

## William Phelps Eno

3 June 1858 - 3 December 1945



From the Eno Center for Transportation website, William Phelps Eno was born in 1858 in New York City and spent the first nine years of his life on East Twenty-third Street in Manhattan. In 1867, Eno, the youngest in his large family, set sail to Europe to visit France, Italy and England.

After returning to the United States in 1869, the young Eno would finish his primary and secondary schooling at over a dozen institutions, including those he attended in France. At Yale University, Eno made average grades and had a bout of Scarlet Fever, but eventually graduated with a Bachelor of Arts.

It's not difficult to imagine what American streets were like before William Phelps Eno. It was pure chaos. In New York City of the 1860's, streets such as the famous Broadway were constantly clogged with horse-carriage traffic. In 1867, a young Eno was caught in a traffic jam that served as the genesis to the career of "the Father of Traffic Regulation."

Reflecting on that traffic jam, Eno later wrote, "There were only about a dozen horses and carriages involved, and all that was needed was a little order to keep the traffic moving. Yet nobody knew exactly what to do; neither the drivers nor the police knew anything about the control of traffic."

Unlike many of today's graduates, Eno did not go directly into traffic regulation, as there was no such discipline yet established. Instead, Eno worked at his father's real estate firm in New York, where his father, Amos, gave him millions of dollars. It was with this money that Eno was able to give up his real estate career in 1899 to devote the rest of his life to traffic regulation.

After missing the opening of an opera performance in New York due to heavy traffic, Eno lobbied for his first traffic innovation. This first innovation was an early electric traffic signal that used numbers to indicate which carriage would drive up to the Metropolitan Opera, which reduced confusion.

An article submitted by Eno to *The Rider and Driver* in 1900 would result in the first written New York traffic regulations, which promoted the smooth flow of horse and vehicle traffic. Some of the ideas proposed in the article are still absolutely fundamental to how people get from A to B in cities across the world. Eno proposed turn signals, slowing and stopping signals and the idea that vehicles should stay to one side of the street (right-hand side in America).

One of the most important aspects of Eno's regulations was that his "Rules of the Road" should be well understood by both police officer and driver. He suggested that traffic regulations, including speed limits and right-of-way laws, be publicly posted. Eno also proposed that the police should have someone to manage street traffic to record information about accidents, provide driver's exams and licenses among other tasks considered essential today.

It's not as if everyone was on board with Eno's "Rules of the Road," but eventually, cities all over the world adopted Eno's ideas to make traffic flow smoother. In 1902, New York got their first traffic police, the "Apollo Squad," around the same time that the city was posting their first traffic signs. Eno would also take his efforts to Europe.

In 1921, Eno established "The Eno Foundation for Highway Traffic Regulation, Inc." This organization served to create traffic regulation, assist the traffic police and to make recommendations about road infrastructure. The organization was established at Eno's "Judah Rock" estate in Westport, Connecticut. After several name changes throughout the twentieth century, the organization became the Eno Center for Transportation we all know and love today.

In 1945, Eno had died, living 87 years. Though recognized as the Father of Traffic Regulation, William Phelps Eno was a dedicated equestrian and never knew how to drive a vehicle despite his honorary driver's license.

The rotary (traffic circle), the one-way street, the interstate highway system and even the subway, might have come about eventually without Eno. However, no one objects that William Phelps Eno did more for the world of traffic control than any other single person. He changed the way we get from A to B forever and for the good.

The 1920's served as the beginning of Eno as an organization. Following the publication of his "Rules of the Road," William Phelps Eno saw his traffic ideas come to life—from New York City to Paris to London—and officially established The Eno Foundation for Highway Traffic Regulation to provide an organizational arrangement capable of attracting the participation and thinking of others and to disseminate his ideas. With the creation of the Ford Mobile T and the passing of the 1921 Federal Highway Act, the 1920's saw the rapid rise of the automobile in America.

At the age of 63, after devoting 22 years of his life to the study of traffic control, Eno could see that the search to improve street traffic circulation would continue to pose many more challenges than one person could address in a lifetime. Thus, he established the The Eno Foundation for Highway Traffic Regulation, Inc. The organization was established at Eno's "Judah Rock" estate in Westport, Connecticut. Besides Mr. Eno, the founding board members included Philip Golden Bartlett and David Jay Ely of the law firm of Simpson, Thacher and Bartlett of New York City, which handled the Eno family's legal affairs. The first annual meeting of the Eno Foundation was held at Mr. Eno's Saugatuck home on October 10, 1922. During the early years of the Eno Foundation, meetings of its board members were often held in Eno's Saugatuck, Connecticut home. At a special meeting of the Eno Board two months later, the Directors elected their first woman member, Sophie Irene Loeb of New York.

Purposes of the Foundation, as spelled out in the Articles of Association, April 21, 1921, were to: investigate and study regulations relating to all kinds of traffic; promote the safety and facility of the public and to do, promote or assist in the following: devise traffic methods and rules; publish information on traffic; standardize general highway traffic regulations; familiarize the public with traffic laws; promote special traffic regulations; provide proper instruction of traffic police; promote proper understanding by all police that they have general traffic obligations when in uniform; furnish advice on traffic regulation generally; and recommend physical changes, such as widening of roadbeds, to assist the movement of traffic.

In the 1930's, William Phelps Eno's vision of traffic was furthered by the organization's growth and influence. This decade saw the invention of the Enoscope (a traffic speed measurement tool), the association of Eno with Yale University, and the creation of a new headquarters for the organization. The 1930's also saw the creation of a federal gas tax and more widespread use of automobiles.

During the summer of 1932, Professor Tilden (the Eno Foundation President at the time) invented a device for measuring the speed of automobiles. The Enoscope, as it was called, was introduced in several states. It consisted of a black L-shaped box with two open sides and a mirror attached across the interior angle. The operator set the scope on a fixed tripod at a measured distance to the spot the car would first pass. When the blip of the moving vehicle registered on the mirror the operator would start his stopwatch. When the car reached the operator's position he would stop his watch. The elapsed time compared to charted time/distance relationships would indicate the miles per hour. The box was a forerunner of today's use of radar for speed detection and an improvement over the earlier method of placing two policemen at a measured distance apart and connected by telephone. The Enoscope was used in a 1930s speed survey in which more than 45,000 observations were made. Conducted in the state of Connecticut by the Commission of Vehicular Traffic, it was sponsored by the Transportation Committee of Yale University, Eno Foundation for Highway Traffic Regulation, the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads, and the Connecticut Highway Department.

After a long courtship between the institutions, the Eno Foundation became a legally connected associate of Yale in April 1933 without ceremony or fanfare. The University approved a contract of cooperation in furthering purposes and objects of the Foundation. The primary duty of the Foundation was to study and investigate problems of highway traffic regulation and related subjects in association with Yale. The University was to assume no financial responsibility, but was to have an oversight role regarding the Foundation's finances. And the Foundation would bear the clerical costs that Yale might have in the joint arrangements. The Foundation, on the other hand, would retain its autonomy and Mr. Eno reserved the right to rescind or terminate the agreement during his lifetime.

A significant landmark in the Eno history occurred at a special meeting of the Foundation's Corporate membership on July 18, 1938, when the name was changed from Eno Foundation for Highway Traffic Regulation, Inc., to Eno Foundation for Highway Traffic Control, Inc. While being shortened by two syllables, the name more accurately portrayed the broadened scope of the Foundation's activities and projections. It also was more appropriate to the inscription spanning the main entrance to the Eno Foundation building: "For Traffic Control."

Source:

Eno Center for Transportation

<https://enotrans.org/>