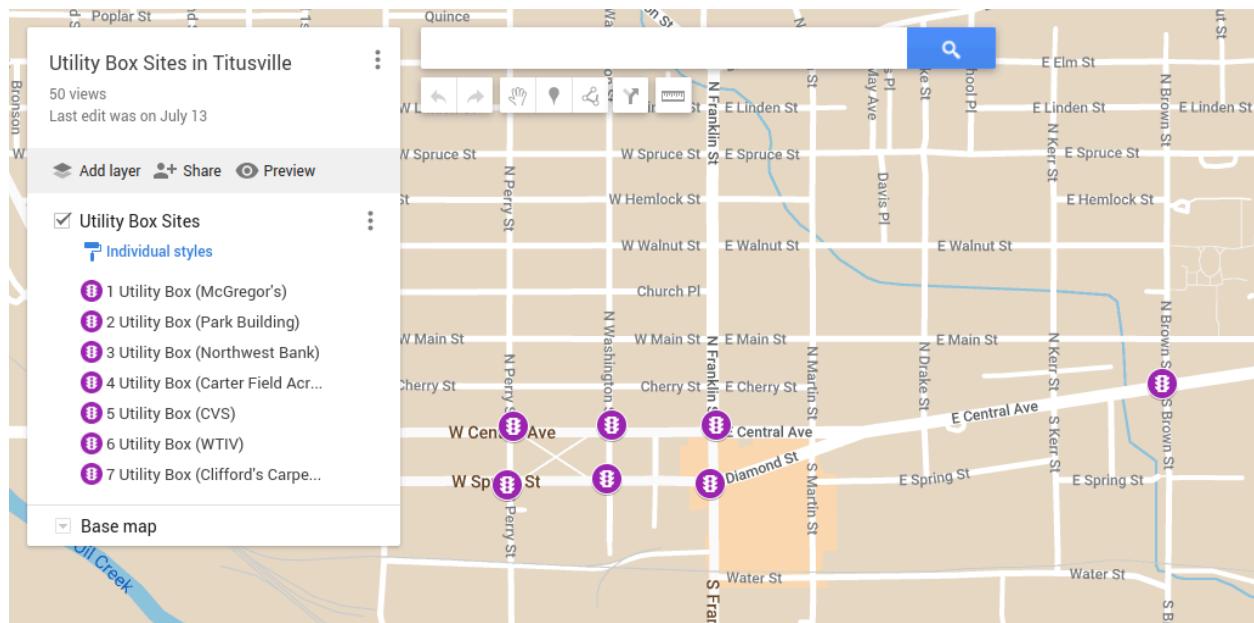


Utility Box Art Narratives

Written by Jessica Hilburn - September 2023 & March 2024



Box 6: Liberty Bell & Justice Bell

On April 26, 1893 the Liberty Bell made a stop in Titusville on its way to be displayed at the World's Fair in Chicago. It was estimated more than 6,000 people clambered close to the train depot to see the bell slowly ride by and cheer it on its journey. A few local children even got the chance to sit atop it, one giving it a smooch while tipping his cap to the crowd.

On July 23, 1915 the Justice Bell also made a stop in Titusville to help campaign for women's suffrage. Unlike the Liberty Bell, this one's clapper was held in chains which represented women's inability to vote. The bell stopped in every Pennsylvania county in the back of a truck and was welcomed to Titusville by the Titusville Equal Suffrage Association, led by Alice Carter. More than 1,000 people attended the ceremony at City Hall. Though women's suffrage was refused by voters in 1915, the majority of men in both Titusville and Crawford County voted in its favor. Finally, suffrage was granted to women nationwide with the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution in 1920.

This art piece by Jamey Bush features the Liberty Bell on one side on a backdrop of the American flag and the Justice Bell on the other with the Women's Suffrage Flag in the background. Perched atop the Justice Bell is the suffrage bluebird made popular by the Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Association.

Box 4: Queen Cutlery

Queen Cutlery originally began its life in a garage behind what is now Titusville High School. Founded by five former employees of Schatt & Morgan Cutlery, a knifemaker brought to town by the Titusville Board of Trade in 1902, Queen quickly became a crucial homegrown business. By the late 1920s, the business boasted 30 employees, 5 of whom were women. In 1933 they bought out Schatt & Morgan's assets to combine the two knifemakers and local blade craft was once again headquartered at the top of Chestnut Street.

During World War II, Queen Cutlery manufactured pruning knives with hooked blades for the Army Air Force, pocket knives for the Army and Navy, and leather-handled hunting knives and machetes for the Navy Seabees. Many locals and visitors count themselves lucky to be the owner of a knife made from genuine "Queen Steel."

This artistic rendering by Barbara Jewell Proper draws inspiration from the Queen factory building and the company logo, paying homage to a local manufacturing giant of yesteryear.

Box 5: Colonel Drake Hotel

The Colonel Drake Hotel's lineage traces back to the early days of Titusville. Originally the Pendleton House, the hotel became The Mansion House after a full renovation in 1868. In the mid-to-late 1800s, the hotel was best known for its delicious food. It was demolished and reconstructed in sections multiple times, eventually going from a wood frame to a yellow brick structure. In 1945 it was purchased by the Titusville Hotel Corporation and renamed the Colonel Drake Hotel, reopening for business in 1947.

By the 1980s, the hotel was known for its two dining rooms, the Pendleton Room and the Mansion Room, as well as overnight accommodations and apartments. Around this time, the original chandelier was found in the basement and returned to public view. After over 130 years of hotel operation in that location, the Colonel Drake Hotel closed in May 1998 and demolished, with CVS taking its place.

This mixed media creation by Kaleb Lewis features an image of the hotel and a depiction of its namesake as well as a historic photograph of the original Mansion House, a stately remembrance of a century of history in this spot.

Box 3: Hula Hoops

Though the concept of a hoop you twirl for fun is a centuries-old idea, the modern plastic hula hoop was popularized in the 1950s by the Wham-O toy company of California. Wham-O contracted with Skyline Plastics Company of Titusville to extrude the petroleum-based plastic Grex to make hula-hoops. Employees at Skyline worked around the clock to keep up with demand and Wham-O sold more than 25 million hoops in the product's first four months. Soon,

the demand for Grex was greater than the supply and Wham-O began using Marlex, a newly invented synthetic polymer plastic.

Hula hoops made at Skyline Plastics Company were overseen by plant incorporator and owner Noel J. Poux. In 1963, Poux sold his plastics business to Phillips Petroleum Company, creator of Marlex.

This colorful creation by Amanda Mott showcases all the ways people enjoyed hula hooping through the years. The hobby continues today with people of all ages playing with this colorful toy whose history includes that of industrial Titusville.

Box 1: Oil Ablaze

An enormous conflagration occurred on the morning of Friday, June 11, 1880 in what became known in Titusville as “Black Friday.” During a storm, a lightning strike ignited an oil tank from the Tidioute & Titusville Pipeline near Perry Street. Despite the firemen’s best efforts, the heat from the tank began igniting adjacent tanks and eventually spread through Acme Oil Company and the Keystone Refinery and spilled burning oil into the creek. The *Titusville Herald* wrote that the fire was “majestic and appalling” as it licked at buildings “with a threatening power that made men stand aghast at the probable consequences.”

The uncontrollable fire and its “oceans of flame” raged for three days, burning almost 300,000 barrels of oil and destroying homes and businesses on Perry and Breed Streets, as well as damaging both the Franklin and Perry Street bridges. Another more famous fire occurred in Titusville in June 1892 when another storm caused massive flooding, oil leakage, and fire, resulting in numerous human casualties and immense property damage.

This depiction of the 1880 Black Friday fire by Alaina Mott shows lightning striking the oil tanks and the quick spread of flames reaching skyward. Fire and water were a deadly combination in the era of oil.

Box 2: Ruth Harkness

Explorer Ruth Harkness was a Titusville native. Born here in 1900, she famously trekked across China with an exploratory group by train, boat, plane, and foot. She returned to the United States in 1936 with the first live giant panda outside of China in tow. Before her exploring days, Harkness was better known as a socialite and fashion designer and began exploring with her husband. After his sudden death, Harkness was determined to see his dream of bringing a panda to the U.S. become reality.

Su Lin, the nine-month-old baby panda, was placed at the Brookfield Zoo in Chicago where she lived until her death in 1938. Harkness brought a second panda to the U.S. in 1937 named Mei-Mei.

Harkness wrote a book about her adventure, *The Baby Giant Panda*, where she explains how people were concerned about the consequences of taking the panda from its home. However, Su Lin's fame caused a "panda-monium," leading to worldwide interest in conservation of pandas.

While an art student at Edinboro University, Hannah Kinney was commissioned by Ross Ruot to paint this portrait of Ruth Harkness. The panda drawing was created by 12-year-old Evelyn Schwab who has been creating art since she was three.

Box 7: Wax Nature Scene

Local artist Judy Slater created the nature scene seen here with encaustic art. Also known as hot wax painting, this art involves heating wax with colored pigments and applying it to a surface. Wax-based colorful art and its implements can trace part of their history to the first commercial oil well drilled in Titusville in 1859.

Paraffin wax is a byproduct of petroleum production. While the first crayons were made of charcoal and oil, wax made the tools more user-friendly and it is what crayons are made from still today. While the classic "black gold" oil gets all the attention, paraffin, petroleum jelly, petrolatum, and their family of lubricants and waxes have spawned lucrative industries which intersect with our daily lives in countless ways including waterproofing, chewing gum, candy coating, candles, cosmetics, and art supplies.

Slater's wax painting celebrates the natural beauty of our historic region through one of its earliest products.