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## **TOURING SULLIVAN COUNTY'S MUSEUM ... while dusting**

Recently we came across some rather interesting observations concerning times gone by and thought you may find them somewhat thought provoking, if not funny. Most of this stems from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and kept application even into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in rural areas such as Sullivan County.

Ever wonder why June is the popular month for marriages? Well, it was often the habit of taking a yearly bath in May, about the time the weather warms up enough to do so. Now, by June you'd maybe not smell quite as good as a month earlier – so, brides carried bouquets of flowers to, well, you get the idea. And on the subject of baths, to fill a tub for the family (the whole family) with warm water, the man of the house would be first in. Then, the family would continue down the line, which by now would be pretty dirty water – hence, the saying “Don't throw the baby out with the bath water!”.

Many people in building their homes would make the roofing of straw piled high but no wood underneath. In colder months, every conceivable critter from mice to dogs would keep warm by burrowing into the roof. Then when it would rain and become slippery, some would simply fall thru. Hence, the figure of speech “It's raining cats and dogs!”.

Canopy beds came into existence due to bugs and droppings falling on the bed. Four poster beds with sheeting draped across solved this problem. Because most homes in the beginning were of dirt flooring and wealthier people could afford wood flooring, the saying “dirt poor” came into being. And straw would be put on dirt floors to keep from slipping on them as they got wet. Over time the straw would mount up and begin slipping out the doorways, hence a piece of wood to stop this action became a threshold.

Did you know that at one time tomatoes were considered poisonous? Wealthy people who could afford pewter plates would eat high acid foods from them that would leach lead into the food being ingested and this lead to death by lead poisoning.

Lead cups were used for alcoholic beverages and this combination could tend to knock the imbiber out for a couple of days. Persons found in this condition, but not known by the finder, would be taken home and laid on the kitchen table while the family went on about their daily routines, including having meals at the table as they awaited if the person would awaken. Hence the term and custom of “having a wake”.

And from England comes the story of grave use efficiency wherein they would exhume bodies and take the bones to a bone-house, thus being able to reuse the grave site. But, in one out of 25 cases, they'd find scratching on the inside which meant the person was buried alive. So, to avoid this, they'd tie a string around the wrist of the deceased person, send it up through the coffin to above ground where it was attached to a bell. Someone would then sit in the graveyard throughout the night to listen for the bell. Thus two phrases: “the graveyard shift” and “saved by the bell”.

Sometimes we don't know why we do what we do but that's where history comes into play and we thought we'd just share a few.