

**Archive
Lakeshore Museum Center
Amazon Knitting Company**

Collection: Amazon Knitting Company Records

Object ID Number: X88.097.1 to X88.097.12

Location: LMC Archive, Room 204, Shelf P5 (X88.097.12 in FSCA Drawer 2)

Dates: 1898-1945

Quantity: 11 ledgers, 44 papers inserted into X88.97.10, 4 papers inserted into X88.97.6, and 13 blueprints

Restrictions: No Restrictions

Abstract: This small collection of archival materials provides researchers with information about the Amazon Knitting Company, also known as the Amazon Hosiery Company, and is primarily financial in nature. This collection includes several ledgers, papers, and blueprints, and provides researchers with a better understanding of the final years of the company. The Amazon Knitting Company was an important business in Muskegon and helped shape Muskegon's industrial history.

Historical Information: The Amazon Hosiery Company was formed in Valparaiso, IN, in 1876 and moved to Michigan City, IN, in 1883. In 1895, the Muskegon Chamber of Commerce negotiated an agreement with George W. Powell, president of the enterprise, to bring the company to town. This was part of a greater initiative to bring industry to Muskegon following the decline of the lumber industry, and the Chamber of Commerce offered the company a \$5,000 bonus if they relocated to Muskegon. Many other cities bid for the company's relocation, particularly Fort Wayne, Indiana, but the moist climate of the Lake Michigan shoreline, the abundance of soft water for dyeing purposes, and excellent shipping facilities made Muskegon the most attractive option.

By the summer of 1896, Powell's business was moved to Muskegon and occupied the newly built factory, designed by noted architect William Makepeace of Boston. The building was made of solid brick, had 185,000 square feet of space, was 220 feet long and 80 feet wide, and had five stories. In the beginning years, the company had \$200,000 in assets, 475 women and 75 men worked for Amazon, and the average woman made \$6 to \$10.50 a week. Economic downturn threatened to cause the company to fold in 1897, but Charles Hackley and Thomas Hume stepped in to help the ailing company. They provided financial backing to stabilize Powell's business. Reorganized as the Amazon Knitting Company, Hackley was the president of the corporation, Powell the vice-president, and Hume the secretary and treasurer. By the turn of the century, Amazon employed 650 workers and, though underwear remained its staple product, began to introduce new clothing items to its product line.

The company flourished throughout the first few decades of the twentieth century, becoming a nationally lucrative business. It produced cotton underwear, gloves, hosiery, hooked rugs, and army shirts. In the early years the capital increased from \$300,000 to \$600,000 and the main plant in Muskegon was expanded and had about 233,130 square feet of total floor space. As the business flourished, the company opened additional plants in Grand Haven in 1917 and Muskegon Heights in 1920. In the early years, it was one of the only large factories that took in raw cotton in bales and manufactured a completed product, making almost everything in-house. The factory had numerous rooms, such as the washing and bluing room, a many large machines with hundreds of knitting needles. In 1920, the Amazon Knitting Company made an average of 4,000 dozen goods every day or 48,000 garments. At that time, employees had the option of eating in a large dining room and they could purchase soup or coffee. The majority of the employees were women.

By 1937, the company employed almost 1,000 workers and was faring relatively well compared to other industries during the harsh economic climate of the Great Depression. Many men and women sought out jobs at the company because of the stable pay, and some were making \$25 a week sewing garments. In 1939, it was the only complete textile mill in Michigan and was busy supplying the nation with garments. However, in spite of a government order for 600,000 shirts for the U.S. army in 1941, the advent of World War II spelled the end for the Amazon Knitting Company. On October 19, 1942, George A. Hume, Jr., company president, announced that the plant would be closing within six months as the war effort was drawing away labor and supplies that the company needed to function. All departments were shut down by the spring of 1943, and Amazon assets were transferred to Louis Lunsford, company secretary, who sold them off and divided the profits amongst the company's stockholders.

In March 1943, plans were drawn up and proposed to turn the Amazon plant into 130 war housing apartments, but the plans were never approved. The structure was idle until 1945, when a section was leased to the AC Sparkplug division of General Motors Corporation. Over several decades, a number of businesses moved in and out. On May 24, 1982, the building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1993, plans began to turn the Amazon Building into a shared residential and business space, and work was completed in 2001.

Scope and Contents: This collection of archival materials is organized by object identification number. It contains ten ledgers of financial records of the Amazon Knitting Company ranging from 1898 through 1945, a ledger of meeting notes from 1921 through 1941, papers dealing with the dissolution of the corporation, and thirteen blueprints of the unrealized plan to remodel and lease the Amazon Knitting company plant to the government for wartime housing in 1943.

X88.97.1- Financial ledger keeping track of the monthly expenses of the company from January 1939 through August 1943, the final years that Amazon Knitting Co. was in business.

X88.97.2- Financial ledger of accounting records, specifically the value of inventory, sales gains, cost insurance, tax records, and other expenses, from 1940 through 1945.

X88.97.3- Current Cash Book ledger with financial records from 1942 through the dissolution of the company in 1943, detailing transactions with various clients of the company.

X88.97.4- Financial ledger detailing labor costs from 1938 through 1944, including payroll analysis and dollar amounts disbursed to employees on a monthly basis.

X88.97.5- Monthly inventory ledger ranging from September 1898 through December 1926.

X88.97.6- Ledger of notes from both Board of Directors meetings and Stockholders meetings, ranging from July 1920 through March 1941.

X88.97.7- Financial ledger of expenses ranging from October 1943 through September 1945. Its contents are brief, as it is a record of accounts settled after the company shut down.

X88.97.8- Ledger of duplicate checks issued by the Amazon Knitting Company between August 1943 through December 1944, presumably to settle outstanding accounts following the corporations dissolution on August 27, 1943.

X88.97.9- Book of blank debenture certificates issued in 1936. Inserted in the front cover are various documents and records detailing the end of the company: meeting notes, the certificate of dissolution, a list of stockholders and their shares, a bill of sale to the company secretary to enable him to sell off the company's assets, and plans to rent the Amazon plant to interested parties.

X88.97.10- Payroll book detailing records from 1943 through 1945.

X88.97.11- Ledger book, blank.

X88.97.12- Thirteen oversized blueprint pages for a proposed plan to convert the closed Amazon Knitting Co. plant into wartime housing used by the government.

Arrangement: The original order of this collection is unknown, as the collection was found in the museum archives. This collection was rearranged to best anticipate researcher needs and provide the best access possible.

Related Materials: The Lakeshore Museum Center also has a collection of numerous photographs of the interior and exterior of the Amazon Knitting Company building.