

[Walton HomePg](#)[Old Timer Home](#)**Presents...**

The Outhouse

The Great Outhouse Race

Modern bathrooms are a relatively new convenience. Here in the small farming communities of Alberta, a few families didn't get indoor bathrooms until well into the 1960's, which for an old goat like me wasn't that long ago.

Building an Outhouse

as told by Rose Adamson (born 1914)
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The average outhouse was three to four feet square by 7 feet high. Many were single holers, but often they were double holers. In the last century, hotels often had outhouses with a dozen holes. And at least one hotel outhouse in Montana had a two story outhouse with a plank from the second floor going over to the second floor of the outhouse. The `droppings' fell through a 1 foot channel down past the first level into the hole.

Outhouses were easy to build. They were nothing more than a wooden shell with a roof, a floor and a front door. Inside was a 2 foot high box built into the back half that went from one side wall to the other side and came out from the back wall about two feet. In the top of this was an oblong hole about 12 inches by 10 inches. The outhouse was set over a hole that had been dug, usually about 5 feet down into the ground.



FAQs

Did these things stink?

Yes.

What kind of toilet paper did they have?

Although toilet paper may have been marginally available in the early days, it didn't really catch on. People didn't know anything else, and had better things to spend their meager cash on than this new unnecessary stuff. There are lots of stories of newspapers, the Eaton's catalog, and other magazines in the outhouse that weren't there for reading. We tore a page out, ruffled it up to make it a little softer, then used it.

In the Summer time how were the flies kept down?

Lots of people really didn't worry about the flies. Some of the fancier outhouses had lids for the holes. And if people were really concerned, they bought powdered lime or sometimes lye and sprinkled it down into the hole. This also helped the stench considerably. One thing is for sure, wondering where that fly had been that was walking on the dinner plate took on a whole new meaning with an outhouse near by.

How far away from the house was the outhouse?

Anywhere from 50 to 150 feet.

Couldn't people do something different in the cold winter time?

Like what? There is many the story of children (now old timers) telling about their '50 yard dash' in the middle of the night in the dead of winter, dreading putting their bare little bottom on that icy seat. But many families had



Some outhouses really hang in there. This old outhouse sitting on the Alberta plains is the only structure remaining on this old homestead. It seems kind of lonely all by itself.

'chamber pots' under the bed. These were used exclusively for '#1' and not '#2.' If they had to do 'that,' they still needed to run to the outhouse. In the mornings someone had to take the chamber pot outside and dump it, then take it to the well or creek and wash it out (never mind who lived down stream).

With sincere apologies to the Village Blacksmith...

Beneath the spreading buckeye tree the weathered outhouse stands, a sanctuary where you're free from labor's harsh demands.

Of all the big city's luxuries, tile, porcelain, or chrome, none satisfies & gives sweet ease like that fragrant shack back home.

Submitted by [Jim Maggard](#), Dayton, Ohio

What happened when the hole under the outhouse got full?

Usually the father of the family dug a new hole a few feet from the outhouse, moved it onto the new hole, then took the dirt and filled in the old hole. However, I know an uncle who got in there with a shovel because he didn't feel like digging a new hole. (He left the seat just a little messy.)



What the inside of the above outhouse looks like. I often get requests for outhouse blueprints. The above picture is about as good as it gets. It doesn't take much skill to hammer one of these things together... unless you want a really fancy one.

What about privacy?

Well, sometimes there wasn't. If it was a two holer outhouse and two members of the family had to go and couldn't wait --- well, you know. We have two and three bathrooms in our homes now, but I don't know of anyone who thought hard enough about having two outhouses to build another one in those days.

How do I keep the dainty women folk from getting embarrassed when going to the outhouse?

Always put the outhouse on the other side of the wood pile. Women, generally being easily embarrassed, will stop and get wood if there are any men around. This way the man never has to carry wood into the house! And, always put the outhouse downhill, or at least never uphill. The length of time it takes to get back to the house doesn't matter.

Suggested by [Mike Taylor](#)

And now for the most ask question - What about that cutout of the moon on the door?

A moon and stars were used in colonial times to designate the sex of the outhouses. Originally the moon was for women and the star was for the men. But the men's outhouse was usually in such disrepair, everyone wanted to use the women's outhouse. ...so, eventually they quit using the stars altogether.

Halloweening - a true outhouse story

As told by Lewis Adamson (born 1912)

We always had lots of fun on Halloween night when we were teen-agers. One of our favorite people was the town policeman. When us kids were out Halloweening, he stayed right at home, making sure that none of us came to do some Halloweening at his place. On Halloween in 1928, when I was 16 years old, we were down at his place trying to figure how we were going to get him and play Halloween tricks. We watched him close, and saw him come out of his house and go into his outhouse. He figured we were going to tip it over, and so he stayed out there, expecting to give us a little surprise. A friend and I got a long piece of wire off the fence. Then we told the rest of our bunch to go out and act like they were going to come in from the other side. While he was watching them, we came in from the back side, threaded that wire around the outhouse and twisted up the ends. Then we motioned for the rest of them to come and help us. They came sneaking around to where we were. When he heard us, he tried to come out to surprise us. But it was too late. It was him that got the surprise. With him in it, we tipped his outhouse over so it landed on the door. Then we all ran away. Luckily, he never found out who we were.

The funny part of it was, the next day I was in the cafe' and I heard someone talking about it. The man sitting by the table next to me said, 'There was sure something strange happen last night. I was away from home. My wife was there alone, and she heard somebody hollering. So she went out to see what it was. Here it was, the town policeman in his tipped over outhouse with his head out the hole. She couldn't get him out. So she went and told my neighbor, and he went and got

Rich Man's Outhouse



Our new outhouse is made entirely out of old oak pallets. The total cost was under \$12.00. The only items that had to be purchased were one box of nails, and the electrical light socket. The other new items were electrical wire, electrical boxes, switces, roofing shingles, and the plexiglass for the window, which was stuff just laying around in the garage.



someone else to lift the outhouse off him and let him out of there."

Life Around an Outhouse

As told by Lucinda Jensen

Memory takes me back to the little house on the hill. It had to be stationed at least 2 blocks away to protect the sensitive noses of those who lived in the area.

I was ill from eating too many of those wonderful green peas from the garden. The need came to make the run up the hill. I made it up there and accomplished my mission but on the way back I ran into trouble. I awoke about half way to the house. I was lying in the path where I had fallen. I got up and everything worked so I made it back to the house. Oh, the trials that accompanied the little house on the hill.

Another memory, unpleasant to recall: when the north wind blew and the thermometer registered below zero, the bad weather didn't stop the need to make a hurried flight up the hill. The cold seat didn't help, either. We didn't linger long and the droppings froze immediately, thus making a neat pile which eventually reached the seat. In my minds eye I can still see that neat pile that had to be tipped over quit often to make room for more deposits.

Oh the joys of the "Out House".

In the summer time the heat did a turn about on the pile. The smell really permeated the area. Thus, for a different reason, we didn't linger long. Big blow flies filled the interior and their happy buzzing was ever present. In my mind I could see those same flies crawling on my food.

During the depression the government sent unemployed men into rural areas to build new sanitary out door toilets. It wasn't long before we had a nice new out house sitting on the hill. A cement box surrounded the hole and a nice cover was put in place that could be lifted up or closed according to the need. This new invention made the whole scene quite pleasant. But the story of the little house on the hill would not be complete without singing the praises of the old Sears Roebuck catalog that was used with much anxiety. A far cry from the soft toilet paper of the now generation.

Thank you, but, I'll just use my new toilet in the house.

Lucinda Jensen

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The outhouse has an electric light, space heater (located above the door), magazine rack, paper roller and can holder. The outside has brackets to help move it when one hole fills. The only problem we will have at the deer camp is that on a cold November morning in Northern Missouri, it will be tough to leave it to head for the woods.

Jim Flowers (St. Louis, Mo.)