



The AMA History Project Presents:
Biography of WILLIAM (BILL) L. EFFINGER
Modeler, Designer, Kit Manufacturer
Manufactured one of the earliest Radio Equipment



May 29, 1917– May 23, 1999 Started modeling around 1924
AMA #1232

Transcribed by NR (06/1999); Edited by SS (2002), updated by JS (12/2005)

Career:

- Started Berkeley Models Inc. in 1933 (closed 1960)
- Produced a large number of Scale Model Kits in all disciplines of modeling
- Was an AMA founder
- Started We Plan service in 1980

Honors:

- 1981: National Free Flight Society Hall of Fame
 - 1986: Model Aviation Hall of Fame
 - Recipient of the famous (Walt Billett) 8 Ball Trophy
 - 1996: Kits and Plans Antiquitous Hall of Fame
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Bill passed away before he had a chance to write his biography. What follows are various articles from newspapers, magazines and advertisements about Bill Effinger. The material was collected by Norm Rosenstock, Frank Anderson, and Mary-Lou Vojslavek.

The following is a reproduction of an article that appeared in the now extinct magazine American Modeler in the January issue, 1957 (p-20). Frank Anderson supplied this copy.

**BERKELEY: From Consolidated Fleetster to Cessna A72"
A Business Built on Scale**

The big fellow leaned back in his chair, grinned a bit and put his hands behind his head. The question he'd been asked was, "Of all the kits Berkeley has put out, what is your all-time favorite?"

"If I had any real publicity sense," admitted Bill Effinger, "I'd name one of our new offerings like the Combat Knight or the Curtiss Goshawk. But the truth of the matter is I just don't have any single favorite. You see a manufacturer puts so much planning and sweat into each new model that it always occupies a special niche in his heart – at least that's the way it is here with us."

Talking with William L. Effinger, Jr., president of Berkeley Models, West Hempstead, N.Y., you get the impression that although he gives the outward appearance of a businessman he will always remain a modeler. You soon sense this when you delve into the background history of the 24-year-old Berkeley concern.

For instance, Bill (or “Boikley Bill” as he is known to many an old-time Brooklyn model builder) does not consider himself in the mass merchandise business. He sees Berkeley as a concern of specialists appealing to a very special market, a market demanding “creative construction kits.”

It's sort of like the fellow, Bill thinks, who turns out one-of-a-kind women's hats. Both Bill and the hat maker get a tremendous amount of personal satisfaction in bringing out a product that is different from all others. While we might question Mr. E's abilities as a hat maker, there's no denying the terrific impact his company has had on modeling, both at home and around the world. For instance:

Berkeley Models turned out America's first gas model plane kit back in 1935, the famous Buccaneer. This was soon followed by the 9' Cavalier, then the Buccaneer Standard, the Super Buccaneer and the Custom Cavalier. These set the pace for large, scale-like gas buggies.

Berkeley was the first manufacturer to bring out a kit for Dyna-jet powered speed models, for Half-A powered helicopters, for twin engine Half-A powered Control Line scale models. The concern which got its start in a three car garage in Brooklyn in 1933 (by Bill as a means to earn money toward an engineering education) still comes up with the unusual consider solid rocket fuel, model engine lubricants, fiberglass resin sets, big size bubble canopies, electric motors, plastic scale auto kits, man-carrying sailing “sleds,” racing boat models, 32" plastic hulled cabin cruisers, radio control transmitters and receivers, COI cartridge powered gliders, even books-books on radio control and engines and Control Line models.

About the only thing Berkeley is not currently featuring are model railroad kits; that's all the more surprising because the company is located on Railroad Avenue in its Long Island community.

Two out of every three kits designed by Berkeley is still on the active sales list. Thus of the 150 different types that have rolled off the assembly lines, 100 are carried in the Berkeley sales catalog and sell today. One reason for this is that many are flying scale models and Bill couldn't drop them from his “line” if he wanted to because there's a continual demand for the Minnow, the Shoestring and the Bearcat, even though they may have been first released three, four or five years ago.

This manufacturer figures that to date he has produced and sold around 2 million kits; average retail price is well over \$1, thus taking the business out of the nickel-and-dime category. Berkeley kits generally divide into three classes: the Half-A size of 1" to the foot scale, the King size of 1 2" to the foot and the Giant size of 2" to the foot, the latter primarily for Radio Control.

One of the big reasons for Berkeley's success is that Mr. Effinger has developed a unique system of enlisting the services of top model competition flyers and designers to help out with new kits. One finds that Berkeley designs have come from such individuals as Paul Plecan (Minnow), Benny Shereshaw (Custom Cavalier), Dick Korda (Powerhouse), Keith Storey (Key), Denny Davis (Sandy Hogan), Bob Elliott (Warhawk), Jim Saftig (Zilch), Henry Struck (Super Cloud),

Joe Dale (Super Aerotrol), Don McGovern (Privateer), Dr. Walter A. Good (Royal Rudderbug), Woody Blanchard (International) and on and on.



When you stop to consider that this listing, incomplete as it is, includes three National Champions, a president of the AMA, international stunt and Free Flight winners and nationally known experimenters, it's easy to understand the impact Berkeley models have on the national scene. The red-banded kit boxes show up around the world. A Sinbad glider was flown at the South Pole and completed Berkeley models have appeared in every non-iron curtain country.

How, we wanted to know, does a new Berkeley kit get started? What process is used to pick one? We found that Berkeley's

Bill keeps a listing of possible projects with about 40 suggestions on the docket. At the rate of one new kit per month that would keep Berkeley Models busy for the next three years. But it doesn't always work that way. Ever the ambitious modeler, Bill manages to slip an extra kit into the production schedule every now and then when he senses a real need for it. And along with those regular kits you're apt to find Berkeley announcing all manner of unusual accessories.

For instance, it's no secret that Mr. Effinger has been experimenting with ducted fan engines for more than five years, that he's now thinking of a multi-stage "fan" to give out "sickle" sound! Then there's more to come in the book field, too. All the Berkeley books and booklets have been the outgrowth of thousands of letters, which usually start with "Can you tell me how..."

Says Bill, "It's easier to commission a book which will supply the answers than try to handle the never-ending inquiries on an individual basis."

Berkley's first scale model kit was the Consolidated Fleetster; it was for powering by rubber strands. One of Effinger's newest is the 54" Cessna "172" for .09 to .19 engines and designed for Radio Control. Bill wouldn't mind it at all if you stuff in a Tone Aerotrol receiver and a Super Aerotrol compound escapement. But even if you don't buy his Cessna, he asks but one thing: keep up your interest in flying scale models!

The following was taken from a full-page ad in the November 1953 advertisement in Air Trails magazine.

The name of Berkeley has been so closely allied with the development of modern model building that the new ideas from the drawing boards of Berkeley designers have paralleled the great strides of American Model Builders.

Here are some of the things that happened in Model Aviation, closely allied with Berkeley, over the past 20 years:

1933	Berkeley established
1934	Berkeley produces it first scale rubber powered model kits, the Consolidated Fleester and the Folker triplane.
1935	Berkeley becomes the first source for gas model supplies and introduces the first gas model kit, the original Buccaneer.
1936	The original nine-foot Cavalier was introduced.
1937	Great new gas models – Buccaneer Standard and Super Buccaneer
1938	The big beautiful Custom Cavalier was introduced.
1939	Henry Struck’s American Ace, Flying Cloud and Sinbad gliders were added to the Berkeley line.
1940	Buccaneer B and C Special developed and produced. First models with slotted wings and stall-proof tails.
1941	Championship Flying Scale line started with Struck’s Interstate Cadet.
1942-1944	Tactical Demonstration Solids.
1945	P-47 Thunderbolt – First Berkeley Scale Controlliner.
1946	P-51 Mustang Controlliner with flaps, retracting landing gear and other features. (It won again at the 1953 Nationals.)
1947	Super Zilch Stunt Controlliner and Korda Powerhouse designs prove to be most popular contest ships of the year. Struck’s Stinson Sentinel wins Nationals in Flying Scale.
1948	Cessna 195 sets new trend in Controlline Scale Design. Squirt is first jet-powered model to be kitted.
1949	Key is first Team Racer design kit form. Super Brigadier is designed for Pan Am Airlines (PAA) - Load and Radio Control.
1950	Hogan Free Flight designs by Denny Davis, D-E Aerotrol. Radio Control made available in low priced kit form.
1951	Bootstraps PAA-Load Quest Team Racer and beautiful scale models of the Pitt’s Special and North American T-28.
1952	SNJ (AT-6) and Savage Scale Models, Bootstraps A-RC for radio control, and license-free Super Aerotrol.
1953	P-40 Warhawk Semi-Scale Controlliners 1/2A Privateer Flying Boat, Super Cloud Wakefield among many new models introduced to make 1953 the biggest year in Berkeley’s history.

Berkeley’s Growth Unique in Modern Business

Berkeley Models Inc. is a manufacturing company founded by Bill Effinger while still in high school in 1933. Originally, it was a small home workshop in a three-car garage. Without any additional investment, it has grown to its present size. The assembly plant alone now occupies

nearly 15,000 sq. feet in a modern building in West Hempstead, Long Island.

During its 20 years of growth, the only profits drawn from the business have been for employee pension funds. All other profits have been used for the expansion of facilities and the development of new and better model products.

The average experience of designers on Berkeley's staff is over 29 years! You receive all the benefit of this experience when you select a Berkeley design.

Bill Effinger, as President of Berkeley, realized many years ago that any one designer has definite limitations in the vast scope of model airplane design and flying. Therefore, he selected those he thought best in each field, to design exclusively for Berkeley. Today the Number One Team of model designers is with Berkeley to give you the world's best model designs.

Throughout the years Berkeley has drawn on the "cream of the crop" to attain its goal of excellence. In pre-war years, there were Ben Shereshaw for his Cavalier; Alan Booton for his Gondolier floats and his famous Folkerts Racer; Larry Eisinger for his P-47 Controlliner.

In more recent years Berkeley has been helped by Paul Plecan on the Minnow and Cessna 195; Don Newberger, the Control Line Speed Flyer, on the Whirlaway; Keith Storey, Mr. Team Racing himself, and President of the Academy of Model Aeronautics, on the Key and Quest; Dick Korda, one of the all-time great names in model aviation, for his Powerhouse; Harold Bunting, a pioneer in Jet Control Line, on the Squirt; and last but not least, Roy Clough on Berkeley's sensational Cloud-Copter Helicopters.

Denny Davis, West Coast Free Flight Expert. A resident of San Diego, Denny "Hogan" Davis grew up in a model building family. His father, Frank Davis, was the first Novice National Champion. An active builder since 1936, he is a regular contest flyer and a member of the San Diego Aeroneers. He was the first model builder to achieve a perfect 30 minutes in Class C. He won first in A and D at the Internationals in 1949 and A at the 1950 Nationals.

Jim Saftig, "Mr. Stunt Flyer." Jim was the first National and International Stunt Champ. Many of the present-day Control Line stunts were originated by him. His straightforward stunt designs were chosen by Berkeley *before* he won his first Championship.

Jim's Zilch designs are produced exclusively by Berkeley. In production at present are the Mini-Zilch, Wee-Duper Zilch, Lil' Duper Zilch and the big Super-Duper Zilch.

Bob Elliot, New 1953 Stunt Champ! Bob, of Atlanta, Ga., is one of the newer members of the Berkeley design team. His specialty is making realistic Control Line Stunt designs. Since we bought Bob's Semi-Scale P-40 Warhawk design, it has won the Tangerine Internationals and both Junior and Open at the 1953 Nationals.

Berkeley has commissioned Bob Elliott to develop other Semiscale Stunt models. The first new model will be ready early in 1954.

Bill Effinger, Founder of Berkeley. Bill started Berkeley Models in 1933 as a means of working his way through engineering school. The success of the firm's designs during his school years inspired him to build the Berkeley line to its present position in the model industry. While president of Berkeley Models, he still takes active interest in the design, development and engineering of all Berkeley products.

In the early 1930s, he was a pioneer gas model builder. He designed and built his first gas job without having seen one before. His second model, the original Buccaneer, became the first commercially produced gas model kit. Since then Buccaneers have appeared in many sizes. Their pre-war contest winnings are legend. Today they are still one of the most popular designs for Radio Control and Sport Flying.

Bill's most recent efforts have been in the development of Berkeley's new seaplane designs along with Don McGovern and Henry Struck.

Don McGovern, Sport Flyer and Artist. Don has been designing and building model airplanes since 1935. In 1937, he started building gas jobs and has never stopped. A member of the Prop Spinners, his interest is mainly in sport flying, particularly seaplanes of all types.

Don is an accomplished artist and draftsman. He has served as a model editor and has written many articles on building and flying. For the past six years, he has been associated with Berkeley as advertising and art director.

In addition to the many fine plans he has drawn, he is the designer of the 1/2A Privateer, Berkeley's popular new Long Planning Hull Flying Boat, the multi-engine North American Savage and the new P-6E Curtiss Hawk.

Henry Struck. Former National Champ and All Time Scale Model Champ. Those who meet Henry on the flying field see him as a quiet, unassuming flyer. His first flight with a new model is generally uneventful. The second flight after the "Struck Touch" has been added is spectacular. "Hank" has been building models for the past 28 years. An expert tool designer and draftsman, he imparts something extra to model building with each of his new designs.

As an active contest flyer before World War II, he collected a roomful of trophies. His crowning contest achievements have been the winning of the 1941 Nationals as high point champ and also the winning of the Joy Memorial Trophy for National Flying Scale three times, using the Interstate Cadet and Stinson Sentinel, both now in kit form.

Struck is known for his Air Trails designs of the Record Hound and the New Ruler. The New Ruler was kitted by Berkeley in 1940 under the name of American Ace.

He also designed the International Free Flight Speed Record Holder. What is not generally known is that Hank, during World War II, built and flew the first Supersonic Model Airplanes.

These models measured only in fractions of inches and were shot from high-powered guns. They provided the government with valuable scientific data before the advent of supersonic wind tunnels.

Designs of Henry Struck currently in production at Berkeley include Bootstraps A-RC for Radio Control; 1/2A Bootstraps for PAA-Load; Sinbad Gliders; the new Super Cloud Wakefield Design; and the great line of Championship Flying Scale Models.

Joe Dale, "Old-Old-Timer" in Model Aviation. Joe Dale has been building model airplanes since before 1910. His contest-flying career was in the years between 1910 and 1917, when he built and flew with such model plane immortals as Cecil Peoli and Percy Pierce. In 1917, Joe's interest turned to radio as well as model airplanes and he received his "Ham" radio license that year. Since 1917, he has been issued a number of patents on radio devices. As an expert machinist, he has built dozens of gas and diesel engines of his own design.

Joe Dale is responsible for the development of new and better things in radio control at Berkeley. The new D-E Super Aerotrol Transmitter, Receiver and Escapement are the result of his efforts.

In 1986, John Worth, then the executive director of the AMA, filed an application for Bill Effinger to be inducted into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame. Below are the comments Worth wrote in the "Supporting Remarks" section of the application.

"Bill is one of those people we assume is already a Hall of Famer. It's hard to realize that he had been overlooked (taken for granted) all of these years. He was one of the first winners of the 8-Ball Trophy (The Walt Billett Loving Cup) in 1952, in recognition of his generous support via awards to model events. The enclosed sheet describes that award and shows the good company he was in.

"Berkeley was probably the most prolific producer of model kits, at least in terms of numbers of different kits produced, numbers of designs of kits and sheer volume of products advertised.

"Bill was one of the real modeling pioneers and promoter of model aviation. He continues in business today on a much smaller scale, but still very active, innovative and interested."

Bill Effinger was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1986.

The following is a clipping from the local newspaper, the Atlanta Journal Constitution on May 25, 1999. Please note that there are numerous errors in the reporting. This is a faithful reproduction of the newspaper obituary.

William L. Effinger, 81, made a career from model plane hobby

By Harry Thomas

Staff Writer

Model airplanes were more than a boyhood hobby for William L. Effinger Jr., 81, founder and President of Berkeley Models Inc. He turned his lifelong passion into a successful business.

“You could pick just about any airplane that ever flew, and he'd have a kit for it,” said Dick Read of Sandy Springs, an Air Force veteran and retired Delta Air Lines employee who said he had assembled “hundreds” of Mr. Effinger’s model kits.

“I was on a Navy base in the Pacific during World War II, and they had a craft shop. You could buy his kits there.” Mr. Read added that Mr. Effinger’s product “was the best,” with its plans for highly detailed, flight capable models with 6-foot wingspans.

Mr. Effinger founded Berkeley about 1936, selling balsa wood to fellow model enthusiasts out of a three-car garage behind his parents’ house in Brooklyn, N.Y. He closed Berkeley in the early 1960s, but continued to work in model airplanes, selling instruction kits via mail as W.E. Technical Services.

Specializing in models of World War I era planes, the company has more than 50 kits available, all of which contain instructions and blueprints, researched and hand-crafted by Mr. Effinger himself.

The memorial Mass for Mr. Effinger, a Sandy Springs resident, is at 10 a.m. today at St. Jude Catholic Church. A diabetic, he died Sunday at St. Joseph’s Hospital of Atlanta of congestive heart failure. The body was cremated. Creation Society of the South is in charge of arrangements.

Mr. Effinger went into the model business full time after graduating from Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute in 1938, when his reputation was for model building and not yet design.

“I think he won a national championship when he was young,” said Mr. Read, who added that the contests were based on how long a model could aloft. “Now everything is Radio Controlled, but then it was on gas. You had to launch a model and just hope, because you didn’t have any control over it once it was up. I understand that when he won that competition, they had to get a real plane to chase his model. It just about flew out of the state.”

About 1939 or 1940, Mr. Effinger and others in the model airplane industry founded the Academy of Model Aeronautics in Muncie, Ind. About 1977, he was inducted to its Hall of Fame.

In 1943, he volunteered for the Navy and was sent to the Pacific, where he rebuilt damaged airplanes of the full-sized variety. He served at Guadalcanal and for a year at a naval base, in Pensacola, Fla.

“They put one of these damaged planes back together so well that the admiral on the base took it for himself and used it for his personal plane,” said his wife, Jean Duggan Effinger.

Moving to the Atlanta area in 1979, Mr. Effinger continued to sell models until February.

He worked on a 6-foot drafting table amid a “tremendous” collection of books detailing aeronautical history, particular the World War I years, said his wife.

“Perhaps he liked that because it was the beginning in a way,” she added. “I think it was in World War I that planes really became important.”

Survivors other than his wife include three daughters, Claire Sheridan of Dover, N.H., Kamn Otto of Bowie, Md., and Laurie Davidson of Medford, Mass.; a son, William L. Effinger III of Atlanta; and nine grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests contributions be made to the American Diabetes Association, One Corporate Square, Suite 127, Atlanta, GA 30329.

No information was recorded as to the author of the following text or where it might have been published.

“The real ‘old timer’ remembers Bill as an early model airplane designer but the “near timer” remembers Berkeley Models. Bill and Berkeley were one and the same. Born May 29, 1917, in the Bronx, Bill spent many a weekend at the Curtiss factory in Garden City and at the old Roosevelt Field and Curtiss and Mitchell Field. He built scale and duration models and one of his favorites, that he built many of, was Ben Shereshaw's *Chick-A-Dee*, a tailless Rise-off-Ground (ROG) model.

Berkeley Models was started in 1933. A \$1.80 ad was placed in Model Airplane News magazine as a mail order supply house. How did the name Berkeley come about? Very simple – the business was located on Berkeley Place in Brooklyn. They produced their first kit in 1934 and their first gas design was the Buhl Pup followed by the 88 Buccaneer. Sal Taibi joined in 1938 prototyping and producing gas designs. Henry Struck came in next and the American Ace, New Ruler, Sinbad and Flying Cloud were kitted. Berkeley produced over 200 designs, most in the scale category, but many contest designs were created by Henry Struck, Woody Blanchard, Dick Korda, Ben Shereshaw, Bill Winter, Walt Good, Ron St. Jean and Don McGovern. Remember the names Bootstraps, Super Brigadier, Powerhouse, Sandy-Hogan, Pay-Loader, Yank, Privateer and Rudderbug?

After World War II Bill and Berkeley produced new scale kits and Control Line kits. Remember Jim Saftig's Zilch? Bill helped promote the Plymouth meets during this period. He and Henry Struck flew flying-saucer models, International Air Mail with a Sea Cat and broke the Free Flight speed record (an FAI category).

In the 1930s and 1940s, Berkeley cement was a popular item. Silkspan, the covering paper that is

still widely used today, was introduced by Berkeley in the late 1930s.

In the 1950s, Bill sold the assets of Berkeley to Duke Fox and moved to Arkansas to assist. Later he returned to New York and became a project engineer for A.C. Gilbert Company. A line of ready-to-fly plastic models were developed using engines from Bob Holland and Hi Johnson. Bill and Henry Struck joined in developing the first ready-to-fly gas powered Flex-Wing airplane model. The patent rights for the Wanner Wing (miscalled Rogallo after the NASA engineer) were purchased and 200,000 Wing-Thing kits were produced using this concept.

Bill, a graduate of Brooklyn Polytechnical Institute (mechanical engineering) and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (aeronautical engineering), is a holder of 10 patents. He retired from the Naval Reserve in 1977 after 34 years. He served in the Pacific as an Aviation Engineering Officer. He also served in the Civil Air Patrol.

While on Guadalcanal, he assisted in building radio controlled SBD aircraft for pilotless raids on Rabaul and supervised building a seven-passenger version of a Grumman TBF from wrecked aircraft – all unofficial sideline ventures. Upon returning to the U.S., he was responsible for the overhaul of 3,600 SNJs and 240 PBYS.

From 1964 until 1979 Bill worked as a product development engineer in marine accessories, toys, photo equipment, vending machines and office equipment. Bill now lives in Atlanta and is converting some of his designs to Radio Control. You'll see the ads under the title W.B. Technical Service, Inc. Guess what – Henry Struck is working with him on this project!

Bill's 50 years in model aviation has been a great contribution to our heritage.”

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