

Oral History of Illinois Agriculture



John Deere

Illinois State Museum



[Http://.avbarn.museum.state.il.us](http://.avbarn.museum.state.il.us)

Who REALLY Was John Deere?

Adapted from a Lesson Plan by Steve Sargeant from Macomb

The name John Deere today is associated with the manufacture of farm machinery easily recognized with its bright green color. But what do you know of John Deere, the man behind the company?

This activity will introduce you to that man, who was a pioneer in the industrialization of agriculture.

The AVBarn project interviewed the curator of the John Deere Archives at headquarters in Moline, Illinois. He researched and wrote a book about the life of John Deere and his son and successor, Charles Deere.

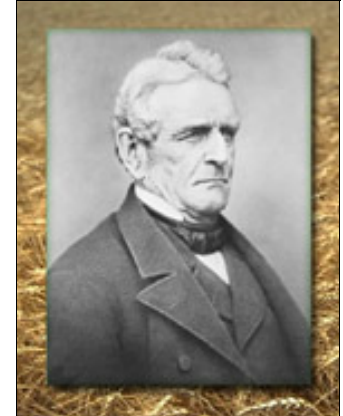
By watching the video oral history of Mr. Neil Dahlstrom, you will

learn about the Deeres as businessmen, inventors, and personalities.

The oral interview can be viewed at <http://avbarn.museum.state.il.us/BioID/40>. In the right-hand column, you will find short video clips on different topics. You can also listen to the full interview.

You can also learn about John Deere and his company history at http://www.deere.com/en_US/compinfo/history/johndeere.html, on the company website.

Ag teachers can use this activity to have their students create a lesson for FFA students to teach to younger students.



Portrait of John Deere, courtesy of the Deere Website.

Special points of interest:

- Introduction
- The John Deere Plow
- For Ag Teachers
- Objectives, Activity
- Learning Standards
- Assessment
- Resources

The John Deere Plow

Settlers coming to Illinois in the early-to-mid 1800s found a land of rich, fertile soil and a level terrain, a farmer's dream. The prairie had another characteristic, though, that made plowing the land very difficult. That characteristic was the growth of thick, tall, prairie grasses that had thick, deep, tangled root systems. The traditional wooden plow, and even ironclad plows were not strong enough to turn a deep furrow.

By the 1830s, men of an inventive mind turned their talents to devising improvements to the plow. One of the most successful was John Deere, who in 1837 built a plow with a curved face that was highly polished. The polished surface would allow the overturned soil to slide across the surface of the plow. This prevented the plowshare from getting caked with damp clods of soil that the farmer had to stop and clean off every few yards.



A John Deere plow from the 1890s in the Illinois State Museum's collections

For Ag Teachers—Objectives

Interest Approach:

Deere & Company, founded in 1837 (collectively called John Deere), has grown from a one-man blacksmith shop into a corporation that today does business around the world and employs approximately 56,000 people.

Objective 1: Explain the early development of mechanical technology in agriculture, more

specifically, the invention of the plow by Charles Newbold in 1797.

Objective 2: Explain how the innovative discovery by John Deere in 1837 revolutionized the agriculture industry, paving the way for modern agriculture as we know it today.

Objective 3: Introduce your audience to John Deere, the man, not the company. Tell of his early be-

ginnings as a blacksmith in Vermont, his early financial disasters and the route he took to forming, arguably the biggest agriculture success story in US history.

Objective 4: Introduce his son, Charles Deere, to your audience and explain his importance to the company known as Deere & Company.

Ag Lesson Activity

Activity: Students will research and review information, as well as listen to oral interviews, about the man known as John Deere. They will develop a lesson that can be easily adapted for use with younger students [in preparation for AITC (Ag In The Classroom) lessons]. The lesson should use at least

one form of technology such as audio clips, video clips and/or PowerPoint. The activity should focus on the four objectives listed above. The goal is for younger students to understand the importance of John Deere and Company in the history of science and technology.

Illinois Learning Standards—Science and Social Studies

ISBE Standards: Use ISBE descriptors for each standard to assess:

Grade Level: 9

Science:

13. Understand the relationships among science, technology and society in historical and contemporary contexts.

13:B. Know and apply concepts that describe the interaction between science, technology and

society.

13:B:5b. Analyze and describe the processes and effects of scientific and technological breakthroughs.

Social Studies:

Era: Development of the industrial United States from 1865 to 1914

History: 16.D.4 (W) Identify significant events and developments since 1500 that

altered world social history in ways that persist today including colonization, Protestant Reformation, **industrialization, the rise of technology** and human rights movements.

Economics: 15.C.4b Explain the importance of research, development, invention, technology and entrepreneurship to the United States economy

Assessment, Rubrics

A 20 point rubric will be utilized as an assessment tool. The rubric will focus on the following:

1. Up to 4 points for each of the 4 objectives assigned.

Objective 1: Explain the early development of mechanical technology in agriculture, more specifically, the invention of the plow by Charles Newbold in 1797.

4 points: Clear, detailed explanation of the importance of Newbold's invention
 3 points: Clear explanation but lacks some details of the invention and its importance necessary for student understanding
 2 point: Vague or in complete explanation of invention and importance
 1 point: Confusing explanation but effort was made.

Objective 2: Explain how the innovative discovery by John Deere in 1837 revolutionized the agriculture industry, paving

the way for modern agriculture as we know it today.

4 points: Clear, detailed explanation of the importance of Newbold's invention
 3 points: Clear explanation but lacks some details of the invention and its importance necessary for student understanding
 2 point: Vague or in complete explanation of invention and importance
 1 point: Confusing explanation but effort was made.

Objective 3: Introduce your audience to John Deere, the man, not the company. Tell of his early beginnings as a blacksmith in Vermont, his early financial disasters and the route he took to forming, arguably the biggest agriculture success story in US history.

4 points: Salient details of Deere's life and work give a rich picture to audience.
 3 points: Basic details of Deere's life and work are clear.
 2 points: Only a few details are given, or a general summary lacking details.

1 point: Not enough information is given for students to understand Deere's contribution.

Objective 4: Introduce his son, Charles Deere, to your audience and explain his importance to the company known as Deere & Company.

4 points: Details of Charles Deere's business acumen and success are given.
 3 points: A few details of Charles Deere are given, including his business acumen.
 2 points: General summary of Charles Deere's contribution are given or do not make clear what his contribution was.
 1 point: Attempt was made to explain Charles Deere's contribution, but was unclear or incomplete.

1. Rubric for the Implementation of technology, eg. PowerPoint, AV clips, etc.

2 points: Presentation incorporates smoothly digital images, AV clips from OHIA database, and other technology.
 1 point: Presentation includes the above, but as a distraction rather than as an integrated part.

Resources

Websites:

Oral History of Illinois Agriculture website: www.ohia.museum.state.il.us

John Deere & Company website: www.johndeere.com

Books:

Bogue, Allan G. (1994). *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the nineteenth century*. Iowa State University Press.

Buck, Solon J. (1967). *Illinois in 1818*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana.

Calkins, Earnest E. (1937, reprint, 1989). *They Broke the Prairie: Being some account of the settlement of the upper Mississippi valley by religious and education pioneers, told in terms of Galesburg*. University of Illinois Press.

Dahlstrom, Neil and Jeremy Dahlstrom. (2005) *The John Deere Story: A Biography Of Plowmakers John & Charles Deere*. Northern Illinois University Press; illustrated edition.

Wayne G. Broehl Jr (1984). *John Deere's Company: A History of Deere and Company and Its Times*. Doubleday

The John Deere Company has published many books for children and tractor enthusiasts. You can find them listed at online booksellers—Keyword—John Deere.