

Blaw Knox Removal Leaves History in Wake

By SHELLEY HANSON
Staff Writer

In about two months the remainder of the Blaw Knox facility in Wheeling will be dismantled, leaving behind a 100-plus year history that includes ties to the Panama Canal and both world wars.

Wheeling City Solicitor Rosemary Humway-Warmuth said the owner of the Blaw Knox site, Park Corp. of Moon Township, Pa., has been steadily tearing down the factory's bays on the city's Peninsula since January. One of the primary factors in the demolition is for Park Corp. to decrease its fire service fee and other expenses incurred with the property, Humway-Warmuth said.

"We hope to have the site cleared for future development possibilities," she said. "This is another way the city of Wheeling hopes to promote growth and development within the city limits."

Humway-Warmuth said the city agreed to work with the corporation concerning fire service fees because city officials are aware of how expensive it is to raze a building.

The Park Corp. "has been in steady contact with the legal department and city administrators in regard to having the property cleared of the factory," she said. "Rather than litigate we decided to work with them to have the site cleared. We're well aware of the large cost. Also, putting a lien on property with a large building on it is not ... attractive to potential developers."

Lee Allen of Clearview, who worked at the plant from 1972 until it closed about 1994, said the company had a "world-wide impact."

A written history he kept after the plant closed, titled "A Brief Sketch of the Origin and History of the Wheeling Mold and Foundry Division of Continental Foundry and Machine Co.," gives detailed information about the foundry and its past owners.

According to information from the history, the foundry was organized in 1892 with \$3,500 at a rented space located at 18th and Eoff streets in Wheeling. The ground floor of this building was the foundry and the second floor was the machine shop.

The firm specialized in the manufacturing of glass house molds and machinery and in making cast iron castings.

The company, organized by C.E. Blue and Associates, supplied and developed Blue's new methods of molding glass. This was applied to what was known as the container division of glass manufacture. "Blue Patents" proved to be successful enough for the firm to move to what was known as the Manchester Plant in East Wheeling in 1897.

As capital increased to \$7,500, the

Peninsula Works was started in 1901. Until all was transferred to this site, the Manchester Works continued until 1906.

The Manchester site was restarted in 1915 for production of small caliber 75-millimeter shells for Russian and French contracts, and in 1917 for American 3-inch shells. This building was later used as a small chilled roll foundry and still later for pattern storage.

The foundry supplied mill equipment to plants across the nation. Supplying chilled cast iron rolls was a main product in 1901.

Steel rolls were made after the steel foundry was started, and contracts for parts of the Panama Canal were finished about 1913. Allen said so many parts were made for the canal in Wheeling that an office of the U.S. Inspection Department of the Canal Commission was located in Wheeling. The foundry's

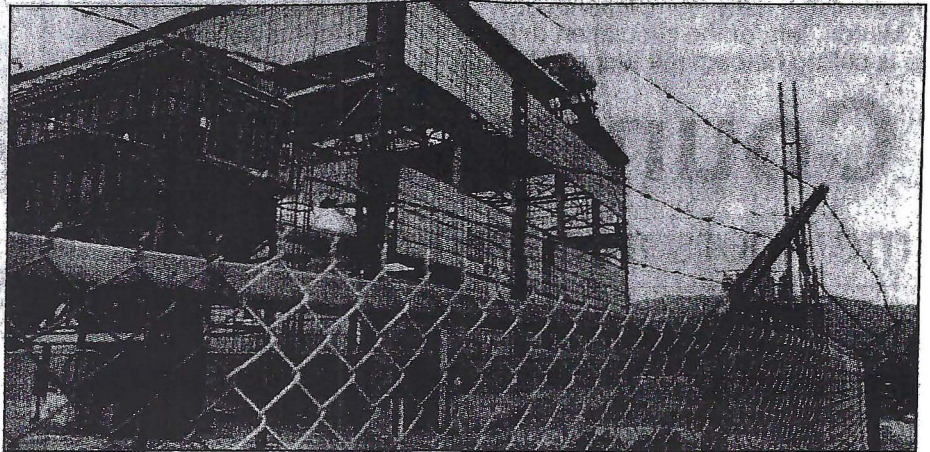
facilities were used to full capacity for this project for two years.

"We had several types of contracts, the principal one a sub-contract from

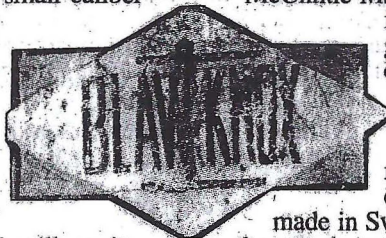
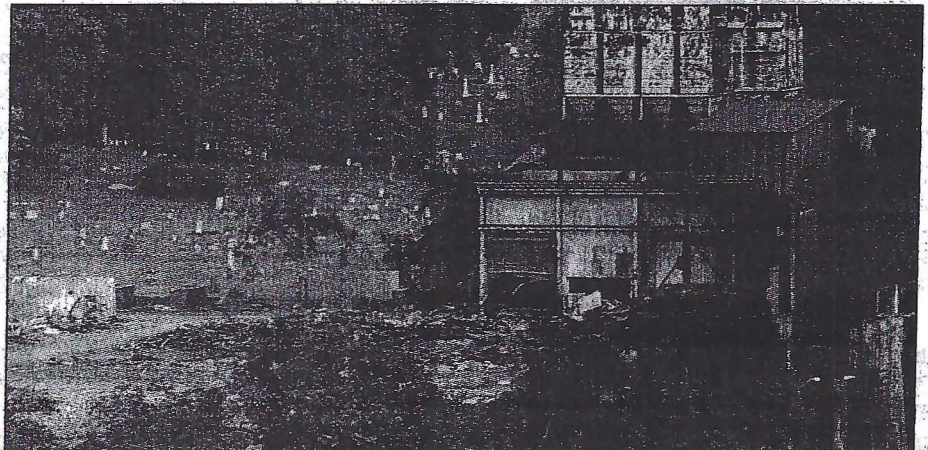
McClintic-Marshall for all steel castings, machined for the gates. Our own direct contract was for gate operating mechanism, stoney gate and cylindrical valve mechanism. Some of the operating screws we had

made in Sweden. We furnished all the steel castings to the General Electric Co. for electric mules, which tow the vessels into the locks and snub them when in position in lock chamber. We engineered the design and supplied several independent items, like the extruded copper rail. The vanadium steel castings for yokes were the first vanadium castings ever supplied to the government departments," Allen said.

In 1903, the company started on a 60,000-ton tunnel segment for



Photos by Scott McCloskey and Alex Kozlowski
TOP: This is what the Blaw Knox facility looked like a few months ago before demolition by the Park Corp. BELOW: Officials say the remainder of facility will be dismantled in about two months.



Pennsylvania Railroad tubes under the Hudson and East rivers in New York City. A total of \$50,000 was spent on expansion of the main building and equipment for the work.

"We were most successful with this contract, and ever since our firm has been held in high respect in its capacity to furnish this type of equipment, we being one of the three suppliers of cast iron and steel casting tunnel linings in the United States," the company history states.

In 1915, the foundry started on shell work as sub-contractors of Bethlehem Steel Co. When the nation entered World War I in 1917, 3-inch shells were made at the Manchester Works, and at the Peninsula Works the company took on a contract for 100,000 6-inch shells. After the order was complete, equipment to make the 6-inch was sold to the Canadian Munitions Commission.

In 1922, the Wheeling Steel Castings Co. was built in Warwood, which was later called the Cast Iron Roll Foundry.

Blue was president and general manager from 1892 to 1914, and also chairman of the company's board of directors until 1917. From 1914-19, H.E. Field was president and general manager.

According to the history, in 1919 the West Virginia-chartered Wheeling Mold and Foundry Co. was sold to the Wheeling Mold and Foundry Co., a Delaware corporation, and Field and associates became the majority stockholders. Field remained president and general manager of the foundry until the company was taken over by Continental Roll and Steel Foundry Co. in June 1930.

As Continental, the Wheeling Works produced hull and turret castings for M-4 tanks and gun shields for the Navy during World War II. After the war, the focus was on designing and manufacturing various types of commercial steel castings and steel mill equipment. Special projects included wind tunnels and saddles for suspension bridges.

In 1952, during the Korean War, the Wheeling Works made casted and machined turrets for the M-47 and M-48 tanks.

The company remained as Continental until 1955, when it was purchased by the Blaw-Knox Co. Its reputation for quality production of steel castings, rolls and mill machinery expanded.

In 1968, Blaw Knox became a division of White Consolidated Industries. It continued to produce mill machinery and also produced hull and turret castings for the M-60 tank.

Blaw Knox's Steel Roll division closed in 1993. The plant was later sold to the Park Corp. in March 1994. At one time the Wheeling site employed more than 1,000 people.