



KIDS

TALES FROM JAIL

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Bristol Historical & Preservation Society

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THE RUBBER INDUSTRY IN BRISTOL

According to a local legend, sometime around 1820, a sea captain brought back a pair of rubber shoes from his travels to Ecuador. Since Rhode Island can be a cold, wet place for half of the year, locals immediately seized on the usefulness of rubber boots and shoes.

But, rubber was a tricky material. It was usually either too soft and sticky (like taffy) or too hard and brittle (like glass). In 1844, Charles Goodyear figured out how to "vulcanize" rubber by heating it and adding sulfur. This process stabilized the rubber and made it usable.

After Goodyear's discovery, everyone wanted a piece of the rubber market. One such person was George Bourn, and his son, Augustus. Bourn, Sr., had founded a rubber company in 1840 and by 1850, was creating vulcanized products. After his father died in 1859, Augustus took over. He expanded the business, renamed it the National Rubber Company, and moved it to Bristol.



The National Rubber Company

The factory he built for \$110,000 is still standing on Wood St. Today, we call it the Bristol Industrial Park.

By 1875, the National Rubber Company was producing 5,000 pairs of rubber shoes and boots each day. But, the rubber market was fickle. By the late 1880s, the National Rubber Company was in real financial trouble. In 1888, the entire company was put up for sale, and another Bristol resident, Samuel Pomeroy

Colt, came to the rescue. He purchased the factory, reorganized it, and

Yipes! Imagine all the stinky feet in those shoes!



renamed it the National India Rubber Company. Colt remained President until 1918.

In 1931, the company changed names again to the United States Rubber Company. They stopped making shoes and began focusing on rubber insulated wires, which became useful during World War II. At its height, US Rubber processed more than 3,000,000 pounds of rubber each year, made 400,000,000 feet of wire, and employed half the town of Bristol. Ask your grandparents if they knew anyone who worked there!

\$110,000 is
\$1,800,000 in today's dollars.
That's a lot of money!



COLT ANDREWS
CRANSTON WORSTED MILLS
GUITERAS
HUGH COLE
KICKEMUIT
LLOYD KENT
LOUIS TIFFANY
MOUNT HOPE
PHILEMON STURGES
ROCKWELL
TAFT SCHOOL
WALLIS HOWE
WILLIAM O'ROURKE
WALLEY SCHOOL
WARDWELL FARM

Can you find these
names and places?



A	F	B	M	A	J	A	D	L	F	R	B	I	G	K	N	T	F	I	U
M	S	A	R	E	T	I	U	G	W	G	Z	S	K	S	E	H	C	B	G
S	L	L	I	M	N	E	L	O	O	W	N	O	T	S	N	A	R	C	S
T	N	U	T	E	L	C	B	V	W	O	S	R	J	D	Q	I	H	P	E
C	W	Y	U	M	C	L	Y	N	A	F	F	I	T	S	I	U	O	L	G
V	I	R	M	S	O	D	W	V	L	R	H	T	X	D	T	Z	U	L	R
O	L	J	M	W	L	U	N	G	L	E	C	Y	F	W	A	E	Y	O	U
C	L	F	R	B	T	K	N	J	I	X	F	A	E	O	F	X	D	Y	T
G	I	Q	A	I	A	Q	Y	T	S	Z	H	T	J	H	T	P	I	D	S
E	A	N	F	Z	N	M	H	Y	H	K	G	I	Q	I	S	K	L	K	N
O	M	A	L	X	D	P	P	R	O	O	H	U	G	H	C	O	L	E	O
P	O	S	L	P	R	L	B	U	W	T	P	M	S	Q	H	J	R	N	M
X	R	W	E	V	E	Y	Z	T	E	K	Z	E	L	C	O	M	A	T	E
D	O	B	W	C	W	D	M	L	D	N	U	K	E	O	O	P	J	Q	L
L	U	K	D	A	S	V	E	M	X	M	U	C	T	S	L	U	R	W	I
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G	K	Q	A	X	C	N	T	Y	R	O	C	K	W	E	L	L	O	D	P
Z	E	H	W	P	L	O	O	H	C	S	Y	E	L	L	A	W	X	Y	F
A	R	Q	B	S	I	C	B	K	Z	J	L	H	O	M	I	N	G	O	N

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Attention KIDS members: Would you like to contribute to a future issue? Let us know!!!

Email us at info@bhps.necoxmail.com or call 401-253-7223

HOW DO YOU MAKE RUBBER?



Rubber is made from a type of sap that is tapped from the rubber tree in a fashion similar to maple sugaring. Most rubber trees are located in South America, Africa, or in the islands of Malaysia. Bristol's weather is way too cold for rubber trees to grow here.

Step 1



These rubber trees in the photo are located on a rubber farm in Thailand. They are being "tapped" for their sap. The cups hanging from each tree are to catch and collect the sap.



Step 2

After the sap is harvested from the tree, it is baked over a fire to solidify it for transportation. The baked sap was gathered together into a very large ball—kind of like when you rub rubber cement into a ball, except that this ball was the size of a person!



The ball was then transported to wherever it was going to be used. In Bristol, these large balls of rubber arrived by ship and were unloaded onto the waterfront docks. They were carried to the factories by either train or truck. Did you know there



Once the rubber was received at the factory, it was washed and cut into sheets. The sheets were put into mixing mills that softened them up and compounds were added to give them color.

Step 3

When the sheets were dry, they were cut up and fed into a machine called a calender. The calender consisted of three or four heated steel rolls, each weighing thousands of pounds, that pressed the pieces back together into sheets. This process evened out the imperfections, kind of like when you make pasta.



Step 4

The last step of the process was to wrap the new sheets on drums and place them in very hot water to "vulcanize" them. Vulcanization ensured that the rubber did not melt back into sap. The drums were very, very heavy and had to be lifted in and out of the vats by a crane.



This machine (pictured to the left) is used to vulcanize tires. It essentially bakes the rubber at very high temperatures to keep the rubber solid, so that it doesn't get sticky or brittle.

Once vulcanized, the rubber was ready for use. What a lot of work, right? Makes you really appreciate your sneakers!

The Byfield Rubber Company, Bristol

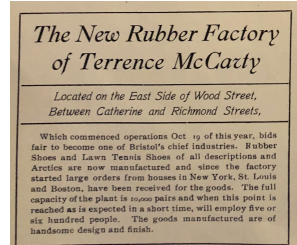
The Byfield Rubber Company was founded in 1897 with the intention of making bicycle tires and tennis shoes, or what we know as sneakers. You might be surprised to learn that this factory was located on Catherine Street in Bristol. Today, that neighborhood is full of houses, so it is hard to imagine that a three story tall factory building used to be there.

Over the next two years, the company grew rapidly, making about 3,000 pairs of sneakers daily and employing about 250 people. But, while business was good, the building had little room to grow, and its location was further away from the docks where their rubber products needed to be delivered. By May, 1899, rumors began to circulate that Byfield Rubber was looking to relocate to another town. Everyone urged the Town of Bristol to make an offer so that the Byfield Rubber Company would stay in Bristol. This the Town did, but this success was short lived. In October of 1901, the rubber plant shut down, claiming that it couldn't compete with all of the other rubber shoes being made on the market. All the company's assets were then sold to the National India Rubber Company.



Exactly what the Town offered the Byfield Rubber Company is a mystery!

But, that wasn't the end. In 1903, the founders of the Byfield Rubber Company founded another rubber company...



The Consumers' Rubber Company

Terrence McCarty, Vice President of the Byfield Rubber Company, sold his company's assets to the National India Rubber Company. Part of the deal was that McCarty could not create another company to manufacture rubber shoes in competition with National India Rubber.

McCarty was undaunted, and he formed a new company called the Consumers' Rubber Company to manufacture insulated wires and cables on the site of a nearby power plant. By 1905, the company was doing well and employed 25 people. It was even able to buy back its old Byfield Rubber plant, and it also built a new factory on Richmond Street. In addition to wire, they also manufactured cloth and other mechanical goods.

The Consumers' Rubber Company occupied a nearby power plant, but it wasn't the one at Brayton Point that they just blew up.



In 1907, the new company partnered with the Providence-based Corliss Rim Company to manufacture tires. This new division employed another 50 people. At the same time, the wire production increased and the company was making 1 million feet of wire per week. In 1909, the National India Rubber Company's right to be the only firm to manufacture rubber shoes expired. McCarty expanded again, producing 7,000 pairs of boots and shoes per day.

By 1911, the company's growth seemed unstoppable. They purchased a 2-ton truck to convey freight to and from the railroad depot, which used to be located at Independence Park on Thames Street. And, they expanded shoe production to include boots, heavy footwear, cold weather shoes, and gum shoes (like sneakers, but a little different). But creditors were not being paid on time and had begun to get tired of waiting. Despite their promising beginnings, this development spelled the beginning of the end of the Consumers' Rubber Company. In 1915, the company's assets were sold to...



The Narragansett Rubber Company

The Narragansett Rubber Company was founded in 1915. Purchasing the assets of the Consumers' Rubber Company placed the company in a very prosperous position: they had many existing orders for tennis shoes, arctic shoes, and other types of foot wear, and they had 500 workers already trained and ready to go to work. This was very good because World War I was driving up demand for rubber shoes for the servicemen going overseas.

By 1917, the Narragansett Rubber Company was making 10,500 pairs of tennis shoes per day! Workers were making good money and raises were being offered. And workers were able to earn even more by working overtime to help meet production deadlines.



Unfortunately, Terrance McCarty, Narragansett Rubber's President, died in May, 1917, following gall stone surgery. Good leadership matters, and after his death, the business began to fail. In 1919, the United States Rubber Company purchased the Narragansett Rubber Plant and all its land on Catherine, Richmond, and Wood Streets. McCarty's rubber dreams were finished.

Converse Sneakers!

Did you know that they used to make Converse sneakers in Bristol? They did!



In 1969, the Converse company purchased a factory that had been owned by the Bristol Manufacturing Company.

They made many different kinds of Converse sneakers until 1981.

The next time you see Bristol Town Clerk Lou Cirillo, check out his feet. He often wears Converse sneakers!

Ask your parents if they remember buying shoes at the Converse outlet!



The Kleistone Rubber Company, Inc., Warren

Bristol was not the only town where rubber was manufactured. Warren also had a rubber factory!

Founded by J. Everett Stone of Boston, MA, the Kleistone Rubber Company, Inc., opened at 80 Cutler Street in Warren in 1920. The business operated until c. 1960. Mr. Stone himself had already been associated with the rubber industry for more than thirty years, serving the last fourteen as Assistant Treasurer of the Hood Rubber Company.



Kleistone produced mechanically molded goods, such as flooring, rubber heels, and soles for shoes, mats and cushions, as well as novelties. The company developed and marketed their own flooring tiles, known as "Kleistone Rubber Tile Flooring", which became popular in private homes, libraries, banks, churches, hospitals and other businesses. This rubber flooring material was quiet under foot, as people walked across it. At the height of its business, the company manufactured forty standard designs and colors.

The Kleistone Rubber Company was one of many businesses that used to be where Tom's Market is today!



Another result of the Kleistone research lab was the creation of the "Lynco Muscle Building Arch Cushion". Endorsed by medical experts, these arch support cushions were made from a special type of rubber and covered with leather to conform to the foot with each step. The expansion and contraction of the cushion helped build up muscles in the arch and foot. They made Dr. Scholl's before Dr. Scholl!



Pandora's Amazing Box of Bristol History

Hey, History Kids, look what I just discovered in the Amazing Box of Bristol History! It is a small fireman's raincoat, with a dinner menu printed on the inside, dated February 14, 1903. Actually, this tiny raincoat was a "salesman's sample". Instead of having to lug around full size items manufactured at the National India Rubber Company, salesmen could easily carry small scale replicas like this one to show customers what the items would actually look like.



Menus were not normally printed on these salesmen's samples. This raincoat with the printed menu was used as a novelty for a banquet held by the National India Rubber Company for its foremen, salesmen, and clerks. The menu says that they ate oysters, boiled salmon, potatoes, radishes, olives, Italian string beans, cardinal punch, French ice cream, cakes (yum!), coffee, and cigars (yuck!). Dogs, of course, were not admitted (boo!).

During the evening's speeches, it was reported that approximately 3 & 1/3 tons (6,667 lbs) of rubber were being processed daily by the company's 1400 workers. The National India Rubber Company employed approximately 1/5 of the town's population.

Only two of these raincoat menus are known to have survived. Come visit the Society to look at ours to learn more about the history of rubber in Bristol. Now, go out and make history!

Open on Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays from 1 to 5 p.m. & Summer Saturdays from 12 to 3 p.m. 401-253-7223 www.bhpsri.org



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