a cheque for them free of charge, send your telegrams, telephone, ask questions, leave your over garments, umbrellas, anything. Should you have too many parcels, there are trunks from 90c. to $1.00 in the basement quite convenient. So much for your parcels. Now you want to wash, arrange your toilet, and take a rest. Take the elevator to the second floor, and right south of the freight elevator you will find a nicely curtained waiting-room, a clean toilet room, with towels, soap, etc. Other waiting-rooms are scattered throughout the building for your convenience. These rooms are yours; we give them to you. Wash as often as you please; wait as long as you like. Get thoroughly refreshed before you start your shopping. We give you the invitation, and will be delighted with your acceptance.

**SHOPPING BY MAIL.**
Public Washrooms in Toronto

- Network of washrooms for men expands in 1900s-1910s to encompass strategic crowding points on streetcar system
- From 1906: street washrooms for women (but not downtown)
  - No sign of pressure from women’s groups
  - Women didn’t use them much
Toronto Streetcars
The Growth of Passenger Volume
Public Washrooms in Toronto

• From 1906: street washrooms for both sexes (but not downtown)
  – No sign of pressure from women’s groups
  – Women didn’t use them much
City of Toronto
Usage of Public Lavatories on City Streets

Source: Toronto City Engineer’s Annual Reports, 1905-10.

Yonge &
Cottingham
Men: 197370
Women: 9576

Streetcar route

Queen &
Broadview
Men: 103076
Women: 8167

Queen &
Spadina
Men: 594927

Toronto &
Adelaide
Men: 683308

Circles are proportional to reported usage.

Source: Toronto City Engineer’s Annual Report, 1910
Bodies in Urban History

- Rising dominance of the middle class in Victorian & Edwardian Toronto
- Expressed (in part) through the moral regulation of the body
  - Bathing culture, nudity
  - Public washrooms,
  - “the Great Unwashed
- Each has a geography, landscape, spatial expression