



Finding Aid for

JOHN TJAARDA PAPERS, 1916-1962

Accession 1714

Finding Aid Published: March 2011



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OVERVIEW

REPOSITORY: Benson Ford Research Center
The Henry Ford
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ACCESSION NUMBER: 1714

CREATOR: Tjaarda, John, 1897-1962

TITLE: John Tjaarda papers

INCLUSIVE DATES: 1916-1962

BULK DATES: 1940-1958

QUANTITY: 0.8 cubic ft. and 1 oversize box.

LANGUAGE: The materials are in English.

ABSTRACT: The John Tjaarda papers include general and legal correspondence, clippings, photographs and a sketch book of designs. The bulk of the papers cover Tjaarda's work at Briggs Manufacturing Company and subsequent legal claims against Briggs and Chrysler Corporation over ownership of designs and patents.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

- ACCESS RESTRICTIONS:** The papers are open for research.
- COPYRIGHT:** Copyright has been transferred to the Henry Ford by the donor. Copyright for some items in the collection may still be held by their respective creator(s).
- ACQUISITION:** John Tjaarda's personal papers were donated to the Archives in 1987 by the Tjaarda family.
- RELATED MATERIAL:** Related collections within The Henry Ford:
- See the Automotive Design Drawing collection
- Related collections beyond The Henry Ford:
- An additional John Tjaarda Collection can be found at the Detroit Public Library, National Automotive History Department.
- PREFERRED CITATION:** Item, folder, box, accession 1714, John Tjaarda papers, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford
- DESCRIPTION INFORMATION:** The finding aid was originally published in April 1988 by staff of the Benson Ford Research Center. The hardcopy paper finding aid was scanned, converted to MS Word electronic format, and republished by Brian Wilson in March 2011.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

John Tjaarda, design engineer who influenced the automobile industry with his advanced, styling and engineering, was born 4 February 1897 in Arnheim, The Netherlands. After graduation from the Alexander Klemens School of Aeronautics in London, he joined the Royal Dutch Air Force.

In 1923 Tjaarda emigrated to the United States, obtained employment as a design assistant with Locke & Co. of Rochester, N.Y., an automobile manufacturer of bodies for Stutz, Pierce Arrow and Packard. During this time, he designed and built a prototype of a small, rear-engine automobile, the Sterkenburg, named after his family's home in the Netherlands.

Impressed by his design ability, Walter O. Briggs, in 1932, hired Tjaarda to work in, and eventually head the design engineering division of the Briggs Manufacturing Company, of which the LeBaron division was a custom body subsidiary designing bodies for Ford, Packard and Chrysler. Tjaarda, encouraged by Edsel Ford, produced a full-size, fully detailed wood frame mockup of a rear-engine automobile. It was included in the 1933 Ford Exhibition of Progress in Detroit and in the Ford exhibit at the 1934 Chicago World's Fair, A Century of Progress. This prototype was the basis for Tjaarda's most notable design, the 1936 Lincoln-Zephyr.

In 1941, a patent disagreement between Tjaarda and the officers of Briggs developed and Tjaarda's employment was abruptly terminated. Many years of legal battles followed. In 1942, Tjaarda organized his own design firm, John Tjaarda and Associates. Again, he attempted to design, finance and manufacture his own automobile, the Cortez. Due to lack of financing, he was not successful. Then, in 1961, pursuing an interest in solid state rocketry, he joined the Aerojet-General Corporation, Sacramento, CA as a technical adviser. His colorful life came to an end in 1962.

John Tjaarda's advanced work on unit-body construction and rear engine automobiles were important contributions to automotive design. His work had simplicity, refined design, and lightweight structural strength.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection contains legal correspondence, patent correspondence, general correspondence, newspaper/periodical articles, photographs, and a sketchbook. The majority of the correspondence concerns Tjaarda's legal battles with Briggs Manufacturing Company and Chrysler Corporation.

ARRANGEMENT

The materials are arranged alphabetically by subject, and then chronologically.

SUBJECT TERMS

Names

Tjaarda, John, 1897-1962.
Briggs Manufacturing Company.
Ford Motor Company.
John Tjaarda and Associates.

Subjects

Automobile industry and trade
Automobiles -- Design and construction
Drafting and industrial drawings.
Industrial designers
Lincoln automobile
Patent suits

Genre and Form

Photographs.
Design drawings.

BOX AND FOLDER LISTING

Box no. **Description**

BOX 1

Briggs Manufacturing Company
 Aspin Engine, 1940-1941
 Invoices, 1941
Briggs Patents Controversy
 Attorneys Gray and Joselyn, 1951
 Briggs, W.O., Correspondence, 1951
 Briggs-Chrysler Suit, 1951-1953
 Briggs-Chrysler Suit, 1954 (Folder 1 of 2)
 Briggs-Chrysler Suit, 1954 (Folder 2 of 2)
 Briggs-Chrysler Suit, 1955, 1957, 1958
 Reference Data, 1933-1941
 Reference Data, 1948-1949
 Reference Data, 1951-1955
 Reference Data, undated
Briggs Termination
 Correspondence, 1941 (Folder 1 of 3)
 Correspondence, 1941 (Folder 2 of 3)
 Correspondence, 1941 (Folder 3 of 3)
Clippings
 Auto Design, 1939, 1954, 1956, 1958
 Briggs Mfg. Co., 1936, 1938-1939, 1941, 1948
 John Tjaarda, 1943, 1945-1947, 1954, 1961-1962, 1968, 1971-1973, 1987
Correspondence
 Miscellaneous, 1942-1943
 Miscellaneous, 1943-1944, 1949-1950
 Miscellaneous, 1951, 1956-1958
 Miscellaneous, 1961-1962

BOX 2

Design
 John Tjaarda and Associates, 1944-1946
 Post War Automobiles, circa 1944
 Product Ideas, 1942-1943, 1953, 1955-1956, 1960-1961
 Rear Engine Cars, 1931, 1933, 1935-1938, 1959
 Sterkenburg Motor Car, 1926
Drafts; Speeches and Articles, undated
Patent Application; 1943
Patents
 Registered Mail, 1941-1944
 Registered Mail, 1944-1945
 Registered Mail, 1946, 1951, 1955, 1956
Periodicals; 1916, 1934

BOX AND FOLDER LISTING

Box no. **Description**

BOX 2 continued:

Photographs

Di-Noc Company, 1955

J. Tjaarda & Associates

Album 1-10, circa 1943

Album 11-20, circa 1943

Album 21-30, circa 1943

Album 31-40, circa 1943

Album 41-50, circa 1943

J. Tjaarda and Harry Bennett, circa 1945

J. Tjaarda, informals, 1945, 1959

J. Tjaarda, portraits, circa 1935, 1945

Negatives, undated

Photomechanical Print; Lincoln-Mercury Rally, circa 1960

Research Papers; Controlled Combustion Engine, 1942, 1944

Research Papers; Controlled Combustion Engine, 1945, 1950

Sketch; "Mr. Moore"

BOX 3 (Oversize, Size C)

Drawings; 1911, 1936, 1942, 1956