

History on the Rocks: Gadsby's Historic Ice Well

Same but Different

After a 420 day long break, the ice well blog is back for a moment. I would like thank the Ice Well Restoration Tweetup crew for inspiring me to get back on the saddle because their new passion for our project was electrifying. Plus it became swelteringly clear during the derecho weekend how important ice and cool is to our existence in today's world. With 100+ degree days, everyone ran to their nearest Starbucks (that had power) for AC, pool (that had power) to take a dip, or favorite bar (that had power) for a frozen margarita or frosty beer. All provided a refreshing break from the sweaty humid mess that was the outdoors.

So imagine life 200 years ago; no modern amenities like wonderful air conditioning. How did anyone survive and not melt to death? Well actually, they enjoyed all these things listed above, just in different forms. No air conditioning but they had a fan chair.

George Washington used a [fan chair](#) during the 1787 Constitutional Convention, providing a welcome breath of air from the heated political debate. The fan was operated by foot, leaving hands free to write, read, drink Madeira, etc. The fan chair was designed by Charles Willson Peale, best known for his painting skills but was also considered a Renaissance man as he could also build stuff, make shoes and fix your teeth. No pool but they had springs and public bath houses.



Fan Chair

Just around the corner from the City Hotel, you could go the Shields Public Baths. As stated in the 1813 advertisement, one could take advantage of the; Warm, Cold, and Shower Bath with the greatest benefit to health from; frequent bathing during the warm weather. Others ventured farther out to take advantage of the waters. The Washington's enjoyed trips to Berkeley Springs, where Martha Washington wore a [linen gown](#) with lead weights sown into the hem to ensure modesty. What would she think of today's swimwear? No margaritas at the bar but an ice well.



Martha Washington's Linen Swim gown

The City Tavern might not have had a blender, but they had the commercial ice well to handle the, "I would like a cold [insert drink here]."

Wine glasses were chilled in a monteith or for your rum punch in Philly, "brought to us with a lump of ice in each glass." The City Tavern ice well stored enough ice to provide these cold beverages to hotel guests during the summer, but residents could also buy a few chunks for their private ice boxes at home. Mr. Gadsby; providing cold refreshment to all since 1796.

So grab that linen swim suit, pour yourself a cold glass of wine, construct a fan chair and step back from your 21 century life into a day out of the 18. In actuality, not too far a step.

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