

Minnesota State University, Mankato,  
Memorial Library, Southern Minnesota Historical Center.  
Dotson Company and Family. Collection, 1882 - 2015.  
SMHC Manuscript Collection 0282

**Dotson Company and Family. Collection, 1882-2015. SMHC Collection 0282. 121 Hollinger boxes, 3 Half-Hollinger boxes, 7 Legal Hollinger boxes, 12 oversize boxes, 2 Negative boxes, 3 boxes; 84 cubic foot.**

**ABSTRACT:**

The Dotson Company and Family collection consists of organizational documents and records from the Dotson Company and its historical predecessors including Mayer Brothers and the Little Giant Company. A series consists of records related to their subsidiary companies including Zabel-Getty Manufacturing Company and Fuller Company. There are personal documents in the collection from the Fazendin, Butler and Dotson families such as correspondence, diaries, and genealogy materials.

**HISTORICAL NOTE:**

The Dotson Company is a manufacturing business founded in 1876 as a blacksmith shop in Mankato, MN. At the time of the records acquisition (2021), the company remained a privately held corporation owned by the Dotson family. Since their founding, they made boilers, trip hammers, steam shovels, steel beams, structural iron parts for buildings, road graders, tractors, and a variety of other items. In the 1890s, they produced specialty items including metal bars for jails.

In 1876, Laurentius (aka, Laurence and Lorenz) Mayer began his own blacksmith shop at 802 North Front Street in Mankato, MN after immigrating to the area in 1871. By 1891, his three sons, Lorenz L., Conrad, and Louis had enough experience as blacksmiths to start their own business on Vine Street. By 1894 they expanded their father's business on Front Street by building a foundry on the same site as their father's blacksmith shop and started production of the Little Giant trip hammer.

The brothers incorporated as the Mayer Brothers Manufacturing Company in 1891. After three years, Conrad established a separate business, and Lorenz and Louis continued to operate. In 1901, a fire damaged the 802 North Front Street facility and the company purchased land and buildings on West Rock Street from the defunct Rocky Mill Company, a former flourmill. They converted the old flourmill and built a new structure next to it as the machine shop and foundry.

In 1903, the company incorporated again as the Mayer Brothers Incorporated, with Louis as president, Lorenz as secretary-treasurer, and Henry F. Leonard, a local Mankato businessman, as the vice president. By 1907 the company struggled financially and in 1909 they reincorporated once more as Mayer Brothers Company.

Also in 1907, Louis and Lorenz Mayer created the Little Giant Company, named for their most valuable and popular production item, the Little Giant trip hammer. The Little Giant hammer became a standard of the industry. By 1915, however, Louis and Lorenz Mayer lost control of both companies to investors concerned about financial stability. Louis and Lorenz Mayer ended up moving to Wisconsin. During the transition in 1915-1917, the

Mayer Brothers name was dropped, and the company became known simply as the Little Giant Company, held in trusteeship controlled by the First National Bank in Mankato.

In 1923, the Little Giant president George Palmer, president of the First National Bank, hired Leonard Joseph Fazendin to manage the company. In 1937, the company declared bankruptcy and sold assets at a sheriff's auction. Charles Butler, previous Vice President of the local newspaper *The Free Press* and a Minneapolis businessman, and Fazendin's brother-in-law, purchased the company assets. Fazendin continued managing the company and purchased the company from Butler by 1944.

In 1943, Fazendin hired his son-in-law, Gerald A. Dotson, Sr. to work at the company and the two entered into a partnership and the Dotson Company emerged. Fazendin and Dotson expanded the foundry including the purchase of the Sartre Foundry in Faribault, reorganized as the Fairview Corporation. In 1952, Dotson and his wife, Mary K. (Fazendin) Dotson, purchased majority control of the company and The Dotson Company emerged in the late 1950s as the parent company. In 1967, The Dotson Company again expanded its operations by providing ductile iron casting and production. Gerald A. Dotson, Sr. served as president from 1952 until his death in 1978, and James Dennis Dotson served as president from 1978 until 2014, after which he remained as Chair of the Board. The Dotson Company produces iron casting metal products for local, regional, national, and international clients and companies.

Over the years a number of subsidiary companies grew out of the main foundry operations. The Zabel-Getty Manufacturing Company produced potato pickers in the 1920s. Two farmers near Mankato created the product and the Little Giant Company produced the patterns, manufactured the machines in the foundry, and acted as the sales manager. The company discontinued production by 1925. Under Fazendin's management, the company manufactured two different lines of products for which some records can be found. The first focused on plumbing supplies such as floor drains, roof drains, and plugs under the FULCO line and under the name of the Fuller Company. The Fuller Company stopped production by 1943. Other subsidiary companies have included Dotson Enterprises, E.F. Leasing, Fairview Oaks Inc., Foundry Collection, Marcar and Eighty/20, and People Driven Performance.

In May 2023, MacLean Power Systems from Fort Mill, SC acquired Dotson Iron Castings. <https://www.dotson.com/maclean-power-systems-acquires-dotson-iron-castings/>

Dotson Iron Castings website - <https://www.dotson.com/>

#### **SCOPE AND CONTENT:**

The company papers include correspondence, subject files, contracts, financial records, incorporation documents, ledgers, production data, employee records, engineering drawings, and photographs from the three main manifestations of the company: Mayer Brothers, Little Giant Company, and The Dotson Company.

The records are arranged into seven series, with three series further arranged into subseries. The content of the series and the subseries are arranged alphabetically by filename topic. The series and subseries arrangement are as follows:

**Series 1: Organizational Files, 1894-2009:** The series documents much of the internal operations of the company. It consists of nine subseries containing financial records, board of directors' minutes and notes, property records, union records, and records used by supervisors and senior officers to manage the company. Includes records from all three main iterations of the company: Mayer Brothers, Little Giant, and Dotson Company.

**Subseries 1: Board of Directors:** Meeting minutes, agendas, and notes regarding meetings of the Board of Directors made up of Dotson family members. The board met annually and more frequently as conditions warranted. The minutes and notes summarize the year for the company, challenges the company faced, and prospects for the future.

**Subseries 2: Corporate Taxes:** Copies of completed and submitted corporate income tax forms for state and federal income tax. The records include a digital submission of federal taxes during the early 1980s that include a signed transmittal form and a copy of a 5-1/2" floppy disk.

**Subseries 3: Employees:** Records detailing employee health insurance plans, pension records, available retirement plans, company work incentive plans, internal communication including copies of the company newsletter and the Dotson People Program initiative. The bulk of the records encompass 1969 to the late 1990s.

**Subseries 4: Finances:** Financial records from the following companies: Dotson Company, Mayer Brothers, Little Giant and Fairview Corporation. The records include budgets, financial statements, loan information and ledgers.

**Subseries 5: Insurance:** This subseries contains some policies from the Dotson Company in the early 2000s along with insurance information from the Little Giant Company and Dotson Company in the 1950s and 1960s.

**Subseries 6: Management:** This subseries contains company records from the management perspective for the Dotson, Little Giant, and Mayer Brothers Companies. It includes information about marketing, product quality, production results and company reorganization.

**Subseries 7: President:** Most of the series is correspondence from the company president to other companies. A number of letters detail the companies' change in business practice and handling of the 1982 economic crisis.

**Subseries 8: Property:** The property subseries details property holdings for the Dotson company and its predecessors and subsidiaries. Types of records include maps, deeds, property records and legal documents.

**Subseries 9: Union:** Contracts and contract negotiation notes between the Dotson Company and a union of its employees along with grievances filed by the union against the company.

**Series 2: Subject Files, 1908-2013:** Subject Files constitute a large series including material related to other businesses, community organizations, community activities, and Minnesota state entities. The Subject Files include correspondence, memoranda, invoices, and marketing material on a variety of topics kept by management over the years.

**Series 3: Subsidiary Files, 1957-2012:** Records from subsidiary companies include items from: Dotson Enterprises; E.F. Leasing; Fairview Corporation; Fairview Oaks; Marcar and Eighty/20; and People Driven Performance. Smaller series include records from companies purchased by the parent company including the Zabel-Getty Manufacturing Company, the Murco Hammer Company, the Fuller Company, and Fillmore Corporation. Marcar and Eighty/20 material include examples of software developed by the company on 5 ¼ “and 3 ½ “ computer disks.

**Series 4: Personal Files, 1938-1998:**

The first two Personal File subseries were created by G.A. Dotson and J. Dennis Dotson. This subseries includes correspondence, notes, and other items regarding the operation of the company and community involvement. The G.A. Dotson, Sr. personal files include correspondence related to Alcoholics Anonymous during the 1960s and early 1970s.

The Personal Records collection also includes items kept by Mary Katherine (Fazendin) Dotson. There are greeting cards and family photographs dating to the 1930s that have some interest, including color photographs of their first child who died at the age of three, during early development and availability of colored photography for commercial use. The bulk of the personal papers, however, include correspondence between Mary Katherine (Teke) and her husband Gerald, Jr. (Jerry), the bulk of it dated from 1931 through 1936, when they were married. Other items are dated into the 1940s and a few items as late as the 1990s. Other personal correspondence includes communication between “Teke” and her parents during the 1930s, and various letters from the Boyle family in Stillwater. Teke’s mother was a Boyle.

Mary K. Dotson remained involved in the company and conducting family affairs until the 1990s. She graduated from the University of Minnesota in Business Administration in 1931, with Jerry earning the same degree in 1932. She worked for Metropolitan Life Insurance Company until her marriage in 1936 and worked briefly for Hughes Aircraft and Boeing in California and Oregon until she became pregnant in 1939. She maintained family records, diaries, and correspondence that date as early as 1882.

**Series 5: Architectural and Engineering Drawings**

The drawings and blueprints provide details of company buildings and products, and include architectural renditions of the foundry, machine shop, and office. Also includes

engineering drawings regarding the Little Giant trip hammer, the Little Giant tractor, and parts commissioned by other companies.

The drawings are organized for the most part by drawing number and are further organized by the order kept at the company. Drawings were kept in file folders and others, stored in oversize boxes, were kept in tubes or some other storage method. A print index exists and can be found in Box 109 in accordance with the file order kept at the Dotson Company.

**Series 6: Historical Materials**

Company histories, magazine articles about the company, and oversized materials collected by the company used as a reference by managers that provide additional context for the company and family records.

**RESTRICTIONS:**

There are some restrictions on access and use of this collection for research purposes. The researcher assumes full responsibility for observing all copyright, property and libel laws as they apply.

**COLLECTION CITATION:**

This collection should be cited as:

Dotson Company and Family. Collection, 1882-2015, SMHC Collection 0282, Southern Minnesota Historical Center, Memorial Library, Minnesota State University, Mankato.

**ACQUISITION:**

J. Dennis (Denny) Dotson donated this collection in May and October 2021.

**PROCESSED BY:**

Brian Fors processed this collection as an independent contractor for the Dotson Company prior to its donation to the University Archives. Adam Smith finished reprocessing this collection in May 2023.

**RELATED COLLECTIONS:**

The Blue Earth County History Society has artifacts, photographs and additional documents related to the Dotson Company and its subsidiaries.

Fors, Brian D. [\*The Dotson Story: the Rise and Fall and Rise Again of American Manufacturing\*](#). First edition. Saint Paul, MN: Beaver's Pond Press, 2022.

**LCSH SUBJECT HEADINGS:**

Dotson Iron Castings (Firm) – History  
Dotson Company, Inc – History  
Mayer Bros. Co – History  
Little Giant, Inc – History  
Foundries – Minnesota – Mankato – History

Iron and steel workers – Minnesota – Mankato – History  
 Minnesota—Mankato

<b>SMHC Manuscript Collection</b>	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
<b>Organizational Files – Board of Directors</b>		
Meeting Agendas and Notes, 1974-1982	1	1
Meeting Agendas and Notes, 1984-1986	1	2
Meeting Agendas and Notes, 1985-1991	1	3
Meeting Agendas and Notes, 1993-1994	1	4
Meeting Agendas and Notes, 1994-1995	1	5
Meeting Minutes, 1974-1977	2	1
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Fairview Corporation, 1972-1978	3	9
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Fairview Corporation, 1980-1988 (restricted)	3	11
Income Tax Returns, 1978-1982 (restricted)	4	1
Income Tax Returns, 1983-1985 (restricted)	4	2
Income Tax Returns, 1986-1987 (restricted)	4	3
Income Tax Returns, 1987-1988 (restricted)	4	4
Income Tax Returns, 1988-1989 (restricted)	4	5
Income Tax Returns, 1989-1991 (restricted)	5	1
Income Tax Returns, 1990-1992 (restricted)	5	2
Income Tax Returns, 1992-1994 (restricted)	5	3
Income Tax Returns, 1994-1998 (restricted)	5	4
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Dotson Daily Newsletter, 27 April 1981- 22 February 1982	6	13
Dotson People Handbook 1980	6	14
Dotson People News, 1979-1981	6	15
Dotson People Program 1979-1981	6	16
Dotson Dispatch, 1999-2010	7	1
The Dotson Times, January-May 2005	7	2
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The Dotson Times, January-May 2006	7	4
The Dotson Times, June-December 2006	7	5
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401K Retirement Plan, 2001	10	3
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401K Retirement Plan, Investment Policy Analysis, March-June 1999	10	5
401K Retirement Plan, Investment Policy Analysis, Sept.-Dec. 1999	10	6
401K Retirement Plan, Investment Policy Analysis, June 2000	10	7
401K Retirement Plan, Investment Policy Analysis, Sept. and Dec. 2000	10	8
401K Retirement Plan, Investment Policy Analysis, March 2001	11	1
401K Retirement Plan, Investment Policy Analysis, June 2001	11	2
401K Retirement Plan, Local 142, 1998-1999	11	3
401K Retirement Plan, Local 142, 2000	11	4
401K Retirement Plan, Local 142, 2001	11	5
401K Retirement Plan, Local 142, Investment Policy Analysis, 1995	11	6
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Health and Life Insurance, 1997-1998	12	1
Health and Life Insurance, 1999-2000	12	2
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Internal Communications, 1975-1987	12	7
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Blethen e.al., 1983-1984	16	15
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Dotson Company Financial Statements, 1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter 1983	19	5
Dotson Company Financial Statements, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter 1983	19	6
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Dotson Company Financial Statements, 3 <sup>rd</sup> Quarter 1984	19	11
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Dotson Company Financial Statements, 1999	20	2
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Mayer Brothers Bank Checks 1911 (5 of 9)	28	8
Mayer Brothers Bank Checks 1911 (6 of 9)	28	9
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