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Wilson Bohannan Padlock Company

A company with a 150-year lock on success

The Wilson Bohannan Padlock Company of Marion, Ohio is 150 years old and the oldest family owned padlock company still manufacturing product in the United States. The company motto is, "Locks since Lincoln". WB began modestly in a garage behind the Bohannan home in Brooklyn, New York in 1860. That was also the year Bohannan's first lock patent was granted and the year Abraham Lincoln was elected to his first term in office. Ultimately Wilson Bohannan held twenty lock related patents.

By 1870 the business had grown and it became necessary to move to larger quarters in Brooklyn. The plant was equipped with what was then recognized as modern machines; lathes were run by foot and stamping and drilling machines operated by the same power. Three years later steam was installed for the purpose of obtaining power for the machinery and heat for the building. In 1888 it was necessary to move once again to an even larger facility in Brooklyn. The main building was 10,000 square feet and was four stories high and a foundry was added later. At the turn of the

century nearly two hundred employees were shipping an estimated 100,000 padlocks each year all over the world. The company's largest customers in the beginning were the railroads. In the early 1900's the customer base had evolved into utilities and heavy industry.

In 1927 the company was being run by Wilson Bohannan Tway, the grandson of Wilson Bohannan, who decided it was time to relocate the company. There are several reasons why Wilson Bohannan came to this area. Marion was a railroad center and the company shipped its products by rail. Their brass padlocks at that time were cast in a mold, and the American Malleable Casting Company was in Marion. Mr. Tway, while traveling across the country on a world war one troop train, stopped to refresh in Marion. He remembered the friendliness of the community when he was later

considering where to move his lock business. Later, changing the company sales focus from the declining railroads to supplying locks to utility companies—gas, electric, water and sewer, he created the customer base that remains a large part of their current sales.

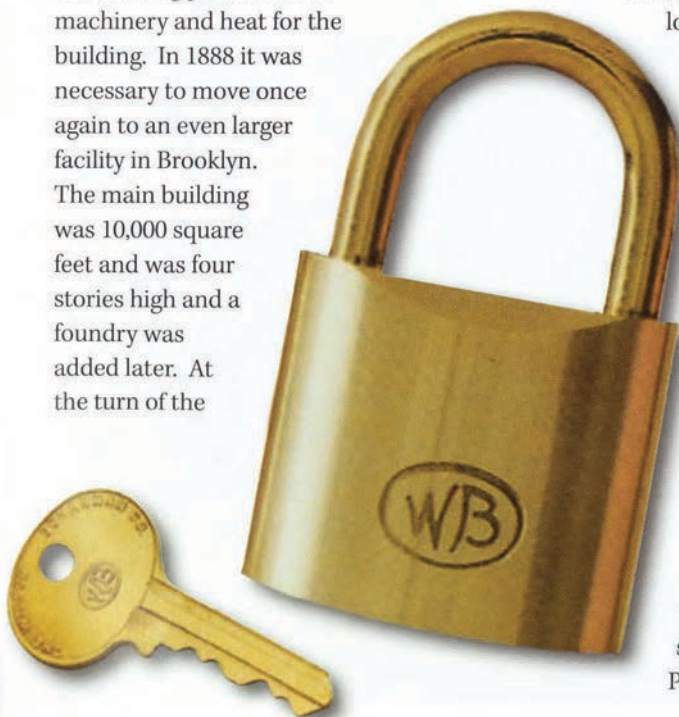
Today the company of 65 employees is owned by the sixth and seventh generations, great-great-granddaughter Pam Smith and her daughters. Pam's husband, Howard, has worked at Wilson Bohannan since 1973, serving as President since 1995.



Howard and Pam Smith

Touring the impeccably clean 35,000 square foot facility one is immediately taken by the amount of technology used to produce padlocks. From product design to quality control, state-of-the-art equipment keeps productivity high and materials waste at a minimum. An ongoing conversion to natural bio-oils will mean no waste and no disposal of by products and should be completed by 2011. Bio-oils will help keep manufacturing costs down while reducing the company's environmental footprint over all.

Wilson Bohannan has its own tool and die and machine shops. Being able to reengineer and convert machinery to





Mr. Wilson Bohannon, founder

Gleaming brass locks move through various workstations.

their specific needs as well as create their own replacement parts reduces equipment down time and makes for a more efficient operation.

The management team of Randy Dawson, V.P. of Operations, Bruce Valentino, V.P. of Finance, Steve Kirk, HR Manager, Dave Kozlik, Manufacturing Manager, Craig Stone, VP of Sales and Mark Williams, VP of Engineering, is a staff of seasoned professionals who credit President Howard Smith with having the company vision and the respect for his employees that allows them to do their best work. They credit a "hybrid management style" with making the operation successful. Mark Williams appreciates the ability to make hands on management decisions on the production floor, and Bruce Valentino summed it up as the newest of the team when he said, "I brought a great deal of outside experience to the mix. I've seen a lot of "best practices" in my career; however, this is the first place I've worked where I've seen all those things come together in one company."

Many of the current employees have twenty plus years with Wilson Bohannon. The family atmosphere is evident as Howard Smith walks through the plant addressing each employee by name. He pointed out that, while technology is important to the future success and

competitive position of the company, not one job has been lost to automation.

"When an employee retires we look at ways we may bring technology into the mix, but we have never eliminated an employee to make room for automation."

WB is ingrained in the community and even their purchasing practices reflect the clear picture of who they are as an organization. "When we purchase materials, services or equipment we start here in the community, and then we look at the state of Ohio, then across the

country," Mr. Smith explains.

The ongoing business plan for Wilson Bohannon seems very straightforward as described by President Howard Smith: "We are committed to remaining an American company producing an American product. This one hundred and fifty year old company and the employees are part of the American dream. We are very proud of that fact."

To learn more about the Wilson Bohannon Company visit their website at www.padlocks.com. 



These solid brass bars will become the rustproof bodies that range in size from less than one inch to eight inches.