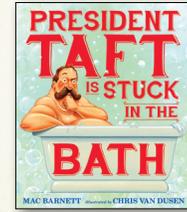


PRESIDENT TAFT IS STUCK IN THE BATH

by Mac Barnett illustrated by Chris Van Dusen



A Note from Author Mac Barnett



PHOTO BY SONJA SONES

Some people say President Taft got stuck in his bath on March 4, 1909, his inauguration day. Others say it happened later in his term. Depending on who's talking, it took two men to pry out the president, or four men, or four men plus a gallon of loblolly, which is butter mixed with lobster liver. Of course, many say Taft never got stuck at all.

Here's what we know for certain.

SOME FACTS PERTAINING TO PRESIDENT TAFT AND BATHTUBS

On August 5, 1910, President Taft denied ever commissioning a special Taft-sized tub: "We have no special bath tubs made for any executive of any particular size." He was lying.

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When Taft took office, he had the White House bathtub removed and replaced with a tub that was seven feet long and three-and-a-half feet wide, which "for size and white porcelain beauty probably has no rival in the United States," according to the *El Paso Herald*.

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In 1909, according to the Minnesota newspaper the *Warren Sheaf*, Taft had a tub with "pond-like dimensions" installed for himself on a battleship, the *USS North Carolina*.

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In 1910 Taft had a giant tub put on his private yacht, the *Mayflower*; and later moved it onto another battleship, the *USS Arkansas*. Was this tub the same one from the *North Carolina*, or a third custom job? This is one of history's great bathtub-related mysteries.

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At least one more huge tub—eight feet by four feet—was commissioned in 1913 for the president's suite at the Hotel Taft, where he moved after leaving office.

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On June 19, 1915, two years after Taft lost his reelection bid to Woodrow Wilson, the *New York Tribune* ran a front-page story headlined "Taft's Displacement Floods Bathtub in Hotel Cape May." According to the article, when the former president entered the bath, "the water overflowed and trickled down upon the heads of the guests in the dining room." According to the paper, as Taft boarded his train the next day, "he glanced at the ocean and said: 'I'll get a piece of that fenced in some day, and then I venture to say there won't be any overflow.'"

But: No newspapers, letters, or diaries confirm that Taft ever lodged himself in the White House tub.

So, did President Taft actually get stuck in the bath?

Maybe. Maybe not.

But more than a century later, this is the story we're still telling.

And to people like me, that's what matters.