

WHERE ARE THE LADIES' REST ROOMS?

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

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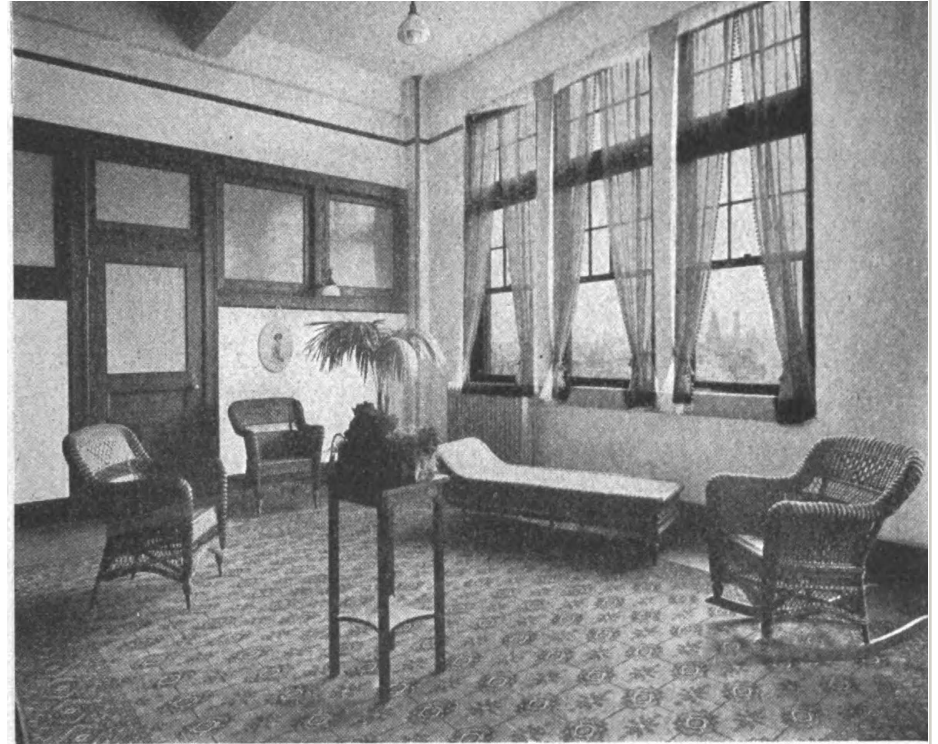
Overview

- 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



THE LADIES' REST ROOM

Ladies' Rest Room at the Public Service Company in Jersey City, Circa 1913

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Ladies' Rest Room at the Delaware County Fair, Circa 1926

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Women's Rest Room at Osborne Works Twine Mill, Circa 1910

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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



Women Campaigning for Suffrage, Circa 1913

Historical & Social Context

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



“Driving a Car”

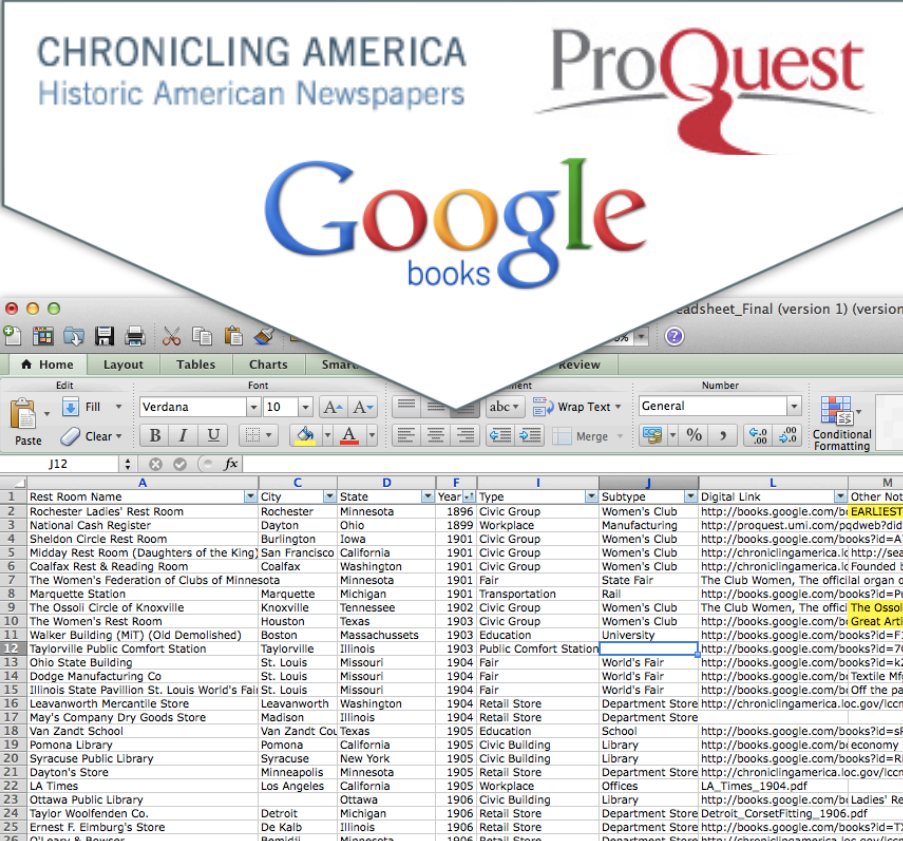
Opens up all sorts of fascinating possibilities

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



CHRONICLING AMERICA
Historic American Newspapers

ProQuest

Google
books

Rest Room Name	City	State	Year	Type	Subtype	Digital Link	Other Notes
1 Rochester Ladies' Rest Room	Rochester	Minnesota	1896	Civic Group	Women's Club	http://books.google.com/bi/EARLIEST_E	
2 National Cash Register	Dayton	Ohio	1899	Workplace	Manufacturing	http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=	
3 Sheldon Circle Rest Room	Burlington	Iowa	1901	Civic Group	Women's Club	http://books.google.com/books?id=A7S	
4 Middy Rest Room (Daughters of the King)	San Francisco	California	1901	Civic Group	Women's Club	http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/search	
5 Coalfax Rest & Reading Room	Coalfax	Washington	1901	Civic Group	Women's Club	http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/search	
6 The Women's Federation of Clubs of Minnesota	Minneapolis	Minnesota	1901	Fair	State Fair	http://books.google.com/books?id=Put	
7 Marquette Station	Marquette	Michigan	1901	Transportation	Rail	http://books.google.com/books?id=7Cf	
8 The Ossoli Circle of Knoxville	Knoxville	Tennessee	1902	Civic Group	Women's Club	http://books.google.com/bi/Great_Article	
9 The Women's Rest Room	Houston	Texas	1903	Civic Group	Women's Club	http://books.google.com/bi/Great_Article	
10 Walker Building (MIT) (Old Demolished)	Boston	Massachusetts	1903	Education	University	http://books.google.com/books?id=F1T	
11 Taylorville Public Comfort Station	Taylorville	Illinois	1903	Public Comfort Station		http://books.google.com/books?id=7Cf	
12 Ohio State Building	St. Louis	Missouri	1904	Fair	World's Fair	http://books.google.com/books?id=k2G	
13 Dodge Manufacturing Co	St. Louis	Missouri	1904	Fair	World's Fair	http://books.google.com/bi/Textile_Mfg	
14 Illinois State Pavilion St. Louis World's Fair	St. Louis	Missouri	1904	Fair	World's Fair	http://books.google.com/bi/Off_the_pari	
15 Leavenworth Mercantile Store	Leavenworth	Washington	1904	Retail Store	Department Store	http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/ccn/	
16 May's Company Dry Goods Store	Madison	Illinois	1904	Retail Store	Department Store	http://books.google.com/books?id=sP8	
17 Van Zandt School	Van Zandt Col	Texas	1905	Education	School	http://books.google.com/bi/economy_b	
18 Pomona Library	Pomona	California	1905	Civic Building	Library	http://books.google.com/books?id=RIQ	
19 Syracuse Public Library	Syracuse	New York	1905	Civic Building	Library	http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/ccn/	
20 Dayton's Store	Minneapolis	Minnesota	1905	Retail Store	Department Store	http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/ccn/	
21 LA Times	Los Angeles	California	1905	Workplace	Offices	http://books.google.com/bi/Ladies'_Rest	
22 Ottawa Public Library	Ottawa	Illinois	1906	Civic Building	Library	http://books.google.com/books?id=TXI	
23 Taylor Woolfenden Co.	Detroit	Michigan	1906	Retail Store	Department Store	http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/ccn/	
24 Ernest F. Elmburg's Store	De Kalb	Illinois	1906	Retail Store	Department Store	http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/ccn/	
25 O'Leary & Bowser	Bemidji	Minnesota	1906	Retail Store	Department Store	http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/ccn/	

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



1890-1909

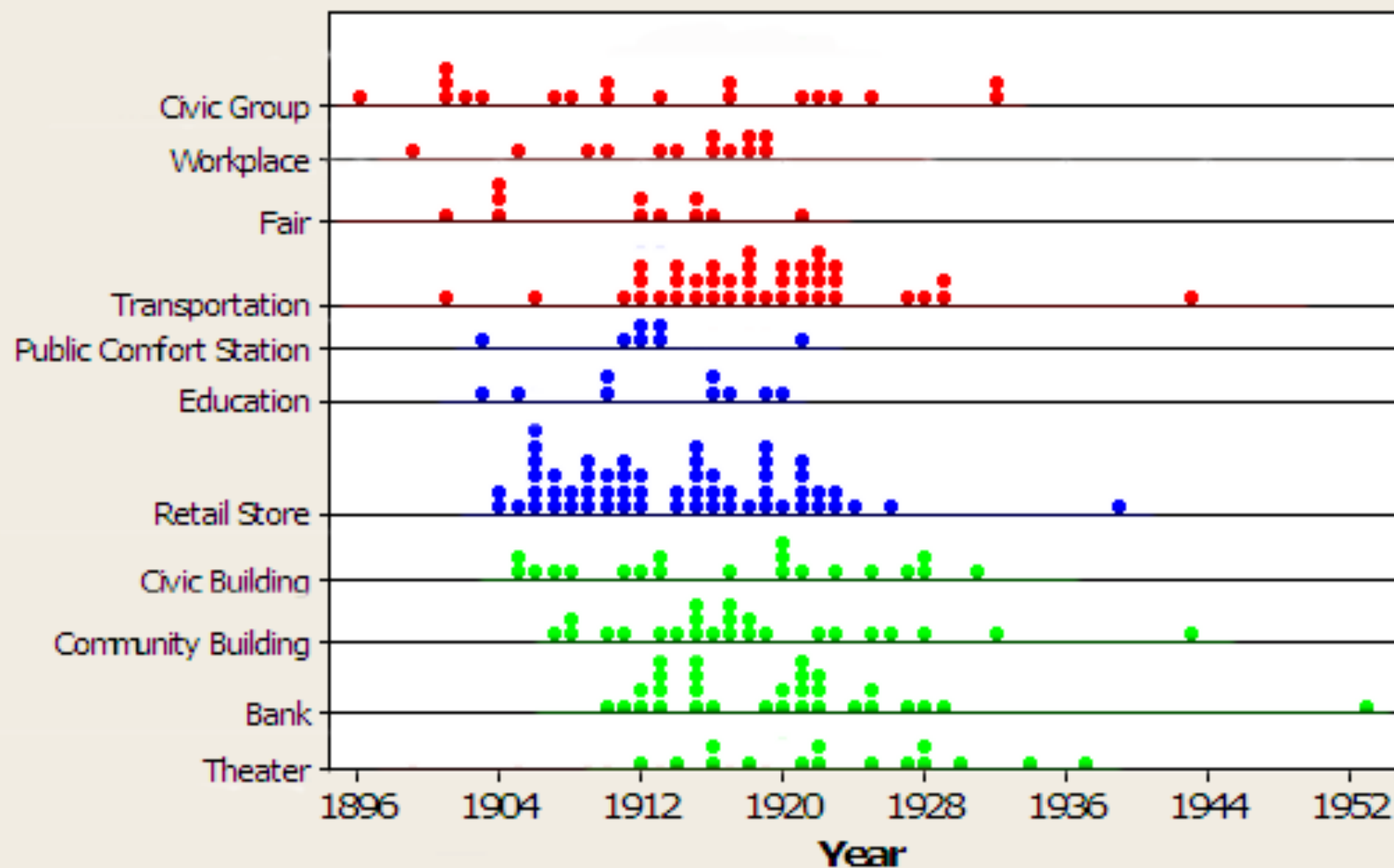


1910-1929



1930-1950

Type



Year

Early Middle Late

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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

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

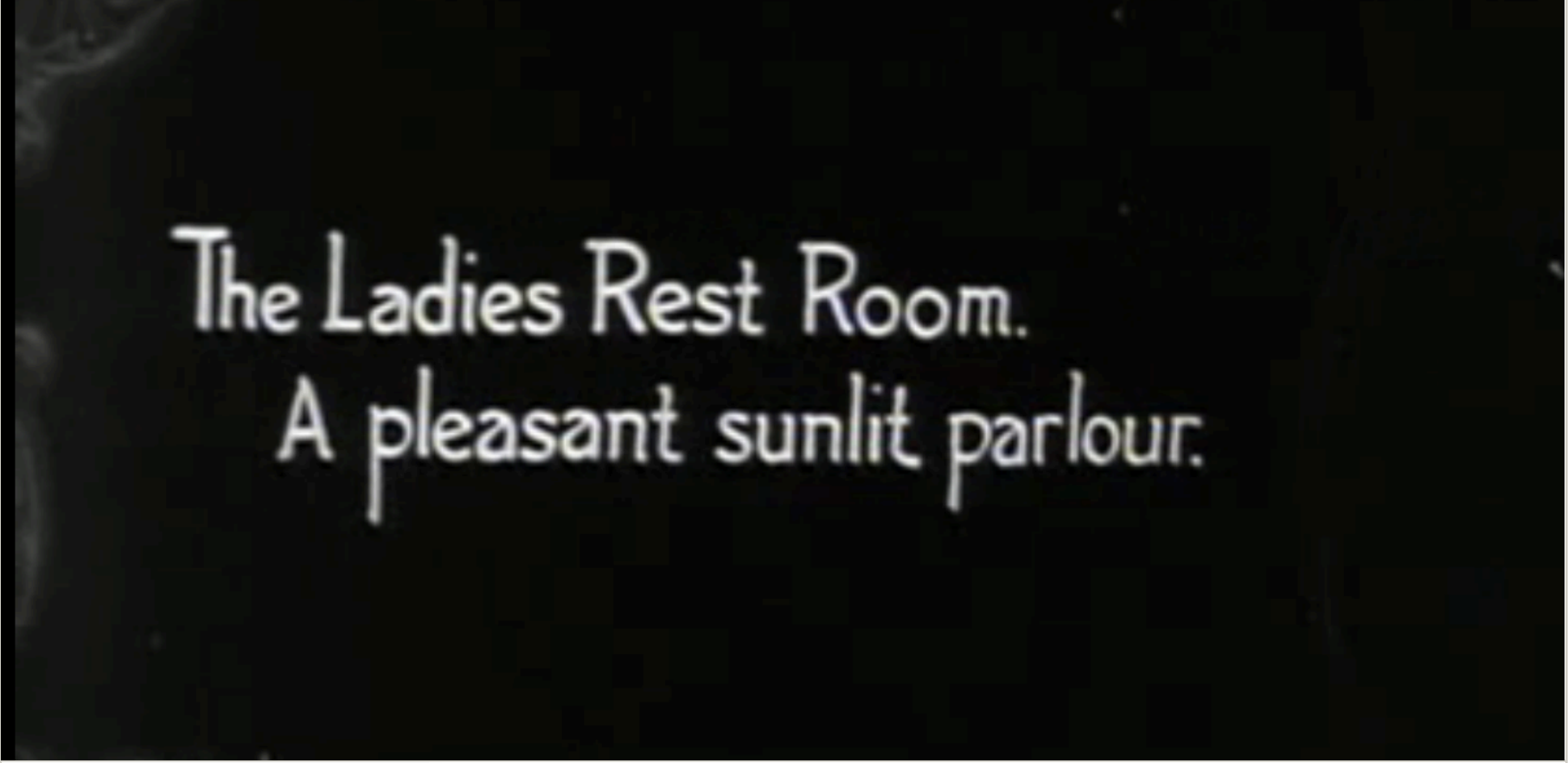
Retail Stores

- 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

A dark, grainy film frame with white text. The text is centered and reads: "The Ladies Rest Room." followed by "A pleasant sunlit parlour." on the next line.

The Ladies Rest Room.
A pleasant sunlit parlour.

Out for Value, A Film by Isaac Benzie's Department Store, Scotland, Circa 1931

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



Women's Lounge in Nordstrom's, Columbia, Maryland, 2012