



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Leedy Manufacturing Co. Photograph Album

NMAH.AC.0188

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1986

Archives Center, National Museum of American History

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Leedy Manufacturing Co. Photograph Album
Date:	circa 1925
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.0188
Creator:	Leedy Manufacturing Co.
Source:	National Museum of American History (U.S.). Division of Musical Instruments
Extent:	0.15 Cubic feet (1 box)
Language:	English .
Summary:	Photograph album documenting the Leedy Manufacturing Company, a maker of percussion instruments.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Purchased in 1985 from Keith Douglas de Lellis.

Provenance

Collection transferred to the Archives Center from the Division of Musical Instruments (now Division of Cultural and Community Life), December 1985.

Processing Information

Collection processed by David Haberstick, 1986

Preferred Citation

Leedy Manufacturing Co. Photograph Album, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

Probably public domain due to expired copyrights. SI Negative Nos. 86-403 to 86-440. Fees for commercial use.

Biographical / Historical

As a child, Ulysses G. Leedy (1867-1931) bought his first drum from a Civil War drummer near his home in Fostoria, Ohio, and played for coins near the Baltimore & Ohio railroad station. He joined the 15th regimental drum corps in Ohio at age 14 and the Fostoria town band and orchestra at 18. Later, he became a member

of the Great Western Band and was featured on drums and xylophone. He traveled widely as a musician and realizing the need that he and other percussionists had for a snare drum stand, he invented the first practical folding snare drum stand in 1890. Also in 1890, Leedy purchased parts from various manufacturers and made his first drum with the assistance of his father, a cabinet maker. After taking a position with an Indianapolis theater orchestra, he concurrently manufactured and sold drums, obtaining the wooden shells from his father and assembling drums in his basement.

Eventually Leedy resigned his theater position in order to devote his full attention to his burgeoning manufacturing business. In 1895 he and Sam Cooley, a clarinetist from the same orchestra, pooled \$50.00 each and began to make Leedy drums, at first under the name of Leedy & Cooley, then the Leedy Manufacturing Company. The original factory was established in a room of the Cyclorama Building in Indianapolis. The firm prospered and a variety of instruments gradually were added to its product line. In 1902 Herman Winterhoff, a cellist, trombonist, and theater orchestra colleague, joined Leedy and Cooley to tune bells and xylophones, and Leroy Jeffries was hired as a mechanic and designer.

Leedy became sole owner in 1903. A brick factory building was erected in Indianapolis in 1903, but the rapidly expanding firm soon outgrew this facility and a three-story concrete building was erected adjacent to it in 1910. In 1920 the first building was razed and additions were made to the second building. By 1927 the expanded Leedy factory contained 78,450 square feet of space.

In 1916 Winterhoff, then a vice-president of the firm, began experimental work on vibrating tones in the steel marimba (Marimbaphone) and produced a device called the Vibratone, which had two rows of resonators moving up and down alternately. This and another model, with butterfly fans in the tops of the resonators which rocked back and forth in a semicircle, were unsuccessful due to noise. Finally in the 1920's Winterhoff and the Leedy engineers devised a practical instrument with rotating fans in the resonators which made complete, even revolutions. This Vibraphone, as it was called, soon became a familiar instrument in dance bands. The company's failure to realize the professional potential of this instrument led to the introduction of copies of the unpatented design by competitors.

The firm's line expanded to over 900 items, including sound-effect instruments for silent films. The most important products were the tympani designed by factory superintendent Cecil Strupe (patented 1923), using a foot pedal with a ratchet-and-pawl system clutch, linked to cables connected to the tensioning screws, with copper bowls formed in a hydraulic press.

C. G. Conn Co. Ltd., a leading band instrument manufacturer in Elkhart, Indiana, the "band instrument capital of the world," acquired control of Leedy in 1929, and in 1930 Leedy's operations were moved to Elkhart. The production of "Leedy" instruments was discontinued in 1958.

Sources

1. J-Leedy Mfg. Co., Inc. "Fifty Years of Drum Progress." Elkhart, Ind., 1945. Photocopy in Division of Musical Instruments. This publication contains several reproductions of images from the album as well as similar pictures not found in the album.
2. Leedy publications, including the catalog above, give 1895 as the date of the firm's inception, although 1900 is cited in the article on Leedy Manufacturing Co. by Edmund A. Bowles in: Stanley Sadie, ed. The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments. New York: Grove's Dictionaries of Music, 1984, Vol. 2, p. 512. Perhaps 1900 was the date of incorporation under the Leedy Manufacturing Co. name.
3. Leedy, op. cit., p. 2
4. Bowles, op. cit
5. Ibid. Again, Bowles disagrees with Leedy company publications, stating that the Conn purchase occurred in 1927. The Leedy catalogs presumably are more reliable. Other articles in The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments provide additional information about connections between Leedy and other firms: Bowles, "Ludwig," Vol. 2, p. 543; Bowles, "Slingerland Drum Co., Vol. 3, p.405; and Carolyn Bryant, "Conn," Vol 1, p. 473.

6. Small captioned portrait of George H. Way in Leedy Mfg. Co., Inc. Leedy. World's Finest Drummers' Instruments, Catalog T. Elkhart, Ind. [1933], p. 1. Catalog in Warshaw Collection, National Museum of American History Archives Center. Cf . group portrait in album.

Scope and Contents

This album documents the Leedy Manufacturing Co.'s production of a variety of percussion musical instruments, such as drums, tympani, xylophones, vibraphones, etc. There is a group portrait of the executive staff, assembled near the door of the plant: it is marked "Indianapolis" and "1925," along with the names "Leedy," [George H.] "Way," "Elsie Way," "Kuerst," and "Winterhoff." The work force stands outside the factory in another image, and interiors depict office scenes and manufacturing stages for several types of instruments. Machine shops and other work areas show workers and craftsmen operating belt-driven machine tools, lathes, drill presses, stamping presses, saws, etc. Storage areas for lumber and hides (for drum heads) are shown, as well as stock rooms for finished instruments and packing and shipping operations. The album contains 38 silver gelatin photoprints mounted on canvas pages, 6-3/4" x 10-3/4", several imprinted "Hoosier Photo Co." The album cover is plain and untitled.

Arrangement

One album of photographs. Photographs unarranged; they were separated from the album covers and the original image order, which did not seem significant, was not preserved.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Craftsmen -- 1920-1930
- Drums -- 1920-1930
- Manufacturing -- 1920-1930
- Marimbaphones -- 1920-1930
- Musical instruments -- 1920-1930
- Xylophones -- 1920-1930

Types of Materials:

- Albums -- 1920-1930
- Photographs -- Black-and-white photoprints -- Silver gelatin -- 1920-1930

Names:

- Leedy, Ulysses G., 1867-1931
- National Museum of American History (U.S.). Division of Musical Instruments

Places:

- Indianapolis (Ind.) -- 1920-1930

Container Listing

Box 1

Photograph Album