

Collection #  
P 0521

## GIBSON COMPANY PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM CA. 1923–1924

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## COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 23 photographs in one album

COLLECTION DATES: Ca. 1923–1924

PROVENANCE: Purchased from Stephen T. Rose, Indianapolis, December 1995

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS:

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1996.0001

NOTES: *See also:* Gibson Company Records (M 0573); *Automotive Equipment* (Gibson Company catalogs) [TL159 .G522](#); Gibson Company rolling directory ([R 2404](#))

## **HISTORICAL SKETCH**

The Gibson Company of Indianapolis was established by Cecil Gibson in 1898 as a bicycle shop. With the rise of the automobile industry, it became chiefly concerned with the distribution of automotive accessories. Gibson also operated the Empire Automobile Company. In 1911, Gibson merged his business with that of Carl G. Fisher of Indianapolis Motor Speedway fame to form the Fisher-Gibson Company, which was located at 424 N. Capitol Avenue. The following year, the business was acquired by Joseph M. Bloch, Charles B. Sommers, and Aaron Waldheim and reverted to the Gibson Company.

In 1916, a new building was constructed at 433–447 N. Capitol Avenue. Although the new structure was designed to also serve as an automobile assembly plant for the Willys-Overland, that part of the operation did not materialize and the Gibson Company continued to sell and distribute automotive accessories and later replacement parts to auto dealerships and service stations.

The company expanded and at one time operated 23 branches in Indiana, Ohio (Lima), and Michigan (Kalamazoo). From 1931-1955 the Gibson Company distributed home appliances. The Capitol Motors Division of the Gibson Company sold automobiles at the Indianapolis location including the Willys-Overland, the Hupmobile, and Dodge cars and trucks. In 1963 the dealership was sold to Palmer Dodge of Indianapolis and was moved out of the building.

The Gibson Company also started Atlas Securities in the 1930s to serve as a finance company for dealers. The company later evolved into an export subsidiary, which sold a line of automotive replacement parts worldwide. "Atlas" was used as the name on the parts that were distributed by the Gibson Company until after World War II. Around the 1960s Atlas became the warehouse distribution operation while the Gibson Company served as the jobbers because of legal restraints.

In 1958, the Gibson Company maintained 400 employees and four operating divisions conducting business in four surrounding states and many foreign countries through Atlas Manufacturing. In that year, it served 4,000 customers ranging from independent automotive jobbers to car dealers, service stations, and fleet operations. It also stocked 40,000 different auto parts ranging from cotter keys to hydraulic lifts. Among the other types of goods that were distributed by the Gibson Company were Norge refrigerators (1931-ca. 1953), Hamilton dryers, and Arvin televisions.

Joseph M. Bloch (1884-1976), who came from Selma, Alabama, to serve as secretary and manager of the Gibson Company in 1912 while Cecil Gibson operated the Empire Automobile Company, continued with the company in similar capacities until his retirement in 1968. Bloch was also the founder of the Starlight Musicals series in Indianapolis. His son-in-law, J. William Julian, entered the business in 1949 and became company president in 1960.

The Gibson Company facility was sold to the Mermont Corporation in 1967 and the former Gibson operation dealt primarily with the distribution of exhaust systems. Mermont was divested around 1970 because of vertical integration and Julian obtained the original company

and its Indiana outlets in 1971. Julian changed the name of the company to ADP Auto Parts. The company ceased operations in 1984.

Sources:

Gibson Company Records collection guide (M 0573).

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service. "National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Gibson Company Building" (<http://www.in.gov/dnr/historic/files/hp-Gibsonbldg.pdf>). Accessed 14 August 2013.

## **SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE**

This collection consists of 23 photographs in one album prepared by commercial photographer W. Frank Jones of Indianapolis. The photographs depict the Gibson Company -- its building (exterior and interiors), some of its workers (unidentified), and commemoration of the company's 25th anniversary in 1923.

The album has printed on the front: The Gibson Company, Established 1898, Indianapolis U.S.A. W. Frank Jones' sticker inside the front cover states "My camera is your salesman." The black-and-white photographs measure 7 1/2 x 9 1/4 inches.

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Page 1: "Home of Gibson Service" shows building exterior.

Page 2: "Sales Organization / 1924" shows group portrait.

Page 3: "Accessory Show Celebrating Silver Anniversary / 1898–1923."

Page 4: "Silver Loving Cup Presented by Manufactures / 1898 – Silver Anniversary – 1923."

Page 5: "Gibson Serves the World / Envelopes containing orders from all parts of the World."

Page 6: "one of the aisles in Stock Room / Over one mile of shelving in this room."

Page 7: "One of the many Aisles in the Stock Room."

Page 8: "One of the Stock Room aisles."

Page 9: "Section of Bulk Stock Room."

Page 10: Replacement Parts Department.

Page 11: "Section of Replacement Parts Dept."

Page 12: "View of Gibson Battery Dept."

Page 13: "Section of Domestic Packing Dept."

Page 14: "Section of Export Packing Dept."

Page 15: "Another View of Export Packing Dept."

Page 16: "Gibson Accessories ready for export shipment."

Page 17: "Equipment Display Room."

Page 18: "1st Floor Salesroom."

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## CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog:  
<http://opac.indianahistory.org/>
2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.
3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, P 0521).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.