

UP FRONT



LIBRARY & ARCHIVES TREASURES

By David R. Grinnell, Chief Archivist

Eichleay and the Atomic Bomb

Western Pennsylvania was humming during World War II. The industrial expertise and manufacturing capacity of Pittsburgh, fueled by ramped-up war production, contributed to winning the global conflict. Local companies like U. S. Steel, Dravo, Westinghouse, Pitt-Des Moines Steel, and H. J. Heinz were all essential to war production in the region, but less well-known is Eichleay Engineering Corporation's role in the testing of the first atomic bomb in 1945.

Eichleay, a Pittsburgh company known for moving entire buildings, was contracted to construct a vehicle and transport "Jumbo," a 214-ton concrete and steel jug made by Babcock & Wilcox in Ohio to contain the bomb. The planned detonation would explode TNT and then a chain reaction of plutonium. If all went well, Jumbo would be destroyed, but if the chain reaction failed, Jumbo was intended to stop the plutonium from escaping. Jumbo went by rail to New Mexico, where Eichleay's 64-wheel trailer (top photo) then carried Jumbo 25 miles to the secluded Trinity Site, part of the Alamogordo Bombing and Gunnery Range.

The Eichleay Corporation also built steel towers to hold the bomb aloft during the test. It was decided that Jumbo would be unnecessary but it would still be hoisted to a tower 800 yards from the blast (right). About 5:30 a.m. on July 16, 1945, the bomb was detonated; observers 10 miles away were



Eichleay employees from Pittsburgh with the trailer they built for Jumbo and the tower it hung from.

All HHC L&A, Eichleay collection, 2010.0227.

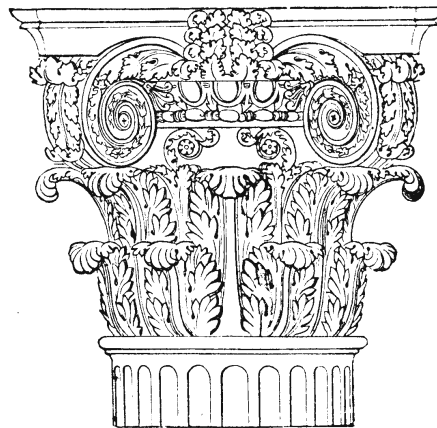
stunned by the blinding light and heat, and the shock broke windows 120 miles away. The towers were destroyed, but Jumbo survived and can be seen today at the Trinity Site National Historic Landmark, part of the White Sands Missile Range near Bingham, New Mexico.

The Trinity test was but one of the many engineering projects undertaken by the Eichleay Corporation, which traces its roots to 1875. The company has moved houses, churches, steamboats, and entire buildings in downtown Pittsburgh. It also constructed additions to mill sites for Jones & Laughlin and other large industrial companies throughout the United States. Many of the company's projects are documented in records and photographs recently donated to the archives at the History Center. The Eichleay records provide visual representations of Pittsburgh as the powerhouse of industry driving innovation and ingenuity. 🌟



The Library & Archives collects materials related to the history and culture of Western Pennsylvania. The Reading Room, located on the sixth floor of the Heinz History Center, is open Wednesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Search the L&A Catalog at: <http://207.67.203.74/S92015Staff/OPAC/index.asp>

Federated Investors
Foundation, Inc.
Supports the Efforts of
*Senator John Heinz
History Center*



Federated®

FederatedInvestors.com

Federated is a registered mark of Federated Investors, Inc. 2011 ©Federated Investors, Inc.