

The Warner Brothers Company and Warner Family Research at the Bridgeport History Center



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Conducting Warner Brothers Company and Warner Family at the Bridgeport History Center

One of the biggest manufacturers in Bridgeport, the Warner Corset Company - later the Warner Brothers Company, then Warnaco - was a major part of the city's industrial history. Starting with Dr. Warner's Health Corsets the company expanded, manufacturing corsets and then bras and other undergarments such as girdles, later branded as slimwear. The company left Bridgeport in the 1970s. It remained in existence until 2013, when it was bought out by PVH.

Due to this long legacy, the Bridgeport History Center holds archival collections and secondary works related to the company itself and the family behind it. The largest is the corporate archive of the Warner Brothers Company itself. The secondary works are all company histories that were written at various points in time by company executives. They strive to tout the company's influence on the history, and help to provide timelines of garment manufacture as well as larger historical context for the fashion industry.

The family material is integrated with both the archival collections and secondary works.

Materials in these collections are pertinent to fashion historians, those conducting research on Connecticut industry, or genealogists with family who worked at the company's Bridgeport headquarters.

Archival sources

Records of the Warner Brothers Company (BHC-MSS 0021.) Bridgeport History Center, Bridgeport Public Library.

The largest collection at the Bridgeport History Center, the Records of the Warner Brothers Company covers the years from the 1870s to 1978. Within the collection is extensive advertising material (over half the collection), employee payroll and information, corporate activity, and the personal papers of the Warner Family itself, especially Ira DeVere Warner.

Records of the Warner Brothers Company 20 Year Club (BHC-MSS 0043), Bridgeport History Center, Bridgeport Public Library.

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 compiled several scrapbooks documenting the event. This collection provides a useful insight into Warner's corporate culture and employee lives.

Films of Ira F. Warner and Family (BHC-MSS 0053.) Bridgeport History Center, Bridgeport Public Library.

As the son of Ira DeVer Warner, one of the key players in the Warner Corset Company, Ira Follett Warner was granted no small amount of wealth and privilege in his lifetime. These family

films, some of them from as early as the 1920s when owning a home film camera was unusual, show Ira's branch of the Warner family on various vacations around the world. Currently BHC does not have the appropriate playback equipment to access this collection.

Other primary sources

Newspaper clippings, Industries--Warner Brothers, 1870s-2004

Newspaper clippings represent a selected curation over the years of newspaper articles related to specific topics in Bridgeport. The Warner Brothers clippings show contemporary press coverage of various aspects of the company while it remained in Bridgeport and afterwards, with the most recent articles dating to 2004.

Secondary works

John W. Field. Fig Leaves and Fortunes: a fashion company named Warnaco. Phoenix publishing: West Kennebunk, Maine. 1990. (HC 338.76870973 F454f)

The most recent company history, this book was written by John W. Field, a former company president and descendent from the Warners. Covering up to 1990, the text includes information about the undergarment industry before the Warners entered it, and helps to provide context for the extensive advertisements in BHC-MSS 0021.

Arthur W. Pearce. The Future Out of the Past: an illustrated history of the Warner Brothers Company on its 90th anniversary with the histories of the coporate family, C.F. Hathaway, Purtian Sportswear and Warner Packaging. Printers Inc.: Hartford, Connecticut. 1964. (HCq 338.47 P35f)

Written in celebration of the 90th anniversary of the book by executive Arthur Pearce, this book only covers up to 1964. Compared to Field, there is a more celebratory air in contrast with Field's attempt to provide a more straight forward history.

Lucien T. Warner. Always Starting Things Through Eight Eventful Years. Second printing. Warner Brothers Company Printing Department: Bridgeport, Connecticut. 1957. (HCq 338.47 W379a)

The earliest company history held by the Bridgeport History Center, this history by Lucian T. Warner was originally published in 1947. Lucian died in 1950, and a second printing was produced in 1954 by John W. Field to update the information within. Featuring extensive illustrations, this book is heavy on faux conversation dialog to relay history. Also included is information about research and development, with a particular emphasis on the company's effort to assist in World War II such as parachute development.