

**S0331 Mesker Brothers Iron Works
Records, 1879-1953
11 Volumes On 3 Microfilm Rolls**

MICROFILM

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The Mesker Brothers Iron Works records, 1879-1953, were loaned for microfilming by David Mesker on March 21, 1988.

Frank and Bernard Mesker founded Mesker and Brother, a structural iron and sheet metal firm, in 1879. After the retirement of his father, John Bernard Mesker, in 1876, Bernard (Ben) Mesker, the older brother, had taken over the management of Mesker and Busse, a stove manufacturing partnership co-founded in 1847 by the elder Mesker. John Mesker, a Dutch immigrant, had previously sold hardware, stoves and sheet metal and provided repair services to small towns along the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers from a flat boat he constructed. Three years after entering the Mesker and Busse partnership, John Mesker opened a stove store in Evansville, Indiana and eventually began galvanizing iron work for buildings. Two of his three sons, George (b. 1857) and Frank (b.1861), were born in Evansville. Ben Mesker was born in Cincinnati in 1851. All three sons attended private and business schools in addition to learning the family trade. Frank graduated from Kliner's Commercial College in 1876 and worked as a bookkeeper and estimator for Huzzell and Cozzens, a sheet metal firm in St. Louis, for three years prior to organizing Mesker and Brother.

Ben sold his interest in Mesker and Busse to his brother George in 1879 to pursue fortunes in Colorado, but changed plans after visiting Frank in St. Louis and deciding to join him to form the company. The firm incorporated under the name Mesker Brothers Iron Company in 1912.

The company recorded a net loss of \$710 its first year, with Frank and Ben sharing the younger brother's \$12 weekly salary as a bookkeeper. As the effect of the 1873 panic on the construction industry in St. Louis diminished, however, business began to improve. Ben Mesker cultivated a friendship with St. Louis architect Joseph W. Givens, who urged the pair to submit a bid to do sheet metal work for a building project the architect was starting for the St. Louis Art Museum. The company's low bid, \$18,000, secured the commission in 1880. It also secured its position among St. Louis architectural firms. Mesker and Brother received another significant commission, the St. Louis Exposition building, and continued to move toward architectural sheet metal work.

Because of uncertain market conditions in St. Louis, Frank Mesker made several trips to New York to investigate the possibility of relocating the business. Although the company decided to remain in St. Louis, one of Frank's investigations in 1884 led him to a sheet metal company in Washington, DC that was going out of business. The company had 1500 catalogs depicting its sheet metal products. Frank Mesker decided to replace the covers of the catalogs

with Mesker Brothers covers and send them to potential customers in surrounding territories. The effort led to a large number of mail orders and the company began publishing its own catalog the following year. The new catalog depicted the new sheet metal store fronts the company began producing in 1884. Because of the enormous response to these catalogs, primarily from the Western states to which the majority had been mailed, the Mesker Brothers increased their print run from 50,000 in 1886 to a half-million in 1887. George Mesker, who had located another factory in Evansville, Indiana, also used catalog marketing to sell over 5000 store fronts.

The Mesker Brothers filled a large number of mail-order store fronts from 1887 until the 1893 panic. Mesker Brother store fronts dating from this period, distinguished by the St. Louis fleur de lis design, can still be found in California, Colorado, Montana, Idaho and other western states. The company also produced and sold jail cells through its mail-order catalog.

During World War I the Mesker Brothers company produced ranges and bread bakers for the U. S. and allied governments and steel kitchens for France. The company's factory expanded to include 800 workers running three daily shifts. During World War II it produced fragmentation bombs, airplane landing mats, ammunition lockers and tanks for submarines. After the war, Mesker Brothers Iron Works took patents on a variety of products using sheet metal construction, including house fronts, rolled wrought iron work, tubular school and library doors, and shapes for casement pivoted and factory sash. The company eventually established itself in the steel sash industry.

Bernard Mesker died on January 23, 1936. George Mesker died in October 31 of the same year. Frank Mesker died in St. Louis on October 10, 1952. In 1961 Frank Mesker, Jr. sold Mesker Brothers Iron Works to his brother, John Mesker. John Mesker sold the company to Barry Wehmiller.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Mesker Brothers Iron Works Records, 1879-1907, document the founding and early development of the company and the personal lives of members of the Mesker family. The records include correspondence, company licenses, shares and checks, catalogues, a patent, an account book and publications relating to the building trades. The collection contains early correspondence between Frank and Ben Mesker, 1882-1886; biographical information, birth and graduation announcements, obituaries, and newsclippings regarding members of the Mesker family; issues of two metal trades publications, *Stove and Hardware* and *The Metal Worker*, 1896; and six volumes of *Weekly Compendium*, the organ of the Building Trades Council, 1896-1897. The bulk of the collection includes six copies of Mesker Brothers catalogues, 1888-1898; and an account book of company component costs and sales records, known as "Ben's Bible," maintained by Ben Mesker from 1889-1931.

The collection is divided into six series: 1. Correspondence and Ledger, 1879-1907; 2. Correspondence from Frank Mesker to Ben Mesker, 1882-1886; 3. Company Licenses, Shares and Checks, 1884-1887; 4. Mesker Brothers Iron Works Catalogues, 1888-1898; 5. Patent, 1889; 6. Account Book (Ben's Bible), 1889-1931; 7. Publications, 1896; 8. *Weekly Compendium*, Official Organ of the Building Trades Council, 1896-1897; 9. Miscellaneous, 1896-1936; 10. Correspondence, Newsclippings and Photographs, 1907-1953; 11. George

Mesker's Will, Correspondence and Newsclippings, 1926-1936.

MICROFILM ROLL LIST
ROLL 1

SERIES 1 - Correspondence and Ledger, 1879-1907

1. Letter from Anna, July 27, 1879
2. June 29, 1892
3. Trial Balances Ledger, December 31, 1895
4. Mesker and Brothers Post Card, "The Substitute for Jail In China," May 1, 1905
5. Envelope Addressed to Frank Mesker, January 24, 1906
6. Letter from George L. Mesker to B. B. Lindly, July 8, 1907

SERIES 2 - Correspondence from Frank Mesker to Ben Mesker, 1882-1886

1. Pittsburgh, October 26, 1882 (two letters)
2. New York, November 3, 4 (two letters), 5, 1882
3. St. Louis (typed), January 19, 21, 1886
4. Western Union wires, January 24, 26 (two letters), 1886

SERIES 3 - Company Licenses, Shares and Checks, 1884-1887

1. Delinquent Manufacturing License Notice, July 1, 1884
2. Three Vulcan Company Shares, February 9, 1889
3. Vulcan Company Licenses, 1886-1887 (twelve)
4. Mesker Brothers, Checks, 190?

SERIES 4 - Mesker Brothers Iron Works Catalogues, 1888-1898

1. New Designs and Ornaments, 1888
2. Sixth Edition, 1889
3. Ninth Edition, 1891
4. Tenth Edition, 1892
5. Eleventh Edition, 1895 (two copies)
6. Fifteenth Edition, 1898

SERIES 5 - Patent, 1889

1. Frank Mesker's Plate Metal Column Patent #397,868, February 12, 1889

ROLL 2

SERIES 6 - Account Book, 1889-1931

1. Mesker Brothers Account Book (Ben's Bible), 1889-1931

ROLL 3

SERIES 7 - Publications, 1896

1. Stoves and Hardware, June 25, 1896
2. The Metal Worker, June 20, 1896

SERIES 8 - Weekly Compendium, Official Organ of the Building Trades Council, 1896-1897

1. Newsclipping, September 1896
2. Volume 1, Number 4, September 20, 1896
3. Volume 1, Number 7, October 11, 1896
4. Volume 1, Number 8, October 18, 1896
5. Volume 1, Number 38, May 16, 1896
6. Volume 1, Number 39, May 23, 1897
7. Volume 1, Number 42, June 13, 1897

SERIES 9 - Miscellaneous, 1896-1936

1. Frank Mesker Biography, c. 1929
2. Itinerary for Gehner's and Nolkers European Trip, 1896
3. Frank Mesker Birth Announcement, Saturday, August 25, 1906
4. Two War Ration, No. 3 Books, 37 Red Point Tokens, 21 Red Tokens (meats and fruits), c. 1930s
5. Letter from August Gehner to Frank Mesker, August 1, 1903
6. Envelope to Pauline Gehner, card from Frank Mesker enclosed, 7. Frank A. Mesker's Graduation from MIT, Newsclippings, June 9, 1927
8. Ben Theodore Mesker's Gravestone and Birth and Death dates of parents and siblings (1823-1872), 1936
9. Letter from August Gehner to D. R. Francis, January 1, 1906

SERIES 10 - Correspondence, Newsclippings and Photographs, 1907-1953

1. Letter from Frank Mesker to Anne, May 9, 1907

2. St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Newsclipping on Bernard and Frank Mesker's living expenses, March 27, 1953

3. Pauline Mesker Obituary, October 28, 1952

4. Correspondence with Francis A. Mesker and Oscar Schmidt, March 1953

SERIES 11 - George Mesker's Will, Correspondence and Newsclippings, 1926-1936

1. Correspondence, 1926

2. Newsclipping, nd.

3. Correspondence and Newsclippings, nd.

4. Letter to Frank, October 7, 1926

5. Copy of Will, August 19, 1926

6. Correspondence with H. F. Koch, 1936

7. Evansville Courier, December 6, 1936

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