



# The AMA History Project Presents: History of POLK'S MODEL CRAFT HOBBIES

## - POLK'S HOBBIES

Founded in 1935 by Irwin Polk



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### **Polk's Model Craft Hobbies / Polk's Hobbies**

The story of Polk's Model Craft Hobbies/ Polk's Hobbies is less a story of a hobby shop and more a story of two brothers, Irwin and Nathan Polk.

The Polk brothers' lives seemed to run along the same track. There was not much that one did without the other, or much one did that was not duplicated by the other. It started with the eldest brother, Irwin Polk. A modeler himself, in the mid-1920s he organized a model group called the Aero Club and wrote model aviation articles in the "Just for Boys" column of the *Newark Evening News*. Unfortunately, his club ran into a problem; there was nowhere nearby to get model supplies. Irwin took up the cause, convincing Bamberger's department store to start a modeling section. They, in turn, convinced Irwin to run it.

Accessibility to supplies opened the floodgates, and a larger aero group, the Bamberger Aero Club, formed. During Irwin Polk's time there, he taught over 4,000 children how to build and fly successful model airplanes. When William Randolph Hearst began the Junior Birdmen of America in the 1930s, he hired Irwin as Field Director, leaving his duties with the ever-growing Bamberger Aero Club to his younger brother, Nathan.

Nathan left a job with Sears, Roebuck and Company to follow his brother's example, continuing to grow the sport of model aeronautics both through the Bamberger club and by opening a store in Newark, New Jersey called Polk's Model Craft Hobbies. In order to grow his store, Nathan felt he had to grow the industry as a whole. He took to the road, selling his wares and promoting model aviation, becoming one of the first manufacturer representatives to promote items like Jim Walker's A.J. Aircraft, Ideal, and Burd Models. Unfortunately, even with these efforts, the store did not survive and Nathan moved on to work with his brother, who owned a hobby shop in New York City.

Around the time Irwin stopped working with the Junior Birdmen and started as editor of *Model Aircraft Builder* magazine, he dived back into the hobby business by starting a walk-up hobby shop near Penn Station. While he was away editing, his wife, Chuddy, ran the store and Nathan continued his roadwork, stumping for model aviation and hobby shops. While *Model Aircraft Builder* business dissolved, the Polk family's store business was booming. They headed for better facilities.

The Polks' began combining wholesaling with representing manufacturers, and business grew so much that they were once again forced to move, right onto New York's Fifth Avenue. They

turned this store into a five-story showcase for anything and everything related to the hobby industry, reinvigorating Polk's Model Craft Hobbies.

In 1980, the company sold their New York residence and moved to New Jersey, creating a spin-off of the original company that survives today as Polk's Hobbies. Still family run, the shop continues to live by their founders' oath to put the hobbyist first in mind.

This is the story of the Polk's hobby shop, but the Polk story does not end here. They continue their enthusiastic support of model aeronautics, becoming instrumental in the establishment of the Academy of Model Aeronautics (AMA) and several other organizations and events. Their complete biographies can be found in the AMA's History Project biography website, listed individually as Irwin S. Polk and Nathan J. Polk.

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