

THE PLOWSHARE

News for John Deere Collectors



Look — there's a Deere in our yard! 50 years of John Deere lawn and garden equipment

When John Deere fashioned his first self-scouring plow out of a discarded saw blade 176 years ago, Americans either lived in cities or small towns, or on farms.

A little over a century later, automobiles, mass transit, and other developments helped fuel a mass population shift toward new suburban homesteads carved into woodlands or plotted onto farmland outside urban areas. By 1950, more Americans lived in the new suburbs than in either rural or urban areas. Along with millions of new homes came new lawns and gardens that needed tending.

In 1962, Deere & Company began drafting plans for a small tractor modeled after the company's legendary full-size farm equipment. The resulting John Deere 110 Lawn and Garden Tractor launched in 1963 was built at the plant in Horicon, Wisconsin. An immediate success, the 110 was first issued with a cast-iron 7-horsepower Kohler engine and a Peerless three-speed transmission with an exclusive variable-speed drive that allowed for high-speed mowing and low-speed tilling.

From field to yard

After its success with the 110 Lawn and Garden Tractor, Horicon Works was the company's key consumer-product manufacturing plant. By the end of the 1960s, Deere & Company moved grain drill production to John Deere Des Moines Works, allowing Horicon to focus exclusively on its line of consumer products. Over the years, that line included walk-behind mowers, tillers, snow blowers, snowmobiles, and Gator™ utility vehicles.

In 1997, the company added another plant — John Deere Turf Care in Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina — to build golf and commercial mowing equipment. Two years later, the John Deere Worldwide Commercial & Consumer Equipment Division merged with the Agricultural Division to form the Agriculture and Turf Division. Through all the changes, Horicon Works has continued to make quality lawn, garden, and turf-care products. In April 2010, Horicon employees celebrated the production of the five-millionth lawn tractor made at the factory.

“It’s a passion:” A John Deere 110 collector helps organize a 50th anniversary event



Scott Wooldridge of Galesburg, Illinois, stands with one of his many John Deere 110 Lawn and Garden Tractors, this one fitted with his prized possession: a rare 1965 Sweepster-brand fiberglass transporter attachment that transforms the mower into a golf cart.

He doesn’t mow yards for a living, but Scott Wooldridge says he lives for collecting John Deere lawn and garden tractors.

The railroad diesel mechanic from Galesburg, Illinois, owns about 75 John Deere mowers, including four 1963 John Deere 110 models — some of the first built by the company. Wooldridge will move some of these out of storage to display at the Weekend of Freedom Machines event this July in Horicon, Wisconsin, to celebrate Deere’s 50th anniversary in the lawn and garden business.

Calling all 1963 110 collectors

Wooldridge is also hoping to round up as many other 1963 John Deere 110s as possible from collectors around the world. He wants to gather at least 100 of the originals for visitors to see. That could be tough: there were only 1,000 of the machines made that first year.

Wooldridge now has enough John Deere memorabilia to fill two machine sheds, a barn, and a warehouse, but he started collecting in childhood with a few John Deere toys. He still has them. They’re in their original packages, too.

For a while, he and his dad even bought two-cylinder John Deere tractors at auctions, but prices got too high. Then, in 1991, when Wooldridge was still in high school, he noticed a 1965 John Deere 110 Lawn and Garden Tractor at a farm consignment auction. He bought it for \$240 and took it home.

“It didn’t have a spark plug in it, but everything else was there. I put a plug in it, cleaned it up, put fresh gas in it, and the thing popped right off.

“I started studying old John Deere literature about the machines, and that’s when the bug bit. I haven’t looked back,” Wooldridge said, adding that he never sells his tractors. “It’s not a money thing to me. It’s a passion.”



You are invited!

John Deere lawn and garden tractor collectors and enthusiasts are invited to the Weekend of Freedom Machines in Horicon, Wisconsin, to display their machines and memorabilia or just take in the sights. Featured entertainment includes tours of Horicon Works, presentations by John Deere engineers and employees, and daily tractor parades. Admission is free. For more information, go online to www.dodgecountyfairgrounds.com.

WHAT: Weekend of Freedom Machines event to celebrate 50 years of John Deere lawn and garden tractors

WHEN: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Friday, July 26
8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday, July 27
8 a.m. to 1 p.m., Sunday, July 28

WHERE: Dodge County Fairgrounds, Horicon, Wisconsin

ADMISSION AND PARKING: Free

This wood carving depicts the Van Brunt brothers and their first seeding machine in 1861. This “fluted force-feed” seeder was designed to solve the problem of passenger pigeons eating farmers’ seed before it was able to germinate.



The rarest of the rare

Wooldridge even traveled to Ontario, Canada, to pick up one of his favorite and most-expensive pieces: a 1965 Sweepster-brand fiberglass transporter body that fits onto a John Deere 110 Lawn and Garden Tractor.

John Deere didn’t make products to modify its machines like this, but other companies did, Wooldridge said.

“It was made so you could turn your 110 into a golf cart. It carries up to four people at a time. To this day, we only know where nine of them are located in the collecting world.”

Despite their age, almost all of his John Deere mowers run, which he said is a testament to the company.

“They’re stout machines. They’re built very well. They’re just the world’s best. You’re not going to beat ‘em.”



Horicon and pigeon feed

John Deere’s Horicon, Wisconsin, plant traces its beginnings to the mid-19th century when farmers were in a constant battle with passenger pigeons. The birds were eating seeds before they could be protected with a layer of dirt. In 1861, brothers Daniel and George Van Brunt began manufacturing a machine at a Horicon factory that covered seeds as they were being sown so the birds couldn’t eat them off the ground. After overhunting led to a catastrophic drop in the passenger pigeon population — the species would be extinct by 1914 — the Van Brunts started work on the first closed-delivery disk drill in 1900.

The brother’s innovations helped them increase their business, and Deere & Company bought the plant in 1911 and renamed it the John Deere Van Brunt Company. The plant would carry this name until Deere & Company’s 1958 reorganization, when the operation was renamed the John Deere Horicon Works.

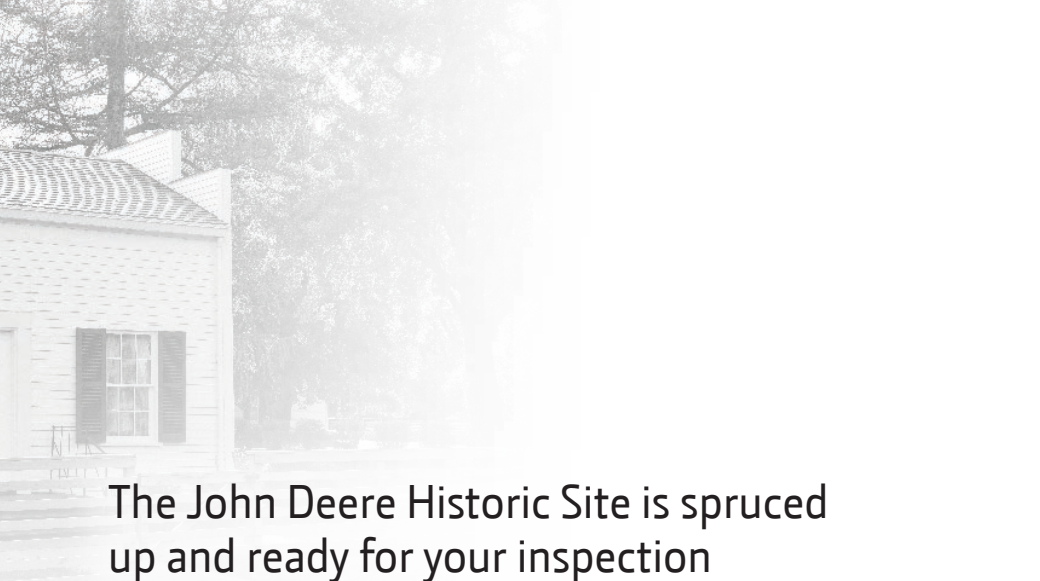
John Deere’s first lawn and garden products were introduced in the 1960s, and their popularity continues today.



Visitors enjoy the tales and handiwork of company blacksmith Rick Trahan, who practices his ancient art with a hammer, anvil, and bed of hot coals much like John Deere did in the 1830s.



As part of the Historic Site, the original Deere homestead has been accurately recreated, including 19th-century-style furnishings.



The John Deere Historic Site is spruced up and ready for your inspection

The ringing “clang” of iron colliding with iron echoed across the John Deere Historic Site as company blacksmith Rick Trahan practiced an ancient art with a hammer and hot coals.

Thick snowflakes were falling on this winter day and the facility was closed for the season, but Trahan was still busy creating ironwork souvenirs to sell when the Grand Detour, Illinois, site reopened in May.

But Trahan’s was not the only work completed lately at the historic site that includes the prairie home John Deere built more than 175 years ago when he moved from Vermont to Illinois. Soon, visitors will see several improvements at the site — some subtle, and some more noticeable — when they come for tours this season, said Brian Holst, heritage marketing manager at John Deere.

“Each year we try to make some needed improvements around the grounds and the nine outbuildings. They need to be properly preserved without taking away from the appearance or the meaning of the historic facility.”

Work last winter included installing new siding on the building that covers the location of the original blacksmith shop where John Deere developed his first steel plow in 1837. This new exterior replaces the original siding installed when the building was erected soon after an archaeological team from the University of Illinois unearthed the site in 1962. The nails were rusting through and the old siding was falling off the building.

“Now it’s sided in lap cedar, which is what would have been used in the 1830s,” Holst said of the building where visitors can see how John Deere’s shop was arranged and operated by him and his apprentices.

Many artifacts found at the site in 1962 are now displayed in the exhibit hall, where visitors will view a new video about the site and an expanded exhibit area. Historic site workers also replaced the siding on the replica of the blacksmith shop, putting up new rough-cut cedar like that commonly used at the time Deere built his home there, Holst explained. A small addition to the shop made room for a heated area where Trahan can ply his blacksmith trade during the cold winter months.

For the inside of John Deere’s home, plans are set to install new period-correct carpeting in the living room and master bedroom, because the current carpet — not original to the house — is worn. Last year, workers also put up new fencing and built new sidewalks at the site.

The company’s blacksmith gets a lot of interesting questions from visitors every year. Some are unaware John Deere died before Deere & Company got into the tractor business. Others are surprised the sprawling site even exists.

“We’re very proud that our company is preserving the place where it all started,” Holst said. “It’s seven acres of well-manicured grounds full of exhibits that will be of interest to any John Deere enthusiast or history buff.”

Plan your visit

The John Deere Historic Site is open May through October, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesdays through Sundays.

The museum is closed Mondays and Tuesdays. Special group tours can be arranged during the winter months.

Admission is \$5 for visitors ages 12 and older to tour John Deere’s home, visit a working replica of his blacksmith shop, and take a look at the very beginnings of Deere & Company in an archeological exhibit hall.

For more information, call 815.652.4551. To see video of John Deere blacksmith Rick Trahan in action, go online to www.JohnDeereAttractions.com.

Green means go: Mark your calendars for Green Iron Days

If you get excited thinking about strolling through a display of more than 100 John Deere tractors and implements manufactured before 1979, then Green Iron Days is for you.

This event, formerly known as “2-Cylinder Days,” will be held August 3 and 4 at the John Deere Historic Site in Grand Detour, Illinois.

This is the 13th year for this event, held every other year on the manicured lawns of the house John Deere built more than 175 years ago when he settled in the Midwest. Cost to attend is \$5 per person ages 12 and older, and includes entry to view the regular features of the John Deere Historic Site.



Where did spring go?

Longtime readers of this newsletter know spring is my favorite season. Although winter has held its grip on us far too long this year, I've been doing my springtime planning, anyway.

After careful consideration of my total-failure-of-a-sweet-corn crop last season, I have elected to take a new path: pumpkins. Not just regular jack-o-lantern-style pumpkins, but the big ones — the behemoths weighing hundreds of pounds that growers enter in competitions every year.

After some research and preparations, I think I'm ready to take on the competition. I've sketched out a layout of my new pumpkin patch, fertilized the ground, and now I'm ready to go. All I need is for Mother Nature to cooperate and I'm assured of growing the biggest pumpkins in the county...well, that's the plan, anyway.

All kidding aside, as I travel country roads, I see farm after farm with growers and machines getting prepared for another bumper crop. Just remember, whether you are involved in a large farming operation or are just a small-scale gardener, don't get in so much of a rush that you forget to take all available safety measures.

We value each and every one of you as customers, readers, and, most important, friends. If you are tilling, be mindful of where you are digging. For the gardener, know where any cables are buried. Farmers should know where power lines run overhead so your tillage tools clear them.

When working with chemicals, review how to handle them properly and safely, and dispose of them carefully so you don't contaminate any soil, water, or wanted vegetation. As stewards of our land, none of us wants to hurt the environment or ourselves. Please take that extra step and be safe today — we want you all to be around tomorrow.

Keep your hand on the throttle and your plow in the ground.

Brian Holst
Manager, John Deere Heritage Marketing

THE PLOWSHARE

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One hot John Deere collectible

In the mid-1970s, John Deere dealers stocked a handy item for backyard grilling.

The John Deere Barbecue Branding Iron allowed grill masters to show off their favorite equipment "brand" to their guests. With iron surfaces to sear "R," "M," and "W," for rare, medium, and well, or the familiar "leaping deer" logo into a meat entrée, these made quite the patio conversation piece.

A recent online search revealed both original new and used examples of the John Deere Barbecue Branding Iron are still available. Better hurry, though, as it appears they are becoming increasingly "rare."



Although the barbecue branding iron turned out to be a flash in the pan, John Deere-branded grills have been on the market for years and are still available today.