

Search for Nation's Oldest Copper Plumbing Continues

Without a doubt, one of the great watershed moments in U.S. history is the day indoor plumbing was first installed.

Although cities developed sewage and water distribution systems in the 1890s to protect public health, private baths were just a pipe dream to most Americans in the early 20th century. Believe it or not, nearly half of all homes were still without complete indoor plumbing by the time World War II broke out.

The earliest indoor systems used cast iron, steel, galvanized steel, lead or brass, but an inexpensive, easy-to-produce, longer-lasting pipe material — thin-wall copper tubing — created a revolution that helped modernize the nation. Introduced around 1927, copper tubing eventually grew to account for about 90% of indoor water piping. To date, more than 5.7 million miles of copper tubing have been installed in homes and commercial buildings in this country.

To honor copper's historic role in the development of plumbing, the Copper Development Association (CDA) set out two years ago on a search for the nation's oldest residential copper plumbing system. The group sent its inspectors into basements, bathrooms and boiler rooms across the continent, determined to flush out the absolute earliest example.

Recently, a plumber in Fort Wayne, Indiana, alerted CDA about an older home in his area that still had its original copper plumbing —

and it was in excellent working condition even though it had been installed nearly 70 years ago.

Built in 1937, the home's original copper tubing continues to perform, day after day, long after many other building products such as windows and major appliances have been replaced, according to Andy Kireta Jr., CDA's national program manager for tube, pipe and fittings.

"This home gives testimony to the longevity of copper pipe," says Kireta. "No other plumbing system (except for turn-of-the century systems made with red brass, an 85% copper alloy) can rival copper for its durability and performance. In fact, copper is so durable, it's the only plumbing product that comes with a 50-year manufacturers' limited warranty."

In recognition of its antique yet fully functional copper plumbing system, CDA announced that the Fort Wayne residence is the first — of what they hope will be many more — to be designated "A Copper Quality Home." Meanwhile, the search continues for an original copper installation dating to 1927.

Anyone who believes his or her home might still have its original copper plumbing from the late '20s is encouraged to contact CDA at copper-topics@cda.copper.org.

For more information on copper tube, pipe and fitting applications, homeowners can visit CDA online at www.copper.org. **HP**