

The Ford Tractor

Minneapolis, MN 1916



This Ford Tractor was not made by the famous automobile maker Henry Ford, but rather by an enterprising man named William Baer Ewing, who intended to capitalize on the well-known Ford name. Henry Ford wanted to manufacture a tractor, but the success of his automobile kept him so busy that W. Baer Ewing beat him to it by establishing The Ford Tractor Company of Minneapolis in 1915.

When Ewing set up the Ford Tractor company, he was working for the Federal Securities Company (FSC) in Minneapolis as its manager. He reaped all the profits as the FSC manager as he sold Ford stock, but also owned the company, which sold the machines to farmers. In 1914, Ewing obtained the rights to a tractor design through Lion Traction Co. and began looking for a name for his new tractor. Ewing knew he had to have a moniker both easily recognized and strong enough to pull in buyers. He found Paul B. Ford, whom he hired and made director of the Ford Tractor Co. in exchange for the use of his name. Ford Tractor Company claimed: "Mr. Paul B. Ford, inventor and designer of the Ford Tractor, has devoted years of his life to its study." But Ford knew nothing of tractor design, and Ewing wanted Ford solely because of his last name.

Ewing then hired a Minneapolis designer named Robert Kinkead to modify the Lion tractor. Kinkead insisted the machine's design was seriously flawed, but Ewing overruled those concerns and instructed Kinkead to proceed with the

patent applications. Ewing knew Kinkead was right and the tractor needed more work, but was certain the Ford name would sell the tractor. Kinkead, reluctant to have his name connected with the venture, left the company. Henry Ford also tried to put a stop to a 'Ford' tractor coming out of Minneapolis, but he was unsuccessful and Henry Ford & Son were forced to sell their new tractor as 'Fordson' because Ewing had taken the name 'Ford.'

Ewing claimed the company was making two tractors a day in its Ford plant, and when the night shift was started it would produce five a day. He said orders with the \$75 deposit were pouring in from all over the world, and the tractors were being sold quicker than they could be produced. The company was making money.

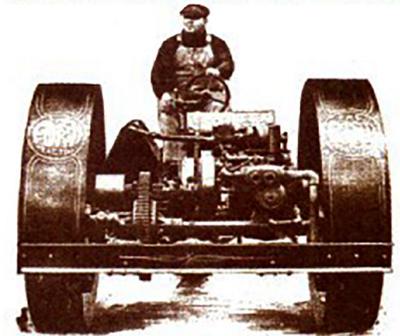
In 1916, the Ford tractor sold for \$350, fully equipped with magneto, carburetor, governor, and coil. Company ads stated the tractor would do the work of six to eight horses and cost less than a good team. The warranty claimed the company would cover parts for one year from date of purchase and promised free replacement if the owner was not satisfied. As months passed, the Ford Tractor Company web began to unravel. Stockholders wanted to see monetary returns, and farmers demanded their promised tractors, which had never been shipped. Company personnel had spent \$10,130 of new-tractor deposit money, but not a single tractor had been delivered.

Finally, the house of cards tumbled. Fewer than a 100 – perhaps only 30 – Ford tractors were ever sold, not thousands as the company claimed. Ford Tractor Company of Minneapolis went into bankruptcy and few Ford tractors still exist today.

There is an upside to Ewing's greed and deception. When Nebraskan legislature representative Wilmot Crozier was duped with his Ford tractor, he proposed a bill allowing manufacturers to sell tractors in Nebraska only after thorough evaluations verified their claims. The bill was adopted and testing began at the University of Nebraska in 1920. Within a few years, the entire tractor industry adopted the Nebraska Farm Tractor Tests as the gold standard across the nation.

THE FORD TRACTOR

See it on the Main Floor (lobby) West Hotel
During Implement Dealers' Convention, Jan. 11-13



During the first half of the year 1915, Ford Tractors were shipped to purchasers in various parts of the following states: Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Indiana, Illinois, Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, New Mexico, Texas and New York. Our master Dealers in these States are "lining up" for the big 1916 business, which is believed will be the biggest tractor year in history. Make your arrangements now for the Ford Tractor agency in your locality.

THE FORD TRACTOR COMPANY

General Office and Sales Room: Ford Tractor Building, 2619 to 2827 University Avenue S. E.
MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.