Descriptive Summary

Creator: Tracy Brindle, Intern
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File folder in Map Case Drawer 04, Diagrams

Administrative Information

Restrictions: None

Acquisition Information: Gift
Preferred Citation: Turner Brass Olympic Torch Collection, Sycamore History Museum Archives, Sycamore, IL

Collection Description

Biographical/Historical Note:

The Turner Brass Works was founded in 1871 by E.F. Turner on the north side of Chicago, IL. Several years later, the company was purchased by Charles Reckitt, who made arrangements for Turner Brass to relocate to Sycamore in the fall of 1906. The factory, located on the south side of Sycamore at 821 Park Avenue, was completed in the summer of 1907. The True Republican
(Nov. 28, 1906) reported that it was the first of its kind in terms of industry to appear in Sycamore. At the time, there were 230 workers employed in the factory. The company relocated to Sycamore for a bonus of $10,000.

The company issued around 30 catalogues, including “Automobile Cycle and Power Boat Specialties,” “Foot and Pressure Pumps,” “Repair Parts for Electric Arc Lamps,” “Hardware Specialties,” “Brass Fixtures and Lantern,” “Gasoline Vapor Lamps,” “Machinery Name Plates,” “Gasoline Thermo-Light Outfit and Dental Appliances.” Their catalogues boasted that they were the “largest concern in the world manufacturing these goods.”

The employees held a Reception and Ball and invited the people of Sycamore as their guests. The True Republican described it as the “Largest Dance Ever.” Attendance was about 1,500 people. Over half that number took part in the opening grand march which was led by company President Charles C. Reckitt and the mayor’s wife, Mrs. O.H. Smith. About 250 employees “and their ladies” came on a train from Chicago.

Richard E. Byrd took Turner blowtorches and firepots on the 1933-1935 Antarctic Expedition.

Turner made fuel appliances, tubular brass fixtures, fittings, and trim items.

In April 1955, Harold V. Engh, Sr. took over the management of the company, and between 1955 and 1969 he modernized the equipment, machinery and facilities. In November 1969, the Olin Corporation acquired Turner and made it a part of the Winchester Group of Olin Corporation. Under their direction, Turner continued to develop stoves, lanterns and heaters for the camping industry. In 1975, a decision was made by Olin to withdraw from the camping industry and plans were formulated to sell or close the three manufacturing plants, which provided camping products.

Olin's decision provided Cleanweld Products Inc. in Los Angeles, CA, an opportunity to aggressively expand their propane torch solid oxygen technology. Cleanweld acquired Turner in June 1976. The combined production facilities of Turner Industries Inc. made this company one of the world's largest producers of 14 and 16 ounce propane fuel cylinders and solid oxygen products for home, farm, and industry.

In 1984, Turner was purchased by Cooper Industries of Houston, TX and assigned to their tool division, Cooper Tools, in Raleigh, NC. The plant closed in 1999.

Sources:


The 1984 Olympics and the Torch Relay:

Turner Brass manufactured the torches used in the 1980 Winter Olympics. They were the only company to bid on the project. Gil Farnham was the project manager. Lou Ignelzi was the model maker. Abed Zantout was the designer and product engineer. Richard Shivers was vice president of marketing. The ’80 torch was a “morning glory” or bell-shaped design, and three models were made: gas fire, liquid fire, and non-operational (for dignitaries). About 140 (to 180) torches were made for the Winter Olympics.

Turner Brass was one of three companies bidding to manufacture the 1984 Olympic torch. Turner won in 1981 and worked on the torch in 1982, although the contract for the torch was finalized in 1983. It was originally intended to be black with the 1980 bell design, but changes were made, and the resulting torch was a bowl-like aluminum structure with antique brass finish and a leather-covered handle. This torch was ¾ the design of the ’80 torch, and instead of the bell shape, the torch was formed into a “classic” cup shape. It was designed to stay lit for about 45 minutes with the ability to operate in light rain and 40 degrees below 0. Inscribed around the cup are the Los Angeles Coliseum, Olympic ring symbol, and motto: “Citius, Altius, Fortius” (Swifter, Higher, Stronger). The torch is 22 inches long and weighs 2 pounds 4 ounces. Turner sold the Olympic torches for about $50 per torch – so this was not a money maker. Gil Farnham said “It’s been a pleasure to work on though. We’re not going to make a lot of money in it, so we better enjoy it. And we do.” Gil Farnham was the engineer heading the project with Abed Zantout as his assistant. George Yockem was the plant engineer.

Farnham graduated from Freeport High School in 1952, worked for Illinois Central railroad and Micro Switch, and then got a degree from NIU in 1959. He taught science and biology in Galesburg and Sycamore before joining Turner in 1957.

During this time, Turner manufactured disposable propane torches sold in Kmart, Sears, Montgomery Ward, and True Value. Farnham estimated that the company produced 7 million propane tanks a year. They used the technology from their Liberty Torch to produce the Olympic torch, making it refillable.

The torches’ machined parts were completed in Sycamore. These parts included valves, barrel, hilt, protective cap, handle guard, bezel, heat shields, screw inclines parts, and the burner assembly. The parts were then shipped to the Turner factory in Irwindale, CA where spun parts were produced and plating, etching, and final assembly took place.
The torch relay raised money for a Legacy of Youth fund. Runners paid $3,000 for the opportunity to run 1 kilometer (3/5 mile). The funds raised went to YMCA’s, Boy’s Clubs, and Girl’s Clubs. They were hoping to raise $30 million.

The torch relay was originally meant to be run in all 50 states. It was then scaled down because only 2,000 kilometers of 10,000 had been sold. At the time, it was believed that the relay would pass through all regions of the U.S. including Hawaii and Alaska. Later, it was determined that the relay would go through all regions of the country and all types of terrain: mountains, rivers, deserts, plains, but not through Alaska, Hawaii, Florida, or the Northern Plains.

The relay was sponsored by AT&T. This was the first Olympics to have corporate sponsorship. Runners were allowed to keep their torch and official Levi’s running suit.

The torch relay covered over 12,000 miles from New York City to Los Angeles. It was the longest torch run in Olympic history.

Gil Farnham and Bill Lindgren drove down Barber Green Rd holding a prototype out the window to make sure the torch would withstand 40 mph winds.

Gil Farnham tested the torch near Loveland Pass, Colorado at a height of 12,000 feet to test its staying power in a wet blizzard with 40 mph winds. The torch would not stay lit. It went out in 10 degrees below 0. “Farnham said through chattering teeth, ‘We’re getting the bugs worked out so the Olympic flame can make it across the mountains.’” Propane has to boil to a gas in order to come out of the tank and burn. So the flame hadn’t gone out, it was just too small to see. Turner made an additional part to remedy this: an enhancer, or flame extender. Now it could burn brighter and would keep the flame from ‘suffocating.’ The parts were UPSed to Farnham at the next town.

On April 17, 1984, Turner tested the torches in Sycamore with a 39 mile run with 30 runners enlisted by the Kishwaukee YMCA. Another test run of about 30 miles was also completed in April.

The torch was fueled by propane. Because propane burns clean, the flame was difficult to see. Turner added a Coleman burner to give it a larger and more colorful flame.

Turner needed to make the torch smoke when it was carried into the coliseum, because the torch flame would be hard to see in the daylight.

The Olympic flame comes from the Temple of Zeus on Mt. Olympus in Greece. Sypros Fotinos, mayor of Olympia, was concerned that the U.S. was using the Olympic flame for commercial gain because of the sponsorship of AT&T and did not want the U.S. to take the flame. Olympic
representatives from the U.S. were sent to smooth things over. The Greeks ended up lighting the torch and three Welsh miner’s lamps (as backups that traveled with the relay). The flame traveled from Olympia to Athens, then by plane from Greece to New York City, where it arrived on board Air Force One.

Two days before the torch relay began, the Soviets announced they would be boycotting the Olympics. The U.S. boycotted the 1980 Olympics in Moscow as protest against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

The relay began in New York City on May 8. The first torch was lit from the Olympic cauldron in front of the United Nations. The cauldron was made to light electronically if the flame failed, just as a back-up. It wasn’t needed, even though there was a heavy rain. About 100-120 miles were traveled daily in the torch relay. The relay ended at the LA Coliseum in Los Angeles, California on July 28. The torch never went out.

Turner Brass sponsored 1K of the torch relay. Paul O’Neal, 42 and Tony Young, 26, were Turner employees who were randomly chosen from a drawing to represent the company in the relay. Young was sponsored by the United Steel Workers of America Local 5292, and his $3,000 opportunity benefited the Kishwaukee YMCA. They each ran 1K in May 1984. Young ran in South Holland, IL and O’Neal ran in Hammond, ID. At the time, Turner had produced 5,280 torches, and said they would make more as needed. (It is believed that no more were produced.) Gil Farnham and seven other employees accompanied the relay. Farnham entered his name in the drawing for the employee chosen to run 1k. “I was in the drawing but not chosen. My wife’s prayers won out.”

Farnham had a heart attack on June 7 and was treated at Swedish American Hospital in Rockford.

Turner offered assistance in the manufacture of torches for the 1988 Special Olympics. They designed the cauldron for the same Olympics. They also designed torches for the Senior Olympics, Sport-Aid, Badger State Games, Pan-Am Games, and the Jesse Owens Games.
Sources (Articles):

“Alumnus Turns Brass into Torch of Gold,” Alumni News, Northern Illinois University, Summer 1984


“Better to Fix Torch than Curse Altitude,” Mountain Bell Times, April 18, 1984

Cooper Industries, Vol. 3 No. 1, First Quarter 1984


“O’Neal, Young Carry Torch,” Daily Chronicle, June 1, 1984

“Pride in His Country Prompts Citizen to Paint Torch,” Sycamore News, February 6, 1985


“Torch Goes to Race Winner,” Publication and Date unknown. Local.


“Torch Test,” Daily Chronicle, April 17, 1984


Interview with Bob Davis:

“1980 – big year. I came back to my office one day and one of our ladies had told me there was a phone call for me from someone who asked if we’d be interested in making an Olympic torch. And of course, I thought it was a bit of humor from somebody. But I made the call and, to make a long story short, we were successful – and our engineers [were] successful in designing a propane carrying torch for the 1980 Olympics in Lake Placid, New York. We were the first American manufacturer and there is a lot of paper and a lot of publicity on that particular situation. We made 180 of those torches that were used fairly successfully in the 1980 Lake Placid Games. I have a sample of the 1980 unit.
I wasn’t, of course, the designer of the torch, but in those days, I was a big jogger and I used to do a lot of testing to see how it was operating and I can remember running alongside my car – my wife was driving – and I think within two blocks the torch had gone out six or seven times. So, we knew we had work to do and the research and development team was successful in developing and making it do what it was supposed to do. Well in 1984, the Olympics were held in Los Angeles, and we were again asked to manufacture the torch and this time ended by making eleven thousand of these torches and developing something a lot more sophisticated – because now we had learned from 1980 – and a much nicer looking unit.”

“The 1984 Olympic torch, I can remember when that torch was developed, designed by Gil Farnham who took it up into the mountains in Colorado because it had to work perfectly in cold weather and because he knew what that torch was going to be going through. He spent a lot of time up there perfecting that torch. That happened in 1984 and that’s the time Cooper Tools was acquiring Turner. They knew about the torch, but there was a question in their mind whether or not there was going to be any publicity involved because they were not involved at all in the torch development. So, I’ll never forget – and Gil may correct me on this – Rafer Johnson, the former decathlon champion, was the man that took the torch and ran up the steps to light the cauldron in Los Angeles. And there was a question in the corporate mind as to that torch operating and functioning in the manner that it should. So they had, under those steps periodically, someone with another torch, just in case the torch, going up those steps, malfunctioned. There could be a quick substitution. It didn’t happen. He got to the top, he lit the torch, and corporate was happy. It’s sort of funny now to think about that, but I can understand Cooper’s reluctance. And of course, we prayed a lot too, no question about our hopes that everything functioned. But the engineers had put in a lot of work. I didn’t have to do as much running with that one – I did some, but not as much as the 1980.”


Scope and Content Note:


Arrangement Note:

Arranged by document type: Technical Drawings, Letters, Documents, Instruction Booklets, Newspaper Articles, Photographs
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Correspondence, letters to and from Turner Brass concerning the Special Olympic torches, 1980-81, 82-86, 88 2006.009.19

Correspondence, letters relating to the Olympic Torch used in the 1988 Winter Games in Calgary, Canada. 2006.009.23

Correspondence, “thank-you” letters from Sycamore students to Gil Farnham, who visited the students in 1988 and 1992 with a 1984 Olympic torch produced by Turner Brass of Sycamore. 2006.009.26

Correspondence, “get well” cards for Gil Farnham, who suffered a heart attack in early June 1984. He recovered at Swedish American Hospital in Rockford. The cards are mostly from Turner Brass employees of Sycamore. 2006.009.27

Documents

Parts lists and bills of materials for the 1984 Olympic torch, 1982 2006.009.02

Status report, map, schedule, and logistics for the simulation run of the 1984 Olympic torch relay, March 18-24, 1984 2006.009.10

Schedules of events, contact names and numbers for the 1984 Olympic torch relay. 2006.009.11

Documents relating to the 1984 Olympic torch relay, including routes, contact names and numbers, map, and uniform specifications for Turner Brass representatives 2006.009.12

1984 Olympic Torch Relay Folder, official folder containing map of relay route and a news release put out by the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee 2006.009.13

1984 Olympic Torch Relay Folder, official folder containing a media guide and news releases put out by the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee 2006.009.14

Documents relating to the Koeler Lights flame safety lamps used to house the Olympic flame during the torch relay. 2006.009.15
Parts lists and bill of materials for Special Olympic ceremonial torches

Documents related to Sport Aid (UNICEF), 1986 including letters to Turner Brass concerning the Sport Aid torches as well as documents concerning Sport Aid's Race Against Time purpose and schedule of events

Documents related to the Badger State Games, 1986 including a map of Indiana from 1987, a poster from the Tenth Pan American Games in Indianapolis, August 1987, a souvenir program and guide for the 1986 Badger State Games as well as numerous copies of newspaper articles concerning the Badger State Games. It is believed that the Turner Brass Company of Sycamore was involved in the manufacturing or assistance in the manufacturing of the torches for these athletic events.

Documents related to the World University Games, 1993 including pamphlets and two negatives of torches. It is believed that the Turner Brass Company of Sycamore was involved with the manufacturing or assisting in manufacturing of the torch used in this event.


Program: Runner's World: Olympics Guide, 1984. This guide to the Olympics contains "Major Sections," "Stars of the Olympics," and "Olympic Sports." The program is signed to Gil Farnham from several people who are believed to be Gil's coworkers.

Turner Brass Torch Label - what is believed to be a label
for the 1984 Olympic torch manufactured by Turner Brass. The label is back by cardboard and reads "Manufacturer of the 1984 Olympic Torch" with the star symbol and Olympic rings. There is a plastic cover with a red section that is layered on top of the label. A layer on onion paper covers this layer.


Instruction Booklets

Ceremonial Torch Instructions Book, 1984 2006.009.09
Instruction and safety booklets on operating and filling Olympic torches
Special Olympics Torch Instruction Booklets for filling and operating torches and assembling cauldrons 2006.009.17

"How to" Booklets for Turner Brass torches as well as correspondence regarding the editing of the booklets. "How to" Book, 1983, "Turner Torch Tips" is the instruction book of torches manufactured by Turner Brass 2006.009.32

Newspaper Articles

Original Press Releases of newspaper articles on the 1980 Winter Olympics and the 1984 Summer Olympics concerning the torches manufactured by Turner Brass. 2006.009.04


Local newspaper articles, 1981-1992 2006.009.37
Dekalb and Sycamore articles relating to Turner Brass Company of Sycamore and the manufacture of the 1984 Olympic torch. Copies.

Illinois newspaper articles 1983-1984 2006.009.38
Articles from Illinois relating to Turner Brass Company of Sycamore and the manufacture of the 1984 Olympic torch. Copies.
Newspaper articles, Non-Illinois, National 1976-1985
Nonlocal articles relating to Turner Brass Company of Sycamore and the manufacture of the 1984 Olympic torch. Copies.

Photographs


Blowtorch photographs. Photo of two older blowtorches made by Turner Brass Company of Sycamore, possibly early 1900s. Photo of abandoned building with Flex Construction sign in front. On back reads "Upstaging 2007 former Turner Brass Park Avenue."

Olympics and Torch Photos
Photo of cadre runner Michael Fuller standing with the torch next to a police car and AT&T bus. Photo of the Olympic torch being held upright. Photo of Kate Washburn who is wearing an AT&T tank top.

Olympic Torch Photos and Slide, 1980-1984
Slide is an image of the 1984 Olympic torch standing upright on red, white, and blue bunting. Five photographs are of the proposed Olympic torch with the bell shape that was rejected. One photograph is of three torches: two that were rejected and the accepted cup-shape torch in the middle. Four photographs are black and white and are of the accepted 1984 Olympic torch that was manufactured by Turner Brass Company of Sycamore.

Gilbert Farnham Photos
Photo of Gil Farnham standing at a podium that is believed to be at the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago. The banner behind him reads "1984 Olympic Torch Relay." There is an unidentified man standing at the left. Photo of Gil Farnham (far left), Bill Lindgren (second from left) and two unidentified men, believed to be employees at Turner in Irwindale, California. The banner behind them reads "Cleanweld Turner Sycamore, Ill. ~ Irwindale, Calif. Official Manufacturers for the XIII Winter Olympic
Games Lake Placid (NY) 1980."

Olympic Torch Relay and Turner Factory
Loose sleeves of photographs of the 1984 Olympic torch trial relay and the official relay, as well as photographs of the inside the Turner Brass factory of Sycamore and Turner Brass employees, including Paul O'Neal who ran in the torch relay.

**Related Collections - Objects**

- Blow Torch with Black Handle, Turner Brass 2001.6.01
- Paperweight, formed in the shape of a Turner Brass Blow Torch, with Turner embossed on each side of paperweight. 2001.6.02
- Blowtorch, with Red Handle, "150" Stamped on Handle Turner Brass Corporation Blow Torch. Tank is made of Brass or Steel Painted like Brass. Torch assembly is of cast iron with a hanging hook on top and black adjustment knob at rear. Tank pump has logo of gymnast stamped onto it. Tank handle is of wood painted red. 2001.007
- Blowtorch, kerosene, large, made by Turner Brass Co., brass with red handle, with hanging hook and pumper, used 2003.014
- Blowtorch - Gas Torch, Turner Brass, 12" tall Painted red, Master line, donated 2002 2004.176
- Blow Torch, pump action, manufactured by Turner Brass of Sycamore, IL., blue body with black handle, side fill for gasoline. More information available 2004.177
- Blowtorch - Turner Brass Brazing torch 3000 degrees self-igniting 2004.178.1
- Box - for Turner brazing torch see 2004.178.1 2004.178.2
Plaque - Framed  11.5x13.6  Presented to Olympic Torch model maker Louis Ignelzi of Turner brass

Painting - Oil on canvas, framed 25"x31" Yellow gold background, Olympic Torch, TURNER - and 5 Olympic rings Signed Terry Dyer, 1984

Key chain - Turner Corp. pencil keychain Rocket shaped " 1962"

Torch - Turner - Blk -Handle Propane/Plaque w/ red plastic trigger "First" self igniting

Torch - Turner Hand torch - green handle chrome plated

Torch - Turner Brass propane torch

Blowtorch - Turner Brass black knob, brass body

Torch - Turner hand torch self-contained, orange body black knob, inscribed "Tempest"

Manual - Turner Brass owner's manual "Brazing Torch"

Torch - Turner Liberty Refillable Torch w/wire stand black body.

Torch - Turner, Cooper Weller self-igniting, red body

Torch - Turner-Cooper Weller precision soldering torch

Blow Torch, bottom fill gasoline model. Manufactured by Turner Brass Works of Sycamore, IL. Blow Torch, extra large brass body, pump action with red handle, bottom fill for fuel
with 2 control knobs on top of body. Manufactured by Turner Brass of Sycamore, IL.


Turner Self-igniting Propane torch. Olympian model, missing stem. 2005.457.02

Turner self-igniting Torch 2005.462A

Turner self-igniting Torch Hose 2005.462B


34, Brass handle, red and light blue Turner logo, plastic black knob, red strip of paint at base of torch, mostly black color, (Pic 244) Pictures are in the "Artifacts Research Material" file, and also in Turner Corporation files. 2008.31.2

30, Brass handle, no Turner logo, plastic black knob, red strip of paint at base of torch, mostly black in color.(Pic 244) Pictures are in the "Artifacts Research Material" file, and also in Turner Corporation files. 2008.31.3

Baby Turner torch, Brass handle, red and brown Turner logo, plastic black knob, brass color (Pic 238) Pictures are in the "Artifacts Research Material" file, and also in Turner Corporation files. 2008.31.7

Silver Torch, black handle, manufacturer unknown, black plastic knob, mostly silver color (Pic 235) Pictures are in the "Artifacts Research Material" file, and also in Turner Corporation files. 2008.31.10

Turner Brass Corporation blow torch, 10" in height ad 6" in diameter at the base. Tank is brass. Torch assembly is of brass with a
hanging hook on top and black adjustment knob at rear. Tank pump has logo of gymnast stamped onto it. Tank handle is of wood painted red.

Turner Torch, Model 30A, with instruction card attached. Knob to regulate flame is partially broken. 2008.77

Turner Propane Torch Kit 2009.051

Torch, Olympic Turner Brass 1984. Games of the 23rd Olympiad, Los Angeles, CA Additional information available. 2009.119.01a

Turner 1984 Olympic Torch case. Games of the 23rd Olympiad, Los Angeles, CA 2009.119.01b

Turner torch in metal storage box. 2010.116

Turner torch, narrow tank. Some red paint remaining around base. 2010.117.01

Small Turner torch, round, shiny brass tank. 2010.117.02

Large Turner torch, round tank, has some minor dents in it. 2010.117.03

Large Turner torch, round tank, has red painted handle 2010.117.04

Large Turner torch, round tank. 2010.117.05

Large shiny brass Turner torch, round tank. 2010.117.06

Large dull brass Turner torch, round tank, black handle. 2010.117.07

Large dull brass Turner torch, round tank, gold painted handle. 2010.117.08

Turner Brass Works torch. Has red handle, hook on top. Finish is dull. 2011.051

Cooper Hand Tools Division, Turner Plant. Plaque was on the City Building wall. 2012.012.02
Gray bag "Cooper Tools" in red on side. Has a zipper side pocket, carry strap.

DVD - Program presented by Abed Zantout about the 1984 Olympic Torch.