

THE JOSEPH LAY COMPANY RECORDS, 1843-1925

Collection #
M 657
OM 324

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Processed by
Charles Latham
4 May 1995

USER INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 5 manuscript boxes, 3 oversize folders

COLLECTION DATES: Inclusive 1843-1925; bulk 1900-1920

PROVENANCE: Robert M. Taylor, Jr., Indianapolis, IN, 28 November 1994

RESTRICTIONS: None

REPRODUCTION RIGHTS: Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the Indiana Historical Society. See note.

ALTERNATE FORMATS: None

OTHER FINDING AIDS: None

RELATED HOLDINGS: None

ACCESSION NUMBER: 95.0080

NOTE: Photographs are copies of originals at the Ridgeville Museum, Ridgeville, Ind.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

This collection concerns Joseph Lay, his son Samuel C. Lay, and The Joseph Lay Company which they operated together for three decades.

Joseph Lay (1830-ca 1914) was born in Seneca County, New York, the son of Samuel A. and Lucetta (Moore) Lay. After schooling, he taught school for two years in New York State. In 1853 he moved to Olmsted Falls, Ohio, just southwest of Cleveland. There he and his brother John for some years manufactured bentwood. In 1875 Lay began to make brooms and brushes, and in 1877 he obtained a patent for a broom on which the fibers were held together by a metal band.

In 1879, after surviving two lawsuits about the patent, Lay incorporated a company in which equal shares were held by himself and his two sons, Samuel C. and Frank R. Lay. Samuel C. Lay (1857-ca 1921), who figures prominently from this point on, was born in Olmsted Falls. He attended Baldwin University in nearby Berea, but before graduating began to work for his father. He was later a trustee of the university. In 1881 he married Alice Damp.

Within a few years (either 1881 or 1885) Frank Lay withdrew from the firm. The main product was a metal-banded broom with a broom-corn center and with hickory splint on the outside. Some brooms were also fastened with metal staples, but this process could not be patented. The firm also made snow shovels and wood forks.

A flood in the Rocky River damaged the Olmsted Falls plant in 1883. Three years later the Lays moved the company to Ridgeville, Randolph County, Indiana. They took over an abandoned brewery (which looked something like an Eastern Orthodox church) and the buildings of a defunct college. The business prospered, thanks both to a quality product and to an aggressive sales campaign, both by mail and through traveling salesmen. The chief customers were manufacturers, street commissioners, hardware stores, and railroad purchasing agents. In 1892-1893, the firm spun off a banking business (Joseph Lay's daughter Gertrude married the new bank's head), and in 1898 it briefly operated a gas and oil business. In 1896 a branch factory was established at Columbus. By 1900 there was another branch factory at Mattoon, Illinois, and later another at Saratoga, Indiana.

In 1900 the Joseph Lay Company was negotiating to purchase a factory in Indianapolis. Instead, a former employee, M. R. Stratton, along with another Ridgeville native, George Lemaux, bought the factory. They established the Indianapolis Brush and Broom Manufacturing Company, and a suit between them and the Lays immediately ensued. One result of this suit was that the Lays made special efforts both to patent their Lay brooms and Victor brushes and to register trademarks for their distinctive labels.

In 1904 there was a suit between the Lays and a German exporter of broom corn, Oscar Steidtmann of Hamburg, about the payment of import duties and shipping costs. About 1910 the firm seems to have taken the lead in trying to organize a national association of broom manufacturers, partly in order to stabilize the price of broom corn.

The Lays made a modest effort to join the automobile manufacturers who were springing up all over Indiana. In 1906 they set up the Victor Automobile Company, and engaged two local mechanics, John Oliver Carpenter and Joe Landwich, to produce the Ridgeville Senator automobile. The firm made a wooden frame, "armored" with metal, but bought the mechanical parts elsewhere, notably a four-cylinder air-cooled Carrico engine and a transmission made by the Marion Motor Company. The Senators did not give complete satisfaction; two buyers in Mattoon found that hills made the engine overheat and lose power. A verbose lawsuit resulted, in which the crucial question was whether the Senator was "as good as a Buick," and whether the Lays had claimed that it was. The Victor company ceased in 1912, having produced a total of seven cars.

In 1912 Frank R. Lay, who had apparently been at odds with his brother for many years, persuaded Joseph Lay, then over eighty years old, to leave the Joseph Lay Company and join him in founding the Joseph Lay Broom and Brush Company. The result was a memorable tangle, with one company receiving and filling orders intended for the other. Of course there was another suit. In 1914, probably because of Joseph Lay's death, the rival company was dissolved.

Samuel C. Lay continued the company until his death. While he spent his summers in Petoskey, Michigan, he let his

son Arthur manage affairs. In his correspondence, particularly the letters about his Packard and Cadillac automobiles, he enjoyed arguing about details, and when he used lawyers he did not hesitate to question their fees. The company continued under his sons until at least 1925.

Sources: Materials in collection

Robert M. Taylor, Jr, "As Good As A Buick," *Traces of Midwestern and Indiana History*, Spring 1994, p. 18-23

SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection, filling five manuscript boxes and three oversize folders, contains correspondence, deeds and certificates, legal briefs, business papers, photographs, and artifacts, from the period 1843-1925. It is arranged chronologically.

Box 1 contains historical material, and items from the firm's history up to 1904. This includes records from the original patent suit (Folder 2); deeds to their first property in Olmsted Falls, Ohio (Folders 3-4); and records of the suits against Indianapolis Brush and Broom Manufacturing Co. (Folder 11) and Oscar Steidtmann (Folder 18).

Box 2 continues the firm's operations 1904-1913. Of special interest are employee contracts of 1906-1910 (Folder 3); proposals for a national association of broom manufacturers (Folders 10-11); and records of the 1911-1912 suit about the Senator automobile (Folders 13-15).

Box 3 continues the company's operations from 1913 to 1924. In Folders 4-6 are materials about the lawsuit between the two Lay companies. Folders 17-27 contain company correspondence 1919-1924.

Box 4 contains Samuel C. Lay's voluminous correspondence about his personal automobiles (Folders 3-8); inventories (Folders 9-15); insurance (Folders 16-17); items on employee liability (Folders 18-22); and deeds (Folders 26-30).

Box 5 contains financial records: tax assessments and returns, and bankbooks.

BOX AND FOLDER LISTING

BOX 1: Historical; 1878-1904 **FOLDER**

1: Historical

2: Patent application 1878

3: Deeds-- Olmsted Falls, ca 1879

4:(OM 324) Deeds-- Olmsted Falls, 1843-1879

5: (VC) Photograph-- factory at Ridgeville, Ind.

6: Agreement, F. R. Lay to leave firm 1885; manufacturing instructions 1880s

7: Correspondence 1890-1899

8: Ridgeville Bank 1892-1893

9: Catalog 1895

10: Lay Gas and Oil Co. 1898, 1900

11: Joseph Lay Co. vs Indpls. Brush & Broom Mfg. Co. 1901-1910

12: Day & Lay, specialties in wood ca 1900

13: Correspondence 1900-1903

14: Inventory 1903-1904

15: Inventory, Ridgeville 1904

16: Correspondence 1904

17: Agreement to sell 1904

18: Oscar Steidtmann vs Joseph Lay Co. 1904

BOX 2: 1904-1913
FOLDER

1: Oscar Steidtmann vs Joseph Lay Co. II

2: Correspondence 1905-1906

3: Employee contracts 1906-1910

4: Correspondence 1907-1910

5: Controversy with Hermann Pauli 1908

6: Trademarks 1908-1910

7: Signs and labels

8: Advertisements and brochures

9: (ART) 2 newspaper cuts

10: Proposal, Broom Manufacturers Association 1909

11: Proposal, Mfrs. Broom Corn Co., n.d.

12: Correspondence 1911

13: (VC) Photos, curved-dash and Senator automobiles

14: Checkley vs. Victor Auto Co. 1911

15: Correspondence re: Senator automobile 1912-1913

BOX 3: 1913-1924
FOLDER

1: Company memos 1913, 1916, n.d.

- 2: Correspondence 1913-1916
- 3: Agreement, Joseph Lay and Joseph Lay Co. 1913
- 4: Mail dispute 1914
- 5: F. R. Lay application for injunction 1914
- 6: Jos. Lay Co. vs Jos. Lay Brush & Broom Co. 1911
- 7: Jos. Lay Co. vs Jos. Lay Brush & Broom Co.-- depositions
- 8: Jos. Lay Co. vs Jos. Lay Brush & Broom Co.-- letters
- 9: (OM 324) Dissolution of Jos. Lay Brush & Broom Co. 1914
- 10: Termination of Jos. Lay Co. vs Jos. Lay Brush & Broom Co. 1914
- 11: Report of operations 1915
- 12: Correspondence 1915-1917
- 13: S.C. Lay Diary, 1918
- 14: Stockholders & directors meetings 1919-1920
- 15: Partnership agreement S. C. Lay and L. P. Sims
- 16: Company operations 1919-1920
- 17: Correspondence-- 1919-- Jan. - Mar.
- 18: Correspondence-- 1919-- Apr. - June
- 19: Correspondence-- 1919-- July - Sept.
- 20: Correspondence-- 1919-- Oct. Dec.
- 21: Correspondence-- 1919-- 1920-- Jan. Feb.
- 22: Correspondence-- 1919-- Mar.
- 23: Correspondence-- 1919-- Apr. - June
- 24: Correspondence-- 1919-- July - Sept.
- 25: Correspondence-- 1919-- Oct. - Dec.
- 26: Correspondence-- 1919-- 1919-1920
- 27: Correspondence-- 1919-- 1921-1924, n.d.
- 28: Inventory, Illinois Metal Broom Co., 1920

**BOX 4: S. C. Lay auto correspondence; inventories; insurance; employee liability; deeds
FOLDER**

- 1: Contract re: Saratoga factory 1920
- 2: OM 324 Blue print-- railroad siding at Saratoga
- 3: S. C. Lay automobile correspondence--1919-- Jan. - Sept
- 4: S. C. Lay automobile correspondence--1919-- Oct.- Dec.
- 5: S. C. Lay automobile correspondence--1920-- Jan. - Mar.
- 6: S. C. Lay automobile correspondence--1920-- Apr. - June
- 7: S. C. Lay automobile correspondence--1920-- July - Sept.
- 8: S. C. Lay automobile correspondence--1920-- Oct. - Dec.
- 9: Inventory-- real estate n.d.
- 10: Inventory -- farm machinery n.d.
- 11-12 Inventory -- machinery n.d.
- 13: Inventory -- real estate, Mattoon
- 14: Inventory -- supplies and machinery n.d.
- 15: Inventory -- supplies n.d.
- 16: Fire insurance 1895-1905
- 17: Insurance 1895-1920
- 18: Employee accidents & insurance-- 1906, 1910
- 19: Employee accidents & insurance -- 1912-1915
- 20: Employee accidents & insurance -- 1917-1918
- 21: Employee accidents & insurance -- 1920
- 22: Employee accidents & insurance -- 1921-1925
- 23: List of customers n.d.
- 24: Cards
- 25: Numerical jottings n.d.
- 26: (OM 324) Deed 1853
- 27: Deeds-- 1864-1886
- 28: Deeds -- 1891-1900
- 29: Deeds -- 1901-1910

30: Deeds -- 1912-1916, n.d.

**BOX 5: Tax assessments; tax receipts; bankbooks
FOLDER**

1: Tax assessments-- 1903, 1905

2: Tax assessments -- 1907

3: Tax assessments -- 1911

4: Tax assessments -- 1912

5: Tax assessments -- 1913

6: Tax assessments -- 1914

7: Tax assessments -- 1919, 1924

8: Tax receipts-- 1900-1903

9: Tax receipts -- 1904-1906

10: Tax receipts -- 1907, 1911

11: Tax receipts -- 1914, 1920

12: Bankbooks-- S. C. Lay

13: Bankbooks -- Joseph Lay Co.

14-15: Check stubs-- Joseph Lay Co. 1898-1903

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FOLDER**

1: Newspapers--*Ridgeville News* 1893-1921, *Ridgeville Record* 1903, *Broom and Broom Corn News* 1914; Dissolution of Joseph Lay Broom & Brush Co.

2: Deeds--Olmsted Falls, O. 1843-1879

3: Insurance policy 1925; Deed 1853; Blueprints; Switchboard panel; Track siding at Saratoga, Ind.

CATALOGUING INFORMATION

MAIN ENTRY: Joseph Lay Co.

SUBJECT ENTRIES: Joseph Lay Co.

Indianapolis Brush and Broom Mfg. Co.

Joseph Lay Broom and Brush Co.

Lay, Joseph, 1830-ca. 1914

Lay, Samuel C., 1857-ca. 1921

Lay, Frank R.

Broom and brush industry--Indiana

Broom and brush industry--Indiana--Employees

Brooms and brushes--Indiana

Actions and defenses--Indiana--Cases

Business records--Indiana--Ridgeville

Senator automobile--Photographs

Senator automobile

Automobile industry and trade--Indiana--Ridgeville--

History--Sources

Ridgeville (Ind.)--Manufactures

Olmsted Falls (Ohio)--Manufactures

END