

Collection #  
SC 3633

**J. I. HOLCOMB MANUFACTURING  
COLLECTION, CA. 1906-1981**

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## **COLLECTION INFORMATION**

**VOLUME OF COLLECTION:** Two manuscript folders, One folder cold storage color photographs, One folder photographs

**COLLECTION DATES:** 1906-1981

**PROVENANCE:** E. L. Bennett Indianapolis, IN, 2019

**RESTRICTIONS:** None

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**ALTERNATE FORMATS:**

**RELATED HOLDINGS:** A little goes a long way, TP990 .J23 1926; Bristles, HD9971.5 .B764 J542;

**ACCESSION NUMBER:** 2019.0210

**NOTES:** Materials in cold storage need at least 4 hours to acclimate, so patrons should call ahead if they wish to view materials that are in cold storage.

## HISTORICAL SKETCH

J. I. Holcomb Manufacturing Company was based in Sullivan and Indianapolis, Indiana. They developed and sold cleaning products. They were in business from 1896-1964. The company holds multiple patents. Some products sold by this company were waterproof wax, wax applicator, odorators, stick mops, window cleaners, vitreous cleaner, freshettes, metal luster and brushes. J. I. Holcomb was also part owner of Holcomb and Hoke, in existence before J. I. Holcomb Manufacturing. Fred Hoke sold his interest in the brush business to J. I. Holcomb in 1901 and the company began in earnest with producing cleaning products. Holcomb and Hoke was known for two products, the Box Ball Bowling Alley and the Butter-Kist Popcorn Machine. Both companies were located in the same building at Draper and Van Buren streets in Indianapolis until 1937. There was the addition of the Bemis Warehouse on Shelby Street around 1926. There was even a warehouse in New York City, across the street from Hell's Kitchen. In 1937, the company moved to Barth Avenue and built on to the building in 1948 and 1950. They added a California office, a warehouse in Los Angeles in 1950 and a warehouse in Dallas in 1955. In 1955, the company purchased a property on Sumner Street for Pattern Wax production. 1956 brought about the first foreign venture in Toronto, Canada in the form of a plant. The facility in New York City was insufficient for the needs of the area, so they moved to a facility in New Jersey that was larger. The company merged in 1964 with Premier Industrial to become the Holcomb Division of Premier Industrial.

James Irving Holcomb (1876-1962), founder of the company, began his own business in his late teens with 25 borrowed dollars. He wanted to sell furniture polish, but the bottles he had prepared exploded in the sun's heat. His second venture had 180 dollars invested. He sold soap, which he called Self Washo, to corner grocery stores. It shrank on the shelf, so it also failed quickly. He decided to return to selling furniture polish and that is where he met someone who knew about cleaning brushes. His friend from church, Fred Hoke, decided to go into business with him and sell these products.

J. I. Holcomb was born in LaSalle, Illinois in 1876 to William Henry (1845-?) and Sarah Rebecca Holcomb (1851-1941). He attended the University of Michigan. He married Musetta Black (1876-1957) in 1893. They had two children, Jessie Mae (Strickland) (1893-1938) and Jessie Mckinney (1894-?). They traveled to multiple countries in 1929. He donated 250,000 dollars in 1953 to Butler University to build an observatory that is named in his honor. He served for a time as the vice president of the Board of Trustees for Butler University. Upon his death from a heart attack in 1962, he gifted stock and other assets to Butler to finance a research department focused on preventing illness and poor health.

Sources:

[Historicindianapolis.com](http://Historicindianapolis.com)

[Ancestrylibrary.com](http://Ancestrylibrary.com)

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

E. L. Bennett made a scrapbook of the history of J. I. Holcomb Manufacturing. He worked as a production manager over the brush department for over 40 years. A history of the company written by a long-time employee and some pages from the company newsletters are included. Bristles, the appropriately named newsletter, includes employee-submitted information and stories. It includes pictures and dedications to the employees retiring or receiving a pin for their years of service. There are also brief introductions to individuals from a different department with each publication. Customer appreciation letters and funny stories are included as well. Many of the clippings are from the years 1940-1946, with many service members mentioned. Some pages are dedicated to listing those employees with photos that were serving during World War II. Photos of staff at various events and buildings are included. Some names listed with the photos are Mother Singleton, W. R. Hatton, E. L. Bennett, Mary Baur and E. E. Martin. Included are a front door photo of the new building in 1937 and the construction of the first additions made in 1947. The color photos document four company picnics from 1977-1981. There are invitations to two of these picnics. A sales receipt for a special brush from 1906 is included. Two books used by the traveling salesmen are also included.

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Scrapbook Pages, 1906-1981	Folder 1 of 2
Company Newsletters, 1940-1963	Folder 2 of 2
Snapshots, Staff Events, 1929-1970	Photographs, Folder 1 of 1
Snapshots, Staff Picnics, 1977-1981	Cold Storage Color Photographs, Folder 1 of 1