



## THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MISSOURI RESEARCH CENTER-KANSAS CITY

K1233

### Western Auto Supply Company Records

ca. 1920- 2000

36 cubic feet; 9 oversize volumes

*Historical records of the national retail store headquartered in Kansas City, MO. Includes photographs, catalogs, publications, scrapbooks of advertising, artifacts, correspondence and working files on Western Auto stores.*

#### HISTORY:

Many Baby Boomers raised in rural or emerging suburban America owned a Western Flyer bike, red with chrome handlebars and fenders. Maybe we also had a Western Flyer red wagon used to pull our important stuff round the neighborhood, or careen down the hills of the tar covered roads. Or a Western Flyer sled with its thin metal runners that we would grease with an old wax candle to go faster over the snow and ice. The Western Flyer brand came from the Western Auto store on the local town square—a place of exciting toys, furniture and appliances, and of course, anything your dad or older brother needed to keep the family car running.

Founded in 1909 by accountant George Pepperdine and run as a mail-order auto parts supplier from his Kansas City kitchen, the Western Auto Supply Agency thrived and grew. He sold after-market parts needed to keep the Ford Model-Ts clacking—if you owned a car in those early years you would either pay someone to keep it running or you became a tinkerer adept at changing tires, sparkplugs, and an occasional transmission. With the opening of the first retail store in Kansas City in 1913, Pepperdine branched out to other products and was innovative in marketing specialty brands unique to his catalog and new stores. In 1915, for health reasons, Pepperdine sold his Kansas City operation to Don Davis, but moved to California and established a second Western Auto Company serving the west coast (these two companies eventually merged again in 1955).

Under Davis and his successor managers, Western Auto became a household name that at its peak had over 3,000 stores throughout the county supplying families those Western Flyer bikes, wagons, and sleds; the Truetone radio, and later TV, line; and many other Western Auto brand items. Much of this success

came from the creation of the Western Auto Associate Stores beginning in 1935. Unlike Wal-Mart of today, the Associate Stores were home-owned by members of the community, who agreed to sell a minimum of Western Auto Supply Company brands, but were also free to stock other goods. This gave the Associates the best of both worlds—a reliable and reputable identification with a national chain and the independence necessary to meet the needs of local customers—“Locally Owned, National Known” read the Company motto. Western Auto not only grew an impressive market-share, but also a dedicated and loyal workforce. The Company newsletters were filled with articles and items about employee events and families shared with the Western Auto “family”.

The world changes, and by the 1970s Western Auto began to fall behind its growing number of competitors, such as Sears, Wards, and Ace Hardware. Management tried to reposition the Company, even to the point of abandoning the Western Auto “Circle Arrow” logo that had identified it since the 1930s. More disastrous was a change in the franchise relationship that supposed that the Company knew better what would sell than the local Associate owners. Dissention resulted in the loss of Associate stores and a Company unable to focus its energy to meet the competition. By the late 1980s, Western Auto was a shadow of what it once had been and in 1988 it was purchased by Sears—its long time arch rival. Over the next ten years Sears stripped away several of the Western Auto product lines, including the Tire and Battery lines, and then sold the rest to Advance Auto the year before its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

On October 6, 2003, Western Auto dealers got word that on December 31<sup>st</sup> Western Auto Supply Company would cease its wholesale operation. Only 300 stores remained and this was too few to sustain the Company. Western Auto was no more.

As early as 2002, the Research Center-Kansas City had received records and other materials from retired and former employees of Western Auto. Early in 2004 came the call to come pack up the records and other materials in the Company offices and SHSMO-KC staff responded with boxes and carts to move approximately 36 cubic feet of photographs, catalogs, publications, scrapbooks of advertising, artifacts of display items, correspondence and working files on Western Auto stores. This last are “dossiers” on many of the Associate stores including photos, advertising, and brief histories.

The book, *The Last Western Flyer: the Western Auto Century* by Jim Marchman (Blacksburg, VA: Jim Marchman, 2004) insightfully details some of the lessons learned from the Western Auto enterprise. The *Western Auto Supply Company Records* (K1233) now with SHSMO-KC allows the researcher to focus on individual stores, employees, and management and marketing practices in greater detail.

#### PROVENANCE:

This gift was received from Bob Strickler as accession KA1162 on January 7, 2002. An additional accession, KA1270 was received on February 20, 2004.

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**PREFERRED CITATION:**

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**DESCRIPTION:**

Includes photographs, catalogs, publications, scrapbooks of advertising, artifacts of display items, correspondence and working files on Western Auto stores.

**INVENTORY:****BOX 001**

Circle Arrow Retailer – Employee Edition, 1952-1959

**BOX 002**

Circle Arrow Retailer – Associate/Dealer Edition, 1952-1959

**BOX 003**

Western Auto Retailer – Employee Edition, 1960-1967

**BOX 004**

Western Auto Retailer – Dealer Edition, 1960-1957

**BOX 005**

Western Auto Retailer – Employee Edition, 1968-1975

**BOX 006**

Western Auto Retailer – Dealer Edition, 1968-1973

Western Auto Retailer/Associate Store News, 1974

Associate Store News, 1975

**BOX 007**

Western Auto Retailer – Employee Edition, 1976-1977

Associate Store News, 1976-1977

Western Auto Today – Employee and Associate Editions, 1978-1979

Home Office News, 1961-1965

The WASCO Bulletin, December 1966-April 1970

Other publications/printed materials:

Speech – “Corporate Planning” by Arthur Swenson, 1959

Profit sharing/retirement program, 1956-1964

“Company on the Grow!” – scenario for a motion picture prepared for Western Auto Supply Co., 1968

Report of Board of Directors, FY ending September 30, 1965

Amendment to Missouri Credit Union Bylaws

Brochure - “This is Western Auto!” 1963

“The First Fifty Years” 1958

The Associate, February 1987

Western Auto World – National Show Issue, April 1984

[KA1270]

**BOX 008**

*PUBLICATIONS:*

Associate Planning Guide, Aug. 1987-June, 1992

Western Auto Today, 1978-1979

Associate Store News 1975-1977, Western Auto Retailer 1972-1977

**BOX 009**

*PUBLICATIONS:*

Western Auto Retailer, December 1963-February 1972

**BOX 010**

*PUBLICATIONS:*

Retailer, Dealer and Employee Editions, January 1953-November 1963

**BOX 011***PUBLICATIONS:*

Circle Arrow Retailer, employee, dealer editions December 1946-June 1959;

Western Auto Retailer, dealer and employee editions, January 1960-Mar. 1961

**BOX 012***PUBLICATIONS:*

Employee Handbooks; 1945, 1941, 1969, 1972, 1975, 1986, 1992;

Employee Benefits, retirement, insurance, personnel 1954, 1985;

Dealer ownership plans, management school, recruitment pamphlets;

History of Western Auto; Associate Store News January 1938-December 1941; Western Auto News and Views 1938-1941;

Western Auto World July 1980-November 1986;

The Associate May 1987;

Western Auto Associate Newsletter March, May, July 1987

Photocopies of advertising.

**BOX 013***INDEPENDENT STORE FILES: photographs, advertising, correspondence*

Albany, LA

Alcoa, TN

Alexander City, AL

Americus, GA

Amherst, VA

Appalachia, VA

Athens, AL

Athens, TX

Augusta, KS

Batesville, MS

Baxley, GA

Bay Springs, MS

Benton, KS

Bentonville, AR

Bethune, SC

Blue Springs MO

Bluefield, VA

Bluffton, IN

Bonner Springs, KS

Burlington, NC

Cabot, AR

Camdenton, MO  
Cameron, MO  
Cameron, TX  
Carthage, MS  
Central Point, OR  
Clearwater, KS  
Cochran, GA  
Conyers, GA  
Copperas Cove, TX  
Crockett, TX  
Crystal City, MO  
Dade City, FL  
Dalton, GA  
Darien, GA  
Darlington, SC  
Delano, CA  
Derby, KS  
Dora, AL  
Dos Palos, CA  
Douglas, GA  
Edison, GA  
El Dorado, AR  
El Dorado, KS  
Elizabeth City, NC  
Elko, NV  
Emporia, KS  
Farmington, NM  
Festus, MO  
Flat River, MO  
Flintstone, GA  
Forest City, NC  
Frederick, MD  
Fredonia, KS  
Freeport, IL  
Frisco, TX  
Gardendale, AL  
Gardner, KS  
Grand Island, NE  
Granite Falls, NC  
Great Bend, KS  
Greenville, AL  
Guymon, OK  
Hamilton, NY  
Hanceville, AL  
Harrison, AR  
Hattiesburg, MS

Hays, KS  
Hayes, VA  
Haysville, KS  
Hazen, AR  
Hendersonville, NC  
Hobs, NM  
Holton, KS  
Hot Springs, AR  
Hutchinson, KS  
Jackson, AL  
Jackson, MO  
Jennings, LA  
Jesup, GA  
Kahoka, MO  
Killeen, TX  
Kingsland, TX  
Kings Mountain, NC  
Knoxville, IL

**BOX 014**

*INDEPENDENT STORE FILES: Photographs, advertising, correspondence:*

Lafitte LA  
LaFollette, TN  
Lampasas, TX  
Licking, MO  
Lovington, NM  
Lytle, TX  
Madison Heights, VA  
Malone, NY  
Mansfield, LA  
Marion, IN  
Marion OH  
Marshall, MO  
Marysville, CA  
Maryville TN  
McPherson KS  
Meadville, MS  
Meeker CO  
Merriam KS  
Midland TX  
Midlothian TX  
Mifflinburg, PA  
Mifflintown, PA  
Millport AL  
Milton, FL  
Monroeville, AL

Monticello, KY  
Mountain View, AR  
Muleshoe, TX  
Muscle Shoals, AL  
Mullins, WV  
Naples, FL  
Newton, KS  
Nocona, TX  
Norco, LA  
North Las Vegas, NV  
Northfork, WV  
Oak Harbor  
Ocilla, GA  
Olympia WA  
Opelika AL  
Ottawa, KS  
Painted Post, NY  
Phoenix AZ  
Reeds Spring MO  
Richlands VA  
Riverdale GA  
Robert Lee, TX  
Rochester, NY  
Ruskin FL  
Russellville, AR  
St. Paul, VA  
Salina KS  
Savannah TN  
Sealy TX  
Searcy AR  
Sedalia MO  
Shelby, NC  
Shepherdsville, KY  
Sherman TX  
Slatersville, RI  
Southport, NC  
Streamwood, IL  
Tahlequah, OK  
Temple, TX  
Thomson, GA  
Tupelo, MS  
Union Park, FL  
Valley Center, KS  
Venice FL  
Wake Forest NC  
Walnut MS



Warsaw, IN  
Wauchula, FL  
Waynesboro, MS  
West Warwick, RI  
Weatherford, TX  
Weaverville, NC  
Welsh, LA  
West Columbia, SC  
West Lake, LA  
West Plains, MO  
Winfield KS  
Wichita Heights, KS  
Woodland, CA  
Winnie, TX  
Zachary, LA

**BOX 015***PHOTOGRAPHS*

A-S, (retail and dealer)

**BOX 016***PHOTOGRAPHS:*

S, T (dealer, retail), U-V (dealer, retail), WXYZ (dealer, retail):

Baltimore Division  
Butler Division  
Dallas Division  
Gastonia Dist. Center  
Jacksonville Division  
Kansas City Division  
Los Angeles  
Nashville  
Portland-Ogden  
St. Louis  
Taunton Divisions  
Temple D.C.  
Historical File #1  
Historical File #2 unidentified by place or date  
Historical File #3  
Historical File #4, meeting photographs  
Photographs of Testing Laboratory in Lenexa, KS 1972  
Credit Department.

**BOX 017***PHOTOS, NEWSPAPER ADS, PUBLICATIONS:*

Photos, newspaper ads, California 1969, Misc. unidentified photos, Misc. unidentified store fronts 1960s; Misc. negatives and photos, pin presentations, retirees; Misc. photos and negatives 1934-1963; History, misc. printed material;

Publications: Beneficial Corp. annual reports 1976-1983, 1960-1975, Beneficial to You 1968-1985; Beneficial News 1984.

**BOX 018**

Sales Circular Programs: undated, 1940, 1942, 1948, 1949, 1950-1957, 1959, 1961, 1963-1969, 1979, 1981-1983, 1996

**BOX 019**

Fortune magazine October 1939, Christmas Card, company ca 1940 incl. photos of management and staff

Pepperdine: oriental trip diary, June 1927

File: includes photos, correspondence, manuscript,

Old photo album

retouched portrait, Pepperdine ca. 1907

File: truck photographs

File: midland international executives ca. 1973

File: "Flag" stickers and blank certificates

File: historical materials: clippings, memorabilia, photos

Expandable file: Associate pictures: November 1996-current

Pepperdine University Academic Catalog 1998-1999

File: Western Auto racing (including pictures)

Program: Daytona 500, 1989, 1993

**BOX 020**

Artifacts: variety of items bearing Western Auto logo, incl. mugs, pens, batteries.

**BOX 021**

Artifacts: plaques, banner, various auto replacement parts

**BOX 022**

Artifacts: Clothing, inventory recorders (used to order online) (2)

**BOX 023**

Miscellaneous photographs, including portraits and Home Office on Grand

**BOX 024**

Miscellaneous photographs, one box identified as home office.

**BOX 025**

Miscellaneous photographs

**BOX 026***PHOTOGRAPHS/PUBLICATIONS/REPORTS*Miscellaneous Publications:

Sales Circular programs 1993, 1996

Wizard Battery publication, 1932, 1937

Home office news: 1991, 1992, 1977, 1978, 1976, 1965, 1964, 1963, 1962, 1961

Happenings (wholesale employees publication), 1991, 1992, 1993

Update, 1981

Upbeat

Wasco Bulletin, 1966, 1967, 1970, 1969, 1968,

Company organizational charts, May 1971, Apr. 1963

Annual Reports: 1986, 1960, 1959, 1958, 1957, 1956, 1955, 1954, 1953, 1952, 1951, 1950, 1949, 1948, 1947, 1946, 1945, 1944, 1943, 1942

Booklet: 1985 New Orleans Merchandise Show

Miscellaneous Photographs:

Scrapbook 1951, photographic

Folder: Lithograph, radio days? (have enlarged version in oversize)

**BOX 027**

Artifacts: Truetone radio, empty box (wizard calculator)

**BOX 028**

Catalogs (Bound), 1927-1930; 1923-1929

Spring/Summer 1962

S&S, F/W 1964

Fall & Winter 1964-1965

1965 catalogs

1966 Spring & Summer  
F/W 1966-1967

**BOX 029**Catalogs (Bound):

Western Auto Fall & Winter Catalog/Spring & Summer Catalog 1967-1971

Catalogs (Unbound): 1964, 1966, 1967

**BOX 030**Bound Publications:

Western Auto Fall and Winter Catalog 1972-1980;  
Assorted Catalogs 1970's-1990's,

**BOX 031**Bound Publications:

Western Auto Retailer, employee and dealer editions 1962, 1963, 1964, dealer 1969, employee 1970, dealer, 1971, 1972  
Home Office News 1961-1965.

**BOX 032***Publications:*Bound Volumes:

Associate Store News, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977

Western Auto Today 1978

Sales Circular Programs: (packets) 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1976, 1978, 1980, 1983 (2), 1984 (2), 1985 (2), 1986, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995 (2)

**BOX 033**

Sales Circular Programs (bound): 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966

**BOX 034**

Sales Circular Programs (bound): 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972, 1974.

**BOX 035**

Sales Circular Programs (bound); 1975, 1991, misc. newspapers ads and events; Manager's Manual (1933)

**BOX 036**

Folder Western Auto Retail Shock Absorber Contest, 1978 (2) folders

Folder Air Force Museum, 1978

*AUDIO VISUAL*

Video Tapes:

1991 Birthdays, master tape  
"APAA "93". August 13, 1993  
"Headed for the Future", Montgomery, Alabama  
"Pride of Kansas City", September 7, 1990  
PTV Video, version 2 (with AI), Barkley & Evergreen  
"Catch the Spirit" Western Auto, 1991 United Way  
"Magic From Michelin", promotion  
"Getting There Together"  
"The Digs" Valvoline/Western Auto  
Western Auto Presentation  
Western Auto Show, May 1980

Miscellaneous Film and Slides:

Various stores, meetings 1960's

**OVERSIZE BOOKS**

Flyer program 1 (one vol.) 1957, 1958, 1959  
Sales Circular Programs: (6 volumes) 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981  
Dealer Flyer Program (2) volumes 1983  
Fortune magazine October 1939

**FLAT BOX**

Christmas Card, company ca 1940  
Photo: Western Auto Building (on foam core) [flat shelves]