Welcome to the Agricultural Museum

The museum is owned and operated by the U.P. Steam and Gas Engine Association, a non-profit corporation dedicated to the preservation, restoration and exhibition of early steam engines, gasoline engines, tractors, farm machinery and other items of historical value.

We believe that these items are as much a part of the American heritage as the hardy men and women who used them in forging this great nation. It is lamentable that the unending march of time, coupled with destruction by the elements and ignorance, has all but destroyed many of these implements. The Association's ongoing resolve is to maintain this equipment for present and future generations to enjoy. We hope that you enjoy your visit with us today. If there is anything you don't understand about any of the exhibits, please ask. Our curators are happy to answer your questions.

Thank you for visiting

Free Admission! Donations accepted.

Hours: 1-4 PM every Tuesday and Thursday between May 15 and September 15. Open by appointment only through October 31. Also open during all U.P. Steam and Gas Engine Association events.

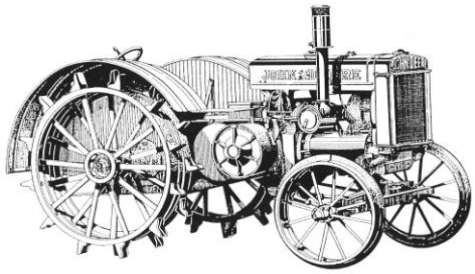
Tours: Guided and/or group tours are available. For more information call 906-789-1257 or visit our website at www.upsteamandgasengine.org

When I was a boy living in Nebraska our neighbor had an old John Deere D tractor. One of the highlights of my young life was when he would drive it past our house.

Long before I could see the tractor, I could hear it popping, puffing and wheezing. I'd stop whatever I was doing and gaze with anticipation at the place where I knew the tractor would appear.

And then it would come lumbering round the bend, its ponderous iron wheels cutting into the dirt road, puffs of black smoke carried high in the air. The whir and clank of the machinery combined with the noise of the exhaust to create an unforgettable experience for a boy of five years.

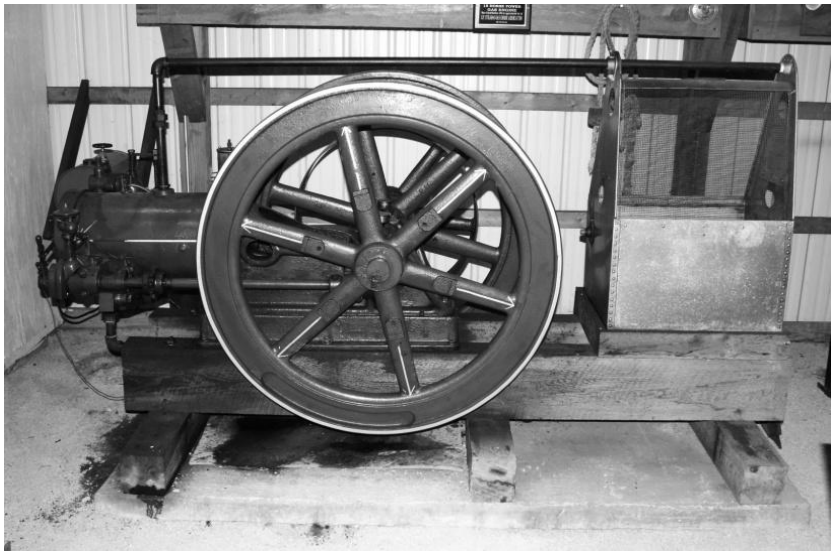
For a moment I would stand transfixed by the glorious spectacle. As the tractor came slowly toward our house I would run to meet it and then run beside it until it had gone past the boundary of where I was allowed to go. Reluctantly, I would come to a stop and watch the tractor pass into the distance until I could no longer see or hear it.



Now I am a boy no longer and the old tractors that helped make the United States the greatest agricultural nation in the world have passed from the scene. The steam traction engine was replaced by the kerosene tractor, which in turn has been replaced by modern machinery.

But here in this museum these grand old machines have one last task to perform. They stand as memorial to our past heritage.

~Robert Willis, Curator

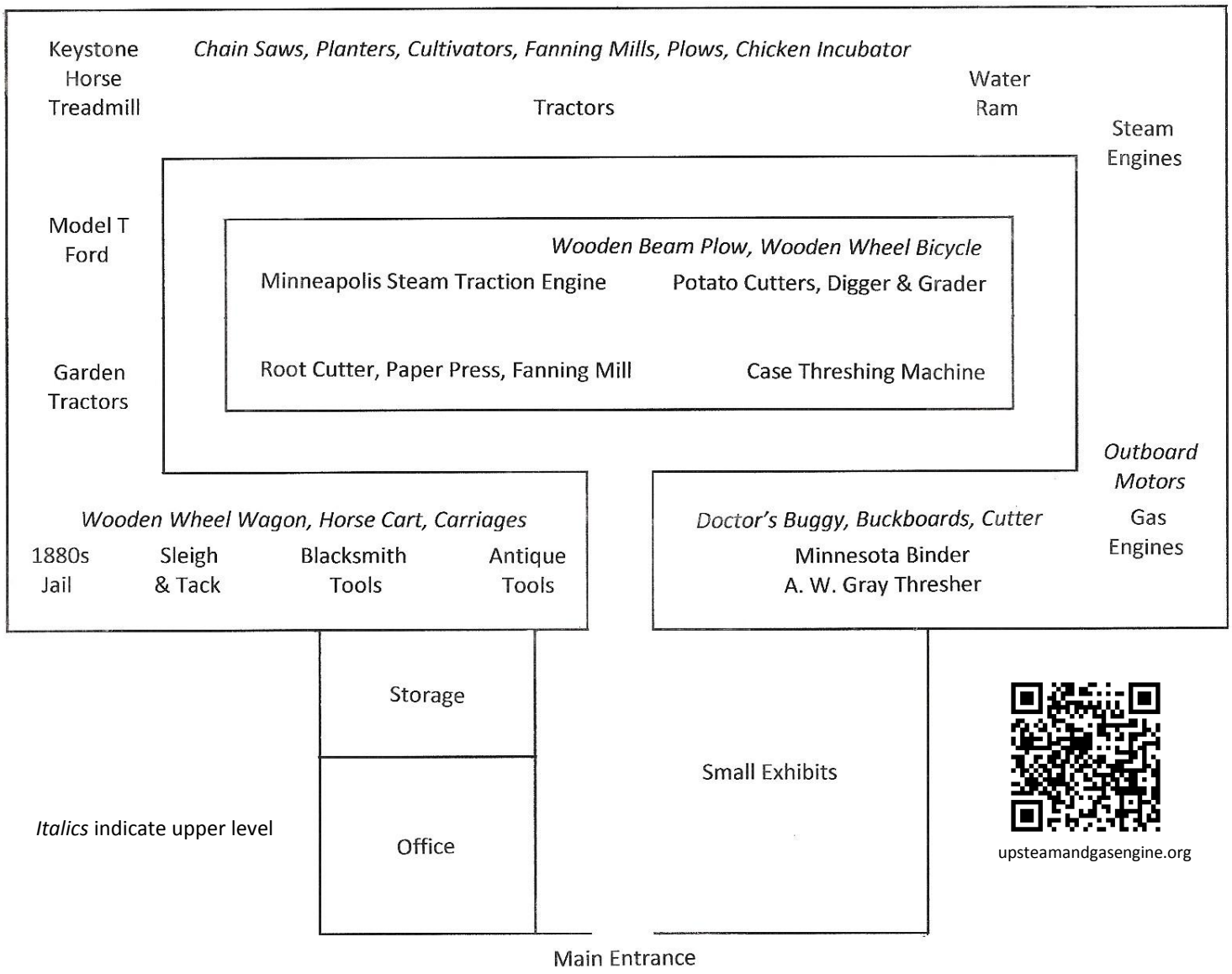


Visitors Guide

The U.P. Steam & Gas Engine Association

Agricultural Museum

U.P. State Fairgrounds
U.S. Highway 2 & 41
Escanaba Michigan



A Brief History of Agricultural Power

Since the beginning of time man has been searching for new and better sources of power. Until the eighteen century muscle power – man and animal – furnished most of the power. But in 1769 James Watt took out a patent for a steam engine using a separate condenser. This machine would soon revolutionize farming, industry and transportation.

In 1831 Cyrus Hall McCormick invented the mechanical reaper. This machine, which harvested grain faster and more easily, was a boon for farmers. Three years later, John Avery and Hiram Abial Pitts devised significant improvements to the thresher, a machine that automatically separated grain from chaff.

Threshing machines needed a dependable source of belt power with a constant speed, a task for which the steam engine was well suited.

In 1849, A. L. Archambault of Philadelphia built the first portable steam engine. Mounted on wheels, it was moved with horses.

Traction engines (self-propelled steam engines) soon followed. These were crude affairs with huge cast-iron gears which wore down rapidly and often gave problems. But as manufacturers refined their designs, these machines evolved into a dependable source of power.

By 1900 there were more than 30 firms manufacturing over 5,000 steam traction engines annually.

Despite the success of steam, the quest for new power sources continued. Gunpowder and coal dust proved to be unsatisfactory fuels. The development of the gasoline engine, later modified to burn kerosene, however, proved to be a viable alternative to steam power.

Charles W. Hart and Charles H. Parr are credited with building the first successful internal combustion tractor, the Hart-Parr. Early tractors were nothing more than a large gas engine mounted on a frame with wheels and gearing.

By 1920 over two dozen manufacturers were producing tractors. While some of these names—Case, International, Allis-Chalmers, and John Deere—are recognized today, other names like Bates Steel Mule, Uncle Same, Square Turn and Coleman have faded into obscurity.

As the gasoline tractor gained popularity, the steam engine waned. The last steam traction engine was built in 1933.