



BHC-MSS 0043

Guide to the Records of the Warner Brothers Company 20 Year Club

By Meg Rinn, 2019

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Warner Brothers Company

Title: Records of the Warner Brothers Company 20 Year Club

Dates: 1944-1953

Quantity: 2 manuscript boxes

Abstract: Starting in the 1940s and continuing into the 1950s, the Warner Brothers Company held annual banquets to honor the employees that had been with the company for 20 years. An unknown company compiler created several scrapbooks documenting the event.

Language: English

Repository: Bridgeport History Center

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 Ira 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 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.

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 9th 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:

Starting in the 1940s and continuing into the 1950s, the Warner Brothers Company held annual banquets to honor the employees that had been with the company for 20 years. Within the collection are scrapbooks of each banquet for 1944 and then 1948-1953. Included are newspaper clippings, programs, and extensive photography.

Arrangement note:

Arranged chronologically. No additional series.

Administrative information:

Provenance: Accession 2010.56

Preferred Citation:

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Names and Subject Tracings

Corporate names

Warner Brother's Company

Subject tracings

Bridgeport, Conn.

Corset industry

Women's underwear

Detailed box and folder listing

Box 1

1. 20 Year Club scrapbook featuring photographs of banquet, 1944 (1 of 2)
2. 20 Year Club scrapbook featuring photographs of banquet, 1944 (2 of 2)
3. 20 Year Club scrapbook featuring photographs of banquet, 1947-1948 (1 of 2)
4. 20 Year Club scrapbook featuring photographs of banquet, 1947-1948 (2 of 2)

Box 2

1. 20 Year Club scrapbook featuring photographs of banquet, 1949
2. 20 Year Club scrapbook featuring photographs of banquet, 1950
3. 20 Year Club scrapbook featuring photographs of banquet, 1952-1953