

Tobacco industry collection

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Friends of Wood Memorial Library and Museum

783 Main Street

P.O. Box 131

South Windsor, CT 06074

Business Number: 860-289-1783

archives@woodmemoriallibrary.org

URL: <https://woodmemoriallibrary.org/>

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Summary Information

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| Repository: | Friends of Wood Memorial Library and Museum |
| Creator: | Friends of Wood Memorial Library and Museum |
| Title: | Tobacco industry collection |
| ID: | C002 |
| ID [aspace_uri]: | /repositories/21/resources/761 |
| Date [inclusive]: | 1856-2002 |
| Physical Description: | 1 Linear Feet |
| Language of the Material: | English . |
| Abstract: | The tobacco industry collection is an artificial collection of ledgers, a stock certificate book, booklets, newspaper clippings, correspondence, and other materials related to Connecticut's (and South Windsor's) role in the tobacco growing and tobacco product producing industry. |

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Tobacco industry collection (C002), Wood Memorial Library and Museum, South Windsor, CT.

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Biographical / Historical

The introduction and popularity of cigars in America from Cuba and elsewhere in the mid- to late-eighteenth century drove South Windsor's agricultural expansion in tobacco cultivation. It has been reported that the first cigar manufactured in the United States was made by in South Windsor by Mrs. Prout, the wife a Virginian, who had been recruited to assist in the "plug and twist" tobacco business. Wives and daughters on neighboring farms also began making cigars. In 1810, Solomon Viets started a cigar factory in Suffield and his brother, Roswell, one in South Windsor. Horace Filley also established a cigar making business in 1810, probably on the family farm.

Experiments made by B. P. Barber of East Windsor about 1830 with some Maryland seed produced a beautiful, finely textured, broad leaf, which was later developed into Connecticut broadleaf. This type provided a superior wrapper for cigars over the shoestring wrapper, a long narrow leaf, formerly grown in the valley.

Beginning in the 1830s, home-making of cigars diminished and cigar factories sprang up. In 1870, there were 235 factories in Connecticut. As cigars became increasingly popular through the nineteenth century, cigar makers set up large operations in New York (shown above), Philadelphia, and other major cities, helping to drive the demand for large quantities of Connecticut-grown tobacco.

Broadleaf was the Valley's sole tobacco product until Havana Seed tobacco was introduced in 1975. This was a smooth, good-looking leaf, which yielded a higher percentage of wrappers than Broadleaf. It became one of the popular domestic wrapper leaves until Shade Tobacco appeared after the turn of the twentieth century.

The importation into the United States of fine Sumatra tobacco in the 1890s posed a serious threat to United States growers as cigar manufacturers preferred it to the American leaf. The Department of Agriculture and the Connecticut Experiment Station tested a number of growing methods and discovered in 1900 that the Sumatra plant could be grown in Connecticut under shade with excellent results. The Secretary of Agriculture reported to Congress that year that "The leaf produced has been so fine that the New York tobacco men say that it cannot be told from the imported Sumatra leaf. They predict, as a result of this work, a complete revolution of the tobacco business in the Connecticut Valley." In 1901, Marcus L. Floyd, a government expert, grew the first shade tobacco in South Windsor on Rye Street.

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, tobacco growing expanded, giving rise to large- and medium-sized farms. Tobacco production in Connecticut reached its height in 1921, when 44 million pounds were harvested, compared with 10 million pounds in 1890. The boom can be attributed to the widespread popularity of cigars, relatively stable prices, introduction of Shade Grown tobacco and changes in production, and favorable government policy. During this time, major corporations, such as the American Sumatra Corp., the Hartman Tobacco Co., and the Consolidated Cigar Corp., were active in South Windsor, as were smaller and independent operations, Ahern Bros., the Burnham Co., Robert Daly, the Farnham Tobacco Corp., John W. Helm, McGrath Bros., Samuel Rice, J. E. Shepard, and the Troy Bros.

In 1917, a group of tobacco farmers incorporated as the South Windsor Tobacco Growers Association initially to address local labor shortages, but more broadly to address issues of concern. The cooperative pooled their resources to bring African American migrant laborers up from the South. Partnering with other local associations, in 1919, it organized four institutes to study tobacco fertilization and diseases. Membership cost \$1 (equal to about \$22 today), and members could buy \$5 stock certificates. Fees were also assessed based on their total acreage.

Some tobacco growers used child labor to fill the large demand for workers. Adrian Francis McDonald, in his "The History of Tobacco Production in Connecticut" written in 1938 for the Tercentenary Commission of the State of Connecticut, observed, "The fact that the leaves are plucked from the stalk makes it necessary to use boys in the harvesting operation for, unlike

men, they do not need to work in a stooped posture." Child labor was used into the early 1940s.

After reaching a high of 30,800 in 1921, acres planted with tobacco in Connecticut declined to fewer than 2,000 in 2010s. Although it continued to be grown throughout the twentieth century, problems began in the 1920s as cigarettes began to replace demand for cigars and new machine-made processes required half as much tobacco per cigar. Some growers began to turn to other crops or sell off their land, some for new industrial uses, while Great Depression of the 1930s caused hardship due to falling prices.

Even if the amount of tobacco cultivation was slowly declining, it remained a profitable business for growers who stayed with it, and the ongoing enthusiasm for the crop was reflected in the Cigar Tobacco Harvest Festivals that took place in the early 1950s to celebrate the end of the season. The several days long events featured a parade with participants from all over Connecticut's tobacco towns, block parties, farm tours, and culminated in a Tobacco Queen pageant.

Acreage devoted to tobacco production continued to decrease. Farmers continued to turn to growing other crops and selling off land for non-agricultural uses. Cigar-making technology improvements in the 1950s reduced even more the demand for tobacco leaf, and the extraordinary growth of suburbanization in the Hartford region—South Windsor's population doubled between 1950 and 1960—drove a steady increase in residential land development. In the 1960s, the healthfulness of smoking became a concern, and the already-established trends only continued. Even so, the market for cigars continued, and tobacco growing and processing in South Windsor lives on today.

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Scope and Contents

The tobacco industry collection is an artificial collection of ledgers, a stock certificate book, booklets, newspaper clippings, correspondence, and other materials related to Connecticut's (and South Windsor's) role in the tobacco growing and tobacco product producing industry.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Conditions Governing Access

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Conditions Governing Use

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Controlled Access Headings

- South Windsor (Conn.)
- Tobacco industry--Connecticut
- Tobacco industry--Connecticut River Valley Region
- Tobacco farms--Connecticut--History
- Tobacco farmers
- Agriculture--Connecticut
- Ledgers (account books)
- programs (documents)
- Photographs

Collection Inventory

| Title/Description | Instances |
|---|-----------|
| Letter from the secretary of state: Tariffs, duties, etc. on American tobacco, 1856 | Tobacco 2 |
| Tobacco in Song and Story, by John Bain, Jr., 1896 | Tobacco 1 |

Tobacco industry collection

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| Subscribers for stock in the Hartford County Tobacco Growers Association, Inc. notebook, 1907-1908 | Tobacco 1 |
| Weekly time book from a tobacco farm, 1910-1918 | Tobacco 1 |
| South Windsor Tobacco Growers, Inc. stock book, 1918 | Tobacco G2 |
| Tariff Act of 1929 (US GPO: 56513), 1929 | Tobacco 2 |
| Jim Zagorski photographs, 1929-1953 | Tobacco 2 |
| Keer Tobacco Control Bill (US GPO 58655), 1934 | Tobacco 2 |
| The History of Tobacco Production in Connecticut, by Adam Francis McDonald, 1936 | Tobacco 1 |
| "Connecticut Harvests Another Tobacco Crop," Hartford Courant, 1941 Aug 31 | Tobacco 1 |
| A. Mulnerite + Son tobacco receipt, 1941 | Tobacco 1 |
| Factors in the Outlook for Connecticut Valley Tobacco, by R. G. Wheeler et al., 1948 | Tobacco 1 |
| Cigar Tobacco Harvest Festival: Hartford, Connecticut, Sept. 11-13, 1951 program (three copies), 1951 | Tobacco 1, 2 |
| Local newspaper articles about tobacco (photocopies), 1951-1992 | Tobacco 2 |
| Cigar Harvest Festival scrapbook, 1951 | Tobacco 2 |
| Cigar Harvest Festival September 9-14, 1952, Hartford, Connecticut magazine, 1952 | Tobacco 2 |
| Connecticut & Tobacco: A Chapter in America's Industrial Growth (Tobacco Institute), After 1958 | Tobacco 1 |
| Employment and Industrial Review article concerning high school students participating in tobacco harvest, 1964 | Tobacco 1 |
| Assorted tobacco periodicals, programs, and newspaper clippings (three folders), 1968-2002 | Tobacco 1 |
| Tobacco Farming and Cigar Making Tools, by John B. Kline, 1975 | Tobacco 1 |
| Background to Kibbe farm tobacco video, 1981 | Tobacco 1 |
| Changing Landscape through People: Connecticut Tobacco Valley, 1982 | Tobacco 1 |
| Tobacco reference file, 1984 | Tobacco 1 |
| Photographs from tobacco events, 1995-1996 | Tobacco 2 |
| Tobacco-Land in Old New England (photocopy of 1944 original), Undated | Tobacco 1 |
| The Story of Tobacco Valley, Undated | Tobacco 1 |

Tobacco industry collection

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| History of tobacco in South Windsor, compiled by Myrtle Odum, Undated | Tobacco 2 |
| WML exhibits and events about tobacco, Undated | Tobacco 2 |
