Brand Development in the Canadian Cast Iron Stove Industry in the First Half of the 20th Century

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Introduction
From the turn of the 20th century and up to the 1950s, many manufacturers operated in Canada during what has been labeled as the “glorious and golden age” of cast iron stove manufacturing (Laberge, 1980). Famous brand names remain in collective memory to this day, including Bélanger, McClary, P.T. Légaré, Moffat, and l’Islet. This paper studies brand development in the Canadian cast iron stove industry over this period to fill a void in the Canadian literature and to add to the very few U.S. papers that comprise the North-American literature. Several clues point to the existence of deliberate branding activity at the largest Canadian foundries beyond efforts to differentiate stove types, models, sizes, names and designs. Canadian stove branding would have followed in the 19th century’s footsteps of the largest U.S. manufacturers who managed “to sell customers a full line of stoves covered by a unifying brand name that conveyed a promise of common quality” (Harris, 2008, p.720). This paper is the first to explore cast iron stove brand development in Canada.

Literature and Research Hypotheses
Few papers exist on cast iron stove brand development and the thin literature covers mainly the U.S. market over the 1815-1875 period (Harris, 2008). Branding development has been investigated in several other historical contexts at the firm level, including Colgate (Foster, 1975), Quaker (Thornton, 1933), Proctor & Gamble (Petty, 1985), General Mills (Gray, 1954), or Listerine (Lambert, 1927) and at the macro level in whole industries like firearms (Witkowski, 2010), brewing (Tremblay and Tremblay, 2005) or automobile (Rao, 2006). Other authors analysed branding as a historical phenomenon through critical evaluations of brand development (Low and Fullerton, 1994; Schutte, 1969) and historiographies (Borden, 1946; Eckhardt, 2010). Contemporary literature on brand management is more profuse. Studies focus mostly on brand development models (e.g., Kavaratzis, 2005; Ghodeswar, 2008) and on brand development strategies (e.g., De Chernatony, 2001; Doyle, 2010; Keller, 1999; Malår and al., 2011; Thompson and al., 2006; Smith and Park, 1992; Dietz, 1973; Farquhar, 1989).

We found the earliest evidence of Canadian stove brand emergence in the first half of the 20th century among foundries that were already reputable not only for their stoves, but most often for a wide array of household, industrial and agricultural goods. From around 1910 and on, marketing activities of branding leaders started to focus on the brand as opposed to a stove model, name, style, quality or functionalities. There are some resonating successes. For instance, Bélanger Foundry’s “Mon beau poêle Bélanger / My beautiful Bélanger stove” ran in printed ads from the 1910s and in television ads starting in the 1950s until the company’s acquisition by the John Inglis and Company (now Whirlpool Canada) in the 1980s. The slogan is still imprinted in collective memory since Bélanger stoves remain very collectible today.

Our research question is: “What has led to the emergence and development of Canadian cast iron stove brands?” To answer this question we will probe the following hypotheses which are rooted mainly in the historical literature on branding.
Cast iron brand development in Canada occurred:

H1 Through slow and steady evolution in a gradual, incremental way as opposed to a catastrophic, sudden pattern of change and acceptance.

H2 As a result of changes in the business and marketing environment at both the macro and firm level, including:
   a. the threat of U.S. branded goods;
   b. local and foreign branding practices; and
   c. the rise of Canadian consumerism.

Sources and Methodology
To assess the pace of brand development in the Canadian cast iron industry, we rely on three primary sources of data. The first is a sample of newspaper advertisements published by a selection of stove manufacturers in the province of Quebec’s newspapers between 1900 and 1950. We surveyed the five most prominent newspapers used to advertise stoves at the time: Le Soleil, La Presse, La Patrie, Le Peuple de Montmagny, Montreal Gazette. The second source consists of foundry catalogues, a popular stove marketing tool at the time. The third source includes the first TV ads that were aired at the beginning of the 1950s. The primary sources of data will enable us to assess H1 while H2 will be assessed with complementary secondary sources from the academic literature, trade publications, as well as government statistics.

Hypotheses are tested using traditional business history methods. The paper focuses on a sample of four stove manufacturers that operated and published ads frequently over the studied period: Bélanger, l’Islet, McClary and Moffat.

Conclusion
This study contributes to the literature on Canadian foundries and on brand development in Canada in the first half of the 20th century. Our findings are consistent with the two research hypotheses. More specifically, we found that stove brand development evolved gradually in Canada, much as it had, starting a bit earlier, in the United States. Indeed, U.S. practices appear to have catalyzed stove brand development in Canada while the stove industry was consolidating and while Canadian consumerism and real purchasing power were increasing.

Sample of References
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