

Washboard

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Hand washer with wooden frame and glass body.

Accession Number 2011.21

Fabricant / Éditeur Montreal Step Ladder Co.

Materials glass, wood

Measurements 60 x 31 x 7 cm

Historical context

Before the 20th century, few Montreal families had direct access to water, and the domestic tasks associated with its use, including laundry, were tedious and time-consuming for the women of the household.

Until the introduction of washing machines into Canadian homes, the washboard was the preferred tool for cleaning clothes. After soaking the clothes in a wooden basin with soap, they are then twisted and rubbed one by one on the washboard to remove the dirt.

Early washboards had a wooden scrubbing surface, which was gradually replaced by corrugated metal sheets. Since the early 20th century, glass has also been used as a scrubbing surface. From 1916 onwards, the Ontario company Canadian Woodenare popularized the glass-surfaced washboard like the model shown above.

By the middle of the 19th century, technological advances were spreading to all sectors of production, including household work. By the early 20th century, electric washing machine models were being marketed in North America. That said, before the interwar period, it was only wealthy families who enjoyed the benefits of technology, as access to electricity was expensive, as was the purchase of the machines.

After the Second World War, however, they were democratized.

Since the early 20th century, the washboard has been popularized as a musical instrument by African-American percussionists, particularly in the blues world.

On display