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W. Lewis & Co. Ephemera Collection

COLLECTION 79

Champaign County Historical Archives

Compiled by: Jazmin Wilkerson, 2016

Creator/Corporate name: W. Lewis and Co. Department Store (Champaign, Ill.)

Inclusive Dates: 1897-1935

Physical Description: 1 box, (0.7 linear feet).

Provenance:

The W. Lewis & Co. Ephemera Collection was donated to the Champaign County Historical Archives in November 2015. The materials were discovered at an estate sale of former female W. Lewis & Co. graphic artist.

Access:

The records are accessible to the public within applicable copyright restrictions and limited to use at the Champaign County Historical Archives of The Urbana Free Library.

Historical Note:

Wolf Lewis (1858-1942) was a Polish immigrant and entrepreneur. He moved to Champaign, IL in 1897 where he opened a general merchandise store, The Economy, at 57 North Neil Street in downtown Champaign. The first advertisement for the store appeared in *The Champaign Daily News* on May 22, 1897. The Economy, later known as W. Lewis & Co., moved to its permanent location at the corner of Neil and Park in November 1901 (*Champaign Daily Gazette*, November 11, 1901). The name change to W. Lewis & Co. occurred in 1905 according to local city directories.

The W. Lewis & Co. Department Store was destroyed in Champaign's St. Patrick Day Fire, March 17, 1915. The morning fire began in the northwest elevator shaft of the W. Lewis & Co. Department Store. The loss for Lewis' store was estimated to exceed \$200, 000. The fire not only claimed the Illinois Building which housed W. Louis & Co. but also completely gutted the Price/Dallenbach block directly east across Neil Street (the buildings were repaired and still remain).

Within a week Wolf Lewis reopened his store in temporary quarters. The Illinois Building was quickly rebuilt and W. Lewis & Co. was its primary tenant until its closure in 1972. The store continued to thrive through the 1960s and was one of the prominent retail establishments in Champaign. In 1967 the store was acquired by Wagner Associated Stores of Chicago. Wagner operated the store anonymously and continued the Lewis name and line of merchandise while adding nationally famous lines of goods. In July 1972, W. Lewis & Co. Department Store ceased operations and Noel Fashions opened in its place. Currently (2017) the Illinois/Lewis building, as it is known, is owned by Busey Bank and houses four floors of office space.

Scope and Content Note:

The collection includes catalogs, advertisements, and newspaper articles for W. Lewis & Co. Department Store and its forerunner The Economy.



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Subjects Terms:

Department stores—Champaign
Neil St (Champaign), North, 57
Retail advertising

Names:

Lewis, Wolf, 1858-1942
The Economy (Champaign, Ill.)
W. Lewis and Co. Department Store (Champaign, Ill.)

Container List:

Box 1

Folder 1: Advertisements

Advertisement, Champaign County Gazette, Wednesday, May 26, 1897
Advertisement, Champaign County Gazette, Wednesday, August 25, 1897
Advertisement, Champaign County Gazette, Saturday, May 22, 1897
Advertisement, Liberty Bonds, promotion
Letter advertising fur coat showing, Aug. 16, 1932
In-house advertising coupon

Folder 2: Anniversary Catalogs

20th Anniversary catalog, 1917
22nd Anniversary Sale catalog, 1919
23rd Anniversary Sale catalog, 1920
25th Anniversary Sale catalog, 1922
27th Anniversary Sale catalog, 1924
38th Anniversary Sale catalog, 1935

Folder 3: Christmas Catalogs

Oversized printed newspaper Christmas catalog (2)
Christmas catalogs (4), various years

Folder 4: Department Managers' Sale Catalogs-

Department managers' sale catalog (2), 1934 and undated

Folder 5: Catalogs, Various

Oversized printed newspaper catalog, Spring 1925
OK! Catalog
The Tiny Times, boys and girls catalog

Folder 6: Newspaper Articles

Newspaper article, "Lewis Bros. Departure," Marinette, Wisconsin, Argus, Friday May 7, 1897

Folder 7: Promotional Material Mailing

Princess Peggy Prosperity Frocks and Pajamas, 1932 (color)
Pamphlet for Rothmoor Coats and Suits, Spring 1935
What Shall I Wear? Printzess Coats, Fall 1933 catalog
Success in Dress creations of The House of Youth, Fall and Winter 1925
Selby Arch Preserver Shoes, promotional material
Peacock Shoes, promotional material