

Case Steam Engine

Racine, WI



In the late 19th century, Case was one of America's largest builders of steam engines, producing self-propelled portable engines, traction engines and steam tractors. It also was a major producer of threshing machines and other harvesting equipment. In the 20th century, Case was among the 10 largest builders of farm tractors for many years.

Jerome Increase Case was a young man of 23 in 1842 when he left Oswego County, New York. His destination was Rochester, Wisconsin Territory. Case had read that the country around Rochester was the wheat center of the Midwest, and he planned to begin his career as a thresherman there. In New York, young Case purchased six "ground hog" threshers on credit and headed for Wisconsin. Five of those machines were sold before he reached his destination, and he kept the sixth to earn a living and use as a model for a new and better thresher he was to build. Case was refused permission to install another millrace and wheel in Rochester so he moved to Racine, Wisconsin, and, after years of steady growth, he erected a three-story brick shop that became the hub of his farm equipment manufacturing business in 1847. Case had foreseen the need for a new power source for his machines because until this time, the machines were powered by treadmill horsepower. Case envisioned a steam-powered thresher that would work faster and out-perform the old horse-power method. He constructed his first portable steam engine in 1869, and won first place at the 1878 Paris

Exposition in France for his thresher. It was the first thresher sent abroad by the Case company, and was to be followed by 36,000 more over the years. This steam engine came more than 15 years before the demand for more farm power brought on a steam-engine boom.

Looking east toward Lake Michigan on the corner of State Street in Racine, Wisconsin, there stands a statue of Old Abe in front of the Case Building. In 1861, Jerome Case happened to be in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, when Company C of the Eighth Wisconsin was being mustered. As their mascot, the company carried an eagle named "Old Abe," named in honor of president Abraham Lincoln. Throughout the war, "Old Abe" went through 38 battles and skirmishes and the Eighth Regiment became known as the Eagle Regiment. Case chose this heroic bird as the Case Company trademark to represent a symbol of excellence in the world.

Apart from being one of North America's most prolific builders of engines, Case was also interested in automobiles and airplanes. In 1910, the J.I. Case Threshing Machine Co. purchased the Pierce Motor Co. The Case Motor Works tended to focus on custom work. If a customer liked a car, but objected to the color of the upholstery, the obliging Case men would tear it out and replace it with whatever the buyer wanted. Case, like other car manufacturers of the period, maintained a racing team and continued to build automobiles until the mid-1920s. In the 1910s, Case also built a few

experimental airplanes and bi-planes at the Motor Works plant, but there is no record of them being produced.



During the 1870s, Jerome Case became interested in horse racing. He purchased a 200-acre farm south of Racine where he developed the Hickory Grove horse farm. Case owned some of the finest horses in the Midwest, but the horse that became a world champion was considered by many to be the joker of the Case string. Jay-Eye-See (named from Case's own initials) was foaled in 1878 and was an extra that was thrown in for \$500 with a string of horses Case had purchased. When the string was brought back to Racine and tried out, Jay-Eye-See was considered to be the freak of the lot because he would rack, pace, and trot indiscriminately. At one point, Case was offered \$50,000 for his horse, but wouldn't even consider the bid. Instead, Case challenged the world for \$10,000 that no horse could beat his famous Jay-Eye-See. There is no record of any takers. In the 1880s and 1890s, Jay-Eye-See notched several harness-racing records and is still the only horse to set world records in two different gaits.