

Information Sheet

R Picher Lead Company.
210 Records, 1875-1918.
Two folders and six volumes.

This collection is available at The State Historical Society of Missouri. If you would like more information, please contact us at shsresearch@umsystem.edu.

This collection consists of correspondence and record books of the Picher Lead Company at Joplin, Jasper County, Missouri. Included are correspondence with shipping agents and commission merchants, ledgers of expense and sales, and smelter records. The records span the period from the founding of the company in 1875 to its merger with the Eagle White Lead Company in 1916.

The Picher Brothers Lead & Zinc Company was established at Joplin in 1875 by Oliver H. Picher (1845-) and William Henry Picher (1850-1924). Both were natives of Madison, Indiana, and graduates of Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. The brothers came to Jasper County, Missouri, after the Civil War, drawn by the possibilities of the mining industry in the area. They formed the Picher Brothers Lead & Zinc Company in 1875, reorganized it as the Picher Lead & Zinc Company in 1876-1877, and reorganized it again as the Picher Lead Company in 1889. In addition, the Pichers were founders and directors of numerous other mining, commercial, and civic ventures, including the Southwest Lead & Zinc Company, the Joplin Zinc Works, the Joplin Woolen Mills, and many social and fraternal organizations.

The Picher brothers controlled around 1200 acres of prime mineral land by the mid-1880s. They became dominant figures in the smelting industry in 1886 with the purchase of A. E. Moffat's Lone Elm Mining Company and its exclusive rights to the process of producing white lead from smelter exhausts. Its acquisition left the Pichers in control of one of only three smelting operations in all of southwestern Missouri. They expanded in later years to the mineral areas around Galena, Kansas, and Webb City, Missouri. In 1914 Picher Lead began testing an extensive ore body in the area now known as Picher, Oklahoma. The drilling was carried out in cooperation with the Eagle White Lead Company of Cincinnati, Ohio. The deposit was so rich, and the interests of the cooperating firms were so mutual, that they merged in 1916. The merger formed the basis of the present-day Eagle-Picher Corporation. The latter had by the 1950s become the largest producer in the Tri-State Mineral District, with production concentrated in Oklahoma.

The records of Picher Lead in this collection evidence several facets of the company's business in the Tri-State District. The earliest material is contained in a ledger of lead ore smelted in 1875, which might record the basis for the first mining revenues of the firm. Other early records include a ledger of expense vouchers, 1876-1877, and correspondence addressed to O. H. Picher by commission merchants and freight agents in St. Louis, Kansas City, and New York, 1877-1878. A ledger of zinc ore sales, 1882-1885, and the minute book and expense ledger of the Webb City Smelting and Manufacturing Company, 1910-1918, document aspects of the middle period in the history of Picher Lead. By the time of the purchase of the Webb City smelter, Picher dominated the smelting industry at Joplin, and was consolidating its operations around Webb City.

The most recent volume in the collection is a ledger of expense for exploration of the Picher field in Oklahoma, 1913-1915. Hundreds of payments are noted to drillers taking core samples, indicating the resources committed to the exploration of the major strike in a new field. Although the Eagle White Lead Company is not noted in the ledger, drilling was carried out in concert with that firm.

Of all the material in the collection, the correspondence file of 1877-1878 might be the most useful. Over 150 letters, telegrams, bills of lading, price lists, and other items are included which concern the pricing and sales of Picher Lead, freight rates, and recession in the national metal mar-

kets. Most of the material was sent by commission agent Oscar E. Schmidt in New York, but there are also communications from John Wahl & Company in St. Louis, and agents of the Great Western Despatch and Canada Southern freight lines at Kansas City. The correspondence illustrates the problems faced by the Pichers during the early years at Joplin. The recession in the national economy is noted, as is competition from other mining firms in Missouri and new producers in the western states. The nature of the business is evidenced by the fact that many of the transmissions from New York were in code, with new ciphers being instituted often. That the Pichers had doubts about their New York agent is clear in a long letter from the agent, Oscar E. Schmidt. In it, Schmidt defends himself against charges of price manipulation to the detriment of the producers in southwestern Missouri. He alleged that the problems were the result of the Pichers' rival, A. E. Moffat of the Lone Elm Mining Company. Evidently Schmidt's answer satisfied the Pichers, for they continued to deal with him.

This collection is also available on microfilm.

<i>r206</i>	<i>12 December 1983</i>	<i>Anonymous</i>	<i>Gift</i>
<i>r260</i>	<i>30 November 1984</i>	<i>Anonymous</i>	<i>Gift</i>

Shelf List

This collection consists of correspondence and record books of the Picher Lead Company at Joplin, Jasper County, Missouri. Included are correspondence with shipping agents and commission merchants, ledgers of expense and sales, and smelter records. The records span the period from the founding of the company in 1875 to its merger with the Eagle White Lead Company in 1916.

This collection is also on MICROFILM.

Folders 1-2: Correspondence, 1877-1878.

Letters to O. H. Picher at Joplin from commission merchants John Wahl & Company, St. Louis, and O. E. Schmidt & Company, New York. Also from freight agents with the Great Western Despatch Company and Canada Southern freight line in Kansas City. A register of correspondence has been filed with each folder.

Folder 1: Correspondence, 1877.

Folder 2: Correspondence, 1878.

Volumes 1-6: Record books, 1875-1918.

Ledgers of expense and sales of the Picher Lead Company, 1875-1915; minute book and construction ledger of the Webb City Smelting & Manufacturing Company, Webb City, Missouri, 1910-1918. The volumes are stored in OVERSIZE.

Volume 1: "Picher Bros., Smelters Record," 27 February 1875--4 October 1875.

Volume 2: Picher Lead & Zinc Company, vouchers, 18 August 1876--13 October 1877.

Volume 3: Picher Lead & Zinc Company, zinc sales, 3 June 1882--17 July 1885.

Volume 4: Webb City Smelting & Manufacturing Company, minute book, 8 April 1910--8 July 1918.

Volume 5: Webb City Smelting & Manufacturing Company, smelter construction and equipment ledger, ca. July 1910--March 1912.

Volume 6: "O. S. Picher, trustee," expense ledger, 14 October 1913--1 March 1915.

<i>r206</i>	<i>12 December 1983</i>	<i>Anonymous</i>	<i>Gift</i>
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