Finding aid for the Baxter collection Collection 027

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

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Summary Information

Repository Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special

Collections Department

Title Howard F. and Robert T. Baxter collection

Date [inclusive] 1882-1980

Extent 6.0 Linear feet Fourteen boxes

Language English

Abstract Howard F. Baxter (1886-1969) and Robert T. Baxter (1913-1975) were

the second and third generations of the Baxter family to head the Baxter Laundries Corporation in Grand Rapids, Mich. The collection contains business records and personal papers. The business records relate daily operations and finances and describe the laundry industry. The personal papers relate the state and local political career of Howard Baxter and the

navy career of Robert Baxter.

Robert T. Baxter

Robert T. Baxter (1913-1975) was born in Grand Rapids. A lifelong resident of Grand Rapids, he became the third generation of the Baxter family to head the company in 1956. The company went bankrupt in 1974, and in 1975 the City of Grand Rapids acquired ownership.

Robert Baxter graduated from Westminster School at Simsbury, Conn., and the University of Michigan in 1935. After graduating, he joined the family business, becoming division sales manager in 1937 and division manager of the Grand Rapids plant in 1941. In the spring of 1942 he enlisted in the Navy. He served many months on patrol duty in the North Atlantic and in the Pacific. His most exciting moments in the Navy were spent as an executive commander of the destroyer Litchfield. After the war, he returned to the family company. He became vice president of the company in 1947 and executive vice president and general manager in 1953.

Baxter was a member of the Grace Episcopal Church and the Grand Rapids Rotary Club. He was a Commodore of the Grand Rapids Yacht Club and a former member of the Peninsular, University and Kent Country Clubs.

He married Elizabeth (Breckenridge) on May 15, 1937. They had two children: Elizabeth Poage and John H. Baxter.

Howard F. Baxter

Howard F. Baxter (1886-1969) was president and general manager of Baxter Laundries Corporation, and an avid recreational sailor. In addition, he held numerous public offices ranging from city parking authority chairman to state representative and state senator.

Baxter was born in Grand Rapids, to Alfred and Kate Baxter. He was educated in city schools and earned an electrical engineering degree at the University of Michigan in 1909. At Michigan he was prominent in the engineering school affairs, and was elected to Tau Beta Pi, scholastic honorary society. In addition, he was an active member in the social fraternity Alpha Delta Phi.

Following graduation he became a district manager with the New York Telephone company for two years, in charge of Troy, Schenectady, Albany and surrounding territory. In 1912 he quit the telephone company, returning to Grand Rapids to become manager of the Grand Rapids, Muskegon, and Kalamazoo branches of Baxter Laundries Company. The company was founded in 1876 by Alfred Baxter in the basement of the haberdashery firm of Gardner & Baxter on Monroe Ave.

In 1922 Howard was elected to his first public office, state representative from Kent County 1st District. He followed his two year representative stint with a two year term as state senator from the 16th District.

By the time he retired from the senate in 1928, his laundry firm had become the largest corporation of its type in the world, owning 30 cleaning plants in 17 states. It was also during this growth period that he founded his own radio station, WBDC, which he renamed WASH when a competing station, supported by furniture interests, changed its name from WEBK to WOOD. Later the two stations merged into one with the call letters of WOOD.

Along with managing the laundry, Baxter served as city welfare adviser from 1932 to 1934 and was appointed to the Municipal Utility Board in 1934. During World War II he worked in the Defense Transportation Organization and was civilian war transportation chairman for Kent County. After the war he took on another city post, acting as chairman of the Automobile Parking Authority from 1947 to 1952. During his tenure on the authority, Baxter was an outspoken advocate of city provided downtown parking. He felt the city had a moral obligation to supply outlying businessmen with off street parking when they came downtown. Thus, it was appropriate that he supervised construction of the city's first municipal parking ramp at W. Fulton St. and S. Division Ave. In 1955, at the age of 69, Baxter eased out of public life. He stepped down as president of the laundry and accepted no other public offices.

Socially, Baxter was a Peninsular Club member and a founding member of Kent Country Club. He was a member of the Macatawa Bay, Grand Rapids and Spring Lake Yacht Clubs and had been, at one time or another, commodore of each. He continued to sail vigorously until he was 81. Therefore, it was appropriate that he received the nickname "Skipper." He also was active in the Downtown Rotary Club and a member of Grace Episcopal Church.

In 1910, Baxter married Miss Elizabeth Clapperton, graduate of Mt. Holyoke College. They had two children Elizabeth and Robert T.

Scope and Contents note

The papers and records relate to Howard F. and his son Robert T. Baxter and Baxter Laundries Company, which was founded in 1876 by Alfred Baxter, father of Howard. The operation began in the basement of Gardner and Baxter a downtown haberdasher and moved to 747 Fountain, NW in 1900. The collection consists of four series, Howard F. Baxter: Papers and Records, Robert T. Baxter: Papers and Records, Photographs, and Miscellaneous.

Howard Baxter's papers and records describe or portray his years as state senator, chairman of city welfare adviser (1932 - 1934), municipal utility board, civilian war transportation and automobile parking authority, and president of Baxter Laundries Corporation. His personal life is also documented. In addition, this series provide information on the family laundry corporation from 1928 to 1956. The series is divided into the following subseries: biographical sketch, correspondence, business records, newspaper clippings, certificates, and executive manual.

The Robert T. Baxter papers and records pertain or portray his years as president of Baxter Laundries Corporation, and his years in the Navy. It consists of economic or financial information in regards to the laundry company. Most valuable in describing the functions and operations of the company; especially

in describing the rise and fall of its business. In addition, it is valuable in describing the laundry industry. There are also records that portray his personal finances. Furthermore, it contains information in regards to his daughter's (Elizabeth Poage) admission to boarding school and college. The series is divided into subseries: Baxter Laundries Corp. - Business Records, correspondence, personal finances, magazine article, Navy, notes, pamphlets, reports, and Elizabeth Poage.

Photographs pertain to the Baxter family and it's laundry business from 1882 to 1970.

The miscellaneous materials provide valuable information in regards to the laundry industry.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department December 1986

Immediate Source of Acquisition note

Baxter Family, accession numbers 0000.029, 1986.529, 00.[0559].1, 00.[3321].1

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

Collection 289, GRPL Publishers & Publishing Collection, for an illustrated booklet prepared by Dean Hick on the firm.

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

• Baxter Laundries Company.

Geographic Name(s)

- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History
- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- Politics and government
- Michigan -- Politics and government

Personal Name(s)

- Baxter, Howard F, 1886-1969
- Baxter, Robert T, 1913-1975

Subject(s)

• Dry cleaning industry -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids

Collection Inventory

Series. I. Howard Baxter Papers and Records, 1923-1974

Scope and Contents note

Contains material in regards to Howard Frances Baxter. It is divided among the following subseries: biographical sketch, correspondence, business records, newspaper clippings, certificates, and executive manual. Biographical sketch portrays the early life of Howard Baxter. Business records contain information which pertains to the function and operating costs of the family laundry company.

The correspondences and newspaper clippings portray the years of Mr. Baxter as a state senator for the Kent area 16th District, president of Baxter Laundries Company, general chairman of the 32nd (Red Arrow) Division Association, chairman of the welfare advisory council, of the Municipal Utility Board, the war transportation committee of Kent County Defense Council, and of the automobile parking authority. There are newspaper clippings that portray the lake Michigan sail boat races, which Baxter was involved in. In addition, there are also clippings pertaining to his boats. It also contains certificates in regards to his involvement in American Society of Planning Officials, 126th Infantry, Michigan National Guard, Volunteer Veterans' Reemployment Rights Commission, United States Naval Institute, National Aeronautic Association of U.S.A., American Arbitration Association, Grand Rapids Association of Commerce, Alpha Delta Phi, and Selective Service System.

Most valuable is the certificate from President Harry Truman, which pertains to Baxter's services in the administration of the Selective Service System. Finally, there is the Executive Manual of the Baxter Laundries Corporation which contains information from the following divisions of the company: general manager; finance and accounting - cash and banking, accounts receivable, sales and payrolls, invoices, insurance, statistics, stock subscriptions; advertising and selling - public relations department, personnel service, telephone, advertising, route selling, special sales plans; purchases and supplies; laundry production; and dry cleaning production. This manual is most valuable in describing the functions and operating costs of the company from 1928 to 1942.

Box Folder

Biographical Sketch, 1932.	1	1
Correspondence		
	Box	Folder
1928-1942.	1	2
Baxter Laundries Corp., 1939-1947.	1	3
Business Records		
	Box	Folder
Articles of organization and Certificate of the Wisconsin Plant, 1927.	1	4
Balance Sheets, 1941-1951.	1	4a
	Box	Folder
Bylaws of Baxter Laundries Inc. (Wisc.), 1928.	1	5
Directors Annual Meeting Minutes (Wisc.), 1928.	1	6-7
Resolution of Dissolution (Wisc.), n.d.	1	8
Newspaper Clippings		
	Box	Folder

Baxter Laundries Corp., 1927-1948.	1	9
Boating and Sailing, 1928-1947.	1	10
Family and Social Life, 1936-1947.	1	11
Local News, 1923-1945.	1	12
State Senator Baxter, 1925-1928.	1	13-14
Laundry Yearbook, 1938.	Box 1	Volume 1 Box
Certificates		2
	Box	Volume
Executive Manual - Baxter Laundries Corp.	2	1

Series II. Robert Baxter Papers and Records, 1923-1974.

Scope and Contents note

Contains material in regards to Robert T. Baxter. It is valuable in reviewing the economic background of the Baxter Laundry Company from 1956 to 1974, in tracing Robert's years in the Navy, and his personal life background. It-provides background information on the laundry business. And, it provides documentation in regards to his daughter's (Elizabeth Poage) admission to boarding school and college. It is divided among the following subseries: Baxter Laundries Corporation - Business Records, correspondence, notes, reports, pamphlets, personal finances, Navy, and Elizabeth Poage.

The Baxter Laundries Corp. Business Records are valuable sources in describing the financial background of the company. The business records provide the company's balance sheets from 1971 to 1972, comparison sheets (1961 -1974), income and expense, earnings, laundry department production sheets, dry cleaning dept. production sheets, power plant expenses, sales expenses, indirect overhead and office and administrative expenses, annual reports from 1943 to 1970, company's retirement funds, property expenses, cash balances, assets, drive - ins expenses, sales, budget, operating statistics, divisional operations, payroll, taxes, fringe benefits, insurance, capital stock, monthly statement and canceled vouchers, check receipts, sales less payroll, calling in preferred stock (1956), corporation statistics, and stock holders information.

Correspondences are valuable in portraying his years as president in the Navy and with the Baxter Laundries Corp. In addition, there are letters that pertain to his vacation trips to the Hawaiian Islands, and in regards to the linen Supply Association of America.

Personal finances consist of records that contain information in regards to his expenditures. Accounting Records contain information on his check balances, and expenses at the University Club, Peninsular Club, Kent Country Club and Hidden Valley. Invoices and statements provide financial charges from local businesses.

Notes are most valuable in containing information in regards to the bankruptcy of the company. In addition, there is some helpful material in regards to laundry weight.

Correspondence

	Box	Folder
Aug 29, 1966 - Jan 28, 1967.	3	15
Sept 2, 1966 - Sep 18, 1967.	3	16
Feb 1, 1967 - Jan 7, 1974.	3	17
Baxter Laundries Corp., 1972-1974.	10	18

Personal Finances		
	Box	Folder
Receipts, 1973.	3	19
Check Receipts, 1958-1961.	3	20
		Box
Check Stubs, June 12, 1964.		12
	Box	Folder
Statements, 1963-1965.	3	21-22
Statements, 1963-1966.	4	23
Invoices and Statements, 1962-1966.	4	24
		Box
Statement and Paid Checks, 1960-1961.		12
	Box	Folder
Here's The Completely Remodeled United States Laundry and Cleaning Plant, 1938.	4	25
Notes		
	Box	Folder

Bankruptcy, n.d.	10	26
Telephone directories, 1930.	4	27
Laundry Weight Chart, 1934.	4	28
Pamphlets		
	Box	Folder
Industrial Electronics, n.d.	4	29
Power Laundries: The Story of a Five Hundred Million Dollar Industry, n.d.	4	30
Reports		
	Box	Folder
American Laundry & Cleaners Co. Policy, 1964.	4	31
Digest of an Essential Industry n.d.	4	32
Digest of an Essential Industry n.d. Instructions for operating, n.d.	4	32

Work Measurement Survey of Plant Employees, Muskegon, n.d.	4	36
Work Requirements for Laundry and Dry Cleaning Departments," n.d.	4	37
Baxter Laundries Corp. Business Records		
	Box	Folder
Annual Reports, 1943-1970.	5	38
Annual Report, 1929/30 (Found in Box 14), formerly MKG658.B33	5	38.5
		Box
Annual Reports, 1943-1970.		11
	Box	Folder
Assets, 1970.	5	39
Audited Financial Statements, 1966.	5	40
Balance Sheets		
	Box	Folder
Grand Rapids, 1968-1972.	Box 5	Folder 41-44
Grand Rapids, 1968-1972. Bay City, 1971-1972.		

Flint, 1971-1972.	5	47
Grand Rapids, 1971-1972.	5	48
Lansing, 1971-1972.	6	49
Muskegon, 1971-1972.	6	50
Pontiac, 1971-1972.	6	51
Western Michigan, 1971-1972.	6	52
Budget, 1962-1963.	6	53
Business Records		
	Box	Folder
Bay City, 1961-1974.	6	54
Flint, 1961-1974.	6	55
Grand Rapids, 1961-1974.	7	56
Kalamazoo, 1961-1974.	7	57
Lansing, 1961-1974.	7	58

Muskegon, 1961-1974.	7	59
Pontiac, 1961-1974.	8	60
	Box	Folder
Call In Preferred Stock, 1956.	10	61
Capital Stock, 1956.	8	62
Capital Stock Information, 1956	8	63
Cash Balances, 1962-60.	8	64
Divisional Operations, 1950-1957.	8	65
Drive - Ins, 1958.	8	66
Earnings, 1946-1954.	8	67
Fringe Benefits, 1959.	8	68
Income & Expense, 1969-70.	8	69
Insurance, 1959-63.	8	70
Monthly Statement & Canceled Vouchers, 1946.	8	71

Operating Statistics, 1962-1963.	8	72
Pay Roll, 1966-1974.	8	73-74
Property, 1963.	8	75
Retirement, 1962.	8	76
Sales, 1966-1974.	8	77-78
Sales less payroll, 1966-1974.	8	79
Statistics, 1955.	10	80
Stockholders, 1954-1956.	8	81
Taxes, 1974.	8	82
Tax payments, 1974.	10	83
Elizabeth Poage		
	Box	Folder
Correspondence, 1955-1959.	9	84-85
College Catalogs, 1958-1959.	9	86
	Box	Folder

U.S. Navy Correspondence, 1945-1966.	10	87
U.S. Navy Correspondence, 1945-1966.	9	88

Series III. Photographs, 1882-1974, n.d.

Scope and Contents note

Contains family photos include formal portrait and some casual shots of Mr. & Mrs. Baxter and children Robert and Elizabeth. Several images of boats and sailing. Several ages and time periods.

Also included some images showing Baxter Laundry staff, as well as views of the facility at Muskegon, and other Michigan facilities, as well as several out of state laundries.

A few military photos are also found.

	Box	Folder
1. Howard Baxter, relaxing on his sailboat.	13	1
2. Relaxation on the sailboat.	13	1
3. Sailboat race on Lake Michigan.	13	1
4. Sailboats on Lake Michigan.	13	1
5. Howard Baxter on his sailboat.	13	1
6. Sailing on Lake Michigan.	13	1
7. Howard Baxter and his sailing crew.	13	1

8. Boating on Lake Michigan.	13	1
9	13	1
10	13	1
11. Col. Edward C. Black	13	2
12. Howard Baxter - Public Service.	13	2
13. Mr. Clapperton (Howard Baxter's Father-in-law).	13	2
1415. Howard Baxter and Fred Dukesherer at the Muskegon Plant.	13	2
16. Robert - Elizabeth Baxter (marriage picture).	13	2
17. Howard Baxter daughter – Elizabeth.	13	2
18. Sailing on Lake Michigan.	13	2
19. Boating. Man w/o shirt, women and men in caps behind him.	13	2
20. View of water & sails	13	3
21. View of distant object on water near horizon	13	3
22. Liberty Lyman & Lucinda Sykes Lyman, Shiawasee Co.	13	3

23. Group of children. Family?	13	3
24. First Annual Picnic. Baxter Social Aid, 1938	13	3
25. Mrs. & Mrs. Howard Baxter, son Robert and daughter Elizabeth, and dog, 1928, on porch with brick steps.	13	3
26. Robert T. Baxter, toddler, and his Mother, with buildings behind.	13	3
27. Robert T. Baxter. Baby picture.	13	3
28. Show Girls.	13	3
29. Youth Jazz Band.	13	3
30. Woman in long dress, white gloves.	13	4
31. "Flapper" Dark dress with puffy sleeves and bottom on skirt	13	4
32. Group of 4 women seated and three men standing	13	4
33. Two women with parasols	13	4
34. Howard Baxter and the airplane (Frigidair).	13	4
35. U.S. Cafe, Malamoros, Mexico, Feb. 18, 1931.	13	4

36. Howard Baxter – Army.	13	4
37. Gardiner and Baxter, Fine Clothing, 55?. Gardiner & Baxter Steam Laundry Co., (1882?). Mr. Howard Baxter, 26th Division. Blickley's at left.	13	4
38. Joyant (sailboat). Photo by Morris Rosenfeld, N.Y.	13	4
39. Standard Uniform, Route Salesman, Baxter Laundries, Incorporated.	13	4
40. Alfred Baxter and administrators. Group of 9 men, interior, formal.	13	5
41. Municipal Utility Board. Courthouse? Setting, Audience in wooden chairs facing men at a long table with names in front of them. Levin, Baxter, Nielson, Evans, Speaker, Matson, Wakefield, Miller, Moe (cut off)	13	5
42. Elizabeth Clapperton. Oval portraint photo.	13	5
43. Howard Baxter at airplane. Baxter and son(?) in the plane, wife and daughter standing by airplane.	13	5
44. Mrs. Howard Baxter in fur wrap, daughter in coat, son in knee pant and cap with dog, on front steps of house.	13	5
45. Mrs. Howard Baxter. Formal portrait photo of her in evening dress	13	5

4647. Howard Baxter and the family. Interior, seated. Daughter as toddler, son as infant. 2 copies.	13	5
48. Baxter Laundries Co., Muskegon Plant.	13	5
49. Baxter Laundries Co., Muskegon Plant.	13	5
50. New Hampshire Skiing Contest.	13	6
51. Boy receiving a trophy from a man.	13	6
52. Portrait photo of a man, Randall photographer.	13	6
53. Naval Ship #336 on water near shore with palms.	13	6
54. Robert Baxter. Formal portrait photo in suit & tie.	13	6
55. Robert Baxter, 7 months (Dec. 1, 1913)	13	6
56. Frederic L. Howard? 1932	13	6
57. Donald K. Baxter? 1942.	13	6
58. Three men standing in military uniform and old man seated in front.	13	6
59. Family Photo (Alfred Baxter Childhood?) Late 19th century?	13	6

60. Robert and his sister, Elizabeth, as children.	13	7
61. Howard Baxter and his family; fireplace photo.	13	7
62. Robert Baxter, Naval Officer. Formal portrait photo.	13	7
63. Sailboat Yacht. Same image as 38 above?	13	7
64. Elizabeth Baxter wedding picture.	13	7
65. Howard Baxter, fishing. Standing in the White River, May 1, 1938.	13	7
66. Elizabeth Baxter, childhood photo. Toddler.	13	7
67. Yacht.	13	7
		Box
68. "Very efficient office force" Baxter Laundries Incorporated, Oct. 1928. Dressed for halloween. Women and a child.		14
69. Robert Baxter, Naval Officer. Portrait photo.		14
	Box	Folder
70. Baxter Laundries Corp., May 1909. Shows building with a row of horse drawn wagons with the Baxter name along the front.	14	
Baxter Laundry Building images (Muskegon, Mi.)	13	8

Camera Shop photo 271518. Building with three stories and dentils at the cornice, stack in rear. (Muskegon or GR?)	13	8
Grand Rapids Building (?) and staff	13	11
2nd Annual Banquet of the Salesment of the Baxter Laundry Co., May 3, 1916.	13	11
Baxter Laundry, 1939. Beckquist photographer. Exterior group (Picnic?)	13	11
3rd Annual Picnic. Baxter Social Aid, Aug. 15, 1940. Beckquist's. Exterior.	13	11
		Box
Photo no. 207. Paul L. Richards, Montgomery, Ala. "74. Army Air Force, 26t Military officer, ca 1918. Rolled panoramic	h Division.	14
	h Division.	14
Military officer, ca 1918. Rolled panoramic	h Division. Box	14 Folder
Military officer, ca 1918. Rolled panoramic		
Military officer, ca 1918. Rolled panoramic Michigan Facilities	Box	Folder
Military officer, ca 1918. Rolled panoramic Michigan Facilities Trojan. Flint, Mi. (3; three different photographers stamps)	Box 13	Folder 9

Federal Laundry, Detroit (1)	13	9
Bay City	13	9
Baxter Launderers and Cleaners, Kalamazoo (1)	13	9
Out of State facilities		
	Box	Folder
Fame Laundry Co., Harrisburg	13	10
Fame Laundry Co., Covington, Kentucky (Cincinnati Division)	13	10
Keese Laundry, Chicago Division	13	10
South Shore Wet Wash, Chicago Division	13	10
Baxter Cleaners, Chicago Division	13	10
Quality Laundry Service, Milwaukee, Wis.	13	10
New Way Service Co., Milwaukee, Wis.	13	10
Beaver Falls. Partial View of Engine Room	13	10
Toledo Laundry Co. Exterior	13	10

Toledo. Tanks, machines	13	10
Lawrence's, Minneapolis, Minn. (2)	13	10
Schriver Laundry Co., 3132. Unknown location.	13	10

Series IV. Miscellaneous, 1918, 1929, n.d.

Scope and Contents note

The miscellaneous material includes cards, papers, name plaque, and the Laundry Year Book (1938). This book is basically a reference and data source. Most valuable in providing data about the laundry industry. Furthermore, there is a newspaper (Grand Rapids Press) cover page regarding the death of United States Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg.

Original sketches by Fred Baxter are found, most of which were used in a Chistmas booklet.

	Box
14 pen & ink drawings by Fred Baxter. (15 sheets)	14
Annual Report, 1929.	13
Economy soapaerator / Home Research Bureau, Inc., c. 1904. Blueprint.	FF.IX.A
Scope and Contents note Found 8/29/2000 in FF's in folder labeled only "Baxter." Baxter's name is not on the drawing. 00.[559].1	