

# **ERECTOR**

## **Auction notes of interest for Erector collection Saturday February 25<sup>th</sup> 2011**

### **About items from the Gilbert Archives: (Lot Numbers: 1010, 1012, 1014, 1016, 1018, 1020, 1022, 1024)**

Bill writes, "The next group of sets comes from the Gilbert Archives. Long time employee Charles Ryan calls it the "Gilbert Museum" and he was one of the few people who had access to it. He describes it as a long, narrow building which was separate from the factory. One side of the building was covered with windows. There were rows of shelves and piles and piles of toys and trains; not only those produced by Gilbert but also the toys of competitors, which were studied. The archive also housed prototypes of American Flyer Trains and other Gilbert toys. He says that a half-hearted effort was made to keep one of everything that the company made, but since no one person was assigned that job, it never quite got done. Other things were stored here as well, and he remembers that Gilbert's pole-vaulting equipment was stored here along with a large stack of bamboo poles that Gilbert had acquired in England during the 1909 Olympics.

### **About sales materials from A.J. McGrail: (Lots 1040 & 1042)**

A.J. McGrail was a long time employee of A.C. Gilbert, and the companies' top salesman. His territory was the New England states including Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut as well as Nova Scotia and Quebec. He has hundreds and hundreds of customers that included hobby shops, hardware and sporting good stores, appliance stores, electrical supply businesses, dry good and novelty stores, bicycle shops and department stores. These are all listed in his notebook by city and state. This notebook defines all his sales activity from 1948. All the New England dealers are listed, with addresses. Wouldn't it be fun to check the locations and see if there is any old new stock abandon in the attics or basements?

It is a most fascinating item that gives great insight into the methods Gilbert used to market his products. For example, we find that Gilbert bundles his toys into what he calls "assortments". The assortments came in different sizes, but each assortment included a mix of the different size Erector sets in proportion to what the dealer could expect to sell. The notebook defines what each assortment of Erector, American Flyer, and Gilbert toys contained. It also tells what each customer purchased and how the store displays were distributed. Gilbert distributed his toys and trains to most dealers in pre-packed groups that he called "assortments" Each assortment contained a mix of toys or trains that was "just right" ...the dealer would have enough stock to last the season, but it would be sold

out when the season was over. There were two different sizes of assortments, one for the smaller dealer and one for the larger dealer. The contents of the assortments are here, and that gives us clear insight into the proportion of sets that was manufactured

The notebook also describes in detailed the improvements that had been made in the line of toys and trains for 1948 and covers the problems with the previous years line and how those problems have been addressed. Those who study the minutia in Erector and Flyer will find this information fascinating.

Classic Toy Trains will be publishing an article on this book in the near future.

There are some actual photographs of tools and a Flyer train display as well as a dozen appliance pictures and flyers.

In addition, there is a great deal of internal memos dealing with a multitude of issues typical to the running of a large business. The notebook is full of trivia such as what complaints the dealers were getting (brake downs and such) and what manufacturing changes the engineers were making to correct the problems. Most of these things can be tracked not just by the year, but by the month! Also there is a large fold out Gilbert organizational chart.

The next item is McGrails sales kit from 1953. It contains a "sales presentation" for Flyer trains, catalogs for the trains, accessories, Erector and Gilbert toys along with the contents and dealer price lists for the 1953 assortment packages. It also pictures all of the store displays.

**About the Personal items from A.C. Gilbert's office: (Lots 1044, 1046, 1048, 1050, 1052, 1054 )**

The seven items in this auction are very special. They belonged to A.C. Gilbert and came out of his office at One Erector Square. These items were his personal reference books. All labels with dates and other information are original.