

Collection #
P0041

COLE MOTOR CAR COMPANY PHOTOGRAPHS, CA. 1920

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Processed by

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Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF
COLLECTION: 1 folder of photographs

COLLECTION
DATES: Ca. 1920

PROVENANCE: Unknown

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Wallace Spencer Huffman (M0159); Indiana Automobile Advertisements (P0143)

ACCESSION NUMBER: 0000.0667

NOTES:

HISTORICAL SKETCH

Located in the 700 block of East Washington Street—beside the railroad tracks—the Cole Motor Car Company (1909–1925) produced a “standardized car,” one which competed with the prestigious General Motors Cadillac. GM used only GM parts in its automobiles, while founder J.J. Cole assembled his with parts from various manufacturers. Cole cars were the first to include four-door bodies, demountable rims, motor drive tire pumps, streamlined bodies (some with fine hardwoods, and balloon tires—all standard equipment—as well as the first to mount electric lights and utilize a self-starter.

The history of the Cole Motor Car Company begins with its founder, Joseph Jarrett Cole, (1869–1925) who was born on a farm near Connorsville, graduated from the Richmond Business College and settled in Indianapolis in 1888. He worked at the Perry Manufacturing Company, then in sales (1896) at the Moon Brothers Carriage Company. During his final year at Moon Brothers, he purchased Gates-Osborne Buggy Company of Indianapolis and changed the name (1909) to the Cole Carriage Company. Successful as a maker of horse-drawn carriages, Cole produced his first car from his Indianapolis mechanics shop in 1908.

Cole cars competed in various races around the country, including the first auto race at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in 1911. Some of the early cars could reach speeds of more than 65 mph. One Cole motor was mounted in a biplane which in 1911 flew from California to Florida.

Cole Motor instituted new and creative ways to advertise. Gas-filled balloons, Cole cigars, a Cole car as pacesetter in the 1924 Indy “500” race, and even a baseball team boosted their sales. Prices were steep, however, for early twentieth century buyers. In 1918 several models ranged in price from \$1995 for the Touring Car to \$3795 for the Aero-Eight Towncar.

Despite the founder’s imagination, superior product, and hard work, sales of the Cole Car designed for the wealthy, slowed in the early 1920’s. Lower cost, mass-produced cars drove it out of business. The company closed in 1925 having produced a creditable 40,000 cars during its 16 years of production. Soon after liquidation of his company Joseph Cole died at the age of 56. Today the site is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Sources:
Bodehamer, David J. and Robert G. Barrows, eds. *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University,

1994. Reference Room Collection

Indianapolis News, November 3, 1965.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection, assembled in one folder, contains 17 black and white photographs of the Cole Motor Car Company ca. 1920. The images are mainly views of machine parts on assembly lines, skilled tradesmen working at the factory in Indianapolis, and one schematic drawing of an engine. One photograph is a group portrait of the Cole baseball team in uniform at a ball park, and one photograph shows the exterior of the factory.

The photographs seem to have been part of an album at one time as all are mounted on linen paper and punched with holes along the side.

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Various views of workers in the factory building engines, exterior view of factory, Cole Company baseball team, and schematic drawing of an engine

CONTAINER

Photographs:
Folder 1

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, P0041).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.