GIBSON COMPANY (INDIANAPOLIS, IND.)
RECORDS, 1895–1998

Collection Information

Historical Sketch

Scope and Content Note

Series Contents

Processed by

Paul Brockman
13 February 1991

Updated 4 January 2002
Updated 2 July 2004

Reprocessed by
Laura Shumar
13 July 2006

Updated 26 September 2012

Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

www.indianahistory.org
COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: Manuscript Materials: 11 Boxes, 7 Oversize folders, 1 Bound Volume
Visual Materials: 2 Boxes of Photographs, 1 Box of Oversize Photographs, 1 Oversize Photo Album
Printed Materials: 7 catalogs
Artifacts: 6 Artifacts

COLLECTION DATES: 1895–1998

PROVENANCE:

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS:


NOTES:
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 owned by Fisher and Gibson, and 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 N. Capitol. 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 to 1963, starting with the Willys-Overland to 1931, the Hupmobile, 1931, and Dodge cars and trucks, 1931-1963, at which time 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

The Gibson Company facility was sold to the Maremont 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:
Other information obtained from conversations with J. William Julian in 1990 and 1991.
SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection, made up of several individual donations of materials, contains the records of the Gibson Company and related operations and is divided into eight series.

Series 1:  Ledgers and Minute Books


Series 2:  Contracts

Contracts and correspondence with automotive parts production companies for sales through the Gibson Company of such items as carburetors, spark plugs, batteries, tires, lights, and horns, 1910-1929. Also included are salesmen's contracts, 1912-1917, and other contracts in such areas as advertising, building maintenance, shipping, transportation and general company operations, 1910s and 1920s, including a list of the number and type of cars in Illinois, Ohio, and every county in Indiana, 1914 (Box 3, Folder 52).

Series 3:  Catalogs

Catalogs from the Fisher Automobile Company (1908), the Fisher-Gibson Company (1912), the Gibson Company (1913-33), and the Atlas Manufacturing Company (1963).

Series 4:  Newsletters

Sets of company newsletters for salesmen, dealers, and overseas distributors, including a complete set of “The Gibsonian” (1916–17), incomplete Volumes 1 and 2 of “The Gibson Raider” (1917–18), several issues of “Gibson Tips” (1934) and complete years of “The Gibson Company News” (1950–67). Issue 2:4 (January 1918) of “The Gibson Raider” includes a list of all the Gibson men who enlisted in the Armed Forces; a second copy has been annotated by hand to revise and expand the list.

Series 5:  Scrapbooks and Company History

The series features two scrapbooks, one compiled by the Sidener-VanRiper Advertising Agency for the 1914 “Gibson Raiders” campaign, and a second, probably compiled by Mr. Bloch, covering the 1916 “Gibson Raiders” and Willys-Overland material through 1929. Other materials include photographs of the building, company operations, and staff, 1903–38, and articles, order books, and price lists. There is also information from the company Christmas parties, 1935 and 1952–63, and material, prepared by Mr. Bloch and others, on the history of the Gibson Company and the automobile industry.

Series 6:  Advertising Photographs
The photographs in this series are from sets of professional photographs taken 1916–18 and 1923, apparently for advertising and promotional use. Selected photographs were bound into two albums, one showing the company’s North Capitol building and the other compiled about 1923, providing an overview of operations. There are two copies of the 1923 album; one is in much better condition but the other has had many of the people in the pictures identified. This second copy was the property of Bill Martin, who was manager of the Gibson Company’s Lima, OH branch by 1923, but is shown packaging parts for shipping in the 1918 photographs. The series includes additional, loose, copies of many of the photographs, and some photographs from the same periods not used for albums.

Series 7: Architectural Drawings and Building Specifications


Series 8: General Operational Records

The records also contain stockholders information such as meetings and proxies, 1930-1954, and permission to conduct business in the surrounding states of Illinois, Ohio, and Michigan.

The records also include those of the Gibson Company international subsidiary, Atlas Manufacturing Company/Atlas Securities including insurance receipts, invoices, policies, and related materials, 1924-1933, and company stocks and bonds, 1931-1933.
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Photographs of Annual Sales Conference, 26–28 December, 1928

Group photograph of meeting, n.d. [2 copies]

Photograph of Fada Radio display, n.d. [2 copies]

Photograph of “Gibson Girls,” 1934

“Quarter Century of Business Progress” chart, 1934

Photograph of Dodge meeting, French Lick, Ind., 1935

Speech for Christmas party, 28 December 1935

Tickets (5) and nametags (11) for Christmas party, 1935

Photograph of “Old-fashioned” Christmas party, 28 December 1935

Group Photograph, “Entire Gibson Company sales force visits the Perfect Circle Company, 5 January 1937”

Christmas card from Terre Haute branch and response letter, 1938–39

Group picture of Terre Haute branch, 1938

Group picture with Badger Tires material, n.d.

Christmas party information, 1952–63
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First order book, The Atlas Company, August–September 1932  Box 10, Folder 10

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Photographs of work on building, from an envelope labeled “Archives, 432 N. Capitol, 433 N. Illinois,” n.d.  OVC Photographs: Box 1, Folder 10

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Photographs of Asia 59ers Party, Chicago, Illinois, 1984  Photographs: Box 1, Folder 26

Paper on automobile industry history by J.M. Bloch, 24 July 1933  Box 10, Folder 13

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Bulletin to Atlas representatives re price war on cylinder heads, 24 August 1934

Acme Machine Products Co., Inc. jobbers net price list, 1 June 1934

Bulletin to Atlas salesmen re Jambor’s price list, 22 October 1934

List of Atlas representatives and their territories, ca. 1934

List of suggested jobbers’ stock of Plymouth parts

Atlas Parts for Ford and Chevrolet, Catalog No. 115, ca. 1933

Personalized Automotive Care script, 1966

Personalized Automotive Care medallion

J. William Julian, correspondence and papers, 1980s

J. William Julian correspondence re: Prayer Breakfast, 1937

Correspondence with retiring salesmen, 1983–5

Flyer for Asia 59er’s Party, 1986

Noblitt-Sparks Advertisement, Tribute to Gibson Company, n.d.

Roller directory of telephone extensions for Gibson Company Building

Box of one dozen Carbide Gas Burners by the American Lava Company, Chattanooga, TN [3 remaining]