

MSS. Collection #241

Vick Chemical Co. Collection, 1933-1993. 3 boxes (51 folders), ca. 350 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

This collection consists of photographs and printed materials pertaining to Vick Chemical Co. and its successors. Best known for the cold salve called Vicks VapoRub, the company was founded by Lunsford Richardson and retained family ownership until it was acquired by Proctor & Gamble in 1985. Company newsletters comprise the bulk of this collection, providing insight into the company's culture and work environment during the 20th century. Researchers interested in business history, Vick Chemical Co. history and operations, and the pharmaceutical industry may find this collection useful.

Arrangement: This collection is organized into two series and arranged within series by document type and/or subject. The series are: **Photographs**, ca. 1940s-1980; and **Printed Materials**, 1933-1993.

Provenance: The bulk of this collection was donated by Ed Morrah in February 2017 and assigned the accession number 2017.8.1. Ed Morrah began working for Vick Chemical Co. in 1961 as a Planning Engineer, eventually became Director of Engineering for the Healthcare Division, and retired from Proctor & Gamble in 1994. He obtained these materials from several colleagues at the company, including Eddie Leonard. Ben Fort gave him most of the items dating before 1960, as well as the photograph taken at the Pennsylvania plant in 1980. The collection also includes eight newsletters dating from 1960-1963 that were transferred from the Outer Banks History Center in 2003 and assigned the accession number 2003.33.1.

Processing: This collection was organized and the finding aid was prepared by volunteer Elizabeth Moore in May 2017. Additional newsletters were incorporated and the finding aid was updated by Archivist Elise Allison in November 2020.

HISTORICAL NOTE

Lunsford Richardson and John Fariss bought the W.C. Porter drug store in Greensboro in 1890 and renamed it Richardson & Fariss. While working as a pharmacist, Richardson developed a variety of home remedies, including a vaporizing salve for colds that he called Vicks Magic Salve; it later became known as Vicks VapoRub. In 1898, Richardson sold his share in the drugstore to form the Lunsford Richardson Wholesale Drug Company, which sold remedies to merchants in the counties surrounding Greensboro. He sold this business in 1905 to found Vick's

Family Remedies; when that company began to lose profit, his son, Smith Richardson, suggested that it scale back its product line to focus on its unique product, Vicks VapoRub.

The company opened its plant on Milton Street in Greensboro in 1910 and changed its name to Vick Chemical Co. a year later. During the 1918 Spanish influenza pandemic, the Milton St. plant operated continuously and VapoRub sales increased from \$900,000 to \$2.9 million in 1919. By incorporating innovative advertising techniques, such as billboards and streetcar advertising, and offering free samples, sales continued to grow. Vick Chemical established a second plant in Greensboro on Wendover Avenue near Latham Park in 1936; this location produced cough syrups and cough drops.

In 1938, Vick Chemical Co. acquired the William S. Merrell Company, at the time the largest pharmaceutical company in the country. It purchased two more companies in the 1940s, and changed its name to Richardson-Merrell Inc. in 1960 as a nod to its founders. As it continued to grow, Richardson-Merrell moved out of the Milton St. and Wendover Ave. plants into a larger plant on Swing Road in 1966. In 1980, the Merrell division was sold to Dow Chemical Company, and the remaining division became Richardson-Vicks, Inc. This company was bought by Procter & Gamble in 1985.

Historical Sources: The historical information was obtained from *The Early History and Management Philosophy of Richardson-Merrell*, by Smith Richardson (Richardson-Merrill, Inc., 1975), as well as the finding aid for the [Richardson-Vicks, Inc., Records](#) in the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Information on the Greensboro plants was found in Jim Schlosser's *The Beat Goes On* (Greensboro Bicentennial Commission, 2008) and *Remembering Greensboro* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2009), as well as in newsletters in the collection.

SCOPE & CONTENT NOTE

The types of materials found in this collection are photographs and printed materials. The bulk of the collection consists of newsletters that document company culture in Greensboro, as well as at the plant in Hatboro, Pennsylvania. While the newsletters provide some information on the company, they focus largely on the personal interests and professional accomplishments of employees by featuring employees of the month, highlighting worker hobbies and vacations, and announcing advancements within the company.

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

1. Photographs. 4 folders (15 items). ca. 1940s-1980.

The photographs depict professional and social scenes relating to Vick Chemical Co. Ten images show employees posing for group portraits, some with company buildings in the background (1:1). One photograph features employees filling out a company-wide survey (1:2). Two photos show company social events, including a dinner and a Christmas party (1:4). A photo of employees at the Hatboro, Pennsylvania plant in 1980 includes Ben Fort and Lunsford "Lump" Richardson, grandson of the VapoRub inventor (1:3).

2. Printed Materials. 47 folders (ca. 335 items). 1933-1993.

The printed material includes a banquet program and menu from January 1942 (2:1) and a health insurance plan from 1951 detailing benefits (2:3). Annual reports from 1945-1946 contain information on the company's sales and earnings, mission and goals, production, and new products (2:2). Employee surveys provide a glimpse of satisfaction and morale (2:4). While the newsletters contain some information on company policy and production, they are mostly employee-centered, highlighting family news, hobbies, community service and promotions of individual employees. Also included is an "employee of the month" column. Earlier newsletters feature columns specifically for female employees with recipes and tips for homemaking; later issues encourage employees to vote (2:30) and feature articles on the benefits of exercising (2:43) and stress management (2:44).

FOLDER LISTING

<u>Series</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	
1	1	Photographs	<u>-- Group Portraits (ca. 1940s-1960s)</u>
	2	"	<u>-- Office Scenes (ca. 1950s)</u>
	3	"	<u>-- Pennsylvania (1980)</u>
	4	"	<u>-- Social Events (ca. 1950s-1960s)</u>
2	1	Printed Materials	<u>-- Annual Banquet (1942)</u>
	2	"	<u>-- Annual Reports (1945-1946)</u>
	3	"	<u>-- Employee Insurance Plan (1951)</u>
	4	"	<u>-- Employee Surveys (1948)</u>
	5	"	<u>-- Memoranda (1962)</u>
	6	"	<u>-- Newsletters (1933)</u>
	7	"	<u>-- Newsletters (1938)</u>
	8	"	<u>-- Newsletters (1939, Jan.-June)</u>
	9	"	<u>-- Newsletters (1939, July-Dec.)</u>
	10	"	<u>-- Newsletters (1940-1942)</u>
	11	"	<u>-- Newsletters (1943-1945)</u>
	12	"	<u>-- Newsletters (1949-1952)</u>
	13	"	<u>-- Newsletters (1953)</u>
	14	"	<u>-- Newsletters (1954)</u>
	15	"	<u>-- Newsletters (1955)</u>
	16	"	<u>-- Newsletters (1956)</u>
	17	"	<u>-- Newsletters (1957)</u>
	18	"	<u>-- Newsletters (1958)</u>
	19	"	<u>-- Newsletters (1959)</u>
	20	"	<u>-- Newsletters (1960)</u>
	21	"	<u>-- Newsletters (1961)</u>
	22	"	<u>-- Newsletters (1962-1963)</u>

<u>Series</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	
2	23	Printed Materials	-- Newsletters (1964)
	24	“	-- Newsletters (1965)
	25	“	-- Newsletters (1966)
	26	“	-- Newsletters (1967-1968)
	27	“	-- Newsletters (1969)
	28	“	-- Newsletters (1970)
	29	“	-- Newsletters (1971)
	30	“	-- Newsletters (1972)
	31	“	-- Newsletters (1973)
	32	“	-- Newsletters (1974)
	33	“	-- Newsletters (1975)
	34	“	-- Newsletters (1976)
	35	“	-- Newsletters (1977)
	36	“	-- Newsletters (1978)
	37	“	-- Newsletters (1979)
	38	“	-- Newsletters (1980)
	39	“	-- Newsletters (1981)
	40	“	-- Newsletters (1982)
	41	“	-- Newsletters (1983)
	42	“	-- Newsletters (1984)
	43	“	-- Newsletters (1985)
	44	“	-- Newsletters (1986)
	45	“	-- Newsletters (1987)
	46	“	-- Newsletters (1988)
	47	“	-- Newsletters (1992-1993)