



Our Old Bookcase, June 8, 2017. J. Powell, inventor, NI Corn Picker

Photo caption: John Powell's Corn Picker, with P.T.O., in 1925, which New Idea produced commercially as of 1928.

OUR OLD BOOK CASE

By Joyce L. Alig, President, Mercer County Historical Society

I just read an article in the Farm Collector, (Gas Engine Magazine), entitled, "*The History behind New Idea Farm Machinery,*" by Sam Moore, Salem Ohio. Moore acknowledged Scott A. Highfield, General Manager of Witmer's Inc., his local AGCO dealer, for information pertaining to the New Idea name. Since Sam Moore, gave the title, "*The History behind New Idea Farm Machinery,*" I wondered what he wrote about the history "behind New Idea Farm Machinery." One sentence jumped out at me, when Moore wrote, "*Henry Synck patented several improvements to the manure spreader and helped develop the farm equipment industry's first successful 2-row corn picker in 1928.*"

Since Mr. Moore is addressing the "*History behind New Idea Farm Machinery,*" I do believe that he would want to know the "*History behind the New Idea Corn Picker.*" For those of you who have a copy of the history book, "*New Idea Company's Corn Pickers, 1925-1982, Coldwater, Ohio,*" by the New Idea Historic Preservation Committee of the Mercer County Historical Society, printed by The Messenger Press in 2015, go to pages 21 and 22, and page 6 at the beginning of the book, and you will learn about

John Powell, the person behind the history of the “*farm equipment industry’s first successful 2-row corn picker in 1928.*”

As any person, who recognizes the importance of creative ideas, not only in business and industry, but also in every walk of life, understands that sometimes ideas come together for a person who has a broad education, not only in technical or academic schooling, but also in life experiences, i.e. where he works, where he follows recreational activities, the people with whom he associates, and where he lives and/or travels. Thus, John Powell, Kokomo, Indiana, was aware a new industrial invention, the P.T. O., (Power Take Off), with Frenchman Albert Gougis at the turn of the Century.

At that time, various companies were working on developing and improving tractors. John Powell thought that he could build a better tractor, than the ones on the market. His home-made tractor had a power lift which meant rotating parts behind that turned with engine power. A visiting neighbor was talking with Powell, about his unpicked corn in the field, and was disgusted with mechanical field pickers that would not work in a muddy field. The neighbor asked Powell if Powell’s home-made tractor would be of any help. Powell drove his tractor into the muddy field and found that slippery mud made it difficult to use a mechanized corn harvester. At that moment, Powell had the inspiration [a “new idea” of his own] of creating a two-row corn picker.

As of 1925, Powell approached the New Idea Company with his idea of a two-row “Power Take Off” corn picker, which could be pulled by a two plow tractor. For whatever arrangements John Powell and the New Idea Company made, the New Idea Company assumed responsibility of developing Powell’s invention into a practical farm machine. New Idea engineers worked on Powell’s two-row P.T.O. corn picker in 1926 and 1927. New Idea produced the New Idea Two Row Corn Picker Husker commercially in 1928.

The July 30, 1930 and February 12, 1931 issues of the “*Farm Implement News,*” carried the story of Albert Gougis with the P.T.O. and John Powell, with the Corn Picker.

In the meantime, whether at home or at work or during your free time, never under-estimate the value of your creative ideas, about any topic whatsoever. Equally important is to always listen to children who share their ideas with you; they may become the next generation’s successful inventors.

[Mercer County Historical Society President Joyce Alig, may be contacted at 3054 Burk-St. Henry Road, Saint Henry, OH 45883, or hystalig@bright.net or 419-678-2614