

# Reeves

## 40

Columbus, IN 1911



Reeves & Co. was an American farm tractor builder for 30 years, and manufactured some of the largest steam-traction engines used in North America. There was never a more unusual pair of brothers in the tractor-manufacturing world than the two Reeves brothers, Marshall and Milton. Between the two of them, they invented a six-wheeled and an eight-wheeled automobile, wrote a booklet of directions on how to play the game of Roque (an American variant of croquet played on a hard, smooth surface), founded and pastored a church, included sermons in Reeves & Co. agricultural products catalogs, donated half a million dollars to church missions, invented the variable transmission, had a well-known writer dedicate a work to the Reeves automobile, worked side-by-side with factory hands, and manufactured Reeves steam traction engines, cars, tractors, and gas engines.

Here's how the brothers got started: Marshall Reeves was a teenager, plowing corn on his father's farm with an old conventional double shovel plow in

1869, when he was struck with an idea. As The Evening Republican newspaper of Columbus, Ind., reported,

"The day being hot and the task not a pleasant one, the youth began thinking in terms of labor-saving machinery with the result that he devised a plow on which two double shovels were fastened, one a right-hand and the other a left. He was then able to plow a row of corn at one operation instead of merely a half row as he had done in the past."

With this the inventive genius of Marshall Reeves was unleashed. His father helped him improve the device, and in 1874 Marshall, his father, and his uncle, Alfred B. Reeves, formed Hoosier Boy Cultivator Co. In 1879, the company name was changed to Reeves & Co. Marshall. It began developing new Reeves items for the product line including threshers, straw stackers, separators, corn shellers, and clover hullers. During his lifetime, Marshall Reeves was credited with more than 50 patents.

In the same year, the other half of the dynamic duo, Milton Reeves, worked in a sawmill in Columbus. He noticed workers could not control the speed of the pulleys used to power woodcutting saws. The high speeds caused wood to split and resulted in a great deal of profit-cutting waste. After some months of study and experimentation, he invented a variable-speed transmission to control how fast the saws cut. During his lifetime, Milton patented more than 100 different items. In September 1888, Milton, along

with Marshall, M.M. Reeves, and A.B. Reeves bought Edinburg Pulley Co., moved it to Columbus, and renamed it Reeves Pulley Co.

In 1910, Reeves & Co. built its first tractor, a large 4-cylinder machine with an engine built by Minneapolis Steel & Machinery Co. It was identical to the Twin City 40-65 engine. The Reeves 40 was a 40-65 with a 4-cylinder engine.

In designing the Reeves 40 Gas Tractor, the manufacturers had the benefit of the experience of nearly 40 years of tractor building. The tractor never did do well, partly because Reeves & Co. was sold to Emerson-Brantingham Co. of Rockford, Illinois, in 1912. Emerson-Brantingham continued to make the Reeves 40 through 1920, as well as Reeves steam traction engines. Emerson-Brantingham also acquired the Gas Traction Co, Rockford Engine Works, and the Geiser Manufacturing Co. But by 1915, the companies ran into financial difficulties. After a merger with the former D. M. Osborne Company in 1928, it was bought by J. I. Case Company, now the Case Corporation.

The Evening Republican reported: "For more than a third of a century, Mr. Reeves was president and general manager of the Reeves & Company's manufacturing concern ... at the time of the sale of the company, the annual business done by the company totaled approximately two million dollars."

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