

Finding Aid for

ALVIN A. DUNIVENT PHOTOGRAPHS AND PAPERS, 1904-1959

Accessions 2012.30 and 2012.55

Finding Aid Republished: February 2015



Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford
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OVERVIEW

REPOSITORY: Benson Ford Research Center
The Henry Ford
20900 Oakwood Blvd
Dearborn, MI 48124-5029
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research.center@thehenryford.org

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2012.30 and 2012.55

CREATOR: Dunivent, Alvin A., 1897-1977

TITLE: Alvin A. Dunivent photographs and papers

INCLUSIVE DATES: 1904-1959

BULK DATES: 1917-1936

QUANTITY: 0.4 cubic ft. and 1 oversize box

LANGUAGE: The materials are in English.

ABSTRACT: Photographs and papers relating to Alvin A. "Don" Dunivent's years of employment with White Castle eating houses along with some family related material.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

- ACCESS RESTRICTIONS:** The photographs and papers are open for research.
- COPYRIGHT:** Copyright has been transferred to The Henry Ford by the donor. Copyright for some items in the collection may still be held by their respective creator(s).
- ACQUISITION:** Donations, 2012.
- RELATED MATERIAL:** Related material held by The Henry Ford:
- See museum catalog system for White Castle related objects.
- Related material beyond The Henry Ford:
- Ohio Historical Society. MSS 991. White Castle System, Inc. Records, 1921-1991. Finding aid:
<http://www.ohiomemory.org/cdm/ref/collection/aids/id/11079>
- ALTERNATE FORMS:** Selected material from the collection has been digitized and is available at:
<http://collections.thehenryford.org/Collection.aspx?keywords=%22Dunivent%2C%20Alvin%20Alonzo%2C%201897-1977%22>
- PREFERRED CITATION:** Item, folder, box, accession 2012.30 or 2012.55, Alvin A. Dunivent photographs and papers, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.
- PROCESSING INFORMATION:** Collection processed by Cynthia Read Miller, 2012.
- DESCRIPTION INFORMATION:** Finding aid written by Cynthia Read Miller, 2012, and published in January 2015. Additional editing done and finding aid republished in February 2015.
- Finding aid prepared using Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS) and local guidelines.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Alvin Alonzo Dunivent,¹ (1897-1977) nicknamed "Don" by his coworkers, began working in a Kansas City, Missouri White Castle® restaurant in July 1927.² He flipped burgers and worked the counter of this small fast food restaurant (figure 2). The White Castle System of Eating Houses, Corporation called his position an operator for the Kansas City Plant.³ Employment included corporate training in customer service and pride of a job well done in this emerging industry. It was a good career move for Don.

Hamburgers were considered an inferior "poor man's food" until fry cook Walter Anderson improved their reputation by coming up with a secret new cooking method. In 1921, he and partner Edgar Waldo "Billy" Ingram opened a chain of hamburger eating houses—compact, castle-like structures they called "White Castles." From the architecture to the menu to the workers' appearances, White Castle set a new standard for cleanliness and uniformity.⁴

For a hardworking young man like Alvin "Don" Dunivent, White Castle offered opportunity. Dunivent was born into a farming family on June 20, 1897.⁵ He and his twin brother, Albert, were the eighth and ninth of twelve children of Thomas and Georgia Ann Dunivent.⁶ The family lived in rural Silver Creek Township and later Clifton Village, Missouri.⁷ Dunivent grew up accustomed to hard, outdoor work and as a young man landed jobs in a poultry house and a shale mine for a cement company in Hannibal, Missouri.⁸

In 1927, at age 30, Dunivent began working for the White Castle System "on the ground floor." As a young, married man (figure 1), he was probably seeking work beyond the manual labor he was accustomed to. In his new job, Dunivent would have the opportunity to interact with customers and other employees. But most importantly, he probably welcomed the chance that his hard work and understanding of the corporate philosophy of quality and good customer service could provide a career. By February 1930 Dunivent had become Assistant Manager for the Kansas City Plant (figures 3 and 4). By the mid-1930s, he was Supervisor of the St. Louis,

¹ Full name "Alvin Alonzo Dunivent" found on <http://search.ancestry.com> World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, Registrar's Report # 24-2-10 B, August 26, 1918. Also on calligraphic calling card, see box 1, folder, Cards, 1904-1935.

² Nickname and date of hire on page 2, column 1 "This Month's Cover" article of *The White Castle Official House Organ*, volume 7, number 8, September-October, 1932.

³ Beginning position described "job as an operator" on page 2, column 1 "This Month's Cover" article of *The White Castle Official House Organ*, volume 7, number 8, September-October, 1932.

⁴ Statement regarding significance of the White Castle fast food restaurants from the *Driving America* label, Henry Ford Museum, written by Donna R. Braden, Curator of Community Life, The Henry Ford, Dearborn, Mich.

⁵ Date of birth found in Social Security Death Index, on <http://search.ancestry.com> SSN # 494-07-8986.

⁶ Names of parents and siblings found in 1900 United States Federal Census on <http://search.ancestry.com> "Alvin A. Dunnivent / Alvin A Dumaine" and Owen Family Tree on <http://trees.ancestry.com> "Thomas C. Owen Dunivent (1859-1924) Randolph County, Missouri" father of Alvin A. Dunivent (1897-1977).

⁷ Geographic locations of childhood found in 1900 United States Federal Census (Silver Creek Township, Randolph County, Missouri) on <http://search.ancestry.com> "Alvin A. Dunnivent / Alvin A Dumaine" and 1910 United States Federal Census (Clifton Village, Randolph County, Missouri) Census on <http://search.ancestry.com> "Alvin A. Dunivent".

⁸ Found on <http://search.ancestry.com>: employed by "Bishop Poultry house, Hannibal, Mo." World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918 for "Alvin Alonzo Dunivent". Employed as "Shale Mine Laborer" at a "Cement Plant", found in 1920 United States Federal Census, Silver Creek, Randolph County, Missouri.

Missouri area for White Castle System, Inc. Dunivent's long career with White Castle lasted through the 1950s. The White Castle System provided financial stability for people willing to work hard and embrace the company's philosophy. It certainly provided a welcome career for Don Dunivent.

® White Castle is a registered trademark of the White Castle System, Inc.

- Based on Miller, Cynthia Read. (2013, January). White Castle® Restaurants: From Flipping Burgers to a Career for Don Dunivent. Retrieved from http://www.thehenryford.org/exhibits/pic/2013/13_jan.asp



Figure 1, Mabel Lindsey (1898-1982) married Alvin Dunivent (1897-1977) on June 8, 1919 in Quincy, Illinois, across the Mississippi river from their hometown of Hannibal, Missouri. This photograph was probably taken about the time of their tenth wedding anniversary in 1929. It was made by the Cooley Studio in Kansas City, Missouri. (ID 2012.55.1)

Figure 2, White Castle System eating house operators Abie Best⁹ and Don Dunivent pose for their photograph outside and at the counter in Kansas City, Missouri, probably 1927. (ID 2012.30.4 and 2012.30.3)



⁹ Spelling of "Abie" Best's nickname name found on page 6, column 1 and column 2 of *The White Castle Official House Organ*, volume 7, number 8, September-October, 1932. Research on <http://search.ancestry.com> indicates that "Abie" Best is probably Orville A. Best; "Orval A. Best" is listed in the 1930 United States Federal Census (Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri) as a "cook" in a "café" with a wife "Bonnie." "Orville A. Best" is listed in the City Directory for Kansas City in 1929 as "attendant White Castle System" and in 1933 as "waiter White Castle System" (with a wife, "Bonnie"). Results of Social Security Death index search are inconclusive; could be "Orville Best" SSN# 478-28-2527, born 1905 died 1980.

Figure 3, Don Dunivent, Assistant Manager, standing outside of the White Castle System Plant in Kansas City, Missouri, probably 1930. (ID 2012.30.5) White Castle is one of the fast food restaurants highlighted in the *Driving America* exhibit in Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Mich. The museum's collection contains a stained glass sign from a 1930s White Castle restaurant, a restaurant uniform from the 1980s, and promotional items from the 1950s-1995.

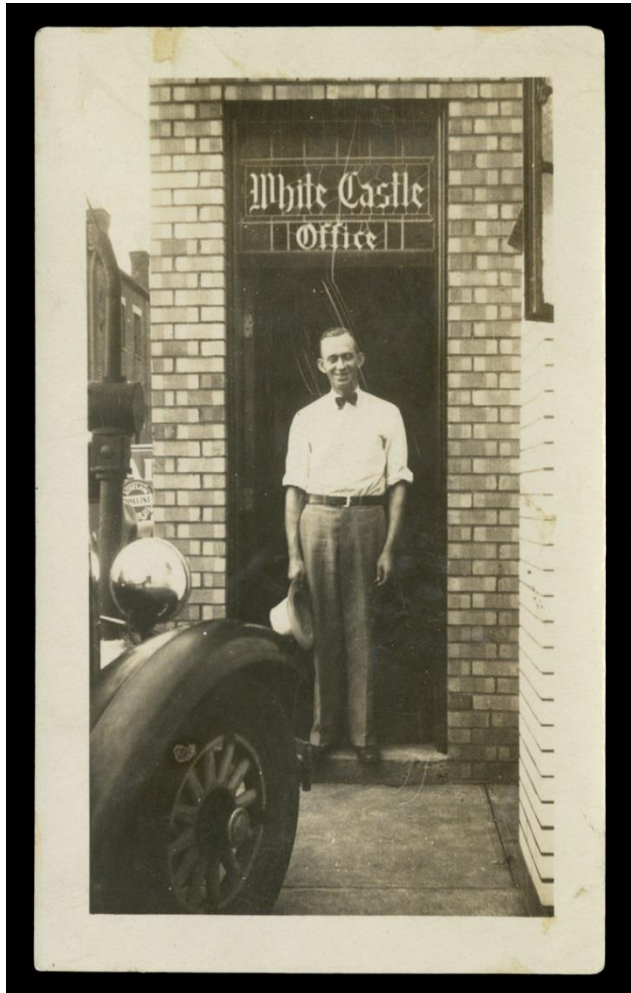


Figure 4, *The White Castle Official House Organ*, September-October, 1932. Alvin A. "Don" Dunivent, Assistant Manager, Kansas City Plant appeared on the cover of this company magazine. Inside is a brief article, "This Month's Cover" about Dunivent including this insightful sentence, "Prior to his joining the White Castle Family, he learned the meaning of the word 'work' through several years experience as a miner." (ID 2012.30.2)



SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Alvin A. Dunivent collection dating from 1904 to 1959 (predominately 1917 to 1936) includes family papers relating to Alvin Dunivent and Mabel Lindsey's courtship and marriage in 1919, family portrait photographs, as well as material relating to "Don" Dunivent's years with White Castle® eating houses. This collection also comprises papers and photographs relating to White Castle restaurants, employees and managers, and company bowling leagues and picnics. This archival collection was given to The Henry Ford by his great-grandnephew on the Lindsey side of the family.

SUBJECT TERMS

Names, Personal and Corporate

Dunivent, Alvin A., 1897-1977

Dunivent, Mabel Lindsey, 1898-1982

White Castle (Restaurant)

Subjects

Employees

Restaurants

Genre and Form

Photographs

Portraits

Container list

Box no.	Description
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Box 1

Cards, 1904-1935 (birthday, business, calling, Christmas, place names)
Documents, 1917-1930s (correspondence, marriage certificate, Easter telegram; see also
oversize Box 2)
Periodicals
 1930 (newspaper clippings, White Castle® restaurant managers meetings)
 1932 (employee magazine, *The White Castle Official House Organ*; Alvin A.
 Dunivent on cover)
Photographs
 1917 Alvin A. Dunivent portrait; Mathes Studio, Quincy, Ill.
 1917 Alvin A. Dunivent portrait; military uniform
 1922 Alvin A. Dunivent portrait; Hansen Studio, Hannibal, Mo.
 1927 White Castle, Kansas City, Mo. restaurants--exteriors; Abie Best and Don
 Dunivent
 1927 White Castle, Kansas City, Mo. restaurants--interiors; Abie Best and Don
 Dunivent)
 1927-1930 White Castle, Kansas City, Mo. restaurants--operators, customer,
 managers
 1927-1935 White Castle, Kansas City, Mo. restaurants--employee banquets
 1930s White Castle, Wichita, Kansas restaurants--executives--Walt Anderson and
 airplane
 1930-1935 White Castle, Kansas City, Mo. restaurants--assistant managers meetings
 1932-1933 White Castle, Kansas City, Mo. restaurants--recreation bowling league
 1936 White Castle, St. Louis, Mo. restaurants--exteriors
 1940s Alvin A. Dunivent with his pet dogs
 1940s-1950s White Castle, St. Louis, Mo. restaurants--employee picnics
 1950s White Castle, St. Louis, Mo. restaurants--managers
Research materials (Dunivent, Lindsey families; White Castle restaurants)

Box 2 (Oversize)

Document, 1926 (Certificate of Membership, American School, Chicago, Ill.)
Photographs
 1919 Alvin A. Dunivent portrait
 1929 Mable and Alvin Dunivent wedding anniversary portrait; Cooley Studio, Kansas
 City, Mo.