



BHC-MSS 0021  
Guide to the Records of Warner Corset Company  
By Meghan Rinn  
October 2018

**Descriptive Summary**

*Creator:* Warner Corset Company

*Title:* Records of Warner Corset Company

*Dates:* 1879-1970s [Bulk 1900-1960s]

*Quantity:* 181 boxes, 20 films, unknown number of ledgers

*Abstract:* One of the biggest manufacturers in Bridgeport, the Warner Corset Company (later Warnaco) was a major part of Bridgeport's industrial history. Starting with Dr. Warner's Health Corsets, the company expanded and expanding, manufacturing corsets and then bras and other underclothing. While the company still exists, the collection documents the early history of the company into the 1970s through corporate documents, pattern books, and advertising.

*Collection Number:* BHC-MSS 0021

*Language:* English

*Repository:* Bridgeport History Center

**NOTE:** Access to this collection may be restricted due to processing that is anticipated to begin in 2019.

**Administrative History**

The history of the Warner Corset Company is lengthy, and the company still exists today in the form of Warnerco.

Founded by Lucian and I. DeVer Warner in 1874, the company was a reaction to the health issues that the two siblings, who were also doctors, saw in their female patients due to corset wear. They developed a more flexible corset, with the boning material coming from the a Mexican plant called ixtle. The fibers, once treated, became material called Coraline which allowed greater freedom of movement and lightened the pressure put upon the wearer's body versus other boning material. Called Dr. Warner's Health Corset, the business took off immediately, with the brothers moving manufacture from McGraw, New York, to Bridgeport, Connecticut in 1876. Demand required that the Bridgeport business be scaled up to larger factories multiple times in the early years due to demand. Likewise, the firm also began to manufacture accessories to go along with the corsets themselves.

The health corset, also called the Coraline corset, was later phased out by the company's development of rust proof steel boning, which began in 1894 - the same year that D.H. Warner (son of I. DeVer Warner) took over the company. This development, later the standard boning for all corsets, was a major coup in production design and development for the company, and the advertising bears this out as well. As the 1900s began, the trend for extremely tight lacing was in

vogue, meaning that the company was in the black and able to develop even more styles. This went on to include corsets that went down to and past the hip. Also at this time, the bra was being developed, and Warner was a part of that development as well.

Changing styles did see the company deal with particular challenges, especially with regards to 1920s fashion when flat chests were in vogue. While some products were developed, such as fashionable girdles, sometimes called “wraparounds,” the company mostly worked on developing and distributing in Europe, Mexico, and other regions. It wasn’t until the Great Depression that real trouble set in, as customer spending dropped off sharply.

It was, however, in the 1930s that development saw the creation of elastic thread, called Lastex, which was a major change in the production of undergarments. It allowed for more wear and tear of a garment, and with that came new marketing which proudly promoted the new material, its lightness, and its longevity.

The 1930s also saw the development of the Warner’s longest lasting contribution to the undergarment industry: the creation of cup sizing for bras which is still in use today. This was first developed in 1935 with A, B, C and D cups and has remained in use ever since.

During the 1940s, the bra truly replaced the corset as the women’s support garment of choice, and the company continued production. Post-war production meant high demand, and the company tried to keep up - especially with finding enough people to work. This meant the expansion of production plants all over the US. This continued into the 1950s, especially with the creation of the Merry Widow line of garments. Meant to work with the in-vogue high waist fashions, the Merry Widow was a cinch, half bra, and garterbelt - and promoted with the Lana Turner film of the same name.

Merry Widow was a massive success, one that endured. At the same time, the Warner Company was also developing something even more enduring: the creation of lycra (a collaboration with DuPont), still a common fabric today.

Also during this time, Warner began to acquire other companies, and the company continued to grow into the 1960s. Slimwear was also produced with the creation of lycra, and still business boomed. This continued well in the 1970s, which is when Warner donated the collection to the Bridgeport History Center.

Warnerco continues to exist today, with manufacturing rights for Speedo and Calvin Klein garments.

Refer to *The Future Out of the Past: an illustrated history of the Warner Brothers Company on its 9<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the histories of the corporate family, C.F. Hathaway, Puritan Sportswear and Warner Packaging* for a more in depth history.

### **Scope and Content Note**

The content of the Warner records is vast, encompassing many aspects of the company. In addition to extensive material related to D.H. Warner and the early business days, there are ledgers that document cash flow, daily operations, and other aspects of the firm well into the 1960s. In addition there is an extensive volume of advertisement materials, ranging from original art to proofs to photographs to films with the 1950s-1960s particularly well represented.

Due to the unprocessed nature of the collection, additional insight into the collection's strength is forthcoming.

### **Arrangement Note**

This collection was arranged in the 1990s, and processed according to standards at the time. As such, the box and folder listings reflect an older inventory approach, and are not as descriptive as contemporary practices might require. This is especially true for advertisements. Likewise, the 1990s inventory does not list series, although there appears to be an attempt to make it so.

Due to lack of time to review the material, no additional order has been enforced in the finding aid. The collection will be processed in the future.

There is additional unprocessed, uninventoried material that is not available at this time.

### **Provenance**

Donation from Warnerco received in 1970s.

### **Name and Subject Tracings**

#### *Personal Names*

Warner, I. DeVer (Ira DeVer), 1840-1913

#### *Corporate names*

Warner Brother's Company

Warner Corset Co.

#### *Subject tracings*

Bridgeport, Conn.

Advertising--Underwear

Corset industry

Corsets--Patterns.

Underwear industry--Wages

Women's underwear

### **Administrative Information**

#### *Preferred citation*

Records of Warner Corset Company, (BHC-MSS 0021), Bridgeport History Center.

### **GROUP I**

Box 1, D.H. Warner's account books, 1914-1920

Box 2, D.H. Warner's account books, 1921-1929

Box 3

1. D.H. Warner's account books and accessories, 1899-1921
2. D.H. Warner's account books - engineering department, 1912-1920,1926

Box 4

1. D.H. Warner's account books - Redfern Shops, 1917-1925
2. D.H. Warner's account books - box, 1899-1926

3. D.H. Warner's account books - executive, 1910-1922

Box 5, D.H. Warner's personal receipts, 1904-1905

Box 6, D.H. Warner's personal receipts, 1906-1907

Box 7, D.H. Warner's personal receipts, 1908-1909

Box 8, D.H. Warner's personal receipts, 1910

Box 9, D.H. Warner's personal receipts, 1911

Box 10,

1. D.H. Warner's account books, shirt department, 1899-1901
2. D.H. Warner's account books - Redfern Shops, 1914-1923
3. D.H. Warner's account books - engineering department, 1910-1911
4. D.H. Warner's account books - metal, 1899-1916
5. D.H. Warner's account books - metal machine shop, 1921-1923
6. D.H. Warner's account books - printing and machine department, 1904-1909
7. D.H. Warner's account books - executive, 1922-1926

Box 11

1. D.H. Warner's account books - final black book, 1908-1911
2. D.H. Warner's account books - final black book, 1911-1915
3. D.H. Warner's account books - corset department, 1899-1912
4. D.H. Warner's account books - corset department, 1922-1926
5. Bradford G. Warner's cash journals - personal expenses (3 items), 1919-1930

Box 12

1. I. D. Warner's account book, 1879-1899
2. Warner Bros. Sales book, 1879-1887
3. Journal advertising expenses, 189-1898
4. D.H. Warner's personal account books, 1921

Box 13, D.H. Warner's correspondence, 1901-1905

Box 14, D.H. Warner's correspondence, 1908

Box 15, D.H. Warner's correspondence A-C, 1909,1910

Box 16, D.H. Warner's correspondence D-Y, 1910

Box 17, D.H. Warner's correspondence A-L, 1911

Box 18, D.H. Warner's correspondence M-Z, 1911

Box 19, D.H. Warner trustee for Eva Warner, 1930s

Box 20, D.H. Warner trustee for Ira D. Warner , 1920s

Box 21

1. Yacht & farm inventory, correspondence, 1920s
2. D.H. Warner automobile expenses, 1924-1930
3. Deeds, 1920s
4. Land deeds to D.H. Warner, 1917-1919

Box 22

1. Superior court papers re: D.H. Warner, 1943
2. D.H. Warner's money holder, undated
3. Misc. papers

Box 23

1. Trustee papers for Eva Follett Warner, 1913-1933
2. Bank checks for Eva Follett Warner, 1914-1925
3. Probate papers & wills for Ira DeVer Warner, 1890-1920s
4. Probate papers & wills for Ira DeVer Warner, 1921-1933
5. Probate papers & wills for Ira Follett Warner, 1920s-1930s
6. Checks of Ira Follett Warner, 1910-1931

Box 24

1. Memorial resolution re: Ira DeVer Warner from the Brooklawn Country Club, 1913
2. Memorial book of Ira DeVer Warner, from the Bridgeport Hydraulic Co., 1913
3. Memorial book of Ira DeVer Warner from the Bridgeport Gas and Light Co., 1913
4. Memorial book of Ira DeVer Warner from Bridgeport Hospital, 1913
5. Memorial book of Ira DeVer Warner from Corset Manufacturers of America, 1913
6. Memorial book of Ira DeVer Warner from First Presbyterian Church, 1913

Box 25

1. Bradford G. Warner's cash book, 1922-1927
2. Bradford G. Warner's cash book, 1924-1925
3. Bradford G. Warner's cash book - trial balance, 1931-1943

Box 26

1. Maude C. Warner's account books, 1917-1931
2. Misc. papers, Garden Club, Fairfield Country Club, Fairfield Visiting Nurse Association, 1920s-1930s

Box 27, Maude C. Warner's bank statements and checks, 1920s

Box 28, Maude C. Warner's bank statements and checks, 1920s-1930s

Box 29

1. Maude C. Warner's European trip, 1928
2. Mrs. H.T. Cody's papers, 1920s
3. Maude C. Warner's estate papers, 1930

Box 30, Mrs. Maude C. Warner's charitable papers, 1917-1920

Box 31, John W. Fields cancelled checks, 1913-1914

Box 32

1. Financial statements, 1907-1925
2. Income tax data, 1918-1929

Box 33, Tax returns prior to 1921

Box 34, Federal taxes, 1919-1921

Box 35, Federal tax returns (see enclosed list), 1927-1938

Box 36, Federal tax books, 1938-1942

Box 37, Federal income taxes, 1943-1945

Box 38, Federal tax returns information, 1940-1950

Box 39

1. Tax data, 1936, 1938-39
2. Tax data, 1940-1941
3. Federal unemployment, 1941
4. OAB reports, 1943
5. Inventory & machinery valuation, Bridgeport taxes, 1926

Box 40

1. Tax data, 1943
2. Tax returns, 1945
3. Taxes withheld, 1943, 1945
4. Payroll, 1942

Box 41

1. Employee tax statements, 1938
2. Office payroll balance sheet, 1943
3. State tax returns, 1934
4. Profits and losses, 1920

Box 42

1. Old Age Benefit tax data, 1937-1938
2. Pay roll ledger cards - office and officers, 1941-1942
3. Office pay roll, 1936-1943

Box 43

1. New York unemployment insurance, 1939-1945
2. New York unemployment insurance, 1939-1945
3. New York unemployment insurance, 1939-1945
4. New York unemployment insurance, 1939-1945
5. Illinois unemployment insurance, 1937-1945
6. Illinois unemployment insurance, 1937-1945

7. Illinois unemployment insurance, 1937-1945
8. Illinois unemployment insurance, 1937-1945
9. Connecticut unemployment insurance, 1936-1945
10. Connecticut unemployment insurance, 1936-1945
11. Connecticut unemployment insurance, 1936-1945
12. Connecticut unemployment insurance, 1936-1945

Box 43, Tax claims, 1928

Box 45

1. State and city tax returns, 1938-1939
2. Corset department, 1918-1920
3. Annual reports, 1917-1925

Box 46, Bridgeport city taxes, 1933-1945

Box 47

1. State & city tax returns, 1940-1945
2. Misc. out of state taxes, 1945

Box 48

1. Office payroll overtime, 1943-1945
2. Office payroll overtime, 1943-1945
3. Office payroll overtime, 1943-1945
4. Labor union agreements, 1950-1960
5. Ford, Bacon & Davis - factory reconstruction, 1944-1945
6. Ford, Bacon & Davis - factory reconstruction, 1944-1945
7. Ford, Bacon & Davis - factory reconstruction, 1944-1945

Box 49

1. Cafeteria day book, 1944-1950
2. Payroll record book, 1891-1910
3. Data compiled by R.G. Rankin, 1920-1921

Box 50

1. Sales convention scrapbook, Dec. 1912
2. Seaside Institute opening scrapbook, 1887
3. Corset patents, 1881-1885

Box 51

1. Community appraisals & dedications, 1965
2. Scrapbook, 70th anniversary & sales, convention, 1944
3. Office payroll book, 1905-1909
4. Assets & liabilities, 1881-1895

Box 52

1. AMA Seminar, 1959
2. Warner Bros. fire dept. Papers, 1949-1952
3. Warner Bros. fire dept record books (3), 1918-1959

Box 53, Annual & semi-annual reports, 1916-18,1921, 1923,1969-72

Box 54, Pamphlets & quarterly reports, 1960s-1970s

Box 55

1. Herbener contracts,1938-46
2. Herbener contracts, 1946-1955
3. Herbener contracts, 1940s

Box 56

1. News releases, 1964-65
2. Field report, 1968
3. Reports by John W. Field, 1964,1969
4. Warnaco public relations, 1969
5. Warnaco location directory, 1969
6. AMA seminars, 1966-1967
7. The Wall Street Letter, 1970

Box 57, Covers, press releases, publicity, news clippings,1964-65

Box 58

1. Annual reports, 1978
2. Strategic plans

Box 59

1. Warner Bros. correspondence, 1891-1899
2. Warner Bros. correspondence, 1900-1907
3. Warner Bros. correspondence, 1907-1910, undated

Box 60

1. Lucien Warner estate papers, 1912-1934
2. Karen Osborne Warner's estate papers, 1932-1938

Box 61

1. Promissory notes, 1926-1938
2. Promissory notes, 1926-1948

Box 62

1. Corset patent book, 1866-1871
2. Corset patent book, 1878-1881

Box 63, Corset patent book, 1886-1889

Box 64, Corset patent book, 1890-1893

## **Group II, Advertisements**

Box 1

1. Ads, 1870-1902



2. Ads, 1908-1928
3. Ads, 1914-1915
4. Ads, 1923-1928
5. Ads, 1907-1908
6. Ads, 1908-1929
7. Ads, 1909-1910
8. Ads, 1910-1911
9. Ads, 1911-1913

Box 2

1. Jitney Service, June 1919
2. Warner Bros. factories, Bridgeport, 1947
3. Ads, 1930-1945
4. Fashion show and staff photos, 1927-1940s
5. Ads, Little girl with dog (1917), 1905-1917

Box 3, Ads, 1928-1951

Box 4

1. Ads, 1931-1938
2. Ads, 1946-1950s
3. Ads, 1931-1936
4. Ads, 1934-1940

Box 5

1. Warner history, undated
2. Warner personnel, undated
3. Free for all summer, 1943
4. Parisian" preview of corsetry, 1949
5. Tomorrow ad, 1950-1959

Box 6

1. Life magazine, 1901
2. Catalogue, 1909
3. Catalogue, 1910
4. articles, catalogue (1915), 1911-1916
5. corsets, 1917-1918
6. Ads, 1919
7. Ads, 1920
8. Ads, 1921
9. styles and price lists, 1921-1927

Box 7

1. Correspondence, 1924-1970
2. Ads, 1913-1919
3. Ads, 1910-1915
4. Ads, 1920
5. Ads, 1921-1939

Box 8

1. Hathaway history, 1837-1963
2. Hathaway strike, April 1937

Box 9

1. Fashion photos, 1935-1950s
2. Training course, 1945

Box 10

1. Warner framed photo, 1911
2. Factories and office, 1910-1921
3. Factories, 1910-1921
4. Merit awards and certificates, 1951-1969
5. Executives and salespeople, undated
6. Warner ad photos, 1940s-1950s
7. Warner ad photos, 1940s-1960s
8. Framed merit award, 1966

Box 11

1. Warner Bros. ads, 1928-1929
2. Ads, 1931-1939
3. Ads, 1941-1949
4. Warner training classes, 1946-1947

Box 12

1. Early building and history, 1914-1957
2. Warner photos (personnel), 1915-1946
3. Ads, 1931-1981
4. Baseball teams, 1910, 1920

Box 13

1. Signature proofs, 1948
2. Model (photos), 1948
3. Bras, 1946-1948
4. Corselettes, 1948
5. Girdles, 1948

Box 14

1. Ads, 1905-1959
2. Corset patent, April 1890
3. Maps and charts, Bridgeport Factory, undated
4. Historical literature, 1887

Box 15

1. Factory fashion show, Nov. 1944
2. 70th anniversary sales conference, Oct. 1944

Box 1, Ads, 1930s-1940s

Box 17, Ads, 1930-1939

Box 18

1. Conference, 1930-1939
2. Ads - bras and girdles, 1936-1980

Box 19

1. Warner ads and products, 1900-1949
2. Ads, 1947-1948
3. Fashion show, Hotel Astor, 1947

Box 20, Ads, 1947-1950s

Box 21, Ads (oversized), 1947-1949

Box 22, Ads, 1950-1960s

Box 23, Ads, 1959-1960s

Box 24, 1950s

Box 25, Ads, 1957

Box 26, Ads, 1959

Box 27

1. Fashions, 1950s-1960s
2. Hotel Sherman, Chicago, 1953
3. Harbor Rock swim suits, undated

Box 28, Ads, 1950s

Box 29, Ads, 1948-1957; 1949-1950

Box 30, Ads, 1956; 1958

Box 31, Ads, 1950s

Box 32, Ads, 1950s

Box 33, Ads, 1959

Box 34, Ads, 1949-1960

Box 35, Ads, 1958-1959

Box 36, Ads, 1950s

Box 37, Ads, 1950s

Box 38, Ads, 1950s

Box 39, Ads, 1950s-1960s

Box 40, Ads, 1951-1959

Box 41, Ads, 1958-1959

Box 42, Ads, 1950s

Box 43, Ads, 1950s

Box 44, Ads, 1949-1950s

Box 45, Ads (oversized), 1949-1950s

Box 46, Ads (oversized), 1949-1950s

Box 47, Ads (oversized), 1950s

Box 48, Ads (oversized), 1959-1960s

Box 49, Ads (oversized), 1959-1960s

Box 50, Ads (oversized), 1959-1960s

Box 51, Ads, 1960s

Box 52.

1. Ads and price lists, 1960s
2. Swatches, 1960s

Box 53, Ads, 1960s

Box 54

1. Bad Guys collection, 1960s
2. Spring calendar, 1961

Box 55, Lettering, 1960s

Box 56, Ads, 1960s

Box 57, Ads, 1960s

Box 58

1. Dedication, 1964
2. Newspaper clippings, 1964

3. Publicity releases, 1964
4. Ads and displays, 1960s

Box 59

1. Warner Wash, 1960s
2. Training books, 1960s
3. Mothers Day lingerie, 1960s
4. Warner ads, 1960s

Box 60, Ads, 1960s

Box 61

1. Ads, 20 year club, 1960s
2. Ads, 1960s

Box 62, Ads, 1960s

Box 63, Ads, 1960s

Box 64, 15th-17th century styles

Box 65

1. Ads, 1960s
2. Moorish styles, undated

Box 66, Ads, 1960s

Box 67, Ads, 1960s

Box 68, Ads, 1960s

Box 69, Ads, 1960s

Box 70, Ads, 1960s

Box 71, Ads, 1960s

Box 72, Ads, 1960s

Box 73, Ads (oversized), 1960s

Box 74

1. Lettering and ads, 1960s
2. Bumpless garter, 1960s

Box 75, Ads, 1960s

Box 76

1. New little hangers, undated

2. Ads, 1960s

Box 77

1. Ads and negatives, 1960s
2. Ads, 1960s
3. Transparencies, 1960s

Box 78, Ads, 1960s

Box 79, Ads, 1960s

Box 80, Ads, 1960s

Box 81

1. Ads, 1960s
2. Russian collection, undated

Box 82 Posters (oversize), 1960s

Box 83, Ads (oversize), 1960s

Box 84, Ads (oversize), 1960s

Box 85, Ads (oversize), 1960s

Box 86, Ads (oversize), 1960s

Box 87, Lingerie ads, 1964

Box 88, Ads, 1960s

Box 89, Ads, 1960s

Box 90, Ads, 1960s

Box 91, Ads, 1960s

Box 92, Ads, 1960s

Box 93, Ads, 1960s

Box 94

1. Ads; Redecorating Warner's, 1960s
2. Ads; Photography, 1960s

Box 95

1. Sashay manual, 1966
2. Correspondence, 1966

### 3. Price lists, 1966

Box 96, Lingerie and price lists , 1966

Box 97, Ads (oversize), 1960s

Box 98, Ads (oversize), 1960s

Box 99, Ads (oversize), 1960s

Box 100, Ads, 1973-1974

Box 101, TV slides, 1970s

Box 102, Ads (oversize), 1970s

Box 103, Ads (oversize), 1970s

Box 104, Ads (oversize), 1970s

Box 105, Ads (oversize), 1970s

Box 106, Ads (oversize, 1970s

Box 107, Ads (oversize), 1970s

Box 108, Ads, 1970s

Box 109, Layouts, 1970

Box 110, Envelope art, 1970s

Box 111

1. Warner Station slides, 1974
2. White Stag slides, 1974

Box 112, Merit Awards, 1941-1965

### **Group III, Films**

**Note:** Each film is housed in a separate canister. At this time, the Bridgeport History Center does not have the appropriate equipment for playback.

1. WF01-20, Figure Forum, 1955, 16mm color
2. WF02-20, Untitled, undated, 35mm (master negative)
3. WF03-20, Face the Figures, 1951?, 16mm color
4. WF04-20, Warner's Shadow & Bras, 32mm color (negative)
5. WF05-20, Warnerette A'Lur, 32mm color (negative)
6. WF06-20, Warner's Sta-Flat Corsetette, 32mm color (negative)
7. WF07-20, Untitled, undated, 35mm color(negative)

8. WF08-20, Good News, undated, 35mm
9. WF09-20, Warnerette A'Lure Good News, 35mm
10. WF10-20, Untitled, undated, 35mm
11. WF11-20, Warnerette A"Lure Good News, 35mm
12. WF12-20, Figure Forum, 1954
13. WF13-20, Untitled, undated, 35mm
14. WF14-20, Untitled, undated, 35MM (negative)
15. WF15-20, Untitled, undated, 35mm (negative)
16. WF16-20, Untitled, undated, 35mm
17. WF17-20, Untitled, undated, 16mm
18. WF18-20, Untitled, undated, 16mm
19. WF19-20, Untitled, undated, 16mm
20. WF20-20, Untitled, undated, 16mm

#### **Group IV, Ledgers**

**Note:** These six boxes are only the recorded ledgers at this time. There are approximately 75 to 100 additional ledgers related to corsets, cash flow, daily operations, and other aspects of the company that were never inventoried and have remained untouched at this time.

Box 1, Property appraisal report ledgers, vol. 1 & 2, Dec. 31, 1942

Box 2, Warner Realty Company

Box 3, Private journal, July 1, 1926-Dec. 31, 1938

Box 4, Journals, Apr. 21, 1876-Aug. 24, 1876; Jan. 1919-Oct. 1923; Oct. 1920-July 1921

Box 5, Property Appraisal report ledgers, vol. 3 & 4, Dec. 31, 1942

Box 6, Property appraisal report ledgers, Sept. 1, 1921 and July 1, 1926