

Collection #
P0008

REEVES PULLEY COMPANY COLLECTION, 1896–1969

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	Visual Materials: 1 box of photographs, 5 polyester negatives Printed Materials: 7 printed pamphlets
COLLECTION DATES:	1896–1969
PROVENANCE:	Reliance Electric Company, Cleveland, Ohio 1971
RESTRICTIONS:	Negatives may be viewed with assistance of Library staff.

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Publications on the Reeves Company can be found in the library's printed collections

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1971.0207

NOTES: Additional materials on the Reeves Company are located in the Bartholomew County Historical Society in Columbus, Indiana.

HISTORICAL / BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The Reeves Company

Many and varied were the products of Reeves Pulley of Columbus, Indiana, as noted in the literature and pictures in the collection. Wooden pulleys, steam and gasoline engines, saw mills, and threshing machines sold so well that at one point the Company required nearly a thousand workers to keep up with demand. In 1899 the Company held seven U.S. and three Canadian patents, plus one each in England and France. When Milton Reeves moved the plant to Columbus, Indiana, on Seventh St.—since 1999 called Reeves Way—it was the largest factory in southern Indiana. His horseless carriage, technically separate from Reeves Pulley, never competed well against the Ford Quadricycle, Stanley Steamer, or Peugeot Lion. In 1912 the Emerson-Brantingham Company of Rockford, Illinois, purchased the Reeves Company. The firm continued to operate, but the Collection contains little information about later years.

The Columbus facility located on Reeves Way and once an expansive center for a variety of heavy duty manufacturing, now (2007) houses offices for a local law firm, a warehouse for a discount store, and a flea market.

Jabez Reeves, the entrepreneurial “father” of the Reeves Pulley Company, was born (in 1806) in Brown County, Ohio. There in 1824 he married **Nancy Coe**. To their home were born ten children, including **William F.** (b. 1827), **Alfred Benton** (b. 1940), and **James M. D.** (b. 1844?), all of whom figured prominently in the establishment, maintenance and growth of Reeves Pulley. Some time in the 1840s Jabez and family moved west to Rush County, Indiana where he farmed and began to work on his inventions. In 1873 he began manufacturing field cultivators in nearby Knightstown, Indiana. Three years later the Reeves brothers founded the Hoosier Boy Cultivator Company. In 1877 the Company moved its operations to Columbus, Indiana, where Jabez then 70-plus years of age, and his son William F. drew up a partnership agreement. The following year, for reasons not clear, William handed over his interest to his son (and Jabez's grandson) Marshall T. who became president of the company. In 1880 Milton M., another son of Jabez, purchased part ownership in the company. From that time on the business was know as Reeves and Company. Jabez died in Knightstown in 1895.

William F. Reeves, son of Jabez, was born on the family homestead in Brown County, Ohio in 1827. Nine children were born into the home of him and his wife, including Marshall T. and Milton O. He farmed in the summer and taught school in the winter. The latter position he held for five years before returning entirely to the farm. In 1850 he married Hannah Gilson, four years his junior. After earlier establishing the Hoosier Boy Cultivator Company, in 1888 William and three sons (Marshall, Milton and Girmie) founded the Reeves Pulley Company in Columbus, Indiana in 1890. He died in Knightstown, Indiana in 1892.

Other Reeves' family members were waiting in the wings. **Alfred Benton**, son of Jabez was a man fully alert to the interests of the business and possessing executive ability. Through his sales and marketing skills Reeves implements could be seen throughout the Great Plains. In 1859 he married Louise Redick who died seven years later, leaving Alfred with one child. A second marriage (1867), this one to Pantha Wadlington, brought them three children. In his later years Alfred, a Democrat by persuasion, served on the Columbus City Council, was chief of the Fire Department and, with his family, a member of the Christian Church in the city. He passed away in 1889.

James M. D. Reeves, son of Jabez and Nancy (Coe), was born in Rush County in 1844. He worked on the family farm in his early years and was educated in the rural schools. At age 16 he went to Knightstown—the family had not yet moved to Indiana—where he worked as salesman in a mercantile house. The 1860 U.S. Census listed him as “literate.” Six years later he started his own dry goods business which he quit after a half-dozen or so years. At 25 years of age he married Mary Hill of Knightstown who gave birth to two children. He worked for a while in sales in Indianapolis, but in 1879 became a senior member of the Reeves Company in Columbus. Like other members of the clan, James voted the Democratic ticket and was a member of Columbus' Christian Church.

Marshall T. Reeves, son of William F., was born (1851) in Rush County where his parents had settled. Like most of the first generation Reeves, Marshall spent his boyhood on the farm where he became self-reliant and early on repaired and improved farm machinery. After completing the first eight grades of his education, he taught school in Rush County and later relocated in Knightstown, where with his father William and his uncle Alfred, he engaged in the manufacture and sales of an improved version of the Two-Horse Tongueless Corn Plow, his first invention. In 1872 he married Louisa McBride of Rush County. Following improvements on the Tongueless Plow and after renaming it the Hoosier Boy Corn Plow, Marshall saw it widely adopted by many farmers in the corn-belt states. In 1881 the Reeves Straw Stacker made its debut on the implement market. Like others in the large family Marshall—wealthy, a philanthropist, and a self-made man—was a Democrat, a member of the Christian Church and of the Columbus City Council (to which he was twice elected), and president of Reeves Pulley in the mid-1980s. He died in 1925.

Milton O. Reeves, another son of William F., was born in Rush County in 1864, married in 1882 and early pioneered in the automobile industry as the builder of either the fourth or fifth American auto, and even sold some of them. But his work on the horseless carriage he did without directly tying it to the Reeves Company. He called his vehicle a “motocycle” (not motorcycle). Largely because of its variable speed transmission (based on belts and pulleys), he believed it was superior to Henry Ford's “quadricycle” which had only one speed. His first recorded test of the transmission in an auto took place on 26 September 1896, before all the coach work was complete. It worked perfectly, as did the power train, but it was noisy and emitted nasty fumes and vapors. A double muffler, later installed, was probably the industry's first. Later that fall when the car was driven to Indianapolis, it attained a top speed of 15 mph, and was reportedly “the first auto in the city.” (In a later test the vehicle would attain 30 mph.) Nonetheless, in 1898 Milton confessed in a Board meeting that he had lost momentum in his work because of matters of vibration, odor/vapor, exhaust—and “other [problems] too numerous to mention.” “I have been discouraged,” he acknowledged, “with the machine as a whole.” His distress however probably grew out of the almost complete lack of sales from his intended wealthy customers.

Two auto models, more the product of Milton Reeves' own initiative than of the Company itself, deserve mention. His eight-wheel Octo-Auto was hailed by writer and editor Elbert Hubbard for its comfort and durability. Traversing Chicago streets, including those with ruts six inches deep, it brought “ease to the passenger and . . . length of life to the auto,” remarked Hubbard. Its tires reportedly should last eight times as long as one might expect because eight wheels carried the load and eased the car in and out of road furrows caused by horse-drawn wagons. With 40-horsepower and a length exceeding 20 feet, this 4-passenger vehicle retailed for \$3200.00.

The Sexto-Auto, a six-wheel version of the Octo-Auto and in the luxury class, had variable speed and reportedly made several cross-country jaunts. It never caught on with the American public, probably because of its price: in 1910 it sold for \$4500.00. The second motocycle he built was called “The Big Seven,” for the number of adults it held. The last such vehicle which came from Milton's plans was perhaps the “grandfather” of modern buses, for 20 passengers could squeeze into five soft, leather seats. More like a bus than a passenger car, its wheels were too far apart and the engine did not run well when it encountered wagon ruts in dirt or gravel roads. Milton's vehicles were not successful but he jump-started a new era in land transportation with his variable speed transmission, important both to automobiles, to

lathes, and other Reeves engines...

Nonetheless, the Reeves name was firmly entrenched in the manufacturing world. When Milton died in 1925 at the age of 60 he held more than 100 patents. In 1910 his gifted designer and builder was awarded the Edward Longstreth Medal for pioneer work in the development of the variable speed transmission, so important was it in the country's first automobiles.

Sources:

Elbert Hubbard Appreciates the Reeves "Octoauto" [Columbus, Ind.? : Reeves Pulley Co., ca. 1912] Pamphlet F Collection: TL215.R47 E4 1912

History of Bartholomew County... Columbus, Indiana: Bartholomew County Historical Society, 1976. Reference Room Collection: F532.B2 H6 1976

Laura M. Long, "C.C.C.—Columbus Culture Club," *Indiana Magazine of History*, xliii (1947), 257 and 259. Reference Room Collection: F521 .I52

"Reeves Chassis Model 'J' for High Wheel Buggy Auto," Columbus, Ind. : The Company, [1900?] Pamphlet Collection: TL255 .R44 1900

Reeves Variable Speed Control... Columbus, Ind. : Reeves Pulley Company, c1938. General Collection: TL210 .R46 1938

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection spans the years 1896–1969. It includes 174 photographs and copy photographs of vehicles and drawings of the Reeves Pulley Company products: split wood pulleys, gasoline engines, and automobiles. Many of these images were used for advertising and/or company product catalogues. The items show completed automobiles on display and parts of motors, chassis, and Milton O. Reeve's plans for a variable speed transmission. Printed material consists of catalogs, clippings, and a type script history of the Reeve's Pulley Company.

The materials have been arranged into three series:

Series 1 Original Photographs shows automobiles, and illustrations of auto parts, and schematic drawings of vehicles.

Series 2: Copy Photographs and Negatives contains copy photographs and five copy negatives made by the Reliance Electric Company showing many different images of the Reeves vehicles and products copied from old photographs. The images were numbered by the Reliance Company. They are arranged in numerical order with brief descriptions after each number.

Series 3: Pamphlets and Printed Materials includes newspaper clippings, histories, and pamphlets produced by the Reeves Company.

SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Original Photographs: 1896–1909

CONTENTS

"Reeves Motorcycle Summer 1896, Columbus, Indiana" [seven people seated in vehicle]

"Chicago Auto-Parts Show 1906" [Reeves Co. display]

[Auto race, July 4, 1906, no location]

CONTAINER

Photographs:
Box 1, Folder 1

[Reeves Sexto-Auto with people]
[two vehicle photos, 1 composite photo]

“The Reeves Gasoline Engine” [photographs of illustrations]

Reeves Gasoline Engine parts, different views

Schematic drawings of various engines and vehicle chassis

Advertising photographs, woman in white dress and hat posed with a wooden wheel

Photographs:
Box 1, Folder 2

Photographs:
Box 1, Folder 3

Photographs:
Box 1, Folder 4

Photographs:
Box 1, Folder 5

Series 2: Copy Photographs and negatives

CONTENTS

18029: Reeves air-cooled 6 cylinder car (2 copies)
18030: Reeves 6 cylinder, air-cooled, engine (2 copies)
18033: automobile, 4 wheels
18034: automobile, 4 wheels (2 copies)
18037: Reeves Sexto-Auto with people (3 copies)
18039: Auto race, July 4, 1906
18063: Reeves Octo-Auto (8 copies)

18520: Reeves wooden wagon interior with pulley (2 copies)

18521: Reeves auto with passengers at Indy 500 (2 copies)

18522: Reeves automobile, 4 wheels (3 copies)

18523: Reeves wooden wagon, interior, pulley (3 copies)

18524: Drawing of Axles, Rear, Driving and Front (2 copies)

18525: Chassis: top and side views

18526: Sexto-Auto in Limousine form, drawing (2 copies)

18527: Rear view of Chassis, Sexto-Auto (2 copies)

18528: Reeves Octo-Auto pictured in ad for The Horseless Age, Aug 9, 1911

18529: Side View of Truck, axels of the Sexto-Auto (2 copies)

18530: Reeves Six-Passenger, Straight Line, Sexto-Auto (3 copies)

18531: Reeves Sexto-Auto, 1912

19254: Auto with convertible top (2 copies)

19255: Auto with convertible top (2 copies)

19256: Auto with convertible top raised (2 copies)

19257: Auto , front view (2 copies)

CONTAINER

Photographs:
Box 1, Folder 6

Photographs:
Box 1, Folder 7

Photographs:
Box 1, Folder 8

19457: Schematic Drawing, Reeves Speed Varying Mechanism Applied to Motorcycle
19458: Schematic Drawing Reeves Speed Varying Mechanism Applied to Motorcycle, side view
19460: Schematic Drawing
19463: Reeves Model 6, Drawing (2 copies)
19466: Reeves Model 6 Drawing (2 copies)
19468: Reeves Model J Go-Buggy Chassis, Drawing (2 copies)
19469: Model J Go-Buggy Chassis, Drawing (2 copies)
19471: Model "P", Drawing (2 copies)
19472: Reeves 4x4 Watercooled Engine, Drawing (2 copies)
19474: Model S Engine Drawing (2 copies)
19475: Octo-Auto with driver
19476: Auto frame, side view
19477: Auto frame, top view
19478: Auto engine
19479: Auto open top, 7 passengers (2 copies)
19480: The Reeves Motorcycle with the inventor Mr. Milton O. Reeves at the lever. Built Summer of 1896, "shot" Sept 26, Columbus, Indiana (3 copies)
19481: Reeves Sexto-Auto with passengers (2 copies)
19483: Reeves Auto, one seater, four wheeled (3 copies)
19484: Reeves Auto two seater, four wheeled (2 copies)

19502: Reeves Auto engine on chassis (2 copies)
19504: Reeves 4 wheeler, 4 bench seats, fringed top (4 copies)
19507: Reeves 4 wheeler, 2 seats, Drawing
19532: Cylinder for 4x5 Water Cooled Engine, Schematic Drawing
19534: Photo of fan mounted on engine
19535: Two autos driving on race track
19536: Photo of engine block"
19537: Photo of engine block showing cylinders (2 copies)
19538: Photo of engine parts (2 copies)
19539: Photo of engine part
19573: Photo of engine part(2 copies)
19574: Drawing of The Reeves engine (2 copies)
19575: Reeves Pulley Co. Men with engine display at Chicago Auto-Parts Show 1906

Photographs:
Box 1, Folder 9

Copy negative of the July 4, 1906 auto race photograph

8x10 Polyester
Negatives: [1]

Copy negative of the Reeves Octo-Auto

8x10 Polyester
Negatives: [2]

Copy negative of the Reeves Sexto-Auto	4x5 Polyester Negatives: [3]
Copy negative of the Reeves Octo-Auto	4x5 Polyester Negatives: [4]
Copy negative of the Reeves Six Passenger Straight Line Sexto-Auto	4x5 Polyester Negatives: [5]

Series 3: Pamphlets and Printed Materials, 1906–1969

CONTENTS

“The Reeves” variable speed countershaft powerful, responsive, durable and efficient for securing any speed without change of belt or loss of time

“The Reeves” gasoline engine: built to” do business” and keep doing it.

The Reeves “Sexto-Auto”

“The Reeves” 4 Cylinder four cycle air cooled auto engine

Illustrated catalogue and price list of “The Reeves” patent wood-split pulley: general purpose single-arm pulley

“The Reeves” wood-split pulley: catalog No 25

Reeves and the Automobile

Delivery wagon description and price list 1909,
Newspaper clippings,
Reeves Pulley Company typed histories

CONTAINER

Pamphlet F Collection:
TL159.R44

Pamphlet Collection:
TL159.R42

Pamphlet Q Collection:
TL215.R4 R44 1912

Pamphlet Collection:
TL210.R449 1906

Pamphlet Collection:
TJ1103.R44

Pamphlet Collection:
TJ1103.R44 1913

Reference Room
Collection:
TL215.R4 B7 1969

Photographs:
Box 1, Folder 10

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, P 0008).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.