

The Allegheny City Society

REPORTER DISPATCH

The Quarterly Journal of Old Allegheny History and Lore - Volume 3 No. 1

Society Announces First Event for 1999.

Join the Allegheny City Society on their first event of 1999 on Wednesday, March 10th at the Foundry Ale Works, 2830 Smallman Street. Specially brewed beers and cocktails will be available (with happy hour prices) at 6:00 PM followed by a sit-down buffet dinner around 7:00 PM.

The speaker will be the Foundry's Brew Master, Jonathan Zangwill, who will discuss the evolution of brewing, past and present training for brew masters, and a brief description of modern micro-brewery methodologies. Mr. Zangwill was the Head Brewer at Shadow Mountain Brewing Company in Temecula, California for a year before becoming the



Head Brewer at the Foundry Ale Works in March 1997.

The brewer's art is a commercial enterprise that in Pittsburgh can be traced back to before the War of 1812. If you have questions, be ready to "Stump the Brewer" in a give and take question and answer part of the evening.

The cost for the evening is members' \$16.00. Non members \$18.50.

Bring your appetite and savor an evening with friends while treating yourself to light buffet, fine brew with a bit of history attached.

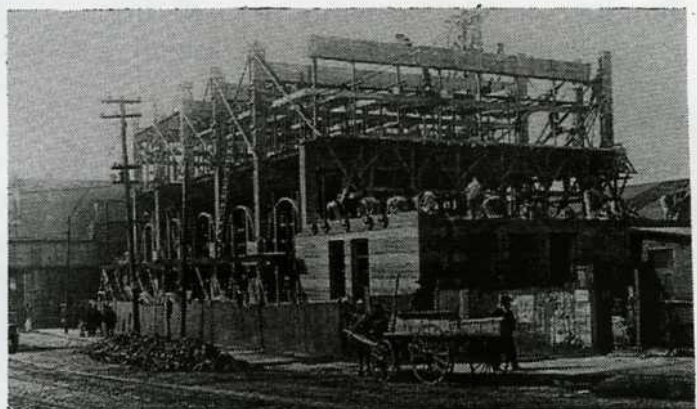
For reservations call the Allegheny City Society at 322-8807.

Annual Meeting Scheduled For April 28, 1999

American grew up on trains. The railroads fueled the rapid expansion of this country and united the East and West Coast. However, many people don't realize the first railroad in Western Pennsylvania operated out of Allegheny City.

In October 1851 the Ohio and Pennsylvania Railroad began carrying passengers from the Fort Wayne Station on Federal Street to New Brighton (about 27 miles down the Ohio River).

Learn more about the history of the Allegheny City Railroads at the Annual Meeting on April 28th. Yours truly, the editor of *The Allegheny Reporter Dispatch* will speak on The Railroads of Allegheny. The meeting will be held at Calvary United Methodist Church with a social hour from 6:00 PM to 7:15 PM, brief business meeting, followed by the talk. The meeting and talk are free and open to the public.



Building the new Fort Wayne Station April, 1906

Local History Wolverine Toys

by Terry Mowrey

Did you find a Wolverine Toy under your Christmas tree this year? This writer did, and for most of this century, many children, not only in Pittsburgh and the United States, but world-wide, were the gleeful recipients Christmas morning of the ingenious brightly lithographed mechanical tin toys manufactured right here on the Northside of Pittsburgh.

The Wolverine Toy Company, known during most of its existence as the Wolverine Supply and Manufacturing Company, for years made Pittsburgh a major player (no pun intended) in the toy market shared by the better-known toy makers such as Louis Marx & Co., J. Chein, and Ohio Art.



The original Sandy Andy - The signature toy of Wolverine Toy Company

The company, Wolverine Supply & Manufacturing Company, was founded in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1903 and incorporated there in 1906. That year's City Directory locates the company in the Phipps Power Building, Cecil Place new Duquesne Way, with B. F. Bain, Manager. The founder, Benjamin Franklin Bain, after working his way through a Michigan university as a salesman in his home state, came to Pittsburgh to manufacture household utensils and broom holders. The company's name came from uncertain origins, but all three versions are related to the founder's home state.

One version states the name comes from Benjamin Bain's supposed hometown, Wolverine, Michigan, a rural community in the northern tip of Michigan's southern peninsula. Another source says the name was derived from Bain's alma mater's mascot, the

Woverines. The third version simply states the name is the nickname of his home state.

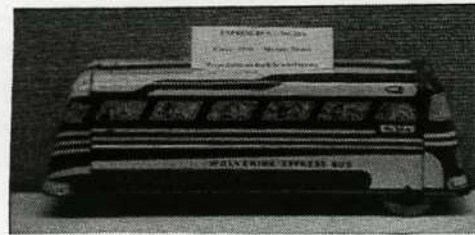
Not only did Bain's company make its own merchandise, but they made the equipment necessary to make those goods, as well as designing, manufacturing and repairing tools and dies for stamped sheet metal parts for other companies. One of Wolverine's customers was the Sand Toy Company of Pittsburgh, who had hired them to make tools for their mechanical, gravity-action sand toy, the "Sandy Andy." Patented in 1909, by the Sand Toy Company, the dies and patents were turned over to Mr. Bain's company as part of a bankruptcy settlement for monies owed him for dies and tools. The "Sandy Andy" became the signature toy of Wolverine. It was a miniature, pulley-run, sand-carrying and dumping cart that became a sudden toy success. The "Sandy Andy" trademark

remained on many related designs of toys, and was joined by similar names such as Sunny Andy, Captain Andy, and Sunny Suzy.

Bain, a quiet, studious, and a shrewd businessman, was also a clever and inventive type, and got some of his ideas from watching sand hauling equipment along Pittsburgh's rivers. His success was largely due to the fact that most of his toys were in line with the then growing trend toward constructive and instructive playthings such as cranes, sand carriers, and pile drivers, made of lasting materials. An article in a November 1921 issue of *The Pittsburgh Sun* indicates that these characteristics had raised United States toy manufacturers to a lead position in the world market, and had given Wolverine a permanent place in the industry.

In 1913 Bain started construction on a three-story toy factory on a lot on the southwest corner of Page and Fontella Streets on Pittsburgh's Northside. (Allegheny City had already been annexed into Pittsburgh in 1907. If one looks at an earlier map of this area, Fontella Street will be shown as Frazier Street. When the two cities were combined, most of the streets in Allegheny that duplicated street names already in existence in Pittsburgh had to be renamed).

In addition Bain purchased a home on an adjacent lot at 1212 Western Avenue. The mansion was known as Kilbuck. (See companion story for more information)



The Wolverine Express Bus

By 1913, Wolverine had introduced a line of sand toys to be sold in large department stores all over the United States. By 1919, Wolverine Toys were widely advertised in Sears, Roebuck, and Company catalogs, with detailed sketches and explanations on how they worked. Wolverine's business was going well, and in 1921 Bain built a large addition next to his original plant, along Page Street. About this same time, Bain introduced a line of housekeeping toys which quickly became as equally popular as his mechanical sand toys. The toys were not only a hit with children, but were equally popular with their parents, because of their educational properties and rugged construction, combined with fun-filled qualities. By 1921, Wolverine along with other U.S. toy manufacturers had surpassed Germany and other foreign manufacturers in the world wide market.

SANDY ANDY--Long Running Toys

Genuine Wolverine Automatic Sand Toys.

ular Automatic Sand \$1.00
Special at \$1.00.
See how the little man works. No wheels. Will run as long as sand is kept in hopper. See the sand car load up. When filled it swings around in a big circle and the little man dumps it in the can. All steel enameled. Bright colors. Size, 13 1/2 x 14 in. Shpg. wt., 3 lbs.
49T5782..... \$1.00

Over and Under, the Long Running Racer. 89c

Forward on upper incline, backward on lower incline. Car is automatically lifted up and starts over again. Sheet steel, nicely decorated. Wind up spring, then place the 2 1/4-inch racer on upper track and it will run down incline by its own weight. After it reaches lower end of bottom track the motor will start and by means of the carrier pick up the auto and carry it to the upper track. This will be repeated for two or three minutes. Size, over all, about 25x5 in. Shipping weight, 2 1/2 pounds.
49T5832..... 89c

PANAMA PILE DRIVER 98c

Watch the little man handle the pile driver. He rides up and down in his two-wheel car, working the dummy hammer up and down as long as marbles are kept in hopper above. Complete with twelve marbles. Size over all, 17x12 1/2 in. Shipping weight, 2 1/2 pounds.
49T5822... 98c

The Famous Sandy Andy. 57c

Light gauge sheet steel, attractively painted. Simply pour sand in the hopper and the car starts going up and down the incline, carrying sand to the bottom. This operation is continued as long as there is sand in the hopper. Size over all, 9 1/2 x 10 1/2 inches. Shpg. wt., 1 1/2 lbs.
49T5742 57c

SEARS, ROEBUCK AND CO. 529

Benjamin Bain died in 1925. His wife carried on quite capably as the company's board chairman, and the business continued to thrive. James S. Lehran, who had served as Sales Manager as well as the company's sole salesman for six years, became its President upon Bain's death. Lehran had come to work at Wolverine after Mr. Bain had met him at Gimbel's Department Store where he was employed as a toy demonstrator. Joseph Schmitt, who managed the company's operations, became its Vice President.

In addition to Wolverine's original sand toys which were basically gravity actuated, the company developed many unique spring activated drive mechanisms for their line of toys. Some were also driven by marbles and ball bearings. In the 1940's and 50's lines of educational toys were introduced, helping children to count, add, spell, and tell time.

In 1959, "Rite Hite" toy kitchens were introduced, and in 1972 they began producing a line of doll houses. The second half of the twentieth century saw quite a few changes in the company's identity. In 1962, the Wolverine Supply and Manufacturing Company became the Wolverine Toy Company, and in 1968 they became a subsidiary of Spang Industries of Butler, Pennsylvania. In 1971, operations were moved to Booneville, Arkansas, because of antiquated equipment and facilities in the Pittsburgh factory. The buildings were purchased by the Hinkel-Hoffman Company and those buildings that once were part of the toy manufacturing complex are still in existence. If one looks up from Western Avenue to the top of the building on the left side, the word "Toys" can still be seen. From Fontella Street, the old company name, "Wolverine Supply & Mfg. Co." can also still be seen. By 1986, the company's toy lines were being marketed under the name "Today's Kids," and still are today.

There are still good examples of the

older "Pittsburgh" Wolverine Toys still available in the after market, and they can be found with some diligent searching at the various flea markets, auctions, and antique shops around the country.

Aside from the still existent buildings, all that now remains on the Northside of the Wolverine Toy Company, one of the early flagships of the United States toy industry, are many fond childhood memories of Wolverine Toys, as well as the memories of the hundreds of employees, both full time and part time, from a workstaff that swelled to 450 or more each year around September, to meet the additional demands of the approaching holiday season. By mid December the cadre of workers who had been busy cutting, stamping, painting lithographing, and boxing the company's miniature products would dwindle to less than 200, while the warehouse floors became empty expanses. Among the core, year round staff, were some 23 machinists who did nothing but make the dies that would shape the new issues of toys each year, and two development workers who spent their time designing and tinkering with new and fresh ideas that kept Wolverine in the top ten, among U. S. toy makers.

In keeping with its mission to preserve the history of Allegheny City, and Pittsburgh's Northside, the Allegheny City Society continues to search for information documenting the history of the Wolverine Toy Company, and Wolverine Supply & Manufacturing Company. We are looking for photographs, catalogues from the company or Department Stores (such as Boggs & Buhl) showing Wolverine Toys, newspaper articles about the company or their employees, paper documents and advertisements from the company, and personal reminiscences of experiences with the company. If any of our readers have any information related to the Wolverine company, regardless of how obscure it may seem, we would be most appreciative to receive this information, or copies of them.

The Kilbuck Mansion - Home to the founders of Wolverine Toys

by Terry Mowrey

Benjamin Franklin Bain and his wife, Dora Elliot Bain purchased the adjoining lot next to the factory, 1212 Western Avenue. On this lot stood the long vacant mansion, Kilbuck. This was to become their home.

The landmark residence, known for years as "Kilbuck" mansion, was built in 1823 by the Rev. John H. Hopkins, and named after the kindly Delaware Indian who had befriended the brave pioneers who settled at The Point.

Some legend weavers believe that Chief Kilbuck was actually buried on the property, but there is some controversy to this idea. This home had a proud history prior to the Bain's purchase of it.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Mr. & Mrs. Robert McKnight lived in Kilbuck, and the house became a rendezvous for the elite.

Mrs. McKnight was Elizabeth Denny, granddaughter of Pittsburgh's celebrated Gen. James O'Hara. She became one of the most famous hostesses of her day. Celebrities like Ulysses S. Grant were entertained by them, along with other statesmen, bankers, generals, and bishops. Not only did Mrs. McKnight have an inherited love for society, and a genius gift for hospitality, but no other household in the area had enough china to entertain these large festivities. The Twentieth Century Club is also said to have been formed here.

After Benjamin Bain died, Dora, his widow, remarried in 1932 to a onetime stock actor and motion picture director, Robert Alan Green, from New York. The theater and movies were Mr.Green's secondary avocations. He was a real estate executive, involved with the Manhattan Fricke Realty Company, along with other concerns and holding companies. While recuperating from an automobile accident, Mr. Green put his

varied theater experience to work, and conceived a miniature theater in the basement of the Bain Mansion to help young Pittsburghers gain theatrical experience and techniques.

This new role for the mansion in 1934, added a whole new and unique era to its already storied existence.

In 1936, the Kilbuck Theater was billed as the smallest legitimate theater in the world, seating only 40 persons, with four rows of ten seats each. Its stage held only five actors at a time, and was a mere 8 feet by 12 feet in size, but earned quite a reputation for the quality of its productions. Mrs. Green, in addition to her duties of overseeing the toy company, participated wholeheartedly in the theater, doing much of the decorating and scenery herself.

The theater was well laid out and organized, with quick-change scenery equipment, shower-equipped dressing rooms, air-conditioned auditorium, a sheik silver and black lobby and even a "green room." Walls throughout the theater displayed murals painted by local artists.

Robert Alan Green's health began to fail, and in 1937 the little "Kilbuck" Playhouse was closed and dismantled. Green died of a heart attack in Miami, Florida in 1940.

If anyone has more information out Kilbuck, please contact the Allegheny City Society at (412) 322-8807.

*Your Support and Contributions to the
Allegheny City Society
enable us to preserve the
history of Allegheny City.
To find out how you can help call us at
(412) 322-8807*

**This newsletter is printed as a
Community Service of
National City Bank**

Annual Rimmel Award



At Left: The Annual Rimmel Award was presented in November 1998 at Calvary United Methodist Church to Rick Sebak. Rick is shown with Allegheny City Society board members, Michael Coleman and C. A. Eubanks. Mr. Sebak premiered a short film entitled "The Lost Footage from The North Side Story" which featured shots that were taken at the Society's Show and Tell in September 1998. More than 50 people attended the event.

Fragments of Old Allegheny Found

While excavating for the new PNC Park, archaeologists from Christine Davis Consultants Inc. have uncovered foundations of at least six row houses, a wooden plank floor and porcelain and china. These artifacts are believed to be part of the homestead of the General William Robinson Family. As part of the stadium plans, the archaeological firm was hired to survey the land and make records or preserve items of historical significant historical interest. More information can be found at the Christine Davis Consultant's web site: www.chrisdavis.net.

WE NEED YOU.... WE NEED YOU WE NEED YOU WE NEED YOU

The Society needs volunteers to serve as docents, tour guides, and help at our informational booths at house tours and other events. If you love history, join us as a volunteer. We promise you will learn about the history of Allegheny City and the North Side neighborhoods.

Please call us at (412) 322-8807

or write:

The Allegheny City Society

P. O. Box 100255

Pittsburgh, PA 15233-0255

The Allegheny City Society has planned an exciting year of events planned for 1999. Listed below are events for the first six months of 1999.

- March 10, 1999** **Dinner and talk at the Foundry Ale Works** - 6:30 Social Hour 7:00 PM
Dinner followed by a talk by the Brew Master. Members \$16.00 Non-Members \$18.50.
- April 28, 1999** **Annual Meeting Calvary United Methodist Church** 6:00 PM - Talk by John Lyon about the Railroads of Allegheny City - FREE
- May 23, 1999** **Joint meeting with the Sewickley Historical Society in Sewickley.** Join us and share remembrances of those Allegheny City residents who "Moved on Up" to the suburbs. FREE
- June 6, 1999** **135th Anniversary Recreation of the Pittsburgh Sanitary Fair.** The original Fair was held in Allegheny City in 1864. The event raised more than \$300,000 for Union soldiers. Join us for lectures, living historians and other surprises. From 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM. West Commons in front of the National Aviary. FREE
- June 27, 1999** **Walking Tour of Division 1 of Union Dale Cemetery.** Jointly sponsored by the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation. Cost to be announced.

Other Events

- March 18, 1999** The Lawrenceville Historical Society will open their Spring sessions with a talk on William Foster, founder of Lawrenceville, father of the famed composer Stephen Foster and Mayor of Allegheny City. 7:00 PM at the Stephen Foster Community Center, 286 Main Street, Lawrenceville
- April 22, 1999** Arthur Scully of St. Margaret Hospital will be the guest speaker of the Lawrenceville Historical Society and discuss the Hospital's 100 years of service to Pittsburgh. 7:00 PM at the Stephen Foster Community Center, 286 Main Street, Lawrenceville
- May 20, 1999** Lewis and Clark's Expedition and the Pittsburgh Connection will be the subject of a talk by Allan Becer at the Lawrenceville Historical Society's May meeting. 7:00 PM at the Stephen Foster Community Center, 286 Main Street, Lawrenceville

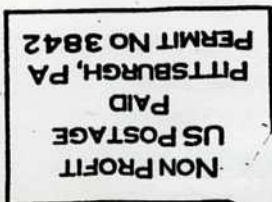
For information on other events check out the Allegheny City Society's web page:

<http://trfn.clpgh/org/acs/>

Notice Notice Notice

Our Address Has Changed
The Allegheny City Society
P. O. Box 100255
Pittsburgh, PA 15322-0225

The telephone number remains the same (412) 322-8807



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Pittsburgh, PA 15233-0255

Join the Allegheny City Society

March 10, 1999

At The Foundry Ale Works

2830 Smallman Street

Specially brewed beers will be available at happy hour prices

From 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Sit down Buffet

7:00 p.m.

Meet Foundry's Brew Master, Jonathan Zanwill
will talk about the art of brewing and micro-brewery operations

For reservations call (412)322-8807