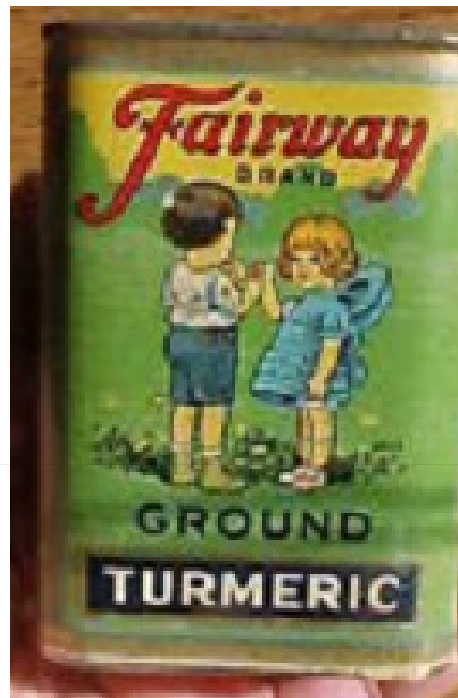
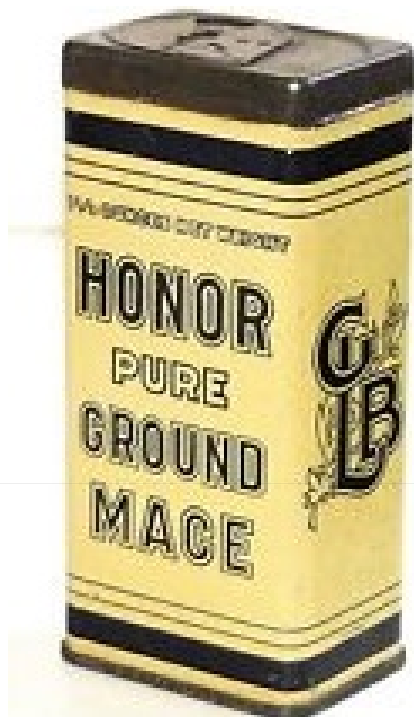


Collecting Minnesota Spice Tins

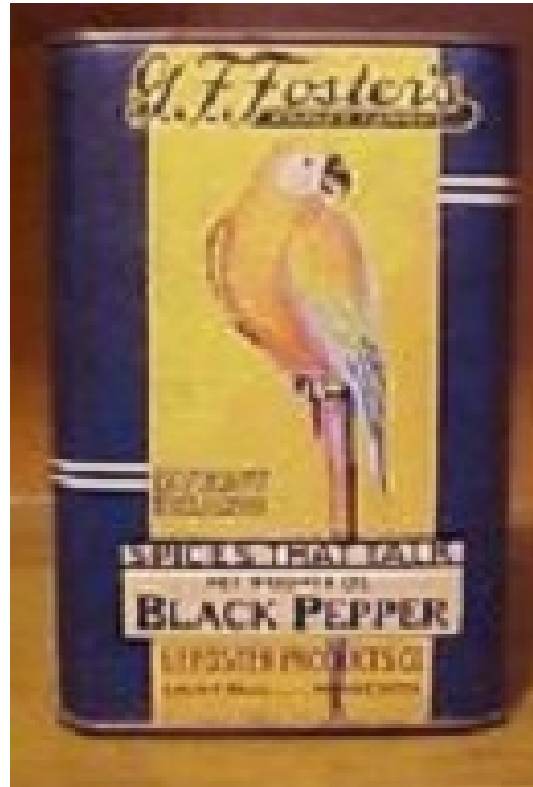
By John Breyfogle

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I have bought and sold many spice tins over the past 18 years. Through the years, I came to realize how many different firms in Minnesota were involved in providing spices to the local market since the late 19th century. Some of these firms were importers, processors, distributors or even local merchants.



I have encountered over 50 different Minnesota firms with their name on a spice label. Many of these firms had several product lines, packaging, and theme changes and some also provided private label brands to many small town merchants. My best guess is that if one were to try and accumulate one spice type of each of these firms and one example of each of their packaging type, the challenge would be huge and the collection would probably exceed 800-1000 different spice tins. If you only wanted to collect one example of each label, the collection would still be in the hundreds.



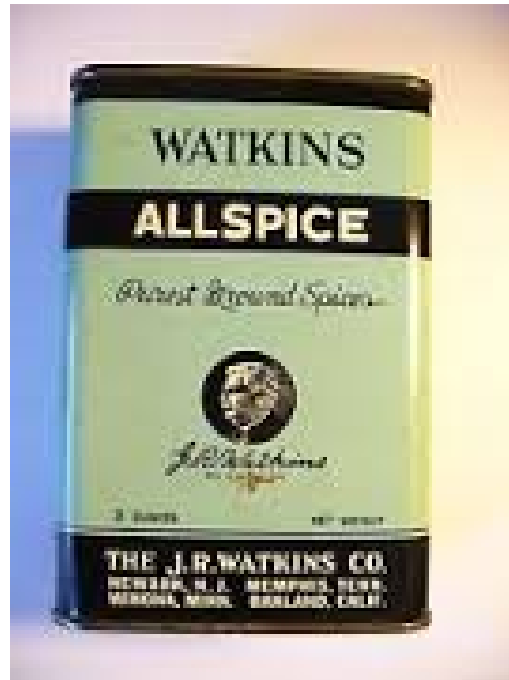
Minnesota was probably not unique in having such variety in marketing spices but I do know Minnesota has a long and varied history in the food industry with such giants as General Mills, Pillsbury, Green Giant, Fairway Foods, Watkins, Nash Finch, Red Owl, Super Valu and others based here through time. But for the most part, it was not these giant firms packaging spices; rather it seems that most were smaller firms and most are long gone from the business world now.



One of the earliest firms that I know of packaging spices was Watkins of Winona MN. I believe they sold spices door-to-door in Norton Brothers tins starting in the 1890's. They are still in this business today. Obviously word of their success spread in that soon Winona was home to Dr. Koch's, Dr. Ward's and McConnon's also selling their own spices. Minneapolis/St. Paul was

home to many of the firms in this business with their many labels. Duluth MN was also a location with numerous spice related firms.

An example of this great variety would be Watkins alone. Accumulating one example starting with their very first tin and adding one each of each package type and variation through the years would result in several hundred tins.



Another early firm out of Minneapolis was Geo. R. Newell which became Winston and Newell and later became the food giant Super Valu. Over time, the Newell name appears on many different labels such as Leopard, University and 18-K to name a few.



Many of the brands and label types are fairly common and others are very rare. Certainly the rarest are those that were packaged for the small town local mercantile. Some examples of these rare tins are pictured here (Ivanhoe, Blue Jay, Viking, Minnehaha). Other labels are rare because they were some of the earliest package types or were only sold for a very short period of time or sold in a very limited market. Amazingly I still see brands and different labels show up on eBay

and other sites that I have never seen before. How many other unknowns that are still out there is only a guess.



The values of Minnesota spice tins are like any other collectible, depending on condition, rarity and eye appeal. Some have fairly generic labels and others had wonderful graphics such as the Old Faithful geyser, the Foshay tower (built in 1928 to look like the Washington monument and for 40 years the tallest building in Minneapolis), Minnehaha falls, Indians, a leopard, a carpenter in bib overalls, the "round tower" from historic Fort Snelling, the Fairway children, parrot, peacocks etc. The University brand was an open book in the colors of the University of Minnesota (maroon and gold).



As stated earlier, Minnesota was not unique in spice label variety as many other states also had many firms and labels based there. If a person wanted to have a home state based collection you could create your own spice label collecting challenge. I have seen people collect spice tins for many different reasons including: their first name (Ginger), their last name (Nash, Watkins, Foster, Jordon etc.), family member worked at the firm, themes such as animals, their home town or even specific colors. The reasons that people collect spice tins are as varied as the people themselves.



As a collector myself, I am always on the lookout for unique Minnesota tins. If you would like to contact me, you can do so at jbreyfogle@msn.com