

Guide to the Records of Read's Department Stores BHC-MSS 0100

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Bridgeport History Center, Bridgeport Public Library

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Summary Information

Repository:	Bridgeport History Center, Bridgeport Public Library
Creator:	Reads Department Stores Inc.
Title:	Records of Read's Department Stores
ID:	BHC-MSS 0100
Date [inclusive]:	1880-1994
Physical Description:	6 linear feet;
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	Read's Department Stores began in 1857 as a dry goods store. Selling high quality goods, it quickly gained a reputation as one of the premier places to shop in Bridgeport. Eventually the single store evolved into a local chain, boasting clothing, hats, special restrooms, a dedicated tea room, and more. This collection focuses primarily on the visual history of the flagship Read's store in Bridgeport, located at Broad and John Streets, with photographs of window displays and interiors dominant. Also present is information for employees who worked at the store, some ledgers, and material related to the Read family.

Preferred Citation

Records of Read's Department Stores (BHC-MSS 0100) Bridgeport History Center, Bridgeport Public Library.

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Biographical / Historical

The Read family was an active family in Bridgeport's business and social communities in the mid-to-late 1800s. Their rise to prominence began with David M. Read. He married Helen A. Barnum (a half-sister of P.T. Barnum), and the couple had three children: Charles B., David F. and May. They later played roles in expanding the Read businesses.

Read's Department Stores began in 1857 as a dry good company, renamed to D.M. Read Company in 1884. It became one of the premier places to shop in Bridgeport thanks to its high quality goods. It boasted not only departments for typical clothing, hats, and the like, but included special restrooms for shoppers as well. Business was exceedingly excellent into the 1920s, causing the store to move to a new building in 1926 at Broad and John Streets to support its business and offer even more amenities. It was considered a luxury store within Bridgeport, even going so far as to have a restaurant within. Read's fell under the jurisdiction of Allied Stores in 1954, and soon Read's became a chain. This was successful for a time, but in 1981, Read's flagship store at John and Broad closed down, moving it into a space at Lafayette Plaza Mall instead. Sadly, the name Reads was done away with in 1987 when another merger saw it change to the name of Jordan Marsh. That flagship building still stands, now the home of Artspace as of 2004, an area for artists to live and work. The ground floor features commercial space. Bankruptcy by Allied Stores in 1991 saw the closing of most remaining stores, and more and more mergers saw an eventual takeover and being folded into Macy's. Read stores no longer exist.

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Scope and Contents

The collection present in the Bridgeport History Center's holdings is not a comprehensive look at how the Read's department stores were run. Aside from ledgers and scant correspondence, there is little about executive management present in the collection. What does feature heavily are photographs of the store's window displays and interiors from the 1930s to the 1950s, employee manuals and orientation information, and anniversary materials from the store's 50th anniversary onward. As such, the Records of Reads Department Stores offers a greater visual history of the store in the mid-20th century compared to anything else present.

The presence of clippings, anniversary material, and employee information allows for a greater focus on how the store presented itself and what it was like to work there during the store's peak popularity. In addition the WINS scrapbook helps demonstrate how the store tried to position itself in terms of duty within the Bridgeport community, as the store served as an army recruiting station during the Second World War.

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Arrangement

Series I, corporate activities, consists of an extremely large general activities ledger, a few annual reports, and a few memos and other correspondence. The acknowledgement of/gifts to earliest account owners folder refers to customers with particularly old Read's credit cards.

The second series consists of merchandise and specialty labels produced exclusively for Read's, such as the "Fairfielder" apparel line.

Employees are the focus of series III. The material within include training manuals, internal newsletters, and the slides for presentations meant for orientation.

Series IV focuses on Read's flagship store in Bridgeport, including the large building at Broad and John streets which still stands today. It is further divided into sub-series due to the large number of photographs of window displays (sub-series 2) and interiors (sub-series 3.) Negatives make up sub-series 4. Exterior images (sub-series 1) tend to be remarkably similar.

Series V consists of store promotion and marketing materials, often including company histories and store opening events. Series VI contains anniversary celebration materials from year 50 onward, with many scrapbooks present.

Other activities are located in Series VII and catch the remaining documents in the collection. Series VIII contains material on the Read family, but should be used in conjunction with the Papers of the Read Family (BHC-MSS 0026.)

Series IX consists of clippings with a focus on print advertising.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Related Materials

Related Materials

Papers of the Read Family (BHC-MSS 0026) Bridgeport History Center, Bridgeport Public Library.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Bridgeport (Conn.)
- Department stores
- Department stores--Employees
- Allied Stores Corporation
- Read, David M.
- Hall, W.B.

Bibliography

Artspace Read's. Accessed 4 November, 2020 <https://www.artspace.org/reads>

Papers of the Read Family (BHC-MSS 0026) Bridgeport History Center, Bridgeport Public Library.

"Read's." The Department Store Museum. Accessed 4 November 2020. <http://www.thedepartmentstoremuseum.org/2010/09/d-m-read-co-bridgeport-connecticut.html>

"Read's Marks 100 Years of Progress in Bridgeport," Sunday Herald. January 6, 1957.

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Collection Inventory

Series I – Corporate activities

Title/Description	Instances	
General ledger, 1916-1927	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 1	
Annual reports, 1948, 1951-1952	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 2	folder 1
Stockholder ledger cards, 1950	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 2	folder 2
Memo re: purchase of warehouse from Warner Brothers, 1927	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 2	folder 3
Acknowledgement of/gifts to earliest account owners, 1976-1982	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 2	folder 4
Correspondence, general, 1948-1982	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 2	folder 5
Departmental changes, 1925	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 2	folder 6

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Series II – Merchandise and specialty labels

Title/Description	Instances	
Linen samples, embroiders David M. Read, c. 1880s	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 2	folder 7
Samples of "Fairfielder" apparel labels, 1957, 1962	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 2	folder 8
"The Tailored Suit", 1901-1902	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 2	folder 9
Christmas catalog, 1969-1970	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 2	folder 10
Sample tissue paper with Read logo, undated	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 16	folder 6
2 Read's gift boxes, undated	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 17	
A Gift from the Cannery featuring Read's logo, undated		

BHC-MSS
0100 Box 17[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)**Series III – Employees**

Title/Description	Instances	
Photograph, Quarter century club, 1922	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 15	folder 1
The Ready Reference Diary, 1935, 1937	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 2	folder 11
Employee songs, 1940	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 2	folder 12
Employee sales manuals, 1940s-1973	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 2	folder 13
Employee charge account campaign, 1975-1977	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 16	folder 1
"The Readio" and Reads newsletter, 1930-1938, 1972-1973, 1978	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 2	folder 14
Read's Review, 1984	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 2	folder 15
Orientation slide presentation, c. 1983	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 2	folder 16
Orientation slide presentation, c. 1983	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 3	folder 5-7
Yer slide presentation, c. 1980s	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 2	folder 17
Obituaries, Milton Mandelson	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 11	case 8
Other employee communications, undated	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 2	folder 18
Orientation or sales promotion duplicates? , c. 1983	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 3	folder 11-21
Orientation or sales promotion duplicates? , c. 1983	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 4	folder 1-3
Read's History slide presentation, c. 1983	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 3	folder 1-4
Slide promotions, c. 1983		

BHC-MSS folder 8-10
0100 Box 3

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Series IV– Bridgeport Flagship Store

Sub-series 1 – Exterior photographs

Title/Description	Instances	
Photograph, Building, pre-Broad street, pre-1924	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 15	folder 2
Construction of store at John and Broad Streets, 1924-1925	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 5	folder 3-4
Photo album featuring construction of store at John and Broad Streets, 1925	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 5	folder 5-6
Store at a local mall, 1966	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 7	folder 14
Photograph, Construction site along Route 6, undated	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 15	folder 3
Photograph, Trumbull store construction, undated	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 15	folder 4

Sub-series 2 – Window display photographs

Title/Description	Instances	
Window displays, (c. 1918-1965)	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 6	folder 2-22
Window displays, Christmas, undated	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 6	folder 23
Window displays, Easter, undated	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 6	folder 24
Window displays, Women's, undated	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 6	folder 25-28
Window displays, Men's, undated	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 6	folder 29
Window displays, Other, undated	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 6	folder 30
Window displays, Other, undated	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 7	folder 1
Photo album of window displays, undated		

BHC-MSS folder 2
0100 Box 7

Sub-series 3 – Store interior photographs

Title/Description	Instances
Interior of original store, c. 1880s-1890s	BHC-MSS folder 2 0100 Box 5
Store interiors, women's, 1935-1965, undated	BHC-MSS folder 3 0100 Box 7
Store interiors, Men's, 1940-1944, undated	BHC-MSS folder 4 0100 Box 7
Store interiors, Children's, 1935-1959, undated	BHC-MSS folder 5 0100 Box 7
Store interiors, Accessories, 1935, undated	BHC-MSS folder 6 0100 Box 7
Store interiors, Homewares, 1934-1944, undated	BHC-MSS folder 7 0100 Box 7
Store interiors, Furniture, 1934-1944, undated	BHC-MSS folder 8 0100 Box 7
Store interiors, College shop, 1935-1937, undated	BHC-MSS folder 9 0100 Box 7
Store interiors, Bookstore, 1939, undated	BHC-MSS folder 10 0100 Box 7
Store interiors, Organ, undated	BHC-MSS folder 11 0100 Box 7
Store interiors, Anniversary sales, 1907	BHC-MSS folder 12 0100 Box 7
Store interiors, Other, 1934, undated	BHC-MSS folder 13 0100 Box 7

Sub-series 4 - Negatives

Title/Description	Instances
Negatives, store interior, 1944	BHC-MSS folder 3 0100 Box 8
Negatives, lending library, undated	BHC-MSS folder 4 0100 Box 8
Negatives, general, undated	BHC-MSS folder 5-7 0100 Box 8

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Series V – Store promotion and marketing

Title/Description	Instances	
Trade cards, c. 1880s-1890s	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 8	folder 8
Excursion ticket, 1889	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 8	folder 9
Store concerts, 1889-1900, 1932	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 8	folder 10
Store events, 1911-1936	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 8	folder 11
Company history, 1915	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 8	folder 12
New store opening – John and Broad Streets, 1926	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 8	folder 13
Wedding Embassy yearbook, 1965	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 8	folder 14
Store opening invitations, 1978-1981	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 8	folder 15
Store promotional ephemera, 1940, undated	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 9	folder 1
Store directories, undated	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 9	folder 2
"A Modern Department Store", undated	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 9	folder 3
Postcards, undated	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 9	folder 4
Consumer advertisements, c. 1970s?	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 9	folder 5

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Series VI – Anniversary celebrations

Title/Description	Instances	
50 year commemorative booklet, 1907	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 9	folder 6
70 year anniversary observance, 1927	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 9	folder 7
75th anniversary scrapbook, 1932	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 9	folder 8
80th anniversary scrapbook, 1937		

	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 9	folder 9
90th anniversary , 1947	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 10	folder 1-3
100th anniversary /Store centennial, 1947	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 10	folder 4-6
Anniversary dinners, 1976-1983	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 10	folder 7
Anniversary programs and announcements, 1932-1953	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 10	folder 8

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Series VII – Other activities

Title/Description	Instances	
Company stationary, undated	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 10	folder 9
Receipt, July 1, 1909	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 10	folder 10
State of Connecticut minimum wage posters, 1942	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 10	folder 11
YMCA membership campaign, 1943	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 10	folder 12
Air raid instructions, 1943	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 10	folder 13
WINS scrapbook [Women In National Service], 1943	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 14	
Retail awards and community recognition, 1961-1968	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 16	folder 3-4
Exterior signage for Trumbull store, 1964	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 11	folder 1
Donation of Trumbull cemetery to town of Trumbul, 1965	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 11	folder 2
Softball tournament second place plaque, 1980	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 16	folder 5
Participation in White House Christmas pageant, 1981	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 11	folder 3
Paste-ups for Reads Cookbook, undated		

BHC-MSS folder 5-6
0100 Box 15

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Series VIII – Read family

Title/Description	Instances
Private ledger with other businesses of the Read family, 1908-1909	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 12
Private ledger with other businesses of the Read family, 1910-1912	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 13
"In Memorium" badge, David M. Read, 1930	BHC-MSS folder 4 0100 Box 11
Biography, David M. Read,, undated	BHC-MSS folder 5 0100 Box 11
In Memorium, Charles B. Read, 1912	BHC-MSS folder 6 0100 Box 11
Copy of will and codicil of David F. Read, 1913-1914	BHC-MSS folder 7 0100 Box 11
Read family, 1875, 1800, undated	BHC-MSS folder 1 0100 Box 8
Images of Read family transferred to slide film, undated	BHC-MSS folder 4 0100 Box 4

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Series IX - Clippings

Title/Description	Instances
Clippings, early advertisements, c. 1860s	BHC-MSS folder 9 0100 Box 11
Early newspaper advertising, 1886	BHC-MSS folder 10 0100 Box 11
The American Queen October 1898 cover, Published by the D.M. Read Company, 1898	BHC-MSS folder 2 0100 Box 16
Standard Fashions, 1891	BHC-MSS folder 11 0100 Box 11
Fashions Magazine, Bridgeport Telegram, 1903 and November 5, 1905	BHC-MSS folder 7 0100 Box 15
Coverage of new store opening, 1926	

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	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 11	folder 12-14
Souvenir program, 1929	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 11	folder 15
Announcement of opening at Crossroads Mall, 1981	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 11	folder 16
Autoroute atlas, undated	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 11	folder 17
General newspaper advertisements, 1930s-1980s	BHC-MSS 0100 Box 11	folder 18-19

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