

A Guide to the Wetsel Seed Company Oral Histories, 1971, 1990 SdArch 0001

Wetsel Seed Company oral histories

1971



Title Statement

A Guide to the Wetsel Seed Company Oral Histories, 1971, 1990 SdArch 0001

Author: JMU Cataloging

Publication Statement

Publisher: James Madison University Libraries Special Collections

820 Madison Drive
MSC 1706
Harrisonburg, Virginia 22807
Telephone: (540) 568-3612
library-special@jmu.edu
URL: <https://www.lib.jmu.edu/special/>



1994

Profile Description

Creation: This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on 2025-10-17 07:01:56 -0400.

Language Usage: Description is written in: English, Latin script.

Descriptive Rules: Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

SdArch 0001

Unit ID

/repositories/4/resources/502

Unit Date

1971

Unit Date

1990

Language

English

Abstract

The Wetsel Seed Company Oral Histories, 1971, 1990, is comprised of interview transcripts, audio recordings, a pamphlet, and background papers, documenting the history of the Wetsel Seed Company, of Harrisonburg, Virginia.

source

Rennyson, David James

Extent

0.51 cubic feet 3 folders, 4 audiocassettes, 7 cds

Repository

Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University

Repository

James Madison University Libraries Special Collections

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Collection is open for research. Researchers must register and agree to copyright and privacy laws before using this collection. Please contact Research Services staff before visiting the James Madison University Special Collections Library to use this collection.

Use Restrictions

The copyright interests in this collection have been transferred to the James Madison University Special Collections Library. For more information, contact the Special Collections Library Reference Desk (library-special@jmu.edu).

Acquisition Information

Collection was donated on April 23, 1990 by David James Rennyson.

Processing Information

Audiocassettes were transferred from original audiocassettes to MAMA-R 700MB gold cd-r using Tascam cc-222 mkII in 2006 by Cindy Minter. Audio was converted to mp3 and wav files on July 11, 2018 by Digital Projects Specialist, Kirsten Mlodynia of JMU Libraries Innovation Spaces and Services. Interviews were cataloged at the item level in 1994; The descriptive metadata was adapted to the Finding Aid in July 2019.

Preferred Citation

[identification of item], [box #, folder #], Wetsel Seed Company Oral Histories, SdArch 0001, Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University.

Bio/Historical Note

Wetsel Seed Company was founded in 1911 by Daniel M. Wetsel and his eldest son, Arnold W. Wetsel in Harrisonburg, Virginia. It was originally called D.M. Wetsel and Son, and was the Shenandoah Valley's first seed, feed and plant business. In 1915 it changed names to become Wetsel Seed Company, Inc. Daniel Wetsel was known to experiment and develop various seed products, notably those associated with corn and tomatoes. The business eventually developed mail order catalogs and truck delivery services, opened up additional stores in Waynesboro and developed a garden center. Wetsel Seed Company has involved four generations of family members, including Earl H., Robert E., Nelson T., and Thomas M. Wetsel. The company was purchased by BFG Supply Company in 2011.

Scope and Content

The Wetsel Seed Company Oral Histories, 1971, 1990, is comprised of interview transcripts, audio recordings, a pamphlet, and background papers, documenting the history of the Wetsel Seed Company, Inc. of Harrisonburg, Virginia, from its beginnings as the Shenandoah Valley's first seed/feed/plant business in 1911 to its status as a multi-state seed/plant/lawn-garden firm in 1971. It includes an interview with Nelson T. Wetsel, former president and consultant for the Wetsel Seed Company; an interview with Maxine Thomas, former employee (mostly in payroll accounting) at the Wetsel Seed Company in Harrisonburg, Va; a pamphlet, written by Russell Stultz, which gives a history of Wetsel Seed Company, Inc., from 1911 to 1971; and background papers written by interviewer, and JMU history undergraduate student, David James Rennyson.

Keywords

Keywords

Agricultural industries -- Virginia -- Rockingham County
Farm supply industries -- Virginia -- Rockingham County
Garden centers (Retail trade)
Seed industry and trade -- History
Seed industry and trade -- Equipment and supplies
Seed industry and trade -- Personnel management
Distributors (Seed industry and trade)
oral histories (literary works)
Rockingham County (Va.) -- History
Harrisonburg (Va.) -- History
Rockingham County (Va.) -- Industries -- Sources
Family-owned business enterprises -- Virginia -- Harrisonburg
Rennyson, David James
Wetsel Seed Co

Arrangement

Materials are arranged chronologically.

Description of Subordinate Components

House of Wetsel Seeds 1911-1971 Pamphlet

Unit ID 1-1

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/18125

Unit Date 1971

Mixed Materials [1000898332] 1 (box)

Container 1 (folder)

Scope and Contents

Records the growth and development of the Wetsel Seed Company, Inc. of Rockingham County, Va., from its beginnings as the Shenandoah Valley's first seed/feed/plant business in 1911 to its status as a multi-state seed/plant/lawn-garden firm in 1971. Gives biographical information about the founder, Daniel M. Wetsel, who experimented and developed various seed products, notably those associated with corn (and also tomato). Mentions his contributions, beginning in 1896, with the marketing of seeds and plants produced by the "Green Island Seed Farm at Port Republic, Va., with expansion/distribution to Harrisonburg and surrounding areas (cont.) Records important dates and changes in the development of the business (ex. in 1911, known as D.M. Wetsel & Son, with a store located in Harrisonburg; in 1915, it became known as the Wetsel Seed Company, Inc., with the eldest son, Arnold W., as co-founder). Refers to contributions made during World War I (victory gardens); 1929 depression, drought of 1930; exports (ex. grass seeds) during and following World War II, to various states and countries. Mentions development of mail order catalogs, delivery schedule calendars; seed cleaning/processing/packaging/storing service; truck delivery service; Waynesboro, Va. branch store; and development of the garden center. Mentions acquisitions of various buildings, etc. Relates contributions of four generations of family members, besides D. M. and A. W., including Earl H., Robert E., Nelson T., and Thomas M. Wetsel.

Nelson T. Wetsel interviewed by David James Rennyson

Unit ID 1-2

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/18126

Unit Date 1990-01-24

Mixed Materials SA0001-SET-001 (network storage)

Creator Wetsel, Nelson T. (Nelson Thomas), 1922-2004

Creator Rennyson, David James

Access Restrictions

Oral history is open for research. The transcript and recording were reviewed and edited by the narrator.

Use Restrictions

The copyright interests were transferred to Carrier Library.

Scope and Contents

Records the reminisces and viewpoints of Nelson Wetsel, former president, now consultant for the Wetsel Seed Company, recently bought out by Southern States. Includes a brief history of the company, which began as a family-owned business in 1911 and now employs close to 200 workers. Discusses the development/diversification of the firm over the years from primarily a local (Shenandoah Valley) seed business to a multi-state, etc. wholesale distributor of lawn and garden supplies, and supplier for the professional grower (greenhouses, nurseries) and turf grass industry. Gives biographical information about various family members, their contributions, and the general sense of what it was like to be part of a family-owned business (the company's policies, philosophy, employees). Reflects on recent developments with the Southern States association; gives views on the future. More specifically, discusses the following: diversity of products (including grass seeds such as varieties of bluegrass, orchard grass; lawn/indoor and outdoor garden/professional grower supplies such as fertilizers, pesticides, insecticides, herbicides, gardening tools, soils, containers; supplies specifically for greenhouses/nurseries, such as cuttings and rooted plugs; hydroseed turf industry). Describes various aspects/percentage of business trade and market: primarily wholesale/distributor; some middleman relations; retailer; associations with dealers and growers. Discusses Harrisonburg and Waynesboro stores; also warehouse branches.

Transcript

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/18127

Mixed Materials [1000898332] 1 (box)

Container 2 (folder)

Maxine Thomas interviewed by David James Rennyson

Unit ID 1-3

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/18134

Unit Date 1990-03-14

Mixed Materials SA0001-SET-001 (network storage)

Creator Thomas, Maxine B., 1926-2018

Creator Rennyson, David James

Access Restriction

Oral history is open for research.

Use Restriction

The copyright interests were transferred to Carrier Library.

Scope and Contents

Records the reminisces and viewpoints of Maxine Thomas, a forty-two year employee (mostly in payroll accounting) at the Wetsel Seed Company in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Describes experiences and standpoints from the perspective of a non-family member, women and long-time employee at Wetsel's. Gives brief descriptions of various aspects of her work; some recollections concerning employee-employer relations, the growth of the company over the years, and memories of family members (Arnold W., Earl, Nelson, Bob (Robert), Tom, and Jeff Wetsel). Mentions growth in number of employees from around ten in 1949 to close to 200 in 1990. Briefly describes technological changes, such as the advent of computers; hiring practices; fringe benefits, etc. Mentions the number of salesmen; truck drivers; a few long-standing employees. Names the various states which are a part of the company's delivery/distribution service area.

Transcript

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/18135

Unit Date March 14, 1990

Mixed Materials [1000898332] 1 (box)

Container 3 (folder)