

Their Job is to Taste and Smell Philadelphia's Drinking Water Every Day



BEFORE AND AFTER—Ed Witkowski, assistant bacteriologist at the Belmont laboratory, looks at a sample of Philadelphia drinking water before treatment. Treated water is on table

By HARRY HARRIS
PHILADELPHIA drinking water has been the target for gibes by wits, real and alleged, for a long time.

Bob Hope, during a recent visit here, declared that this is the only city where the kitchens have three water taps—"Hot," "Cold" and "No Fishing"—and where a drink of water requires a whisky chaser. His colleague, Jerry Colonna, he claimed, was recently arrested because he had Philadelphia drinking water on his breath.

Amide remarks about "chlorine cocktails" and "Schuykill punch" have become as much a part of the repertoire of transient critics as references to the Main Line or Billy Penn.

But four Philadelphians, whose jobs include the drinking of Philadelphia water, grin tolerantly when they come across such lampoons, continue to swallow the water daily as part of their work and then go home and voluntarily drink from one to three quarts more.

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THESE FOUR hardy gentlemen, employes of the Bureau of Water, conduct daily taste and smell tests in the bureau's Belmont Laboratory, at Belmont av. and Ford road.

They sniff and swallow samples of water from as many as 27 different points in the city—including water plants, filter stations, fire houses and police stations—and record any daily variations.

"I've been doing this work every morning for the past 18 months," says Wilson Crawford, 5935 N. Leithgow st., Olney, "and I'm completely sold on our water for taste and safety. I wouldn't drink spring water, but I drink about 12 glasses of tap water every day. I like it!"

"I've tasted water all around the world," chimes in James Stinson, 5 S. 38th st., who has been assigned to the testing work for the past six months. "During two-and-a-half years in the Merchant Marine I visited Russia, England, South America, Cuba and many distant states, including Texas, and as far as I'm concerned Philadelphia water is as good as any and better than most."

These sentiments are echoed by the other two tasters—Thomas F. Kinslow, 5225 Schuyler st., who has been gulping down water at the laboratory for approximately 20 years, and James A. Moran, 1634 Downton st., a two-year man.

"The latter's not much of a water-drinker ("only about a quart a day") but Kinslow averages from 10 to 12 glasses daily.

"I drink nothing but Philadelphia water," he says, and adds: "It's very good."

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SAMPLES of Philadelphia drinking water are brought to the laboratory every morning in label-



EAU DE PHILADELPHIA—Sniffing a sample of the city's drinking water here is Thomas F. Kinslow, an industrial waste inspector, who has been helping perform this task for the past 20 years



BOTTOMS UP!—Wilson Crawford, another industrial waste inspector, likes "Schuykill punch" so well that he drinks a dozen glass daily—and not as part of his testing job either, but at home or at the office

Smelly Shaving Goo Taboo for City's Water Tasters

THE four official tasters and smellers of Philadelphia's water have to order their lives according to the requirements of their job.

"We have to take some special precautions," explains Wilson Crawford. "For instance, we can't use smelly shaving lotions or hair tonics before coming to work. If we did, we'd never be able to detect an aroma in the water."

What if a perfumed woman, visiting the laboratory, were to wander into the two rooms where the tests are conducted? "Well," says Crawford, "that would probably rule out odor tests for hours afterwards."

"Furthermore," he adds, "we have to do all our testing before lunch, because recent eating makes it difficult to determine taste in water. "Certain foods, like oranges, make it especially tough, and we try to skip those at breakfast."

ed bottles. Thirteen points are checked daily—all the city's water plants and the four sources of the city's supply—from the Delaware at Torresdale, and from the Schuykill at Queen Lane, Belmont and Roxborough.

In addition, 14 special samples are brought in at least three times a week, from scattered spots throughout the city and its suburbs.

The tasters conduct the odor check first. This consists of smelling a flask of the water, determining and recording the type of aroma, if any. Twenty-two adjectives are used to classify different types of odors which occur in water. Among them are: fishy, pignen, cucumber, sweetish, disagreeable, medicinal, violets and geranium.

Each sample is then given a "threshold test," that is, it is diluted with measured quantities of entirely odorless, tasteless water, until the odor is entirely gone. A threshold number is assigned to the sample, so that Water Bureau personnel may properly treat the water from which the sample was taken.

"Several of us check the same samples for from three to five hours each morning," says Crawford. "Our estimate of the type of odor frequently varies. One man's geranium is another man's aromatic. But several noses are better than one."

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TASTING FOLLOWS. A num-



OTHER JOBS, TOO—When not holding water samples to lips or noses, the water-testing crew performs other laboratory duties. Here two of them, James A. Moran (center) and James Stinson (right) check drinking water's hydrogen content, under supervision of Walter C. Ringer

ber, from one to five, is assigned to each sample. The higher the number, the more marked the taste.

"Five," says Stinson, "would be downright horrible, but Philadelphia water before treatment is rarely even in the four category. However, what seems like a three to us might seem like a five to the average citizen.

"We swallow only one mouthful from each bottle," says Crawford, "because if you can't distinguish the very first time, there's no use going back."

"The number assigned to each sample is used in subsequent treatment of the water."

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HUMAN SNIFFERS and tasters

have been used to test Philadelphia water since about 1920, according to Sam Crawford, 1920 Dallas road, senior bacteriologist of the Belmont laboratory. A Water Bureau employe for 34 years, he served as one of the tasters for almost 20 years.

"They're essential," he says, "Despite all the progress made in water sanitation, there is still no known chemical method for detecting minute quantities of taste- and-odor producing substances in water."

"We laugh at the wisecracks—but we all drink plenty of water—

at work and at home. We know it's safe. And we know that any large city using surface supply water must have taste and odor problems."

Moreover, adds Walter C. Ringer, 4517 Conshohocken av., sanitary engineer who supervises treatment of water for the West Philadelphia area, all the gags about "chlorine cocktails" are in error.

"You never taste chlorine in the water," he says. "That chlorinous taste is due to the combination of chlorine with something else in the water. And the taste-odor process is designed to eliminate that something else."

"The taste of Philadelphia water

has been improving steadily," he adds, "especially since we started using the activated carbon treatment last April."

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2004.019.0022B