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E. E. Dickinson Company Records

Box inventory prepared by Damon Pearce

Archives & Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center
405 Babbidge Road, Unit 1205
Storrs, Connecticut 06269-1205

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Overview of the Collection

Repository:	Archives & Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center.
Creator:	E. E. Dickinson Company.
Title:	E. E. Dickinson Company Records.
Dates:	undated, 1840-1979.
Quantity:	95 linear feet.
Identification:	MSS19960001
Language:	English.
Abstract:	Founded in 1875 by Edward E. Dickinson, Sr., the company refined the development of witch hazel begun by the Reverend Thomas N. Dickinson. A family controlled company until its sale, E. E. Dickinson survived the Depression and both World Wars intact and profitable. By 1983, and no longer thriving, the family sold the company to a group of investors. Two years later it was sold again, this time to the German pharmaceutical concern, Merz Inc. Currently, the only portion of the E. E. Dickinson & Company remaining in Connecticut is the actual distillation of witch hazel.

History

The practice of steeping the twigs and leaves of the witch hazel plant originated with Connecticut's Native American population. Throughout colonial times, and well into the 1880s, white Americans adopted the practice, producing a mild astringent which was used as a family remedy for a variety of minor ills. Commercially, however, little profit was made from witch hazel due to the product's short shelf life.

The first person to harness the commercial potential of witch hazel was Dr. Alvin F. Whittemore. In the early 1860s, Dr. Whittemore opened the first drug store in Essex, CT, in which he also manufactured and sold witch hazel extract. The secret to the doctor's success was that by adding alcohol, he preserved the witch hazel, vastly increased the product's shelf life. For the remainder of the decade, witch hazel continued to be produced by an ever changing consortium of partners. By 1870, these partnerships had been consolidated under one person, the Rev. Thomas N. Dickinson.

For the next 17 years, Rev. Dickinson expanded the company's operations. Technical innovations led to the increased harvesting of the witch hazel plant, allowing for the expansion of several new mills and distilleries and it was during this period that the wholesale trade of witch hazel began. By 1875, the company had facilities in Middletown, Durham, Guilford, Higganum, as well as the headquarters in Essex.

In 1875, a fundamental shift in the company occurred. In that year, the Rev. Dickinson sold his interest in the company to his son, Edward E. Dickinson, Sr. and the company came to be known as E.E. Dickinson & Co. Under the new leadership the company flourished as production grew and many new facilities were constructed. More importantly, Edward's attention to manufacturing and distribution succeeded in creating a world wide demand for the product and by the end of his tenure, E.E. Dickinson & Company produced half of the world's supply of witch hazel. In 1929, due to a severe illness, Dickinson turned the company over to his son, E.E. Dickinson, Jr., he died the following year in a Boston Hospital.

Control of the company remained a family matter for decades. E.E. Dickinson, Jr. captained the company through the turbulent years of the Great Depression and WWII and was followed by his son, E.E. Dickinson, III, the fourth generation to lead the company. Indeed, relatives ran the company until its sale in 1983.

Its heyday long past, the family sold the E.E. Dickinson & Co. to a group of investors in 1983. Two years later, the company was sold again, this time to the German pharmaceutical concern, Merz Inc., who performed painful but necessary downsizing. In 1995, Merz announced plans to move all operations to North Carolina, where they had other production facilities. Today the only portion of the E.E. Dickinson & Company remaining in Connecticut is the actual distillation of witch hazel.

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Scope and Content

The E.E. Dickinson Company Records, comprised of correspondence and bound journals, offers a portrait of one of Connecticut's most prominent business dynasties. Particularly strong in the three decades of the 1920s-1940s, the records allow researchers insight into the day to day manufacturing, distributing and marketing practices of a mid size, family run business. The wealth of personal correspondence in the collection also makes it a valuable documentary of social history of the early 20th century.

The Archives & Special Collections received the company records from the Connecticut River Museum where the collection underwent rudimentary organization into 5 series. This organization has been retained by the Dodd Research Center staff, which added two additional series (VI and VII) to accommodate unorganized material. At the present time, the collection is organized only at the box level. Essential preservation work, such as the removal of staples and the substitution of acid free folders has been performed.

CAUTIONARY NOTE: Most of the company's official outgoing correspondence is extremely brittle. Exceptional care must be taken when handling this material to avoid permanent damage to the records.

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Arrangement

Series I: Company Correspondence (1915-1965) is comprised of correspondence to and from individuals or organizations who conducted business with the company on a day to day basis. The material in this series is arranged chronologically by year. Each year is organized alphabetically by person or organization.

Series II: Travel Files (1920-1963) contains correspondence between the company and both E.E. Dickinson, Sr. and E.E. Dickinson, Jr. on their many trips throughout the country and abroad. The first portion of the series holds E.E. Dickinson, Sr.'s correspondence, 1920-1929 while the second portion contains that of his son, 1920-1963. The material is arranged chronologically by month.

Series III: Personal Correspondence (1921-1963) consists of correspondence between E.E. Dickinson, Jr. and his family members. The largest quantity of correspondence is devoted to his children Alan Page, A Alice Ben, Edward III, and Patricia while they were away at school or traveling for pleasure. In addition, there are a few folders of correspondence to his mother (Francis Louise), his brother (Thomas), and his nephew (T. Leon Dickinson). Finally, the series concludes with legal correspondence involving the estate of Francis Louise Dickinson and several family trust funds. The series is arranged alphabetically by individual followed by the legal correspondence.

Series IV: Sales Correspondence (1920-1947) is comprised of routine correspondence between the company and its traveling sales force and includes quotes, financial statements, product orders and other general information. The bulk of the correspondence is divided between three salesmen though several other individuals are also included. This series is arranged alphabetically and chronologically by salesman.

Series V: Gould Witch Hazel 1920-1938 contains correspondence demonstrating the extremely close working relationship between the company and the Gould Witch Hazel Company out of Boston, MA. The correspondence includes shared information on customers, referrals, price quotes, marketing ideas, as well as financial documents and receipts. The series is arranged chronologically.

Series VI: Administrative and Promotional Material (undated, 1894-1980) holds a wide variety of materials ranging from legal documents and supply catalogs to photographs, publicity brochures, and bottle labels. The material is arranged alphabetically by subject with the last box containing unorganized promotional material.

Series VII: Bound Volumes (1840-1979) consists of six boxes and 194 volumes which chronicle the company's financial and marketing history. The series is divided into two sections, the first of which is comprised of 21 publicity volumes which include advertising, newspaper clippings, and testimonials. The second section contains the financial volumes; these volumes have not been organized.

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Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

There are no access restrictions on this collection.

Restrictions on Use

Permission to publish from these Papers must be obtained in writing from both the University of Connecticut Libraries and the owner(s) of the copyright.

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Related Material

Archives & Special Collections has a substantial collection of Connecticut business records. For detailed information on these collections please contact the [curator](#) or ask at the reference desk.

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Index Terms

This record series is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Subjects:

Document Types:

Correspondence.
Ledgers.
Manuscripts.
Personal Papers.

Occupations:

Pharmaceutical company.

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Administrative Information

Custodial History

The E.E. Dickinson Company Records were donated (early 1990s) to the Connecticut River Museum at Steamboat Dock in Essex, CT.

Preferred Citation

[Item description, #:#], E.E. Dickinson Company Records. Archives & Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries.

Acquisition Information

Donated by the Connecticut River Museum in February 1996.

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Detailed Description

Series I: Company Correspondence, 1915-1965

- 1 Correspondence, 1915-1922
- 2 Correspondence, 1922-1924
- 3 Correspondence, 1924-1927
- 4 Correspondence, 1928-1936
- 5 Correspondence, 1936-1940
- 6 Correspondence, 1941-1945
- 7 Correspondence, 1946-1965

Series II: Travel Files, 1920-1963

- 8 E.E. Dickinson, Sr., 1920-1927
- 9 E.E. Dickinson, Sr., 1927-1929
E.E. Dickinson, Jr., 1920-1925
- 10 E.E. Dickinson, Jr., 1925-1948
- 11 E.E. Dickinson, Jr., 1948-1963

Series III: Personal Correspondence, 1921-1963

- 12 Alan Page Dickinson, 1939-1957
Alice Ben Dickinson, 1937-1951
Edward E. Dickinson, III, 1934-1963
Patricia C. Dickinson, 1939-1945
- 13 Patricia C. Dickinson, 1946-1963
Francis Louise Dickinson, 1921-1936
Thomas N. Dickinson, 1926-1936
T. Leon Dickinson, 1921-1942
- 14 T. Leon Dickinson, 1943-1948
Dickinson Family Miscellaneous, 1923-1963
Estate of Francis L. Dickinson, 1939-1940
E.E. Dickinson, Jr. Guardian Trusts, 1938-1942

Series IV: Sales Correspondence, 1920-1947

- 15 Bane, J.E., 1925-1929
- 16 Bane, J.E., 1929-1934
- 17 Bane, J.E., 1934-1936
- 18 Bane, J.E., 1937-1939
- 19 Bane, J.E., 1939-1940
Hall, F.J., 1920-1923
- 20 Hall, F.T., 1923-1928
- 21 Hall, F.J., 1928-1940
Huff, Jack, 1941-1942
- 22 Huff, Jack, 1942-1943
Menken, H.A., 1944-1945
Viall, Harry, 1920-1922
- 23 Viall, Harry, 1922-1924

- 24 Viall, Harry, 1924-1927
- 25 Viall, Harry, 1927-1929
- Miscellaneous Salesmen, 1921-1947

Series V: Gould Witch Hazel Company, 1920-1938

- 26 Correspondence, 1920-1923
- 27 Correspondence, 1924-1935
- 28 Correspondence, 1935-1938
- 29 Correspondence, 1938
- Gould Witch Hazel Contracts, 1919-1920
- 30 Gould Witch Hazel Contracts, 1922-1937
- Tax Exemption Certificates, 1934-1935
- 31 Tax exemption certificates, 1935-1938
- Receipts, 1935-1938

Series VI: Administrative and Promotional material, undated, 1894-1980

- 32 A - O, 1894-1980
- 33 P - T, 1894-1980
- 34 Bottle labels, brochures, photographs, undated

Series VII: Bound Volumes, 1840-1979

- 21 publicity volumes, 1883-1975
- 35-40 financial volumes (unorganized), 1840-1979
- 173 financial volumes (unorganized), 1840-1979