

Western Grocer Co.

1901-1944

Marshalltown IA

The largest grocery distributor between Chicago and Denver

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Incorporated in Iowa in 1901 – engaged in wholesale grocery business - roots go back to 1867

Branch Houses

H. L. Spencer Co., Oskaloosa, Ia. – 1867
Letts-Fletcher Co., Marshalltown, Ia. – 1883
Letts-Fletcher Co., Carroll, Ia.
Letts-Spencer-Smith Co, Mason City, Ia. - 1895
Letts-Parker/Letts-Melick Grocer Co., St. Joseph, Mo.
Letts-Parker/Letts-Melick Grocer Co., Eldorado, Kan.
Letts-Melick Grocer Co., Manhattan, Kan.
Western Grocer Co., Cedar Rapids, Ia. (Frick-Stearns-Russel Co.)
Western Grocer Co., Clinton, Ia. (Clinton Grocer Co.)
Western Grocer Co., Dubuque, Ia. (John T Hancock Co)
Western Grocer Co., Minneapolis, Minn.
Western Grocer Co., Albert Lea, Minn. - 1901 (Ransom Brothers Co.)
Western Grocer Co., Owatonna, Minn. (Owatonna Grocer)
Western Grocer Mills, Marshalltown, Iowa.

Canning Factories

Western Grocer Mills, Marshalltown, Ia.
Marshall Canning Co., Marshalltown, Ia. - 1878
Marshall Vinegar Co., Marshalltown, Ia.
Marshall Canning Co., Hampton , Ia. - 1910
Marshall Canning Co., Ackley, Ia. - 1918
Marshall Canning Co., Roland, Ia. - 1919
Marshall (Kelley)Canning Co., Waverly, Ia. - 1902
Marshall Canning Co., Grinnell, IA - 1912
Marshall Canning Co., Grundy Center, Ia
Marshall Canning Co., Reinbeck, Ia
Marshall Canning Co., Gilman, IA
Marshall Canning Co., Pella, IA
Marshall Canning Co., Matthews, Ind.
Marshall Canning Co., Sugar Land TX. - 1936
The company also owns a large interest in Pacific American Fisheries, Bellingham, Wash.



Pickle Salting stations:

Marshalltown, Ia; Waverly, Ia; Buckeye, Ia; Galt, Ia

About 1878 the Marshall Canning Company, of Marshalltown, Ia., was organized and operated under the above name until 1891, when the name was changed to the Marshall Canning Works, which organization was discontinued in 1909, when the equipment was sold to the Western Grocer Mills. A new plant was built in 1910. and was operated by the Western Grocer Mills until 1913, in which year the Marshall Canning Company, a newly incorporated concern, took over the canning operations of the Western Grocer Mills, and the factory is now being operated as the Marshall Canning Company.

Western Grocer/Marshall Canning Brands include:

Jack Sprat - sugar, coffee, spices, flour, etc.
Marshall - spices, etc
Uncle William - canned foods: sweet corn, pork and beans, tomatoes, kidney beans, lima beans, sauerkraut, pumpkin, hominy, succotash and tomato catsup.
Le Grande - canned foods: pumpkin, green beans
Cameo - stringless beans
May-Flower - cocoa, etc.
Brown Beauty - baked beans
El Rey - Hominy
After Glow - Coffee
Chocolate Cream - Coffee
Golden Wedding - spices

Monday, Feb. 07, 1944 – For about \$1,500,000 Grocer Nate Cummings of Sprague Warner-Kenny Corp, bought up some 85% of the stock of Western Grocer Co. of Marshalltown, Iowa, one of the biggest wholesale grocers between the Mississippi and the Rockies. By this stroke, he mushroomed his interests over three-quarters of the U.S., acquiring ten canneries and one packaging plant, along with Western's subsidiary, Marshall Canning Co.

In 1945, the Consolidated Grocers Corporation change their name to Consolidated Foods Corporation to emphasize its diversified role in food processing, packaging and distribution. In 1985, Consolidated Foods changes its name to Sara Lee Corporation.

An article in the May 21, 1912, issue of the Albert Lea Tribune described the layout of the six-floor Western Grocer building: Built in 1895, it is a brick structure, six stories in height (on the south side) with basement and sub-basement, 66 feet wide by 160 feet long.

The sub-basement is used for perishable goods, wrapping paper and stoneware.

The basement is used to store sugar, flour and salt. The large cold storage rooms are also built as an addition to these floors.

The first floor is utilized for offices, shipping and receiving room, plug tobacco, soap, candles and numerous small items.

On the second floor is the packing room, where less than original packages are packed as well as the fruit and labeling room, where fruits are packed and labeled. Smoking tobaccos, soda fountain supplies, and various other items are likewise stored on this floor. The immense peanut roaster is also on the second floor and an average of 1,000 pounds of the nuts are roasted each week day.

On the third floor are the canned fruits, canned vegetables, canned meats, cereals, coffee, tea and starch. The fourth floor is used for storing wooden ware. and other light and bulky lines.

The building is supplied with a large electric elevator, a hand power elevator and an elaborate protection system, which consists of an immense 4,600 gallon reserve (water) tank on the top floor and a system of pipes throughout each floor.

Some idea of the magnitude of the business can be gained from the fact that an average of six (railroad) cars of merchandise are received and shipped out to the customers each day. To deliver to the different freight depots and to the local merchants the goods sold in less than carload lots, requires the constant service of six horses.

The cigar room, located in the packing room on the second floor, is especially fitted up to care for the immense quantity carried in stock – usually about 500,000 cigars – varying in price from \$35 to \$115 per 1,000.