Hotpoint/General Electric Collection

1911-1975
Descriptive Summary

Title: Hotpoint/General Electric Collection

Dates: 1911-1975

Collection Number: Consult library

Creator/Collector: General Electric

Extent: 32.5 Linear feet (31 boxes)

Repository: Ontario City Library, Robert E. Ellingwood Model Colony History Room

Abstract: Earl H. Richardson was a meter reader for the Ontario Power Company in the early 1900’s. In his spare time, he experimented with electrifying flat irons. Designing a small, lighter weight model (flatirons could weigh 5-10 pounds each), he convinced his company to generate power all day every Tuesday (ironing day) so power customers could use his new iron. He reasoned that if enough electric irons were in use, customers would demand more power and the high rates would be reduced. It worked. By 1904, he left the power company and started up the Pacific Electric Heating Company on Euclid Avenue just below the railroad tracks to manufacture electric irons. A major problem was soon identified: the iron got too hot in the center of the ironing plate. Richardson asked his wife Mary for advice (!). She suggested that he make an iron with more heat at the point for easier pressing around buttonholes, ruffles and pleats. He fabricated this new improved version and gave several to local laundresses to try for one week. When he returned, they refused to part with “the iron with the hot point”. In 1905, he made and sold more electric irons under the “Hotpoint” name than any other company in America. Between 1911 and 1917, Richardson found other innovative ways to marry electricity with household appliances. Thus was born the “El” line (El meaning “electric”): El Perco (an electric coffeepot), El Chafo (chafing dish), El Tosto (electric toaster), El Stovo (an early hotplate), El Egg, El Teballo (electric teapot), and El Warmo (electric heating pad). An early crockpot, (the “jug cooker”) came out in 1929. With World War I raging in Europe, a merger was proposed with Richardson’s Hotpoint Electric Heating Company, George Hughes (owner/inventor of the electric range) and the heating device section of the General Electric Company. The new company, formed in 1918, was known as the Edison Electric Appliance Company. In 1952, Hotpoint became a division of the General Electric Company. The Ontario plant continued to manufacture electric irons until it closed in 1982. Several milestones marked the Ontario plant’s history: the 20 millionth iron (gold-plated) was presented to Una Winter, Earl Richardson’s sister in 1941; the 50 millionth produced in 1956 with President Eisenhower looking on; the 100 millionth in 1969 and the 150 millionth in 1980. Legend has it that the last iron was buried in the grounds of the Ontario plant rather than sent back to GE’s Bridgeport Conn. Plant in 1982. The Model Colony Room also has an extensive Oral History of Bryce Denton and a slide/transcript presentation he created on the history of Hotpoint.

Language of Material: English

Access

Collection is open for research during the operating hours of the Robert E. Ellingwood Model Colony History Room, or by appointment.

Preferred Citation

Hotpoint/General Electric Collection. Ontario City Library, Robert E. Ellingwood Model Colony History Room

Acquisition Information

This collection was donated to the Model Colony Room over a period of years from 1976 to 1989 by the Engineering Management of the General Electric Iron Plant in Ontario. Bryce A. Denton, GE engineer and historian, coordinated the original donation and augmented it with yearly contributions from 1980-1989.

Scope and Content of Collection

The Hotpoint/General Electric Collection contains various business records as well as company histories, company newsletters, engineer drawings, patents, product and parts catalogs, and product advertising. Other material include photographs, 16mm motion picture film, vinyl recordings, negatives, slides, and scrapbooks.

Indexing Terms

General Electric

Hotpoint/General Electric Collection Container List