Avon: An International Forum on Its Archive

Discussion published by Carol Ressler Lockman on Monday, March 29, 2021

AVON: AN INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON ITS ARCHIVE
Sponsored by the Hagley Library, Wilmington DE
Friday May 7, 9 am - 12 noon EST via Zoom

In the 20 years since Avon Products, Inc., deposited its records at Hagley Library they have become one of our most popular research collections. A virtual event on May 7 will bring attention to their contribution to history.

Avon Products, Inc., is one of the oldest direct selling companies in America. It traces its origins to 1886, when David H. McConnell bought the Union Publishing Company and started manufacturing perfumes to give away with his books. McConnell discovered that his customers were more interested in the fragrances than the books, so he decided to concentrate on selling perfumes. The business was renamed the California Perfume Company (CPC) in an effort to associate its products with the perceived beauty of the Golden State.

From the beginning, CPC sold directly to the consumer through a national network of sales representatives, primarily women, who were looking for economic opportunity and flexible part-time employment. In 1929, CPC introduced the Avon brand in an effort to modernize its image. The corporation was renamed Avon Products, Inc. in 1950. Avon rapidly expanded into the international market during the 1950s and 1960s, principally Latin America and Europe. By the early 1970s, Avon International operated in sixteen countries.

Speakers at the event will come from around the USA and Europe and discuss Avon’s activities in the United States, Brazil, and Italy, as well as its efforts to reach out to African American women and diversity its American salesforce. The event’s keynote will be offered by Katina Manko, who helped bring the Avon Collection to Hagley. Manko’s book, Ding Dong! Avon Calling!: The Women and Men of Avon Products, Incorporated will be published in June. Full details of the forum at https://www.hagley.org/avon-international-forum-its-archive.

Katina Manko, Independent Scholar, “Ding Dong! Avon Calling!: The Women
and Men of Avon Products, Incorporated”

Jessica Burch, Denison University, “‘Soap and Hope’: Direct Sales and the Culture of Work and Capitalism in Postwar America”

Jessica Chelekis, Brunel Business School, “Avon in the Brazilian Amazon: Direct Sales and Consumption among Vulnerable Communities”

Lindsey Feitz, University of Denver, “Creating a Multicultural Soul: Avon, Corporate Social Responsibility, and Race in the 1970s”

Shawn Moura, Director of Research at NAIOP, “Exploring Avon's Encounter with Gender, Race, and Class in Brazil, 1958-1975”

Emanuela Scarpellini, University of Milan, “Transnational Beauty: Avon International and the Case of Italy”

Advance registration is required to view the pre-circulated papers and to participate in the conference sessions; there is no fee to register. Register at https://www.hagley.org/research/conferences/avon-forum-conference-registration