

REO and the Automobile Industry

A Guide to the Resources in the
Michigan State University Archives and Historical Collections

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The purpose of this resource guide is to familiarize visitors of the MSU Archives with some of the available resources related to the REO and other automobile company records. Note that this guide is not a comprehensive listing of all the available sources, but is intended to be a starting point from which visitors can begin their research according to their specific needs. Online versions of the finding aids for most collections listed can be accessed by clicking on the collection name.

REO at the MSU Archives

REO Motors Inc. was incorporated in 1904 by R. E. Olds and other investors as the R. E. Olds Company. It passed through several name changes and permutations until May 30, 1975, when Diamond REO Trucks, Inc., filed for bankruptcy. In its lifetime, the company built passenger cars and trucks, but it was best known for the latter. The company became dependent on government contracts in the 1940s and 1950s, but by 1954 continuing losses led to a takeover by a group of majority stockholders. From 1954 to 1957 the company went through a series of business crises ultimately leading to its purchase by White Motors and the formation of the Diamond REO Truck Division of White Motors in 1957.

REO Motors

1. **REO Motor Company Records** **00036**
 - 283 Volumes, 170 cubic feet
 - This collection consists of the business records of REO Motors, Inc. and includes: correspondence, financial records, annual reports, minutes of meetings, policy directives, personnel records, blueprints, government contracts, sales and distribution records, operating expenses, and office memos. Personnel records include labor turnover reports (1917-1944), health and safety records (1917-1955), agreements and grievances, appeal board minutes, unemployment compensation cases, and wage records. A full record of correspondence details the company's relations with the U.S. government (1939-1957). Foreign correspondence documents REO sales in a number of countries (1923-1959). Miscellaneous records include business association correspondence, newsletters, and publications. Blueprints provide detailed information on the company's civilian and military products from 1920 to 1972, as well as describing company property holdings (1909-1973). White Motor Company Records, 1922-1974, include financial statements, letter books, sales information and parts specifications.

2. **REO Publications Collection** **00182**
 - 1.0 cubic feet
 - The REO publications collection contains several different publications relating to the REO Motor Car Company. The publications in the collection are: *REO Echo* (1906-1911), *REO Spirit* (1928-1933), *REO - Items* (1952-1953), *REO Echo* (1974-2012) and *REO Spirit* (2002-2013). The collection also contains one folder of miscellaneous material relating to the REO Club of America.

R. E. Olds



3. Ransom E. Olds Papers

00027

- 5.6 cubic feet, 9 volumes
- The Olds Papers are divided into two sections. The first section consists of Olds' personal papers. Included in this section are Olds' love letters to Metta Woodward, whom he married in 1899, correspondence related to his philanthropic activities, day books, and two journals of the Olds family's European tour. The second deals with Olds' business activities from 1904 to 1947. Included are correspondence series of Olds Motor Works, REO, and several small companies of which Olds was either owner or the major stock holder. Also included is correspondence between Olds and various investment agents.
- Ransom E. Olds (1864-1950) founded the Olds Motor Vehicle Company in 1896 in Lansing, Michigan. For various reasons, including the high cost of his first line of Oldsmobiles, this first venture in mass producing cars was less than successful. By 1902, however, the company's inexpensive curved-dash Olds was a success. In 1905 he sold out his stock in the Olds Motor Company and joined the REO Motor Car Company. He was President and General Manager from 1905 to 1924, when he retired from an active part in REO. Olds was chairman of the board from 1924 to 1936. During the later years of his life, Olds built financial security for his family and himself in stocks, bonds and real estate. Olds was also a philanthropist and donated money to a wide variety of social and moral reform societies. He was a businessman of widely varied interests, assuming a managerial involvement in such diverse activities as automobile manufacturing, peat mining and real estate.

Automobile Company Collections

4. **Peter Berg Papers** **UA 10.3.106**
- 1 folder
 - This collection consists of a paper titled "Welfare Capitalism and Worker Response at the REO Motor Car Company, 1916-1929," which was written by Peter Berg for History 901 at Michigan State University in June 1983. The paper discusses the welfare capitalism program at the REO Motor Car Company of Lansing, Michigan.
 - REO Motor Car Company of Lansing, Michigan, was founded by R.E. Olds. The welfare capitalism program was established there by 1919 and flourished throughout the 1920s. Peter Berg was a doctoral student at Michigan State University at the time that he wrote the paper.
5. **Mrs. C. M. Burdick Collection, 1904-1957.** **c.00487**
- 0.25 cubic feet
 - This collection contains diaries, correspondence, and a biographical sketch of R.E. Olds entitled "That Boy Ranney." Also included is a letter from R. Shettler explaining his unhappiness with Olds over the affairs of the REO Motor Car Company. Some material on Olds' interest in music is also included.
 - C. M. Burdick was Ransom E. Olds' personal secretary for a considerable period of time.
6. **Duplex Truck Company Records** **00108**
- 3 cubic feet, 12 volumes
 - The records of the Duplex Truck Company, originally Duplex Power Car Company, include articles of incorporation, correspondence, patent certificates, audit reports, profit and loss statements, stock certificates, meeting minutes, records of labor, and land purchase agreements, circuit court records, and other related documents. Also in the collection are company advertisements, blueprints, and photographs of their trucks, documents on the company's merger with Warner and Swasey Company in 1955, insurance documents, issues of the magazine *Sperry Scope* (from Sperry Gyroscope Company, 1935-1949), specifications for other Duplex products, parts catalogs, and a notebook containing a brief company history.
 - The Duplex Power Car Company was founded in Charlotte, Michigan, in 1909. It manufactured trucks and truck-related machinery. The company was reorganized into Duplex Truck Company in 1916, and was bought out by Warner and Swasey Company in 1955. The Duplex Division of Warner and Swasey closed down in 1975.

7. **Lisa Gerber and Mojden Hojjati Papers, 1982.** **UA 10.3.49**
- 1 folder
 - This collection consists of a student paper written by Gerber and Hojjati entitled "Industrial Patriotism: Americanization in the REO Motor Company." They argue that the paternalistic program of the REO Company was aimed at making immigrants better citizens, whereas the program of the Ford Motor Company was directed at increasing production.
8. **Jacqueline D. Holecek, Papers** **UA 10.3.154**
- 1 folder
 - The collection consists of a paper written by Jacqueline Holecek for a class assignment titled "Archival Research in the R.E. Olds Mansion in Lansing, Michigan" (1995). The paper traces the history of the Olds family and their mansion.
9. **H. J. Karn Collection** **c.00184**
- 1 folder
 - This collection contains notes kept by Bill Taylor during an interview with H. J. Karn, in which Karn describes his working experiences (1906-1916) at the Lansing plant of the REO Motor Car Company. Also included is a brochure describing a 1910 record-breaking transcontinental trip made in a REO automobile.
10. **Lansing Magazine Publication, 1979.** **c.00445**
- 1 folder
 - This collection consists of the January/February issue of *Lansing Magazine*. The magazine contains two articles on Ransom E. Olds: "How Lansing Lost and Regained Oldsmobile," and "The Incredible Saga of How R.E. Olds Got the Boot."
11. **Walter Neller Family Papers** **00196**
- 2 scrapbooks
 - This collection contains thirteen scrapbooks which span from 1924 to 1991. The scrapbooks contain newspaper clippings, correspondence and memorabilia highlighting the Neller's social life in Lansing and East Lansing. There is also information on the R.E. Olds Museum in Scrapbooks 9 and 12.
 - Walter H. Neller founded the Walter Neller Company, a real estate company in the Lansing, Michigan area. Walter Neller's son, Richard, conceptualized the R. E. Olds Museum. Richard's wife, Susan, was director of the museum in the 1980s.
12. **Nixon and Starr Family Papers** **00060**
- 1 folder
 - Of particular interest in this collection may be a set of receipts pertaining to B.E. Starr's purchase of a new REO automobile in 1923.

- 13. Oldsmobile Club of America Publication** **00183**
- 0.3 cubic feet
 - The Oldsmobile Club of America, Inc. was founded in 1971 as a way for people interested in collecting, restoring, or researching Oldsmobile to find and share information. *Journey with Olds* is the monthly newsletter sent to each member of the club. The collection contains an incomplete run of the first nine volumes of the newsletter. There are also some miscellaneous pieces of correspondence.
- 14. Oldsmobile Publications, 1972.** **c.00477**
- 1 folder
 - This collection contains one booklet and two brochures on the history of the Oldsmobile. It was published for the 75th anniversary of production.
- 15. Florine Folks Plumb Papers** **UA 10.3.198**
- 1 folder.
 - The collection consists of the poem "The 25th Anniversary of 4-H Clubs" written in 1940 by Plumb and newspaper and magazine articles from 1940, 1942, 1961, and 1983 about her being judged best in a contest and winning an REO touring car.
 - Florine Folks Plumb was the daughter of William Folks from Hanover, Michigan. At age 11, she entered the corn she grew in a judging contest held at Michigan Agricultural College (now Michigan State University). Her corn took first prize and she won a REO touring car. She graduated from Michigan Agricultural College in 1920. She married Harold J. Plumb.
- 16. Allan S. Thompson Photographic Collection** **00186**
- 16 glass plate negatives
 - The collection consists of glass plate negatives, film negatives, and contact prints of images of people, places, and events in the greater Lansing, Michigan area, 1898-1913. There are images of the companies Thompson worked for, including Oldsmobile Motor Works (slides 551-565). Also, there are images of curved-dash vehicles on Washington Avenue (slides 1136-1137).
 - Allan S. Thompson was born on May 26, 1866 in Lansing, Michigan. He attended Michigan State University from 1886 to 1890 and in 1889 worked as a machinist in the Lansing Wheelbarrow Company. In 1906 he left Lansing Wheelbarrow to become a shipping clerk in Capitol Electrical Engineering Company. In 1908 he went to work for Oldsmobile Motor Car Company as a clerk and later became a foreman. He retired in 1922 and in 1924 started an importing business, mostly importing fancy baskets from the Philippines. In 1938 he retired from his importing business. Thompson died on September 25, 1953.

17. Eugene G. Wanger Papers

00203

- 2.25 cubic feet
- This collection contains "Discovering Ingham County: A Descriptive Bibliography" by Eugene G. Wanger, which has information about R.E. Olds. Also in the collection are R. E. Olds Transportation Museum materials, including meeting minutes and agendas, bylaws, reports, and correspondence from the Board of Trustees, Executive Committee, Search Committee, and other REOM committees.
- Eugene G. Wanger was a founding member of the Ingham County Historical Commission, and an active member of the R. E. Olds Museum Association.

18. Jon L. Young Reminiscences, 1986.

UA 10.3.116

- 3 folders
- This collection consists of Jon L. Young's reminiscences, based on diaries he kept as a student at Michigan State College from 1931-1935. Young talks about his family, who lived in Lansing, and the impact of the Depression, especially on his father, an employee of the REO Motor Car Company. Young also analyzes the unsettled international events of the 1930s.
- Jon L. Young graduated from Michigan State College (now Michigan State University) with a bachelor's degree in Liberal Arts in 1935. He was a member of ROTC and the International Relations Club.

Other Resources

1. Information Files (MSU. Auto Lab; MI. Lansing Auto Industry; MI. Lansing Automotive History Survey; MI. People. Olds, R. E.; MI. People. Iaccoca, L. A.; MI. Olds Family; MI. Oldsmobile-Centennial 1897-1997; MI. Oldsmobile & REO Car Club; MI. REO Motor Car Company)
2. REO Transportation Museum Glass Plate Negatives and Slides image files (automobiles, trucks, motors for 1916 – 1929)
3. Reference Books (Automobiles, REO, Oldsmobile, Ransom, E. Olds)