The Missouri Valley Room will **open late Tuesday, Dec. 5th at noon** due to a radio program being recorded.

The Hardware Company That Ruled Them All

Author:

Kara Evans Flinn

Tuesday, May 24, 2016

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."

ULTRA VIOLET RAYS!

UTAH SUN

Brings Health and Happiness to Your Home

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.

Utah Sun Model U

$35.00

Utah Sun Carbon, Box of 40, $6.00

Utah Sun Localizer Set Includes

1 Localizing Shield.
3 Localizer Units.
1 Orificial Tube

$5.00 *extra.*

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, 20¼ in. Minimum height, 14⅛ in. Size of bowl, 12¼ in. Dia. Depth, 9 in.

Current Draw:—6 to 8 amperes.

Types of Current Used:—Will operate off of 110 A. C. or 110 D.C. current. Also 60 or 25 cycle current.

Weight: —Shipping, 17½ lbs.

Carbon Life:—A pair of Utah Sun Carbons will burn for 1¼-1½ hours. Good for five to fifteen child treatments at the start. Two to five longest time treatments for an adult.

Finish:—Bowl of polished aluminum. Stand lacquer two-tone finish to harmonize with home surroundings.

Packing:—Approved by carriers. Strawboard container 16x16x18¼ inches.

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

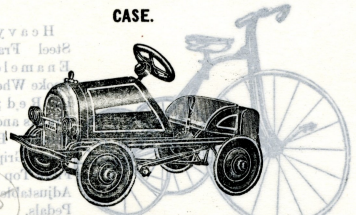
Printed in U. S. A.

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.

JUVENILE AUTOMOBILES.

CASE.

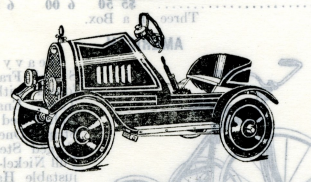


N0. 4524D—Shipping Weight Each 56 Pounds....Each, **$23 00**

DESCRIPTION.

Body—13x39½ Inches.
Finish—Red, Decorated and Striped in Yellow.
Wheels—Steel Disc, Diameter 10 Inches, ½ Inch Rubber Tires, Plain Bearing.
Equipment—Composition Steering Wheel, Horn, Motor Meter, Instrument Board, Nickel-plated Steel Radiator, Oil Can with Holder, Gear Shift, Road Lamps, Sicense Tag, Rubber Pedals, Upholstered Seat.
One in a Box.

OAKLAND.

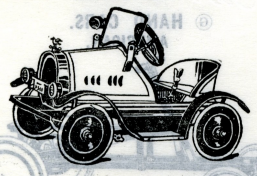


No. 4528DM—Shipping Weight Each 54 Pounds..Each, **$24 00**

DESCRIPTION.

Body—12x36 Inches.
Finish—Maroon, Decorated and Striped in Red and White.
Wheels—Steel Disc, Diameter 10 Inches, ½ Inch Rubber Tires, Plain Bearing.
Equipment—Cast Steering Wheel, Horn, Motor Meter, Oil Can with Holder, Gear Shift, Lamps, License Tag, Bumper, Rubber Pedals, Instrument Board, Upholstered Seat, Motor Buzzer.
One in a Box.

LIBERTY SIX.

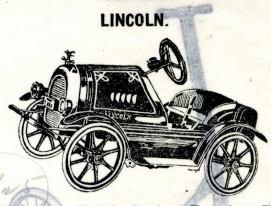


No. 4535D—Shipping Weight Each 65 Pounds....Each, **$29 00**

DESCRIPTION.

Body—13x34 Inches.
Finish—Tan, Striped in Brown and Yellow.
Wheels—Steel Disc, Diameter 10 Inches, ½ Inch Rubber Tires, Plain Bearing.
Equipment—Composition Steering Wheel, Horn, Nickel-plated Windshield, Spotlight, Motor Meter, Instrument Board, Oil Can, Road Lamps, Gear Shift, Operating "Stop" and Slow Signal, Rubber Pedals, Upholstered Seat.
One in a Box.

LINCOLN.

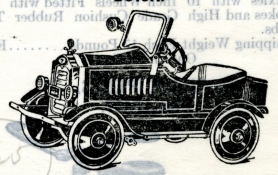


No. 4538W—Shipping Weight Each 63 Pounds...Each, **$30 00**

DESCRIPTION.

Body—13x39 Inches.
Finish—Royal Blue, Light Blue Panel, White Striping.
Wheels—Artillery Type, Diameter 11 Inches; ½ 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 Shift, 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.

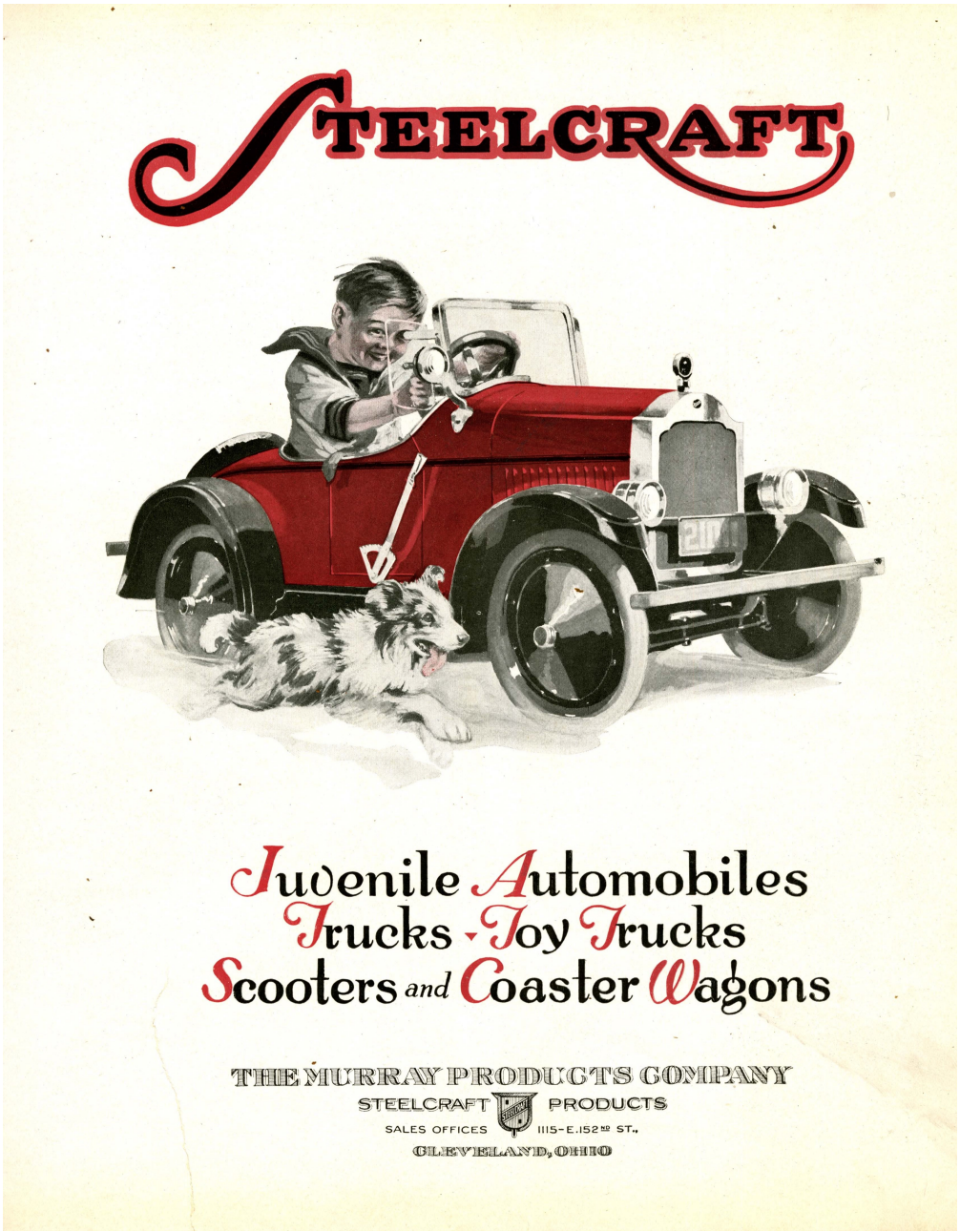
Body—13x41 Inches.
Finish—Pea Green, Decorated and Striped in Yellow and White.
Wheels—Steel Disc, Diameter 10 Inches, ½ Inch Rubber Tires, Plain Bearing.
Equipment—Cast Steering Wheel, Horn, Nickel-plated Windshield, Spotlight, Motor Meter, Nickel-plated Metal Front, Road Lamps, Instrument Board, Oil Can, Gear Shift, Trunk with Nickel-plated Bars, Rubber Pedals, Fenders with Runing Board, Upholstered Seat, Rear View Mirror, Kick Plates.
One in a Box.

PACKARD SIX.

No. 4548DM—Shipping Weight Each 90 Pounds..Each, **$50 00**

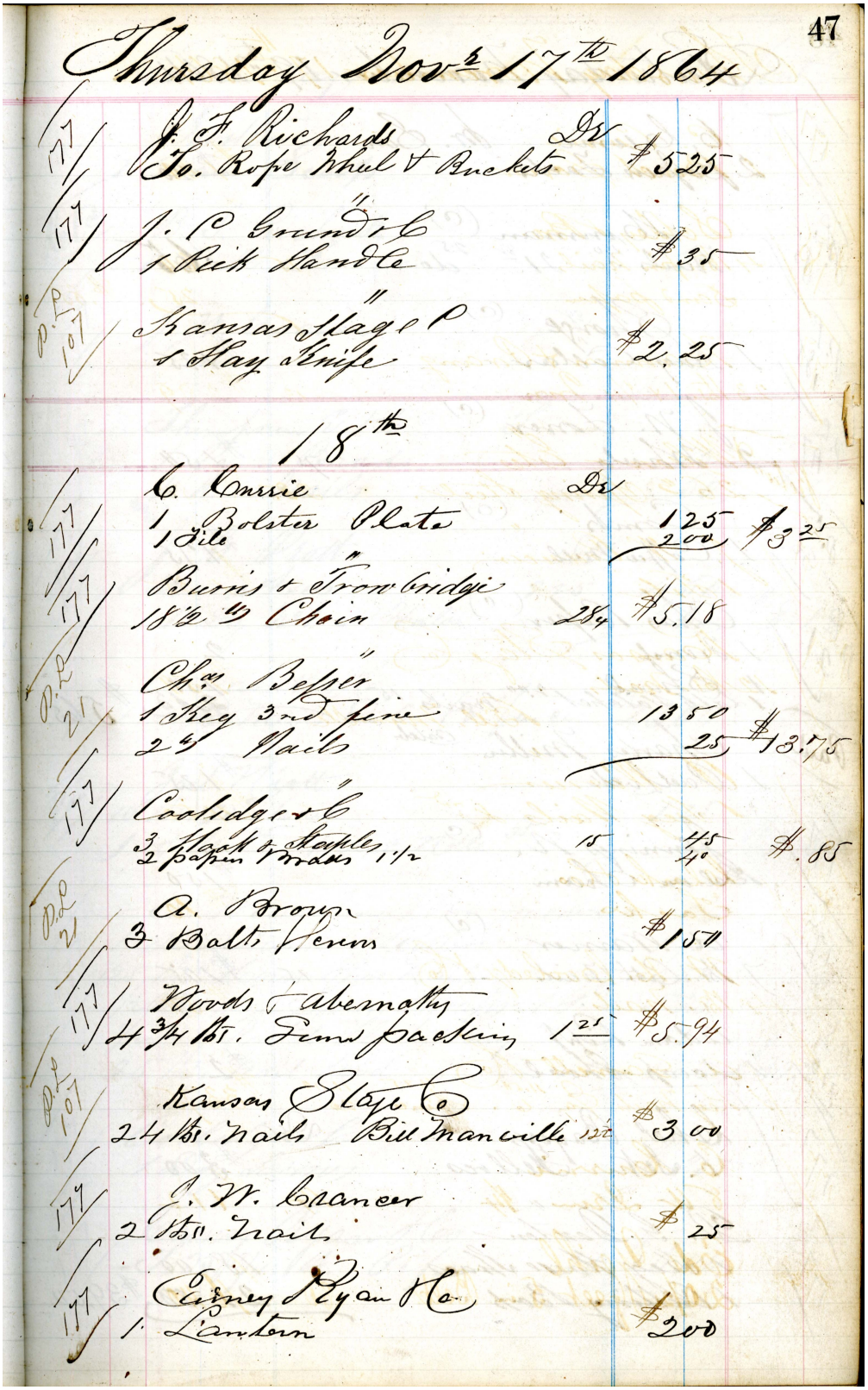
DESCRIPTION.

Body—13x45½ Inches.
Finish—Tan, Decorated and Striped in Red and White.
Wheels—Steel Disc, Diameter 12 Inches, ⅝ Inch Rubber Tires, Roller Bearing.
Equipment—Composition Tilting Steering Wheel, Divided Windshield with Side Wings, Spotlight, Motor Meter, Metal Mesh Front, Road Lamps, Instrument Board, Gear Shift Operating "Stop" and "Slow" Signal, Jar-not 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 Buzzer, 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 Novr 17th 1864

177 J. F. Richards Dr
To. Rope Wheel & Buckets $5.25

177 J. C. Grund & C "
1 Pick Handle $.35

P.P. 107 Kansas Stage Co "
1 Hay Knife $2.25

18th

C. Currie Dr
177 1 File Bolster Plate 1.25 2.00 $3.25

177 Burris & Trowbridge "
18½ lb Chain 28¢ $5.18

P.P. 21 Chas. Besser "
1 Keg 3rd pine 13.50
2½ Nails .25 $13.75

177 Coolidge & C "
3/2 paper Hooks & Staples 1/2 15 45 40 $.85

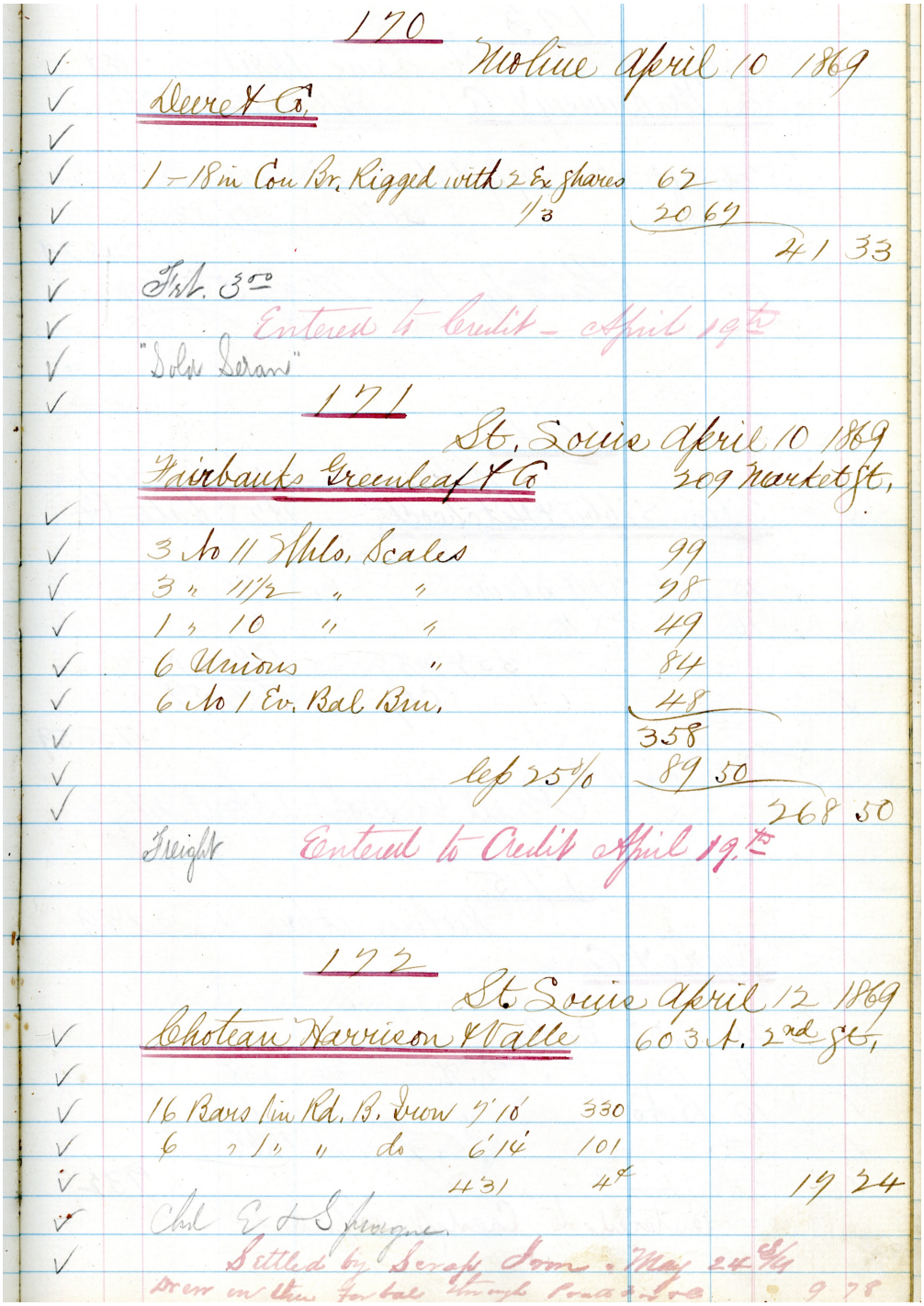
P.P. 21 A. Brown
3 Bolt Screws $1.87

177 Woods & Abernathy
4 3/4 lbs. Iron packing 1.25 $5.94

P.P. 107 Kansas Stage Co
24 lbs. Nails Bill Mancille $3.00

177 E. W. Cranor
2 lbs. Nails .25

177 Cairney Ryan & Co
1 Lantern $2.00



170 Moline April 10 1869

Deere & Co.

1 – 18 in Cou Br. Rigged with 2 Ex shares 62
1/3 2067
41 33

Frt. 35c

Entered to Credit – April 19th

"Solid Screws"

171 St. Louis April 10 1869

Fairbanks Greenleaf & Co 209 Market St.

3 No 11 2 Wks. Scales 99
3 " 11½ " " 78
1 " 10 " " 49
6 Unions " 84
6 No 1 Ev. Bal Bm. 48
358
less 25% 89 50
268 50

Freight Entered to Credit April 19th

172 St Louis April 12 1869

Choteau Harrison & Valle 603 L. 2nd St.

16 Bars Iron Rd. B. Drow 5'10 330
6 " 1½ " do 6'14 101
431 4¢ 17 24

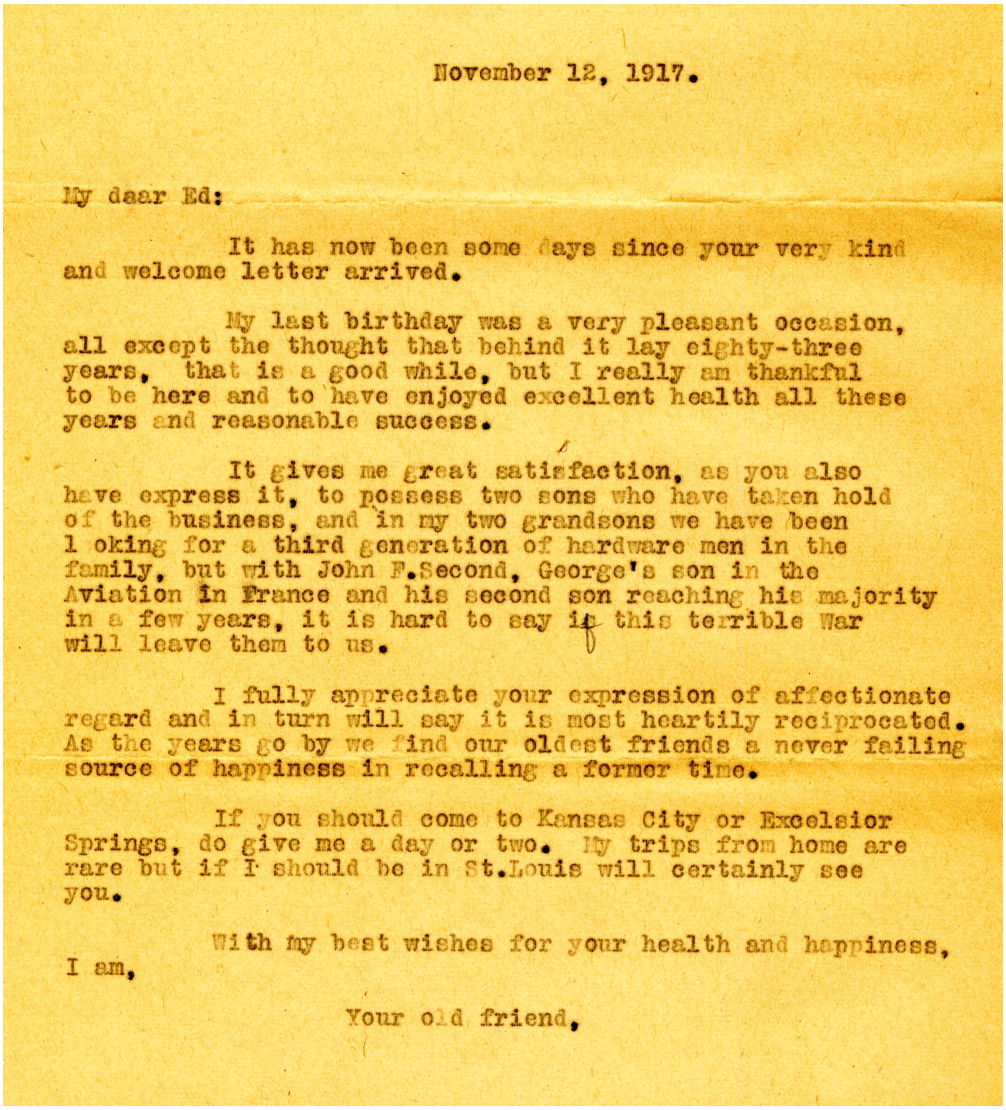
Chd E & S Freight.

Settled by Scrap Iron May 24th
Drew on them for bal through Boatmens 9 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 daar 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 l oking 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 if 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.

RICHARDS & CONOVER — SUPERIOR QUALITY — TRADE RICH-CON MARK ® — FINEST FINISH — HARDWARE COMPANY

the Rich-Con*versation*

MARCH, 1958 VOL. 2, NO. 3

DEALER SERVICES DEPT. ORGANIZED

Paul Humphries, 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 by 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 employee, 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 broadsides, 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. Graber, partner in the Graber Hardware Co., has been presented the 1957 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 Bacon, president of the senior Chamber of Commerce, at the annual bosses' night dinner.

A Progress Report Of Rich-Con

To Employees and Readers:

As we look back on the year 1957, 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 1956, Rich-Con's Board of Directors decided that the wholesale hardware business, as we knew it then, was very defintely 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 livlihood, was fast passing out of the picture. With these facts at hand, the Board of Directors, led by Mr. Sawyer and Mr. Bird, 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 allow us to rid ourselves of the problem 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 1957 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 remodelling was accomplished. A period of experimentation has resulted in our present consolidation on the Merchandising Departments.

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 Merchandise Managers have obtained several very desirable, exclusive merchandise lines for our salesmen 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 19th, 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 1958.

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. Bird, Rich-Con will become the largest, most modern and progressive wholesaler in this area.

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

Sincerely,
Paul E. Humphries
Vice-President

Rich-Con Signs Contract With Teamsters

As a result of the recent National Labor Relations Board election, Clyde Hull, Operations Manager, and R. M. Signor, 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, 1958.

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

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

Robert M. Signor, Editor, and Bea Miller, Associate Editor, of the Rich-ConVersation, have been admitted as members to the Kansas City Industrial Editors Association.

January 17, 1958, they attended the monthly meeting of the K.C.I.E., as guests of Bob Criger, Editor of the Sheffield Ladle, and Vice-President of the Association.

The meeting was held in the Georgian Room of the Hotel Continental with Sylvia Hamilton of the United Funds, and Mark Stone, Editor of the Downtowner, as guest speakers. The 1957 United Fund Campaign Awards were presented by Justin Hayes of the Southwestern Bell Telephone Co.

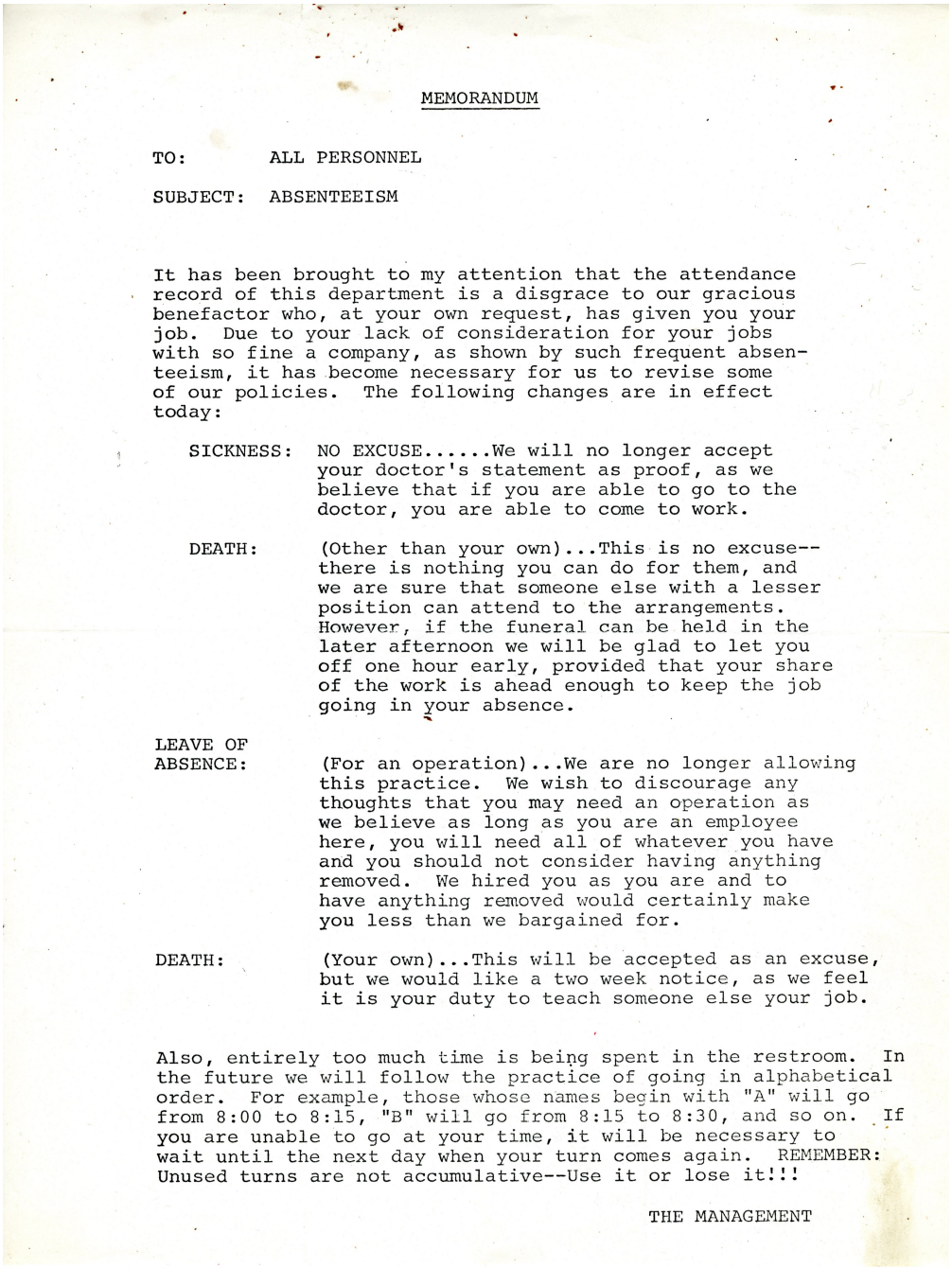
PICK PLAYS PART IN ANVIL CHORUS

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 McNary Daehlin, Chief Percussionist with the Philharmonic the past four years, found that by striking a hammer against an axe, the desired sound effect could be made.

Mrs. Daehlin borrowed the axe for the performance and we grant this was probably the first time a contractors axe 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 lhistory@kclibrary.org.

The Kansas City Public Library
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Kansas City, MO 64105

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