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Finding aid for Keeler Brass Company papers Collection 460

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

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

111 Library Street NE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

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URL: <http://www.grpl.org>

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Summary Information

Repository:	Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department
Creator:	Keeler Brass Company
Source - dnr:	Bogard, Susan
Title:	Keeler Brass Company papers
ID:	Collection 460
Date [inclusive]:	1955-1986
Physical Description:	.1 Linear Feet One Box
Physical Description:	Fair
Language of the Material:	English
Abstract:	The Keeler Brass Company (1893-1979) collection contains photographs of the Keeler Brass Company manufacturing plants and M.S. Keeler and George Atkinson in 1975, three short typed histories which appear to have been written for speeches or presentations on the history of the company from different eras, and news clippings from the 1980s.

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Historical Note

The Keeler Brass Company was established in Grand Rapids, Mich. by Miner S. Keeler when he purchased the defunct Middleville Brass Company in 1893. The company started manufacturing decorative brass fittings for Grand Rapids furniture manufacturers but by the early 1900s they added brass stampings and metal screws to the product line and began distributing nationally. During WWI, Keeler manufactured rifle and revolver cartridges as well as belt fasteners for the army. In the 1920s Keeler Brass Company became famous for inventing robe rails, a bar that stretched along the back of the front seat of an automobile for storing folded robes and blankets for passengers to use to stay warm. It was also during this time that Keeler Brass Company began expanding and acquiring other companies, manufacturing casket hardware and institutional furniture hardware. In the 1930s Keeler developed the stainless steel sheet metal handle for Studebaker and Ford automobiles, keeping the company afloat during the depression. During WWII, Keeler produced canteens and other metal items for the United States armed forces. The post war years was a story of success after success for the Keeler Brass Company as they expanded areas of manufacturing and invested heavily in new technology

including zinc dye casting and plastic molding. By the 1980s, Keeler became the largest manufacturer in North America of furniture hardware. In 2009 JVA Associates purchased the company, making Keeler a privately held company for the first time since 1979. The Keeler family has shaped Grand Rapids in more ways than just industrial manufacturing. Mike and Mary Ann Keeler, the owners of Keeler Brass Company from 1962-1979, were strong supporters of modern arts and philanthropy. In 1967 they donated considerable funds to the Grand Rapids Public Library addition project. In 1969, they contributed to the acquisition of the famous La Grande Vitesse and created a 1/23 size model of the iconic sculpture which was donated it to the city so that the blind could fully enjoy the sculpture. They also donated \$7.5 million to the music and performing arts center that is now called the DeVos Performance Hall. In 1995, they began the Jo Withers Endowment for Kendall College of Art and Design. In 2000, Mike and Mary Ann Keeler donated another \$1.2 million dollars to the Grand Rapids Public Library during renovations allowing for a better marriage between the new and old buildings and moving mechanical equipment to the roof freeing up space for materials.

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Content Description

Photographs, press clippings, and abbreviated written histories of the company.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Business records -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids
- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History
- Manufacturing industries -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids
- Bogard, Susan

Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Instances	
Histories, 1955-1981 <u>Date [inclusive]:</u> 1955-1981	Box 1	Folder 1
Photographs, 1975 <u>Date [inclusive]:</u> 1975	Box 1	Folder 2
Press Clippings, 1981-1986 <u>Date [inclusive]:</u> 1981-1986	Box 1	Folder 3