
**The John Deere Story**
A Biography of Plowmakers John and Charles Deere
By Neil Dahlstrom and Jeremy Dahlstrom

The introduction of steel plows was a leading step to the opening of the midwestern prairies by pioneer farmers. Tough prairie sod could not be broken with cast iron shares, and sticky soils could not be turned with ironclad moldboards. In the 1830s, a few blacksmiths used steel to make sharper plowshares and some experimented with wrought iron moldboards. In 1837, John Deere, an ambitious smith from Vermont, newly arrived in Grand Detour, Illinois, produced a plow that cut more keenly and turned furrows more smoothly than its rivals. It sold well and Deere continued to improve the implement, importing fine steel and enlarging his workshop. In 1848, he moved to Moline on the Mississippi River, where he built a large new factory to produce even better plows for an expanding market ranging north to Minnesota and south to Missouri. In the 1850s, output soared from over 2,000 to over 13,000 plows a year.

A crucial problem for the growing enterprise, examined in detail by Neil and Jeremy Dahlstrom, was how to maintain a cash flow. Young pioneers who bought land on the prairies had little or no money in their pockets. They needed Deere's plow to start cultivating and, until their crops and livestock were sold, they remained desperately short of ready currency. On the other hand, suppliers of steel demanded immediate payments in cash for material imported from England or Germany or transported from Pittsburgh, and each week Deere had to find cash to pay wages to sixty-five workers. A long lag between expenditure and income made it difficult to assess the profitability of the business. The financial panic of 1857 imposed a severe strain on its credit.

In 1858, Deere passed control of the business to his only surviving son, Charles, who was college-educated and also well trained in the office and on the factory floor. Charles's first task was to visit customers and dealers in the field, instructing them to make cash-only sales. After the Civil War, he faced unfair competition from
another plowmaker, marketing replicas of his "Moline Plow." A lawsuit ended in 1871 with a judgment against Deere for attempting to impose an "odious" monopoly. For the remainder of the century, farmers' associations and labor unions regarded him as a dominating industrial giant. Deere responded by devolving production and marketing to eight branch houses located across the continent.

This outstanding study in business history has been constructed from company archives, letters and papers kept by members of the family and business partners, and files of newspapers and trade journals. It is particularly illuminating on the close relations that bound industry to agriculture during the pioneering period of settlement in the Midwest. In Europe, mechanization of agriculture was mostly initiated and financed by large landowners and wealthy farmers. In America, the manufacturer took the initiative and actively promoted his product. It is unlikely that any other firm in the world produced as many steel plows in the third quarter of the nineteenth century as Deere and Company, and few businessmen took greater risks than John and Charles Deere. It is an enthralling story.

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**Lincoln's Speeches Reconsidered**

By John Channing Briggs


No one can read Abraham Lincoln's state papers without perceiving in them a most remarkable facility of "putting things so as to commend the attention and assent of the people," wrote Henry J. Raymond, editor of the *New York Times*, in 1864. Still, there has been no end of difficulty in understanding exactly how Lincoln's "facility" of expression managed to achieve the ultimate political goal of commanding "attention and assent." Almost all of Lincoln's surviving corpus of "speeches" are either texts he wrote beforehand or transcripts of speech acts which a stenographer or reporter reduced to a written text, with or without Lincoln's knowledge or even approval. So, at the very beginning, we are on uncertain ground about what constitutes a Lincoln "speech"—is it a spoken act, or a written text? Historians are further burdened with uncertainty about the rhetorical style in which the spoken acts were cast. We have vanishingly few concrete descriptions of Lincoln in action on a platform, and thus lit-