

Finding aid for the Robert W. Irwin Company records Collection 048

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

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

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Summary Information

Repository	Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department
Title	Robert W. Irwin Company records
Date [inclusive]	1920-1953
Extent	1.3 Linear feet Two boxes
Language	English
Abstract	<p>The Robert W. Irwin Company was a furniture company in Grand Rapids (Mich.) from 1919-1953. The Robert W. Irwin Company resulted from the merger of the Phoenix Furniture Company, founded in 1870, and the Royal Furniture Company, organized in 1892. Records include journal and cash ledgers and newspaper clippings.</p>

Biographical/Historical note

The Robert W. Irwin Company resulted from the merger of the Phoenix Furniture Company, founded in 1870, and the Royal Furniture Company, organized in 1892. Robert W. Irwin came to Grand Rapids in 1889 from Harbor Beach to join the Grand Rapids School Furniture Co. (later American Seating Company). Within two years Irwin was named factory superintendent and purchasing agent. Irwin resigned in 1900, and with A.W. Hompe and Ralph P. Tietsort, purchased the Royal Furniture Company. In 1907 the same three partners with Eber W. Irwin, Robert's brother, bought the New England Furniture Co. Robert Irwin then organized the Steele Furniture Co., and later in association with another brother, Earle S. Irwin, and A.W. Hompe acquired the business of the Macey Co. In 1911 Robert W. Irwin, Charles H. Bender, James W. Wylie, Dudley E. Waters and Ralph Tietsort purchased the Phoenix Furniture Company.

In 1920, Robert W. Irwin acquired controlling interest in both the Phoenix and Royal furniture companies, and under his name consolidated them into one company. The Royal line was continued. But, under the designation of "custom", as the Royal Furniture since 1915 had consisted of custom made reproductions, sold through galleries as works of the furniture art. During the 1920s the company flourished, due in no small part to the introduction of the Pendelton" line of furniture. The Pendelton Line was based on the custom line, but made to be less expensive for the working classes.

In 1931 the company bought and merged with Cooper-Williams, Inc. of Boston, another quality furniture company. The Company continued to hold its place through the 1930s. In 1951, Irwin, as owner of all stocks except small blocks held by the Earle Irwin and Eber Irwin estates, and a few individuals, sold the company to a group of Cincinnati businessmen headed by Abe Byer, president of American Compressed Steel Co. In 1953, the Company discontinued operations, citing a suit against Sterling, Inc. charging unfair practices, which cost the Robert W. Irwin Co. \$400,000 in profits, and led to the failure of Irwin to pay \$41,428 in debts owed. In May, 1953, the plant & equipment of the company were auctioned.

Scope and Contents note

Journals and cash ledgers document the operation of the Company during a period of success. Through the three series, Journal Ledgers, Cash ledgers and Miscellaneous, a reflection of the Grand Rapids furniture industry is presented. The clippings file is helpful in understanding the company's demise.

Records include ledgers associated with the daily business and the accounting of this furniture company, plus a Jan. 1, 1922 financial statement. Also included are one original oversized clipping, and a folder full of photocopies of newspaper clippings. Primarily Grand Rapids Press and Grand Rapids Herald clippings, these document historical changes in the company from 1920 to 1953. The company was initially formed from the consolidation of the Phoenix Furniture Co. (1870) and the Royal Furniture Co. (1892) under the

Robert W. Irwin name. Based upon the date of the records found here, this information documents the Company's pre-World War II business record. The company discontinued operations in 1953.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department August 1987

Immediate Source of Acquisition note

Stow-Davis, Inc., accession number 1987.040

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- Robert W Irwin Company.

Geographic Name(s)

- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History

Personal Name(s)

- Irwin, Robert W

Subject(s)

- Furniture industry and trade -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids -- History

Series I. Journals Ledgers

Collection Inventory**Series I. Journals Ledgers****Scope and Contents note**

Consists of journal ledgers of the company, 1926-1937, reflecting daily operations, supply costs, labor expenses, etc. Arranged Chronologically.

	Box	Volume
1926-31	1	1
1937-41	1	2
1931-37	2	3

Series II. Cash Ledgers**Scope and Contents note**

Consists of cash ledgers of the company, July 1929 to March 1936. Arranged chronologically.

	Box	Volume
1929-30	2	4
1931-36	2	5

Series III. Ephemera

Series III. Ephemera**Scope and Contents note**

Consists of one legal sized folder of photocopies of newspaper clippings, 1920-1953. Also contains one letter sized folder with an original financial statement (1 folded sheet), 1922, issued upon consolidation and formation of the Company. Arranged chronologically.

	Box	Folder
Robert W. Irwin Co. Financial statement / A.E.Kusterer and Co., Jan. 1, 1922.	1	1
Clippings, 1920-1953		
	Box	Folder
GR Press, Jan. 1, 1924. Story of the Robert W. Irwin Company replete in industrial romance – operates two of the largest factories here. Phoenix & Royal.	1	2
GR Press. Dec. 24, 1927. Royal line among best in country.	1	2
GR Herald, Dec. 26, 1927. (4 stapled sheets make oversized copy). Robert W. Irwin Co. brings together two of the most famous lines in American. Royal and Phoenix. Patti Nicolini Craigyna?	1	2
GR Herald, July 10, 1929. Robert W. Irwin Co. opens show room in Chicago today.	1	2

Clippings, 1920-1953

Clippings, 1920-1953

GR Herald. June 8, 1931. Robert W. Irwin Tells what makes Furniture Market.	1	2
GR Press. July 8, 1931. Irwin Company in new merger.	1	2
GR Herald. July(?) 9, 1931. Boston firm is merged with Irwin Company. Cooper Williams, Inc.	1	2
GR Herald. Jan. 10, 1933. Irwin patent suit of great interest to whole industry.	1	2
GR Herald. ? 23, 1938. Irwin Company launches a new line of furniture. Pendleton.	1	2
GR Herald. Aug. 25, 1946. Pendleton line ready.	1	2
GR Herald. May 4, 1947. America views Pendleton postwar shop and says "ok".	1	2
Michigan Tradesman. Sept. 26, 1951. Robert Irwin Company sold to unnamed group.	1	2
GR Herald. Nov. 23, 1951? #300,000 resale price of Irwin Co.	1	2
GR Press. Nov. 7, 1951. R.w. Irwin group buys back, rents plant to new owners.	1	2
GR Press. Nov. 22, 1951. Irwin firm sold; buyers not named.	1	2

Clippings, 1920-1953

GR Press. Jan. 22, 1953. Irwin seeks \$400,000.	1	2
GR Herald, Jan. 22, 1953. Asks \$400,000. in court plea.	1	2
GR Herald. May 9?, 1953. \$200,000 realized on Irwin.	1	2
GR Press. May 9, 1953? Irwin Co. Auction brings \$200,000.	1	2
Furniture Manufacturer and Artisan Magazine. [Typed transcription of article] v. 19, Feb. 1920, pg. 116. "The Phoenix Furniture Company of Grand Rapids has changed its name to the Robert W. Irwin Company ..."	1	2
Daily Artisan-Record, June 9, 1931.(copied pieces) "An Announcement"	1	2
		Box
Daily Artisan-Record, June 9, 1931. Original		FF.IX.E