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The Hardware Company That Ruled Them All

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This series of items comes from the recently processed SC193 Richards & Conover Hardware Company Collection. The wholesale hardware company was started by John Francisco Richards in Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1857.

Richards was a smart and calculating businessman who took note of how cities in the area were evolving. He saw local developments such as the opening of the Hannibal Bridge in 1869 and growth of the railroads and stockyards as indicators of future prosperity. Realizing that Kansas City's industrial and commercial potential would soon surpass that of Leavenworth, he moved his business in 1857 to Kansas City, where it continued to prosper and expand.

By the 1950s, the market for wholesalers began to change and the hardware company adapted. Those in charge at Richards & Conover decided to refocus their business strategy on steel distribution, opening a new warehouse at 6333 St. John Avenue and closing the hardware business. When the company itself closed in 1999 due to a faulty new software system and changes in the steel market, it could attest to being one of the longest continually operating family owned businesses in Kansas City with five generations of the Richards family having been involved.

Throughout its 145 years, Richards & Conover occupied several buildings. But its location at Fifth and Wyandotte, where it operated for over 75 years, is still standing today with the company's name as a "ghost sign" reminding onlookers of the old brick building's origins. This collection documents a large portion of the company's business proceedings, publications, and internal structure.

Catalogs like this one for 1955-1958 one were used by salesmen to advertise everything from garden supplies, mechanical tools, flooring, and kitchen items to children's toys, sporting goods, and suitcases.



Richards & Conover catalog, 1955-1958

This advertisement in the 1926-1929 catalog features the Utah Sun, a light fixture for “bestowing all the health-giving rays of natural sunlight.” Using ultra-violet rays, the lamp “gives you a rich flood of pure, intense sunshine every day in the year regardless of climate or location whenever you want it.” Light therapy became a popular method of curing many ills in the late 1920s, as can be seen from this pitch for “selling sunshine over the counter.”

4-25-29
1477U

UTAH SUN

Ultra Violet Rays

No
Suit East
Not a

434
\$36.00
IYD2
OYXX

*Extra Carbons
Cut up to 1/2 inch
Suit (Patented) \$6.00
Not a - 27X
44X*

Utah Sun Model U \$35
Complete with one pair goggles, screen, and four carbons; light cord with connector plug and switch.

Utah Sun Carbons (Box of 40) \$6

Utah Sun Localiter Set including
1 Localizing Shield
1 Localiter Units
1 Official Tube
\$5.00 extra

UTAH RADIO PRODUCTS COMPANY - Chicago, U. S. A.

ULTRA VIOLET RAYS!

UTAH SUN

Brings Health and Happiness to Your Home



Utah Sun Model U
\$35.00

Utah Sun Carbon, Box of 48,
\$2.00




Utah Sun Incandescent Set
Includes
1 Incandescent Bulb,
1 Incandescent Tube,
1 Original Tube
\$5.00 extra.

Here is a tremendous new market! Brand new! Selling sunshine over the counter. All homes can now have the advantages of this wonderful development through the Utah Sun at a popular price.

SCIENTISTS tell us all life comes from the sun. Without the sun's beneficial rays plant growth is pale and weak, animal growth stunted. Truly, old Dr. Sun is the greatest physician in the world—but it is not so easy to make an appointment with this great healer.

Before the development of modern civilization man lived in a more natural way, closer to nature—and the sun was his doctor. The race grew strong and sturdy.

Modern man has changed all this. He has purer water, better food, more comfortable surroundings; but the sunshine—particularly its ultra-violet rays are almost entirely shut out of his life.

These ultra-violet rays of sunshine are the vital—the health-giving rays. But they cannot penetrate our clothing. Clouds, smoke or dust greatly weaken their intensity. Window glass stops them. Is it any wonder that the health of the race has suffered accordingly, that we are easy victims to disease, and that we and our children fall short of that exhaustless vitality which is our birthright?

Fortunately science comes to our rescue by producing an artificial sun—one bestowing all the health-giving rays of natural sunlight—one that you can use in the privacy of your own home, at any hour of the day or night—that will give you a robust tan Summer or Winter, regardless of weather—that will help repair the ravages of a strenuous existence.

Until recently it was necessary to go to your doctor for this artificial sunlight. But now American ingenuity has perfected a safe artificial sun, the Utah Sun—Ultra-Violet Rays.

It gives you a rich flood of pure, intense sunshine every day in the year regardless of climate or location whenever you want it. Under its benign influence fatigue, lassitude and insomnia are assuaged, irritability and nervousness tend to give way to composure and self control, and sound physical stamina often replaces the general lack of tone that has resulted from sunlight starvation.

Dimensions—Height when extended, 28½ in. Minimum height, 14½ in. Size of bowl, 11½ in. Dia. Depth, 9 in.
Current Draw—4 to 5 amperes.
Type of Current Used—Will operate off of 110 A. C. or 110 D.C. current. Also 40 or 25 cycle current.
Weight—Shipping, 17½ lbs.

Carbon Life—A pair of Utah Sun Carbons will burn for 11½ to 17½ hours. Good for five to fifteen child treatments at the rate. Two to five longer time treatments for an adult.
Finish—Bowl of polished platinum. Stand lacquer treatment. Finish in harmony with home surroundings.
Patenting—Approved by various. Baseboard contains 12x14 11½ inches.

UTAH RADIO PRODUCTS COMPANY - Chicago, U. S. A.

Utah Sun advertisement, ca. 1920

These pages from an early 1920s catalog show children's toy vehicles. The cars were constructed with automobile steel and sold for \$20-\$50.

RICHARDS & CONOVER HARDWARE CO. 2175

April 27, 1914

JUVENILE AUTOMOBILES.

CASE.



No. 4524D—Shipping Weight Each 56 Pounds... Each, \$23 00

DESCRIPTION.

Body—12x29 1/2 inches. Finish—Red, Decorated and Striped in Yellow. Wheels—Steel Disc, Diameter 10 inches, 1/2 inch Rubber Tires, Plain Bearing. Equipment—Composition Steering Wheel, Horn, Motor Meter, Instrument Board, Oil Can with Holder, Nickel-plated Steel Radiator, Oil Can with Holder, Gear Shaft, Road Lamps, Spare Tire, Rubber Pedals, Upholstered Seat.

One in a Box.

OAKLAND.



No. 4528DM—Shipping Weight Each 54 Pounds... Each, \$24 00

DESCRIPTION.

Body—12x36 inches. Finish—Maroon, Decorated and Striped in Red and White. Wheels—Steel Disc, Diameter 10 inches, 1/2 inch Rubber Tires, Plain Bearing. Equipment—Cast Steering Wheel, Horn, Motor Meter, Oil Can with Holder, Gear Shaft, Lamps, License Tag, Spare Tire, Rubber Pedals, Instrument Board, Upholstered Seat, Motor Throttle.

One in a Box.

LIBERTY SIX.



No. 4530D—Shipping Weight Each 65 Pounds... Each, \$29 00

DESCRIPTION.

Body—12x34 inches. Finish—Tan, Striped in Brown and Yellow. Wheels—Steel Disc, Diameter 10 inches, 1/2 inch Rubber Tires, Plain Bearing. Equipment—Composition Steering Wheel, Horn, Nickel-plated Windshield, Spotlight, Motor Meter, Instrument Board, Oil Can, Road Lamps, Gear Shaft, Operating "Stop" and "Slow" Signal, Rubber Pedals, Upholstered Seat.

One in a Box.

LINCOLN.



No. 4535W—Shipping Weight Each 62 Pounds... Each, \$30 00

DESCRIPTION.

Body—12x30 inches. Finish—Royal Blue, Light Blue, Pearl, White Stripes. Wheels—Artillery Type, Diameter 11 inches, 1/2 inch Rubber Tires, Plain Bearing. Equipment—Composition Steering Wheel, Horn, Motor Meter, Instrument Board, Oil Can with Holder, Nickel-plated Metal Front, Road Lamps, Gear Shaft, Trunk with Nickel-plated Bars, Rubber Pedals, Upholstered Seat.

One in a Box.

BUICK.



No. 4540DM—Shipping Weight Each 70 Pounds... Each, \$34 00

DESCRIPTION.

Body—12x41 inches. Finish—Pan Green, Decorated and Striped in Yellow and White. Wheels—Steel Disc, Diameter 10 inches, 1/2 inch Rubber Tires, Plain Bearing. Equipment—Cast Steering Wheel, Horn, Nickel-plated Windshield, Spotlight, Motor Meter, Nickel-plated Metal Front, Road Lamps, Instrument Board, Oil Can, Gear Shaft, Trunk with Nickel-plated Bars, Rubber Pedals, Fenders with Running Board, Upholstered Seat, Rear View Mirror, Kick Plates.

One in a Box.

PACKARD SIX.

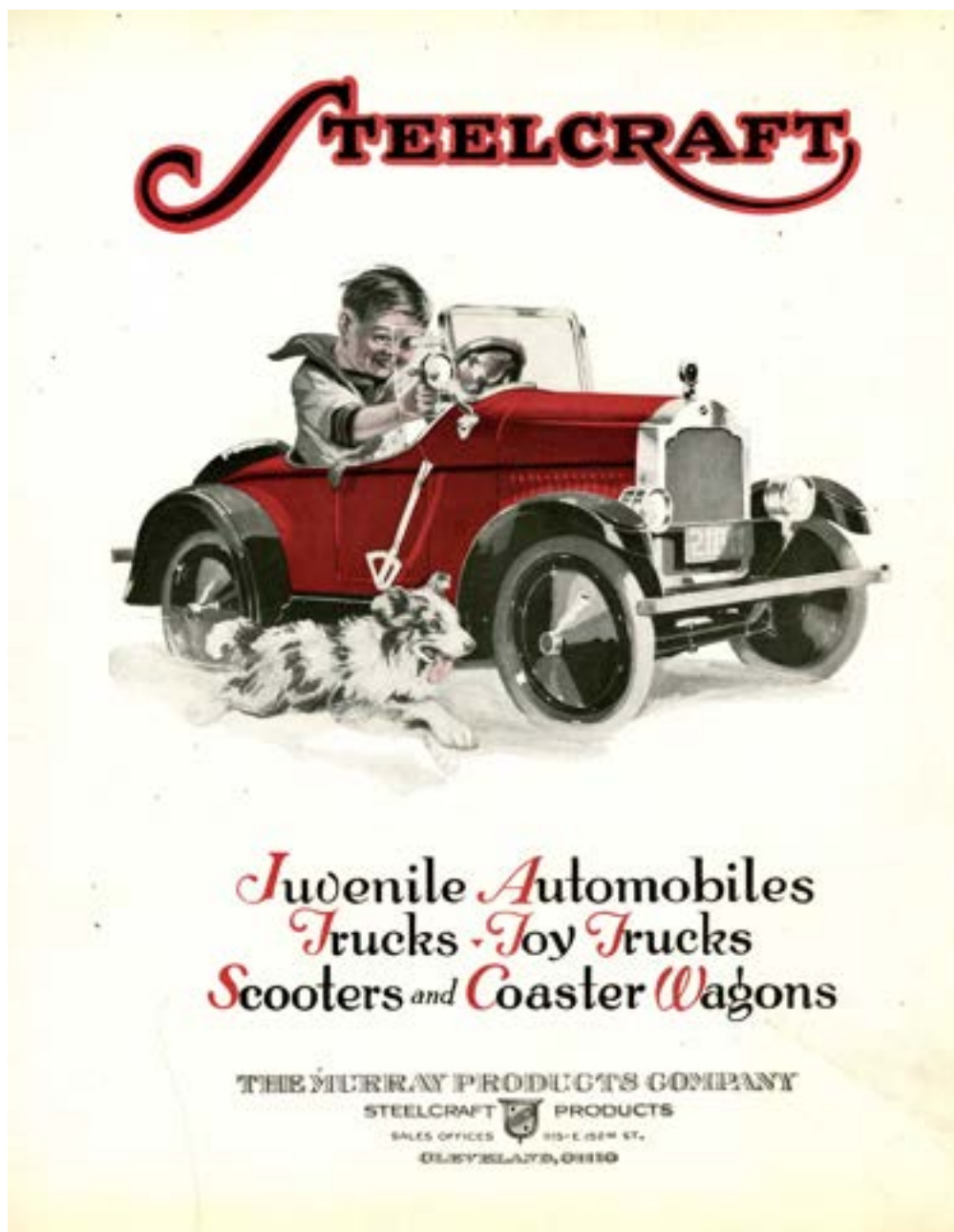


No. 4545DM—Shipping Weight Each 60 Pounds... Each, \$36 00

DESCRIPTION.

Body—12x45 1/2 inches. Finish—Tan, Decorated and Striped in Red and White. Wheels—Steel Disc, Diameter 12 inches, 1/2 inch Rubber Tires, Rubber Bearing. Equipment—Composition Tilted Steering Wheel, Divided Windshield with Side Wings, Spotlight, Motor Meter, Metal Mesh Front, Road Lamps, Instrument Board, Gear Shaft Operating "Stop" and "Slow" Signal, Jarcoot Rear Springs, Roller Bearing Rear Axle Bracket, Leather Cloth Top, Open Side Door, Trunk with Nickel-plated Bars, Luggage Carrier, Rubber Pedals, Upholstered Seat and Back, Rear View Mirror, Kick Plates, Horn, Motor Horn, High Pressure Lubricating System.

One in a Box.



Richards & Conover catalog, ca. 1920

Among the great resources this collection offers researchers are ledgers recording the sales, purchases, and inventories of the company's business transactions. These ledgers show who the Richards & Conover Company was doing business with, what was purchased and sold, and dates of transactions.

47

Thursday Nov^r 17th 1864

177	J. F. Richards	Dr	
177	10. Rope Wheel & Buckets		\$5.25
177	J. P. Grundt & Co		
177	1 Pick Handle		\$35
177	Kansas Stage Co		
177	1 Hay Knife		\$2.25
/ 8 th			
177	G. Linnic	Dr	
177	1 Bolter Plate		125
177	1 File		200
			\$3.25
177	Burns & Iron Bridge		
177	18 ^{lb} Chain	25	\$5.18
177	Chas Bopp		
177	1 Key 3rd fine		1350
177	2 ¹ / ₂ Nails		25
			\$13.75
177	Coolidge & Co		
177	3 Hook & Staples 1/2	15	75
177	2 paper & mats 1/2		25
			\$1.00
177	A. Brown		
177	3 Batt. Verm		\$1.50
177	Woods & Abernathy		
177	4 ¹ / ₂ lb. Fine packing	125	\$5.94
177	Kansas Stage Co		
177	24 lbs. nails	Butmanville 100	\$3.00
177	A. W. Crancer		
177	2 lbs. Nails		\$25
177	Carney & Co		
177	1 Lantern		200

	<u>170</u>		
✓			Moline April 10 1869
✓	<u>Stearns & Co.</u>		
✓			
✓	1-18 in Con Br. Rigged with 2 1/2 screws	62	
✓		1/2	20 69
✓			41 33
✓	Feb. 3 rd		
✓			Entered to Audit - April 19 th
✓	John Sedani		
✓	<u>171</u>		
			St. Louis April 10 1869
	<u>Freibanks Greenleaf & Co</u>		207 Market St.
✓			
✓	3 No 11 1/2 Hilo. Scales	99	
✓	3 " 11 1/2 " "	98	
✓	1 " 10 " "	49	
✓	6 Unions "	84	
✓	6 No 1 Ev. Bal. Bin.	48	
✓		358	
✓		up 25%	89 50
✓			268 50
	Eight		Entered to Audit April 19 th
	<u>172</u>		
			St. Louis April 12 1869
✓	<u>Robt. Harrison & Wall</u>		603 N. 2 nd St.
✓			
✓	16 Bars lin. Rd. B. Screws 7/16	330	
✓	6 " 1/2 " " do 6/16	101	
✓		431	4 th 19 24
✓	Chas. E. & S. Spencer		
✓			Settled by Cash down - May 22 nd 1869
			more in the future - High 1869 - 1870 2 78

Daybook, 1864 and Ledger, 1869

Along with business material, there also are items documenting the lives involved in the family business. Correspondence details not only professional dealings but also the interpersonal relationships that were cultivated through a well-run business. In the letter below to Edward Simmons of the Simmons Hardware Company, John F. Richards writes that “in my two grandsons we have been looking for a third generation of hardware men in the family.” He worries, however, that “with John F. Second, George’s son(,) in the Aviation in France and his second son reaching his majority in a few years, it is hard to say if this terrible war will leave them to me.” John F. Richards II, for whom Richards-Gebaur Air Force Base and Kansas City’s first air terminal, Richards Flying Field, were named, was indeed killed in action during World War I.

November 12, 1917.

My dear Ed:

It has now been some days since your very kind and welcome letter arrived.

My last birthday was a very pleasant occasion, all except the thought that behind it lay eighty-three years, that is a good while, but I really am thankful to be here and to have enjoyed excellent health all these years and reasonable success.

It gives me great satisfaction, as you also have express it, to possess two sons who have taken hold of the business, and in my two grandsons we have been looking for a third generation of hardware men in the family, but with John F. Second, George's son in the Aviation in France and his second son reaching his majority in a few years, it is hard to say in this terrible War will leave them to us.

I fully appreciate your expression of affectionate regard and in turn will say it is most heartily reciprocated. As the years go by we find our oldest friends a never failing source of happiness in recalling a former time.

If you should come to Kansas City or Excelsior Springs, do give me a day or two. My trips from home are rare but if I should be in St. Louis will certainly see you.

With my best wishes for your health and happiness,
I am,

Your old friend,

The company's employee newsletter, the "Rich-Conversation," contained information about the activities of the employees and gave updates on what was happening at the warehouse. It is unknown how long the newsletter was published, but this collection includes some issues from 1957-1958.



the Rich-Conversation

MARCH, 1938

VOL. 2, NO. 3



DEALER SERVICES DEPT. ORGANIZED

Paul Haugheir, Vice-President and General Manager of the Kansas City Hardware Division, has announced the installation of a new department, effective February 15th. This department is called "Dealer Services Department" and will be under the control of the Dealer Services Manager, Claude Stone.

Realizing the need for promotional materials for the independent dealer, Rich-Con is devoting considerable time, effort, and money toward this department which was set up to provide these things for the dealer.

Reporting to Claude Stone will be Harold Jackson, who as Catalog Manager will be in complete charge of cataloging, order forms, basic stock lists, printing, etc. A new assistant, Glenn Scott, will be our Promotion Manager, also reporting to Claude Stone. He will be responsible for the development of all dealer promotional aids, such as brochures, tabloids, newspaper advertising, layouts, promotional items, etc. A great deal of his time will be taken up with the development of these aids for Red Circle Stores.

HONOR BESTOWED ON NEWTON HARDWARE MAN

Max H. Cober, partner in the Greater Hardware Co., has been presented the 1937 distinguished service award given annually by the Junior Chamber of Commerce in Newton, Kansas, as the outstanding young man of the year.

Presentation of the award was made by Preston Stone, president of the senior Chamber of Commerce, at the annual dinner night dinner.

A Progress Report Of Rich-Con

To Employees and Readers:

As we look back on the year 1937, I think we should reflect for a few moments on the changes and progress that have been made at Rich-Con. I think we all realize the many changes that have been made but for the average individual it's quite hard to see the over-all picture and to determine exactly what progress may have come from these changes.

With this in mind, I would like to present to our employees a quick, comprehensive look at the inner workings of our company. In 1936, Rich-Con's Board of Directors decided that the wholesale hardware business, as we knew it then, was very definitely in need of change. They felt that the hardware industry as a whole had failed to keep pace with other progressive American industries. They also felt that the independent hardware dealer, upon whom we depend for our livelihood, was fast passing out of the picture. With these facts at hand, the Board of Directors, led by Mr. Sawyer and Mr. Black, decided upon a bold plan of action. Rich-Con would be reorganized and revitalized before the time actually forced it upon them. This action would show us to rid ourselves of the problems inherent in such a step, quickly, and place us in a leading position among our competitors in the wholesale hardware industry.

Soon after the year 1937 began, a series of changes were started. A Master Plan was drawn up and a complete analysis was made of the company's operations and wasteful and inefficient practices were noted. Certain new people were brought into the company in responsible positions. These people were successful individuals who had proven their ability with other companies. The Master Plan was broken down and various people were given a portion of it to accomplish.

Some departments were eliminated; others were cut back and some were expanded. A complete office remodeling was accomplished. A period of experimentation has resulted in our present consolidation on the Merchandising Department.

Wherever costs could be eliminated or cut, this was done also. Our duplicate facility at Oklahoma City was closed, thereby eliminating needless overhead. A fair Union contract was worked out for the warehouse employees.

Our Merchandising Managers have obtained several very desirable, exclusive merchandise lines for our salemen to handle.

A cooperative dealer program to ally us with a group of modern, progressive, independent hardware stores was started. As of today's date, February 1938, we have installed 20 Red Circle Stores in addition to the group of 22 in the Greater Kansas City area. With a net of 42 now, we should have no difficulty in achieving a minimum of 100 Red Circle Stores by the end of 1938.

You can see that progress has been made—painful sometimes—but progress nevertheless. With the progressive spirit of the directors and officers of Rich-Con, led by our President, Mr. Sawyer and the Chairman of our Executive Committee, Mr. Black, Rich-Con will become the largest, most modern and progressive wholesaler in this area.

I hope that you will join me in taking pride in the progress and accomplishments made in a few short months.

Sincerely,
Paul E. Haugheir
Vice-President

Rich-Con Signs Contract With Teamsters

As a result of the recent National Labor Relations Board election, Clyde Hull, Operations Manager, and E. M. Eganor, Personnel Director, began negotiations with Local 541, National Brotherhood of Teamsters, shortly after the first of the year and consummated a labor contract for the hardware division warehouse employees, which was signed on Monday, February 17, 1938.

Representing the employees of the negotiating committee were Don Durns, steward; Jim Bellis, Jim Thompson and Bob Calkin. Representing the Teamsters were Carl Rogers, President Local 541 and Clyde "Red" Raark, Business Agent.

RICH-CONVERSATION Now Member of K.C.I.E.

Robert M. Sigour, Editor, and Vera Miller, Associate Editor, of the Rich-Conversation, have been admitted as members to the Kansas City Industrial Editors Association.

January 17, 1938, they attended the monthly meeting of the K.C.I.E., as guests of Ruth Cright, Editor of the Sheffield Leader, and Vice-President of the Association.

The meeting was held in the Georgian Room of the Hotel Continental with Sylvia Hamilton of the United Photo, and Mark Stone, Editor of the Downtownier, as guest speakers. The 1937 United Fund Campaign Awards were presented by Justin Blum of the Southwestern Bell Telephone Co.



PICK PLAYS PART IN ANVIL CHORUS

While rehearsing for their recent concert, the Kansas City Philharmonic Orchestra found they were in need of a percussion instrument to be used in their interpretation of the Anvil Chorus.

Upon visiting Rich-Con, Vera Miller, Chief Percussionist with the Philharmonic the past four years, found that by striking a hammer against an anvil the desired sound effect could be made.

Mrs. Dushkin borrowed the anvil for the performance and we grant this was probably the first time a contractor saw was used in a production number of the Philharmonic.





A series of office memos from 1964-1991 also provides insight into the people who worked for the company. While most of the letters are about business-related issues, some clearly were typed up by an employee with a sense of humor (see below).

MEMORANDUM

TO: ALL PERSONNEL
SUBJECT: ABSENTEEISM

It has been brought to my attention that the attendance record of this department is a disgrace to our gracious benefactor who, at your own request, has given you your job. Due to your lack of consideration for your jobs with so fine a company, as shown by such frequent absenteeism, it has become necessary for us to revise some of our policies. The following changes are in effect today:

SICKNESS: NO EXCUSE.....We will no longer accept your doctor's statement as proof, as we believe that if you are able to go to the doctor, you are able to come to work.

DEATH: (Other than your own)...This is no excuse--there is nothing you can do for them, and we are sure that someone else with a lesser position can attend to the arrangements. However, if the funeral can be held in the later afternoon we will be glad to let you off one hour early, provided that your share of the work is ahead enough to keep the job going in your absence.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE: (For an operation)...We are no longer allowing this practice. We wish to discourage any thoughts that you may need an operation as we believe as long as you are an employee here, you will need all of whatever you have and you should not consider having anything removed. We hired you as you are and to have anything removed would certainly make you less than we bargained for.

DEATH: (Your own)...This will be accepted as an excuse, but we would like a two week notice, as we feel it is your duty to teach someone else your job.

Also, entirely too much time is being spent in the restroom. In the future we will follow the practice of going in alphabetical order. For example, those whose names begin with "A" will go from 8:00 to 8:15, "B" will go from 8:15 to 8:30, and so on. If you are unable to go at your time, it will be necessary to wait until the next day when your turn comes again. REMEMBER: Unused turns are not accumulative--Use it or lose it!!!

THE MANAGEMENT

CapMemo: Absenteeism

The finding aid for this collection is available online at www.kchistory.org. For more information about this collection, please contact the Missouri Valley Special Collections at 816-701-3427 or lhhistory@kclibrary.org.

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