



Record Group Structure for

**EDSEL B. FORD OFFICE PAPERS,
1903-1945 (bulk 1920-1940)**

Catalog Number RG 001

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OVERVIEW

REPOSITORY: Benson Ford Research Center
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CATALOG NUMBER: RG 001

CREATOR: Ford, Edsel, 1893-1943

TITLE: Edsel B. Ford Office papers

INCLUSIVE DATES: 1903-1945

BULK DATES 1920-1940

QUANTITY: 143.2 cubic ft. and 2 oversize boxes
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LANGUAGE: The materials are in English.

ABSTRACT: This document presents an overview of the Edsel B. Ford Office papers record group. A record group is an assemblage of accessions that were created by the same person(s) or organization(s). The separate accessions comprising the collection have their own finding aids, which contain more detailed description of the material.

Finding aids can be accessed through the Benson Ford Research Center online catalog at:
<http://www.dalnet.lib.mi.us/henryford>

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

- ACCESS RESTRICTIONS:** The collection is open for research. Original audio or visual materials are not available for use. Digital copies are available for use in the reading room.
- 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:** The bulk of the papers were donated by the Ford Motor Company Archives in 1964
- PREFERRED CITATION:** Catalog number RG 001, Edsel B. Ford Office papers, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford
- Note: when citing material from the individual accessions use the preferred citation found in the accession finding aid.
- PROCESSING INFORMATION:** See individual accession finding aids for processing information.
- DESCRIPTION INFORMATION:** Finding aid written by staff of the Benson Ford Research Center. Last revised March 25, 2011. Reformatted and published January 2012.
- Finding aid prepared using Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACCS) and local guidelines.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Edsel Ford

Edsel Bryant Ford was born November 6, 1893 in Detroit, Michigan, the only child of Henry and Clara Bryant Ford. Educated in public schools and the Detroit University School, he was persuaded by his father upon graduation from high school in 1912 to assume responsibilities at the Ford Motor Company's new Highland Park Plant rather than going on to college. When Henry decided to build tractors as well as automobiles in 1917, he formed a new corporation, Henry Ford & Son, Inc. and began to produce the Fordson tractor in a Dearborn factory. Edsel was, however, already handling major responsibilities beyond tractors within the Ford organization. He was elected secretary of the company on November 1, 1915, and vice-president as well as secretary on January 18, 1917. On December 30, 1918, when Henry Ford resigned as president of Ford Motor Company, Edsel was named president effective January 1, 1919, a position he would hold for the rest of his life. He was also appointed treasurer in 1921. Particularly adept in planning, sales, and advertising, Edsel assumed responsibility for the business side of corporate affairs, overseeing, for example, the company's massive expansion from 1919 to 1925. He also presided over the branch and marketing relationships of the company and over all foreign developments. In addition to the functional aspects, Edsel believed an automobile could be beautiful. After the company purchased Lincoln Motor Company in 1921, he took charge of Lincoln design and marketed Lincolns with customized coachwork by leading American and European designers. He introduced and was instrumental in the design of the Model A in 1929, the Lincoln Zephyr in 1936, the Mercury in 1938, and the Lincoln Continental in 1940. His vision for the Ford Motor Company included attention to design, production, and sales, combining the beauty of custom design with the low cost of production.

Edsel had a lifelong enthusiasm for aviation and was a major sponsor of Admiral Richard E. Byrd's flights over the South Pole in 1919 and the North Pole in 1926. After the Stout Metal Airplane Company was absorbed by the Ford Motor Company in 1925, he encouraged the design of a trimotor airplane and fostered an annual Air Reliability Tour to promote dependable flying. Edsel also encouraged Ford Motor Company's participation in major events such as the World's Fairs of the 1930s.

Edsel Ford married Eleanor Lowthian Clay on November 1, 1916. They had four children: Henry Ford II, 1917-1987 (who became president of Ford Motor Company in 1943 after the death of his father); Benson Ford, 1919-1978; Josephine Clay Ford, 1923-2005; and William Clay Ford, 1925-. Eleanor and Edsel Ford were generous benefactors to a number of organizations. Among them were the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Detroit Institute of Art (Edsel served as president of the Arts Commission), Museum of Modern Art, Detroit University School (Edsel was chairman of the board), the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, Inc., and the Isle Royal National Park Commission. In 1932, Edsel brought Mexican painter Diego Rivera to Detroit to create a fresco in the fountain court of the Detroit Institute of Art. Rivera considered the *Detroit Industry* fresco cycle the most successful work of his career. In addition, Edsel was active in Ford Motor Company educational and charitable enterprises, including the Edison Institute

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE continued:

(now The Henry Ford), Henry Ford Hospital, and Henry Ford Trade School. Other interests included boating, aviation, photography, painting, and golf.

Other individuals

In 1918, while Edsel B. Ford was secretary of the Ford Motor Company, A. J. (Alfred Joseph) Lepine began to do some of his clerical, stenographic, and phone work. Later that same year, Lepine was designated secretary to Edsel Ford. He served in this capacity throughout Edsel's career and presidency, staying on with the company for nine years after Edsel's untimely death in 1943 to manage matters relating to the estate. The papers include some of these later records.

Others who worked in Edsel Ford's office included A. A. Backus, hired in 1923, who eventually took over bookkeeping and overall management when Lepine was out of the office; Floyd Carns, hired in 1924, who handled bookkeeping details; Hazen Behrens, hired in 1926, and Fred Chilton, hired in 1935, who both served as stenographers; and J. C. Gibbs, hired in 1937, who assumed various duties including accounting and tax work and stayed on to work for Henry Ford II.

HISTORICAL NOTE

In 1916, Ford Motor Company operated twenty-eight producing branch factories in the United States. A sweeping modernization of old buildings and major construction of a number of new factories was undertaken between 1919 and 1925; by 1925 the company had thirty-six branch factories. The control of the branches, both in manufacturing and selling was centered in Detroit. A line of relationship was clearly drawn from dealer to roadman to branch head to Edsel Ford in Detroit.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Edsel B. Ford Office papers are comprised of eight series covering the years 1903-1945: the Correspondence series, Subject File series, Financial Records series, Personal Files series, Reports series, Edsel Ford Automotive Scrapbook series, Audio Speeches series, and the Desk Contents series. Researchers should note there is much overlap in subject matter among most of the series.

There are summary records for each series in the Benson Ford Research Center online library catalog, and if a finding aid exists in electronic format, a link is provided in the catalog record. Use the following link to access the catalog:

<http://www.dalnet.lib.mi.us/henryford>

The **General Correspondence subseries**, 1919-1942 (69.6 cubic ft.), Accession 6, is the largest and most substantial. It is comprised of correspondence between the office of Edsel B. Ford and a wide range of companies and individuals. The Answered by Form Letter subseries, 1933-1936 (0.8 cubic ft.), is correspondence managed by Lepine and other staff on behalf of Edsel Ford, utilizing repeatable text. The Motor Files subseries, 1931-1945 (2 cubic ft.), is comprised of correspondence and agreements between the Office of the President, Ford Motor Company, and various educational institutions. The Telegrams subseries, 1923-1942 (1.6 cubic ft.), consists of outgoing telegrams and cablegrams from the office of Edsel B. Ford, arranged chronologically

The **Subject Files series**, 1921-1942 (30.8 cubic ft.), Accession 6, is comprised of Edsel Ford office correspondence with individuals and companies arranged alphabetically by subject. In some cases where the files are large, subject headings were further subdivided. Included among the topics are names of companies and organizations in which Edsel Ford had an active interest. Of particular note are reports and correspondence sent to Edsel Ford from branches, both foreign and domestic, as well as reports and correspondence regarding Ford Motor Company of Canada and Ford Motor Company, Ltd. and associated companies. Other Ford related topics include special deliveries of Ford automobiles; Ford sponsored radio programs; Ford World War II activities; Ford participation in fairs and exhibitions; and Edsel Ford speeches. Edsel Ford's many community and philanthropic involvements are also well documented. Researchers should note that there is overlap with the Personal Files series and the General Correspondence series where documents on many of the same subjects can also be found.

The **Financial records series** is comprised of six subseries. The Edsel Ford Audit Papers subseries, 1941-1942 (0.4 cubic ft.), Accession 543, consists of working papers and summary sheets for audits of Edsel Ford's office for 1941 by the Auditing Department of the Ford Motor Company. The Ford Motor Company Ltd. records subseries, 1929-1935 (1.2 cubic ft.), Accession 261, consists of financial ledgers and consolidated balance sheets with related reports and correspondence. The National Recovery Administration records subseries 1933-1937 (5.6 cubic ft.), Accession 52 and Accession 279 is comprised of correspondence, reports, literature, and federal government information relating to the National Recovery Administration (NRA). The Office of the Treasurer

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE continued:

records subseries, 1903-1932 (1.2 cubic ft.), Accession 483, includes comparative balance sheets for the Ford Motor Company from 1903 to 1915; notes receivable for 1908 to 1932; plant engineering contracts and agreements for Ford Motor Company Highland Park Plant, the Ford Motor Company Rouge River Plant and a Ford plant in Atlanta, Georgia; and miscellaneous legal records. The Purchase Orders subseries, 1922-1940 (1.6 cubic ft.), Accession 6, contains copies of purchase orders issued by the office of Edsel Ford. The Universal Credit Corporation records subseries, 1928-1932 (1.2 cubic ft.), Accession 6, includes certificates of incorporation, bylaws, stockholders meeting minutes, and board of director meeting minutes for Universal Credit Corporation, Delaware; Universal Credit Company of America; Universal Credit Company of Indiana; and Universal Credit Company of New York.

The **Personal Files series** is comprised of three subseries. The first and most substantial, General Personal Files subseries, 1927-1944 (14.4 cubic ft.), Accession 6, consists of correspondence regarding company matters personally handled by Edsel Ford and activities of special interest to him. The Edison Institute Construction records subseries, 1929 (8.8 cubic ft.), Accession 6, consists of architect and contractor records, cost certificates, and invoices relating to the Edison Institute (now The Henry Ford) in the year in which it was dedicated. The President's Birthday Ball Treasurer's Records subseries, 1935-1940 (2 cubic ft.), Accession 6, are records compiled during the period when Edsel Ford served as treasurer of the Detroit Committee for the National Committee for Birthday Balls, which was sponsored by the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis and held annually on January 30th, Franklin D. Roosevelt's birthday.

The **Reports series** contains two subseries: the Territory Reports subseries, 1921-1927 (1.2 cubic ft.), Accession 6, and the Special Files and Reports subseries, 1917-1936 (0.4 cubic ft.), Accession 6.

The **Edsel Ford Automotive Scrapbook series** pages hold magazine and catalog clippings of fine cars (mostly European), illustrations and snapshots of English custom bodies on the Model T chassis, and pictures of early racing cars. Most of the first entries are from about 1913, when Edsel was age 19 or 20. In 1919, when he became president of Ford Motor Company, additions to the scrapbook taper off.

The **Audio speeches series** is comprised of ten 78 RPM phonograph records and fourteen CD-Rs. Speeches on the phonograph records were recorded on compact discs for research use.

The **Desk Contents series** contains memorabilia found in Edsel Ford's desk and office. Included are two baseballs signed by Ty Cobb, a booklet of newspaper clippings about Edsel Ford and Admiral Richard Byrd, tokens and mementos, and miscellaneous desk items.

ARRANGEMENT

The papers are arranged into eight series:

- 1) Correspondence series (Accession 6)
 - General Correspondence subseries, 1919-1942
 - Answered by Form Letter subseries
 - Motor File subseries, 1931-1945
 - 1945 Correspondence subseries, 1945
 - Telegrams subseries, 1923-1942
 - Miscellaneous subseries, 1925-1945

Link to finding aid for Accession 6 in pdf format (note that this finding aid contains all series in Accession 6, not only the Correspondence series):
http://www.dalnet.lib.mi.us/henryford/docs/EdselBFordOfficePapers_Accession6.pdf

- 2) Subject File series, 1921-1942 (Accession 6)

- 3) Financial records series

Edsel Ford Audit papers subseries, 1941-1942 (Accession 543)

Link to finding aid for Accession 543 in pdf format:

http://www.dalnet.lib.mi.us/henryford/docs/EdselFordAuditPapersSubseries_Accession543.pdf

Ford Motor Co. Ltd. records subseries, 1929-1935 (Accession 261)

Link to finding aid for Accession 261 in pdf format:

http://www.dalnet.lib.mi.us/henryford/docs/FordMotorCompanyLtdRecordsSubseries_Accession261.pdf

National Recovery Administration records subseries, 1933-1937, (SE 001, contains Accession 52 and Accession 279)

Link to finding aid for SE 001 in pdf format:

http://www.dalnet.lib.mi.us/henryford/docs/NationalRecoveryAdministrationRecordsSubseries_AccessionSE001.pdf

Office of Treasurer records subseries, 1903-1932 (Accession 483)

Link to finding aid for Accession 483 in pdf format:

http://www.dalnet.lib.mi.us/henryford/docs/OfficeOfTheTreasurerRecordsSubseries_Accession483.pdf

Purchase Orders subseries, 1922-1940 (Accession 6)

Universal Credit Corp. records subseries, 1928-1932, (Accession 6)

- 4) Personal Files series (Accession 6)

General Personal Files subseries, 1927-1944

Edison Institute Construction records subseries, 1929

President's Birthday Ball records subseries, 1935-1940

ARRANGEMENT continued:

- 5) Reports series (Accession 6)
 - Special Files and Reports subseries, 1917-1936
 - Territory Reports subseries, 1921-1927
 - Receipts and Memberships subseries

- 6) Edsel Ford Automotive Scrapbook series, 1911-1925 (Accession 660)
 - Link to finding aid for Accession 660 in pdf format:
http://www.dalnet.lib.mi.us/henryford/docs/EdselFordAutomotiveScrapbookSeries_Accession660.pdf

- 7) Audio Speeches series, 1938-1943 (Accession 1689)
 - Link to finding aid for Accession 1689 in pdf format:
http://www.dalnet.lib.mi.us/henryford/docs/AudioSpeechesSeries_Accession1689.pdf

- 8) Desk Contents series, undated, 1 oversize box (Accession 6)

SUBJECT TERMS

Names, Personal and Corporate
Ford, Edsel, 1893-1943

Subjects
Ford Motor Company--Management
Ford Motor Company--Presidents