

THE MUSEUM CORNER



Berkley History & Museum Happenings

September 2021

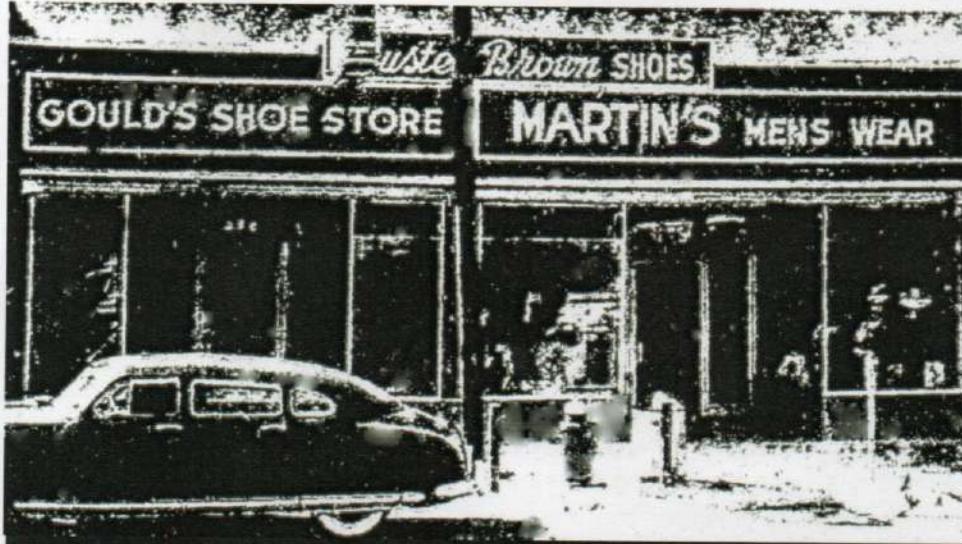


Photo from The Berkley Advance, August 10, 1950, Page 1

Kids' Shoes & Crime

by Don Callihan

In the fall of 1951, my mother got a part-time job at Gould's Shoe Store at 3141 W. Twelve Mile Road. The store occupied the east half of the building known today as The Yellow Door. Martin's Men's Wear occupied the west half, and an inner archway connected the two businesses. Litman Gould owned the shoe store and his brother Irving Gould owned Martin's Men's Wear.

Gould's Shoe Store was typical of the shoe stores of the day with floor to ceiling shelves on all available walls containing shoe boxes of multiple styles and sizes, but unlike today, they also carried shoes in widths from AAA to EE. While Gould's stocked women's everyday shoes, they did not sell high heels. For the most part, they catered to men and to children.

Buster Brown Shoes

Two things made the store attractive to children: the store sold Buster Brown Shoes and it had a shoe-fitting X-Ray machine. Buster Brown Shoes became popular with kids because of the "Smilin' Ed's Buster Brown Gang" radio show that began in September of 1944 and continued until April of 1953. The show aired on NBC at 11:30 on Saturday mornings and was carried locally by WWJ radio.

The show was hosted by Smilin' Ed McConnell and began with an adventure story followed by antics from the make-believe character Froggy the Gremlin and his support characters, Midnight the Cat and Squeaky the Mouse.

Continued on Page 3

Whether you're new to Berkley or have been here for a while, there is something for you at the Berkley Historical Museum. Here, you can learn the city's history, re-search the history of a Berkley school or hear about famous Berkley citizens. Whatever your interest, a friendly volunteer is here to help you.

In This Issue

- Kids' Shoes & Crime
- Getting Out in a Fire
- What is It?
- Caryatids?
- The Museum Gift Shop



The Fire Escape at Pattengill School

Getting out in a Fire

The original Pattengill Elementary School building, then known simply as Pattengill School, was made up of only six classrooms, three up and three down, and only one stairway in the front of the building. The standard of the day was to have an exterior fire escape, made of steel and attached to the outside of the building, as a second means of egress. These fire escapes were accessed in smaller buildings by a window rather than a door. At the bottom of the fire escape there was either a suspended stairway or ladder that was lowered from above so that the fire escape could not be used to access the building from the ground. Because of the complexity of lowering a stairway or ladder, this was not a desirable option when the building occupants were elementary school children.

The Fire Escape at Pattengill

Rather than an exterior stairway, Pattengill had an escape slide, similar to the one in the photo above, that exited the second floor on the back of the building. (A photo of the original escape slide does not exist) The slide was accessed through a pair of half-sized doors with crash bars. A teacher was stationed at the bottom to assure that children made a rapid exit as the next child was right behind. Even if collisions occurred, the speeds attained were low enough to avoid injury. Needless to say, the escape slide made second floor fire drills fun for Pattengill's students, even in the dead of winter.

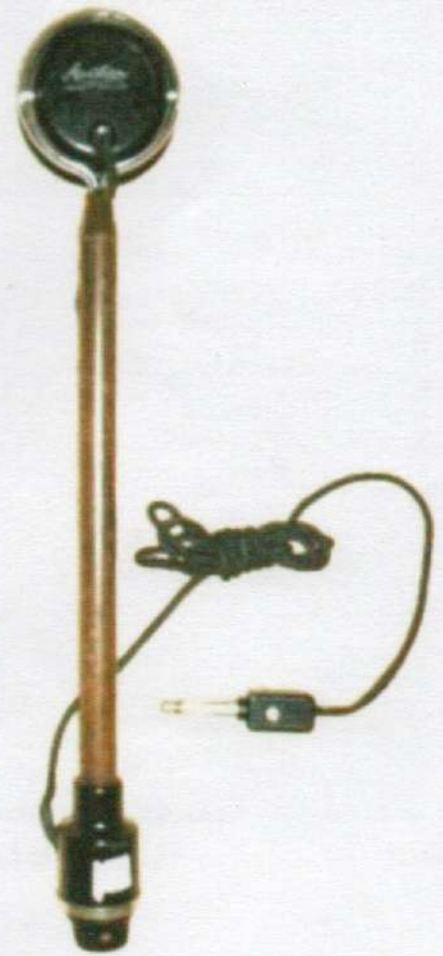
An Additional Recreation Device

In summer or after school and on weekends, these slides became an extra piece of playground equipment. While it was difficult, it was possible to enter the slide and climb to the top by forcing your back against the top of the tube and then slowly putting one foot forward and quickly moving your back forward. The reward for getting to the top was an exhilarating slide down in the dark, with just the "light at the end of the tube."

All Good Things Come to An End

When the first addition to Pattengill opened in the fall of 1948, it contained a second stairway, and the slide was no longer needed. Another way to have fun was now gone forever.

What is It?



Acousticon Dictograph Earphone Hearing Audio Aid

The Berkley Theater was innovative for its time. In addition to the "Cry Room," to be discussed in a future edition, it had accommodations for the hard-of-hearing. Under the seats in the right middle back row were jacks where a device similar to the one pictured above could be plugged in. The patron held the earphone to their ear and adjusted the volume with the knob on the bottom. There was no charge to use the device.

Caryatid?



Caryatid—A support, taking the place of a column, consisting of a draped female figure used in classic Greek architecture. The one pictured above is one of ten, two per column, that support the gates at Roseland Park Cemetery



More on Roseland Park Cemetery in a future issue.



The Gould's Shoe Store Building Today

Kids' Shoes & Crime *CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1*

Interspersed throughout were appearances by Buster Brown and his dog promoting Buster Brown shoes. The show's familiar tagline, "I'm Buster Brown, I live in a shoe. That's my dog Tige, he lives there too," could be repeated by most kids at the time.

The Shoe-Fitting X-Ray Machine

The shoe-fitting X-Ray machine was an even bigger draw. While its main purpose was to show moms that the shoes their child had tried on had enough toe space, the kids were enthralled by the sight of their toe bones wiggling inside the shoes.

The machine was actually a fluoroscope contained in a wooden box that was approximately two feet by two feet by four feet high. The child stepped on an elevated platform and inserted his/her feet in a slot at the base of the machine. A push button activated the X-ray. There were three viewing ports on top, one each for the child, the mom and the shoe salesperson so that he/she could describe to mom how well the shoes fit.

The machines did expose children's feet to radiation and could also expose mom, the salesperson and even the body of the child if any of the shielding shifted or if the machine was not properly maintained. No studies were ever done to evaluate their safety. However, radiation concerns did begin the phase-out of the machines in the late 1950s. It wasn't until the early 1970s that they disappeared completely.

The Crime

Gould's Shoe Store was also the scene of one of the costliest burglaries in Berkley History. On the Saturday night before Christmas, December 20, 1952, proceeds from the day were put in the safe along with proceeds from Martin's Men's Wear as the two stores (Gould's and Martin's) shared a common backroom. When Litman Gould entered the building the following Monday, the safe was open and the contents were gone. According to an article in the Daily Tribune on Monday, December 22, 1952, \$3700 in cash and a ring valued at \$1600 were missing.

The store had an alarm system that was armed, but it never sensed an intrusion. The thieves had cut a hole in the roof and somehow managed to drop to the floor and then get back up through the hole to escape. I visited the store that day with my mother and saw the hole. The ceiling had a grid of wires stretched across it connected to copper pins in clips. A slight displacement of the wire caused the pin to pull out of the clip and set off the alarm system. The thieves must have been aware of this as they cut the hole in the roof in the exact place where they could carefully get between the wires without setting off the alarm. No suspects were ever identified.

Litman retired in early 1960 and the store closed for good. Litman's brother, Irving, retired at the same time, and Martin's Men's Wear also closed. Several other businesses occupied the building before the Yellow Door opened in 2010.

The Museum Gift Shop

The museum gift shop has the perfect gift for that person with a Berkley connection. Selections include books about Berkley history, posters, banners, post cards and more.

Best Sellers

Our best selling gifts/souvenirs are our Berkley Coffe Mugs with the Berkley Theater mug being our most popular. The Santa on view at Coolidge and Twelve Mile is a popular choice during the Christmas Season, and the "WE CARE" mug is popular year around. Come in and purchase a mug. All proceeds go to support the museum.



Coffee Mugs available at the Museum Gift Shop

Berkley Historical Museum
3338 Coolidge Highway
Berkley, MI 48072

PLACE
STAMP
HERE

If you wish to receive The Museum Corner each time that it is published, please put your name and email address in the body of an email and enter the phrase "The Museum Corner" in the subject line. Send the email to: museum@berkleymich.net

Visit Us

Berkley Historical Museum
3338 Coolidge Highway
Berkley, MI 48072
248-658-3335
museum@berkleymich.net

Hours:

Wed: 10 AM till 1 PM

Sun: 2 PM till 4 PM

Group tours by appointment.

Visit us on the web at
[www.berkleymich.org/
explore_berkley/museum/
index.php](http://www.berkleymich.org/explore_berkley/museum/index.php)

Facebook: Berkley Historical
Museum

The Museum Corner Editor:
Don Callihan