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THE SCAIFE FAMILY AND THE SCAIFE COMPANY¹

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THE ORIGINAL Scaifes were undoubtedly of Danish origin, having migrated to England at least by the fourteenth century, because there is a definite record of two different Scaifes having served in the British Parliament under King Edward II, who ruled from 1307 to 1327, and both of them lived in the parish of Kirby Stephen in Westmoreland County, close to Raisgill Hall and Orton, presumed to be the original seats of our direct ancestry. The name is not an uncommon one in England, and many Scaifes came from the near-by parishes of Orton, Ravenstonedale, and Appely. It is possible that the first direct ancestor of ours was Thomas Scaife of Crosby Garrett, Westmoreland County, who was born or baptized there in 1678. Due to uncertainties, I shall not attempt to trace the next three generations until I come to Henry Scaife, who was born in 1760; he was, presumably, a bookbinder and later a tea merchant, who while en route to this country was drowned at sea near the Barbadoes in 1789. His son, Jeffery Scaife, born in 1781, was my great-great-grandfather, who was the founder of our lineage in this country, and the originator of the Scaife Company.

In 1789, at the age of eight, Jeffery came to America from Cambridge, with his uncle and aunt, William Gazzam and Elizabeth Scaiffe Gazzam. The former had been educated at Cambridge and later became a journalist, but as an editor, his liberal views got him in trouble

¹ Presented at a meeting of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania on December 12, 1950.—*Ed.*

with King George III, and so he was forced to flee here. Jeffery learned the trade of tinner in Philadelphia, and in 1801 he reached Pittsburgh, where in March, 1802, he founded our company, with his uncle, William Gazzam, and William Borrett as partners. These men manufactured tin, copper, sheet-iron ware, and japanned-ware in a building at Fourth Avenue and Market Street. Japanning was the art of coating metal surfaces with a variety of varnishes, which were dried and hardened in stoves, and which were ultimately used in ironmongery goods and domestic ironwork. Hence 148 years ago, Jeffery established a business that is the oldest *manufacturing* company in the United States west of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. I emphasize the word *manufacturing*, because other businesses, such as some New England fisheries, merchants, and here in Pittsburgh, the *Pittsburgh Gazette* (1786) definitely antedate our company, but the fact remains we are unequivocally the oldest manufacturing company west of Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

What was the borough of Pittsburgh like in 1802 when Jeffery arrived here? The governor of Pennsylvania was Thomas McKean, but we had no mayor, no charter as a city, no bridges, no hospitals, and the population was under two thousand. Fort Pitt lay in ruins. The present site of the Pennsylvania Station was considered far out in the country, and where we are assembled tonight, was for all practical purposes out of the bounds of civilization. There were no banks, so Jeffery undoubtedly carried his currency on his person, or concealed it. Land was cheap, for two years later, twenty acres of land on Grant's Hill sold for \$105.00. It was to be two years before a stage coach line came through from Philadelphia, or before the Bank of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia opened a branch here. Rent was cheap—we have a photostat of a deed dated 1809 in which one Connell O'Donnell paid William Borrett (Jeffery's partner) \$2.50 a month for a store and dwelling at Third and Market. Pittsburgh's first directory, published in 1815, did not list such current household names as Carnegie, Westinghouse, Frick, Heinz, Oliver, Laughlin, or Mellon. However, almost to a man, Jeffery's descendants were to remain Pittsburghers.

Unfortunately, we do not have a single record of any of Jeffery's own personal, or business correspondence, but I am convinced this is attributable to Pittsburgh's early disastrous fires and floods, and he left

no will in this city. At the turn of the nineteenth century, most houses, factories, and taverns were built mainly of wood, and the hazard of fires, inundations, and storms, was a constant menace. Moreover, there is no known painting or likeness of Jeffery. Suffice it to say that the company's founder was a remarkable workman, whose varied products soon became a Pittsburgh fixture.

The year 1810 was an eventful one for Jeffery, because at the age of twenty-nine, he became sole proprietor of an established business at the southeast corner of Diamond Street and Market Square. Moreover, he married Lydia Borrett (1788-1865), the daughter of one of his partners. Eight children were born to this union, of whom the eldest, William Borrett Scaife, born on September 5, 1812, in the First Ward of Allegheny, was my great-grandfather. The company manufactured sponge buckets for artillery during the War of 1812. In 1834, Jeffery retired from business, and ultimately died at the age of sixty-six in 1847. Jeffery's son, Thomas W. Scaife (1820-50) was a grocer, who had a shop on Market Street, near Water Street.

Upon Jeffery's retirement, the firm became known as Wm. B. Scaife & Co. after the name of his eldest son, who at that time had two partners, whom my great-grandfather bought out in 1838. The location of the plant was then at 8-10 Wood Street, between Front (now First Avenue) and Water Street. Many of Wm. B.'s diaries, records, and letters have survived, but doubtless others were destroyed in the great fire of April 10, 1845.

Wm. B. received the finest education that was then obtainable, and at an early age, he began to work in his father's plant. Records indicate that he was a sagacious mechanical genius, who at the tender age of nine, built products which were sold along with those made by the most talented workmen in the shops. When he, in turn, became sole proprietor of his shop at the age of twenty-six, he fabricated tin, iron, and copper products for the vast river steamboat trade, then so vital to Pittsburgh's industry. He not only equipped steamboats, but later constructed them. He was, I believe, the first person to advocate towing coal by barges, in lieu of the older inefficient method of floating coal down the rivers, a process which to him was a mere waste of time.

Wm. B. had many early serious financial worries, and his plant was heavily mortgaged; in addition, he records grave disagreements with his associates, because in 1849 and again in 1851 he admitted two

junior partners, but he at all times retained control of the company. However, by 1853, he finally once again bought out the associates. At this period, he became one of the earliest fabricators of sheet-iron roof frames, and corrugated iron for roofing and sidings, ventures which not only partially reduced fire hazards, but which were eventually to prove to be bonanzas for him. In a letter dated November 15, 1855, Wm. B. states: "At our County Fair in October, I received a silver medal for the best model specimen of metallic roofing, together with a complimentary notice." We have this silver medal, and four other similar ones. Again with reference to hard times, Wm. B. wrote on January 27, 1855: "I have never seen such times here, the richest are breaking up, and many are suffering with hunger. There has been a soup house opened where soup is given to those who send for it. Yesterday the crowd was so great that the police were sent for to keep order."

Of Wm. B.'s sterling characteristics, I am quite sure that to him, religion was the most influential single factor in his life. From his writings, one learns that he was a veritable Cotton Mather (1663-1728), the renowned Congregational minister, who was in his prime a century and a half earlier. Wm. B. was an austere Methodist, and like Mather, was a conservative. In their later lives, each kept abreast of the multiple new ideas of his day, and each grew in tolerance toward other sects. Each was highly sensitive, quick-tempered, and each showed undeniable traits of actual religious fanaticism. Mather had fifteen children by three marriages, but Wm. B. was not far behind with thirteen children by one wife! Great-grandfather was an unswerving believer in temperance, and assisted this cause with his influence and means; he refused to make machinery for spirituous liquors; however, I can find no record of his successors taking similar action! He advocated the abolition of slavery, and also organized a society known as the Philo Institute, a debating club, which once owned a splendid library, but which was destroyed by the calamitous fire of 1845. Politically, he was first a Whig, and then a Republican.

Wm. B. was married to Mary Frisbee of Schoharie County, New York, which is in the vicinity of Cooperstown, and of their thirteen children, eleven reached maturity. One daughter, Edmonia (don't you think Edmonia an unique name?), died in 1852, and Willie died

three years later, both of their deaths occurring on the same date, March 31. I, myself, vividly remember all of the others, except one sister, Emma Scaife Wilde, who resided in Denver.

One of Wm. B.'s most captivating diaries, written in 1851, graphically describes a business trip via the steamers "Hibernia" and "Elephant" from Pittsburgh to New Orleans. Due to the vicissitudes of fortune, the trip consumed thirty-eight days. Below Louisville, the bulk of the steamer's cargo was jettisoned when the boat stuck in the mud. When all hands turned out on a Sunday to free the boat, Wm. B. stubbornly refused to help, feeling that no Sunday work should be done, because "there are souls to be saved." While thus marooned, the ice closed in and was described by the diarist as "now resting against the upper side with a scratching, tearing, thundering noise." You can guess that Wm. B. called upon his Maker to be saved, and he again sounded precisely like Cotton Mather.

There were many deaths from exposure. "Eight more," reads one entry, "have been buried from this boat—very unceremoniously—just put in rough square boxes without any ceremony—our deck hands dig a hole just deep enough to cover the boxes." Again several days later: "Most people aboard are Catholics, and I spent the evening singing hymns with the officers and was surprised to find so many of them were acquainted with Methodist hymns." Other entries indicate that there was plenty of game to be shot—such as deer, partridge, rabbits and doves. When the journey resumed, he mentions passing innumerable river steamers, with such names as "Saranack," "Federal Arch," "Martha Washington," "Greek Slave," and "Ionian." Still later: "Passed the Arkansas-Louisiana line—many fine plantations, but what seems strange is that most houses are below the surface of the river, and there are no hills to fly to in case of inundation." Wm. B. refers to New Orleans as "a wicked city, a city of Sodom." In company with a friend he visited the slave dealers and noted that "outside the houses were negro men, women, boys and girls—these slaves were comfortably dressed, and were arranged in lines just like shopkeepers display specimens of their merchandise. My friend inquired about the slave's ages, health, qualifications and finally bought a slave woman and her baby, for \$800—this seems strange to deal in human beings." While in New Orleans, he closed a number of contracts and secured specifications for the building of river boats; a typical one was for a boat with a 130 ft. keel and a 23 ft. beam for a price of

\$5,000. An entry which amused me states: "Had a most violent attack of neuralgi, so I relieved this with belladonna and by bathing my feet."

Other diaries and memos elucidate bizarre and astounding facts, such as one wage contract for an apprenticeship in his company dated July, 1850: "James Morgan binds his son, Wm. Wallace Morgan, from July 1st for one year at \$2.00 per week, \$2.25 for the second year, \$2.50 for the 3rd, and \$3.00 for the 4th. If satisfactory, 50 cents additional during the fifth year, but all lost time to be deducted." This was scarcely an extravagant contract, was it? Another entry records the acquisition of "one new spittoon." On a stormy sea voyage to Newfoundland in July, 1865, he noted: "My wife got to supper, but she had to part with it—she awakened at 3 A. M. dreaming a dog had bitten her—afterwards we spent a pleasant hour cracking jokes." Knowing Wm. B.'s character, I can assure you the jokes were of a puritanical nature!

Wm. B.'s diaries show the Civil War apprehension of Pittsburghers in the spring of 1863. Jeb Stuart's minor cavalry raids near Chambersburg the previous year were still fresh in mind. According to the diarist's notes of June 11, "report says Rebels coming on us with 18,000 cavalry under that Villain Stuart—the Rebel Thief—Lord Thou Art Our Shield." Another entry in the same month, notes "25 of our hands sent today to dig fortifications in Winebiddle's Woods." Still another entry: "2,000 men set to work on surrounding hills of our city and to erect forts and rifle pits on Mt. Washington, Herron Hill, etc." It is needless to say that before the result of Gettysburg was known, great-grandfather fully expected Generals Lee, Pickett, Longstreet, and Stuart to take up positions on all high ground around this city.

During these years and later, the Scaife Company made sponge and tar buckets for the arsenals, life boats and life preservers, air pipes, steel chimneys, equipment for the iron gunboats (built here by Snowden & Mason Co.), oil stills, iron barrels, iron cornices for a Catholic church in Des Moines, canister plates for the Allegheny Arsenal, cupolas, fire-extinguishers, etc. Wm. B. was granted two patents on corrugating machines, and he was also the designer, and the first fabricator, of the current style kitchen range boiler. In between times, he attended prayer meetings twice weekly, was a manager of the Pennsylvania School of Reform, and he proposed the then new buildings

at Morganza. In 1876, accompanied by his wife, he attended the Centennial at Philadelphia, and his diary relates that "after viewing the foreign exhibits, we then saw those of the U. S. A.—ours is the best, greatest, grandest nation of the most talented people under the sun, and the most generous, truthful, and *cleanest*, the most honest and most religious, most civilized—the furthest advanced in everything good and noble and we have the finest display of the finest goods,—Mary and I bade farewell to our first and last Centennial." Perhaps this was an omen of death—in any event, early in 1876, Wm. B., long suffering from a painful cancerous disease, gathered his family together, to reiterate how much comfort he had enjoyed in religion, and to express the conviction that all of them would meet again in heaven as an unbroken family. He further mentioned that his own greatest mistake was that he had not had enough charity for others, and that if he could relive his life, he would have no ill feeling against anyone. Wm. B. advised his children to keep out of debt, to stand together, and then raising his hand said that it was "a satisfaction to know this hand was never raised in any nefarious business deal." He had expressed the desire to die on a clear Sunday, and so he did, on April 2, 1876, aged sixty-four. His final wish was for no foreign hands to touch him after death, and accordingly, his two eldest sons washed him and placed him in the casket. When his grandson, then six, was taken to see the remains, the boy remarked that "it is going to take a lot of angels to carry grandpappy to heaven." Incidentally, his wife survived him by twenty-nine years, dying at the age of eighty-nine, and I might mention that she remembered seeing Halley's Comet in Bolivar, Tennessee, in 1833.

Before describing grandfather, I wish to state a few facts about three of Wm. B.'s other children. The eldest, Oliver P. Scaife, was probably the most able and most aggressive business executive; he died in 1903.

Lauriston L. Scaife (1850-1926) was a Yale graduate, and an eminently successful Boston lawyer; without question, he had the most gentle nature and the kindest disposition of all the children. Uncle Laurie's grandson, Lauriston L. Scaife, now Episcopal Bishop of Western New York, is doubtless personally known to many of the readers of this account, and it was a severe loss to this city when Bishop Scaife was called elsewhere.

William Lucien Scaife, Yale '73, graduated with the highest possible honors and received prizes for excellence in German and civil engineering. He did postgraduate work at Freiberg University in Saxony, and attended the School of Mines in Paris. For some recondite reason, Wm. B. did not wish his daughters to marry, and incredible as it may seem, each of the four spinsters (Mary, Cornelia, Alice, and Lois) always flatly announced that *no* woman anywhere was good enough for any Scaife man! Naturally, no one believed them, because a few of the Scaife men were no basement bargains.

Charles Cooke Scaife, born on September 8, 1844, in Pitt Township, now part of Pittsburgh, was the second surviving son of Wm. B. He received his early education in the Sixth Ward Franklin School, and later graduated from the Pittsburgh High School. At the age of eighteen, he enlisted in Company C, 15th Pennsylvania Volunteer Militia, and at the expiration of his service, he became associated with the Wm. B. Scaife Co., which he served for fifty-four years, twenty-four of them as president. The company became a partnership in 1878, with Oliver and Charles as the principal executives, but thirteen years later, grandfather purchased Oliver's shares. The firm continued to make the same line of products, but expanded its facilities for ice and milk cans, water pressure filters, the erection of iron bridges, copper pipes, plate iron work, etc. At the National Export Exposition held in Philadelphia in 1899, the Wm. B. Scaife & Sons Co. was awarded a diploma of honorable mention for mechanical filtration. In 1907, the company installed an autogenous welding plant, the first one in this district, for the welding of all kinds of sheet and plate work for boilers and tanks. This then rather revolutionary idea, as a substitute for riveting, was sheer heresy to some of the factory foremen, but times change, and we must of necessity, change with them.

Charles Cooke Scaife, my grandfather, was married in 1867 to Priscilla Murray Verner, and four children were born, namely, James Verner, William B., Charles C., Jr., and Anna Verner Scaife, who later became Mrs. John H. Ricketson, Jr. She was the most gracious and kindly lady I ever knew. All of the sons later became associated with the business.

Grandfather was an emulator of Samuel Pepys, in that, like his father before him, he kept faithful and graphic diaries. He speaks of painting or drawing many pastel or India-ink portraits of his

children, brothers, and a few friends, and these were excellent likenesses, which showed an uncanny artistic ability. Apparently, portrait painting completely absorbed his mind, without exhausting his body. He took great delight in writing poetic stanzas, both humorous and sentimental, on anyone's anniversary. In addition, he records many original ideas for inventions, such as a scheme noted in 1878, for charging soda water fountain drinks or raising bread with carbonic acid gas. Another brain wave alluded to the idea of permanently preserving foodstuffs in metallic cans. Grandfather gives vivid descriptions of the railroad riots of 1877, and the financial panic of the following year. He was horrified when Jones & Laughlin increased the pay of common labor to \$1.50 a day. He even considered the possibility of making iron bathtubs, underground cable, and steel stoves. In 1910, when two Pittsburgh bankers were sent to jail, grandfather kept them supplied with books. He was a staunch Republican, and during President Wilson's first term he wrote: "Business falling off, due to Democratic legislation. Wilson has fatally wounded the goose that lays golden eggs, by his foolish legislation, and I see no commercial silver lined clouds until he is down and out of office."

Grandfather lived in old Allegheny on Western Avenue, and his home was called "Wilverchan." The first six letters are from the names of William and Verner, and the last four, the first two letters each from Charles and Anna, the combined names of his four children. It is interesting to note that this land was adjacent to the McKnight residence, which was once a country home when that part of Allegheny was woods and fields. Originally, it was owned by the famous Indian chief Killbuck (1737-1811) who at one time held possession of large tracts of land in Allegheny County, and tradition says that "Killbuck is buried under the stone slab near the lilac walk in the garden." A diary entry of October 22, 1881, states: "Borough taxes \$4.00." Another: "Took my cow Rosie to Bull today." February, 1901: "Carnegie Steel Combine said to be close—prepare for the greatest panic this country has even seen."

In 1915, grandfather unveiled a bronze tablet, erected by the Women's Historical Society of Pennsylvania to commemorate the original site of "Ye Olde Town Hall of Allegheny Town." He died six months later on the last day of 1915, aged seventy-one.

My father, James Verner Scaife, was born in Allegheny, on November 7, 1868; he first attended public school, then the Boys Classical School. He qualified for admission to Cornell University at the age of fifteen, but waited another year before entering, matriculating with the Class of 1889 and graduating with a B. S. degree. He received honorable mention for his thesis, entitled, "On the Natural History of Copper." After a short stretch with the Illinois Zinc Company, he became associated with the family company, and served it forty years, fourteen of which were as president. In 1894, my father organized the Tarantella Musical Society, which gave charity concerts, and he appeared in many plays, as a member of the Amateur Dramatic Club. On November 18, 1896, he was married to Hannah Mary Magee, and there were three sons. Frederick Magee, Alan Magee, and myself.

Father was a man of manifold interests, in that he felt that the cultivation of hobbies was of prime importance, and that a person might acquire great knowledge of subjects unconnected with his business, and yet receive scarcely any benefit or relief. Men, I believe, can be divided into three classes: Those who work themselves to death; those who are worried to death; and those who are bored to death. Father was not of the last category, because his diverse hobbies included the making up of all types of neatly compiled and dated photo, scrap, and general information albums, grapho-analysis (reading handwriting), and collecting stamps, coins, autographs, manuscripts, and genealogical data. He was one of the first amateurs to take successful photographs in color; he was an acknowledged authority on the Civil War, and his extensive Civil War library now belongs to Cornell University. Fresh-water angling was his favorite sport. He died on March 30, 1930, in his sixty-second year.

My brother, Alan, represented the fifth generation when he entered the services of the family company in 1920. If space permitted, I would like to enlarge upon the splendid work done by the firm in World War II, in which it was awarded the Army & Navy "E", while turning out colossal quantities of war materials, chiefly aerial demolition bombs and 4.2 inch mortar shells. Today, Mr. Roger L. Scaife of Boston, another grandson of old Wm. B.'s, is the oldest living member of our family. He is now in his seventy-sixth year and is a retired publisher.

To recapitulate, the majority of Scaife men had, I think, ageless enthusiasm, zestful desires to crowd innumerable activities into waking hours, individualities which bristled like porcupines the moment anyone crossed them, tempers definitely above normal, intelligent but thoroughly stubborn minds, sentimental affection for their ancestors, a genuine love of the home, and undeviating loyalty to any cause they espoused. In different generations, there were several deadly intramural quarrels, but if any rank outsiders tried to chisel in on these private fights, the Scaifes usually banded together to throw them out. All of the relatives described in detail, have now passed to the great beyond, but I think that each of them in his time contributed something to the progress of Pittsburgh. May their souls rest in peace.