

Collection #
P 0314

**INDIANAPOLIS GLOVE COMPANY
COLLECTION, CA. LATE 1920S–CA. 1960S**

Collection Information	1
Historical Sketch	2
Scope and Content Note	4
Series Contents	5

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 2 folders

COLLECTION DATES: Ca. late 1920s–ca. 1960s

PROVENANCE: Gift from Charles O. McCormick of Greenwood, Ind., 2005

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS:

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2005.0185

NOTES: *See also:* Panoramic Photograph Collection (P 0062) for more company group photos; Indianapolis Glove Company catalog (General Collection: TS2160 .I65 1922)

HISTORICAL SKETCH

The Indianapolis Glove Company was established in 1904 by Brodehurst Elsey (1878–1968) and Charles F. Zwick (1869–1946). It was known for producing Red Apple work gloves with a logo consisting of an apple and the words “Indian Apple Us Gloves.” Over several decades, the company grew to be the country’s third largest manufacturer of work gloves, offering more than six hundred styles of gloves under different labels for various industries.

The Indianapolis Glove Company operated for its first six years in the Century Building on Pennsylvania Street, south of Washington Street. The company moved into its own building when its new factory was built in 1910 on the former site of the first St. Vincent’s Infirmary on Liberty (later renamed N. Park Avenue) and E. Michigan Street. Leather, flannel, and jersey gloves were produced there for national distribution. The ground floor was used for distribution, transportation, and storage. On one floor, workers laid out patterns on large bolts of material while other workers cut out each glove individually. On other floors, as many as a thousand sewing machines were in operation to sew jersey, leather, and flannel gloves.

For the first four years the president of the Indianapolis Glove Company was Morton E. Reagan, with Charles Zwick serving as vice president and Brodehurst Elsey as secretary-treasurer. In 1908, Zwick became president and remained in that position for the next thirty-eight years. Reagan’s widow, Grace W. Reagan, was listed as vice president of the company from 1922–1924, although it appears that she lived in Knightstown at the time.

By 1912, the Indianapolis headquarters employed 400 people, while a plant in Richmond, Indiana, had 125 workers and another in Eaton, Ohio, had 100 workers. In addition to producing jersey and other cloth gloves, including leather palm gloves, the company was the largest manufacturer of children’s gloves in the country. The Richmond plant specialized in white canton flannel gloves. These three plants manufactured 800,000 dozen pairs or \$600,000 worth of gloves.

The company continued to expand in the 1920s. In 1920 another Indianapolis plant was opened at Senate Avenue and Thirteenth Street. In 1923 a fifth floor was added to the headquarters building on N. Liberty, and in 1933 a sixth floor was added for offices. In 1929, the Indianapolis Glove Company bought the Inskeep Manufacturing Company with its four plants in Ohio; the U.S. Glove Company at Marion, Indiana, which also had a plant in Rushville, Indiana; and the Coshocton Glove Company in Ohio.

During World War II, the work force moved to higher-paying war-oriented industries. The Indianapolis Glove Company relocated its manufacturing operation to an available work force in the South – specifically to Mississippi and Arkansas – and to Mexico. The plant at 1513 N. Senate Avenue, which employed primarily African Americans, closed, and the factory at 430 N. Park Avenue became a warehouse and distribution center.

Charles Zwick died in 1946, and so Brodehurst Elsey, who was then vice president of the company, became president. Elsey had been a governor on the Indianapolis Board of Trade since 1907 and served as its president in 1925. During WWI, Elsey was on a committee to purchase gloves for the Army and Navy. He served for ten years as president of the National Association of Cotton Cloth Glove Manufacturers and was director of its successor, the Work Glove Institute. Elsey was also president of the Board of Trustees of Franklin College.

C. Vaughn Akard became president of the Indianapolis Glove Company after Elsey's death in 1968. He had been with the company forty years. By then the company was producing more than 600 types of work gloves for various industries under the labels of Bear Kat, White Chief, Red Fox, Red Hare, Fisherman's Friend, and Apple Dandy. Women's gardening gloves sold as Indy Girl gloves.

In April 1978, Earl S. Rauhen became president of the company. In 1979, retail sales amounted to \$18 million, and in 1980, the company ranked third in glove manufacturing when it was acquired by Wolverine World Wide, Inc. of Rockford, Michigan, maker of Hush Puppies shoes. At that time, the company had a total of 700 employees, with only sixty in Indianapolis working in offices and the warehouse. The rest were manufacturing the gloves in Arkansas, Mississippi, Texas, and Mexico. A distribution center in Los Angeles filled ten percent of the company's orders, while the remainder were distributed from Indianapolis.

By 1979, presses were cutting cloth for gloves, but patterns were still laid out by hand and each glove still needed to be sewn by someone at a sewing machine. Each glove represented the work of fifteen different people each performing a different operation. Due to the amount of labor involved, the glove industry in this country was affected sharply by import trade. Glove imports from China increased 700 percent from 1973 to 1976. By 1979 about 33% of work gloves and practically 100% of dress gloves were imported.

In 1982, the company moved its headquarters and warehouse to a site near the Indianapolis airport. The six-story brick and steel frame structure that had been the Indianapolis Glove Company factory at 430 N. Park Avenue in the Lockerbie Square area was converted into condominiums in 1984.

Sources:

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SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists of three black-and-white photographs of employees of the Indianapolis Glove Company [ca. late 1920s–ca. 1950], a sheet of letterhead stationery for the company [1963 or later], a 1927 company newsletter, a small 1952 book on the history of the work glove industry, and a 1952 membership list of the Work Glove Institute.

The collection is arranged in two series: Series 1, Photographs; and Series 2, Ephemera and Printed Material.

SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Photographs

CONTENTS

Work room with 23 women shows piles of gloves on countertops (photo by Kirkpatrick, #21637 [ca. late 1920s]).

CONTAINER

Folder 1 of 2

“Indianapolis Glove Co. Employees” shows more than 100 men and women gathered outside a brick building (photo by F. M. Kirkpatrick, #2590, 31 May 1944).

Folder 1 of 2

Thirty-nine men and women gathered in a room [ca. 1950].

Folder 1 of 2

Series 2: Ephemera and Printed Material

CONTENTS

History of the Work Glove Industry by Frank M. Lay and Brodehurst Elsey – small, 32-page book, 1952.

CONTAINER

Folder 2 of 2

Leaflet listing companies that were members of the Work Glove Institute, Inc., as of November 1952. Also lists officers and directors.

Folder 2 of 2

Sheet of letterhead stationery for the Indianapolis Glove Company, Inc., with the red apple logo and the words “Indian Apple Us Gloves.” Below company name, centered: Manufacturers of / Gloves and Mittens / 420 – 430 North Park Avenue – P. O. Box 1135 / Area Code 317-637-3578 / Indianapolis, Indiana 46206. Also, to the right: New York Office / 350 Fifth Ave. [1963 or later]

Folder 2 of 2

Glove News – newsletter of the Indianapolis Glove Company – vol. 1, no. 4, September 1927 – cover plus seven pages. Cover shows illustration of the plant at Senate Avenue and Thirteenth Street in Indianapolis. Included is an article that mentions Perry Ghere [uncle of actor Will Geer], an article by a glove salesman, tributes in memory of forelady Louise Skelton who died 29 July 1927, quiz of 34 questions about the company [without answers], news from the main plant, the Senate Avenue plant, and the plants in Richmond, Ind., and Eaton, Ohio, including a list of new employees at the Richmond plant.

Folder 2 of 2