

**Roman God**



**Janus**

# **AN OLD AND HONORABLE PROFESSION**

**The Importance of the Custodian  
And  
His Role in the History of Mankind**

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## INTRODUCTION

In the United States alone, there are millions of men and women working in the housekeeping profession. Theirs is a big and vitally important job. Billions of dollars are spent on housekeeping every year. It is impossible to think of a single area of modern society that could function very well or for very long if the work of the custodian were not done regularly and efficiently. Schools, stores, offices, factories, hospitals, restaurants—none of these places would operate effectively and some could not operate at all if it were not for the custodians.

In today's world where millions of people live and work closely together in crowded cities, dirt, disorder and unsanitary conditions simply cannot be tolerated. The custodians of today are responsible for the maintenance of billions of dollars' worth of property to say nothing of the health and safety of the millions of people who work within the many environments maintained by the custodians.

But the importance of the custodian is not something which belongs only to our modern work of skyscrapers and factories. In one form or another, it goes back for thousands of years.

When preparing our film, "The Importance of the Custodian", we at World Film Productions came across many interesting facts about the long history of man's efforts to keep himself, his homes and cities clean and healthy. Indeed, the story of sanitation, both public and private, is as long as the history of the human race itself.

We could only touch on a few highlights of this story, but in this booklet, we would like to cover some of those highlights in a little more detail. We hope that this booklet will add to your enjoyment of the film and that it will give you a greater appreciation of how important the work of the custodial profession has been through the ages.

## IN EARLIEST TIMES

The quest for cleanliness is at least as old as the earliest civilizations. In the Babylonian Empire, officials were appointed by the kings to be responsible for such things as drainage and water supply in the various districts of the main cities. This was about 7,000 years ago so it might be correct to describe these men as "The First Custodians". Very little information has survived to tell us about them or their duties but it appears that the Babylonians had a fairly advanced concern for public health. In ruins that date back to approximately 4500 B.C., fragments have been discovered of both vertical and horizontal drain pipe systems. The wealthier Babylonians, at least, had running water in their homes and possibly some kind of primitive sewage system.



We can be certain that most of these homes as well as the buildings used by the priesthood and the government were cleaned and maintained by people whose duties would be very familiar to the modern custodian.

Of all the peoples of ancient times, the Egyptians were probably the most concerned with cleanliness. In fact, in writings which date from around 2900 B.C., the Egyptians boasted that they were the cleanest and healthiest mortals in the world. They probably didn't make the connection or know why cleanliness led to being healthy. But they did know that the results of making sure they lived in the cleanest environment by coming up with the best sanitizing processes possible equated to vibrant health.

This is probably true. We do know that there were laws which regulated the standards of sanitation in the towns and cities, in the peoples' dwellings, and even of the people themselves. The example for all of this was set by the Egyptian priests, who maintained a very high standard of personal cleanliness. Only a clean man or woman was considered worthy of the favors of the gods. So strongly did the priests believe that "cleanliness was next to godliness" that—by modern standards—they might have overdone things a bit. They took ritual baths four times a day from head to foot and accompanied each bath with a complete change of clothes.

This extreme concern for cleanliness was also shown in the maintenance of temples and public buildings. There were regular custodians in the temples, some of whom did their work while they were studying for the priesthood. The responsibilities of the custodians in the public buildings were considered to be almost as important.

Under the guidance of the priests, the homes of the townspeople were fumigated several times a year. This served two purposes. It helped to freshen the air and it served to keep the insect population under some measure of control.

Egyptians of all classes were encouraged by example and by law to keep their houses clean. The wealthier households had servants to do the work but even the poorest Egyptian took pride in a clean, well-swept home.

There is evidence that the Egyptians also had a certain amount of knowledge about antiseptics and disinfectants. Dampness, quite correctly, was considered bad for health and cleanliness. Chemicals such as alcohol, nitre and salt were used as preservatives.

In at least the upper class homes, hygienic measures were rather advanced. Elaborate drainage systems have been uncovered featuring pipes made from hammered copper. In the larger Egyptian cities, there were public officials whose duties included making an inspection of the public water supply every ten days. The main streets were paved and lined with stone drainage. In the remains of some upper-class dwellings, well-crafted toilets carved from limestone have been discovered.

Not the least interesting thing about the Egyptians and the importance they placed on custodial work is the fact that some of the more common words associated with such work may have come into the English language by way of ancient Egypt.

For example, the word “wab” in Egyptian meant “pure”. If you placed an “s” in front a word, it gave it the meaning of “to make something happen, to cause something to become”. Some experts in ancient languages believe that the word “swab” (to clean something, to make pure) came into English through the ancient contacts with Egyptian seafarers and traders.

It is also possible that we derive the work “soap” from a modified version of the Egyptian word “swab”, a version which might have been pronounced something like “swope”. Over the centuries, the pronunciation changed until the word “soap” as we know it today came in to general usage.

If we get such words as “soap” and “swab” from the ancient Egyptians, then it should not be surprising to learn that they had a knowledge of sweeping, mopping and scrubbing. Brooms and other cleaning equipment were easily made from reeds that grew in plentiful supply along the banks of the Nile River. If a maid or janitor from 1976 could travel in time back to the days of the Egyptians, he or she would find many items of equipment and many cleaning techniques that would be very familiar.

## CLEANLINESS AND GODLINESS—MOSES AND THE ANCIENT HEBREWS



Among all the peoples of ancient times, however, it was the Hebrews of the time of Moses who placed the greatest importance on private and public cleanliness. It would not, in fact, be an exaggeration to say that Moses was the founder of public health in the modern sense of the term.

Those portions of the Mosaic code which deal with these matters are very detailed. In the Bible, they are found mainly in Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Numbers. The amount of detail gone into, especially in portions of Leviticus, may be difficult for modern readers to understand and may in some places be unpleasant to read. But we must understand fully the wisdom of Moses.

As leader of the Jews, he faced an enormous task. They were a small tribe, compared to the populations of the other races that inhabited the same area. They had been serfs in Egypt for many years. In order to reach and then win a place for themselves in the promised land, they would have to endure a long march through the uninhabited wilderness and, once that was completed, they would have to have the discipline and strength to compete with many other nations—larger, more powerful and better organized than the Jews were when they started their march.

In order to survive the journey and in order to survive the struggle to win their homeland, Moses knew that the people must be turned into a strong, orderly nation, trained to the highest possible standard of moral and physical strength. This is the main purpose behind the Mosaic laws. Without strong leadership, without the unifying influence of a code of laws that was of the highest medical and ethical standards, the Jews might easily have become demoralized or fallen prey to diseases and starvation. What an accomplishment it was!

Fortunately, so great was the power of his leadership, that Moses' efforts usually met with total cooperation from the community. One of the first steps Moses took was to appoint a staff of officials to act as custodians for the entire community, to enforce health regulations under strict penalty of the laws. This system worked well—during the years in the wilderness and for generations to come, the Hebrew community enjoyed a standard of public and private hygiene much higher than that known to any of their neighbors or enemies. Even though they didn't have any knowledge about the science of the benefits of removing germs, what they did know was the simple truth that removing germs made them healthier.

The Jews did not consider the work of the custodian to be undignified—the duties of those who maintained the people's dwellings and places of worship were as important to them as the duties of the priest and the soldier. Without the services of any of these people, the welfare and, perhaps, even the survival of the entire community would have been in jeopardy.

So effective were the Mosaic laws that, even centuries later, when the great plagues were destroying whole cities in Europe, the population of orthodox Jews who continued to observe the letter of the Mosaic laws, suffered dramatically smaller losses from these hideous diseases.

How did these laws function in the daily life of the Hebrews as they journeyed to the promised land?

First of all, the entire camp of the community was organized along sanitary guidelines. It was, in fact, the first recorded example in history of a *planned* community. The campsite was always pitched on healthy ground, on a roomy and elevated location. The layout of the camp was open, spacious and well ventilated. To maintain strict sanitation, Moses enforced rules to assure the following things:

1. A pure and adequate supply of water.
2. Preservation of food from contamination by dirt, flies, refuse, etc.
3. Prompt, effective disposal of all litter and decomposing matter.
4. Avoidance of overcrowding.
5. An efficient organization for the control of contagious diseases.
6. Personal cleanliness for all.
7. An adequate, suitable and sanitary diet.

Cleanliness, the most important factor in sanitation, was at the heart of the Mosaic laws. For as it was written in Deuteronomy 23:14, "The camp must be kept clean for it is the dwelling place of the Lord."

Whole chapters of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are devoted to the subject of cleanliness of the body, clothing, utensils and especially tents and places of worship. There were even penalties for spitting in public!

The tents in which the people lived and most especially their places of worship were cleaned as often and as thoroughly as the bodies of the people themselves. In the Tabernacle itself, there were dozens of cleaning jobs to be performed on a daily, weekly or "as-needed" basis. These involved sweeping, scrubbing, sterilizing with fire, washing, polishing and straightening—many jobs, in fact, with which the modern maid or janitor is very familiar and all of them jobs which were considered vitally important to the spiritual as well as the physical health of the community.

Whenever changing conditions warranted, health bulletins and new cleaning instructions were issued and posted throughout the camp describing special procedures and new regulations. For example, soldiers returning from combat were quarantined for seven days. Anyone who had come into contact with the dead or wounded was disinfected. All articles brought back by the soldiers which could withstand fire were sterilized by flame—everything else was thoroughly washed with water.

How detailed these rules were can be seen from the regulations dealing with earthenware utensils. Because of the pores in the surfaces of such materials, they absorb microscopic particles of whatever is contained in them. Any utensil made from earth that was judged to have held anything contaminated was destroyed. Utensils made from copper or other metals, however, could be cleansed by thorough washing.

Anyone who contracted a contagious disease, especially a disease of the skin, was put into total isolation until the disease was completely healed. Livestock was inspected regularly and was either killed or isolated until cured if any signs of such disease were found.

And, of course all waste disposal was handled by regular collection and burial at a site suitable for the purpose, far beyond the boundaries of the camp.

The wisdom of the laws of Moses and his insistence on their strict observance not only made life longer, healthier and cleaner for his people, but is also insured the very survival of the Jews as a nation. In this instance, we have a case where the importance of the custodian had a profound effect on the entire history of western man. To the Hebrews, the

cleanliness of their homes and places of worship was a sacred matter and those whose job it was to keep things clean were performing God's word as well as man's.

"For the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of the camp; therefore, it shall be immaculate. Do not contaminate the earth where ye dwell for I dwell there also, thus saith the Lord". (Numbers 35:34)

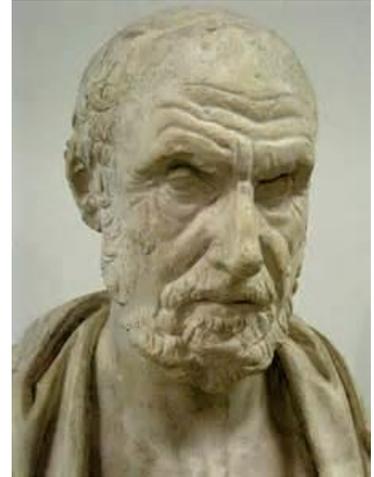
Many features of the Mosaic laws appeared later in the codes of Mohammed. And Mohammed himself is said to have written: "The practice of religion is founded upon cleanliness."

## GREECE AND ROME

The ancient Greeks do not figure too largely in our story. Their cities were in reality much smaller than we have come to think of them as being—and much dirtier. Some fragmentary remains of drains and water storage areas have been found but there seems to have been surprisingly little organized effort in the field of public health by the governments of the time.

This was not true, however, of one of the empires which flourished just before the Greeks rose to power. The Minoan civilization centered on the Mediterranean island of Crete made extensive use of stone and cement drain systems as well as water closets which could be flooded either by rainwater or by reserve water stored in cisterns. Of course, these luxuries were available mainly to the ruling class but they do show an advanced awareness of the problems of sanitary engineering.

What the ancient Greeks *did* contribute to our heritage was the foundation of the principles of medicine as we know them today. Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, wrote of the importance of clean hands, of keeping soil away from wounds and bandages and of the value of boiling water as a sterilizing agent. Unfortunately, he was far ahead of his time. As late as the American Civil War, most surgeons washed their instruments in cold water, frequently without even using soap.

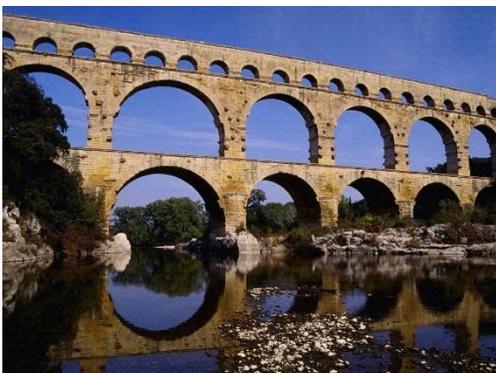


When we come to the Romans, it is a very different story. Under Rome, public and private sanitation reached heights of excellence which would not be equaled for about two thousand years and which have only been surpassed in our own century.

The Romans believed in cleanliness less for religious reasons than for practical ones. They were a people who loved city life and public affairs. In the major cities of the Roman Empire, there were solidly-built sewers, cesspools and water supply systems that were among the marvels of the ancient world. Their systems of public latrines featured carefully-constructed pipes made of lead. There was even a custodial office—Curator of the Public Sewers—which was held in high esteem. The work of building and cleaning the sewers, however, was not; it was usually done by convicts or slaves.

The Romans developed bathing into an art. Their public baths were enormous structures—the baths of Caracalla covered 28 acres of ground, roughly six times the area of St. Paul's Cathedral. All Roman citizens, whatever their rank were entitled to use these facilities. Ingenious systems of ventilation and heating supplied hot water, cold water, and steam. The baths were one of the Romans' favorite places for conducting business or holding social gatherings. Wherever there was a Roman outpost, even in the farthest provinces of the empire, there would be baths as elaborate as the local resources would permit.

The Romans believed that a person should be clean and should live and work in clean surroundings. From paintings and sculptures that have survived, we know that Roman public buildings as well as the upper-class homes were cleaned by janitorial workers whose duties were very similar to those of the modern custodian. Loose dirt was swept out regularly and linens, whether for beds or clothes, were frequently changed. Special care was taken with the interiors of public and governmental buildings—they were very well kept because they were the showcases of the state and their cleanliness was seen as a reflection of the order and stability of the empire.



Along with the baths, the greatest Roman achievements in sanitary engineering were the water supply systems that made the baths possible. The giant "pipelines"—called "Aqueducts"—were marvels of design; they spanned rivers and crossed mountains. They were so well built that many parts of the system are still in use today hundreds of years after they were

built. There were 220 *miles* of aqueducts built to supply the city of Rome itself. Every day, these brought in some 300 gallons of water for every citizen of the city. The resources of modern London are strained just to supply an average of 50 gallons per person.

The Roman army had trained custodians in every garrison. Hospitals, camps and forts were all built according to strict rules of sanitation. The Roman generals understood that a serious outbreak of disease within the close confines of a military camp could destroy a legion much more effectively than the arrows and swords of the enemy.

From the Romans, we even get the word “custodian”. It comes from the Latin word “custodia” which means “the guardian of the household”, the man whose duty it was to keep things safe and orderly within the home.

The “custodia’s” job combined the duties of a door keeper, a butler and a housekeeping supervisor. Roman houses were often large; there were many rooms, spread over spacious grounds. The Roman custodian had many responsibilities—he saw to it that the rooms were kept clean, that the water for bathing and cleaning was kept fresh and plentiful, that trash was disposed of, that kitchen duties and cleaning jobs were performed on schedule by his staff and that visitors to the home were properly welcomed. He was also responsible for security within the home—for keeping undesirable visitors or intruders out and making sure that all valuables were kept safely in their proper places.

All things considered, the Roman custodia had quite a demanding job. His rank was second only to that of the members of the family he served.

The word “janitor” has an impressive origin, too. It comes from the god Janus, one of the most important deities worshipped by the Romans. Janus was the god of entrances and exits, of sunrise and sunset. He is usually depicted as having two faces—one looking forward and one backward. Janus was prayed to at the beginning of any important undertaking such as war or a political crisis. In every home, the first morning prayers were addressed to him. His aid was sought not only for national problems but also for personal and household undertakings. As the god of beginnings, he was logically enough also the god of the new year, as well as the first day of the new month. From him, we get the word “January”. He was the god who ruled over progress and civilization.

From these things, you can see that he was the ideal god for the custodians of Roman homes and estates. . . their special deity, you might say. And it is from this connection between the custodians and the god Janus that the word “janitor” has come down to us.

## THE MIDDLE AGES

If the Romans raised cleanliness to new heights, the nations that emerged after the dark ages which followed the fall of Rome can be said to have forgotten all that Rome once knew. Even worse, as the small villages of the dark ages grew into the cities of the middle ages, sanitation ceased to have any real meaning at all. In Europe, it was an age of filth and terrible diseases. Only in the Mohammedan cultures of Spain and northern Africa and in the eastern remnant of the Roman Empire in Constantinople did the high standards of the ancients survive. Everywhere else, the conditions were so awful, so foul that to modern minds, they seem nightmarish.



Why should matters have fallen so low so quickly after the fall of Rome?

For one reason, the Romans’ whole civilization was based on cities, on public life. The Romans spent their time living, working and socializing in close proximity to large numbers of people. That is how the Romans liked it and they spent so much time and money on sanitation in order that their way of life could be as pleasant and healthy as possible.

But when Rome fell and the early Christian rulers took over in Europe, they believed the exact opposite. To them, the affairs of this world were vain and temporary—they scorned the Roman concept of public life. Unfortunately, they rejected Roman science along with Roman religion. They expected, and in some cases they even *wanted*, a life of physical misery as the price of eternal joy in the life to come.

St. Benedict, one of the most important administrators of the early Church, denounced bathing as a sinful indulgence of the flesh. Even the *idea* of cleanliness was held in contempt. In order to achieve salvation, the body was held in scorn, punished, and it was considered sinful to do anything to relieve its sufferings. Occasional bathing in cold water was acceptable behavior, but too much bathing not to mention the use of *hot* water was considered to be a sin.

Some idea of how bad things were can be seen from the fact that King John of England employed a servant named Aquarius as a custodian of a sort. Aquarius' job was to bathe the king for special occasions. . . three times a year! If the king is any example of what the wealthier persons did in the way of cleanliness, we may well shudder at the thought of the standards of hygiene that prevailed in the lower classes of society.

As towns grew into cities and centers of trade during the late middle ages, as their populations increased and more people crowded together, conditions became worse than anything known in European history. Garbage, animal entrails, dung and urine were poured into open pits wherever there was room to dig a large enough hole. In many cities, not even this crude system was used. All of this waste was simply dumped into the streets for the rain to wash away or for wretched paupers to shovel into wagons and dump outside of town once a month. In most locations, the supply of drinking water was indescribably polluted from these conditions. As for the smell of a typical medieval that, perhaps, is best left to the reader's imagination, although many books on the period contain descriptions guaranteed to turn the strongest stomach.

What should be apparent is that not only were there no custodians but also that society had gotten into such bad condition that it was several hundred years before a serious effort was made to clean things up. The wealthier people expected their servants to dispose of some of the refuse which collected inside their homes but it does not appear that any real effort was made to do more than pour the stuff out into the castle moat or into the street. You will seldom find mention of anything as basic as even sweeping or scrubbing. People of all classes ate, slept and lived in rooms that were, by modern standards, filthy.

If anyone ever tells you that the custodian's job is not important, ask him how he would like to live in a time when there were *no* custodians *at all*. Ask him questions such as: How would you like to walk on floors that were never swept? How would you like to sleep on bed linen that was never changed until it simply wore out and fell apart? Would you have enjoyed conducting business there? Would you like to use the toilets in such a society? Even if you could locate one, what condition do you think it would be in?

These hideous conditions helped to bring about a series of terrible epidemics called plagues. Europe was wracked by these diseases every ten years or so but the worst cases involving the plague known as "The Black Death" occurred during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The Black Death comes from germs that breed inside the bloodstream of rats. Left alone, outside the bloodstream, it is not very contagious. But the rats in medieval times were everywhere and they carried uncountable numbers of fleas. Sanitation standards being what they were, so did most human beings. And the plague germ was highly infectious when transferred directly into the human bloodstream by flea bites.



Once the plague broke out, it spread like wildfire. It was called "The Black Death" because its victims literally started to rot and turn black some time before they actually died. The plague nearly always was fatal.

Entire countries were almost destroyed by the plagues. Norwich, the second largest city in medieval England, had a population of about 70,000 in 1350. In six months' time, the plague killed 57,000. In one of the worst centuries, the worldwide deaths from plague are estimated by historians to have totaled almost 60 million.

Medieval society almost broke down from such horrible losses. In some regions, mankind was thrown back almost to a condition of prehistoric barbarism. To combat the horrible smell of death and rot that filled the

air in a plague-stricken city, people doused themselves with perfumes and burned heavy incense. Indeed, *eau de cologne* and the scents from which we derive our modern perfumes and shaving lotions have their origin in the chemicals developed to hid the putrid stench of the plague.

Gradually, toward the end of the middle ages, it began to dawn on some people that there might be a connection between the plagues and the mountains of garbage and filth heaped in the city streets.

At this point in history, the first custodians as we would recognize them today began to serve society. They were employed to clean up the worst streets and to collect a fine from person caught dumping more waste in public places. It must have been a horrible and sometimes dangerous job, but other citizens gradually began to notice what an improvement was made in their lives by the work of the early custodians. The wonder is that it took people centuries to rediscover the connection between dirt and disease that Moses had known so well three thousand years before Christ.

One of these early custodians has earned a place in folklore as the first martyr to the cause of public health. He has even been suggested as the patron saint of cleaners. His name was Rupert the Raker and he died in the line of duty when the rotten floorboards of a public latrine collapsed under him and he drowned in the pit below.

The cities of Europe had simply grown up far beyond the known methods of cleaning and waste control. The wisdom of the romans was forgotten. Not until the 18<sup>th</sup> century were underground sewers begun in London on any large scale. Even in the 16<sup>th</sup> century little progress had been made although the worst of the plagues was over. Shakespeare's father was fined for throwing garbage into the streets. In London in 1579, there were three toilets for every sixty homes in one of the wealthier of the city. The great Queen Elizabeth was proud of the fact that she took a bath every month "whether she needed it or not"...that's a slight improvement over the days of King John, but not much.

It is interesting to note that a cousin of Elizabeth's, Sir John Harrington, drew up plans for the first modern flush toilet in 1569. It was a century later, however, before technology had advanced enough to make his invention practical.

### INTO MODERN TIMES

Just as the peoples of Europe were starting to become sanitation conscious for the first time since the fall of Rome, the Industrial Revolution came along and added all of its horrors to the traditional problems of cleanliness. Conditions were so appalling that by 1830, the average life expectancy of a rich man was 49 years, of a tradesman 38 and of an industrial worker, only 20.



But men of wisdom could no longer tolerate such conditions. They looked for ways to use this new industrial power to combat filth instead of create it. Modern public health practices as well as most of the cleaning techniques known to modern custodians date from the 1840's when a brilliant and idealistic man named Edwin Chadwick almost single-handedly caused a revolution in sanitation. His "Health Report" of 1842 so shocked the public of Great Britain that widespread reforms were begun, new laws enacted and new techniques for coping with man's oldest problem—dirt—came into being one after another.

In today's world, where millions of people live and work closely together in crowded cities, the role of the custodian is vital. If you remember the original definition of "custodian", you can understand that housekeepers are given "*custody*" of the facilities they maintain. They are responsible for the standards of cleanliness which are so important to the health and safety of all the people who live and work in those facilities.

There's more to the job than that, however; lots more. Think for a moment of the dollars-and-cents value of all the things the modern custodian maintains even in, say, a single office.

Multiply that times the number of offices in an entire building. If you have, for example, a modest-sized modern office building, you're probably talking about a structure that cost millions of dollars to build. If the total cost of an office building amounted to ten million dollars, about three million dollars would have been spent on the items that come under the care and custody of the housekeepers.

Of course, the improper use of equipment or the application of bad cleaning techniques can't hurt the actual structure of a building such as the one we're discussing, but they *can* cause expensive damage to floors, carpets, furnishings and fixtures—damage that is not only costly in itself but which also contributes to lower the overall value of the property. Good maintenance work on the custodian's part can keep a million-dollar environment looking like a million.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup>, building interiors were mostly constructed from wood. It took only one kind of detergent, one or two pieces of equipment and plenty of elbow grease to keep things in pretty good shape.



How time have changed! In modern buildings there are dozens and dozens of different materials that must be maintained. In the category of *floors* alone, you will find composition tile, carpets of many fabrics, ceramic tile, concrete, cork, linoleum, terrazzo, stone and rubber along with wood. Apart from floors, you could list surfaces of metal, plastic and porcelain as well as fabrics of many kinds.



And then there are places with special, unique cleaning problems such as schools, supermarkets, hotels and motels, factories and health care facilities of all kinds.

These are big, specialized jobs. Custodial work today cannot be handled any more with just a mop and a bucket of soapy water. Today's housekeeper needs many kinds of hand-held items of equipment as well as machines—scrubbers, buffers, vacuums,

shampoos, etc.—and many types of chemical formulas to handle all the different cleaning jobs that must be taken care of.

There are skills to be mastered and decisions to be made that the old-time maid or janitor didn't even dream about.

Yes, today's custodian is much more than just a broom pusher. He or she is a professional, a specialist, as different from the turn-of-the-19<sup>th</sup>-century cleaner as the Model T was from today's automobiles.

It's a big profession doing a big job! Custodians/janitors/maids must have a knowledge of the facilities that must be maintained and the people who use those facilities; and to get the job done with the maximum efficiency and safety and at the lowest cost, they must have a more than professional attitude. It takes knowledge, training, skill and experience.

The best way to understand how important the custodians of America is to try to imagine where we would be *without* them. There are many organizations that could not function a single day without proper custodial care.

One important and obvious example is a hospital. In speaking with housekeeping managers in the hospital field, you will find agreement among them that the housekeepers are as vital to the hospital team in their own field as the doctors and nurses are in theirs. They are the ones who maintain the clean environment which is needed if healing is to take place.



The medical staff is quick to acknowledge this fact. So, too, are the patients! It's bad enough to be ill or injured and to have to stay in a hospital bed. It makes things a lot easier for the patients to be able to see each day the kind of care and effort that goes into making their surroundings as clean and pleasant as possible. In fact, patients often look forward to the times when the housekeepers enter their rooms. Hospital custodians know that a large part of their job is to be as pleasant and understanding with the patients as possible. One of the rewards of their job is to know that they are not only helping the patient by keeping his environment as sanitary as possible but also by brightening his day.

But the most vital part of their job, of course, is the battle against germs. Even if the hospital is kept as close to germ free as possible, there is still the danger of what doctors call "secondary infection". These infections are caused by germs brought into the hospital room from outside by visitors, hospital staff or other patients. In ordinary life, we come into contact with billions of these germs every day. For a person in good health, they are no problem at all. But for someone whose normal resistance is lowered by illness, they can be serious, even deadly.

Whether in a hospital or a school, there are sanitation processes designed to destroy and remove this invisible enemy. Our mission is to make your facilities healthier by removing as many germs, micro-organic particles, dust and dirt as practical from your building. The most important part of this process is the removal of the germs. First, we implement our unique sanitization process to destroy as much germ-containing micro-organic particles, as possible. Then we wash away as many of the remaining germs as we can from touch surfaces, followed by a thorough sanitizing of the entire building.



Our strongest focus is on the sanitation of our schools. We know that "clean" is judged visually by the lack of dirt and germs by how shiny a surface looks, but

sanitation is judged by measuring how germ-free it is. Whether you oversee a university or an elementary school, quality school sanitation services are essential to maintaining a healthy environment in which students and teachers can thrive. If your facility is not sanitary, even though it looks cleaned, you have the presence of the root cause of preventable illness and resulting absenteeism of its occupants.

By implementing innovative cleaning and sanitizing programs, you can decrease illness-related absenteeism by 20%–40% percent in most cases. Public schools, universities, hospitals and all education institutions should include cleaning for both appearance and sanitation. That is the only way to get the job done right!

Just as the doctor is the main fighter against the patient's illness, we believe the housekeeper is one of the main defenses against these secondary infections. It's not as glamorous a job as the work the surgeons do on television, but it's every bit as important. A great surgeon can use all his skills in an operation but the success or failure of that operation depends just as much on how germ free the operating room is as it does on the doctor's skills.



There are plenty of other institutions which depend on the custodian. In a large university, for instance, the custodians create the environment that everyone, teachers and pupils alike, must work in. Well-kept classrooms and laboratories make teaching and learning more effective for everybody. If an entire department of studies at a large university suddenly vanished, the other departments could keep on functioning more or less normally. But if the housekeeping department suddenly vanished, *everybody* would be affected very quickly.



And the value of the physical plant, the grounds and buildings that the custodians maintain represents a staggering investment—millions and millions of dollars. But that value goes down very fast and may go down permanently if the custodial work doesn't get done properly.

When we were doing our research, we came across a professor who is head of one of the science departments in a large university. In the lobby outside his office he has framed pictures in his department. Beside them, he has pictures of the custodians who maintain the classrooms, offices and labs in the building. That's how important they are to him!

Much of the same thing could be said for custodial work in factories. If the trash and waste from each day's production were not disposed of efficiently and swiftly, how long would it take for the machinery to grind to a halt, smothered in dangerous debris?

If the floors in a manufacturing plant were not properly cleaned and maintained, it would not take long before the conditions became unsafe and workers began suffering accidents.

The importance of housekeeping in industry is strongly recognized in the policies and guidelines of OSHA, the Occupational Health and Safety Administration. OSHA knows that the cleaner a facility is, the safer it is likely to be for those who work there. In fact, OSHA has given more citations for violations in the housekeeping area than in most other categories combined.

Good custodial work is vital in factories not only in the area of safety but also because dirt, dust and trash can spoil the products that are being manufactured. For example, dust in the finishing area of a furniture plant could spoil the product as surely as broken machinery could do in the assembly stage. Poor cleaning in a food processing plant could lead to contamination of the product, to product recall costing millions of dollars and in some case costing lives.

Cleanliness in manufacturing facilities then is a matter of economic importance as well as good safety practice.



In office buildings, too, the sudden absence of custodial care would be noticed by everyone very quickly. People cannot work efficiently and comfortably not can they think clearly or make decisions soundly in messy disorganized offices. Office workers

like to know that they can leave after a hard day and know that when they come back in the morning they will find their desks clean, trash baskets empty, and their papers, notes and personal objects undisturbed.

Just as important as the above considerations, consider the following: The office worker cannot successfully conduct business if there are dirty fingerprints on his paperwork or coffee-cup rings on his shirt sleeves. A clean office, moreover, looks like an efficient office and that makes a good impression on customers and clients.

There are many true stories that show the importance of the custodian on a personal level. How many times has an honest, alert maid or janitor saved the day by finding something that was thought to be lost by double checking an office to see if everything was A-OK and in the process discovered that it was not—as indeed, happened one night at a large savings institute in Greensboro, N.C., when a janitor discovered that the main vault door had been left open.

There is a small town in Georgia where the people still talk about Uncle Paul, the school janitor who saved the life of a little girl. When a sudden windstorm blew down a power line on this little girl and the electricity began to flow through the child's body, the elderly custodian unhesitatingly jumped to the wire, knocked the stricken child to safety and took the full force of the current through his own body. He was, fortunately, saved but his willingness to sacrifice his own life to save the little girl made him a hero to his community.

And, finally, there is the remarkable, true story of the man who started out as a bank janitor and rose to become president of a large savings and loan company. When we interviewed him, we asked him if this experience had given him any special insight.

“Yes,” he replied, “it taught me that no job is without dignity. Whatever you do, be proud enough to do your very best. There isn't a job in the world that's a dead end if you the right attitude.”

“I decided that I was going to clean that bank better than anyone had ever cleaned it before. Extra effort and imagination makes a job stand out—those things don't go unnoticed. That's why the bank president offered me the job that got me started.”



“I know for a fact how important custodial work is. If a person comes into our building and sees disorder and messiness, he's going to think twice about letting us handle his money. Good custodial care makes all the difference in the appearance of a building such as ours; it makes that all-important first impression on a customer.”

In any business facility, an impression of cleanliness does a lot to shape the attitudes of employees, customers and visitors alike. In the case of employees, it helps determine how highly they regard the company and how much they enjoy working for it. In the case of customers, it helps determine whether or not they want to do business with us.

In short, cleanliness by itself can make money or lose money for an organization on many levels.

There are many, many more examples. Every day, in every part of our environment, the work of the custodian affects our lives. The custodians and housekeepers...the guardians of health and safety for millions of us.

If you want to know how important they are, just think back over some of the things you've read in this booklet about the days when they weren't around. And then try to imagine where we would be without them *today*.

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