

Globe Turns 100 Years Old

By John Corcoran

The year is 1914. Woodrow Wilson presides over a prosperous and peaceful — for the moment — nation. War is brewing in far-away Austria. Babe Ruth makes his major league debut as a pitcher with the Boston Red Sox. The country reels from the recent Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire in which 146 garment workers perished in New York City's deadliest fire.¹

And the first Globe Sprinkler is produced in Cincinnati, Ohio, beginning a 100-year tradition that continues to this day.²

Globe was created through the consolidation and acquisition of rival manufacturing companies in the early 20th century. Globe's predecessor companies included Garrett Sprinkler of Minneapolis, Minnesota (1904-1914), Merchant and Evans, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (1866-1916), in addition to close ties — shared President Powell Evans — to the International Sprinkler Company of Philadelphia (1899-1911).

Following the merger with Merchant and Evans in 1916, Globe relocated to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, after two short years headquartered in Cincinnati, Ohio. This consolidation provided the fledgling Globe access to Powell Evans' considerable arsenal of fire protection patents, manufacturing facilities in Pennsylvania and West Virginia, and overnight access to skilled designers and installation labor.³ Not only did this consolidation enhance the young company's portfolio and capabilities, it also afforded Globe a home field advantage essential to conducting business in the lucrative Northeast and Midatlantic Regions.

"The turn of the last century was the 'wild west' of the manufacturing world," observes Buck Buchanan, Globe's Executive Vice President. Indeed, of the 70-plus sprinkler manufacturers in existence in 1900, only 11, Globe among them, were recognized as acceptable manufacturers by the National Board of Fire Underwriters by 1918³.

Despite the emergence of a governing code body (NFPA, 1896) and the support of a trade association (NFSA, 1905), successful sprinkler manufacturers created their own markets by appealing directly to business owners. Like the efforts of today's Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition to promote residential sprinkler systems to homeowners, the challenge facing the sprinkler industry of 1914 was to build awareness, acceptance, and adoption of commercial sprinkler systems among manufacturers, warehousing enterprises, and

owners of other at-risk commercial structures. Unlike today's collective HFSC, the task of advocacy and education was left to the initiative of individual manufacturers.

As early as 1917, Globe coupled aggressive print advertising campaigns with support from branch offices in key growth markets. Weekly newspaper advertisements appeared in Boston, Atlanta, Kansas City, Indianapolis, and Bridgeport. Advertising in high-profile (and high cost) Regional and National business publications, including *Fortune*, *The Nation's Business*, *American Contractor*, and *Sweet's Catalog*, was another significant component of Globe's media strategy.

The early Globe not only manufactured sprinkler system components, but it also estimated, designed, installed, and maintained the installed sprinkler systems. While the logistics involved in coordinating this depth and breadth of service were daunting, the access to a broad spectrum of influencers in

the buying process provided invaluable insight — for those companies that were willing to invest the time and effort to listen. This direct conduit to architects, engineers, owners, designers, and installers inspired product development that was simultaneously aesthetically appealing to owners and architects, met or exceeded engineering and design specifications, and was durable and easy to install and maintain.

Such innovations included:

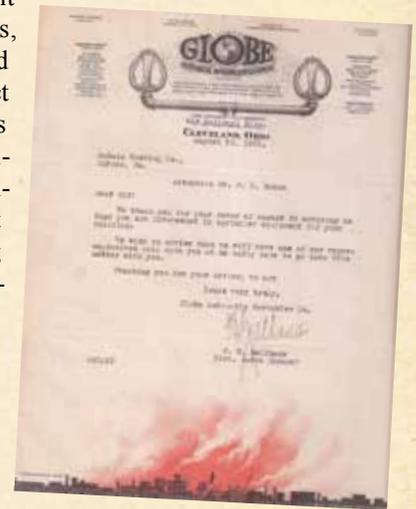
- Lever-Fulcrum Dry Valve (1914)⁴. Reduced installed footprint and ease of service.
- Model C Sprinkler, featuring die-stamped components and an offset 'tilting bar' designed to minimize the mechanical load on the fusible element (1916)⁵. While these attributes may not sound particularly innovative, the marketplace at that time was crowded with products that were susceptible to mechanical damage, had solder compounds that failed to fuse at the required temperature, pre-operated without cause, and were difficult to produce with consistent, repeatable quality. The Globe Model C was designed by President Powell Evans, and "borrowed" these simple yet essential attributes from products developed during his tenure with International Sprinkler and



1914 Garrett-Globe Issue A, Globe Issue A, Globe Issue B. Courtesy of Jeff Suleski.



Circa 1950 'firemen' advertisement. Series featured in local, regional, and national media.



1921 Globe Correspondence to prospective customer.

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Merchant & Evans. The Model C remained in production until the 1930s.

• SaveAll™ Center Strut Sprinkler (1931). The SaveAll's streamlined element and compact design redefined sprinkler aesthetics. This flagship product was reinvented throughout its life — conventional style deflector (1931-1950), upright, pendent, and vertical sidewall deflector (1950s). The recessed pendent 'ceiling type' featured a then-unprecedented deflector distance of 3/4" below the finished ceiling. The SaveAll line remained in production until the late 1960s, and is considered to be the most aesthetically pleasing sprinkler available prior to the advent of concealed pendants in the 1970s.

"The SaveAll was unlike any sprinkler the industry had seen," noted CEO Bob Worthington. "The design was modified to replace the traditional solder element with a heat-activated chemical pellet — rated up to 700°F."

Globe headquarters and primary manufacturing remained in Philadelphia until the sale of Globe to the Fyr-Fyter Company of Dayton, Ohio in 1957. "This was the first of a series of poorly-matched buyouts, making the '60s to the '80s a difficult period for the brand," noted David Heron, VP of Operations for Australia and New Zealand. "But things changed in the late '80s when Bob Sr. took over."

In May of 1988, Robert C. Worthington, a professional fire protection engineer, purchased Globe, bringing with him 35 years of leadership experience, including executive-level positions with both Star Sprinkler Corporation and Central Sprinkler Corporation. "Bob didn't waste time revitalizing the company," recalls Brian Hoening, VP of Engineering. "He invested in the people and facilities Globe needed to remain relevant in a new century."

Under the direction of C.E.O. Bob Worthington and President Steven Worthington, the investments in domestic manufacturing capacity, testing programs with cUL, FM, LPC, and — most importantly — a closely-knit team of industry professionals, are elevating the Globe name within the fire sprinkler industry.

"We took some calculated risks early on," reflected the senior Worthington. At a time when the North American market was dominated by link-style sprinklers, Globe made the bold move to phase out its line of 'traditional' sprinklers in favor of small-diameter glass bulb. "We were the first U.S manufacturer to incorporate 5mm, then 3mm glass bulbs into our entire line."

"Dad was two steps ahead of the market," noted son and

President Steven. While there are specifications remaining that call for link-style sprinklers, the North American market made a rapid shift from fusible element sprinklers to glass bulbs in the 1990s. "Put simply," continued Steven, "glass bulb sprinklers are robust, manufacturing-friendly, and dependable. With very few exceptions, they are a superior product."

When asked to identify why the Globe name has endured longer than any of its contemporaries, Steven reflected. "Globe was, and is, and — I hope — will continue to be, a reflection of the people. When people ask me if it is a family company,

I say 'yes, but not the way you mean it.' The Globe family extends beyond my father and me. Our family is each proud Michiganders inside these walls, the women and men that earn their livelihood here, but know that what they do saves lives...the customer service rep that answers her phone after she has clocked out for the day...the Globe family is the engineer that denies the existence of 'conventional' wisdom, 'standard' operating procedure, and 'best practices'...because she understands that there is *always* a better way."



1920 advertisement in The Nation's Business publication.

National Sales Manager Randy Lane added, "We have been able to bring back the grass roots of this industry in every aspect of how we treat our customers... and our overall approach to the fire sprinkler industry."

About the Author:

John Corcoran, MBA, Director of Marketing & Information Systems, Globe Fire Sprinkler Corporation, resides in Essexville, Michigan. Corcoran has dedicated his professional life to the fire sprinkler industry, with experience in marketing communications, event planning, marketing and sales analysis, customer service, commercial operations, and selection and support of Enterprise Resource Planning systems. He has contributed to both private and publicly traded companies spanning manufacturing, contracting, and research engineering.

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Bibliography

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- ² *Cincinnati "The Queen City"*, The Cuvier Press Club, 1914
- ³ *Automatic Sprinkler Protection*, Gorham Dana, S.B., John Wiley & Sons, 1919
- ⁴ Official gazette of the United States Patent Office, May 15, 1917
- ⁵ *Sweet's Architectural Catalog*, 1920.
- ⁶ "Sprinkler Firm Purchase Told", *The Palm Beach Post*, 1958.



1959 Regional Education Publication (featuring SaveAll 'ceiling type' sprinkler).



1914-2014 products