

MSS. Collection #163

Carolina Sales Co. Collection, 1944-late 1940s [bulk 1944-1946].
½ box (7 folders), ca. 235 items.

NOTE: The numbers cited in parentheses, e.g. 1:5, refer the researcher to the Series#:Folder# in which that name/topic will be found.

INTRODUCTION

The Carolina Sales Co. Collection consists primarily of correspondence and printed materials from the early, mail order years of a Greensboro surplus equipment business. Established by Joseph and Sylvia Grablowsky, the store gradually enlarged its inventory from U.S. Army surplus to general surplus. The mail order advertisements and the correspondence regarding order fulfillment offer some insight into marketing and sales fulfillment for a small business getting started in mail order during World War II.

Arrangement: This collection is organized into three series: **Correspondence**, 1944-1946; **Financial**, ca. 1943; and **Printed Materials**, 1944-late 1940s.

Provenance: This collection was donated by Sidney Gray, the youngest son of Joseph and Sylvia Gray, in March 2002 and assigned the accession number 2002.18.3.

Processing: This collection was organized and the finding aid was prepared by volunteer Ann Koppen in April 2022.

BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL NOTE

The Carolina Sales Co. was founded by Joseph B. Grablowsky and his wife Sylvia to sell U.S. Army surplus equipment. Although the company was in business by 1944, it does not appear in the Greensboro city directories until 1946, mostly likely because it was solely mail order until that date. The name of the company and the surname of the owners changed over time. The owners' name was Grablow in the 1946 city directory and had become Gray by the 1947/48 city directory, when the store name was Carolina Sales Army Goods. In early 1949, the store name changed to Carolina Sales General Merchandise to reflect the expanded inventory beyond army surplus. Later that year, it became The Surplus Store, and the address changed from 606-1/2 to 606 South Elm. In 1960, the store expanded to 606-608 South Elm. After Joseph Gray's death in 1955, Sylvia continued to run the business until she died in 1997.

Joseph B. Grablowsky (1909-1955) was born in Augusta, Georgia, and raised primarily in Brooklyn, New York. Around 1939, he moved to Greensboro with his widowed mother and three younger siblings. That year, he started Carolina Furniture Outlet at 606 South Elm to sell used furniture, and it appears that business evolved into Carolina Sales Co. (since the furniture store disappeared from the city directories in 1946, the same year that Carolina Sales Co. was first listed). Sylvia Samet (1917-1997) was born and raised in Mount Airy, North Carolina, and

moved to Greensboro around 1938 to work as a stenographer for North State Chevrolet Co. and then Odell Mill Supply Co. She married Joseph Grablowsky in 1941, and they raised three children, daughter Michele and sons David and Sidney. In addition to their business activities, the couple were founding members of Beth David Synagogue, and Joseph was a member of the Greensboro Masonic Lodge No. 76.

Biographical Sources: The biographical and historical information was acquired from the donor, the Greensboro city directories, Ancestry.com, and the obituaries of Joseph Gray (*Greensboro Daily News*, March 18, 1955; *Mount Airy News*, March 22, 1955) and Sylvia Gray (*News & Record*, April 24, 1997).

SCOPE & CONTENT NOTE

The types of materials in this collection include business correspondence, financial documents, and printed materials. The bulk of the collection consists of a limited sampling of letters from customers requesting merchandise from the mail order company, and notations or replies from Carolina Sales Co. regarding mail order fulfillment. The letters, primarily from scoutmasters, show the items sold and the scope of the advertising campaign, with more than half the United States represented. The correspondence also reveals the logistics of fulfillment and the pricing for merchandise, postage, and Railway Express. Note that this “good used” army equipment was for sale during World War II, not just afterwards. The collection also includes a few advertisements mailed to scoutmasters and a couple items relating to bank deposits.

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

1. Correspondence. 5 folders (ca. 225 items). 1944-1946.

The correspondence consists of merchandise requests along with replies from Carolina Sales Co. or notations by the company regarding mail order fulfillment. These folders represent a small portion of the sales correspondence from 1944-1946: just the “E” and/or “H” files, providing some idea of the volume of sales by extrapolation. They are organized chronologically and then alphabetically. The requested merchandise was all army surplus: pup tents, packs, cartridge belts, canteens, and mess kits, as well as entire “outfits” that contain all these items, which are the same items listed in the advertisements (2:1). Gas masks, gas mask holders, pistol holders, and canvas leggings were also popular. The letters were sent from throughout the United States, primarily from scoutmasters but also from school superintendents and individuals, including Boy Scouts. One order came from someone in the U.S. Army (1:4), and two letters from a nephew of the Grays combined an order with well wishes (1:2). Note that sales began in January 1944 when the U.S. was still involved in World War II.

2. Financial. 1 folder (2 items). ca. 1943.

The two financial items are a cancelled check made out to Glascock Stove & Manufacturing Co. and an empty envelope addressed to Security National Bank from Greensboro's Fair Park Casino.

3. Printed Materials. 1 folder (6 items). 1944-late 1940s.

This series includes several flyers sent to scoutmasters to promote U.S. Army surplus kits and an advertisement for a Betty Crocker steam ironing attachment sold by Carolina Sales Co.

FOLDER LISTING

<u>Series</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	
1	1	Correspondence	-- H (1944)
	2	“	-- E (1945)
	3	“	-- H (1945, January-June)
	4	“	-- H (1945, July-December)
	5	“	-- C, H (1946)
2	1	Financial	-- Miscellaneous (ca. 1943)
3	1	Printed Materials	-- Advertisements (ca. 1944-late 1940s)