



Smithsonian

National Postal Museum

Bennett Brothers Blue Book Catalog Collection

Mitch Toda, Head Archivist

07/31/2024

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Collection Overview

Repository:	National Postal Museum Archives
Title:	Bennett Brothers Blue Book Catalog Collection
Date:	1928-2012, 2016-2018
Identifier:	NPMA.2024.7
Creator:	Bennett Brothers, Inc.
Extent:	8.5 Cubic feet (17 legal size document boxes)
Language:	English .
Summary:	Founded in 1906, the Bennett Brothers, Inc.'s Blue Book Catalog business got its start after the acquisition of a Diamond, Watch and Jewelry business that was established in 1884. The founding brothers were Eugene C. Bennett, Herbert H. Bennett, and J. Louis Bennett. In 1931 Gail Bennett joined the company. The catalogs featured a wide variety of merchandise including diamonds, jewelry, watches, furs, silver, electronics, cameras, clocks, appliances, luggage, housewares, clothing, sporting equipment, toys and games. The catalogs were primarily sent through the mail to small firms for resale of goods as well as to executives for company and personal use gifts. The catalogs cover a wide swath of consumer and mail order history from 1928 to 2018. Product offerings within the catalogs document shifting consumer desires and trends as well as its illustrations serve as great examples of black and white as well as early color and modern four-color printing.
Digital Content:	Image(s): Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog - Cover, 1942

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Donated by George O. Bennett, 2024.

Related Materials

For related materials please see the [Trade Literature Collection](#) of the Smithsonian Libraries and Archives. The collection contains nearly 500,000 catalogs, technical manuals, advertising brochures, price lists, company histories and related materials representing about 40,000 companies.

Processing Information

Processed by Mitch Toda, Head Archivist, July-August 2024

Preferred Citation

Bennett Brothers Blue Book Catalog Collection, NPMA.2024.7, National Postal Museum, Smithsonian Institution

Restrictions

Collection is open for research. Access to original archival materials is by appointment only. Researchers must submit request for appointment in writing. Please direct reference inquiries to the National Postal Museum Archives: NPM_Archives@si.edu.

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Biographical / Historical

Founded in 1906, the Bennett Brothers, Inc.'s Blue Book Catalog business got its start after the acquisition of a Diamond, Watch and Jewelry business that was established in 1884. The founding brothers were Eugene C. Bennett, Herbert H. Bennett, and J. Louis Bennett. In 1931 Gail Bennett joined the company. The catalogs featured a wide variety of merchandise including diamonds, jewelry, watches, furs, silver, electronics, cameras, clocks, appliances, luggage, housewares, clothing, sporting equipment, toys and games. The catalogs were primarily sent through the mail to small firms for resale of goods as well as to executives for company and personal use gifts. Before major department stores opened, people would use the catalogs to shop for engagement rings, holiday gifts and other items not readily available in rural and smaller towns. During the peak of mail order business in the United States, some of the catalogs would be hundreds of pages long and featured many black and white and color illustrations.

Historically, Bennett Brothers, Inc. had showrooms and distribution centers in Chicago, Illinois; Mahwah, New Jersey; and in New York, New York. The company was a precursor to the catalog showroom industry of the 1970s and 1980s. While Bennett Brothers, Inc. remained primarily a mail order business, it served as a model for other regional catalog houses which became chains with multiple showroom locations such as Service Merchandise and Best Products.

For more information about catalogs and the mail order industry, see the National Postal Museum's virtual exhibit, [America's Mailing Industry](#), in particular the Industry Segment section, "[Catalogs and the Mail Order Industry](#)".

Scope and Contents

This accession of Bennett Brothers, Inc.'s Blue Book Catalogs which cover a wide swath of consumer and mail order history from 1928 to 2018. Product offerings within the catalogs document shifting consumer desires and trends; featuring a wide variety of merchandise including diamonds, jewelry, watches, furs, silver, electronics, cameras, clocks, appliances, luggage, housewares, clothing, sporting equipment, toys and games. The many catalog illustrations of products provide rich visual examples of black and white, early color, and modern four-color printing. Additionally the catalogs document the cost of shipping goods within the United States for almost a century. The shift away in the United States from mail order cataloging can be seen in the decline in page count of the Blue Book catalogs, which began in earnest in 1990 and continued in each year thereafter. From a peak of 968 pages for the 1957 catalog, the last print catalog from 2018 was just 24 pages.

Arrangement

Collection is arranged chronologically.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Catalogs -- Printing
- Color printing
- Consumer goods
- Consumer goods -- Catalogs
- Consumer goods -- United States -- Catalogs
- Mail-order business
- Mail-order business -- Catalogs

Names:

- Bennett Brothers, Inc.
- Bennett, Eugene C.
- Bennett, Gail
- Bennett, Herbert H.
- Bennett, J. Louis
- Best Products Co
- Service Merchandise Company

Places:

- Chicago (Ill.)
- Mahwah (N.J.)
- New York (N.Y.)

Container Listing

Box 1, Folder 1	1: Wholesale Jewelry Catalog, Diamonds - Watches - Clocks - Pearls - Silverware - Gifts, 1928
Box 1, Folder 2	Blue Book, Wholesale Jewelry Catalog, 1929
Box 1, Folder 3	Blue Book, Wholesale Jewelry Catalog, 1930
Box 1, Folder 4	Blue Book, Wholesale Jewelry Catalog, 1931
Box 1, Folder 5	Blue Book, Wholesale Jewelry Catalog, 1932
Box 1, Folder 6	Blue Book, Jewelry Catalog, 1933
Box 2, Folder 1	Blue Book, Jewelry Catalog, 1934
Box 2, Folder 2	Blue Book, Jewelry Catalog, 1935
Box 2, Folder 3	Blue Book, Jewelry Catalog, 1936
Box 2, Folder 4	Blue Book, Jewelry and Giftware catalog, 1937
Box 2, Folder 5	Blue Book, Jewelry and Giftware catalog, 1938
Box 3, Folder 1	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1939
Box 3, Folder 2	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1940
Box 3, Folder 3	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1941
Box 3, Folder 4	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1942
Box 3, Folder 5	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1943
Box 3, Folder 6	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1944
Box 4, Folder 1	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1945
Box 4, Folder 2	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1946
Box 4, Folder 3	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1947
Box 4, Folder 4	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1948
Box 4, Folder 5	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1949

Box 4, Folder 6	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1950
Box 4, Folder 7	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1951
Box 4, Folder 8	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1952
Box 5, Folder 1	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1953
Box 5, Folder 2	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1954
Box 5, Folder 3	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1955
Box 6, Folder 1	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1956
Box 6, Folder 2	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1957
Box 7, Folder 1	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1958
Box 7, Folder 2	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1959
Box 7, Folder 3	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1960
Box 8, Folder 1	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1961
Box 8, Folder 2	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1962
Box 8, Folder 3	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1963
Box 9, Folder 1	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1964
Box 9, Folder 2	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1965
Box 9, Folder 3	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1966
Box 10, Folder 1	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1967
Box 10, Folder 2	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1968
Box 10, Folder 3	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1969
Box 11, Folder 1	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1970
Box 11, Folder 2	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1971
Box 11, Folder 3	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1972
Box 12, Folder 1	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1973

Box 12, Folder 2	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1974
Box 12, Folder 3	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1975
Box 12, Folder 4	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1976
Box 13, Folder 1	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1977
Box 13, Folder 2	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1978
Box 13, Folder 3	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1979
Box 13, Folder 4	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1980
Box 14, Folder 1	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1981
Box 14, Folder 2	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1982
Box 14, Folder 3	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1983
Box 14, Folder 4	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1984
Box 15, Folder 1	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1985
Box 15, Folder 2	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1986
Box 15, Folder 3	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1987
Box 15, Folder 4	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1988
Box 15, Folder 5	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1989
Box 16, Folder 1	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1990
Box 16, Folder 2	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1991
Box 16, Folder 3	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1992
Box 16, Folder 4	Blue Book of Quality Merchandise catalog, 1993
Box 16, Folder 5	Blue Book, A Catalog of Quality Merchandise and Fine Gifts, 1994
Box 16, Folder 6	Blue Book, A Catalog of Quality Merchandise and Fine Gifts, 1995
Box 16, Folder 7	Blue Book, A Catalog of Quality Merchandise and Fine Gifts, 1996
Box 16, Folder 8	Blue Book, A Catalog of Quality Merchandise and Fine Gifts, 1997

Box 16, Folder 9	Blue Book, A Catalog of Quality Merchandise and Fine Gifts, 1998
Box 16, Folder 10	Blue Book, A Catalog of Quality Merchandise and Fine Gifts, 1999
Box 17, Folder 1	Blue Book, A Catalog of Quality Merchandise and Fine Gifts for the Millennium, 2000
Box 17, Folder 2	Blue Book, A Catalog of Quality Merchandise and Fine Gifts, 2001
Box 17, Folder 3	Blue Book, A Catalog of Quality Merchandise and Fine Gifts, 2002
Box 17, Folder 4	Blue Book, Gift, Home and Jewelry Collection catalog, 2003
Box 17, Folder 5	Blue Book, Gift, Home and Jewelry Collection catalog, 2004
Box 17, Folder 6	Blue Book, Gift, Home and Jewelry Collection catalog, 2005
Box 17, Folder 7	Blue Book, Gift, Home and Jewelry Collection catalog, 2006
Box 17, Folder 8	Blue Book, Gift, Home and Jewelry Collection catalog, 2007
Box 17, Folder 9	Blue Book, Gift, Home and Jewelry Collection catalog, 2008
Box 17, Folder 10	Blue Book, Gift, Home and Jewelry Collection catalog, 2009
Box 17, Folder 11	Blue Book, Gift, Home and Jewelry Collection catalog, 2010
Box 17, Folder 12	Blue Book, Gift, Home and Jewelry Collection catalog, 2011
Box 17, Folder 13	Blue Book, Gift, Home and Jewelry Collection catalog, 2012
Box 17, Folder 14	Blue Book, Catalogue of Jewelry and General Merchandise, 2016
Box 17, Folder 15	Blue Book, Catalogue of Jewelry and General Merchandise, 2017
Box 17, Folder 16	Blue Book, Catalogue of Jewelry and General Merchandise, 2018