
Finding aid of the Knapp Plow Company Records, (1909-1923) and the Norman E. Knapp Papers, (1946-1977)

Box number: 1977-1014

History San Jose Research Library
San Jose, California

Processed by:

Nicole C. Warren and Barbara Shaffer

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Encoded by:

Eric Schultz

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Descriptive Summary

Title: The Knapp Plow Company records, (1909-1923) and the Norman E. Knapp papers, (1946-1977)

Bulk Dates: 1946-1947

Creator: Knapp Plow Company

Creator: Norman E. Knapp

Collection Size: 6 linear feet

Repository: History San Jose Research Library.

San Jose, California 95112-2599

Physical location: For current information on the location of these materials, please consult the History San Jose Research Library.

Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English

Access

The collection is open for research.

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Preferred Citation

[Identification of Item], Knapp Plow Company records and the Norman E. Knapp papers, [Box No.]History San Jose Research Library.

Acquisition Information

The Knapp Plow materials (1977-1014) were donated by Norman E. Knapp in 1977. This collection is a combination of the Knapp Plow Company Collection, 1909-1923 and the Norman E. Knapp Collection, 1946-1947.

Historical Note

Knapp Plow Company

The plows manufactured by the Knapp Plow Company contributed significantly to the agricultural history of the Santa Clara Valley. The life of the company began in 1871 in Half Moon Bay, CA when Robert I. Knapp (1833-1904) built his first plow. During that time, many farmers were growing potatoes on the hills along the coast. They plowed the sides using a Kilgore reversible plow (sometimes called sidehill plow), with a cast iron bottom, which was found to be problematic and ineffective.

As a blacksmith, wheelwright, and wagon maker, R. I. Knapp, served many farmers who took their Kilgore plows to him for service. In response, R. I. Knapp built a reversible plow which had a carbon steel bottom, hardwood beam and handles, cast iron standard, and a locking device to stabilize the plowshare. Patented in 1875 and again in 1882, Knapp's plow was so successful that, between 1878 and 1907, it won 14 awards at county and state fairs, as well as at the World's Exposition in New Orleans.

In 1900, Knapp's son, Horace G. Knapp, became a partner in the company. With that change came a new company name: R. I. Knapp and Son. Four years later, however, R. I. Knapp died, and H. G. Knapp promoted his son as partner. During 1907, the company became H. G. Knapp and Son, and relocated in San José, California to expand its customer base.

The company soon diversified its product line to include numerous types of agricultural implements: orchard, subsoil, ditching, and gopher plows, among others. However, after the patents for the original reversible plow expired, several companies began manufacturing exact duplicates. In the midst of this competition, the family company changed its name to Knapp Plow Works in about 1915 and then Knapp Plow Company in about 1922. By 1922, Eastern plow companies were building and selling plows similar to those of Knapp at much lower costs. These forces caused Knapp Plow to lose much of its market share, and in 1924, the family business ended after fifty years of service. Though the company that developed around the first Knapp Reversible Plow was not large-- employing 45 workers in its heyday-- it was important locally, and its plows were widely used.

Norman E. Knapp

Born in 1903, Norman E. Knapp worked for his father Horace G. Knapp in the family plow business until the company closed in 1924. After the closure, N. E. Knapp was employed as a roustabout in the oil fields near Coalinga, California but he returned to San José in 1938 to work for Westinghouse.

In retirement, Knapp built exact duplicates of the early Knapp Reversible Plow, one of which was donated to the Smithsonian in Washington, D. C. in 1970. Born into an innovative family, Knapp was also an inventor. He is recognized for the creation of the Stabilizer which keeps the shares of plows deep in the soil.

Series Descriptions

Knapp Plow Company

The Knapp Plow Company Collection contains materials relating to the marketing and design of the various plows built by the company between 1912 and 1922, when the company was active in San Jose.

Business Records. 1920-1922. Arranged chronologically by material type. Includes a list of retailers; an invoice; bolt lists for the No. 24 and No. 30 Subsoil Plows and oversized bills of material for the No. 24, No. 20 and No. 30 Subsoil Plows.

Correspondence. 1922-1923. 1 album. Arranged in original order. Includes several photographed letters by customers commending the company's service and the excellent workmanship of the plows.

Drawings. Probably produced between 1912 and 1923. Arranged by subject. Includes drawings (artwork) of plows used for the company's catalog, brochures and advertisements; and drawings of part specifications for the no. 24 Subsoiler, No. 30 Subsoil Plow and the Cultivator. None of the drawings of part specifications represent complete sets.

Ephemera. 1909-1912/13. Arranged chronologically by material type. Includes a catalog cover (1909) and a full catalog of products for 1912/13; an early newspaper advertisement (n.d.); various brochures of plows, including one non-proprietary brochure for the Towner Subsoil plow and one product tag.

Photographs. 1909-1923. Arranged in original order where evident and by subject. Includes 8x10 photographs of orchard, subsoil, ditching, gopher and tractor disc plows; cultivators, plow parts, interior (showing employees) and exterior views of the company building and gentlemen posing with a row of plows. In general, photographs of the plows are one of two types: studio photographs, which show the plow against a plain backdrop and field photographs which show the plow being used in the field.

Many of the photographs carry identifying number/letter combinations (e.g., 15A, 38B or 77C). The number portion of the code runs through the full set of photographs sequentially and the letter portion of the code divides the set of photographs into three groups - A, B and C - where the first third of the set forms group A, the second third, group B and the final third, group C. The letter codes appear to refer to the type of plow being photographed.

Photographs which may also be of interest to the researcher can be found in the Research Center Photograph Catalog. The cataloged photos numbers are 13, 95, 101-107 and 411. These photos show the company building, the family home and various Knapp Plows.

Norman E. Knapp

The Norman E. Knapp Collection primarily contains materials documenting the development of the 2-Bottom Offset Disc Plow (Model 402) and the Stabilizer. Though Knapp worked just a short time at the Knapp Plow Company before its closure, his interest in plow manufacturing never subsided. The material belonging to this collection imparts his personal achievements in plow building. Eight series have been identified for the Norman E. Knapp Collection.

Business Records. 1947. Arranged in original order. Includes bills of material for the 2-Bottom Offset Disc Plow.

Correspondence. ca. 1946 and 1970. Arranged chronologically. Includes notes and drafts of outgoing letters regarding the 2 Bottom Offset Plow parts, drawing, etc. and a copy of a letter received from the Smithsonian Institution expressing gratitude for his donation of one R. I. Knapp reversible plow.

Drawings and Blueprints. 1946. Arranged by function and then by part number (for blueprints and drawings). Includes drawings for the layout of the 2-Bottom Offset Disc Plow instruction manual; blueprints of plows; numerous drawings and blueprints of the parts specification for the 2-Bottom Offset Disc Plow (primarily) and the Stabilizer. The bills of material in the Business Records act as a rough index to the parts and drawing numbers.

Ephemera. 1946-1947. Arranged chronologically and by material type. Includes brochures for the 2-Bottom Offset Disc Plow and the Stabilizer, an envelope for the 2-Bottom Offset Disc Plow assembly and operating instructions and a price list for the Knapp Reversible Plow (1947).

Newspaper Clippings. 1966 and 1977. Arranged chronologically. Includes clippings about R. I. Knapp and the history of the Knapp Plow Company; one article deals with the Columbia Hotel which was built in 1891 by John Harms Knapp.

Photographs. ca.1946. Grouped by subject. Includes 31 small photos of the 2-Bottom Offset Disc Plow and 4 photos of its respective parts.

Product Documentation. 1946 and ca.1948. Arranged chronologically. Includes operating instructions for both the 2-Bottom Offset Disc plow and the Stabilizer.

Publications. 1951. Includes one issue of The Machinist affixed with a mailing label addressed to N. E. Knapp.

Related Materials at History San Jose

In addition to the items in the Knapp Plow Company Collection and the Norman E. Knapp Collection in the Research Center are artifacts (physical objects such as plows, parts and models), which are also part of the collection and are located in the History San Jose Collection. See the Registrar for more information.

Knapp Plow Company Collection

Business Records

box 1, folder 1 **List of Retailers ca. 1920**
box 1, folder 2 **Invoice 1922**
box 1, folder 3 **Bolt lists for the No. 24 and No. 30 Subsoil Plows 1922**

Drawings

box 1, folder 4 and 5 **Drawings for Advertisements**

Ephemera

box 1, folder 6 **Product Catalogs 1909 and 1912-1913**
box 1, folder 7 **Newspaper advertisement for the Knapp Tractor Disc Plow ca. 1912**
box 1, folder 8 **Brochures for plows; one non-proprietary brochure for a plow; tag for a Knapp product ca. 1912**

Norman E. Knapp Collection

Business Records

box 1, folder 10 **Bills of material for the 2-Bottom Offset Disc Plow 1947**

Correspondence

box 1, folder 11 **Notes; drafts of outgoing letters; copy of a letter from the Smithsonian Institution 1946-1970**

Ephemera

box 1, folder 12 **Brochures ca.1946**
box 1, folder 13 **Envelope for the 2-Bottom Offset Plow**
box 1, folder 14 **Price list for the Knapp Reversible Plow 1947**

Newspaper Clippings

box 1, folder 15 **Three articles about Robert I. Knapp and the Knapp Plow Company; article about the Columbia Hotel (Knapp's Folly) 1966-1977**

Product Documentation

box 1, folder 16 **Instruction manuals for the 2-Bottom Offset Disc Plow and the Stabilizer 1946 and 1948**

Publications

box 1, folder 17 **Issue of The Machinist 1951**

Blueprints, 2-bottom Offset Plow

box 1, folder 18 **Specifications, numbered K407, K409, K411-K412**
box 1, folder 19 **Specifications, numbered K415, K418, K432**
box 1, folder 20 **Specifications, numbered K429, K432, K433, K441, K441 and K444, K444, K445, K445 and K428**
box 1, folder 21 **Specifications, numbered K449, K456, K460, K470-K474, K476, K485, K497, K510, K522**
box 1, folder 22 **Specifications, numbered K530, K533, K530 and drawings for the kickstand**
box 1, folder 23 **Assembly diagrams; drawings and blueprints of the formed clamp bolt for the Stabilizer and Stabilizer link**

Knapp Plow Company Collection

Correspondence

box 2, folder 1 **One album of photographed letters to the company 1922-1923**

Photographs

box 2, folder 2 **5 photos of gentlemen posing with plow**
box 2, folder 3 **2 photos of disc plows, 1924; 1 photo of a horse-drawn plow**
box 2, folder 4 **Studio photos of orchard plow, numbered 7A-14A**
box 2, folder 5 **Studio photos of orchard plows, unnumbered**
box 2, folder 6 **Field photos of orchard plows, numbered 15A-19A, 21A-24A, 27A-28A, 30A-31A, 34A-36A; one unnumbered colorized photo**

box 2, folder 7 **Studio photos of subsoil plows, numbered 38B, 41B, 43B-50B**
box 2, folder 8 **Studio photos of ditching, gopher and subsoil plows, unnumbered**
box 2, folder 9 **Field photos of subsoil plows, numbered 54B-57B, 59B-63B, 65B, 67B, 73B**
box 2, folder 10 **Studio photos of cultivators, numbered 77C-82C, 84C; one unnumbered studio photo of a cultivator and one unnumbered studio photo of a tractor disc plow**

box 2, folder 11 **Field photos of cultivator, numbered 85C-89C; two unnumbered field photos of the tractor disc plow**
box 2, folder 12 **Field photos of 3 disc plow and 12 disc plow**
box 2, folder 13 **Mounted photo of Knapp side-hill plow parts, tractor and plow**
box 2, folder 14 **7 photos of 3 disc plow with tractor (orchard in winter)**
box 2, folder 15 **2 photos of 3 disc plow and tractor, 2 of orchard, 1 of ditching plow and tractor, 1 of plow and tractor (winter)**

box 2, folder 16 **4 photos of subsoil plow, unnumbered, 2 of field**

Norman E. Knapp Collection

Photographs

box 2, folder 17 **31 photos of the 2-Bottom Offset Disc Plow; 4 photos of the respective parts ca. 1946**
box 3 **Duplicates of some of those found in Box 2**

Original Drawings 1946-1947

box 4, folder 1 **2 Bottom Offset Disc Plow parts specifications numbered K405, K407-K418**
box 4, folder 2 **2 Bottom Offset Disc Plow parts specifications numbered K420-K422, K424-K427, K429-K433**
box 4, folder 3 **2 Bottom Offset Disc Plow parts specifications numbered K438, K440-K447, K449, K456-458, K460, K462-463**
box 4, folder 4 **2 Bottom Offset Disc Plow parts specifications numbered K470-K474, K476, K479, K485, K491-K497, K510, K511**
box 4, folder 5 **2 Bottom Offset Disc Plow parts specifications numbered K515-517, K528, K530-K531, K533-K534, K4423**

box 5

Blueprints

Scope and Content Note

From Norman Knapp Co. unless specified
Instruction Manual Lay-out; Combined Dust Mulch Pulverizer and Seed Bed Maker, Knapp Plow Co., 1923; Drawings for the Kickstand
2 Bottom Offset Disc Plow Parts Specifications numbered K405, K408, K410, K413 and 414, K416 and 417, K420, K421, K424-K427, K430-K432, K440, K442 and K443, K446, K447, K457, K458, K462, K463, K491-496, K515-517, K539, 14T378A, 14T82

Oversize (found in case 5, drawer 8)

Scope and Content Note

From Norman Knapp Co. unless specified.

Original Drawings, Knapp Plow Company

Scope and Content Note

Bills of Material for the No. 24, No. 20, and No. 30 Subsoil Plows, 1922; Drawings of Parts specifications for the 24 Subsoiler, 1922; Drawings of parts specifications for the No. 30 Subsoil Plow, 1922; Drawing of parts specifications for the Cultivator, 1923

Original Drawings

Scope and Content Note

Unidentified Drawing; Bending Fixture for "A" Hitch Tie Bar; Welding Fixture Hitch Frame; Hitch Assembly; Boring Fixture for Disc Assembly
2 Bottom Offset Disc Parts Specifications numbered K402, K406, K408, K410, K412, K416, K418, K420-424, K438, K461, K511, K516, K528, K4423

Blueprints 1946-1947

Scope and Content Note

2 Bottom Offset Plow Disc Parts specifications numbered K402, K406, K422, K423, K461, K447, K511, K531, K534