

John Deere

1804–1886



WHY HE MADE HISTORY John Deere was a gifted inventor and businessman. His specially designed plow helped pioneers survive in the western United States.



As you read the biography below, think about how John Deere's inventiveness influenced his approach to manufacturing.

John Deere began his career as a blacksmith in Vermont. Many people came to respect him for the care he took in making various tools, such as shovels and **pitchforks**. Despite his success, Deere saw manufacturing decline in the 1830s. He knew that many people were heading to the western frontier. In 1836, with his tools and a little money, Deere arrived in Grand Detour, Illinois.

Deere began work almost immediately upon his arrival. Pioneers needed many things from the blacksmith. While talking with them, Deere learned of a large problem they were facing. The cast-iron plows that had worked fine in the Northeast could not easily turn the heavy soil of the plains. Every few feet, the farmer had to stop and scrap the dirt and clay off the plow. This made the progress of land development very slow. Many people were disheartened at these difficulties and wanted to give up farming and return to their homes back east.

Deere studied the problem. In 1837 he demonstrated his invention of a steel plow. This plow enabled people to farm their land much more efficiently. Deere knew his new plow would be useful to many pioneers. He thought about how to best manufacture the plows. In those days, blacksmiths



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VOCABULARY

pitchfork a long-handled fork used to move hay

often took orders first and then built the product. Deere decided to build the plows first and then sell them. This was an innovative approach to business that continues to influence manufacturing to this day.

Deere produced 1,000 plows a year for 10 years after his invention first became known. In 1848 Deere opened a factory in Moline, Illinois. Deere continued to make changes in the design of his plows and make improvements. He also began to develop new products to help farmers.

Following Deere's death in 1886, his company continued to grow and still exists today. Deere & Company is now a worldwide manufacturer of farming equipment, tractors, and lawn mowers.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

- 1. Draw Conclusions** Why do you think that plows were so important to the pioneers?

- 2. Evaluate** Why was John Deere's way of manufacturing more efficient than the previous method?

ACTIVITY

- 3.** Imagine that John Deere won an award for his accomplishments. Prepare a speech in his honor.