

# THE PLOWSHARE

## News for John Deere Collectors



*Former John Deere dealer Joe Colgan, 99, stands with his wife, Majella, and grandson, Andy Colgan, as he inspects his 100-year-old plow.*

## Two tough centenarians

Meet a former Illinois John Deere dealer who owns a century-old plow slightly older than he is

Joe Colgan bent over slightly, looking at the single-bottom John Deere plow his son had just rested carefully on the dining room floor.

"It looks pretty good for being 100 years old," he said proudly, admiring the plow's polished wood and shiny metal moldboard and plowshare.

"Pretty good?" exclaimed Brian Holst, heritage marketing manager for John Deere, as he knelt down to get a closer look. "It's in pristine condition. It's amazing."

Some might say the same about Colgan, a 99-year-old former John Deere dealer from tiny Wyoming, Illinois, who still happens to own the plow once used 52 years ago during the groundbreaking ceremony for the Deere & Company World Headquarters in Moline. The building opened three years later and turns 50 next year.

### Married 73 years

Colgan turns 100 this September, and his wife of nearly 73 years, Majella, turned 95 in August. Sharp-witted and talkative, the Colgans still live in the sprawling two-story brick home on a corner lot in town where they raised 12 children, some of whom are now retired. Their eldest is 72, and Joe and Majella have 23 grandchildren and 31 great-grandchildren, too.

When the Colgans aren't telling stories about when their children were younger or proudly updating folks on their grandchildren's successes, they're sharing memories about John Deere. The two topics constantly intertwine because the company has played such a big role in their lives.

Sitting at the family's long wooden kitchen table — which Joe and Majella say they bought to fit as many family and friends around as possible — they smile at each other as several visitors, with steaming cups of coffee in their hands, settle into seats next to them.



## To a kid, all is fair

We were talking the other day about rites of passage for farm kids growing up in the Midwest — detasseling corn, baling hay, and pitching manure with a fork. To be honest with you, I really enjoyed those jobs. Sure, I complained when Dad would come to me and say, “Today you will (insert chore of the day here),” and the work was usually hard, dirty, and smelly. But it got me to the final goal of every summer, the destination every farm kid dreams about and works hard to arrive at: the county fair!

Whether you showed livestock, vegetables, or your favorite dog, it was the culmination of a summer of hard work, and it was always a thrill to take in all the sights, sounds, and smells. All your friends from around the county were there and you could catch up on the happenings from their townships — and better yet, you could ask for the name of that pretty girl your buddy was talking to over by the Tilt-a-Whirl.

The fair was the place where parents could brag on their kids’ hard efforts in the show ring, and it was the only place I could get cotton candy and a corn dog. I would work all summer on my chores and 4-H projects to guarantee attendance at the fair with enough money to spend time on the midway and at my favorite food stands. It was my reward for a hard summer toiling in the dairy barn, walking the fields, or stacking hay up in the sweltering barn loft. That one week of friends, fun, and food was worth every single day leading up to it.

I still get back to the county fair, but not as often as I’d like. When I do go, I see a lot of my old friends, but now we’re the parents bragging about our kids’ hard work. Standing on the midway, with the smell of corn dogs and funnel cakes wafting in the breeze, it’s almost like the old days. And I find myself daydreaming about the past and about what’s still to come.

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

Brian Holst  
Manager, John Deere Heritage Marketing



Handwritten notes on the back of this framed photo at Joe Colgan's house say Ken Shields steered the horse team pulling Colgan's plow during the 1961 groundbreaking at Deere & Company World Headquarters in Moline, Illinois.

## He started with Deere in '37

Joe rifled through a small cardboard box, pulling out photos and newspaper clippings, as he recounted how he got his start with Deere.

He was 20 years old when he started work as a bookkeeper for the company in 1937. After becoming a parts manager and a territory assistant over the next 10 years, he bought a dealership with a business partner in his hometown.

"I wanted to get closer to the dirt," he recalled about buying the dealership he named the Colgan Company. Five years later, he bought out his partner. He and his family ran the dealership for 40 years

in a building erected in 1964, the same year Deere & Company World Headquarters opened. Colgan didn't attend the grand opening. He didn't attend the groundbreaking in 1961, either.

But his plow did.

Colgan remembers a Deere representative asking if the company could borrow his plow for the special occasion.

"So, somebody came in an automobile, and we put the plow in the trunk," he said, shaking his head. "Can you believe that? We just put it in the trunk."

## The classic plow set him back four bits

At the time, the plow was used as a decoration at his dealership. He paid 50 cents for it at a 1951 farm sale in Castleton, Illinois, where the former owners — two brothers — were retiring.

"I believe they owned the plow from the beginning," he said. "At that time, it would have only cost \$17 brand new."

Because he kept it inside all these years, the plow never rusted. The wood is original except for one of the handles that was replaced by John Deere after it broke off during the groundbreaking ceremony. The original plowshare gleams, too.

"The only time that plow ever touched dirt was at the groundbreaking," Colgan said. "At least, that was the only time since I bought it."

Someone captured that moment in photo, a black-and-white print that shows a plow cutting through the ground behind a team of horses during the ceremony. Colgan keeps a framed copy at home.

"The horses didn't have GPS back then," the Colgans' son, Tim, said with a laugh. "A lot has changed, but what hasn't is John Deere's quality people and products."

Those people include grandson Kevin Curran and nephew David Colgan, who work for the company. Others in the family remain tied to agriculture and are loyal to John Deere products.

Joe Colgan said, "John Deere has always been good to us."

## Spraying for higher yields

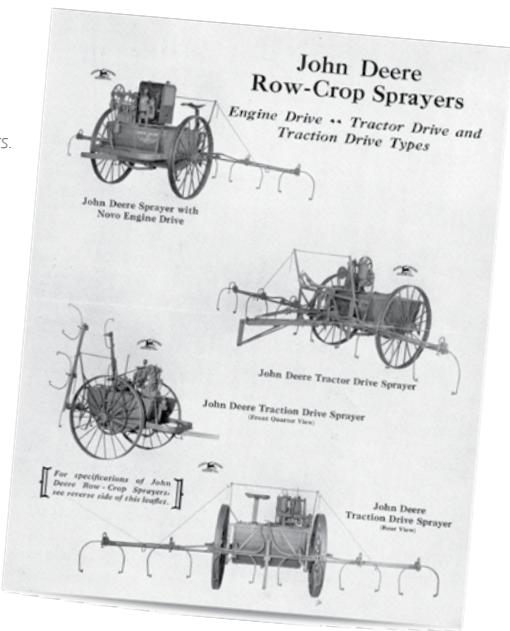
What would happen if insects and weeds were allowed to invade the world's agricultural crops? Food supplies would dwindle and people and livestock would starve. That's why, in the first recorded use of pesticides 4,500 years ago, Sumerians of ancient Mesopotamia dusted their crops with elemental sulfur. Chemical herbicides came around in the 20th century as did spraying equipment to apply chemicals to crops.

Chemical sprayers that combat weeds and insects have long been essential equipment for farmers. The first John Deere row-crop chemical sprayers first appeared in catalogs in the 1930s. The ads for these early sprayers noted 150-gallon cypress tanks and an exclusive John Deere feature — the angle-iron boom.

Effective and cost-efficient herbicides that controlled broadleaf weeds began to emerge after World War II, increasing demand for accurate spraying equipment to keep boll weevil, corn borer, and other yield-robbing pests at bay.

John Deere introduced drawn and mounted sprayers in both tank and drum types in 1959. Models included the 10, 20, and 30 that carried one, two, and three 55-gallon drums, respectively.





## Environmental concerns

In 1962, a controversial best-selling book, *Silent Spring*, introduced the word "environment" into the American popular lexicon. In the book, certain pesticides are singled out as being particularly harmful to birds. Public reaction to the book prompted the Kennedy Administration to launch an investigation into the side effects of farm pesticides, fertilizers, and other chemicals.

Of course, farmers had been concerned about over-spraying of pesticides for some time, and not only to protect birds and livestock. Since most farmers and their families drank the well water beneath their crops, Deere and other manufacturers were already building sprayers with accurate metering. Since the early '60s, John Deere has put an emphasis on ecologically responsible sprayer design, a tradition that continues today.

## Enter John Deere self-propelled models

John Deere made a great contribution to farmers wishing to increase their yields through herbicide spraying with the introduction of the self-propelled Hi-Cycle™ Sprayer in 1962. The first of these, the Des Moines Works-built 600 Hi-Cycle, provided the high crop clearance — 60 inches — needed for spraying cotton, corn, tobacco, and other crops. It featured a 27-foot spray boom and a 200-gallon tank to cover a lot of ground in a short period of time.

A 1965 John Deere 600 Hi-Cycle Sprayer in a field in Shaw, Mississippi.

## Continuing improvements

Beginning in 1966, the three-point-hitch 25A Sprayer became a bestseller, with more than 2,000 sold in 1966 and 1967 alone. By 1972 the company offered more sprayers that could be pulled or mounted in a truck. All featured polyethylene tanks that could "bounce back" after impacts.

As for self-propelled sprayers, the original 600 of 1962 evolved into the 6000 Hi-Cycle Sprayer by 1975. A decade later, the 1985 6000 Hi-Cycle featured adjustable booms that allowed nozzles to spray under leaves for pinpoint chemical accuracy. The 6500 Self-Propelled Sprayer replaced the 6000 in 1992 and was advertised as the "high-technology, high-performance, high-clearance, high-precision, highly-environmentally-sound answer to low-drift spraying." That inspired further improvements to this line of products in the mid to late 1990s.

## Comfort and environmental soundness in the new millennium

In 2004, the 4920 Sprayer offering a 1,200-gallon solution tank and a 120-foot boom was announced. This model was equipped with dry-box capabilities for high-capacity spreading of lime and fertilizers for commercial applications.

In 2008, the John Deere 5430i Sprayer was introduced to the European market. Built to travel on narrower roads but still deliver large spraying capacity, it featured a 36-meter boom and 4,000-liter solution tank.

In 2009, the 4630 Sprayer replaced the 6700 Hi-Cycle Sprayer, and 30-Series machines offered Ag Management Solutions products

such as AutoTrac™ and Section Control to limit potential over-spraying and provide variable-rate application. A year later, the Load Command™ system was introduced on the 4930 Sprayer — it reduces a 10- to 15-minute fill time to around three minutes.

After four years of strong international sales of the John Deere Des Moines Works-produced 4730 Self-Propelled Sprayer, the company began a second production line in Catalão, Brazil. This 4730 Sprayer was introduced at the 2012 Agrishow in São Paulo, Brazil, and represented state-of-the-art sprayer technology in the 50th year of John Deere's worldwide leadership in this product category.

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**Here are some environmentally advanced features found on the current John Deere sprayers:**

**John Deere Mobile Weather** uses a sensor connected to an application controller to display real-time in-cab weather information, including wind speed and direction, to assist in accurate spraying and decrease the risk of chemical drift.

**EPA Interim Tier 4 (IT4)/EU Stage IIIB** engine reduces emissions on the 4940 Sprayer.

**Load Command** is a fully integrated solution that allows faster and more accurate filling of spray materials.

**BoomTrac Pro™** automatic boom-height-sensing system makes operators more productive by increasing application accuracy.



## Meet the new John Deere archivist

**He's still settling into his new office, but history buff, researcher, and author Neil Dahlstrom already feels right at home**

Deere & Company Manager of Corporate History and Records Services Neil Dahlstrom is overseeing the archives, a collection of company artifacts, records, artwork, and other historic information kept in a secured location.

A Deere employee for 11 years, Dahlstrom is also now in charge of the company records center, art collection, Heritage Marketing, and the John Deere Historic Site in Grand Detour, Illinois.



*Neil Dahlstrom, John Deere archivist.*

### Get to know more about Dahlstrom in his own words:

**Plowshare:** Why are you excited about your new position at Deere?

**Dahlstrom:** This role brings together my educational and professional experience with exciting opportunities to leverage John Deere's heritage — now 175 years and counting — of innovation to employees, customers, and fans around the world. Deere is unique in how we talk about what we've done, but we can prove it through our historical assets. This is a very powerful tool for employees, dealers, and customers alike.

**Plowshare:** Very few people get to visit the archives. Can you tell us a little about it? What do you do there?

**Dahlstrom:** The archives' core function is to serve as the central depository for records of permanent legal, fiscal, and historical value. Much of what we manage is sensitive and proprietary, which is why most collections are not open for research. We follow international archival standards for acquiring, describing, organizing, and accessing records regardless of source or format.

Our objective is to ensure these records last for the next 500 years, so not only do we have to manage them, but also develop and execute strategies to store and access the information. This is easy for a paper record, but not so simple for 16mm films from the 1940s, floppy disks from the 1980s, or today's "born-digital" records. So, not only do we think about the information in terms of records — who created them and what they tell us — but we also must consider the proper temperature, humidity, light levels, and other issues that impact their survival.

**Plowshare:** Can you dispel any major myth about what an archivist's job entails?

**Dahlstrom:** Sure! Contrary to popular belief, our job is not to collect one of everything. Can you imagine the size of the building we would need? To archive essential items, we work to better understand why and how events occurred, and that better inform us of opportunities ahead. We develop this understanding by using documents,

images, films, art, and equipment to tell stories, and encourage others to discuss where we've been, what's worked, and what hasn't worked to communicate a common foundation for where we are going as a company.

**Plowshare:** You've written about John Deere, the man. Tell us about that.

**Dahlstrom:** I authored *The John Deere Story*, published by Northern Illinois University Press in 2005, a biography of John and Charles Deere that covers the Deere family and the business through its first 70 years, through 1907. Many people are surprised to learn that John Deere never saw a John Deere tractor. Neither did our second CEO, Charles Deere. The book is available at the John Deere Store and the John Deere Historic Site.

**Plowshare:** Why did you decide to research and write about John Deere? Why is his life so fascinating to so many people?

**Dahlstrom:** John Deere is fascinating because we seem to know a lot about him, but it's mostly second-hand. There are only seven known photos of Deere, and only a handful of letters that he wrote. He's also so much more than the creator of the first successful steel plow.

Deere dramatically transformed agriculture by solving a customer's need. He then continued to innovate and improve on his concept, sparking a transition from sustenance farming to production agriculture. After Deere, farmers could satisfy the needs of their families but now also sell the surplus. This is still crucial to our understanding of a similar transition just now taking place in many parts of the world.

**Plowshare:** When you're not busy with John Deere history, what else do you do?

**Dahlstrom:** I have a three-year-old son, so my wife and I spend much of our time keeping up with him. I'm involved with a number of community organizations, and most recently was on the team raising funds to save and relocate the last train depot in Moline, Illinois. I also serve on the board of trustees and alumni board for Monmouth College in Monmouth, Illinois, and participate in the United Way Young Leaders program.

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## An old John Deere product with a peal

Long before people rang cell phones to let their families know dinner was ready, they rang bells. And John Deere sold them, at least for a while

At the turn of the 20th century, John Deere chimed in with its own farm, school, and church bells for sale through its branch houses and catalogs. The company never made bells in its own factories, but it sold John Deere bells made by others — much like many other consumer products the company has sold over the years.

"I get more questions about John Deere bells than you'd probably imagine," said Neil Dahlstrom, John Deere archivist. "When people hear about them, they're fascinated." Although the Deere archives has plenty of documentation on these bells, it has no information about how many bells were produced or what they might be worth today, he said.

Company records show the first metal bells can be found in catalogs from 1886. That same year,

the John Deere Plow Company's St. Louis and Kansas City branch houses started selling school and church bells in five sizes, and farm bells in four sizes. Later, a 1907 catalog also offered four metal farm bells and 12 sizes of school and church bells.

The largest and most expensive offered that year was the 48-inch, 2,100-pound bronzed No. 48 church bell at a cost of \$250. The John Deere farm bell of the largest size was the No. 4, which was a 21-inch, 100-pound metal bell covered in bronze. Priced in 1886 at \$10, the bell was sold until 1912.

A John Deere bell can be seen in the mural "Reflections of an Era," featuring authentic company artifacts, on the south end of the display floor at the Deere & Company World Headquarters in Moline, Illinois.



A Deere & Mansur Co. catalog listed John Deere bells among its products.