



Smithsonian
National Museum of American History
Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Telescoping Shopping Cart Collection, 1946-1983, 2000

NMAH.AC.0739

Jeanne Sklar

2000

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Telescoping Shopping Cart Collection
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.0739
Date:	1946-1983 2000
Extent:	1 Cubic foot (2 boxes, 1 oversized folder)
Creator:	Watson, Orla E., 1896-1983 Watson, Edith, (estate of)
Language:	English Collection is in English.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The collection was donated to the National Museum of American History in July, 2000, by the estate of Edith Watson, through Leslie S. Simmons, personal representative. The two telescoping Watson carts were donated in July 2000 by Leslie S. Simmons, personal representative, Edith Watson estate.

Separated Materials

The National Museum of American History's Division of Culture and the Arts houses original shopping carts created by Sylvan Goldman and Orla E. Watson.

Processing Information

Collection processed by Jeanne Sklar, 2000.

Preferred Citation

Telescoping Shopping Cart Collection, 1946-1983, 2000, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

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 first shopping cart in the United States was developed in the late 1930s and patented by Sylvan Goldman of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Goldman received US Patent 2,155,896 in April 1939 for a "combination basket and carriage" and in April of 1940 he received US Patent 2,196,914 for a "folding basket carriage for self-service stores." It consisted of upper and lower baskets placed atop a folding frame similar to that of a folding chair with wheels. Following use, the baskets would be removed and stacked with others and the frame folded. Prior to each use the baskets and the frame needed to be assembled.

In 1946, Orla E. Watson, of Kansas City, MO, devised a plan for a telescoping shopping cart which did not require assembly or disassembly of its parts before and after use; this cart could be fitted into another cart for compact storage, hence the cart descriptor. The hinged side of the baskets allowed the telescoping. Watson's Western Machine Company made examples of this invention, and the first ones were manufactured and put to use in Floyd Day's Super Market in 1947.

Alongside the telescoping cart, Watson developed the power lift which raised the lower basket on the two-basket telescoping cart to counter height while lifting the upper basket out of the cashier's way at the check out counter. This made moving groceries, before the invention of the automatic conveyor belt, easier for the customer and the cashier. Watson manufactured and sold the power lift in 1947, but then discontinued efforts on the invention to focus on the telescoping cart. The patent application was abandoned and never granted.

The manufacturing, distribution, and sales of Watson's telescoping carts was handled by Telescope Carts Inc., established in 1947 by Watson, his partner, Fred Taylor, and George O'Donnell. The company had difficulty with the manufacture and sale of the carts, as authorized suppliers were not making carts of the quality expected. Other manufacturers saw an opportunity, and soon telescoped carts were being made and sold by unlicensed parties despite Watson's pending patent.

Watson applied for a patent on his shopping cart invention in 1946, but Goldman contested it and filed an application for a similar patent. In 1949 Goldman relinquished his rights to the patent and granted them to Watson. In exchange, Goldman received licensing rights in addition to the three other licenses previously granted; Watson continued to receive royalties for each cart produced.

The royalties Watson received for each cart manufactured led to his 1954 claim against the Internal Revenue Service, for refund of taxes paid on the profits of his invention, as a Congressional bill changed the status of invention-derived income from ordinary income to capital gains, thereby lowering the taxes owed.

Orla E. Watson was born in 1896, and after attending Nevada Business College for one year, he worked as a stock clerk in a hardware store in Kansas City, then joined the Army until 1918, when he entered a series of jobs as machinist, layout man, forman. He tinkered with mechanical inventions on the side (such as a Model T Ford timer). In 1933, he opened his own business making air conditioners, but he took two more jobs before opening Western Machine Co., a machine shop and contract manufacturing business in 1946.

He had also applied for and was granted four patents prior to the telescoping shopping cart, for mechanical valves, pumps, and gauges, none of which were ever licensed or manufactured.

Orla E. Watson died January 17, 1983.

Scope and Contents

The Telescoping Shopping Cart Collection, 1946-1983; 2000, provides information relating to the development of the product and the legal challenges encountered by its creator, Orla E. Watson, in the patenting, licensing, and manufacturing process.

The collection is divided into three series: Series 1: Background Information, 1983;2000; Series 2: Business Records, 1946-1979; and Series 3: Legal Records, 1946-1966.

Series 1: Background Information, 1983; 2000, contains two items, a document entitled Brief History of the Telescopic Grocery Cart, authored by Leslie S. Simmons, personal representative, Edith Watson estate, 2000, and Orla E. Watson's death certificate, 1983.

Series 2: Business Records, 1946-1979, contains information on the finances and operations of Telescope Carts, Inc. and the development and marketing of the telescoping cart. Materials include royalty and income tax statements of Orla E. and Edith Watson, business correspondence, a time line of cart development, blueprints, patents, details about the patent process, and marketing and publicity materials of brochures and photographs.

Series 3: Legal Records, 1946-1966, contains material relating to the manufacture and licensing of telescope carts, and legal challenges to both the company and Orla E. Watson, including the challenges to the patent process spearheaded by Sylvan Goldman, and the evidence collected for Watson's claim for a tax refund from the Internal Revenue Service.

Arrangement

Divided into 3 series

Series 1: Background information, 1983, 2000

Series 2: Business Records, 1946-1979

Series 3; Legal Records, 1946-1966

Bibliographic references

Images from collection published in Catherine Grandclément and Franck Cochoy, "Histoires du chariot de supermarché," *Vingtième Siècle: Revue d'Histoire*, Numero 91, juillet-septembre 2006, pp. 78, 84, 88. Image filenames not located.

Three reproductions from collection in Warren Belasco and Roger Horowitz, eds., *Food Chains: From Farmyard to Shopping Cart* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), pp. 236, 243, 247.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Container industry -- Equipment and supplies -- 1940-2000
Grocery trade
Retail trade -- Equipment and supplies
Shopping carts
Supermarkets -- 1940-2000

Types of Materials:

Letters (correspondence) -- 20th century.
Patents -- 1940-1950
Photographs -- Black-and-white photoprints -- 1940-2000

Names:

Goldman, Sylvan
O'Donnell, George
Taylor, Fred
Telescope Carts, Inc.
Western Machine Company

Container Listing

Series 1: Background Information, 1983; 2000

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| Box 1, Folder 1 | A Brief History of the Telescoping Grocery Cart, 2000 - 2000
Image(s) |
| Box 1, Folder 1 | Orla E. Watson Death Certificate, 1983, 1983 - 1983 |

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Series 2: Business Records, 1946-1979**Subseries 2.1: Financial Records, 1950-1968**

Box 1, Folder 2 Royalty and Income Tax Statements of Orla E. and Edith Watson, 1948 - 1968

Box 1, Folder 3 Telescope Carts Trust, undated, 1947 - 1947, 1953 - 1965, 1950 - 1950

Subseries 2.2: Operations, 1946-1953

Box 1, Folder 4-5 Business Correspondence, 1963 - 1963, 1950 - 1950, 1946 - 1948

[Image\(s\)](#)

Box 1, Folder 6 Manufacturing, 1946 - 1946

Subseries 2.3: Development, 1946-1979

Box 1, Folder 7 Time line, 1946 - 1947

[Image\(s\)](#)

Box 1, Folder 8 Blueprints and Sketches, 1948 - 1948

[Image\(s\)](#)

Map-folder 1 Blueprint, 1947, 1947 - 1947

Box 2, Folder 1 Patents, 1949-1950; 1956-1957

[Image\(s\)](#)

Box 2, Folder 2 Patent Process and Challenges, undated; 1946-1950; 1953-1954; 1979

Subseries 2.4: Marketing and Publicity, 1947-1977

Box 2, Folder 3 Promotional Materials, undated; 1947-1948

[Image\(s\)](#)

Map-folder 1 Newspaper Advertisements, 1947

Box 2, Folder 4 Product Information Inquiries, undated; 1947-1948

Box 2, Folder 5 Background Articles, undated; 1947; 1950; 1975; 1977

[Image\(s\)](#)

Box 2, Folder 6 Photographs, undated; 1947-1948

[Image\(s\)](#)

One row of 25 grocery carts--11'6" overall---Telescope Carts Inc. [black and white photoprint], 1947

1 Item (8.25" x 10".)

Image(s): One row of 25 grocery carts--11'6" overall---Telescope Carts Inc.
[black and white photoprint].

Photographer unidentified.

Unrestricted research use on site by appointment. Photographs must be handled with cotton gloves unless protected by sleeves.

Silver gelatin on paper.

Local Numbers

02073901 (AC Scan)

In Box 2, Folder 6.

Topic: Grocers
Grocery trade
Shopping
Shopping carts

Genre/ Photographs -- 1940-1950 -- Black-and-white
Form: photoprints -- Silver gelatin

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Series 3: Legal Records, 1946-1966

Box 2, Folder 7	Contracts, Licensing, and Fee Agreements, undated; 1946-1954; 1960-1966
Box 2, Folder 8	Income Tax Refund Claim, 1947-1957
Box 2, Folder 9	Legal Briefs, undated; 1950-1953
Box 2, Folder 10	U.S. District Court Evidence, 1954 Image(s)
Map-folder 1	U.S. District Court Evidence, 1954
Box 2, Folder 11	Sworn Statements and Depositions, 1947; 1949; 1954 Image(s)

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