

Kitten Steam Engine

Ferdinand, IN 1889-1940



Florenz Kitten was born to Henry and Theresa (Heeke) Kitten in Prussia in 1840. After several years of political upheaval, including an economic depression, a revolution, and an uprising by the working class, the Kitten's decided to emigrate to the United States.

A wooden pattern was cut for each piece and thousands of pieces were joined to form a finished engine.

Henry Kitten (Florenz's father) was a wooden-shoe maker by trade. The family ended up Ferdinand, Indiana, where Henry found good, ready-made German customers for his wooden shoes.

As a young boy, Florenz attended school and worked on a small farm. By all accounts, he was a forward thinker more interested in evolving technology than in the usual childhood pursuits. But tinkering was not a trade, so he learned carpentry and farming. He helped out on the farm until he was 19 and then switched to carpentry.

Meanwhile, Florenz met Miss Katherine Luegers, ten years his junior. They were married in 1868 and built a house in Ferdinand. It was here Florenz began to

seriously explore the powers of steam in a second-floor workshop in their house.

Using his knowledge of farming and carpentry, combined with inventor's intuition, Florenz began building steam engines and threshers in his workshop around 1880. His first horse-drawn engines used an upright boiler, but Florenz soon switched to a short, squat, horizontal boiler in place of the elongated version. Kitten's new engine used a 24-horsepower boiler with a return-flue design. The cylinder was mounted on the right side with the fly wheel belt pulley on the left.

Florenz needed to expand his growing industry, so he built a two-story factory and foundry adjoining his home and dubbed the business Ferdinand Foundry and Machine Works. After perfecting his designs, Florenz filed an application with the U.S. Patent Office on May 29, 1889, to receive patent rights for his steam engine. Patent #409,594 was granted on August 20, 1889.

Fully loaded with water, tools, and coal, a Kitten steam engine tipped the scales at 17,025 pounds, which is probably the reason most were sold within a 100 miles radius of Ferdinand. Freight costs were not exorbitant, but they weren't free, either. The Foundry was by far the largest employer in the town of Ferdinand, Indiana.

Florenz's inventions did not lack distinguishing features. The steam engines were generally painted yellow

and red, while all threshing machines featured yellow wheels. Even water wagons were painted to match and sometimes decorated with more intricate designs. Whimsical flowers added a festive touch.

Ferdinand Foundry and Machine Works completed its last steam engine in 1940. During the intervening years, only 224 were built. A wooden pattern was cut for each piece and thousands of pieces were joined to form a finished engine. A water wagon would be built with each engine. Approximately 200 threshing machines were also constructed at the plant.



Florenz Kitten