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2009

Newsletters of First 10 Years

Tractor Museum

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FRIENDS OF THE LESTER F. LARSEN

TRACTOR TEST AND POWER MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER NUMBER ONE *May 1998*

This newsletter is being sent to members of the Friends as well as those who have donated toward the renovation of the Museum. There is some overlap but hopefully people will receive only one copy. Since we will be including some who have not had the opportunity to join our Friends organization, a form is included which will place you on the rolls.

With this inaugural issue we will provide news relative to the status of the Museum and one in-depth article which you will find interesting. At this time we plan to issue two newsletters each year and, as activities increase, go to four issues per year.

Status of the Friends

The Friends of the Lester F. Larsen Tractor Test and Power Museum is a non-profit, 501c3 corporation registered in the State of Nebraska. As a 501c3 the IRS allows donations to the corporation to be tax exempt.

The Friends organization was formed when it was apparent that the University was providing no support for the upkeep of the former tractor test laboratory building, which housed a collection of historic tractors brought together by Professor Lester Larsen. The Friends undertook a funding drive to renovate the roof of the building and this has been accomplished. The Friends then recommended that the building be named the Lester F. Larsen Museum in recognition of Professor Larsen's 39 years as Chief Engineer. This was approved by the Board of Regents on April 4, 1998 and a dedication of the building was held on May 2.

Although it was a cold and windy day, it is estimated that over 400 people came to the open house and dedication program. Professor Larsen and his family were in attendance and many former tractor test employees were able to attend and renew acquaintances.

In addition to the historic tractors, the museum houses the collection of pioneer hand tools and animal drawn implements which Prof. Chauncey Smith had brought together, student forge projects from Professor William Runnalls classes and early conservation tillage equipment manufactured by the L. W. Chase Plow Company of Lincoln. The format for displaying these exhibits has not been finalized and we are employing a Master's student from the Museum Studies program to assist us. This will give the student some experience and will give us access to professional advice.

Our next step with the museum is to replace electrical wiring which had to be removed when the roof was repaired and re-connect the steam lines for heat next winter. As required by the University,

we are working with an architect to draw up the plans for these projects as well as re-painting the interior walls and replacing one or two of the large doors. We do not know the expected costs for these projects but we do know that we have utilized our funding to date for the renovation of the roof and will need your continued support for this next phase.

All support to date has come from donors and volunteers. We need to assure the continued support of the museum activities over the years and, for that purpose, we encourage support of our endowment program through the University of Nebraska Foundation. Our initial goal is \$400,000, which would provide for a part time curator, student hourly help and some operating expenses. Our long term objective is to re-introduce some of the activities which Professor Larsen had such as renovation of specific historic tractors and machines to show calibre. In past years the museum had employed students to renovate a 1908 Ford tractor and a 1925 Model T pickup, both of which were basically junk, but which are now excellent displays. We have several tractors with which Professor Larsen had started renovating but we have placed them in storage until funding is available.

We receive a continuing interest on the part of visitors even though we have not yet set up hours of operation. We generally have someone working on projects during the mornings and can easily accomodate visitors then and we will meet with visitors during the afternoon if they will call ahead.

For those of you who have not yet joined the Friends, you may fill out the form below and return it to the address shown. Our annual dues are \$10. For those wishing to contribute to the completion of the renovation project or toward a perpetual endowment, send your contribution to the University of Nebraska Foundation, 1111 Building, 1111 Lincoln Mall, Lincoln, NE 68588-0650, specifying account number 4182.

I enclose \$_____ for ____ year's membership in the Friends of the University of Nebraska Lester F. Larsen Museum.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone: _____ FAX _____ e-mail _____

Send to: Bill Splinter
202 BSEL
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68583-0832

The Nebraska Tractor Test Law
The Beginnings

by Dr. Louis I. Leviticus
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The May 13, 1919 issue of the *Senate Journal* of the State of Nebraska carried the following item:

HOUSE ROLL No. 85:

"A Bill for an Act to provide for official tests for, gas, gasoline, kerosene, distillate or other liquid fuel traction engines in the State of Nebraska, and to compel the maintenance of adequate service stations for same" was read the third time and put upon its passage.

Whereupon the president stated: "This bill, having been read at large on three different days, and the same with all of its amendments having been printed, the question is, shall the bill pass?"

The roll was called and those voting in the affirmative were: Messrs. Ainlay, Barr, Bradstreet, Brooks, Bushee, Chappell, Cordeal, Cronin, Cooper, Erickson, Good, Hall, Harriss, Hammond, Hoagland, Houston, Johnson, Neal, Peterson, Randall, Reed, Robbins, Swanson, Saunders, Sears, Sturm, Tannaer, Taylor, Warner, Watson, Weaverling, Weston. Total - 32

Those voting in the negative were: None.

A constitutional majority having voted in the affirmative, the President declared the bill was passed and the title agreed to.

The first real consumer protection law aimed at the American farmer thus became law after having been signed by the Governor. The bill was the result of many complaints by farmers and a number of articles which were written on the subject of tractor quality, parts availability and the marketing ethics of some of the tractor manufacturers and their sales personnel. The July 1918 issue of the *Nebraska Farmer* carried two editorials by C. W. Pugsley, who was apparently editor at that time. One of them, discusses many aspects of farming, from machinery development to uniforms for farm workers. There is an interesting heading in this editorial on the subject of tractors and I quote:

" Tractor Difficulties.

At a meeting of approximately a thousand farmers in Lincoln a few weeks ago the subject of the tractor was up for discussion. These farmers had not assembled to discuss the tractor and might therefore be regarded as an average group of Nebraska farmers insofar as their attitude towards the tractor was concerned.

During the course of the discussion it developed that a large number of the farmers present owned tractors, and that a large number of the owners were not using their tractors. Several testified that they had purchased tractors, ranging in price from \$750 to \$2500, that they had only used these tractors a short time and that they were now for sale very cheap.

Many tractors now on the market are impracticable. They have one or more weak points which make them useless and it only takes one weak link in a chain to make it of no value.

The tractor experience of Charlie Warner of Lancaster County, covering a period of ten years, is typical of the development of the tractor. The first five years of the ten were filled with grief and disillusionment. He stayed by the game, however, and as he had chanced to tie up with a good and responsible company pointed out the defects to them. These were repaired and now he and other farmers are reaping the benefits of his costly and trying experience."

The next heading, called "*Irresponsible Companies*" contains paragraphs complaining about false sales claims and sales people who have no other interest than getting the tractor to the farm and pocketing the money from the farmer who, in those days, was not as well educated in the mechanics of machinery as he is today. After the tractor arrived it as often as not was started only once and then broke down. One section reads:

"Another reason why costly and valueless tractors are ruting in farmyard corners or in fields where they refuse to run is because irresponsible concerns are manufacturing tractors merely to sell and not to run."

One of the reasons of the tractor's increasing popularity was the shortage of labor and especially labor skilled in steering the horses which were still in use on most of the farms. There are several cases mentioned in another article by Mr. Pugsley in the same issue of the *Nebraska Farmer* titled "*Farm Tractor Experience*"

The editorial goes on to say:

"Farmers are talking tractors now. They want tractors especially during the labor shortage which now confronts us. Many farmers do not know much about tractors and are obliged to take the word of tractor salesmen. It is easy to describe a tractor on paper. Almost any pile of iron can be so described by a good advertising agent that it sounds like a wonderful tractor. If the defects are covered up with paint, and if the engine will run long enough to get the tractor to the farm, the object of some companies has been accomplished.

On 19 September 1919 an article by Representative Wilmot F. Crozier appeared in the *Implement and Tractor Trade Journal* which was a national farm machinery journal. The article was titled "*Father of Nebraska's Tractor Law explains it*". The editorial heading above the article reads as follows:

"Without a doubt the Nebraska Tractor test Law, which has engendered so much interest among tractor men the country over, is a remarkable piece of legislation. Unlike so many such measures, it aims to be fair to the industry upon which it is to have regulatory

effect. Representative Wilmot F. Crozier of Osceola, Neb., who fathered and pushed the bill through the legislature, tells the trade in straight-forward fashion through the Implement and Tractor Trade Journal why he formulated this important law."

It is clear from this heading that the country as a whole considered this law a very important step for the advancement of a better product and was very much aware of its importance and impact.

I will take the liberty here of quoting excerpts from Rep. Crozier's excellent article:

"I have watched the development of the tractor from its infancy, and have followed many a queer-looking contraption around the demonstration fields, that purported to be able to replace my long-eared mules in front of a gang plow (sic)."

"The successive years of development proved to me, beyond a doubt, that the tractor, in some form, was the agricultural implement the American farmer had been looking for, for these many years. I began investing a little money in the things, that is, I invested in the cheapest one that had wheels. I soon found out that wheels and cast iron are of no value unless you have power to turn them when they are hitched to something.

After operating, or attempting to operate, two excuses for tractors, I finally invested my money in a machine that would really do what the company said it would. Then I began wondering if there wasn't some way to induce all tractor companies to tell the truth."

Rep. Crozier states that the start of his actions began after reading the aforementioned editorial in the Nebraska Farmer by Mr. Pugsley and he quotes the relevant passages from the editorial. He also quotes cases of some companies and their dealers trying to induce farmers to invest in the stock by using false claims. Before taking the legislative route, a "lengthy correspondence" between Mr. Pugsley and Rep. Crozier followed.

"I had one other fact in mind, namely, that the tractor industry is a national institution as far as the American Farmer is concerned and no legislation confined unnecessarily to the boundaries of one state can completely fill the bill. However, Congress is so slow to act on anything of this nature till they get a great deal of pushing, I am in favor of giving the push whenever we can."

In addition, Rep. Crozier addresses the question of availability of repair parts and service which he incorporated into the law:

"Another relief that the Nebraska law is intended to give the farmers is in connection with the maintenance of service stations. The following clipping from one of the state papers of last October will show the need for some relief. This clipping says: "How Nebraska farmers have suffered serious losses and production of foodstuffs has been decreased through inability to replace broken parts of farm tractors and other farm machinery is told by H. Peters of Hay Springs in a letter written to the governor. He declares that the big

implement and machinery concerns compel farmers to wait from ten to thirty days, or even longer, for necessary parts, and in the meantime the grain becomes too ripe and shells out upon the ground. He suggests that the state council of defense issue an order forbidding any new machinery company to enter the state for the sale of its goods until it has provided a complete stock of repair parts and proper facilities for getting them to the farmers."

An interesting remark by Rep. Crozier, which was also addressed in the editorial by Mr. Pugsley was the question of Standardization. There was a lot of unhappiness with the fact that tractors and implements or even parts often could not be matched together without intensive alterations. The Implement and Tractor Trade journal also did address that question. No attempt was made to include this in the bill, apparently because of the difficulty in prescribing what had to be done. It can be deduced however, that these public discussions and the danger to the industry of someone passing some law concerning standardization, were instrumental in the enacting of standardization in the industry.

In the last paragraph, titled "*Aim Is Better Understanding*" Rep. Crozier concludes:

If this law brings about a better understanding between the producer and consumer in the tractor industry, it will be the chief reason for the framing of this legislation. The farmer has always protested against certain practices in the tractor business, but he has protested singly. Now he speaks with a voice that, at least, is being given attention. It was reported to me that one Eastern company intended to contest the Nebraska law in the courts. I am glad that it has reconsidered this decision. If there are any defects in the way the present law works out, or if it is shown to be unfair in any way to the manufacturer, I shall be glad to receive suggestions relative to the matter of a remedy or improvement

WILMOTT F. CROZIER

At the time of the writing of this article, the Nebraska Tractor Test Law has been in effect for about eighty years. Test procedures have changed over the years as technology has changed. The current procedure allows the manufacturer to make adjustments and repairs during pre-test runs conducted before the start of the official test. Over the years there have been many repairs and improvements to tractors as a result of conducting the pre-test runs. Also, all the breakdowns and repairs, which occur during the official test, are made public in the official test reports. Altogether the system has worked to provide a better product for the farmer and has provided industry with a performance standard for comparing their products.

May 26, 1998