



Finding Aid for

**1957 FORD MODEL 51A TESTING AND DEVELOPMENT RECORDS  
1953-1957 (bulk 1955-1956)  
Accession 1945**

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**HISTORICAL NOTE**

Although Ford was not the first automotive manufacturer to produce a power-operated retractable hardtop, it was the first company to fully automate the mechanism. Starting in the early 1950s, Ford engineers began designing a fully-automated retractable hardtop, powered by a complex series of motors and switches, for an early prototype of the Continental Mark II. When company focus shifted away from the more expensive Lincoln and Continental divisions to the more widely produced Ford line, development efforts for the retractable hardtop switched to the prototype of the Ford Fairlane 500 Skyliner.

**SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE**

The records consists of test reports, design meeting minutes, photographs, technical drawings, charts, diagrams, correspondence, and program-planning materials related to the development of the retractable hardtop for Ford automobiles, initially for an early and abandoned prototype of a Continental Mark II, and then for what would become the 1957 Ford Fairlane 500 Skyliner (prototype 195X Model 51A). Most of the records pertain to development of the Fairlane model, which included significant input from Continental Division engineering staff.

**BOX AND FOLDER LISTING**

<b>Box no.</b>	<b>Description</b>
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**Box 1**

- Correspondence, 1955-1956 (2 folders)
- Design Meeting Minutes, 1955-1956
- General Files, 1955-1956 (Contains materials similar to Test Reports; includes photographs)
- Memorandum Reports, 1956 (Includes charts and technical drawings)
- Notes: Car No. 2405X, Model 51-A, Prototype No. 1, circa 1955-1956
- Photographs
  - Body Sub-Assemblies, Body Build, Chassis Build, Etc., undated
  - Continental Mark II Retractable Hardtop Mechanical Details, circa 1957
- Summaries of Specific Work Assignments, 1953-1955

**Box 2**

Reports

195X Ford Retracting Hardtop Design Phase I Report, 1954-1956 (With related enclosures)

Test Reports, 1955-1956 (4 folders) (Includes photographs, charts, memos, technical drawings)

Test Requests and Reports: Body and Chassis and Electrical, 1955-1956 (4 folders) (Includes memos, charts, and photographs)