

Squirrel Brand Company Collection

Cambridge Historical Commission
831 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

Provenance: Unknown

Collection ID: N/A

Dates: ca. 1910-1940

Extent: 1 oversize box

Finding aid by: Meta Partenheimer, June 2017

Access: Collection is available for research under the CHC rules of use

Historical Note:

From “The History of Candy Making in Cambridge” by the Cambridge Historical Society:

12 Boardman Street (1890-1999)

“The Squirrel brand dates back to 1890 when it started as the Austin T. Merrill Company in Roxbury. Incorporated in 1899 as the newly named Squirrel Brands Salted Nut Company, the company’s ownership changed and two long-time employees, Perley G. Gerrish and Fred S. Green, began to run the business. As the company grew, it moved from its Boston location to Cambridge in 1903 and then to this building in 1915.

The company was here in Cambridge from 1915 to 1999. Originally, Perley Gerrish would sell his mixed nut varieties from store to store throughout the area by means of horse and wagon. Here, Squirrel Brand produced nuts that were carried by Admiral Richard Byrd, who led the first expedition to reach the South Pole by air. The nuts were also shipped all over the world during WW2.

From salting to roasting peanuts to chewy taffies and nougats, Squirrel Nut Company developed a loyal customer base. Some of their brands over the years have included Butter Chews, Nut Chews and Nut Yippees. Their popular flagship product was the “Squirrel Nut Zipper,” a vanilla, caramel, and nut taffy that supposedly was named after an illegal drink during Prohibition. The candy was always regionally popular, but it made more of a national comeback during the 1990s when a retro swing band named themselves the Squirrel Nut Zippers and gave out the candy at their performances.

When Hollis Gerrish, the son of the founder, died in 1997, he left instructions for the company to be sold. In 1999, Squirrel Brand Company was purchased by Southern Style Nuts and the operation was moved to Texas. Its leaving marked the departure of the city’s last major independent candy manufacturer.

In 2004, NECCO picked up the license from Southern Nut Company to manufacture squirrel candy brands. Squirrel Nut Zippers and Caramel Chews returned home to Massachusetts, and is just one of NECCO's more recent acquisitions that has helped turned them into an anomaly of the candy industry, and a sort of retro outfitter of sweets."

Collection Description:

Collection of advertising materials manufactured for the Squirrel Brand Company and one copy of a document relating the history of the company from "The History of Candy Making in Cambridge" by the Cambridge Historical Society.

Box list:

One (1) printed history of Squirrel Brand Nuts from "The History of Candy Making in Cambridge" by the Cambridge Historical Society, Researched and written by Natalie Moravek, 2011

One (1) tin container for Squirrel Brand Salted Mixed Nuts 5.5 x 3.75 x 1.5" with the following contents inside:

One (1) set of two Alice in Wonderland brand red hair barrettes, each with two squirrels

One (1) "Whirl-A-Whistle" squirrel whistle made by Commonwealth Plastics, Inc.

Two (2) "The Nut House" matchbooks featuring drawings of squirrels in blue uniforms under the title "Nuts to You"

One (1) tin toy with a Halloween theme, likely a toy included with Squirrel Brand Nut Chews

One (1) nut carved to look like a basket

One (1) lid for Squirrel Brand Salted Peanuts measuring 4.75" in diameter

Two (2) cardboard advertisements for Squirrel Brand Salted Peanuts measuring 11 x 12"

One (1) cardboard advertisement to "Eat Squirrel Brand Butter Chews" measuring 11 x 14"

One (1) cardboard advertisement for Squirrel Brand Salted Peanut Cookies measuring 13.75 x 10.5"

Other items:

Two (2) metal Squirrel Brand pails [location: workroom shelf]

One (1) Squirrel Brand wooden crate measuring 11 x 4.5 x 13" [location: main office on east wall filing cabinet]