

## **Information Sheet**

**R**     **Roy Nelson Canning Company.**  
**1029**     **Records, 1907-1993.**  
           **One volume and forty-two folders.**

This collection is available at [The State Historical Society of Missouri](http://The State Historical Society of Missouri). If you would like more information, please contact us at [shsresearch@umsystem.edu](mailto:shsresearch@umsystem.edu).

These are records of the Roy Nelson Canning Company, a large tomato-canning concern especially active in Stone, Taney, and Douglas counties in Missouri. The collection consists of land records, deeds, financial statements, insurance papers, and records for individual factories, mostly for operations in Stone County, Missouri.

In 1902, Roy Nelson and his brother-in-law B. F. Julian began canning apples and peaches in Rogers, Arkansas. By 1903 or 1904, Nelson had relocated to Marshfield, Missouri. He began canning operations in Stone County in 1912 or 1913, and by 1920 had ten factories there. In 1922, Nelson shipped an entire trainload of tomatoes—thirty-five cars—from the Crane factory; Stone County's 1923 tomato shipment was larger than that of any other county in the state. By 1925, Nelson operated fifteen factories and was reputed to be the world's largest individual canner. In 1926, shipments of canned tomatoes from Reeds Spring totaled seventy-eight train carloads, with sixty more in storage awaiting shipment. Nelson reportedly shipped over one-half million dollars worth of tomatoes from Stone County in 1928. In 1929 his factories processed over 350 train carloads—350,000 cases or 7 million cans of tomatoes—worth \$650,000.

Roy Nelson was known as the "Canning King of the Ozarks" when he died in December 1929. At the time of his death he owned eighteen factories in the southwestern Ozarks, mostly located in Stone, Taney, and Douglas counties. His widow, Lola G. Nelson, sold the company in February 1930. Porter S. Lucas, who owned the factory at Crane, and co-owned those at Eelsey, Hurley, and Quail Spur, headed the new enterprise, which continued to operate under the Nelson name. The new company sold the canneries at Browns Spring, Galena, and Reeds Spring, Missouri, and Bergman and Pyatt, Arkansas. Mrs. Nelson herself operated the cannery at Ava, Missouri.

The tomato canning industry played a central role in transforming the economic lives of native Ozarkers, especially women. The inexpensive labor of women and children was crucial to the success of the Ozarks canning industry—seeding, planting, tending, picking and processing provided what was probably the first cash income for many families. Cannery workers constituted half of all wage earners in Stone County by 1906; by 1909 women comprised one-third of the labor force in Stone County's canneries, earning \$3.00-\$5.00 daily, with extra bonuses possible. In 1923, sixty-five percent of Stone County wage-earners employed in manufacturing were women, numbering over 400. Nelson's Reeds Spring factory alone employed around 75 people in 1924, with the eighteen canneries eventually providing jobs for 2,700 people.

The collection contains a ledger, 1936-1950, and loose papers, 1907-1993. There is information on the Nelson operations generally, and specific details on the factories at Abesville, Crane, Eelsey, Hurley, and Quail Spur, Missouri, mostly during the period of Porter Lucas's proprietorship. The papers include abstracts of title, deeds, insurance records, documents concerning

Stone County factories, financial statements, both personal and business-related, for Roy Nelson and Porter Lucas, tax receipts, and copies of wills.

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### **Shelf List**

These are records of the Roy Nelson Canning Company, a large tomato-canning concern especially active in Stone, Taney, and Douglas counties in Missouri. The collection consists of land records, deeds, financial statements, insurance papers, and records for individual factories, mostly for operations in Stone County, Missouri.

#### **Volume 1: Ledger, 1936-1950**

This a ledger showing expenses and credits for the factories at Abesville, Crane, Elsey, Hurley, and Quail Spur. Individual pages show figures for tomatoes, fertilizer, cans, labels, and crates, labor, salaries, insurance, interest payments, and miscellaneous accounts.

#### **Folders 1-17: Abstracts of title and deeds, 1907-1984**

- F. 01: Boone County (Ark.), abstract of title, 1919
- F. 02: Ava (Mo.), Central Subdivision, deeds, 1924-1926
- F. 03: North Crane (Mo.), Gipson Addition, deed, 1948
- F. 04: North Crane (Mo.), Luscombe Heights Addition, abstracts, deeds, and tax receipts, 1914-1957
- F. 05: North Crane (Mo.), Park Addition, deed, 1925
- F. 06: Stone County (Mo.), Town of To-Ho-Sho-Nee, correspondence and deeds, 1936, 1958, 1961, 1964, 1984
- F. 07: Stone County (Mo.), Sec. 9 & 10, T. 24, R. 23, abstract of title, 1918
- F. 08: Stone County (Mo.), Sec. 15, T. 24, R. 23, abstract of title, 1915
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- F. 10: Stone County (Mo.), Sec. 32, T. 24, R. 23, abstract of title, 1919
- F. 11: Stone County (Mo.), Sec. 22, T. 24, R. 24, deeds, 1917, 1920
- F. 12: Stone County (Mo.), Sec. 29, T. 25, R. 22 and Sec. 15, T. 24, R. 23, abstract of title, 1917
- F. 13: Stone County (Mo.), Sec. 5, T. 25, R. 24, deed, 1926
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- F. 16: Stone County (Mo.), Sec. 17, T. 26, R. 24, abstract of title, deed, contract, and lease, 1916-1950
- F. 17: Stone County (Mo.), Sec. 33, T. 26, R. 24, abstract of title and deeds, 1907-1964

#### **Folders 18-23: Records of individual factories, 1930-1953**

- F. 18: Abesville Factory, correspondence and bill of sale, 1945-1950
- F. 19: Abesville and Crane factories, bill of sale, 1951
- F. 20: Crane Factory, bills of sale, lease, mortgage and notes, 1930, 1937, 1938, 1940
- F. 21: Elsey Factory, deeds, notes, and correspondence, 1930, 1951
- F. 22: Hurley Factory, contracts for sale, 1944
- F. 23: Quail Spur Factory, deeds, bills of sale, 1930, 1936, 1953

**Folders 24-38: Financial, insurance, and tax records, 1923-1993**

- F. 24: Financial statements (Roy Nelson), 1923-1929
- F. 25: Financial statements, (Porter S. Lucas), 1942-1977
- F. 26: Insurance, 1948, 1950, 1974
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- F. 38: Tax receipts, Smythe Special, 1923-1943

**Folders 39-42: Miscellaneous papers, 1917-1985**

- F. 39: Miscellaneous correspondence, 1935-1968
- F. 40: Lucas, Grace, will, 1962
- F. 41: Lucas, Porter S., will, 1985
- F. 42: Moore, Will and Sinda, marriage certificate and cemetery deed, 1917, 1956

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