

## HISTORY FROM OHA

# Pass & Seymour:

## A NOT So Shocking Tale

A small horseshoe factory located along the towpath on the Erie Canal was the original site of the innovative company Pass & Seymour. In 1890, Albert Seymour and James Pass joined forces to produce ceramic electric insulators for fuses. Before their partnership, fuses were primarily insulated by wood that frequently caught fire when the fuses blew and caused dangerous electrical shocks when wet.

■ BY KAREN Y. COONEY

Seymour, superintendent of a Syracuse electric lighting company, and Pass, a Syracuse China ceramicist, together developed a superior ceramic material that satisfactorily conducted electricity and provided excellent protection against any other malfunctions. Porcelain knobs and tubes, along with cleat-style insulators, were the firm's first products. Electric supply houses quickly realized the importance of this discovery and placed numerous orders for the ceramic products. In 1898, Bert Salisbury joined the firm and, within three years, the three gentlemen formed a corporation. The demand for their excellent products soared and the firm soon became known and trusted throughout the world. The company soon outgrew its small factory and, in 1900, a new facility was built, conveniently located by the railway tracks in nearby Solvay.

By 1925, Pass & Seymour was recognized as one of the major manufacturers in Onondaga County. A newspaper article described the facility as modern in every respect, even maintaining a fully equipped hospital room attended by a trained nurse "round the clock." Both male and female

recreation rooms were also available to employees. The company frequently offered a variety of events, dinners, and outings to employees to enhance the workplace experience.

World War II brought an increased demand for the products manufactured by Pass & Seymour as it continued to work closely with Syracuse China to develop land mines for the Army. Syracuse China had produced a ceramic land mine and requested that Pass & Seymour manufacture a fuse for the device. American forces were then provided with these non-metallic fuses encased in the mine that could not be identified by metal detectors used for this purpose. However, before it was deemed safe enough to release to the Army, the fuse was tested more than 400 times on the company's remote proving ground located in nearby Highland Forest. The fuse was so successful that Pass & Seymour, and the city of Syracuse, became one of the leading centers in the entire country for land-mine research.

Eventually, the company went on to develop common household wall switches, outlets, and other wiring mechanisms. In fact,



the original Times Square sign in New York City used lamp sockets specially designed for it by the company. In 1984, Legrand US purchased Pass & Seymour. The company, however, still continues to operate from the Solvay facility. □

Karen Y. Cooney is support services administrator at the Onondaga Historical Association (OHA) Museum ([www.cnyhistory.org](http://www.cnyhistory.org)) at 321 Montgomery St. in Syracuse.



*Santa knows the way to OHA, and so should you!*

**Uniquely local gifts for everyone on your list!**



321 Montgomery Street, Syracuse, NY 13202  
(315) 428-1864 [www.cnyhistory.org](http://www.cnyhistory.org)

**The Central New York Business Journal**  
Call (800) 836-3539 today to subscribe