

Holyoke Public Library History Room & Archives

Finding Aid for
The Parsons Paper Company Collection
(1853-2005)
(HPLA2005.600)

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Abstract

The Parsons Paper Company was founded in Holyoke, Massachusetts in 1853 by Joseph Clark Parsons. Colonel Aaron Bagg of West Springfield was the company's first president and his descendants ran the firm until 1977. In 1959 Parsons Paper Company No. 2 merged with National Vulcanized Fiber Co. From 1989 to 2005 Parsons was the last remaining paper making company in Holyoke producing high quality art papers, parchment and calendar papers and watermarked bond. The company closed in 2005 when National Vulcanized Fiber filed for bankruptcy. The building at 28 Sargeant St. was destroyed by fire in June of 2008.

Volume (linear feet) 16

Acquisition: The Parsons Paper Company Collection was donated to The Holyoke Public Library by The Parsons Paper Company: Mitch Moskal, General Manager and Steve Hale, Sales Manager.

Access: Unrestricted

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Preferred Citation: The Parsons Paper Company Collection.

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**The Parsons Paper Collection
Historical Sketch**

Parsons Paper Company was founded in Holyoke, Massachusetts in 1853 by Joseph Clark Parsons. J.C Parsons was born in Northampton Massachusetts on February 6, 1814 and was educated at Northampton Academy. He began his business career at the age of fourteen working in the pharmaceuticals trade. At the age of twenty-five he and a partner attempted to farm mulberry trees in Agawam. After the failed attempt at tree farming he spent the next fifteen years learning the paper business and worked his way up to General Manager of the Ames Mills in Northampton and South Hadley Massachusetts and Suffield Connecticut. He married Lucretia S. Colton in 1836 and had one son and four daughters.

In 1850 a group of "Boston capitalists" arrived in Holyoke with plans to tap the power of the Connecticut River and build an industrial textile center modeled after the cities of Lawrence and Lowell Massachusetts. They purchased land along the river and established the Hadley Falls Power Company. They created a three level canal system and Holyoke was on its way to becoming the first planned industrial city in the United States. By 1852, J.C. Parsons was ready to start his own paper making company and attempted to purchase land along the canal from the Boston capitalists. But the Hadley officials rejected Parsons' bid. It was their opinion that textiles would be more profitable than paper and they were skeptical of Parsons' plan to build a factory made of brick. But Parsons prevailed and in 1853 he opened his first plant, "The Parsons Paper Company," at the site of an old gristmill.

Within a decade Parsons had turned his company into the largest writing and envelope paper firm in the country. Colonel Aaron Bagg of West Springfield would become the company's first president and it would be his descendants who would run the company until Edward P. "Terry" Bagg retired in 1977.

By 1869 Holyoke boasted eleven paper mills and had established itself as "The Paper City." Between 1884 and 1904 Holyoke produced nearly ninety percent of the paper in the United States. In 1888 Parsons built Parsons Paper Company No. 2 between the two highest-level canals on Sargeant St. A year later he closed his original plant. By this time Parsons had rejected the industry trend of producing cheaper quality paper utilizing a chemically treated wood pulp in favor of mostly cotton rag that produced the high quality ledger and bond paper. Parsons Paper Co. was known for.

Parsons Paper Company barely survived the Great Depression but made a comeback during World War II by producing invasion currency. In 1959 it merged with the New Jersey based National Vulcanized Fiber Co. From 1989 to 2005 Parsons Paper Company was the last paper mill in the city of Holyoke, producing high quality art paper using quality cotton fibers. The mill produced parchment paper, calendar paper and watermarked bond for clients such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard and Yale Universities. Parsons museum board

frames art that is hanging in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

After Parsons Paper Company closed its doors in 2005, the city of Holyoke attempted to claim more than \$1.8 million in unpaid taxes, interest and fees from National Vulcanized Fiber Company. The company, now located in Delaware, and who had owned the 313,000 square foot mill since 1959 filed for bankruptcy but continued ownership of the building and property up until it was destroyed by fire in June of 2008.

From September 23 to October 16th 2008 “Rags to Riches, A Tribute to Parsons Paper of Holyoke” an exhibit of recent color photographs by Sandy Noyes was held at the Taber Art Gallery at Holyoke Community College. In addition to the photographs, artifacts from the Parsons Paper Company Collection were on view. An opening for the show was held on October 1st and attended by over fifty people, several of whom were recent employees of Parsons. Noyes explained how he made the photographs inside the mill using strobe lights, multiple exposures and assistant camera operators. Also featured in the exhibit were three photographic prints from the Milan Warner Collection showing Parsons Paper Mill No.2 under construction in 1880, a 1940s nurse's accident logbook, paper samples, advertising and bricks salvaged from the mill after the June 2008 fire.

**The Parsons Paper Company Collection
Scope and Content Note**

The Parsons Paper Company Collection consists of material dating between 1861 and 2008. The Holyoke History Room Local File on the Parsons Paper Company has related newspaper articles up to 2008. The collection consists of photographs, prints, ledgers, paper samples, technical association papers, common stock certificates, set of bibliography of papermaking and US patents, Insurance appraisals, audit reports, The Paper World trades magazine, (March 7, 1889) advertising papers, public relations documents, company recognitions and small pieces of equipment (gauges and cast plates) and paper making materials, as well as 2 bricks salvaged from the burnt wreckage of Parsons Paper Company No. 2 at Sargeant St.

SERIES 1 consists of a 13-volume set of Technical Association Papers that range from 1923-1934. A 14-book set of Bibliographies of Papermaking ranging from 1944-1959. Common stock certificates and a payroll ledger with a date range of 1861-1869.

Artifacts and paper making equipment and supplies make up SERIES 2. Included here are 2 Pyrex containers of metallic “confetti” used to add color and texture to paper. Hemp and cotton fibers. A water pressure gauge made by the Holyoke valve and Hydrant Company and a Swiss made pressure gauge. In addition to these items are two bricks salvaged from the wreckage of the fire of 2008.

Product samples and related company documents comprise SERIES 3. Incorporation papers, union agreements, sales reports, deeds, advertising, museum mount board samples, price lists, letters from stockholders and various pamphlets and publications.

The photographs and prints in SERIES 4 contain 3 black and white photographic prints made from glass plate negatives from the Milan P. Warner (1848-1903) Collection. Warner was a well-known photographer who worked in the Pioneer Valley during the 1880s and 1890s. His subject matter included Holyoke’s factories, parks, canals, commercial and residential districts and the city’s schools and civic organizations. The Milan photographs in SERIES 4 are dated 1888 and show the Parsons building at Sargeant St. under construction. Also in this series; 7 Polaroids of the Sargeant St. Mill taken in July 1995, A large framed series of 8 black and white photographs from 1884 possibly by Warner showing working scenes inside the factory. A framed citation from the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for recognition of 125 years of service to the papermaking industry and the city of Holyoke. A 28” x 21” framed lithograph of Parsons Paper Company No.2, birds- eye view.

Related collections include:

The Sandy Noyes Collection

The Milan P. Warner Collection

The American Writing Paper Company Collection

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**The Papermaking Collection
The International Brotherhood of Papermakers Collection**

**The Parsons Paper Company Collection
Series Description**

Series 1: Ledgers, 1861-1934, 50 Volumes

Series 1 includes a 14-volume set of Bibliographies of Papermaking 1944-1959, 13-volume set of Technical Association Papers, 1923-1934. Parsons Paper Company payroll ledger 1861-1869. 15 volumes of Common Stock Certificates, 1 volume "Stock Ledger," and 8 large log books.

Series 2: Equipment and Papermaking Supplies

Series 2 includes 2 Pyrex containers of confetti, used in coloring and adding texture to paper, a bag of hemp, bag of organic cotton fiber, 6 cast plates (dandy rollers), Holyoke valve and hydrant Co. water pressure gauge and a Swiss pressure gauge and 2 bricks salvaged from the wreckage of the fire that destroyed the Sargeant Street buildings.

Series 3: Product Samples, Advertising, Sales Reports, Incorporation Papers.

Series 3 includes stationary sets and paper samples including museum mount and paper samples with "Victor Posner" watermarks. Also in this series are letters from stockholders, a patent application, pamphlets on the history of Parsons Paper Company, stock certificates, a "\$100.00 share" document, warranty deed, AFL-CIO Union agreements, purchase and sales receipts, incorporation papers, and a deed.

Series 4: Photographs and Prints

Series 4 contains a gold-framed portrait of Mr. Parsons, 3 black and white prints from the Milan P Warner Collection showing the newly and under construction Parsons building at the Sargeant St. location taken in 1888, lithographs, color photographs from the Sandy Noyes Collection, 7 polaroids taken in July 1995, a print of J.C Parsons and a 28 inch x 21 inch lithograph illustrating a "birds eye view" of Parsons Paper Company No. 2.

**The Parsons Paper Company Collection
Box, Shelf and Folder List**

Series 1: Ledgers

- Shelf 1:** Bibliographies of Papermaking 14 v. (1944- 1959)
 - Book of Stock Certificates 1 v.
 - Log books 8 v.
- Shelf 2:** Common Stock Certificates 14 v.
 - Payroll Ledger 1 v.
- Shelf 6:** Account Ledger 1 v. (1939-1950)
 - Bookkeeping Ledgers 9 v. (ca.1882-1900)
 - Technical Association Papers 13 v. (1923-1934)

Series 2: Equipment and Papermaking Supplies

- Box 3:** 2 Pyrex containers of planchettes
- Box 5:** Watermark plates for dandy rollers
- Shelf 3:** Water pressure gauges
 - Salvaged bricks
 - Hemp
 - Organic cotton fiber

Series 3: Product Samples, Advertising, Sales Reports, Incorporation Papers

- Box 1:** Paper samples
 - Wrapped Bond
 - Museum mount
 - "The Gave us Liberty" (booklet)
 - "A Role in History" (booklet)
- Box 2: Greenfield Stationary**
 - Fox Fiber
 - Parsons # 2 (image)
 - Marbled paper book
 - Wartime reference book
 - Museum mount board
 - Roman parchment sales letter
 - "A Century of Papermaking"
- Box 4: Union contract**
 - J.C. Parsons (print)
 - Letters from Stockholders (1943-1957)
 - Treasury Bond (1943-1970)
 - Train Track Agreement
 - Transfer Stock (National Vulcanized Fiber)
 - Nurses Report (1946)
 - Patent Submission

Victor Posner watermarked paper
Patent booklet
Polaroids (1995)

Series 4: Photographs and Prints: On display in various locations in the History Room

Repository Information

The Holyoke History Room and Archives, a department within the Holyoke Public Library, houses the Library's special collections. In accordance with the Holyoke Public Library's mission statement, the History Room staff provides free access to Holyoke's historical documents while preserving these fragile items from damage and theft. Housed within the Local History Room and Archives are collections documenting the history of Holyoke, a city whose industrial developments during the late 1860s and early 20th century played an influential role on the paper and textile industries both nationally and internationally.

The Holyoke Public Library History Room and Archives is available for public use 20 hours per week. None of the collections stored in either the History Room or the Archives are circulating. In addition, items stored in the Holyoke Public Library Archives are not accessible for browsing. However, they are available for use in the Holyoke History Room. Given the fact that the Curator of Historical Collections is the only full time employee working with the Holyoke Public Library Archives, and as they are stored outside the reading room, patrons must request the use of these items ahead of time. Requests may be made via the phone, mail or email. Please provide the Curator with as much information about your research needs as it will not only help in retrieval of the records but will also help to preserve them. The History Room's contact information can be found on the first page of this guide. Walk-ins may be allowed to use these items provided that there is a second attendant available. These items are not available for use in the Curator is offsite. Please leave your name and number and requested items with the attendant and the Curator will set up an appointment to allow these items to be used. You may use one box at a time and may use one folder at a time to prevent these items from getting out of order. Please put an "in use" slip in the vacant spot to hold the file's place. Photocopying is at the discretion of the curator. Due to the fact that many items are fragile, the Curator may either photocopy the items him or herself or may ask you to please copy the information using paper and pencil as the items may be too fragile for photocopying. You must also be aware that the photocopying of items is subject to federal copyright laws. Please ask the Curator if you are unsure of those laws.

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