The American Association for Promoting Hygiene and Public Baths

With "Health Is Wealth" as their official motto, the bath reformers organized the American Association for Promoting Hygiene and Public Baths in New York City in May 1912, approximately a decade after the public bath movement in the United States had reached its peak. Most American cities by 1912 had either completed or were near completion of their bath systems. The official organization of the bath movement, however, only institutionalized the informal network of bath reformers that had existed since the 1890s.¹

At the heart of this network were Simon Baruch and the New York AICP's People's Baths, which opened in 1891. Boston's Public Bath Commission, Gertrude Gail Wellington of Chicago's Municipal Order League, and the Public Baths Association of Philadelphia all made pilgrimages to New York to inspect the People's Baths and confer with Baruch. As the network widened, Mayor Josiah Quincy of Boston and Franklin J. Kirkbride of Philadelphia spoke in Baltimore on the necessity of public baths. Reverend Thomas Beadenkopf of the Baltimore Bath Commission journeyed to Philadelphia, New York City, Boston, and Chicago to survey their bath systems before the commission made its recommendations to Henry Walters. Not only did the bath proponents from cities that had bath systems offer their expertise to their counterparts from other cities planning to set up such systems, but bath reformers journeyed to inspect
each other’s bath systems, share information, and compare their progress.\(^2\)

The bath reformers also made extensive use of newspapers and magazines to publicize the need for public baths and to disseminate the accomplishments of the public bath movement. Local newspapers not only published feature articles on the bath systems of their own cities but also reported on those of other cities. In their editorial pages they repeatedly urged that their cities build adequate bath systems. Between 1895 and 1915, magazines concerned with the social issues of the day and urban problems, such as *Survey, Outlook, Charities, American City, Municipal Affairs*, and the *Annals*, published many articles on public baths. Bath reformers, such as Josiah Quincy and Franklin B. Kirkbride, frequently contributed to these publications during the time that they were active in the movement.\(^3\)

The bath reformers decided to formalize their informal network when the International Conference on Public and School Baths was announced to meet in the Netherlands in August 1912. Several European countries had national public baths associations, and American bath advocates set up a similar association so they could formally select delegates to attend the conference.

The Reverend Thomas Beadenkopf, superintendent of Baltimore’s public baths, suggested the organizational meeting that met in New York City in May 1912. Some thirty-five to forty people attended this meeting, including the superintendents of the public bath systems of Boston, Manhattan, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. Simon Baruch was elected president and Beadenkopf vice-president of the new association. The treasurer was August Windolph, a member of the architectural firm Werner and Windolph, which specialized in planning public baths. The recording secretary was Jennie Wells Wentworth, who was a special investigator in Manhattan’s Department of Public Works (which had jurisdiction over the borough’s municipal baths). Doctor William Henry Hale, who was superintendent of Brooklyn’s municipal baths, was elected permanent secretary.\(^4\)

The directors of the association included W. L. Ross, H. C. McGrath, and Frank L. Hines, superintendents of the Philadelphia, Boston, and Manhattan bath systems, respectively, and members of the bath commissions of Baltimore and Newark. Persons active in public health, such as Wallace A. Manheimer, a bacteriologist from the New York City Depart-
ment of Health and the Columbia University faculty, and Mary L. Jacobson, a member of the Newark, New Jersey, public bath improvement association, were also directors.⁵

The leadership of the American Association for Promoting Hygiene and Public Baths was, therefore, in the beginning a combination of bath reformers, like Beadenkopf and Baruch, who had actively advocated the cause of public baths since the 1890s, and persons who had not originally been bath advocates but who were professionals who administered and operated municipal bath systems or were involved in public health work. As with many other social reforms in the Progressive Era the public bath movement became increasingly professionalized. The formation of the association was a symbol of this transformation from reform to scientific management of the institutions that the reformers had advocated.⁶

As time went on, the professional aspect of the association became more pronounced as the original bath advocates died. Beadenkopf, who died in 1915, was replaced as vice-president by Dr. Joseph Gichner, a member of the Free Public Bath Commission of Baltimore. When Baruch died in 1921, his successor as president was Dr. Thomas Darlington, professor of anatomy at the New York College of Dentistry and former commissioner of health of New York City. Gichner became president upon Darlington's resignation in 1928.⁷

The increasing professionalism of the association was reflected also in its new members, who in the 1920s were public baths personnel, public health officers (especially sanitary engineers, bacteriologists, and chemists), architects, and public recreation personnel. This professionalization occurred as a matter of course once a reform was in place and required administration and supervision. In the case of public baths it may have been more pronounced because by the 1920s the need for them was declining and there was little impetus to build more.⁸

The American Association for Promoting Hygiene and Public Baths, like the municipal bath movement itself, was confined mostly to the northeastern and middle Atlantic states. At the first meeting in 1912, Pittsburgh was the westernmost city represented and Baltimore was the southernmost. The officers, too, were with rare exceptions either from New York or Baltimore and the bath leaders of these two cities dominated the association. By 1921, however, the association had a somewhat more national character. The board of directors included Chicago's commissioner of health (who had jurisdiction over that city's municipal bath
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system), the chief sanitary engineer of the Florida State Board of Health, and a director from Berkeley, California, whose occupation cannot be determined. The annual conferences of the association were always held in the East, with Baltimore and New York as the most common host cities. Richmond, Virginia; Brookline, Massachusetts; Newark and Jersey City, New Jersey; and Saratoga Springs and Buffalo, New York, also hosted annual conferences. Pittsburgh was the westernmost city to serve as a conference site; Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago never did.9

The first official action of the American Association for Promoting Hygiene and Public Baths was to select two of its members to attend the International Conference on Public and School Baths in August 1912. The members selected were William Henry Hale, superintendent of the Brooklyn baths, and William Paul Gerhard, a sanitary engineer and frequent author on the subject of public baths, also from Brooklyn. Two other Americans also attended this conference: Thomas Beadenkopf, who was sent by the City of Baltimore, and Mrs. Tunis Bergen, a Brooklyn bath advocate.10

The three men delivered papers at the conference. Hale spoke on “The Public Baths of New York City,” Gerhard on “The Progress of the Public Bath Movement in the United States,” and Beadenkopf on “The Portable Baths of Baltimore,” illustrated with lantern slides. The topics of other papers included school baths, baths in industry, swimming baths, the physiology of bathing, and reports on the progress of the public bath movement in twelve countries. In addition the International Association for Public Baths and Cleanliness was organized with permanent offices at The Hague and with a membership list of over 600 names, including the four Americans who attended the conference as well as Simon Baruch, who did not attend.11

Several American organizations sent exhibits to the Public Baths Exposition sponsored by the international conference. These groups included the city of New York, the New York AICP, the New York City departments of Public Education and Public Health, the Public Baths Association of Philadelphia, and the Free Public Bath Commission of Baltimore.12

At the end of the international conference a series of resolutions were passed endorsing the shower bath as the most effective means of attaining personal cleanliness, urging all cities and schools to maintain shower baths, recommending that regular baths become part of the school cur-
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riculum, and recommending that swimming pools and swimming instructions be a supplemental part of public bath systems. Plans were made for the international association to hold biennial meetings, the next one to be held in Brussels in August 1914. The activities of the international association were, however, disrupted by World War I and did not resume until the 1920s. William Gerhard continued to play an active role in the association, and the American Association for Promoting Hygiene and Public Baths from time to time published news of its activities. In 1927 the American association formally joined the international association and began to urge the calling of another international conference to meet in New York City, but there is no evidence that this conference ever materialized.\[13\]

After its founding in 1912, the American Association for Promoting Hygiene and Public Baths held yearly meetings at which members elected officers and toured the bath facilities of the host city, and some members delivered papers. Beginning in 1916 the association began to publish the minutes of its annual meetings and the papers read at the meetings. At the outset, these were published in Proceedings, but in 1918 and thereafter they were published as the Journal of the American Association for Promoting Hygiene and Public Baths.\[14\]

Until the early 1920s the Journal articles were in the main concerned with public baths and bore such titles as "Campaign Work for Promoting Public Baths," "Portable Bath Houses," and "Model Bath Houses and Recreation Centers." Gradually, the emphasis in the Journal moved away from public baths to several other areas of more professional interest. One of these areas was swimming pools, and many articles were written on the subject, especially on technical aspects such as the purification of water in swimming pools by various methods. The Journal also began to print, on a regular basis, state rules and regulations regarding the operation and maintenance of public swimming pools. Other areas of concentration were public health, including such topics as visiting nurses, rural health work and garbage disposal, and public recreation. In these aspects the association cooperated with the American Public Health Association and the American Physical Education Association. Advertisements in the Journal also reflected these changes in emphasis from public bath equipment to swimming pool needs.\[15\]

After Simon Baruch's death in 1921, the American Association for Promoting Hygiene and Public Baths began to hold yearly memorial
services in honor of Baruch at New York City's Rivington Street Bath, which was renamed in his honor. These memorial services were usually fairly elaborate with musical selections by the Department of Sanitation Band, several speeches by members of the association, the placement of a wreath on the Baruch memorial tablet, and the distribution of candy to the children present by the Baruch family. After the memorial service the association generally held its annual business meeting, which now was separate from the annual conference.\textsuperscript{16}

In the 1920s the association voted honorary memberships to a number of prominent individuals, including William G. McAdoo and Andrew Mellon. Honorary membership was also extended to Eugene Levering, chairman of the Baltimore Bath Commission; the surgeon-generals of the United States Public Health Service and of the Army and Navy; various national public baths associations, including those of Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway; and the International Association for Public Baths and Cleanliness.\textsuperscript{17}

Although the American Association for Promoting Hygiene and Public Baths held its annual business meetings in New York City and continued to publish its \textit{Journal} from 1926 to 1929, no annual conferences were held during this period. The association appears to have ceased its activities, including the publication of the \textit{Journal}, in the early 1930s.\textsuperscript{18}

Thus, in 1912 the municipal bath movement, after two decades of agitation and the realization of most of its demands, formally organized itself on a national scale. In the long run, however, the American Association for Promoting Hygiene and Public Baths was not really an organization of reformers who worked for the further extension of the municipal bath movement in the United States (although this was their purpose in the beginning), but rather a professional organization of those responsible for the maintenance and operation of existing public bath systems.