

Guide to
MS 172
**Marion Isbell Restaurants
1940-1973**

Processed by

Reviewed and Updated by
Dennis Preisler

Donated by Robert J. Isbell for the Marion Isbell Family, 1999; Dr. William Miller, Marion Isbell Institute of Business Ethics, 1999; Pamela Rector, Arizona Historical Society , 1999, 2000.

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Library and Archives
Arizona Historical Society
Central Arizona Division

HISTORICAL NOTE

Marion Isbell was born in 1905 in Whitehaven, Tennessee, the second son of truck farmers, Howard and Mary Isbell. As a stock boy in Memphis, Tennessee, he earned \$7 a week and walked three miles a day to and from work. In 1921, Marion and James, his older brother, ran away to Chicago. Marion worked as a dishwasher, bus-boy and general handy man for Walter P. Powers on West Madison Street. Next, he managed a soda fountain for the Portes Drug Store. Eventually Marion moved up in another restaurant to a position that paid \$18 a week and included duties as a sandwich man, fry cook, and soda jerk. In 1926, he met Ingrid Helsing, another Southern transplant who had moved to Chicago from Alabama; they were married in 1927. Marion, in 1926, invested in a sandwich shop called Mary Lou's but it went out of business. So he invested in new ventures with his wife's brother, Bill, operating a cumulative total of 24 soda fountain luncheonettes between 1928 and 1935. In 1934, the two entrepreneurs opened the first Isbell's Restaurant on 590 Diversey Parkway in Chicago.

The success in these ventures gained Isbell an appointment in 1941 as Community Commander in Civilian Defense for his ward, Chairman of the Local Office of Price Administration from 1944-1945, and President of the Chicago Restaurant Association 1942-1944. Marion W. Isbell, owner and operator of Isbell's Restaurants in Chicago, was elected to the presidency of the National Restaurant Association at its annual meeting held on May 12, 1955. His term of office ran for one year until May of 1956. He has served as Director of the National Restaurant Association starting in 1943 and acted as Convention Chairman for the giant national show in 1954. He served for three years as president of the Chicago Restaurant Association. Mr. Isbell's government service includes two years as O.P.A. Director of the Chicago Metropolitan Area, supervising rent, price and rationing controls for this section; plus six months duty in Washington with the O.P.A. During the Korean War Isbell was called back to Washington where he headed the restaurant branch of the Office Price Stabilization.

By 1939 he had five children with his wife Ingrid. His children included Ingrid, who passed away three weeks after her birth; Edward, who died at age twelve from complications of polio and heart disease; Marion William Isbell, Jr. in 1935; Elaine in 1936 and Robert in 1939. In 1946, Marion Isbell began selling his restaurant interests and exploring retirement options in the cities of Phoenix and Tucson, Arizona. Eventually he joined an investment group in 1954 that was acquiring interests in motor hotels, the Bagdad hotel in Las Vegas, the Sahara in Phoenix, and several Flamingo hotels in Arizona, Texas, and California. In 1959, the group sold its first franchise under the Ramada name, and four years later, sold the first motel in the Ramada chain. Marion Isbell entered full retirement in 1978, when he resigned from the board of Directors. Under his leadership, Ramada Inns had grown to include over 500 motels in 45 states, as well as Canada, Mexico, Brazil, and overseas to Europe, Morocco, and the Middle East. He passed away in October of 1988.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Marion Isbell Papers were compiled by the Isbell family from 1934 to 1988, with part of the collection housed at the School of Hotel and Restaurant Management of Northern Arizona University in the family's name. There are miscellaneous items that were donated by Pamela Rector, employee of the Arizona Historical Society, whose father worked in Ramada. The collection includes correspondence from Marion Isbell's time as President of the Chicago Restaurant Association.

PROVENANCE

These records were accumulated by the Marion Isbell family, the Northern Arizona University School of Hotel and Restaurant Management, and Pamela Rector of the Arizona Historical Society. On June 29, July 8, and 16 1999, Robert J. Isbell, for the Marion Isbell family donated Marion Isbell Papers to the Arizona Historical Society, Central Arizona Division.

RESTRICTIONS

None

LITERARY RIGHTS STATEMENT

Permission to publish material from the Marion Isbell Restaurants 1940-1973 Collection must be obtained from the Library and Archives Department at the Central Arizona Division of the Arizona Historical Society.

NOTES TO RESEARCHERS

None

CONTAINER LIST

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