



## University Libraries Special Collections & University Archives

### Ralph Harmon Papers

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#### Collection Summary

<b>Title:</b>	Ralph Harmon Papers
<b>Call Number:</b>	MS 2016-01
<b>Size:</b>	2.5 linear feet (3 boxes)
<b>Acquisition:</b>	Donated by Ken Harmon
<b>Processed by:</b>	JZ, 8-2015
<b>Restrictions:</b>	Box 3 is restricted

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#### Literary Rights

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#### Content Note

This collection documents Ralph Harmon's career as an engineer and executive with various general aviation companies, as well as his efforts during the late 1980s and early 1990s to call for tort reform with respect to product liability.

The collection is notable for records pertaining to Harmon's role as chief engineer of the Cessna Model 620, the company's first attempt to design and produce an executive jet during the mid-1950s; pertinent documents include project memoranda, model specifications, photographs, progress reports, news releases and press clippings, cost analysis records, and charts depicting various divisional workflows with respect to the 620's design and construction. Also present are brochures for various Cessna aircraft, as well as clippings and periodicals relating to aviation.

Of further interest are Harmon's writings pertaining to tort reform and product liability with respect to the aviation industry. An unpublished book-length manuscript and a speech Harmon delivered in 1994 address these topics at length.

Finally, the collection houses recordings of interviews Harmon conducted with former employees of aviation companies such as Beech, Mooney, Cessna, and Stearman, as well as presentations he delivered to aviation clubs. All recordings are on cassette tapes and provide a multitude of perspectives on local and national aviation history; some interviews have transcripts.

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## Biography

Ralph Mervin Harmon was born March 2, 1913 in Indianapolis, Indiana. While in high school, he began to design and build an airplane which was powered by a Ford Model A engine and eventually flown in December 1932. In 1939 he was hired by the Beech Aircraft Corporation as a draftsman, later becoming Chief Design Engineer and Assistant Chief Engineer. In 1953 Cessna president Dwane Wallace asked Harmon to lead his company's effort in designing and building a business jet which could compete with the burgeoning executive transport industry. The end result, the Model 620, was finally flown in August 1956, but was eventually scrapped before production could begin due to high manufacturing cost. From Cessna, Harmon went to the McDonnell and Mooney corporations, respectively, becoming president of the latter before retiring in 1971. Afterward, he acted as a consultant for aviation companies, championing tort reform with respect to the high product liability claims which had hurt the general aviation industry during the 1980s and early 1990s. Ralph Harmon died on December 6, 1994, survived by his wife Irene and their five children.

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## Series Listing

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|----------|------------------------------|--|
| Series 1 | Box 1 FF 1-20,<br>Box 2 FF 1 | <p>Aircraft. This series mainly consists of records relating to the development of the Cessna 323, which was renamed the 620 in the summer of 1954. Items of interest include model specifications, a project activation memo, cost analysis and budget data, promotional material, progress reports, workflow charts, photographs, news clippings, and business correspondence.</p> <p>Also present are brochures for other Cessna aircraft, aviation periodicals, clippings on Cessna and Dwane Wallace, and a CD containing two Word documents of chapters not used in Harmon's <i>Birth of the Bonanza</i>. Company records on the 620 are arranged chronologically; all other items are arranged by type.</p> |
| Series 2 | Box 1 FF 21-25               | <p>Tort Reform. This series consists of items pertaining to Ralph Harmon's advocacy of tort reform during the late 1980s and 1990s. Items present include a copy of his unpublished manuscript, <i>Wrongful Death of an Industry</i>, a speech given to the Texas Conservative Coalition in 1994, and meeting material from the General Aviation Manufacturers Association (GAMA) annual industry review for 1992.</p>   |

Series 3      Box 1 FF 26-31    Interviews and Speeches. This series consists of cassette tapes containing interviews conducted by Ralph Harmon with fellow engineers and aviation personnel who worked in various companies such as Beech, Cessna, and Mooney. Also present are recordings of presentations Harmon gave to aviation clubs. Items are arranged by existing numerical order.

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## Box and Folder Listing

### Series 1 – Aircraft

Box 1	FF 1	Model 620, Proposed Model 323 program, 1953-1956
Box 1	FF 2	Model 620, Budget and man-hours binder, 1953-1957
Box 1	FF 3	Model 620, Annual Report and press release, 1954
Box 1	FF 4	Model 620, Photographs, 1955-1956, n.d.
Box 1	FF 5	Model 620, <i>Cessquire</i> , "The 620 Story," and press release, 1956
Box 1	FF 6	Model 620, Cost Analysis and Substantiating Data, 1956
Box 1	FF 7	Model 620, Brochure, specifications, and progress report, 1957
Box 1	FF 8	Model 620, Project Activation Memo, 1957
Box 1	FF 9	Model 620, Project Activation Memo – Engineering Section, 1957
Box 1	FF 10	Model 620, Model Specification, 1957
Box 1	FF 11	Model 620, Status report, 1957
Box 1	FF 12	Model 620, Report on estimating engineering time for new project, 1957
Box 1	FF 13	"Value Per Mile" brochure n.d.
Box 1	FF 14	Brochures, Various Cessna planes, 1961, 1970-1971, 1978
Box 2	FF 1	Golden Eagle 421 and 421A brochures, n.d.
Box 1	FF 15	Annual Report for Cessna, 1961
Box 1	FF 16	Clippings, 1954, 1956-1958, 1990, n.d.
Box 1	FF 17	Periodicals, <i>Cessquire</i> , 1960
Box 1	FF 18	Periodicals, <i>Flying Annual &amp; Pilots' Guide</i> , 1970
Box 1	FF 19	Table on comparative aircraft manufacturing costs, 1960

Box 1      FF 20      CD of two unused chapters on James McDonnell and William Lear for *Birth of the Bonanza*, n.d.

## Series 2 – Tort Reform

Box 1      FF 21      Correspondence, 1988-1995, n.d.  
Box 1      FF 22      GAMA industry review material, 1992  
Box 1      FF 23      *Wrongful Death of an Industry*, 1993  
Box 1      FF 24      Speech to Texas Conservative Coalition, 1994  
Box 1      FF 25      Notes, n.d.

## Series 3 – Interviews and Speeches

Box 1      FF 26      Tape 1: Ted Wells, interview conducted 4/15/1990 (has transcript)  
Box 1      FF 26      Tape 4: Glen Stearman, interview conducted 1990  
Box 1      FF 26      Tape 5: Side 1 – Alec Odevseff, interview conducted 4/17/1990; End of side 1 and all of side 2 – Leroy Clay and Virgil Fisher, interview conducted 4/17/1990  
Box 1      FF 27      Tape 6: Leroy Clay, interview conducted 4/18/1990  
Box 1      FF 27      Tape 7: Dale Westfall, interview conducted 11/4/1989  
Box 1      FF 27      Tape 8: Side 1 – M.G. Lease, interview conducted 4/15/1990; End of side 1 and all of side 2 – Alec Odevseff, interview conducted 4/16/1990  
Box 1      FF 28      Tape 9: Jack Melenric, interview #1 conducted 9/12/1989  
Box 1      FF 28      Tape 10: Jack Melenric, interview #2 conducted 9/12/1989  
Box 1      FF 28      Tape 12: Don Trompler, interview conducted 10/2/1989  
Box 1      FF 29      Tape 13: Presentation, Mooney Aircraft Pilots Association meeting in Kerrville Texas, 10/14/1989  
Box 1      FF 29      Tape 14: Presentation, Wichita Women's Aeronautical Association, n.d. (almost all of side B is blank)  
Box 1      FF 29      Tape 15: Presentation, Western Bonanza Society Talk, January 1988  
Box 1      FF 30      Tape 16: Speech and Q & A session [copy 1], Twin Bonanza Association, n.d.  
Box 1      FF 30      Tape 17: Speech and Q & A session [copy 2; this recording is superior to copy 1], Twin Bonanza Association, n.d.]

Box 1	FF 31	Tape 18: Stories of Mooney aviation as told by Ralph and Ken Harmon, 7/25/1989
Box 1	FF 31	Tape 19: Further stories of Mooney and Beech aviation as told by Ralph and Ken Harmon, 7/25/1989

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For information, please contact us at:

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