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**Coll. 640**  
**Frank Perlstein & Son Plumbing**  
**(1927, 1940s-1980s, 2008)**

**By Ellen R. Callahan**  
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## **History**

Frank Perlstein (1880-1950) was a Russian emigree who came to the United States in 1898, settling at first in New York City where he met and married Mary Seltzman (1882-1972). After having two children in New York the couple made their way to Trenton in about 1906 where they raised their family of five: Samuel (b. 1903), Ida (b. 1905), Sadie (b. 1906), Matilda<sup>1</sup> (b. 1910), and Lester (b. 1917). A plumber by trade, by 1908, Perlstein was a proprietor of his own business. The location of the business moved over time: 7 Union Street in 1912, 161 South Broad from ca. 1914-1917, 163 Broad from 1918 to ca. 1930, and by 1943 they found a permanent home at 815 South Broad Street.<sup>2</sup>

Frank's eldest daughter Ida, worked as the bookkeeper/secretary for the business and he was later joined by his youngest son Lester as well. Eventually, the company's name became Frank Perlstein & Son Plumbing.<sup>3</sup> When Frank died in 1950, ownership passed to Lester who ran the business until his death in 1986. Lester's daughter Susan Perlstein Tavares took over and with the help of Carl Mathews ran the firm until closing the business in 2018.

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<sup>1</sup> Matilda married and became known as Tamar Weber.

<sup>2</sup> Documents in the collection record that the store's address was at 815 South Broad by 1943. The donor reports that her Aunt Tamar Weber purchased 815 South Broad Street and sold it to her parents a week later. Tax records confirm that the building was sold to a Weber in 1945.

<sup>3</sup> The company also traded as Mercer Plumbing and Heating in 1946 to 1947 as evidenced by the sign donated with the collection and by invoices from Alpha Metals Inc. [see Box 1, Folder 3].

## Scope and Content Notes

This collection contains supplier files, a few plumbing catalogs, project orders (known as “job books”), employee work cards, tax documents, insurance policies, a few photographs, porcelain color samples, sample bathroom fixtures and 3 business signs. While a few of the invoices date back to 1927 and the plumbing supply catalogs are from the 1980s, the bulk of the collection is a sampling of the Perlstein’s businesses records from the 1940s and 1950s which the donor happened to have saved and donated after closing the store. Though a small sampling, these records do provide an interesting look at the breadth of the company’s supply chain which spanned from the Trenton area to California, as well as the types of work they did for both residential and local business customers during the post-WWII years in Trenton.

The collection consists of 7 boxes, 2 porcelain sinks and 3 business signs. It is divided into 10 series as described below.

### Series Description

#### **Series 1. Supplier Files, 1927-1986 (bulk dates: 1940s-1950s)**

This series of files is arranged alphabetically by the name of the vendors. Contents of the files consists of receipts for purchases of plumbing fittings, fixtures and tools. Also included are some Crane Plumbing Company catalogs and publications of the American Iron and Steel Institute, filed at the end of the series.

#### **Series 2. Project Orders, 1948-1950**

Referred to as “job books” this record was kept in booklets with two sections of printed forms. The first section consists of “Order Index Sheets” which kept chronological listing of orders (requests for work or repairs) that includes date received, name and address of customer, account charged to, description of work and “when promised,” which records the number of hours required or number of workers to be used. The second part of the booklet is titled “Job Records” and includes forms that record the name and address of the customer, the job number and the itemized costs for the job. Filed within these are loose forms for “Materials & Returns” which lists materials pulled from the inventory for the project, their costs and what was used on the project. There are also some receipts interfiled in these pages. Included in this series are also a contract for work between Perlstein and the State Street Corporation, Trenton (1940) and an agreement for work at the Pleasant View Farm in Roebling, NJ (1942).

#### **Series 3. Project Invoices, 1952-1954**

This series includes numbered invoices which provide the name and address of the customer, the invoice number, a description of the job or project and costs. Two sets of records are bound and in invoice number order (the first arranged in reverse order) while the third consists of loose invoices which were also numbered but arranged semi-alphabetically by the customer’s name.

#### **Series 4. Weekly Time Records (1955-1957)**

These are bound forms which are arranged in reverse chronological order. They include the name of the employee (rarely including a surname), the name of the customer or address of the project, and number of hours worked.

#### **Series 5. Employees withholding tax balances and forms, 1943-1945**

This series documents the names of Perlstein employees, yearly wages paid, and wage taxes withheld. The information provided varies from year to year, but usually includes a handwritten summary of wages and taxes withheld for each employee and copies of employees W-2 forms reporting this information. Records of 1943 also include the employees W-4 forms which record their marital status and the number of dependents they are claiming. Social Security numbers on these forms have been redacted. In 1943 there are returns of "Victory Tax Withheld" for the first and second quarters of that year. The Victory Tax was begun in 1942 to help pay for the expenses of WWII but was eliminated in 1944.

#### **Series 6. Insurance Records, 1941-1947**

This series includes various policies held by Perlstein covering vehicles, fires (structures and contents), health (for Frank Perlstein), liability and workman's compensation. Also included are invoices and related correspondence from Perlstein's insurance broker, Walter F. Smith and Co. of Trenton.

#### **Series 7. Pictures, 1910s and 1920s**

This series consists of 3 B&W photographs and 3 photocopies of B&W photographs which include images of the Perlstein's storefronts, family members and horse-drawn wagon used by the business in its early years.

#### **Series 8. Miscellaneous**

These are incidental items including a book of blank estimate forms, 1975 invoices from the Plumbing & Heating Contractors Association of Mercer County to members for dues owed to the national organization<sup>4</sup>, a December 1952 copy of the store's inventory and Susan Perlstein Tavares's business card celebrating the company's 100th anniversary in 2008.

#### **Series 9. Color Guides, Tile Samples, and Fixture Samples, 1940s-1950s**

This series consists of porcelain color samples as well as a few bathroom fixture samples. The American Standard samples are mounted on boards and boxed. Some tiles include notations written in grease or china pencil that they were discontinued in 1947 or 1957. The Crane color samples are loose, 2.5" square tiles in paper sleeves. Also included are samples of porcelain fixtures (soap dishes, towel rack brackets, etc.) which are white and in a shell-shaped motif unless otherwise noted in the inventory below. Finally, there are also two Crane bathroom sinks.

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<sup>4</sup> It is assumed that Lester Perlstein held an office in the association at this time. These invoices provide names and addresses of members.

## **Series 10. Signs**

This series includes 3 hand-painted store signs as described below.

### **Container List**

#### **Box / Folder / Content**

#### **Series 1. Suppliers Files**

- 1 / 1 / A-Miscellaneous, 1942-1948
- 1 / 2 / Acme Plumbing Specialties, New York, NY, 1946-1947
- 1 / 3 / Alpha Metals Inc., Brooklyn, NY, 1946-1947
- 1 / 4 / H. Barschi & Son, New York, NY, ca. 1947
- 1 / 5 / C-Miscellaneous, 1946-1949
- 1 / 6 / California Electronics Co., Los Angeles, CA, 1946
- 1 / 7 / The Cleveland Heating Co., Cleveland, OH, 1947
- 1 / 8 / Commercial Supply & Mfg. Co., Philadelphia, PA, 1946-1947
- 1 / 9 / Crane Co., Trenton, NJ, 1946-1948
- 1 / 10 / Crane Co., Trenton, NJ, 1957-1958
- 1 / 11 / D-Miscellaneous, 1947-1948
- 1 / 12 / Delaware Valley Supply, Trenton, NJ, 1946-1948
- 1 / 13 / E-Miscellaneous, 1943-1948
- 1 / 14 / Economy Specialty Co., New York, NY, 1946-1948
- 1 / 15 / Fineburgs', Trenton, NJ, 1946-1948
- 1 / 16 / G-Miscellaneous, 1942-1946
- 1 / 17 / Griffith Electric Supply Co., Trenton, NJ, 1946-1947
- 1 / 18 / Charles F. Gunyon, 1948
- 1 / 19 / Hajoca Corp., Philadelphia, PA, 1947-1948
- 1 / 20 / Hamilton Beach Co., Racine, WI, 1948
- 2 / 1 / Hertz, Trenton, NJ, 1944-1946
- 2 / 2 / Hotstream Heater Co., Cleveland, OH, 1947
- 2 / 3 / Johnston, Inc., Trenton, NJ, 1941-1948
- 2 / 4 / Kaiser Fleet Wing Sales, Bristol, PA, 1947
- 2 / 5 / Keystone Equipment Co., Philadelphia, PA, 1946
- 2 / 6 / John Kmieck Service Station, Trenton, NJ, 1946-1949
- 2 / 7 / Lincoln Supply, Trenton, NJ, 1945-1947
- 2 / 8 / Chas. Lipschutz Mfg., Philadelphia, PA, 1946-1947
- 2 / 9 / Manufacturers Selling Co., Trenton, N.J. 1947
- 2 / 10 / Mercer Hardware & Roofing Supply, Trenton, NJ, 1946-1947
- 2 / 11 / Miscellaneous-Trenton Businesses, 1943-1945
- 2 / 12 / National Distributing Co., New York, NY, 1946
- 2 / 13 / Oldsmobile Repairs (various Trenton auto shops), 1946-1947
- 2 / 14 / Louis B. Orlowitz Co. Philadelphia, PA 1946

## **Box / Folder / Content (cont'd)**

### **Series 1. Suppliers Files (cont'd)**

- 2 / 15 / Paragon Oil Burner Corp., Brooklyn, NY, 1946
- 2 / 16 / Pittsburgh Plate Glass, Trenton, NJ, 1948
- 2 / 17 / Plumbing Products Co., Boston, MA, 1946-1947
- 2 / 18 / Plumbing and Rubber Co., Philadelphia, PA, b 1941-1947
- 2 / 19 / Public Service Electric & Gas, Trenton, NJ, 1946-1948
- 2 / 20 / Royal Plumbing Manufacturers. & Wholesalers, Philadelphia, PA, 1947-1948
- 2 / 21 / S-Miscellaneous, 1946-1948
- 2 / 22 / Stacy Electric Supply, 1946-1947
- 2 / 23 / Toledo Pipe Threading Machine Co., Toledo, OH, 1927, 1944 & 1931
- 2 / 24 / Walker Supply Co., Trenton, NJ, 1946
- 2 / 25 / A. Zeitzew Plumbing [previously Arnold Plumbing], Philadelphia, PA, 1946-1948
- 2 / 26 / Crane Plumbing Catalogs, 1983-1985
- 2 / 27 / Crane Plumbing Catalogs, 1985-1986
- 2 / 28 / "Case Studies in the Design and Construction of Solar Energy Projects," ca. 1970s; "The Handbook of Steel Pipe," ca. 1970s. American Iron and Steel Institute, Committee of Steel Pipe Producers, Washington, DC.

### **Series 2. Project Orders**

- 3 / 1 / Agreement between Perlstein and the State Street Corporation, Trenton, NJ, 1940.  
Agreement between Pleasant View Farm, Roebling, NJ, 1942.
- 3 / 2 / "Job Book," August 1948-Septemebr 1949
- 3 / 3 / "Job Book," October 1948-Septemebr 1950
- 3 / 4 / Work Contracts, State Street Corp., 1940; Pleasant View Farm, 1942

### **Series 3. Project Invoices**

- 3 / 5 / Invoices # 10851 – 11033, 7/1952-12/1952
- 3 / 6 / Invoices # 11251 – 11251-11600, 7/1953 – 7/1954
- 4 / 1 / Invoices, Semi-Alphabetical, 1954

### **Series 4. Employee Weekly Timecards**

- 4 / 2 / January 1955 – June 1956
- 4 / 3 / July 1956 – January 1957

### **Series 5. Employees' withholding tax balances and forms**

- 4 / 4 / 1943-1950

## **Box / Folder / Content (cont'd)**

### **Series 6. Insurance Records**

- 4 / 5 / Policies, Automobile, 1941-1946
- 4 / 6 / Policies, Fire, 1943-1946
- 4 / 7 / Policies, Health, Frank Perlstein, 1940
- 5 / 1 / Policies, Liability, 1942-1946
- 5 / 2 / Workman's Compensation, 1942-1947
- 5 / 3 / Invoices, etc. 1940, 1942, 1944-1947

### **Series 7. Photographs<sup>5</sup>**

- 5 / 4 / a. Frank Perlstein (far left) in company wagon, ca. 1908-1910. 4"x5" B&W in 6.25" x 7.25" paper frame.
  - b. Store front of Frank Perlstein, Plumber at 7Union Street, ca. 1912, 4"x5" B&W in 4.5" x 6.25" paper frame
  - c. Store front of Frank Perlstein, Plumber at 7Union Street, ca. 1912-1918. 4"x5" B&W in 4.5" x 6.25" paper frame
  - d. Perlstein Plumbing & Heating 163 Broad Street, ca. 1918- 1930, 4"x5" B&W in 6.25" x 7.25" paper frame.
  - e. Photocopy of B&W photograph identified by the donor as Mary Seltzman Perlstein and two of her three daughters [ Ida (b. 1905), Sadie (b. 1906), Matilda (b. 1910)].
  - f. Photocopy of B&W photograph of Perlstein store front at 7 Union Street., 1917.
  - g. Photocopy of B&W photograph of Ida Perlstein in front of Perlstein's at 163 S. Broad Street, 1917.

### **Series 8. Miscellaneous**

- 5 / 5 / a. Inventory of goods and equipment, December 1952.
  - b. Invoices from the Plumbing & Heating Contractors Association of Mercer County to members for dues, 1975.
  - c. Pad of blank Perlstein "work to be done" forms, no date.
  - d. Frank Perlstein & Son Inc. business card for Susan Perlstein Tavares, 2008.

### **Series 9. Color Guides, tile samples, and fixture samples**

- 5 / 6 / "American-Standard Color Guide", ca. 1940s – 1950s
- 5 / 7 / "American Standard Color Guide", ca. 1940s – 1950s [includes guide that suggests color combinations for walls, floor sand fixtures.]

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<sup>5</sup> Identifications provided by donor, Susan Perlstein Tavares.

## Box / Folder / Content (cont'd)

- 5 / 8 / "High-Fashion Colors for Bathrooms from American Standard," ca. 1940s – 1950s
- 6 / Assorted bathroom fixtures [all in white and in a shell-shaped motif unless otherwise noted]
- Toilet role holder brackets [set]
  - Towel bar brackets [set]
  - Towel bar bracket [beige, one]
  - Crane tile sample [turquoise, 4 3/8" square]
  - Crane porcelain color samples: citrus yellow (2), desert turquois, French grey, pale jade, shell pink, sky blue, suntan, white
- 7 / Assorted bathroom fixtures [all in white and in a shell-shaped motif unless otherwise noted]
- Soap dish mounted on square tile
  - Soap dish [beige]
  - Soap dish
  - Toothbrush and glass holder
  - Towel bracket [beige, square shaped, one]
- Crane bathroom sinks, 1 white, 1 pale jade [temporarily stored on lower level]

## Series 10. Signs [stored in artifacts area]

- a. "Frank Perlstein & Son," hand-painted with white background, black letters and green accents. 23"x36".
- b. " Frank Perlstein & Son," hand-painted with green background, gold letters and attached to iron scroll bracket for hanging. 20.5" x 28". [poor condition].
- c. "Mercer Plumbing & Heating," hand-painted, black background, white letters and attached to iron scroll bracket for hanging. 13"x19.5" [poor condition]

## Provenance

This material was donated to Trentoniana by Susan Perlstein Tavares as Acc. 2018.19.

## Processing Notes

During processing, some records were disposed of because they had water damage and others were deemed repetitive in nature. Samples of every type of document were retained to provide insight into how the company was run and a broad sample of the types of work done by Perlstein's in the 1940s and 1950s.

## Bibliography

Greenberg, Wendy. "A third generation Perlstein keeps plumbing fixture flowing," Community News. NJ.com, July 5, 2015 Updated Jan 11, 2022.

Mancuso, Michael. "After 110 years, Perlstein Plumbing is closing up shop in Trenton," NJ.com, July 26, 2018.

## Related Material

Vertical File, Trentoniana Collection: Business – Plumbers  
Tax records, Trentoniana Collection