United States Patent

Kretzschmar et al.

[15] **3,679,040**

[45] **July 25, 1972**

[54] COLLAPSIBLE CONTAINER FOR USE IN CONVEYOR SYSTEMS

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[21] Appl. No.: **53,251**

[52] **U.S. Cl.** **198/1,** 220/6

[51] **Int. Cl.** **B65d 7/24,** B65g

[58] **Field of Search** 198/1; 220/6, 7

[56] **References Cited**

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[57] **ABSTRACT**

A collapsible open-top container for use in conveyor systems wherein the containers travel in an upright channel and are entrained by one or more endless belts, chains or like conveyors travelling along the lower end of the channel. The container comprises two upright side walls connected to each other by transverse links which can form an apertured bottom and/or the front and rear end walls of the container. The side walls and the links together form a parallel motion whose components are pivotable with reference to each other about vertical axes so that one of the side walls is movable parallel to itself close to and away from the other side wall. The container is provided with one or more legs which engage the conveyor or conveyors, and with at least one bumper extending beyond the front and/or rear end wall to maintain the container at a desired minimum distance from adjacent containers.

22 Claims, 21 Drawing Figures

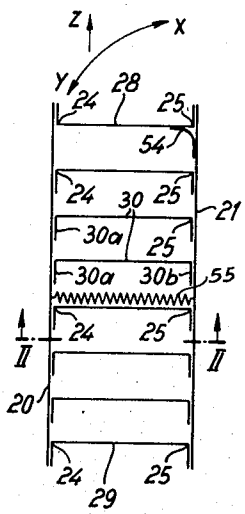


FIG. 1

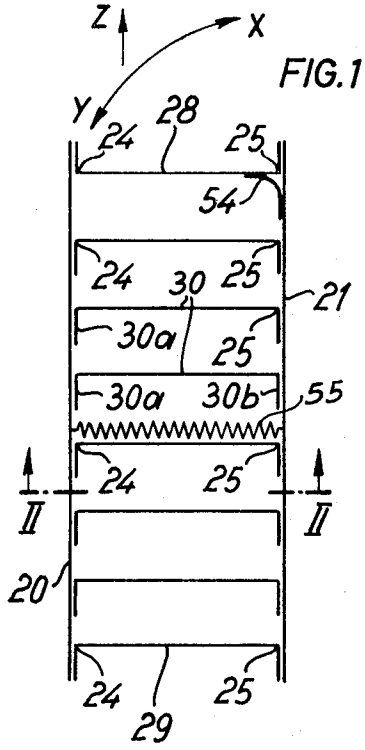


FIG. 3

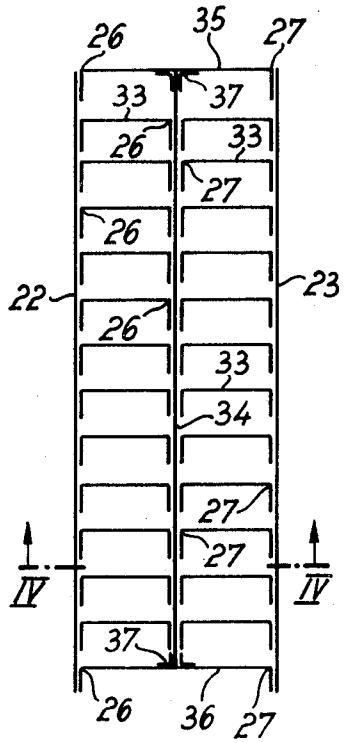


FIG. 2

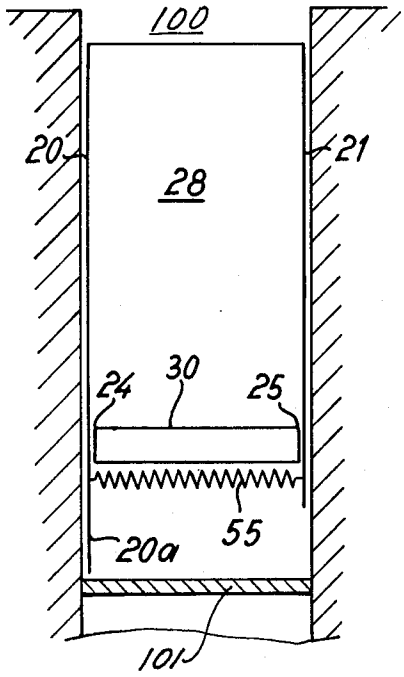
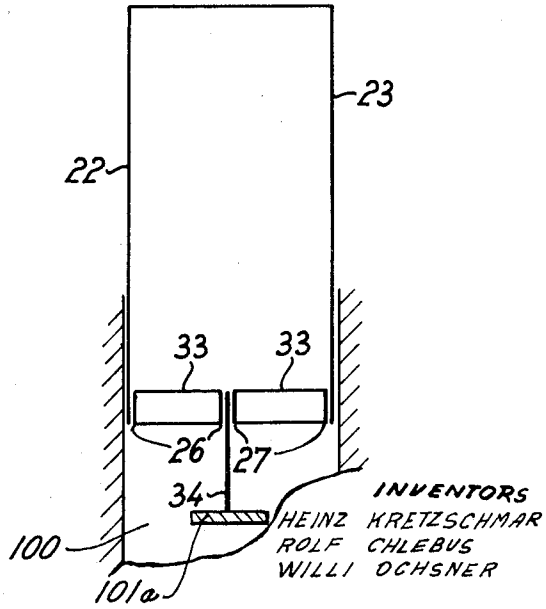


FIG. 4



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FIG. 5

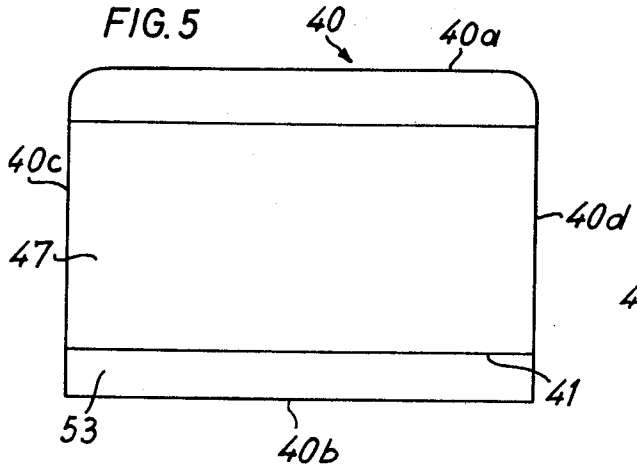


FIG. 6

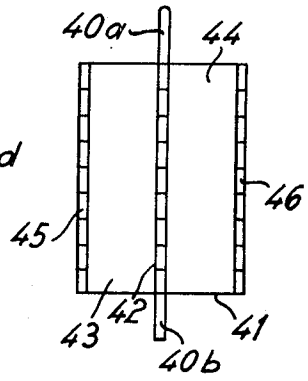


FIG. 8

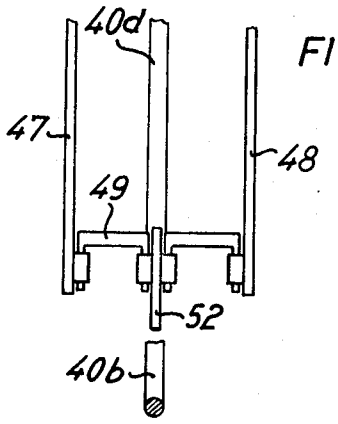


FIG. 9

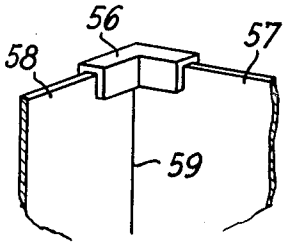


FIG. 7

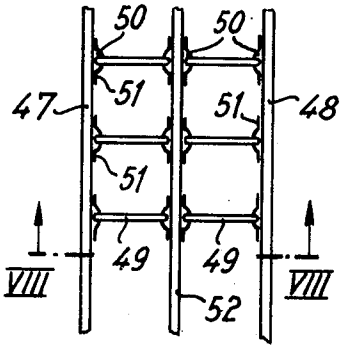
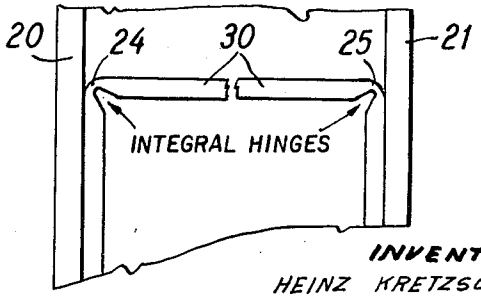


FIG. 1A



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FIG.10

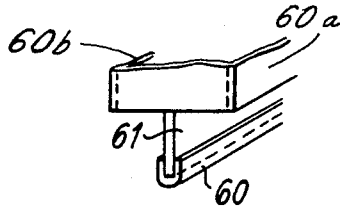


FIG.11

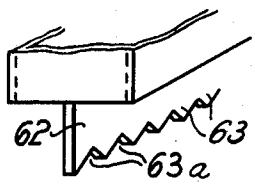


FIG.12

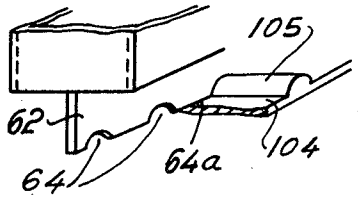


FIG.13

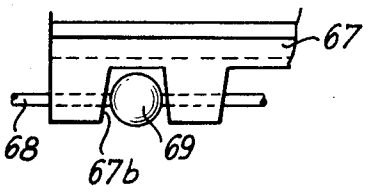


FIG.14

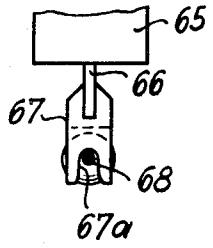


FIG.15

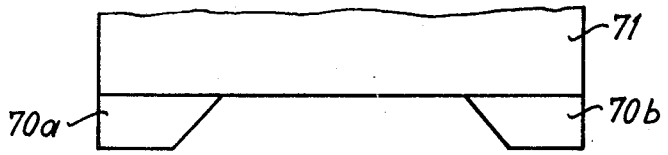
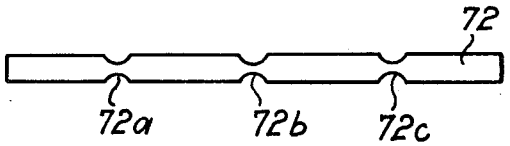


FIG.16



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FIG. 17

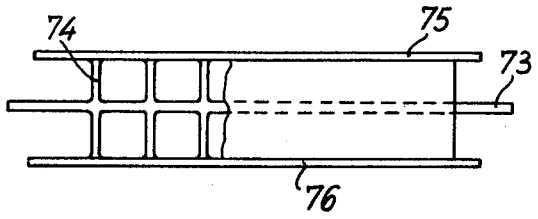
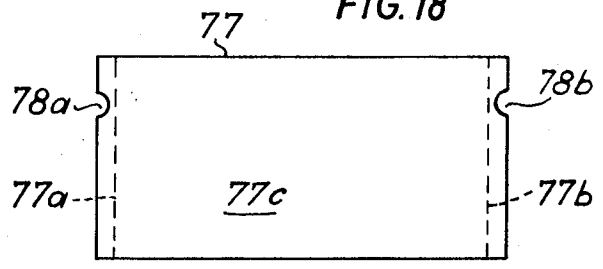


FIG. 18



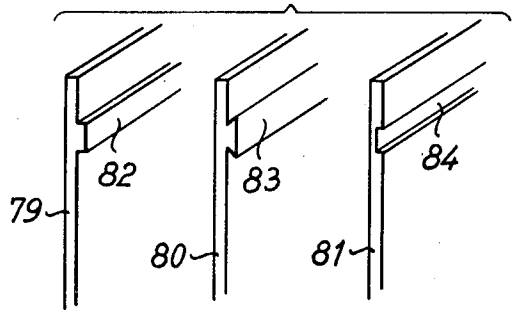


FIG. 19

FIG. 20

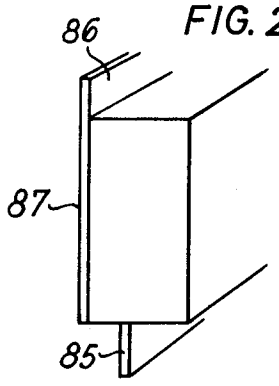
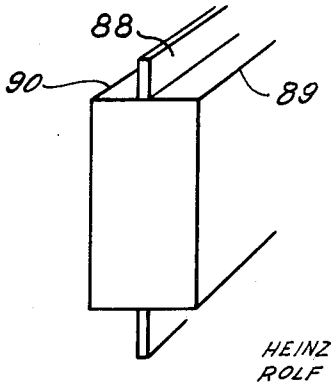


FIG. 21



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COLLAPSIBLE CONTAINER FOR USE IN CONVEYOR SYSTEMS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to conveyor systems for office files or other types of commodities, and more particularly to improvements in conveyor systems of the type wherein office files and/or other commodities are transported in open-top containers travelling in an elongated upright confining channel and receiving motion from one or more continuously or intermittently driven belts, chains, cords or like conveyors mounted at the lower end of the channel.

Conveyor systems of the just described character normally employ rigid, relatively narrow, relatively high and relatively long containers which are open at the top to permit insertion or withdrawal of commodities. It is also known to employ in such conveyor systems containers in the form of bags or pouches which are provided with foldable pleated walls so as to enable the operator to collapse an empty pouch into a small package which occupies little room in storage. When the pouch is expanded, its width is only a small fraction of its height and length.

A drawback of rigid containers is that they are too bulky for storage because each such container occupies a fixed amount of space irrespective of whether its compartment is filled entirely, filled in part or empty. Moreover, the width of the channel in which such rigid containers should travel in response to frictional engagement with an endless conveyor belt or the like must at least equal the width of the widest container; therefore, a relatively narrow container cannot be properly guided in a wide channel and the conveyor or conveyors are unable to insure proper transport of a container which is free to move sideways between the lateral sides of the confining channel. Collapsible pouches are rather unstable and, with the exception of foldability, exhibit the same drawbacks as the rigid containers.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An object of the invention is to provide a novel and improved container for use in conveyor systems wherein the containers travel on endless belts or like conveyors and are confined in upright channels or tunnels which hold them against sidewise movement, the container being constructed and assembled in such a way that it exhibits all important advantages but avoids the drawbacks of presently known containers.

Another object of the invention is to provide a collapsible container for office files or other commodities which automatically tends to assume a collapsed position when its compartment or compartments are empty, which can be used for transport of commodities in relatively wide or relatively narrow confining channels, which can receive motion from continuously or intermittently driven belts, chains, bands, ropes or other types of conveyors, and which can be used in presently known conveyor systems.

A further object of the invention is to provide a container which can be readily inserted into or withdrawn from a confining channel or tunnel, which comprises a small number of simple parts, which can be made to travel along arcuate or straight paths, and which can be designed to insure satisfactory ventilation of conveyed commodities.

The invention is embodied in a collapsible container, particularly for the transport of commodities in a conveyor system wherein the container travels in a predetermined direction in an elongated upright confining channel or tunnel while receiving motion from a belt, chain or a like conveyor travelling along the lower end of the channel. The container preferably has an open top and comprises first and second upright side walls which are parallel to the direction of travel when the container is inserted into the channel, the first side wall being movable toward and away from the second side wall to thereby change the width of the container. At least one of the two side walls constitutes a link of at least one parallel motion mechanism which further includes transverse links

coupling the side walls and hinge means connecting the transverse links with a least one of the side walls for movement about pivot axes which are normal to the direction of travel. Such transverse links may constitute an apertured bottom wall and/or the front and rear end walls of the container. Each transverse link is preferably pivotable along an arc of about 90° whereby the first side wall can move parallel to itself between a position in which it is immediately adjacent to the second side wall and a position in which the two side walls are located at a maximum distance from each other and the container defines a compartment of maximum width.

The novel features which are considered as characteristic of the invention are set forth in particular in the appended claims. The improved container itself, however, both as to its construction and the mode of manipulating and utilizing the same, together with additional features and advantages thereof, will be best understood upon perusal of the following detailed description of certain specific embodiments with reference to the accompanying drawing.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

FIG. **1** is a schematic plan view of a container which embodies one form of the invention;

FIG. **1***a* is a greatly enlarged view of a detail of FIG. **1**;

FIG. **2** is a transverse vertical sectional view as seen in the direction of arrows from the line II—II of FIG. **1**;

FIG. **3** is a schematic plan view of a second container;

FIG. **4** is a transverse vertical sectional view as seen in the direction of arrows from the line IV—IV of FIG. **3**;

FIG. **5** is a schematic side elevational view of a third container;

FIG. **6** is an end elevational view of the container shown in FIG. **5**;

FIG. **7** is a fragmentary plan view of the container shown in FIGS. **5** and **6**;

FIG. **8** is a fragmentary transverse vertical sectional view as seen in the direction of arrows from the line VIII—VIII of FIG. **7**;

FIG. **9** is a fragmentary perspective view of a corner portion of a fourth container and of a locking or stiffening device for the pivotable walls of such container;

FIG. **10** is a fragmentary perspective view of a portion of a further container whose leg is provided with a friction generating shoe;

FIG. **11** is a fragmentary perspective view of a container having a modified leg;

FIG. **12** is a similar fragmentary perspective view of a container having a third type of leg which is in positive motion receiving engagement with a travelling conveyor;

FIG. **13** is a fragmentary side elevational view of another container and of a conveyor which is separably coupled to the shoe of the leg on the container;

FIG. **14** is a fragmentary end elevational view of the container shown in FIG. **13**;

FIG. **15** is a fragmentary side elevational view of a container which is provided with a different leg;

FIG. **16** is a bottom plan view of a deformable leg for a container which embodies the invention;

FIG. **17** is a plan view of a further container whose leg extends beyond both longitudinal ends of the side walls;

FIG. **18** is a schematic side elevational view of still another container;

FIG. **19** is a fragmentary perspective view of three types of contact carriers on the side wall of a collapsible container which embodies the invention;

FIG. **20** is a fragmentary perspective view of a container which is provided with an overhead guide; and

FIG. **21** is a fragmentary perspective view of a container having a modified overhead guide.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring first to FIGS. 1 and 2, there is shown a collapsible container which comprises two elongated upright side walls **20, 21** extending in parallelism with the direction (arrow Z) in which the container travels when placed into an upright confining channel or tunnel **100** so as to rest on and to receive motion from the upper stretch of an endless belt **101** or an analogous conveyor. The top of the container is open so that office files or other commodities can be inserted into the compartment above an apertured bottom wall consisting of several transverse rungs **30**. The container further comprises transversely extending front and rear end walls **28, 29** and a leg **20a** which projects downwardly from and constitutes an extension of the side wall **20**. The bottom face of the leg **20a** engages with the top face of the upper stretch of the conveyor belt **101**.

In accordance with a feature of the invention, the side walls **20, 21** constitute two parallel longitudinal links of a parallel motion mechanism whose transverse links constitute the rungs **30** and end walls **28, 29**. The transverse links **28-30** are articulately connected with the side wall **20** by hinges **24, 25**, shown by way of example in FIG. **1***a* to be integral hinges, each hinge pivoting when necessary through approximately 90° about vertical pivot axes which are normal to the direction (arrow Z) in which the container travels in the channel **100**. The links **28–30** are articulately connected with the side wall **21** by hinges **25** whose pivot axes are parallel to the pivot axes of the hinges **24**. Thus, if the upper stretch of the conveyor belt **101** is horizontal, the axes of the hinges **24, 25** are vertical and these hinges permit the side wall **20** to move from the first position shown in FIG. **1** in which it is located at a maximum distance from the side wall to a second position (arrow X) in which it is immediately adjacent to the side wall **20** and back to the first position (arrow Y). When in the second position, the front portion of the side wall **20** extends forwardly beyond the front portion of the side wall **21**.

Each of the hinges **24, 25** comprises two sets of leaves and a pintle which is normal to the plane of the bottom wall (rungs **30**). When the side wall **20** dwells in the illustrated first position, the walls **20, 21, 28, 29** define a rectangular compartment located above the bottom wall (rungs **30**) and open at its top. The rungs **30** are parallel to each other and to the end walls **28, 29**. These rungs are preferably profiled and their height preferably exceeds their thickness (compare FIGS. **1** and **2**) to thus insure that the bottom wall can properly support a reasonably heavy load.

Since the container receives motion through the intermediary of the narrow strip-shaped leg **20a**, the width of the belt **101** may be considerably less than the width of the channel **100**, as long as the upper stretch of the belt is properly engaged by the leg **20a**. It is clear that a single endless chain suffices to drive the container, and it is equally clear that each of the side walls **20, 21** may be provided with a leg so that the chain (or a narrow belt) can be placed adjacent to either side of the channel **100**.

The container is further provided with collapsing means which tends to reduce its width to a minimum, i.e., such collapsing means tends to move the side wall **20** in the direction indicated by arrow X. The collapsing means includes one or more helical springs **55** (only one shown) which are stressed in the illustrated first position of the side wall **20** and can dissipate energy when the compartment is empty so that the side wall **20** can move toward the side wall **21** or vice versa. FIG. **1** further shows a leaf spring **54** which can be used in addition to or as a substitute for the helical spring **55** and also tends to reduce the distance between the side walls **20, 21**. Other types of resilient collapsing means can be employed with equal advantage. The leaf spring **54** is riveted to the side wall **21** and bears against the rear side of the front end wall **28** to thus tend to pivot the wall **28** in a clockwise direction, as viewed in FIG. **1**. The purpose of the springs **54, 55** is to reduce the width of the container to the extent permitted by the contents resting on the rungs **30** or to a minimum when the compartment is empty.

If desired, one or more of the hinges **24, 25** can be replaced with resilient hinges (as shown at **30***a* and **30***b*) to perform the function of articulately coupling the respective transverse links to the side wall **20** and/or **21** as well as the function of serving as resilient collapsing means.

When the compartment between the walls **20, 21, 28, 29** is loaded with office files or the like, the springs **54, 55** (and the resilient hinges **30a, 30b**) yield to permit movement of the wall **20** in the direction indicated by the arrow Y, i.e., to increase the width of the container.

The hinges **24, 25** between the side walls **20, 21** and the rungs **30** relieve the hinges **24, 25** which connect the side walls with the end walls **28, 29**. Such hinges take up the major part of the weight of commodities on the bottom wall and the spaces between the rungs permit ventilation of the contents. Still further, the hinges for the rungs **30** prevent or reduce the likelihood of twisting of the container. It is clear that office files are but one type of commodities which can be stored and transported in the improved container.

FIGS. **3** and **4** show a modified container wherein the side walls **22, 23** are articulately connected with transverse links including front and rear end walls **35, 36** and pairwise arranged rungs **33** which together form an apertured bottom wall. The leg **34** is articulately connected with the left-hand and right-hand rungs **33** and extends downwardly beyond the side walls to rest on and to engage with a relatively narrow conveyor **101***a*. The leg **34** is an elongated strip which preferably extends to the upper sides of the rungs **33** to permit placing of commodities across the full width of the compartment between the walls **22, 23, 35, 36**. The hinges of the parallel motion are shown at **26** and **27**. The profile of each rung **33** is preferably similar to that of a rung **30**.

It will be seen that the side wall **23** constitutes a common longitudinal link of a composite parallel motion whose other longitudinal link is the side wall **22** or the leg **34** and whose transverse links are the right-hand rungs **33** or the pairs of aligned rungs **33**. Of course, if the container of FIGS. **3** and **4** need not be collapsed into a flat package wherein the side walls **22, 23** are immediately adjacent to each other, the left-hand rungs **33** can be rigidly secured to the side wall **22** and to the leg **34** or the right-hand rungs **33** can be rigidly secured to the side wall **23** and to the leg **34**. Each of the end walls **35, 36** may comprise two sections or panels which are articulately connected to each other and to the leg **34**, as at **37**. However, as a rule, the end walls **35, 36** are rigid panels which are hinged to the side wall **22** (at **26**) and to the side wall **23** (at **27**). The hinges **37** then merely permit pivotal movements of such one-piece end walls with reference to the leg **34** or vice versa. The leg **34** preferably extends along the full length of the container and can but need not receive motion from a relatively narrow chain, belt **101a** or a like conveyor. Since the leg **34** is disposed between the pairs of rungs **33**, it is equidistant from the side walls **22, 23**, at least when these side walls are held at a maximum distance from each other. This prevents unintentional deformation of the container and/or accidental tilting of the leg **34** in response to uneven distribution of load in the compartment above the bottom wall.

FIGS. **5** to **8** illustrate a third container which includes a frame **40** located in a vertical plane midway between the side walls **47, 48**. The upper longitudinal member **40***a* of this frame constitutes a handle and the lower longitudinal member **40***b* of the frame constitutes a leg which can rest on and move with the upper stretch of a belt or chain, not shown. The leg **40***b* extends downwardly beyond the bottom wall **41** of the container whose upper side is open and which further comprises front and rear end walls each including two relatively movable panels or sections **43, 44**. The panels **44** are hinged, as at **46**, to the side wall **48** and to the front or rear upright member **40***d* or **40***c* of the frame **40**, as at **42**. The panels **43** are hinged, as at **45**, to the side wall **47** and to the front or rear member **40***d* or **40***c* of the frame **40**, as at **42**. Thus, the side walls **47, 48** can be moved nearer to or away from the frame **40** independently of each other.

The bottom wall **41** of the container shown in FIGS. **5–8** is assembled of pairs of inverted U-shaped transverse links or rungs **49**. The downwardly extending portions of such rungs are received in sockets **50** provided therefor in female receptacles **51** fixed to the side walls **47, 48** and to a longitudinally extending connector **52**. The arrangement is preferably such that the downwardly extending portions of the rungs **49** are held against axial (vertical) movement in the respective sockets **50**. In the illustrated embodiment, the connector **52** is located at a level above and is separated from the leg **40***b* by a relatively narrow clearance **53** indicated in FIG. **5**. The longitudinal ends of the connector **52** are secured to the frame members **40***c*, **40***d*. It is clear, however, that the connector **52** may form an integral part of the leg **40***b*.

Whereas the resilient elements **30***a*, **30***b*, **54, 55** of FIGS. **1** and **2** tend to collapse the container so that the latter has a width which is determined by the bulk of the contents, the container can be furnished with one or more locking or retaining devices which hold the side walls at a desired distance from each other, preferably at a maximum distance. One such locking device in the form of an L-shaped or V-shaped corner bracket **56** is illustrated in FIG. **9**. It comprises two channeled portions which can receive the adjacent upper edge portions of two container walls **57, 58** meeting along the corner **59**. For example, the wall **57** may constitute a side wall and the wall **58** may constitute an end wall of the container. The corner bracket **56** is readily detachable and, when held in the illustrated position, prevents collapsing of the container under the action of resilient collapsing means by maintaining the walls **57, 58** in positions in which they make an angle of less than 180°, preferably an angle of 90° corresponding to the maximum width of the container. The purpose of the corner bracket **56** is to prevent collapse of the container during introduction or evacuation of commodities, i.e., the person in charge need not hold the walls **58, 57** against pivotal movement and has both of his or her hands free for insertion or removal of commodities.

The container can be furnished with other types of locking devices in addition to or as a substitute for the corner bracket **56**. For example, the supporting leg **20***a* of FIG. **2** can be provided with a pivotable brace which can be separably coupled to the side wall **21** in the fully extended position of the container. When the container is collapsed, the brace extends in parallelism with the leg **20***a*. Moreover, such brace can be biased by one or more springs so that it pivots in response to movement of the side wall **20** away from the side wall **21** and automatically but releasably locks the side walls **20, 21** at a maximum distance from each other.

FIG. **10** illustrates a portion of a collapsible container whose leg **61** is disposed centrally between the side walls **60***a*, **60***b* and whose lower portion is surrounded by a detachable U-shaped shoe or runner **60** preferably consisting of rubber or like friction generating material which engages the top face of the conveyor (not shown) to prevent slippage between the conveyor and the container. The shoe **60** can be held on the leg **61** merely by friction or is otherwise detachably attached thereto to permit convenient replacement after extended wear. Also, the bottom face of the leg **61** may be provided with protuberances and notches (such as teeth and tooth spaces) and the upper side of the web of the shoe **60** may have a configuration which is complementary to configuration of the bottom face to insure that the shoe cannot be moved lengthwise of the leg **61** when the container is to share the movements of a band, chain or like conveyor. The material of the shoe **60** is preferably sufficiently rigid to enable the operator to mount it on the leg **61** in a predetermined optimum position.

FIG. **11** illustrates a portion of a further container having a modified leg **62** whose bottom face is provided with serrations including teeth **63** and notches or tooth spaces **63***a*. The teeth **63** rest directly on the upper stretch of a travelling belt to insure satisfactory traction without slippage. The tips of the teeth subject the adjacent portions of the belt to substantially localized stresses.

The leg **162** of the container shown in FIG. **12** is formed with a flat bottom face having therein equidistant or randomly distributed concave notches **64**. The facets **64***a* between the notches **64** bear against the belt **104** and subject the adjacent portions of the belt to necessary stresses to insure transport of the container without slippage. Such slippage is fully eliminated if the belt **104** is provided with transversely extending entraining ribs **105** which enter the notches **64**. The belt for the container of FIG. **11** can also be provided with protuberances in the form of teeth which enter the tooth spaces **63a** to prevent slippage of the leg **62**.

FIGS. **13** and **14** illustrate a portion of a container **65** having a longitudinally extending centrally located leg **66** which is analogous to the leg **62** of FIG. **12** and cooperates with a beaded conveyor **68** in the form of a wire or cable. The beads **69** are spheres which are mounted at a predetermined distance from each other and the bottom face of the leg **66** is surrounded by a shoe **67** having notches bounded by front and rear flanks **67b** which straddle the adjacent bead **69** and thus insure slippage-free transport of the container **65** when the conveyor **68** is set in motion. The shoe **67** is further formed with a longitudinally extending groove **67a** for the conveyor **68**. The latter can be replaced with a chain whose pintles are receivable in the notches of the shoe **67**. Also, the spherical beads **69** can be replaced by rollers or the like.

The shoe **67** can be replaced with a shoe having different notches for reception of roller-shaped or otherwise configurated beads on the conveyor. Thus, the container **65** can be transported by two or more different conveyors merely by providing its leg **66** with a shoe having a configuration complementary to that of the particular conveyor.

Referring to FIG. **15**, there is shown a container **71** having a leg composed of two portions **70***a*, **70***b* which are respectively adjacent to the front and rear end walls. Such construction of the leg is desirable if the side walls of the container consist of flexible material. The portions **70***a*, **70***b* may be rigid or slightly flexible as long as they insure satisfactory motion receiving connection with the conveyor.

A modification of the just described leg is shown in FIG. **16** wherein the leg **72** (shown in plan view) comprises relatively rigid portions alternating with relatively weak portions **72***a*, **72***b*, **72***c* having pairs of aligned vertical notches which allow the leg to flex to thus insure that the leg will undergo deformation in response to deformation of the side walls, not shown.

The container of FIG. **17** comprises two side walls **75, 76** and a centrally located elongated leg **73** whose end portions extend beyond the front and rear ends of the side walls. Such leg insures that the side walls of successive containers which are placed into a channel end-to-end cannot be moved to less than a predetermined minimal distance from each other. The transverse links **74** of the container are analogous to the links **33** shown in FIG. **3**. The end portions of the leg **73** can be provided with dished or otherwise configurated bumpers or shock absorbers.

The container **77** of FIG. **18** comprises two side walls **77***c* and front and rear end walls **77***a*, **77***b*. At least one side wall **77***c* extends beyond the end walls **77***a*, **77***b* and its end portions are provided with notches **78***a*, **78***b* which are preferably located at the same level and can be engaged by lifting elements, such as the prongs or beads of an automatic flexible lifting device serving to raise a container **77** from the channel or to lower the container onto the conveyor at the lower end of the channel. The end portions of the side wall **77***c* shown in FIG. **18** further serve the purpose of the end portions of the leg **73** shown in FIG. **17**, i.e., they act not unlike bumpers or distancing means to hold adjoining containers at a predetermined minimum distance from each other.

FIG. **19** illustrates three different types of side walls **79, 80, 81** which can be used in the container of the present invention. The outer side of the wall **79** is provided with a contact carrying strip or bar **82** of rectangular outline. This strip can carry the contacts of an electric circuit serving to effect movements of the container in accordance with a predetermined program. The outer side of the wall **80** carries a strip **83** of

dovetailed profile; this strip can carry contacts or analogous components which can be shifted lengthwise to desired positions. The outer side of the wall **81** is provided with a dovetailed groove **84** which can receive electric contacts or the like, for example, in such a way that the contacts need not extend beyond the outer side of the wall **81**.

In certain instances, the nature of conveyed commodities is such that the container should or must be held in an upright position even if its width is less than the width of the channel or tunnel. FIG. **20** shows a container which is provided with a centrally located leg **85** and with a strip shaped guide member **86** which extends upwardly beyond the open top of the container and may constitute an integral extension of the side wall **87**. This guide member **86** can extend into a narrow groove or the like to insure that the container is held in upright position. FIG. **21** shows a further container wherein the guide member **88** extends across the open top and is disposed midway between the side walls **89**, **90**. Referring again to FIGS. **5–8**, the handle **40***a* of the frame **40** can serve as a means for facilitating lifting or lowering of the container as well as a guide to hold the container in upright position.

The walls, legs, handles, frames, rungs and/or certain other parts of the improved collapsible container may consist of rigid or at least slightly flexible synthetic plastic plate, sheet or foil material, but it is also possible to make such parts of metal or wood. If the parts consist of synthetic plastic material, the side walls can be welded to the run gs and/or to the end walls in such a way that the resulting connections form the aforementioned hinges. For instance, the hinges **30**a, **30**b of FIG. **1** can be welded to the side walls **20**, **21**.

An advantage of the improved container is that it can be collapsed to occupy little room in storage and/or during transport to or from the locale of use. Also, the container can serve for storage of commodities while its side walls are held at a maximum or any desired intermediate distance from each other. Still further, the maximum width of the container is determined in advance and the container can be entrained by narrow or wide conveyors. In many presently known conveyor systems, the container is properly entrained only if the entire bottom wall rests on the conveyor. Therefore, the width of the conveyor in such conventional systems must at least equal the width of the container.

Without further analysis, the foregoing will so fully reveal the gist of the present invention that others can, by applying current knowledge, readily adapt it for various applications without omitting features which fairly constitute essential characteristics of the generic and specific aspects of our contribution to the art and, therefore, such adaptations should and are intended to be comprehended within the meaning and range of equivalence of the claims.

What is claimed as new and desired to be protected by Letters Patent is set forth in the appended

1. A collapsible container, particularly for the transport of commodities in conveyor systems wherein the containers travel in a predetermined direction in an elongated upright confining channel while receiving motion from a conveyor travelling along the lower end of such channel, comprising at least a first and a second upright side wall substantially parallel to said direction; transverse links connecting said side walls in the region of the bottom thereof, and together constituting a bottom wall serving to support the commodity being conveyed, said links being hingeably connected to said side walls permitting changes in the width and the transverse collapse of said container in a sense bringing said parallel side walls closer together; and at least one conveyor-engaging leg extending downwardly beyond said side walls and said transverse links.

2. A container as defined in claim **1**, wherein said transverse links are pivotable about respective pivot axes through substantially **90** degrees between first and second positions in which said first side wall is respectively nearest to and remotest from said second side wall.

3. A container as defined in claim **1**, further comprising collapsing means arranged to urge said first side wall toward said second side wall.

4. A container as defined in claim **3**, wherein said collapsing means comprises at least one resilient element.

5. A container as defined in claim **1**, wherein said first side wall is movable between a plurality of positions including a position at a maximum distance from said second side wall, and further comprising locking means for releasably holding said first side wall in at least one of said positions.

6. A container as defined in claim **5**, wherein at least one of said transverse links includes an edge portion making with the adjacent portion of one of said side walls an angle of less than **180** degrees when said first side wall assumes said one position, said locking means comprising a corner bracket arranged to engage and hold said portions in said one position of said first side wall.

7. A container as defined in claim **1**, wherein one of said transverse links constitutes the front end wall and another transverse link constitutes the rear end wall of the container.

8. A container as defined in claim **1**, wherein said leg constitutes a downward extension of one of said side walls.

9. A container as defined in claim **8**, wherein said leg constitutes a downward extension of said first side wall and wherein said first side wall projects forwardly beyond said second side wall in response to movement toward said second side wall.

10. A container as defined in claim **1**, wherein at least some of said transverse links constitute an apertured bottom wall on which the commodities rest during transport with the container and wherein said leg is disposed intermediate said side walls beneath said bottom wall.

11. A container as defined in claim **1**, wherein said leg extends lengthwise in said direction and includes relatively stiff portions and relatively weak flexible portions alternating with said stiff portions.

12. A container as defined in claim **1**, wherein said leg has an uneven conveyor-engaging bottom face.

13. A container as defined in claim **12** for use in conveyor systems including a conveyor having an uneven upper face, wherein the bottom face of said leg is complementary to the upper face of the conveyor so that the latter entrains the container when said bottom face rests on said upper face.

14. A container as defined in claim **1**, wherein said leg includes at least one detachable conveyor-engaging portion.

15. A container as defined in claim **14**, wherein said portion is an elastic shoe consisting of friction generating material.

16. A container as defined in claim **1**, wherein two of said transverse links respectively constitute the front and rear end walls of the container; and further comprising at least one projection extending beyond one of said end walls.

17. A container as defined in claim **16**, wherein said projection is provided with at least one notch to facilitate lifting of the container from the channel by means of a lifting mechanism.

18. A container as defined in claim **1**, wherein two of said transverse links respectively constitute the front and rear end walls of the container and wherein at least one of said side walls extends beyond at least one of said end walls.

19. A container as defined in claim **1**, further comprising front and rear end walls and at least one conveyor-engaging leg extending downwardly beyond said side walls, said leg further extending beyond at least one of said end walls.

20. A container as defined in claim **1**, further comprising at least one guide member extending upwardly beyond said side walls.

21. A container as defined in claim **1**, wherein said side walls are composed of a first material and said conveyor-engaging leg is composed of a second material, and wherein at least one of said first and second materials is flexible.

22. A container as defined in claim **1**, wherein two of said transverse links respectively constitute the front and rear end walls of the container and define with said side walls a compartment of substantially rectangular outline at least when said first side wall is maintained at a maximum distance from said second side wall.

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