WHERE ARE THE LADIES’ REST ROOMS?

The Evolution of Women-Only Resting Rooms Amid Social Changes of the Early Twentieth Century

Kristin Britanik
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Overview

• What is a Ladies’ Rest Room?
• Historical & Social Context
• Research Questions
• Methodology
• Types of Ladies Rest Rooms
• Conclusions
What is a Ladies’ Rest Room?

- Room for Women to Rest
- Popular From the Early 1900s - 1930s
- Made Public Spaces More Accommodating
- Used to Market to Women as Consumers

Ladies’ Rest Room at the Public Service Company in Jersey City, Circa 1913
What is a Ladies’ Rest Room?

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*Ladies’ Rest Room at the Delaware County Fair, Circa 1926*
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Ladies Rest Room, Owen, Moore & Co.

Ladies’ Rest Room at the Owen, Moore & Co. Store, Circa 1909
Historical & Social Context

- End of the Victorian Era
- Progressive Era
- Women’s Rights Movement
- New Technologies

Drawings From the Book Home Dissertations, Circa 1890
Historical & Social Context

- End of the Victorian Era
- Progressive Era
- Women’s Rights Movement
- New Technologies

**FIG. 1.—REST ROOM IN COURTHOUSE AT NORWALK, OHIO.**

Rest Room in a Courthouse, Circa 1917
Historical & Social Context

- End of the Victorian Era
- Progressive Era
- Women’s Rights Movement
- New Technologies
Historical & Social Context

- End of the Victorian Era
- Progressive Era
- Women’s Rights Movement
- New Technologies

“Driving a Car”

*Opens up all sorts of fascinating possibilities*

*Article in the Women’s Home Companion, Circa 1919*
Research Questions

• What were the different types of ladies’ rest rooms?
• How did the use of these rooms evolve over time?
• Did the Progressive Era influence ladies’ rest rooms usage?
• Why is this room type so unknown today?
Methodology

- Create a Typology
- Found Examples Using Primary Sources
- Compiled Survey \((n = 244)\)
- Analysis
## Types of Ladies’ Rest Rooms

- Established by Civic Groups
- The Workplace
- County, State, & World’s Fairs
- Transportation
- Public Comfort Stations
- Educational Facilities
- Retail Stores
- Community Buildings
- Civic Buildings
- Banking Institution
- Theaters
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Civic Groups

Ladies’ Rest Room Established by the Carthage Women’s Club in Missouri, Circa 1913
Civic Groups

• Earliest Type Found
• For Rural Women Visiting the City
• Many Created by Women’s Clubs
• Earliest Types Found in the Midwest

A Stand Alone Ladies’ Rest Room in Lewisburg, Tennessee, Founded 1924
Transportation

Ladies’ Rest Room at the William McKay Co Ford & Lincoln Auto Dealership, Circa 1929

LADIES’ REST ROOM — Conveniently arranged for the comfort of our patrons.
Transportation

- Railroad Travel
- Automobile
  - Dealers
  - Repair Shops
- Other Methods
  - Ocean Liners
  - Air Travel

Place a Conspicuous Sign at the Entrance to Town on Each Main Traveled Highway and Have This Sign Feature the Ladies’ Rest Room

Advertisement from The Horseless Age in 1918
Retail Stores

• Department Store
  • Whimsical and Fanciful Environment
  • Massive Building Size
  • Rest Rooms Used to Entice Women to Buy More

• Specialty Retail
  • Place to Market Specialty Products
  • Attract Women into the Store

Illustration of a Resting Women & Child from The New York Tribune in 1922
Retail Stores

The Ladies Rest Room.
A pleasant sunlit parlour.
Conclusion

• Ladies’ Rest Rooms are Evidence of Social Change in the Built Environment

• Because of Gradual Change in Function, Little is Known About This Room Type

• The Study of Ladies’ Rest Rooms is Informative of the Lives of Women in the Early 20th Century