

**Finding aid for the Harry  
Wesslund images and graphics  
Collection 375**

**Finding aid prepared by Julie Tabberer**

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This finding aid was produced using the Archivists' Toolkit

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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

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<b>Repository</b>	Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department
<b>Creator</b>	Wesslund, Harry, 1912-1985
<b>Title</b>	Harry Wesslund images and graphics
<b>Date</b>	1940s-1960s
<b>Extent</b>	2.4 Linear feet
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>Harry Wesslund (July 22, 1912 - September 23, 1985) was an artist and designer in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He worked in the display departments of Wurzburgs and Herpolsheimers before starting his own company, Custom Displays, Inc. Wesslund designed many displays and graphics for a number of local and regional companies. He is credited as being the “father” of the Wood Radio and TV mascot “Willy Wood.” This collection includes photographs of displays created by Wesslund, including window displays, interior store displays, holiday displays and tradeshow exhibitions. Also included are promotional materials from Wood TV and Wurzburgs. The promotional materials include some of Wesslund's original drawings and sketches, particularly of Willy Wood.</p>

## Biographical/Historical note

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Harry Wesslund was born on July 22, 1912 in Stockett, Montana. His family (including parents John and Hulda and siblings Victor and Pearl) moved to Grand Rapids sometime between 1915 and 1918. Harry attended Union High School, graduating in 1929. According to his senior yearbook, he was the Art Editor of "Unionite," the Chairman of the Decoration Committee; President of the Science Club; Art Staff for Aurora (the yearbook) and belonged to Hi-Y and the Boy's Glee Club. The yearbook also noted that he attended Sibley School. The May 1928 Unionite lists results of the Junior class elections, with Harry Wesslund voted the "best all around boy."

Harry attended Grand Rapids Junior College after high school, where he reportedly studied art. According to the city directories, Harry worked as a sign writer for Wurzburg Dry Goods (1930 and 1935) and as a card writer for Sears Roebuck (1934). He also worked for Herpolsheimers, identified as an "artist and designer extraordinaire" in a newsletter. Harry's older brother, Victor, also worked as a sign writer for Wurzburg's (1929, 1932).

On April 3, 1943 Wesslund enlisted in the United States Army and served as a private in World War II. A May 1954 Peninsular Club Magazine article states that Wesslund served in the photographic intelligence service in Germany and France, specializing in analyzing aerial photographs. The article also indicates that upon returning from the war in 1946, Wesslund started his own design company, Custom Displays, Inc. However, the first directory listings for the company (1946 through 1955) identify the officers as Cornelius VanWesten, Jr. (Harry's brother-in-law) and Victor Wesslund. During this time, Harry Wesslund is listed as an artist.

From 1960 to 1970, Harry and his wife Wanda are listed as the officers of the company, with Harry generally identified as the President and Treasurer and Wanda as the Vice President and Secretary. Wanda's obituary indicates that she and Harry co-owned and operated the business. By 1975, their son John is listed as the Vice President and by 1980 as the President. After Harry's death in 1985, the company is listed with John and Wanda as President and Vice President for a few years, and then is no longer found in the directories.

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## Scope and Contents note

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This collection includes photographs of displays created by Wesslund, including window displays, interior store displays, holiday displays and tradeshow exhibitions. Also included are promotional materials from Wood TV, Herpolsheimers and Wurzburgs. The promotional materials include some of Wesslund's original drawings and sketches, particularly of Willy Wood.

## **Administrative Information**

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### **Publication Information**

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department January 2011

### **Immediate Source of Acquisition note**

Nina Marley, Barbara Neumann, accession number 2010.034.

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## **Controlled Access Headings**

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### **Genre(s)**

- ephemera
- photographs

### **Geographic Name(s)**

- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History

### **Subject(s)**

- Graphic arts -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids

## Series I. Photographs

## Collection Inventory

## Series I. Photographs

## Scope and Contents note

This series consists mostly of photographs of work done by Harry Wesslund, including department store displays and exhibition booths at trade shows. The retail store displays include interior and exterior displays, as well as numerous window displays. The exhibition booth photographs cover many local companies and appear to be from trade shows across the country. The photographs are mostly undated, but appear to be from the 1940s and 1950s, with one photograph identified as 1965.

The companies that Wesslund worked with include Wurzburg's, Herpolsheimer's, WOOD Radio and TV, American Seating Co., Michigan Consolidated Gas Company and Atwood Brass Works. Graphic materials from Wurzburg's, Herpolsheimer's and WOOD may be found in Series II.

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
-Window Displays, "Christmas in the Country," Wurzburg's, n.d.	1	1
-Christmas Decorations, Wurzburg's, 1940s, 1950s and no date	1	2
-Merchandise Displays, Wurzburg's, including Easter, Christmas, War Stamps, 75th Anniversary, Disney, 1955 and no date	1	2
-Exhibition Booths – Bulman Corporation, Oliver, Plywood Detroit and Plywood Grand Rapids, Federal, Michigan Wheel Company, Kal-Equip Company and American Seating	1	3
-Business Enterprises – Forbes Stamp Co., exterior, n.d.	1	3

## Series I. Photographs

-Exhibition Booths – Atwood Brass Works, American Seating Company, Michigan Consolidated Gas Company, Vulcanizers Material Co., Ginn and Company	1	4
-Window Displays – Standard Oil, Kroger, WOOD Radio	1	4
-Exhibition Booths – Bulman, American Seating, i-XL Cabinets, Michigan Wheel Co., Child Accident Prevention Week, Michigan Consolidated Gas Company, Vulcanizers Material Co., Kal-Equip	1	5
-Exhibition Booths – Muskegon Tool Industries, Inc., Michigan Wheel Company, American Seating Co., Michigan Consolidated Gas Company, Bulman, Goudzwaard Heating Co.	1	6
Paintings of Michigan scenes (at a tradeshow?)	1	7
-Exhibition Booths – Michigan Wheel Co., Federal Propellers, Atwood Brass Works, Goebel and Brown, Leigh Products, Inc.	1	7
-Merchandise Displays, Window Displays, Exhibition Booths and Christmas Decorations – Wurzburg's, Herpolsheimers and Wieboldt's	1	8
-Bascom Hall	1	8
-Harry Wesslund painting speedboat in Herpolsheimer's window for the Sportsmen's Show, 1954 (used in Peninsular Club Magazine, May 1954)	1	8
WOOD-TV – Willy Wood, Building, Camera and Crew?	1	9

**Series II. Graphic Design Drawings**

Wurzburg's – Exterior of downtown building (101 Monroe), exterior of Eastbrook Mall building, photographic prints of illustrations of downtown building	1	10
8x10 Negatives – Airport, Bissell building, aerial of downtown Grand Rapids, architectural drawing of Kent County building	1	11
Harry Wesslund with painting in Herpolsheimer window for Sportsmen's Show, 1954 (also see Box 1, Folder 8)	1	12

**Series II. Graphic Design Drawings****Scope and Contents note**

This series includes commercial artwork completed by Wesslund for Wurzburg's, Herpolsheimer's and WOOD Radio and TV. The material is useful for researching these companies as well as graphic design in general.

Numerous items related to Willy Wood, the mascot of WOOD Radio and TV, are included. The mascot first made an appearance in 1951, when WLAV TV was changed to WOOD TV.

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
WOOD Radio/TV – Christmas Cards, featuring Willy Wood	2	1
Willy Wood – Original Artwork	2	2
WOOD Radio/TV – Promotional Material	2	3
WOOD Radio/TV – Promotional Material, oversized	3	3



**Series III. Personal and Business Items**

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Wurzberg's – Promotional Material	2	4
Wurzberg's – Promotional Material, Oversized	3	2

**Series III. Personal and Business Items**

**Scope and Contents note**

Limited personal information about Wesslund is included in the collection. This series contains newspaper clippings about Wesslund and also some of the companies he worked with, office papers and a framed ink drawing.

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Newspaper clippings	3	1
		<b>Box</b>
Framed ink sketch		3
	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Office papers, work in progress	2	5