OPPENHEIM’S DRY GOODS STORE RECORDS, 1874–2000

Collection Information

Historical/Biographical Sketch

Scope and Content Note

Series Contents

Cataloging Information

Processed by
Anton Korenevsky & Molly K. Fausset
October 2003

Revised by
Monica Casanova
July 5, 2007

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: 17 document cases, 1 OMB box, 8 bound volumes,
Visual Materials: 1 OVA folder of photographs, 1 negative
HISTORICAL/BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The Oppenheim family can be traced back to Oppenheim, Germany, where they were first listed on the tax register in 1241. Based on death certificates and naturalization papers, it is believed that the American Oppenheim family originated from Vistytis, Lithuania. As there were only 230 Jews still living in Vistytis at the commencement of World War II, it is also believed that the Oppenheims from that region had died or immigrated before the start of the war. The Oppenheim family can be traced back to Solomon Oppenheim and Bessie Weinstein. Oppenheim and Weinstein were married around 1830 and their four children, Jacob, Joseph, Samuel, and Rose immigrated to the United States in the mid to late 1880s. Many Oppenheims founded dry good stores located in Goshen, Milford, and North Manchester, Indiana, as well as in Detroit, Kalamazoo, Jackson, and Dowagiac, Michigan.

Solomon’s first-born son, Jacob, was born in East Prussia and immigrated to the United States in 1870. He first lived in Detroit, Michigan, where he made a living as a peddler. In 1873, Jacob and Louis Jacobs opened the New York Store in Paw Paw, Michigan; in 1875, the partnership was dissolved. In 1875, Jacob opened his own store, Oppenheim’s New York Cheap Store, in North Manchester, Indiana. The store motto was and remained, “. . . the best place to trade, after all.” In the beginning, Jacob offered men’s, boys’, and women’s clothing, as well as groceries. The store went through several name changes from Oppenheim’s New York Cheap Store to B. Oppenheim & Co. by the 1930s the store was simply called Oppenheim’s.

The town of North Manchester which Oppenheim’s called home sits in Wabash County, Indiana. When Jacob Oppenheim first opened his dry goods store the town boasted about 1,600 inhabitants. Oppenheim faced competition from other dry goods stores populating the downtown commercial area. Besides dry goods, a pharmacy, and The DeWitt High Wheel Auto Buggy factory operated until 1910 when a fire destroyed the building.

Jacob and his wife, Pauline, had five children: Ben, who was born in Germany, and Ike, Fanny, Ida, and Etta, all born
in North Manchester. Jacob died in March 1883.

After his father’s death, Ben and Ike took over the family business. They also shared ownership in a wholesale business, and when Ike left the family business in 1922, he became the sole owner of the wholesale business. Ben’s son, Jean, a Columbia University graduate, entered the family business in 1922 and remained there until his death in 1949.

Jean and his wife, Valery, had two children – Barbara and Phil. Phil graduated from Notre Dame in 1948 and entered the family business shortly after. After Ben’s death in 1950, Phil became the owner and manager of Oppenheim’s. The store closed in 2000.

Sources:
*From Peddlers to Merchants . . . history of four Jewish owned stores founded in Indiana more than one hundred years ago and owned and operated by the same families.*


**SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE**

The Oppenheim store records are broken down into seven series based upon the various aspects of the operation primarily from 1874–1979:

Series 1: Business/accounting journals of Oppenheim’s dry goods (later department) store for the period from about 1874 to 1895. The main feature of these journals is that first of them dated back to 1870’s are written in Hebrew but in very strange way – pages go the same way as in non-Jewish tradition – from right to left and words are written from right to left as it should be in Hebrew. Some of the ledgers during this time period are fragile and have been stored separately in phase boxes.

Series 2: Receipts from different manufacturers with whom Oppenheim’s store had business contacts, payroll and bank checks and 11 bankbooks, 1874–1979.

Series 3: Operational records such as employee hours, lease contract, and retail merchandise certificate, 1877–1979.

Series 4: Big books with advertisement clippings of Oppenheim’s store, various booklets and coupons of the store including advertisement of “Capitan Gizmo’s boys shop.” The ads stored in the manuscript boxes have been clipped out and glued on college ruled paper. The bulk of these advertisements and catalogs come from the 1950s.

Series 5: Correspondence and Newspaper clippings. Miscellaneous materials-Knights of Honor certificate from 1881, a draft of a plaque, and radio transcript-are contained in this series. Also included are a community development plan and a jobber’s list and ephemera materials.

Series 6: Visual Materials. Of the nine photographs and postcards only one is in color and this is a postcard of West Main Street in North Manchester, Indiana. Pictures date from ca. 1900 to ca. 1950. Photographs are of front exterior of Oppenheim’s. Two of the photographs have people standing in front of the store. No one is identified.

Series 7: Printed Materials and artifacts. A family history is included in this series as well as artifacts such as printing blocks, notary seal, and small store signs.
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“Quick Sales and Small Profits, and Never to be Undersold by Anyone. B. Oppenheim & Company. North Manchester, Indiana.” [store motto]

CONTAINER
OVA Photographs:
Folder 1

35 mm acetate negative,
Folder 1

Series 7: Printed Materials and Artifacts

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Tales of the Old Days by W.E. Billings
The Oppenheim Family History: 1750–1995

CONTAINER
General Collection:

2 printing blocks both inscribed “Oppenheim’s…in North Manchester since 1875”
Artifacts: 2001.0183

Wood printing block inscribed “Captain Gizmo’s Boys Shop Oppenheim’s”
Artifacts: 2001.0183

2 printing blocks show Oppenheim store (ca. 1890)
Artifacts: 2001.0183

Metal printing plate with two impressions: ‘NRA member we do our part’ and “We support the U.S. economic program. We fight inflation.”
Artifacts: 2001.0183

2 signs with chain glued back to back: “North Manchester Chamber of Commerce member 1999”; “1996—Manchester Main Street, Inc. Indiana’s 101st Main Street Community organized for the betterment of downtown since 1989”
Artifacts: 2001.0183

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, M 0802).

5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.