

## Introduction

---

In the early days of the automobile industry, there was not much concern for safety by the auto companies or the consumers. There were a few attempts by the American Automobile Association and the National Association of Automobile Manufacturers that called for speed regulations, but the Congress was not concerned or interested. It was up to the states to impose regulations on the industry, and they did a poor job. As a result of this, there was high mortality in car accidents, and the problem of safety in driving and manufacture became more public as years passed. A few organizations sprang up in the 1940's and 50's such as the Automotive Safety Foundation and the National Safety Council that begged drivers to slow down and states to improve roads.

The auto companies started to take safety seriously at the prospect of federal regulations that would take away some of their control. Many of the companies started research on new safety features, or organized a department of safety.

Ford Motor Company did both of those things. In March of 1954, Fletcher Platt was pulled from the product planning committee to manage a brand new Department of Traffic Safety and Highway Improvement. In his department, he dealt with outside safety groups and pushed the engineers to design workable, cost effective safety features. He believed in his work, and wanted Ford to be the first to have factory installed seatbelts. He collected a great deal of information and statistics on auto accidents, and used them to make people understand the seriousness of the highway safety.

In 1956, Ford Motor Company published a book on the conditions of the highway system and driver safety, called Freedom of the American Road. It received national attention, and complimentary copies were sent to any private citizen or organization that requested one. Also, every Ford dealer in the country was asked to supply ten names to receive copies with no request necessary. This publication obviously came out of the safety movement, and Platt's department was responsible for the distribution of it.

When accessioned from Public Relations, this collection contained Platt's files and all the correspondence regarding free copies of the book. It is not clear what the fate of the Department of Traffic Safety and Highway Improvement was, or how Public Relations got possession of this material.

Scope and Content Notes

---

This collection is made up of two series. The first is letters regarding the Freedom of the American Road. Originally there were two boxes of requests for the book from citizens and organizations, and two boxes of Ford dealers' suggestions of customers to receive the book. There were also two boxes of thank-you notes for the complimentary copy. This series is a representative sample of those letters. The folder of introductory letters contains one sample letter from Henry Ford II, and one from Fletcher Platt introducing the book and offering a complimentary copy. The folder labeled "dealer suggestions" includes 20 examples of the forms the dealers sent into the company with their suggestions of people to receive complimentary copies. In the "requests" and "thank-you" folders, there are 20 examples each of the requests and thank-you's for copies of the books. These came from a large variety of people and places, such as; doctors, clergymen, engineers, politicians, libraries, temperance groups, Chambers of Commerce, and the Attorney General's Office. The letters are arranged with unique and most interesting examples towards the front of the folder.

Of special interest are the two letters in the front of the Thank-you folder, which reflect the racial problems of the time.

The second series contains files from Fletcher Platt's office of the Traffic Safety and Highway Improvement Department. This includes correspondence with many organizations such as universities, the National Safety Council, the Good Roads Federation, the National Highway Users Conference, and insurance companies that provided Platt with information. There is also a great deal of inter-company communications, and one folder of clippings and brochures on safety and the organizations with which Platt worked.

Box #      Description

---

Box 1      Freedom of the American Road Letters

Introductory Letters - 1 folder  
Dealer Suggestions - 1 folder  
Requests for Book - 1 folder  
Thank-you letters - 1 folder

Fletcher Platt Office Files

Ford Motor Company - 1 folder  
Ford Division - 1 folder  
Lincoln/Mercury Division - 1 folder  
Company Communication - 1 folder  
G.L. Lynch - 1 folder  
Industrial Relations - 1 folder  
Finance - 1 folder  
Sales & Advertisin - 1 folder  
Engineering - 1 folder  
General Counsel - 1 folder  
Public Relations - 1 folder  
Civic Affairs - 1 folder  
Washington Office - 1 folder  
Dealers - 1 folder  
Associations - 1 folder

Box 2

Governments - 1 folder  
Individuals - 1 folder  
Companies - 1 folder  
Automobile Safety Foundation  
Good Road Federation - 1 folder  
National Highway Users Conference - 1 folder  
Inter-Industry - 1 folder  
National Safety Council - 1 folder

Box 3

Project Adequate Roads - 1 folder  
Insurance - 1 folder  
Colleges - 1 folder  
Technical - 1 folder  
Misc. Correspondence - 1 folder  
Clippings & Booklets - 1 folder