

Biographical Synopsis of Theophilus Brown

1879-1971

Ingenuity, Talent, and Character



Drawing by William Theophilus Brown, at age 12, Theo's son

Cyrus H. McCormick Medal recipient

Robert H. Goddard Award for Outstanding Professional Achievement

Distinguished Service Award from the National Safety Council

Written by Willie Cade

Grandson of Theophilus Brown, CEO and Founder of PCRR

Theophilus (Theo) Brown was born April 19th, 1879 in Worcester, Massachusetts. He attended Classical High School and rowed in the first U. S. high school crew competition. Brown's sense of creative adventure and intellectual endeavor are traceable to his rich ancestral history. His paternal grandfather, also named Theophilus Brown (1811-1879), was a tailor and friend of Thoreau and Emerson. Theo's grandfather and grandmother, Sarah Ann Brown opened their home to the leading thinkers of their day, not only Thoreau and Emerson, but also Alcott and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who praised Brown as *"the freshest and most original mind in Worcester"*.¹



Theo kept a continuous series of diaries from 1911-1971, with two earlier diaries dated 1893 and 1897 from his high school years. The diaries are available online at <http://theo.wpi.edu>. He graduated from Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) in 1901 with a degree in mechanical engineering. For nine years he worked for the Richardson Manufacturing Company, a manufacturer of agricultural machinery. His first invention was a tailboard for a manure spreader and it was a vital addition to general agriculture. In early 1911, he reported signing a Canadian patent application for a low down spreader. He also reported building a lime sower and working on a design for a lift mower. Deere & Company bought Brown's patents from the Richardson Company. In October of 1911, after a trip to Chicago, Theo was offered a job at Deere and moved to Moline, Illinois. A year later, Theo became superintendent of the Marseilles Manufacturing Company's plant in East Moline which later became the John Deere Spreader Works. In 1916 he became manager of the John Deere Plow Works Experimental Department. Some of his patents include:

- 1918 Disk Colter
- 1920 Conveyor Chute
- 1925 Plow
- 1943 Hydraulic Control Mechanism
- 1945 Tractor
- 1951 Adjustable Wheel Base Tractor



Theo designed the power lift to lift implements up and down. It worked by taking power from the motor to raise and lower a draw bar which would then raise and lower the implement.

The first half of the 20th century was an astonishing time for developments in agriculture. New patents meant new products and technologies, which in turn helped the farmer become more productive and efficient. In 50 years farmers went from primarily using beasts of burden to tractors.

The Great Depression and the Agricultural Depression occurred concurrently, and while both of these had their impact on John Deere, the company managed to stay profitable. This can be attributed to both the quality of products being made, and their devotion to innovation. Even during this time Deere continued to fund the experimental department to allow the company to continue to develop new products and ideas. By 1933 Theo Brown had accumulated 91 patents. Throughout his career he continued this trend, and held 158 patents to his name.

Theo Brown had a significant role within Deere, and Deere in turn contributed to agricultural progress. Always devoted to innovation Deere had many patents every year. Even in 1931, while second in farm equipment sales to International Harvester, Deere had 36 more patents than IHC for a total of 253. Brown's enthusiasm and

ingenuity was recognized by Harvester. After having lost the race to the patent office for a new invention, taking advantage of his unique name, Harvester dubbed him “**The Awfulest Brown**”.²

It was this devotion for developing a primer product that kept Deere moving forward. It was this changing technology that also helped the advancement in food production. This means that Deere was and still is a very important force in feeding the world. With a humility befitting the Theo (a.k.a. Popo) I knew, I would conclude that he was one of the driving forces behind their success.

He was committed to the satisfaction of Deere’s customers. His diaries are replete with many train tickets and the names of the hotels where he stayed as he traveled the country relentlessly looking for solutions to problems on the farms of Deere customers. It was this devotion to the company’s image, and to the products that they sold that made Theo Brown such a significant part of John Deere. Theo’s creative solutions and designs, the many years he devoted to creating the best possible product and his efforts to back up every product Deere made with personal efforts all contributed to the world class company that John Deere is today. I dare say that without Theo Brown, John Deere would not be as great a company and without John Deere, the world would be struggling to feed her population just a bit more.

Theo Brown retired from Deere in 1952. Not only did Theo received 158 patents during his career he also led the experimental department, and held a seat on the Board of Directors of Deere for nearly 30 years . Theo had his hand in most of the products coming out of Deere. He was in charge of the entire General Purpose tractor project, and led in designing implements for most tractors. Theo also led the way in standardizing the power take off system, and introduced the Power Lift, hailed as one of the top 3 innovations of the decade.³ “A Works Progress Administration (WPA) study concluded that this one invention saved each farmer 30 minutes every day because operators could pull a lever from their seat, rather than get off the tractor to raise or lower the implement by hand. The WPA study suggested that the power lift might have saved a total of 1,000,000 man-hours a year.”⁴

He was the fifth recipient of the Cyrus H. McCormick Medal for outstanding service in agricultural engineering; the Robert H. Goddard Award for Outstanding Professional Achievement; and the Distinguished Service Award from the National Safety Council for work in farm safety. Of these awards Theo was most proud of his safety award.

In reflecting on his long and ingenious career, Theo wrote: *“It is quite a source of satisfaction to have bridged the gap from the old time New England farm implement factory to the large full line company and to have had a small part in the transition from animal power to the power of the gasoline motor.”*



Aug. 21, 1945.

T. BROWN ET AL
TRACTOR

Des. 142,251

Filed March 26, 1945

2 Sheets-Sheet 1

FIG. 1

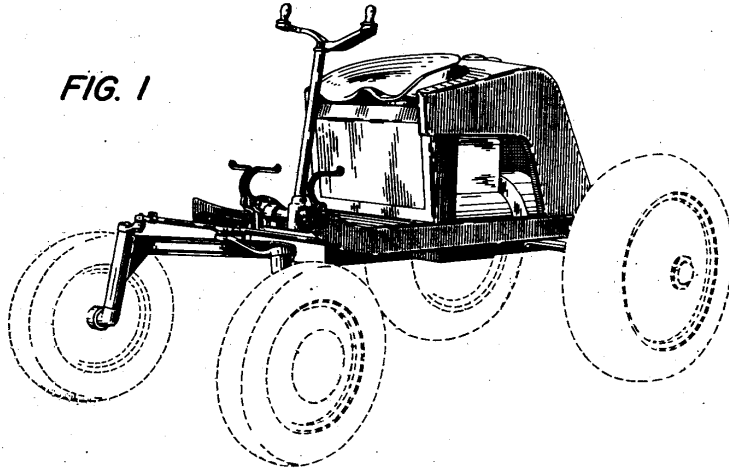
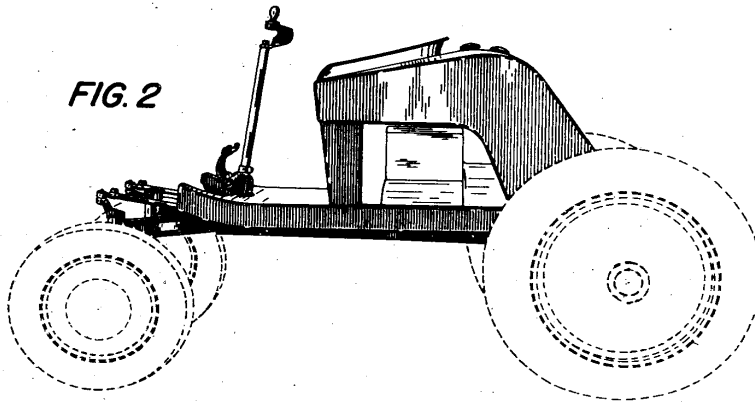


FIG. 2



INVENTORS
THEOPHILUS BROWN &
HENRY DREYFUSS
BY *Ed. J. Parker*
ATTORNEYS

Aug. 21, 1945.

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2 Sheets-Sheet 2

FIG. 3

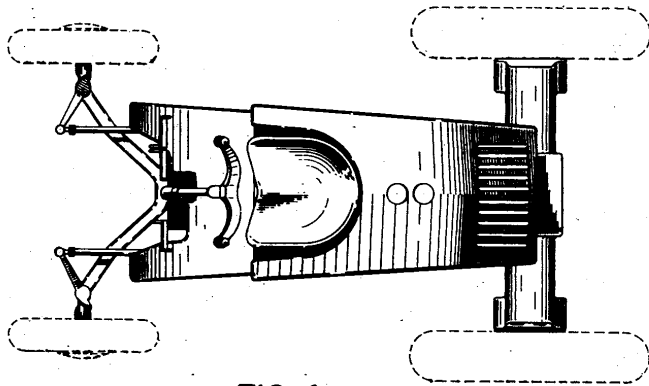
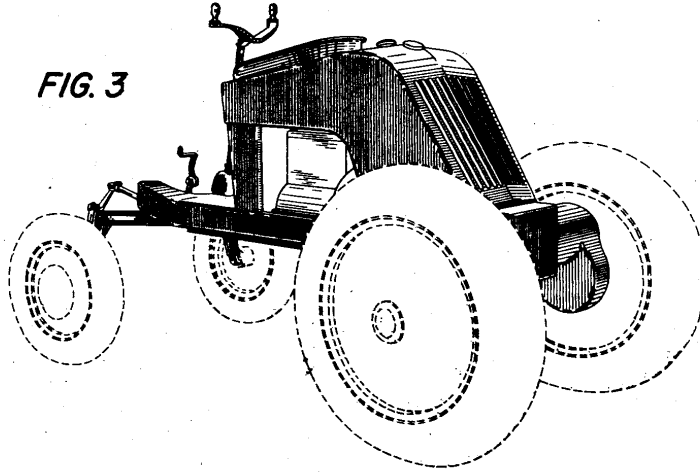


FIG. 4

INVENTORS
THEOPHILUS BROWN &
HENRY DREYFUSS

BY *[Signature]*
ATTORNEYS

Patented Aug. 21, 1945

Des. 142,251

UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE

142,251

DESIGN FOR A TRACTOR

Theophilus Brown, Moline, Ill., and Henry Dreyfuss, New York, N. Y., assignors to Deere & Company, Moline, Ill., a corporation of Illinois

Application March 26, 1945, Serial No. 118,721

Term of patent 14 years

(Cl. D14-3)

To all whom it may concern:

Be it known that we, Theophilus Brown and Henry Dreyfuss, citizens of the United States, residing at Moline, in the county of Rock Island and State of Illinois, and at New York city, in the county of New York and State of New York, respectively, have invented a new, original, and ornamental Design for a Tractor, of which the following is a specification, reference being had to the accompanying drawings, forming a part thereof, in which

Figure 1 is a perspective view of the front and side of a tractor showing our new design.

Figure 2 is a side perspective view.

Figure 3 is a perspective view showing a side and rear of the tractor and

Figure 4 is a top plan view.

The dominant features of our design are shown in solid black lines in the drawings.

We claim:

The ornamental design for a tractor, as shown and described.

THEOPHILUS BROWN.
HENRY DREYFUSS.

After his retirement, Theo continued his interest in Deere, remaining as a consultant and also appointed to an advisory committee, but by 1954 he wrote, on January 24th, “. . . this growing older and finding that Deere & Co. matters move on without my taking much of any active part gives me a strange feeling . . .”

Gradually, in the years that followed, Theo’s focus was on his family. He and Elise, his wife, whom he affectingly called “Lovie,” traveled to Europe on the Queen Mary in 1954. They visited family and friends often, and wrote and received frequent letters to and from their children (Elise or Lee and Bill) and Theo’s sisters. After Theo’s retirement they began spending their summers at their house in Princeton, Massachusetts, many years arriving in May and staying until October. Some years Lee and her family visited for part of the summer. They usually spent holidays with Lee’s family.

Lee’s family moved to Memphis in 1957, and there are letters about segregation in the South. During the early 1960s Theo’s granddaughter Cathy decided to get involved in the Civil Rights Movement which effected the family.

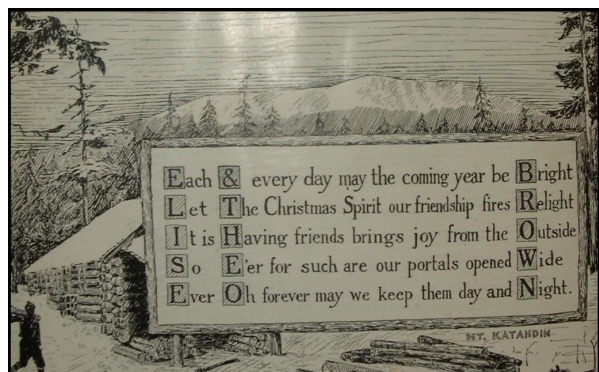
Theo was actively engaged in his community and other activities. In 1958, Theo wrote an article on Farm Machinery for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. For many years Theo recorded in his diaries neatly printed headlines from, major world events. He also did sketches, many of plants in Princeton, Massachusetts and hand colored them. He and Elise had joined the Blackhawk Hiking Club in Moline many years before, and they continued their hiking both there and in Princeton. He set up a workshop in his basement in Moline, and did woodworking, often making gifts for friends.

By 1965, Lee was in Hinsdale, Illinois with her family. Theo and Elise decided to give up their house and move to a retirement community nearby. In 1968, a group of Deere retirees began to have a bi-weekly lunch, which Theo frequently attended and enjoyed. By 1970, Theo had been diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease, and it became more difficult for him to write clearly. Many of his 1970 and 1971 entries are typed. He was honored by his lunch friends in 1971 on the occasion of his 92nd birthday. In their last few years, Theo and Elise were dependent on other people for transportation, as they decided they should no longer drive. They flew to Massachusetts for a few weeks in the summers, having given the Princeton house to their daughter. They continued to take an active interest in their children and grandchildren.

In one of his last diary entries, on March 31, 1971, Theo wrote: “I miss my little basement work bench and tools but now my hands have lost their skill, my eyes can no longer be depended on and I have little strength. Elise and I have had a wonderful life together, ours has always been a happy family and an understanding of aims and purposes of each member.” His last diary entry was May 22nd, and inserted in later pages is an obituary for

Elise. The obituary in the WPI Journal stated that Theo died in Princeton in July 1971.⁶

⁶ <http://theo.wpi.edu/About/>



June 22 THURSDAY

2320

Elise and I drove to Lafayette Indiana 92nd
today starting at 5 in the morning
and getting there at 11 270 miles.

Clear
Cloudy
Rain
Snow

It is still terribly hot & uncomfortable
Meeting of Agricultural Engineers.



BERENFORD HUNTINGTON FLETCHER EKBLAW COUNCIL ASAE CARPENTER OLNEY BROWN SEITZ BRACKETT