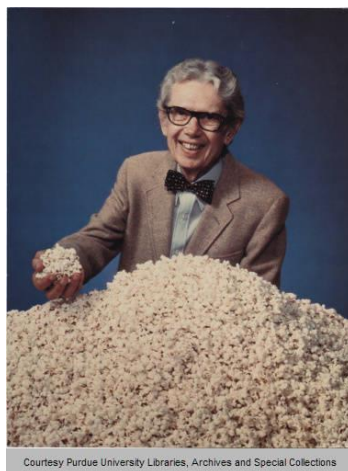


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## INVENTORY TO THE ORVILLE REDENBACHER PAPERS, 1928-1994

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West Lafayette, Indiana 47907-2058  
(765) 494-2839**

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Revised: March 17, 2010  
Compiled By: Mary A. Segó

## Descriptive Summary

<b>Creator Information</b>	Redenbacher, Orville, 1907-1995
<b>Title</b>	Orville Redenbacher papers
<b>Collection Identifier</b>	MSA 37
<b>Date Span</b>	1928-1994, predominant 1966-1994
<b>Abstract</b>	Papers, photographs, and artifacts of Orville Redenbacher.
<b>Extent</b>	1 cubic foot, plus 1 small artifact box and 2 oversized artifacts
<b>Finding Aid Author</b>	Mary A. Segó, 2010
<b>Languages</b>	English
<b>Repository</b>	Virginia Kelly Karnes Archives and Special Collections Research Center, Purdue University Libraries

## Administrative Information

<b>Location Information:</b>	ASC
<b>Access Restrictions:</b>	Collection is open for research.
<b>Acquisition Information:</b>	Donation received from Kevin R. Fish (eldest grandson of Orville Redenbacher) on February 4, 2010. Additions also given by Fish on May 7, 2010; August 5, 2010 and June 30, 2012.
<b>Accession Number:</b>	20100204; 20100507; 20100805; 20120630; 20120630.1
<b>Preferred Citation:</b>	MSA 37, Archives and Special Collections, Purdue University Libraries
<b>Copyright Notice:</b>	Purdue University via deed of gift 2010.

## **Subjects and Genres**

### **Persons**

Redenbacher, Orville, 1907-1995

### **Organizations**

Orville Redenbacher Popcorn

Purdue University

4-H

Chester, Inc.

Hunt Wesson Foods

Indiana Crop Improvement Association

### **Topics**

Purdue University--Alumni

Orville Redenbacher Popcorn

### **Form and Genre Types**

Advertisements

Artifacts

Awards

Certificates

Clothing

Diploma

Microfilms

Nameplates

Photographs

### **Occupations**

Businessman

Agronomist

Purdue University--Students

## Biography of Orville Redenbacher

Orville Redenbacher was born in Brazil, Indiana, and grew up on his family's farm where he sometimes sold popcorn in Wesley town from a roadside stand. He graduated from Brazil High School in 1924 and was in the top 5% of his class. He attended Purdue University, joining the agriculture-oriented Alpha Gamma Rho fraternity and the Purdue All-American Marching Band. He graduated with a degree in agronomy in 1928.<sup>[1]</sup> He spent most of his life in the agriculture industry, serving as a Vigo County Farm Bureau extension agent in Terre Haute, Indiana, and at Princeton Farms in Princeton, Indiana.

In childhood, he joined 4-H, and developed an obsession with developing the perfect popcorn. He earned a small fortune in fertilizer, but in his spare time, he indulged in his obsession. In 1951, he and partner Charlie Bowman bought the George F. Chester and Son seed corn plant near Valparaiso, Indiana. Naming the company "Chester Hybrids," they tried tens of thousands of hybrid strains of popcorn before achieving success. Redenbacher and Bowman initially named the hybrid "RedBow," but were advised by an advertising agency to use the name Orville Redenbacher to market the corn. They adopted the advice, launching their gourmet popping corn in 1970,<sup>[2]</sup> and Orville was suddenly everywhere. Redenbacher could first be seen on national television in 1973, long before his well-known commercial appearances promoting his gourmet kernels. In an episode of the popular game show, *To Tell The Truth*, he stumped the panelists (Kitty Carlisle Hart, Bill Cullen, Joe Garagiola, and Peggy Cass), all of whom were shown enjoying samples of Redenbacher's then-new novelty popping corn flavors including chili and curry<sup>[3]</sup>. The original Orville Redenbacher labels were colored in using Crayola crayons. Orville stayed original and stuck to the basic crayon colors of red, white, black, and yellow for his label so it would have a clean classy look.

By the mid 1970s, Redenbacher and Bowman had captured a third of the market for unpopped popcorn.<sup>[2]</sup> In 1976, Redenbacher sold the company to Hunt-Wesson Foods, which was a division of Norton Simon, Inc. In 1983, Esmark purchased Norton Simon, and the next year (1984), Beatrice Foods acquired Esmark. In 1985, Kohlberg Kravis Roberts acquired Beatrice with the goal of selling off businesses. The popcorn business and other old Hunt-Wesson businesses were sold in 1990 to agribusiness giant ConAgra. Redenbacher then moved to Coronado, California. He continued to promote his popcorn, appearing in numerous television commercials (including later ones with his grandson Gary Redenbacher), always wearing his trademark bowtie and glasses. His wholesome image and folksy name confused many consumers, some even writing the company to ask if Redenbacher was a real person, and not an actor. He responded to this by appearing on various talk shows, professing his identity.

After the initial sale to Hunt-Wesson, the city of Valparaiso, Indiana, started their first Popcorn Festival in 1979. Celebrating Redenbacher's development of his popcorn in Valparaiso, the festival featured Orville and Gary appearing several times as grand

marshal of the signature event, the Popcorn Parade. Purdue University granted him an honorary doctorate degree in the College of Agriculture in 1988.

Redenbacher hosted the *SFM Holiday Network* syndicated movie broadcast package along with his grandson.

On September 19, 1995 Redenbacher was found dead in the jacuzzi of his condominium in Coronado, California. He had suffered a heart attack and drowned. He was cremated and his ashes were scattered at sea. He was 88 years old.

2005 marked the 40th anniversary of Orville Redenbacher's Gourmet Popping Corn, still the #1 selling brand in the United States. To celebrate the man behind the popping corn, ConAgra developed a special website that highlights some of the classic Orville Redenbacher television commercials. One of his most famous and recognizable commercials states, "My gourmet popping corn pops up lighter and fluffier than ordinary popping corn. Mine is blowing the top right off of the popper. Mine eats better too. Try my gourmet popping corn. You'll taste the difference or my name isn't Orville Redenbacher".

Since 2006, several of Orville's commercials from the 1970s and 1980s have aired on many channels across the country during commercial breaks. The advertisements for the brand's "natural" popcorn snacks, introduced 13 years after his death (2008), feature a clip of him at the end.

In January 2007, an advertisement featuring a digital re-creation of Redenbacher appeared on television. Redenbacher's grandson, Gary Redenbacher, responded to questions about how he felt about the advertisement by saying: "Grandpa would go for it. He was a cutting-edge guy. This was a way to honor his legacy." <sup>[4]</sup>

Source(s):

1. Thomas, Robert (September 20, 1995). "Orville Redenbacher, Famous For His Popcorn, Is Dead at 88". *The New York Times*: p. D20.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/1995/09/20/obituaries/orville-redenbacher-famous-for-his-popcorn-is-dead-at-88.html?scp=1&sq=Orville%20Redenbacher,%20Famous%20For%20His%20Popcorn,%20Is%20Dead%20at%2088&st=cse>.
2. Orville Redenbacher's popcorn partner shared the wealth, if not the celebrity, Remembrances Section, Wall Street Journal, April 18-19, 2009, p. A4
3. "Orville Redenbacher and his popcorn weren't always well-known". *TV Squad*. July 2, 2009.  
<http://feedproxy.google.com/~r/weblogsinc/tvsquad/~3/pLrhXYZGhg/>.
4. [ConAgra revives Redenbacher for popcorn ads](#) by Bruce Horovitz, *USA Today*, January 12, 2007
5. Retrieved March 19, 2010 from  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orville\\_Redenbacher](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orville_Redenbacher)

## Collection Description

### Scope

The Orville Redenbacher papers (1928-1994; 1.5 cubic feet) contain artifacts, papers, certificates, plaques, photographs, advertisements, items from Purdue University (1928, the year Redenbacher received his Bachelor of Science degree) and a 1988 honorary Doctorate from Purdue, among other items which represent aspects of Orville Redenbacher's career. Some of the artifacts consist of an extensive bow tie and tie collection, various honorary 4-H plaques and certificates, photographs which document the first commercial Redenbacher made, desk planner diaries and appointment books with notations made by Redenbacher, and his leather briefcase. The papers are organized in one cubic foot box, one small artifact box and two oversized artifacts have been wrapped.

### Descriptive Rules

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

### Processing Information

All photographs and advertisements have been housed in polyester sleeves and acid-free folders. The oversized artifacts were wrapped, and the remaining items in the collection are housed in acid-free boxes.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTION

### Advertisements, Artifacts, Papers and Photographs, 1928-1994

(1 cubic foot)

#### **Box 1** Advertisements, Artifacts, Papers and Photographs, 1928-1994

##### Item

1. Certificate, Honorary Oregon 4-H Member, undated [framed]
2. Desk planner diaries; Orville Redenbacher's day planners with his name engraved on covers, Archer/Martin and Associates, 1983; 1991
3. Yearbook, Purdue University *Debris*, 1928 [has Redenbacher's name written in front]
4. Plaque of appreciation from the Panama City Beaches Chamber of Commerce, for participation in Spring Break 1994
5. Plaque showing advertisement with Redenbacher, "To Orville Redenbacher 'The Pop Corn King' from the Publishers of Term Planner," undated
6. Fountain pen and pencil holder, Soils and Crops Award from the Indiana Crop Improvement Association, 1966
7. Hoosier Celebrity Calendar, 1991 [featuring Redenbacher for July]
8. "Indiana Crop Improvement Association: The First 100 Years," circa 1990s [vhs tape]

##### Folder

1. Photographs, advertisements, and information on first television commercial; (four color 8" x 10" photographs of Orville Redenbacher); 30 second television commercial; Title: "General Store" (nine photos and captions); 30 second television commercial; Title "At the Firehouse" (nine photos and captions); "Raiders Of The Lost Kernel" (8" x 10" ad of Orville with grandson); "Orville Of Arabia" (8" x 10" ad of Orville with grandson and camel, undated)
2. Twenty-one color photographs taken at a promotion in Hawaii (?), undated (Orville Redenbacher is in ten of the photos)
3. Twelve color photographs taken at Disneyland, two taken at Chester Products Incorporated, with white convertible in front of building and one of Orville Redenbacher in white convertible in front of Harveys building, undated
4. Photographs from Churchill Downs, undated (seven color photos, individuals are unidentified)
5. "Wabash Valley Magazine" on hometown heroes, February/March 1993 (photo of Orville Redenbacher on front cover and featured on page 41)
6. Three slides of Spain and Portugal taken by Redenbacher in 1962 (added to

- collection later)
7. Princeton Farms letterhead and ephemera, correspondence addressed to Kevin Fish, some on *Orville Redenbacher's Gourmet Popping Corn* stationery in regards to a trust for Redenbacher's grandchildren, Christmas card to Rubye Smith from Redenbacher asking for stories about Princeton Farms for his autobiography, along with other correspondence; noted memories of Redenbacher and memorabilia supplied by Dianna Barkley, Co-Alliance, Energy and Agribusiness Solutions, Valparaiso, Indiana, circa 1980s-1990s
  8. Diploma, Doctor of Agriculture, Purdue University, 1988
  9. Newspaper clippings about Redenbacher, circa 1990s

## Artifacts and Microfilm, 1928- circa 1994 (0.2 cubic feet)

### Box 2 Small Artifact Box, 1928-circa 1994

#### Item

1. 1928 Purdue Gala Week and graduation exercises booklet
2. Stickers, "I met Orville! The Popcorn King," undated
3. Two burgundy bow ties (tied) and three untied bow ties with the name "Orville" on them along with popcorn design, undated
4. Navy bow tie with "Orville Redenbacher Gourmet Microwave Popping Corn" on it multiple times, undated
5. Cream bow tie with "Orville" written on it and popcorn design, undated
6. Brown bow tie with "Orville" written on it and popcorn design, undated
7. Miscellaneous assortment of bow ties/neckties, undated

#### Item

1. Burgundy, gold, and green bow tie (untied)
2. Black, burgundy, and blue bow tie (untied)
3. Red and blue checkered bow tie (untied)
4. Yellow bow tie with blue accents (untied)
5. Beige tie (untied)
6. Red bow tie
8. Pair of suspenders, hand decorated with "POPCORN" and popcorn designs, inside are the words "Merry Christmas '94 From Greg," circa 1994
9. One gold silk handkerchief, undated
10. Small metal plate that says "Orville Redenbacher 1973" (possibly was affixed to a Plaque)
11. Microfilm reel of "Orville Redenbacher Popcorn; MIZ.LUCY," undated (color)
12. Microfilm reel of "Hunt Wesson Foods; ORGPC Popcorn; Popcorn Demo,"



- undated, (color)
13. Two appointment books, Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company's Chemical Division, 1962; 1977 (personal calendars with notations by Redenbacher)
  14. Two business cards, "O.C. Redenbacher," Chester, Inc., chairman of the board, Valparaiso, Indiana, undated

### **Oversized Artifact, circa 1930**

(0.5 cubic feet)

#### Item

1. Leather briefcase with the initials "OCR," undated