



Lake Maxinkuckee Its Intrigue History & Genealogy Culver, Marshall, Indiana

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Willis C. Vajen



Willis C. Vajen b. October 28, 1851 Indianapolis, Marion county Indiana d. Died: July 22, 1900 age 48 years and 8 months (who suffered from life-long anemia, died at his home at 23 E. Vermont St.) buried 07/24/1900 Crown Hill Cemetery, Indianapolis, Indiana Section 29 Lot: 7 son of [John Henry](#) and Alice (Fugate) Vajen.

Willis C. Vajen was born at Indianapolis, October 28, 1851.

Passing through the grammar and high schools of his native city, he, at the age of seventeen, entered Earlham College, at Richmond, Indiana. His two years' course at this institution was followed by two years of study at Wittenburgh College, Springfield, Ohio.

His health being delicate foreign travel was then deemed desirable for him. He, accordingly, went abroad, and completed his education in the Herr Poppy's Seminary, at Hamburg, Germany.

He had a varied career, following in his father's footsteps as a hardware store owner, later becoming a realtor, pension attorney, publisher, and inventor . Upon his return, he entered into business, choosing the hardware trade, in which he had in his boyhood been thoroughly drilled by his father and developed great proficiency.

He organized the firm of Vajen & New Company, Incorporated, of which he was the president. In 1885 he purchased the entire associate interest, and as sole proprietor continued the business for two years. In 1887, finding his health too strongly taxed by the commercial life, he disposed of his establishment to Lilly & Stalnaker and went to California.



A pencil sketch of him when he attended a firefighters' convention from the Salt Lake Herald, Salt Lake City, Utah, August 10, 1896.)

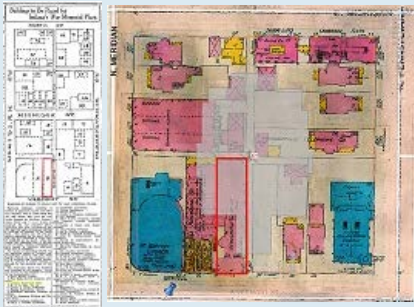




In 1911 the Indiana Democratic Club bought the Vajen home at 22 E. Vermont Street for \$60,000. The large brick house was built in the early 1880s. As members of the Indianapolis elite, the Vajens lived in the most desirable part of town with a By 1911, when Anna sold her old home to the Indiana Democratic Club, the commercial district was rapidly expanding north ruining the residential charm of the area; seen is the adjacent wall of brick which housed the Bobbs-Merrill Company, book publishers.

All the houses on Vajen's E. Vermont St. block were demolished 1926 to make way for the mammoth Indiana World War Memorial, the city's enormous Egyptian-inspired temple to the veterans of World War I, American Legion Headquarters, and Cenotaph Square.

A news article with a diagram and list of 45 buildings that were razed for the Indiana War Memorial Plaza and the area from the 1913 Sanborn map with the light gray, shaded area showing the current location of the Indiana War Memorial and the red box outlines the site of of the former Vajen home which was sold to the Indiana Democratic Club.



m. Anna Bell Claypool 8-29-1876 in Indianapolis. b. 15 May 1858 d. Sept 12 1937 Crown Hill Cemetery, Indianapolis, Indiana Henry Wetzel dau. of Edward Fay Claypool and his wife Mary Catherine Morrow of Indianapolis. After the death of Willis C. Vajen, Anna (Claypool) Vajen married Henry Wetzel of Indianapolis, Indiana on December 29, 1902

They had:

Mary Morrow Vajen Birth 6 Jan 1878 Indianapolis, IN Death: 8 Jul 1943 - Los Angeles, California Burial: Crown Hill Cemetery Indianapolis Marion County Indianam. 16 April 1900 Indianapolis,Indiana, Robert Wickersham Stimson Birth: Feb. 18, 1877 Washington Court House Fayette County Ohio Death: Sep. 28, 1942 San Diego County California Burial: Mountain View Cemetery and Mausoleum Altadena Los Angeles CountyCalifornia son of George Woodbury Stimson & Jane Maria Wickersham; married 2nd --- Hoffman

Edward Claypool Vajen b. 24 MAY 1883 Indianapolis, Marion, IN Death 31 JUL 1954 San Diego, California m. 1 NOV 1905 Marion, Indiana Edna Alice Frank Birth 19 AUG 1883 • Indianapolis, Marion cty, IN Death 24 DEC 1977 Noblesville, Hamilton cty, IN dau. of Frederick William Frank and Ida Butsch

Claypool-Vajen Mausoleum Crown Hill Cemetery, Indianapolis, Indiana



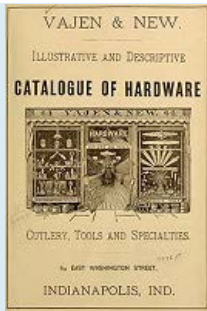
Vajen's Patene Reversible up Plumb Bob produced by Willis C. Vajen of Indianapolis, Indiana. The United States Patent US 267655 A (PDF) for this tool was issued on November 14, 1882.

Vajen & New-Catalog of Hardware, Cutlery, Tools - Indianapolis, IN, 1884

To the Trade

Desiring to extend our trade and to better serve our customers, we have issued this Illustrated and Descriptive Catalogue, which we trust will prove a valuable aid in making selections for Mail Orders, to which we give the most careful attention; making prices as low as though purchased in person.

Owing to the constant changes in lists and prices on so large a line of goods, we have omitted lists on all but standard goodsand prefer to quote net prices or discounts upon application, giving our



customers the benefit of the lowest prices at the time of purchase.

Be particular to give Catalogue page and number of articles desired.

State whether goods are to be shipped by Express or Freight.

Package charged at net cost.

With a grateful acknowledgement of the many favors our trade have so generously bestowed upon us, and which have enabled us to largely increase our business, we ask you to bear in mind that Vajen & New stand at the head to serve and to please. We hope by a careful consideration of your wants to merit and maintain a continuance of your patronage.

Very truly,
WILLIS O. VAJEN.
GEO W. NEW.
VAJEN & NEW

A successful INVENTOR

Reprinted from the Fireman's Herald September 9, 1897

We present herewith a picture of Mr. Willis C. Vajen, of Indianapolis, Ind. the successful inventor of the Vajen smoke protector. As we have mentioned before, no test of a fire appliance attracted as much attention at the Chiefs' convention in New Haven as the test of the Vajen-Bader smoke helmet. There are very few departments of prominence in this country where the helmet is not in use, and the fire departments of Dublin, Guttenberg, Sweden; Valpariso, Chili; Sapore, Japan; and Wellington, New Zealand, are using them with entire satisfaction.

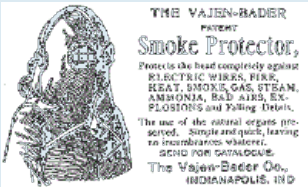
The helmet is made of a chamois leather specially prepared so that fire and water are equally without injurious effect upon it, and is heavily padded about the lower part with fleece, through which the exhaled air works out gradually, acting as a pressure stop against the entrance of outside air. The air for respiration is furnished from a compact compression tank attached to the back of the helmet, and is fed at atmospheric pressure. The temperature secured by the escape of the air from its confined to normal pressure is always at least twenty degrees lower than the temperature of the surrounding atmosphere. The eye pieces are of mica, giving clear sight, and diaphragms of the same at the ear holes transmit sound perfectly and at the same time serve for side lights when occasion presents, as the head is perfectly free to turn about inside the helmet.

Mr. Willis C. Vajen , the inventor, has taken ten years to perfect the device, and has now been making it for sale something over a year. His success in the production is properly a source of much gratification. Mr. Vajen is evidently possessed of a good deal of natural ingenuity. In explaining the discovery that it was possible to make a mica diaphragm transmit vocal sounds to the ear recently, he happened to mention the fact that in 1876 he first used mica in a, sort of crude transmitter to what has since been called a telephone between his front and back office in his hardware store at Indianapolis. That was before the date of the introduction of the diaphragm transmitter now reg ularly applied to use in the telephone, phonograph and similar instruments.

VAJEN-BADER SMOKE MASK -- Although there were many attempts to design a mask that would effectively filter out the smoke as well as provide fresh air, the vajen Bader smoke protector in 1896 was the one that attracted the most attention, and was soon across the UnitedStates and in many foreign countries as well. One of its most desirable features was the compact compression tank that produced fresh, 20 degree cooler air to the firemen.

Vajen-Bader Co. procuded fireman's respiratory equipment since it founding in 1881. The Vajen-Bader Patent Smoke Protector of the 1890's and early 1900's selaed off the wearer's head from the enviorment and supplied breathable air from a compressed air cylinder on the back of the helmet. Ref. US Patents #456687, 645281, 645286.

Here is an ad that appeared in the AG. Book or local papers at time - it was coupled with an ad for Sea Beach Place ([full version](#)).



All original and highly sought after museum-quality c. 1900-10 hand-stitched leather vajen-bader "patent smoke protector" fireman helmet with intact mica lenses was seen at a pric eof \$6,500.00

William Bader's name was on the patent dated [28 July 1891 Us. Patent #456-687](#) (PDF), a drawings for the mask are within patent record as well as other information and other US Patents for it:

- [Patents US645-281](#) (1900)(PDF) Under Willis C. vajen
- [Patent US645-408](#) (1900)(PDF) Under Willis C. vajen
- [Patent US645-286](#) (1900)(PDF) under William Bader

Patents 645281 & 645286 both bear the same date of 13 March 1900, Fireman's Mask tho other date



within as to application, attorney's and witnesses are different - the drawing bear a striking resemblance to each other.

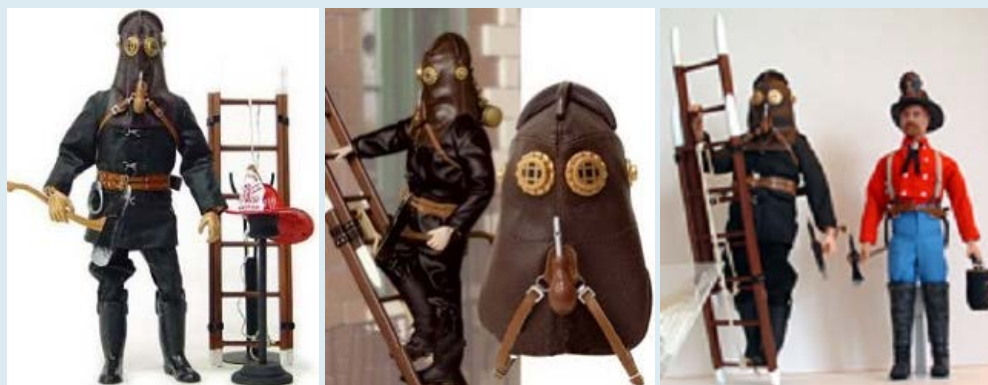
A German immigrant, Bader was a piano maker by profession and may have come up with the idea first. Testimony from a lawsuit filed in U.S. Court in 1899 has it that Vajen first saw a photograph of the device in the music store where Bader worked, and the two worked together to improve efficacy of the mask, meanwhile helped along by Dennis Swenie, Chicago's fire chief. A clip in the Los Angeles Herald suggests that "William Baders" was the real genius, Vajen only "furnishing the capital for the enterprise." The court's verdict, however, was that Vajen deserved most of the credit.

A small team of workers made Vajen-Bader smoke protectors on the second floor of the old Indianapolis Public Library at the corner of Ohio and Meridian streets. The following was found

The factory covers considerable space on the second floor of the old library building at the corner of Ohio and Pennsylvania streets, where a number of men are employed constantly in the manufacture of these goods. Mr. Willis C. Vajen is president and manager of the company. - pg. 343 Hyman's handbook of Indianapolis: an outline history and description of the ... edited by Max Robinson Hyman 1897



These are some pictures found of replicas of the fireman and apparatus as toys possibly manufactured under "Gearbox"



The Vajen-Bader Company. - Of the many useful articles that are manufactured in Indianapolis, there are none that have attracted greater attention than the product of this concern. The Vajen-Bader Patent Firemen's Smoke Protector which is manufactured by this company has received the favorable comment of the press all over the w>

orld; it is the most perfect and practical device yet invented for the use of fire-fighters. It is built upon scientific principles and is considered of greater importance than the submarine diving apparatus which has in the past created so much interest. With the use of this helmet a person is enabled to enter rooms filled with smoke or noxious gases without the slightest discomfort to the wearer.>

It furnishes complete protection against fire, heat, smoke, steam, gas, electric wires and falling debris, and affords the only means for the saving of human life when all other efforts prove unavailable. This protector has been adopted by the fire departments of over one hundred of the largest cities, both in America and abroad. It is also used in the largest brewing establishments in the country, and by large miners and gas companies. It is estimated that during the first year over \$3,000,000 worth of property was saved by the use of this new device. >

Great credit is due to Mr. Willis C. Vajen, who has brought this new protector to its present high state of perfection, and through whose energy it was brought to the notice of the fire-fighters and others who have made practical use of them. >

The helmet has been successfully tested before the many fire chiefs attending their annual conventions. First honors were taken at the meeting of the Pacific Coast Association of Fire Chiefs at Los Angeles, California, in May, 1895, and before the International Meetings of Fire Chiefs, at Augusta, Ga., in October, 1895, and at Salt Lake City, Utah, in August, 1896. The long list of testimonials received by the company would indicate that the helmet had done good service in many fire departments in saving much property both from fire and water as well as a life saving device. >

The materials used in the construction of this helmet undergo a chemical treatment. The cool pure air furnished to the occupant or wearer of the helmet comes from a compressed air reservoir having a pressure of 100 pounds, and enables him to breathe freely and comfortably for from one to two hours. The specially constructed diaphragm in the ear pieces offers the advantages of hearing which one would naturally have on the outside. The double plates of mica in the eye pieces give him the

freedom of sight, overcoming the damaging results from different temperatures in which the helmet is frequently to be used. >

The helmet is most complete in all details, with handsome case, air-pump and other attachments. The factory covers considerable space on the second floor of the old library building at the corner of Ohio and Pennsylvania streets, where a number of men are employed constantly in the manufacture of these goods. Mr. Willis C. Vajen is president and manager of the company. - pg. 343 Hyman's handbook of Indianapolis: an outline history and description of the ... edited by Max Robinson Hyman 1897

The 1896 Vajen-Bader catalog had the following description of the protector:

"The wearer of the Vajen helmet can see through eye-pieces that were guarded by cross wires.

Over his ears the plates of the helmet are constructed as to furnish him with an artificial tympanum, rendering his hearing even more distinct than natural.

There is a whistle in the front bottom part of the helmet which is a means of calling and signaling.

On top of the helmet there is a strong cushion protecting the head from falling debris.

This helmet enables the firemen to venture into thick smoke without fear of suffocation."

Recently on Ebay an 1890's model nearly complete was up for sale for \$4000.00! The last two in row 2 with tag information & logo can be clicked on for larger view



I wonder if the Culver-Union Township Fire Department was gifted with one of these by Willis Vajen and his company and if so what ever happened to it?

Indianapolis City Directory, 1889. Indianapolis, IN: R.L. Polk and Co., 1889 & 1890

Name: Willis C Vajen

Location 1: 79 E Market

City: Indianapolis

State: IN

Occupation: proprietor

Year: 1889

Business Name: Vajens Real Estate Exchange

Name: Willis C Vajen

Location 1: 79 E Market

City: Indianapolis

State: IN

Occupation: Real Estate, Loans and Insurance

Year: 1890

Business Name: Vajen's Real Estate Exchange

Name: Willis C Vajen
City: Indianapolis
State: IN
Year: 1890
Business Name: Vajen's Real Estate Exchange
Location 2: 22 E Vermont

Today is



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