

William Deering Biography

William Deering

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Contents

| | |
|--|-------------------|
| William Deering Biography..... | 1 |
| Contents..... | 2 |
| Biography..... | 3 |

Biography

American manufacturer William Deering (1826-1913) made improvements in the grain harvester that greatly increased production of grain throughout the world.

Born in South Paris, Maine, William Deering intended to study medicine but, because of his father's need for help in his woolen mill, went to work there instead. During the next 20 years he made a considerable fortune selling woolen goods and speculating in western lands. In 1870 he lent \$40,000 to E. H. Gammon, who was manufacturing the Marsh grain harvester in Illinois. When Gammon's health failed in 1873, Deering moved to Illinois to manage the company.

With the rapid expansion of wheat-growing in the Midwest during the 1870s and the efficient design of his machine, Deering's sales soared. His harvester had a mechanical grain lift that saved the labor of four men on ordinary reapers. To further improve his harvester, Deering experimented with an automatic wire binder. He finally purchased the rights to the still experimental Appleby twine binder.

In 1879 Deering became sole owner of the company and took a gamble by building 3,000 twine binders for the next harvest. Although the machines did not work perfectly, they represented a major technological break-through and established a standard design for harvesters throughout the world. Competition among the manufacturers of agricultural machinery grew fierce, and litigation over patents mounted to unprecedented levels. Between 1880 and 1885 the number of machines manufactured in a year rose from 60,000 to 250,000, while the number of manufacturers dropped from over 100 to about 20. The Deering Harvester Company, largely on the worth of its twine binder and Deering's business talent, swept ahead of most competitors. By 1890 the company's Chicago plant, with 9,000 employees, had a daily capacity of 1,200 machines of various kinds, which it sold all over the world.

During the 1890s the intense competition between Deering's company and his principal competitor, the McCormick Harvester Company, became damaging to both. As a result, when Deering retired, the two companies merged in 1902, thus forming the nucleus of the International Harvester Company.

A simple, unaffected man of complete integrity, Deering achieved success based on the huge demand for agricultural machinery at the time plus his own good business judgment and unremitting efforts to improve his products. He died in 1913.