

## **New Fields Beckon**

by Unknown

Automobiles, however, were not the only thing that interested the man who put America on wheels. He had many other ideas, some of which failed while others succeeded.

There was, first, the matter of his interest in farming, and in the land. He had experimented with a gasoline farm tractor early in the 1900's, but he was unsuccessful in developing a line of farm engines. In 1915, a tractor plant at Dearborn was begun. Some of the first tractors were sent to British farmers during the first World War. Out of this experience grew the Fordson tractor, which, like the model T, was light in weight and had a low selling price. Much more important to the farmers than his tractors was the effect that the model T Ford car had on the life of the people in rural areas. It had, in fact, been called "the farmers' car." Eventually Henry Ford became interested in farming itself. He had thousands of acres put under cultivation on Ford farms. In the 1930's, with the world burdened under an economic depression, Ford revived his interest in a program which he had begun in 1919 of establishing small factories in the rural areas of Michigan. He hoped to reverse the tide that saw farmers rushing to become city dwellers, thereby bringing about a decline of agricultural areas. He also became interested in the products of the soil that could be used in the making of automobiles. The agricultural laboratories he established discovered many substitutes for metals, and Ford cars began to appear with parts made from soybeans and other agricultural crops.

He also had an idea about transportation in the air. The idea ranged from "flivver planes" to all-metal three-motored transport ships. The Ford "tri-motor" played an important part in the development of commercial aviation. Pilots called it the "tin goose," and it became known far and wide as a "safe" airplane in a day when flying was hazardous. Aviation safety was also aided when a radio beacon system was first perfected at Dearborn. Then for a period of years, Ford dropped the manufacture of airplanes, but in 1941, with the coming of World War II, airplane production became a necessary part of war preparation, and Henry Ford made airplanes again. This time they were faster, bigger, and more deadly. Bombers moved down the assembly lines at the Willow Run plant, which was the "Rouge" of the bomber industry. When the war ended and production was halted, over eight thousand "Liberators" had been assembled by the Ford Motor Company.

Henry Ford watched over the assembly line at Willow Run just as he did at the Rouge. He continued to learn from tools and machines and to "read" the story they had to tell. Out of his own experiences came his ideas about education. In speaking of his youth, he once said, "I was studying all the time, not only from books but also from things." In 1929 he put his ideas into practice by establishing a combined school and museum, which he called The Edison Institute.

Here he brought the schoolhouses, the dwellings, the workshops, and the stores of other days so that the pupils in the schools of the Institute could study not only from books but from things. This part of the Institute he called Greenfield Village. He gathered thousands of objects to put into The Henry Ford Museum so that they could be studied by all who wanted to learn about the past. "I am collecting the history of our people as written into things their hands made and used," he said; "... a piece of machinery or anything that is made is like a book, if you can read it. It is part of man's spirit." He thus provided a school not only for children but also for workers. Henry Ford once called the museum and Village that he had created "a people's university." Here at The Edison Institute the creator of mass production methods—now intensely interested in the hand work of village craftsmen—spent many hours. He continued to be keenly interested in the future of the automobile industry while he collected

relics of the past. His unusual appreciation of both the past and the future is illustrated by the description of Henry Ford as the one man who could spend his time collecting old churns while he followed the experiments of his chemists concerning synthetic milk.

From his home in Dearborn, he kept a watchful eye over the Rouge plant, now headed by his grandson, and over The Edison Institute. It was after a visit to Greenfield Village on the afternoon of April 7, 1947, that Henry Ford became ill. He died during the evening at the age of eighty-three. This man, who had been born into a world of horse-drawn carriages, had left a world of powered wheels.

Source:

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