

Collection #
P 0796

**MILNER FAMILY'S
COLUMBIA CONSERVE COMPANY COLLECTION
CA. 1930S–1950S, N.D.**

Collection Information	1
Historical Sketch	2
Biographical Sketch	3
Scope and Content Note	4
Series Contents	5

Processed by

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21 October 2019

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	One half-size photograph box, two flat file photograph folders, one folder of manuscript materials, two pamphlets, one compact disk, two filmstrip reels, two envelopes of negatives *The manuscript folder, one pamphlet, and the compact disk are all in the half-size photograph box.
COLLECTION DATES:	Ca. 1930s–1950s, n.d.
PROVENANCE:	Gift from Wanda Milner Winburn, July 2019
RESTRICTIONS:	Any materials listed as being in Cold Storage must be requested at least four hours in advance. Slides and negatives must be requested in advance and may be viewed by appointment only and with the assistance of library staff.
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REPRODUCTION RIGHTS:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained from the Indiana Historical Society.
ALTERNATE FORMATS:	
RELATED HOLDINGS:	
ACCESSION NUMBER:	2019.0205
NOTES:	See also: <i>The Columbia Conserve Company: An Experiment in Workers' Management and Ownership</i> by William Powers Hapgood (Pamphlet: HD5660.U6 H26 1934); "A Business Without a Boss: William Powers Hapgood and the Columbia Conserve Company" by Ray E. Boomhower in <i>Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History</i> , Winter 2001, pp. 4–13

HISTORICAL SKETCH

The Columbia Conserve Company produced canned soups and other canned food items in Indianapolis from 1903 until it was sold in 1953. The company moved into its plant at 1735 Churchman Avenue in 1912. In 1917 its president, William Powers Hapgood (1872–1960), launched an experiment in workplace democracy that lasted a quarter of a century and achieved national and international recognition.

The Belt Line Railroad led into the receiving and shipping departments on the northeast corner of Columbia's plant. Workers processed beans, tomatoes, chickens, vegetables, etc., to go into the company's products such as chicken, vegetable, and tomato soups and chili con carne. Labels for the cans were also printed at the plant. Columbia's salespeople periodically worked in the plant to maintain familiarity with the products and the company.

It was Hapgood's belief that workers were great untapped resources, and that by allowing them to participate in their own management, the company would become more effective than those businesses in which workers had no voice. His vision was one of workers learning to thrive together, to make the plant a real community center – a social and cultural home. He also believed in payment on the basis of need and that approximate equality of income was essential to democracy.

In the beginning of this experiment, control of the company was placed in the hands of a committee of ten, three of whom were appointed by the owners and seven elected from the plant. Another group, composed entirely of workers in the plant, was elected to serve in an advisory capacity. In 1924 the two groups were merged into what was called the Council.

In addition to the workers' Council, a profit-sharing plan and a stock-purchase plan designed to bring about employee ownership and legal control of the company were also implemented. The Council made decisions on virtually all policy and operational matters, such as salary, number of hours worked, the selection of supervisory staff, and the physical plant. The Council had the authority to discipline or discharge employees. Eventually Council participation was opened to all workers on the company's payroll who wanted to attend any or all of its weekly meetings. It met every Friday to discuss business and any problems and served as training in the ways and means of conducting a business enterprise.

In 1925 a contract between stockholders and workers called for all profit after stockholders' dividends to be used to purchase common stock to be held collectively by workers in a trust. By 1930, fifty-one percent of common stock was owned collectively by workers who, accordingly, had legal control of the company. By 1937, workers owned sixty-three percent of the common stock, making Columbia one of the earliest producer-cooperatives in the country. In addition to a guaranteed annual salary, workers were provided free health care, including optometry and dentistry, for employees and their dependents; a yearly three-week paid vacation; an old age and disability pension; and educational benefits.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, no Columbia employee was laid off. Instead, workers accepted substantial pay cuts. However, in 1942 worker discontent resulted in a strike against the company. Workers sued for receivership against Columbia and its management staff, while trustees of the collectively held stock filed a countersuit to dissolve the trust. In 1943 the Marion County Superior Court ruled in favor of the

company and ordered the trust to be dissolved and stock to be distributed to individual workers, thus ending Columbia's experiment in workplace democracy. The company was sold to John Sexton and Company of Chicago in 1953.

Sources:

Items in the collection

Colburn, Kenneth Jr. "Columbia Conserve Company." In *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, edited by Bodenhamer, David J. and Robert G. Barrows. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994: 460. General Collection: F534 .I55 E4 1994

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Davis Leonard Milner (1905–2007) and Hazel Gladys Stewart (1906–1995) both began working for the Columbia Conserve Company as teenagers. They met at work and married on 9 February 1924. Davis's first job there was unloading coal from railroad cars for the boiler room. By 1928 he was a cook, by 1935 a bookkeeper, and by the late 1940s he was a production manager for the company. Hazel's first job there was feeding empty cans from the warehouse onto the conveyor. She later worked as a forewoman at the plant. Their daughter, Wanda (b. 1927) said that her family's life centered around the company. She claimed, "I was born with chicken soup in my veins." When she was in college, Wanda returned home to work at the company during the summers.

Davis Milner worked for the Columbia Conserve Company and its successor, John Sexton and Company, for thirty-two years. He later worked sixteen years for the Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation until his retirement in 1974. He and Hazel are both buried in Forest Lawn Memory Gardens in Greenwood, Indiana.

Wanda Milner attended Arsenal Technical High School before going to Olivet Nazarene College in Bourbonnais (Kankakee), Illinois. She became a teacher and taught at Isom Central School in Greenwood, Indiana. She married Arthur Clayton Winburn (1915–1992) on 20 November 1981.

Sources:

Items in the collection

Ancestry <ancestrylibrary.com>. Accessed 11 October 2019:

Find a Grave

Indiana Birth Certificates, 1907–1940

Indiana Death Certificates, 1899–2011

Indiana Marriage Certificates, 1917–2005

Indiana Marriage Index, 1800–1941

U.S. City Directories, 1822–1995

United States Federal Census, 1910–1940

U.S. School Yearbooks, 1900–1999

U.S. Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936–2007

Olivet Nazarene University. *Glimmerglass* vol. 11, no. 9 (10 March 1952)
<https://digitalcommons.olivet.edu> Accessed 11 October 2019.

Personal correspondence from Angela Fennig, 5 September 2019.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection holds materials pertaining to the Columbia Conserve Company in Indianapolis that belonged to the Davis and Hazel Milner family who were employees of the company. The collection includes photographic, manuscript, and printed materials, which are arranged in two series.

Series 1: Photographic Materials, contains black-and-white photographs, most of which show workers at the Columbia Conserve Company plant; a few were taken at the company's farm. There are two panoramic photographs that are large group portraits with nobody identified. Two promotional film strips have been copied to compact disk for researcher use; one is about the Columbia Conserve Company and the other is about the company's partnership with Red and White Food Stores. There are four negatives that show workers; two of them are color and are of workers at John Sexton and Company, Columbia Conserve's successor company.

Series 2: Manuscript and Printed Materials, includes brief biographical notes handwritten by Wanda Milner Winburn pertaining to her family's involvement with the Columbia Conserve Company. There are also notes written by her with descriptions of photographs; most of these are inserted in a pamphlet titled *With the Compliments of The Columbia Conserve Co.* and pertain to the photographs in the pamphlet. There is another pamphlet about the company titled *An Experiment in Industrial Democracy: The Results of Fourteen Years of Self-Government* by William P. Hapgood. There are also six leaves from a newsletter for John Sexton and Company.

SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Photographic Materials

CONTENTS

Two snapshots of Davis Milner in front of a house at Columbia Conserve Company farm, n.d. In one photo he is seated on the grass with a woman; caption written below says: “[unreadable name] & my sweetie.”

Snapshot of the Hapgood home at Columbia Conserve Company farm, n.d. [blurry photo shows someone sitting on the porch]

Snapshot of Hazel Milner, forelady, seated at desk [January 1951].

Snapshot of sign for the Columbia Conserve Co. office outside of a building, n.d.

Two snapshots of Ella Carlisle (1871–1954), “matron” at Columbia Conserve Co., using a rolling pin, n.d.

Snapshot of women by conveyor belt full of cans, n.d.

Snapshot of man in apron standing at top of stairs by equipment, n.d.

[Four snapshots of workers using printing equipment for making labels for cans, n.d.]

Snapshot of woman seated at table piled with paper; calendar on wall turned to February 1949.

Snapshot of three women seated at a table; caption written below says: “Dining Room Gang,” n.d.

Snapshot of woman and man standing by equipment loaded with cans; caption written below says: “The Union Pres & Queenie,” n.d.

Snapshot of workers at conveyor belt with large cans, n.d.

Snapshot of women with boxes and machinery; caption written below says: “Ben’s chickens,” n.d.

CONTAINER

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 1

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Folder 1

Snapshot of three women outside with brick building in background, n.d.	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 1
Blurred snapshot; writing on back is partially obscured, but appears to say: "Printing Room / Columbia Conserve Co. / Forelady Hazel Milner, right" [Hazel Milner has her back to the camera], n.d.	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 1
Real photo postcard of three people dressed in overalls, bandanas, and hats. Written on back: "friends of mom's [Hazel] who worked in the office Columbia Conserve Co. Halloween," n.d.	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 1
Unidentified older woman leaning on desk in office (7x5 photo), n.d.	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 1
Columbia Conserve Company plant by railroad tracks, n.d.	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2
Field planted with crops [at Columbia Conserve Co. farm], n.d. (Stamped on back: Indianapolis Engraving Co. / Plain and Color Industrial Photography)	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2
Workers at the cleaning tables, cleaning vegetables in preparation for the making of soup, n.d.	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2
Workers in the garnishing line, filling cans, n.d.	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2
Workers in the Process Room, where cans are sterilized, n.d.	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2
Man stirring a large pot; fourteen bowls of ingredients are on a table next to him, n.d.	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2
Same man as above standing at the large pot with a bowl in one hand and large spoon in the other; several bowls of ingredients are on a table next to him, n.d.	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2
Woman in kitchen uniform holding a steaming bowl, n.d.	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2
Group of forty-seven people posing in an industrial setting. (Photo #261117-F by W. H. Bass Photo Co., taken 23 December 1943.) [Bass records state that this was an Airline Manufacturing Company Christmas party.]	Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2

<p>Several people playing Musical Chairs, with a woman playing accordion in the background. [This includes several of the same people who appear in the Airline Manufacturing Company Christmas party photo described above; 23 December 1943.]</p>	<p>Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2</p>
<p>Man in hat standing by bulletin board. A prominent sign says “Effective Today / No More Work / Until / Further Notice.” [ca. 1933] [This image also appears in filmstrip #1 described below and was likely not taken at Columbia Conserve Company.]</p>	<p>Photographs, Box 1, Folder 2</p>
<p>Compact Disk of all the images from the two filmstrips listed below.</p>	<p>Photographs, Box 1, Folder 6</p>
<p>Promotional filmstrip #1: “An Experiment in Industrial Self-Government” shows workers preparing food products and the benefits of working for the Columbia Conserve Company (produced by Progress Film Co. of Chicago) [ca. 1930s].</p>	<p>Cold Storage, shelved with 35mm negatives [Use CD for viewing]</p>
<p>Promotional filmstrip #2: “A Successful Partnership” shows images pertaining to the Columbia Conserve Co.’s partnership with Red and White Food Stores in manufacturing soups with the Red and White label [ca. 1930s].</p>	<p>Cold Storage, shelved with 35mm negatives [Use CD for viewing]</p>
<p>Panoramic photo of large group of men, women, and children in front of large building with silos. None are identified [ca. 1930s].</p>	<p>Flat File 7-o, Folder 1</p>
<p>Panoramic photo of large group of men, women, and children in front of a house. None are identified [ca. 1930s]. [This photo has had some damage.]</p>	<p>Flat File 7-o, Folder 2</p>
<p>Two black-and-white acetate negatives of man in suit and woman in apron.</p>	<p>Cold Storage, 120 film, acetate negatives</p>
<p>Two color acetate negatives [ca. 1950s]: 1) two women at work with Sexton tomato soup in picture; 2) four women at work.</p>	<p>Cold Storage, 120 film, acetate negatives</p>

Series 2: Manuscript and Printed Materials

CONTENTS

Brief biographical information handwritten by Wanda Milner Winburn regarding her family's involvement with the Columbia Conserve Company (one page), n.d.

Brief handwritten note by Wanda Milner Winburn about tomato plants at Columbia Conserve Company farm, n.d. [Possibly describing a photograph that could not be found in this collection. Similar to notes inserted in the pamphlet described below.]

Pamphlet titled *With the Compliments of The Columbia Conserve Co.* with sheets of notebook paper inserted with notes handwritten by Wanda Milner Winburn providing more information about the photographs in the pamphlet. The pamphlet includes photographs of workers in various areas of the Columbia Conserve plant, n.d. [IHS has another copy of this pamphlet: Pamphlet F: HD9321.9.C6 C6]

An Experiment in Industrial Democracy: The Results of Fourteen Years of Self-Government by William P. Hapgood, President, The Columbia Conserve Company. [48 pages; ca. early 1930s]

Six loose two-sided leaves from a published newsletter of John Sexton & Co. includes announcement of the recent establishment of the company's Food Canning Division in Indianapolis; promotional articles about Sexton's Famous Chefs soups and home kitchen aids for heating food; a listing of the company's locations in several states; and photos from company Christmas parties [ca. mid-1950s]. One page has Davis Milner's name handwritten on it.

CONTAINER

Photographs, Box 1,
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Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 3

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 4

Pamphlet:
HD5660.U6 H2 1931

Photographs, Box 1,
Folder 5