

NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTION RECORD

RG4234.AM: L.M. Downs Company (Lincoln, Neb.)

Records: 1922-1960

Lincoln, Lancaster County, Neb.: Wholesale greeting card and paper product manufacturer and distributor

Size: 4.0 cu.ft.; 4 boxes

BACKGROUND NOTE

Leavitt M. Downs, 1859-1930, a Lincoln resident and traveling salesman, founded the L.M. Downs Company in 1906. Located at 938 P Street, the company manufactured and distributed greeting cards for a Midwest clientele. In the 1920's, the business was taken over by L.M. Downs' son, C. Mervyn Downs, 1900-1980, who ran it as president and manager until his death. His son, John M. Downs, then took over until the company's demise in the mid 1980's.

Over the years, the L.M. Downs Company evolved to reflect a changing market. In 1948, it joined 18 other firms nationwide to form Charm Craft Publishers, Inc. As a greeting card conglomerate, Charm Craft produced cards in Brooklyn, New York, for distribution by its holding companies. L.M. Downs Co. handled distribution in a territory represented by the northern border of Texas to Canada, and from Des Moines, Iowa to Denver, Colorado. After this, L.M. Downs Co. no longer manufactured cards but it did package some paper products, notably gift wrapping paper and ribbon, under the name Pioneer Paper Products, Inc. Its business, though, was mostly in sales and distribution within its territory. Its traveling sales representatives sold products to drug stores, "variety" stores, general and department stores, and gift shops, mostly in small towns.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists of four boxes of business records arranged in four series: 1) Journals, 1929-1954; 2) Closed and Delinquent Account Files, 1922-1959; 3) Salesman's Files, 1950-1960; and 4) Miscellany.

The records relate to the day-to-day business of the L.M. Downs Company of Lincoln, Nebraska. In particular, the records deal with the sales of Downs' greeting cards within the company's distribution region. Its clients, usually small stores in small towns, were mostly in Nebraska, western Iowa, Kansas, and western Missouri, although the records also reflect business in Minnesota, South Dakota, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Texas, and other states. The records show the logistics and rigors of the traveling sales business in the Midwest, and how business was affected by general economic conditions, such as the Great Depression or, later, crop failures. Also, the records illustrate the changing greeting card industry, and the L.M. Downs Company evolved from small manufacturer to large regional distributor involved in the creative end of the industry.

Series One contains financial Journals, 1929-1947. These show cash paid and received and accounts invoiced. The Closed and Delinquent Account files, 1922-1959, of Series Two illustrate many of the difficulties the L.M. Downs Company faced in the management of its business. Particularly in times of economic hardship, action would be taken against clients who had not paid for merchandise. These files tell many varied stories of misunderstanding and financial despondency, particularly during the 1930's. The files contain correspondence, bills, legal papers, and reports from collection agencies.

Series Three contains Salesmen Files, 1950-1960. Like the records of Series Two, these deal with many of the company's accounts, but specifically from the vantage point of the individual salesman. These files, which include correspondence, applications, references, schedules, lists, and bills, illustrate the tasks of the traveling sales representative. Series Four, Miscellany, includes one file of general correspondence related to Pioneer Paper Products, 1955, a bankbook for the L.M. Downs Company, 1941-1960, and one file of records relating to investment in a Colorado mining venture called Jumbo Properties, of which Mervyn C. Downs was an investor, 1928-1942.

DESCRIPTION

Series 1 - Journals, 1929-1954

Box 1

Volume 1	1929-1947
Volume 2	1948-1951
Volume 3	1952-1954

Series 2 - Closed and Delinquent Account Files, 1922-1959

Box 2

Folder 1	1922-1929
Folder 2	1930
Folder 3	1931
Folders 4-5	1932
Folders 6-7	1933
Folders 8-9	1934
Folder 10	1935
Folders 11-12	1936
Folder 13	1937
Folders 14-15	1938
Folder 16	1939
Folder 17	1940

Box 3

Folder 18	1941
Folder 19	1942-1943
Folder 20	1945, 1947-1949
Folder 21	1950-1952

Folder 22	1953
Folders 23-24	1954
Folder 25	1955
Folders 26-27	1956
Folders 28-29	1957
Folder 30	1958
Folders 31-32	1959

Series 3 - Salesmen Files, 1950-1960

Folder 1	Cancelled Accounts, 1954-1955
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Box 4

Folder 2	Applications, 1954
Folder 3	Salesmen's Letters, 1954-1955
Folder 4	Kansas Salesmen, 1950
Folders 5-29	Salesman's Files (Alphabetical), 1952-1960 Anderson, J.L., 1954 Brakke, G., 1956 Brandt, F., 1957 Carter, J.H., 1953-1955 Davidson, H.L., 1954-1955 Haggard, H., 1949-1950 Haning, Z.P., 1955-1956 Hankoff, F., 1954 Mears, J., 1956 Moore, G.L., 1951-1956 Lorentzen, R.M., 1959-1960 Lougue, R.F., 1954 Nielsen, A.E., 1955-1957 Norby, K.W., 1957 Orne, E.A., 1954 Randall, R., 1954 Riegel, A.D., 1956-1958 Scovill, C.T., 1956 Titzel, L.B., 1957-1959 Townsend, J.T., 1954 Wheeler, R.R., 1952 Wholley, J.D., 1954, 1960

Series 4 - Miscellany

Box 4

Folder 1	General Correspondence, 1955
Folder 2	Bankbook, 1941-1960
Folder 3	Jumbo Properties Mining Venture, 1928-1942

Subject headings:

Businesses -- Nebraska -- Lincoln
Downs, C. Mervyn, 1900-1980
Downs, Leavitt Melvin, 1859-1930
Greeting card industry
L.M. Downs Company (Lincoln, Neb.)
Lancaster County (Neb.) -- History
Lincoln (Neb.) -- Businesses

PJE/pmc 06-15-1988
Revised TMM 03-11-2017