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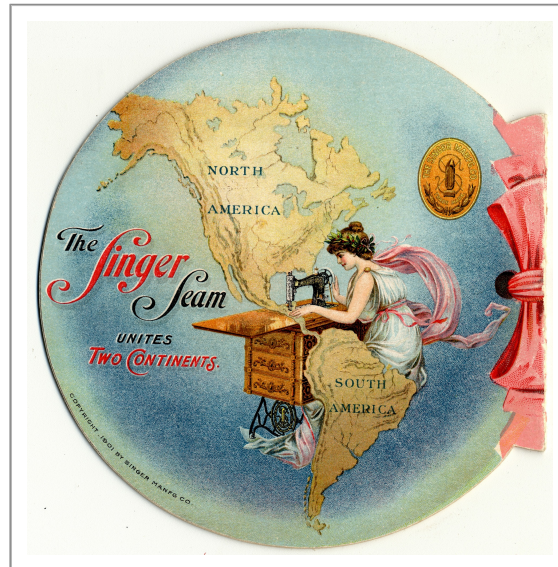
Guide to the Warshaw Collection of Business Americana

NMAH.AC.0060

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1999, Revised 2017



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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Warshaw Collection of Business Americana
Date:	circa 1708-1977
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.0060
Creator:	Warshaw, Isadore, 1900-1969
Extent:	1,150 Cubic feet (approximately. Series 1 contains approximately 1108 cubic feet consisting of approximately 2050 boxes, approximately 326 oversize boxes, and map case material. Additional material in Series 2-4 is unquantified. With also, some digital images of select collection materials.)
Language:	English .

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The Warshaw Collection of Business Americana, Accession AC0060, was purchased from Isadore Warshaw in 1967. Warshaw continued to accumulate similar material until his death, which was donated in 1971 by his widow, Augusta. For a period after acquisition, related materials from other sources (of mixed provenance) were added to the collection so there may be content produced or published after Warshaw's death in 1969. This practice has since ceased.

Related Materials

Materials in the Archives Center

Archives Center Collection of Business Americana (AC0404)

Processing Information

Much of the credit for this finding aid belongs to Mrs. Augusta Levy Warshaw, who gave generously of her time and information about her husband. She knows better than anyone the dedication and energy that went into creating this collection.

Thanks are also due each of the volunteers who have donated time to re-housing portions of the Warshaw Collection. Anne Albertson, Herbert Aldrich, David Backer, Ann Behning, Joanne Davies, Ann Kuebler, Ray Mellet, Grace Meyer, Bernard Radack, and Jack Vaughan spent many hours doing the interesting and not-so-interesting aspects of processing a collection. Jennifer Songster spent time away from school to process and prepare finding aids for the stereographs found in the collection. I wish to express my appreciation for her time and efforts. Maurita Baldock processed large portions of the oversize materials. Her patience, strong interest, sound judgment and commitment to the materials prevailed. Maurita turned a daunting task into a rewarding accomplishment. I would also like to thank Ray Mellett and Victor Salvatore for editing various drafts of this finding aid.

Several members of the Archives Center Staff have been particularly helpful in this project. I would like to thank John Fleckner, Robert S. Harding, Lorene Mayo, and Fath Davis Ruffins for their continuing support and guidance in writing this guide.

In 2016, with funding provided by the Smithsonian Institution's Collections Care and Preservation Fund (CCPF), the Archives Center at the National Museum of American History implemented the use of minimal level processing standards to increase information about and facilitate access to more of our collections.

The CCPF Collaborative Project resulted in approximately one-third of the collection (Series 1 only) receiving minimal processing which included arrangement to the folder level, based on prior processing and preservation action, with retention of the pre-existing arrangement when possible, if applicable. Otherwise, an order was imposed by the Processing Archivist. Some materials were consolidated to eliminate excess bulk but items within folders were not arranged further. The guides may or may not include a more refined list of folder contents. Nonarchival housing was replaced for long-term stability, but staples and other fasteners were not removed.

Minimal level processing and machine-readable finding aids were completed by Nicole Blechynden from July 2016 thru September 2017, and Max Howell from November 2016 thru May 2017.

Preferred Citation

Warshaw Collection of Business Americana, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

Restrictions

Sears, Roebuck & Co. catalogs restricted due to fragile condition. Researchers should consult microfilm in NMAH library for 1880-1983 editions, drawer 692.

Conditions Governing Use

Collection items available for reproduction, but the Archives Center makes no guarantees concerning copyright restrictions. Other intellectual property rights may apply. Archives Center cost-recovery and use fees may apply when requesting reproductions.

Biographical / Historical

The Warshaw Collection of Business Americana is the result of the foresight and energy of Isadore Warshaw. Warshaw believed that the history of America was closely tied to the history of American business. He observed, however, that the business community often looked to the future rather than the past and tended not to retain historical company records. As a result, a number of businesses had no coherent record of their past. Warshaw realized that these records could be of value one day.

"Sonny" Warshaw, as he was known to family and friends, was born June 12, 1900 and reared in Albany, New York, the second youngest of ten children of Rubin and Ray (Mackler) Warshaw. Although he received little formal education, he started in business as a book scout in 1915 searching for rare publications for dealers and collectors. Later he became a rare book dealer and collector himself. His hobbies included sketching and painting, and several pieces of this self-taught artist's work were exhibited in local banks.

Warshaw's interest in collecting business ephemera began in 1928 when an important event inspired him. In the process of searching for books, he often ran across various pieces of ephemera. In these posters, labels, ledgers, invoices, calendars, business cards, correspondence on letterhead stationery, and advertising cards, he could see the romantic side of big business. One day he ran across an invoice signed by John Forsythe, founder of a New York haberdashery, and sent it to the store. In response, he received a thank-you note along with an invitation to select six shirts in appreciation for the item he found. This combination of events encouraged Warshaw to begin a lifelong mission. He opened an office at 61 Columbia Street in Albany, New York, announcing to the business community that he had their history and would make it available.

In 1942, Isadore Warshaw moved from Albany to New York City where he opened an office at 752 West End Avenue. In 1944, he married Augusta Levy, a former buyer for a group of women's ready-to-wear shops in Miami, Florida. They had no children. A portion of their apartment was used as an office where Mrs. Warshaw handled all the correspondence. The Warshaws lived with the fear of a fire destroying the collection because this was their sole source of income. Insurance companies informed them that in order to insure the collection, each piece would have to be counted. As a result, the collection was never insured. A fire did occur once in the building but only a small portion of their vast holdings suffered from smoke damage.

Warshaw spent a great deal of time at the New York Public Library, museums, and historical societies, gathering ideas and information relating to his business pursuits. He never referred to his time spent researching and collecting as a hobby. As his business began to grow, he relied on as many as forty scouts across the country to hunt for material. He acquired material from companies going out of business, buildings about to be demolished, garage sales, auctions, antique shows, stamp dealers and collectors, old safes, small country merchants, and bookstores. He also advertised in catalogues for the book industry throughout the country.

Warshaw's approach at first was to purchase pieces of Americana in hope of finding a buyer. He mailed thousands of advertisements to his five hundred corporate clients. Rejected items went to a brownstone building that he referred to as his warehouse. Warshaw later discovered that there was more profit in renting materials or selling reproduction rights to the very materials he had once carted away. Companies rented objects or entire packaged displays to commemorate anniversaries, for sales conventions, annual reports, trade shows, lectures, and window displays. A few of his major clients included Johnson & Johnson, Kaiser Steel Company, the Riegel Paper Company, the American Can Company, and the Western Electric Company. Reward posters and gold-rush prints were used as props for TV westerns.

Warshaw used the collection to do various kinds of research for a number of businesses. Sometimes he investigated the history of a firm to supply it with founding dates. He found evidence of expansion and product diversification in various documents in the collection. For example, company records showed that Procter and Gamble began as a soap and candle manufacturer before it expanded to a wide variety of products.

Warshaw also had clients outside the business community. Members of the legal profession relied on his collection for various purposes. Lawyers contacted him when they wanted to convert personal property from estates to cash, and he also served as an expert witness, providing evidence in disputes involving trademarks, copyrights, and slogans.

American Heritage, *Life*, and other publications wishing to illustrate articles found graphics in the collection. Warshaw swapped items with local libraries and historical societies. Joseph N. Kane used the collection to document information for his book, *Famous First Facts*. Commenting on the many uses of his collection, Warshaw stated:

I have been fortunate. As a collector of things that now document the rapid growth of industry, I have been able to find wide use for my collection. People are beginning to realize that while the romance of war, fashion and science, for instance, is well preserved in swords, wax dolls, and fascinating models...the romance of business in the form of ledgers, sample books, posters, and tin cans tends to perish in debris. Now people come to me to illustrate histories and to get pictures of things as they were.

As Warshaw aged, he began to look for a buyer for the collection. Ralph M. Hower, at one time a professor of business at Harvard, recommended that the collection be purchased and indexed by the Baker Library at Harvard's Business School. He regarded it as a wealth of evidence on such topics specialization, diversification, and integration of business firms and the location of trade and industry.

Discussions about the Warshaw Collection among the staff of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History (then the Museum of History and Technology) began in 1961. The primary reason for the Museum's interest in purchasing the collection was to prevent the dispersal of a unique resource that could never be assembled again. In the opinions of Smithsonian staff, it provided evidence of things that could be found nowhere else.

Although negotiations for buying the collection and bringing it to the Museum began in 1966, the collection was not actually purchased and transported to the Museum until August 1967. Warshaw had moved his business several

times and at the time of the sale, it was located in three rooms on the second floor of 270 West 96th Street in New York. Packing the collection took four days and it was transported to Washington by two tractor trailers.

When the collection arrived at the Museum, it consisted primarily of advertising ephemera. There were also a number of three-dimensional objects, including shoes, clothing, jewelry, furs, ashtrays, coffee and tobacco tins, carpets, patent medicines, cosmetics, hair products, paperweights, whiskey bottles, and food packages. The collection was divided into hundreds of subject headings created by Warshaw. Some of Warshaw's personal papers revealing his business transactions were included, as well as advertisements used by Warshaw to solicit business from manufacturers and retailers. Most of the rest of Warshaw's own papers were destroyed by Mrs. Warshaw when she left New York in 1973.

Following the sale of the collection to the Museum, Warshaw found himself unable to relinquish his life's work. He continued to do research for a number of old clients, relying on such sources as the public library, historical societies, collectors, and dealers in this type of material. In the process he acquired additional material. The volume of this portion of the collection was equal to the size of a station wagon. It was offered to the Museum by Mrs. Warshaw in 1971, and Museum staff went to the New Jersey home of Mrs. Warshaw's brother to pick up the new collection in November 1971.

Curators from the Museum were encouraged to spend time with the collection after its arrival to determine its content in their subject areas. At that time the collection was stored in shirt boxes. Efforts were made to put the materials in vertical document boxes, keeping them in the subject categories created by Warshaw. As time went on, it was clear that the method used by Warshaw was not adequate for research use. Warshaw located materials by hunch rather than by system and there was little cross-referencing in the collection. Not only was it inaccessible to outside researchers, but many of the objects were fragile and required more protection than they had in their original storage containers.

When the Archives Center was established in 1982, it was intended to be a repository for documents and other archival material in the Museum, assuring proper storage and a place where researchers could come to use collections.

The Warshaw Collection was one of the greatest concerns of the Archives Center because of its heavy use. In 1983 the Archives Center and the Division of Conservation worked together to develop a plan to integrate archival principles with conservation methods and techniques, thus taking the first steps in creating a re-housing project.

The first part of the re-housing project began with a survey of the collection to analyze content and condition of the materials. Faith Zieske, a conservator, conducted the survey. She chose a standard statistical analytical method, randomly using 70 vertical document boxes as samples, to analyze the entire collection. Zieske consulted both the Library of Congress Preservation Office and the conservation staff of the Folger Shakespeare Library. A plan was then developed for implementing the survey. After examining the results of the survey, Zieske developed a phased plan for reorganizing and preserving the collection.

Conservation technician Carolyn Long and museum specialist Lorene Mayo began the pilot project in the summer of 1983, testing recommendations made in the survey. During this period Long wrote guidelines for handling the collection. Long and Mayo also developed new storage containers for housing objects of unusual shape.

As the re-housing project developed, finding aids were created for the processed portions of the collection. This was a crucial step that allowed staff and researchers to find items without actually going through the collection. Archives Center staff continue to develop means of making the collection more accessible to researchers who come to the Museum to use the collection, as well as to increase awareness of the existence of the collection in the research community outside the Museum.

List of Sources

"Cashing In On Old Office Records." *Business Week*, (December 6, 1958).

"A Glimpse at Industrial Advertising of the 80's." *Industrial Marketing*, (February 1946).

Interview by Vanessa Broussard-Simmons with Mrs. Augusta Levy Warshaw and Correspondence in Control File for Warshaw Collection.

Kahn, Joseph. "Trademark Detective: The Colorful Past of American Business is the 'Beat' of a Sleuth Who has Pioneered a New Kind of History." *The Rotarian*, (December 2, 1957) .

Kramer, A. Stanley. "What's Old on Madison?" Madison Avenue. (March 1961).

Menuez, Caroline Bird. "There's Gold in Your Attic." *Esquire*, (1946).

Scope and Contents

The Warshaw Collection consists of approximately 1,150 cubic feet of material currently contained in approximately 2,050 vertical document boxes, approximately 326 flat oversize boxes, 34 map case drawers of oversize materials, 56 volumes of photographic photo prints, 17 boxes of 4 x 5 color transparencies and black and white photonegatives, 11 boxes of stereographs, and a videodisc. It consists of a large body of business ephemera. Ephemera is used to refer to the transient everyday items which are usually printed on paper however in some cases fabric, leather and wood have been used. This material is manufactured for a specific limited use and then meant to be thrown away. The collection also contains samples of ephemera that were meant to be saved for a short period of time and discarded later such as stock certificates. This material dates from the late eighteenth century to about 1977, but the bulk of the material is late from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The largest advertising history collection in the Archives Center, the Warshaw Collection is organized into five major categories: I. Business Ephemera -- Vertical Files, II. Business Ephemera - - Oversize, III. Other Collection Divisions, IV. Isadore Warshaw Personal Papers and V. Photographic Reference Materials. Scope and content notes and a detailed description of the contents for all of these divisions are found in the following sections of the register.

Series 1: Business Ephemera, circa 1724-1977, makes up the largest portion of the collection. It is divided into 538 subject and geographic categories created by Mr. Warshaw and is contained in 2,050 vertical document boxes. Materials include vast numbers of advertising cards, scraps, stock cards, trade catalogs, price lists, menus, pamphlets, labels, lithographs, photographs, business letterheads, bills, receipts, greeting cards, post cards, calendars, printed advertisements, periodicals, newspaper clippings, broadsides, shipping documents, handbills, premiums, promotional items, announcements, business cards, packaging and point of purchase displays.

II. BUSINESS EPHEMERA - - OVERSIZE FILES, ca. 1850-1960, consists of approximately 326 flat oversize boxes and 34 map case drawers of materials. Materials include posters, newspapers, point of purchase displays, packaging, printed advertisements, periodical illustrations, lithographs, labels, shipping documents, promotional items, trade catalogs, pattern sheets, maps, art reproductions, fashion design drawings, membership certificates and price lists. The material is organized by the same subject and geographical categories as materials in the vertical document boxes.

III. OTHER COLLECTION DIVISIONS, ca. 1790-1957, represents a significant accumulation of one type of material rather than a mix of various types of ephemera. Materials generally relate to one subject. Most of the material is stored in flat oversize boxes. Materials include cinema lobby cards, fire insurance maps, photographs and scrapbooks of liquor and wine labels.

IV. ISADORE WARSHAW PERSONAL PAPERS, ca. 1917-1966, consists of three document boxes of materials relating to how Mr. Warshaw maintained the collection as a business. Most of this material is correspondence sent to him in response to his research inquiries. A smaller portion of the material is printed advertisements and circulars created by Mr. Warshaw to advertise his services and the collection. Magazine articles, letterhead stationery and photographs make up the remainder of the material.

V. PHOTOGRAPHIC REFERENCE MATERIAL, consists of photographs, slides and transparencies of items found in the collection. These materials were created for a number of purposes. Some were created in response to requests by researcher for images to be used in publications, exhibitions, and for other purposes. Others were created as a quick reference source for researchers. Several thousand photographic images from the Warshaw Collection were also transferred to an experimental videodisc by the Institution's Office of Photographic and Printing Services (OPPS). The videodisc is available for viewing on equipment in the Archives Center.

Use of the prints, slides, and videodisc reduces wear and tear on the collection, permits rapid searching through many images, and assures the researcher - - in most cases that a photographic negative of transparency already exists, and that copies can be reproduced relatively quickly and inexpensively. Searching the collection's photographic reproductions is especially appropriate for researchers who want to see general images of subjects such as "women in advertising" or an advertisement from a particular year.

The Warshaw Collection originally contained books, three-dimensional objects and food crate labels. Those books that did not directly relate to the collection were transferred to the Smithsonian Libraries. Remaining publications are stored in the Business Ephemera-Vertical Files document boxes within the appropriate subject category.

Mr. Warshaw collected three-dimensional objects to illustrate packaging, to convey information about product content, shape and size, and to document advertising in three-dimensional forms. Such items included hair product packaging, games, patent medicine containers, cosmetics, tobacco tins, food containers, and liquor bottles. There were also a number of objects, mostly made of glass, tin, and wood, including trays and stained glass signs advertising products such as patent medicine, tobacco, phonographs, refrigerators, stoves, hair products, meat, agricultural tools and implements, whiskey, bakery goods, and beer. Some of these objects were framed. All these objects have been transferred to the appropriate divisions in the Museum. Information on the locations of these items can be obtained in the Archives Center reference room.

Food crate labels were once an important advertising device. Used to develop loyalty to particular growers, these labels were appealing because of the commercial artwork. Some of the labels were mounted on wood. These labels also were transferred to a curatorial unit. The un-mounted labels are in the "foods" section of the Business Ephemera - - Vertical Files.

Research Strengths and Limitations

The strength of the Warshaw Collection lies in its size, its variety, and its extraordinarily rich visual imagery. These images illustrate how Americans perceived themselves or wished to be perceived, how they saw others, their work patterns, their recreation habits, and other aspects of American culture from the late eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. They provide an alternative source to written and printed historical materials, sometimes conveying information about values and practices not otherwise documented. These images stand as a powerful reminder that the origins of modern, visual mass communications go much farther back than the invention of television.

Most of the imagery, of course, is a vision of American life as seen through the eyes of advertising agencies and of the businesses they represented. Researchers working with the collection find it an especially rich source for examining the dynamic relationship between advertising and American culture over the centuries.

There are some problems, however, interpreting American culture through these materials. Most of the advertisements in the collection represent Anglo-American mainstream culture. African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans and members of other ethnic groups are only occasionally depicted in the advertisements. Much of this imagery is stereotypical and fails to recognize ethnic groups as consumers. Despite these limitations the ethnic imagery offers penetrating insights into American culture and its changing values and tastes. The Archives Center's Ethnic Imagery Project has identified thousands of items within the Warshaw Collection, and in other Center collections, which depict race and ethnicity. The Project also is seeking to expand the range of such imagery within the Center's collections to provide a better rounded view of how Americans see themselves and each other.

There are few indications in the collection of consumer response. The materials mostly consist of end products, what customers received. Testimonials and celebrity endorsements are among the materials but do not constitute a large portion of it, nor do they appear in every subject category. There is also little documentation on the success or failure of advertisements. Evidence about advertisers' decisions to use specific advertisements is extremely rare.

There is no complete history of any one company represented in the collection. For many of the businesses, the material consists of fragments of the advertising materials created to sell their products or services. Biographical information on founders or the early developments of the company may be included on letterhead stationery or bills and receipts but not always. Occasionally one finds company publications that discuss the history of the business.

These were usually produced for anniversaries and more often for larger companies that had existed for a long time, such as Proctor & Gamble.

Most of the businesses represented in the Collection were east of the Mississippi River. This is probably due to the collecting possibilities for Mr. Warshaw. It also may be due to the concentration of many industries in this region.

Despite its limitations, the Warshaw Collection is the most heavily used collection in the Archives Center. Researchers in the Collection often find information unavailable elsewhere. Researchers in the Collection have included academic historians, Smithsonian curatorial staff, and outside museum staff interested in the collection for exhibition purposes. Smithsonian Shops buyers and others interested in motifs for licensed products, collectors and hobbyists find the collection a rich source for such research.

Series 1: Business Ephemera

Dates: circa 1544-1988

Contents: [Series 1: Business Ephemera](#)

- 1.1: [Subject Categories](#)
- 1.2: [Geographical Categories](#)

Series 2: Other Collection Divisions

Dates: circa 1850-1957

Contents: [Series 2: Other Collection Divisions](#)

- 2.1: Business Records [Obsolete as of 2017]
- 2.2: Cinema Lobby Cards
- 2.3: Fire Insurance Maps
- 2.4: Liquor and Wine Labels and Advertisements
- 2.5: Photographs
- 2.6: Stereographs
- 2.7: Sheet Music
- 2.8: Rewards and Wanted Posters

Series 3: Isadore Warshaw Personal Papers

Dates: circa 1917-1966

Contents: [Series 3: Isadore Warshaw Personal Papers](#)

- 3.1: Correspondence
- 3.2: Secondary Writings about Warshaw and the Collection
- 3.3: Business Materials
- 3.4: Miscellaneous

Series 4: Photographic Reference Material

Dates: undated

Contents: [Series 4: Photographic Reference Material](#)

- 4.1: Photoprints
- 4.2: 35mm color slides
- 4.3: Color transparencies
- 4.4: Videodisc

Arrangement

The collection is divided into four series.

- Series 1: Business Ephemera
- Series 2: Other Collection Divisions
- Series 3: Isadore Warshaw Personal Papers
- Series 4: Photographic Reference Material

General

Several specific companies or proprietors repeatedly appear in various subseries of this collection. These records were dispersed through many subseries and prior arrangement efforts, including those done by the collector as well as post-acquisition staff, which focused on a category or business name of the vendors rather than retaining the record source original provenance and order. As of 2016, there is not a plan to cull through the collection and reconstitute such records, however if such an effort was made, it would likely result in reasonably comprehensive business records for several entities. A few have been noted here but an exhaustive survey of the collection in regards to the this trend of dispersal has not been conducted.

Jacob House (occasionally with variant spellings), which often account for some of the earliest business record within the Warshaw Business Americana Collection, particularly those documents dating in the 1700s and early 1800s.

Luddington, F.L. ... (see Hardware)

Stemmeler...(see Whiskey...)

[Note to be completed, NB 2016-10-18]

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Fires -- Insurance
Insurance, Fire -- Maps
Periodicals

Types of Materials:

Advertisements
Advertising cards
Broadside
Business ephemera
Calendars
Chromolithographs
Ephemera

Letterheads
Maps
Photomechanical prints
Posters
Sales catalogs
Sheet music
Stationery
Trade cards

Places:

Albany (N.Y.)
business ephemera -- Adirondack Mountains (N.Y.)