

Avery 25-50

Peoria, IL 1916-23

Avery made a full range of tractors with the sliding engines. The smallest, the 2-cylinder 8-16, was a 2- to 3-plow tractor weighing 2.5 tons. The company built a 2-cylinder 12-25 as well as a 4-cylinder 14-28, 18-36, 25-50 and 40-80 versions. The company offered the broadest line of tractor sizes in the industry.

Robert Avery was born in a cabin near Galesburg, Illinois in 1840. In his childhood, he was heavily influenced by a great uncle named Rilet Root. Mr. Root invented a rotary fan blower designed to clear railroad tracks of snow. Avery went on to school at the Academy of Knox College and was working part time at the Brown Manufacturing Company, which built a line of corn planters. After graduating from college, he went on to teach school.

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With the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, Avery enlisted in the army. He was captured by the confederacy in August of 1864 and spent months in several different prisons before being released in June of 1865. During his time in prison at Andersonville Avery came up with ideas for the design of a corn planter, scratching his ideas out in the dirt. Robert returned home to Galesburg after his release in 1865 only to come down with typhoid fever, which it took months to recover from.

While Avery was away during the war, his younger brother John bought a 160



acre farm for the two of them. Once Avery had recovered from the typhoid fever, he worked on the farm and on several inventions. During the winters, he worked in a Galesburg machine shop, and used the money from that to develop the riding cultivator he envisioned while in prison during the war. He made patterns and castings were poured; this was the beginning of the company.

Avery’s younger brother Cyrus thought the invention had the potential for huge success and helped provide capital for the venture. Avery then sold his share of the farm to his brother John, and borrowed additional money to help fund the company, now known as the R.H. & C.M. Avery Company. Unfortunately for the brothers, they had plenty of machines, but no customers, and this took them to the brink of bankruptcy.

Avery never gave up on his dream and was ever resourceful, in 1862 he used the Homestead Act to move his family to Kansas and get back into farming. While breaking sod and planting, he tried something new, a spiral corn stalk cutter to be pulled by horses, and this time sales took off. His grit and innovation paid off and a year later in 1872, Robert moved back to Galesburg and again with his brother Cyrus, started the Avery Company.

Around 1878, The Avery Company brought out their newest invention,

the Avery corn planter. The planter was built in the oldest foundry in the area owned by Joseph Frost and ended up being their biggest account. Soon after buying out

the Frost foundry, the Averies outgrew the building, and in 1882 they moved to Peoria becoming one of Peoria’s most important employers.

The company grew quickly and by 1891 they were building steam engines to augment their product line. The company entered the gasoline tractor field early with its first model offered in 1911. Albert Espe, one of the top tractor designers of his day, designed the first Avery tractors.

Avery’s 25-50 tractor saw first light in 1914. This model started with a retail price of \$2,300, but eventually its price fell due to competition. Production continued into 1922 when it was replaced with an improved model. Avery tractor production halted in 1924 when the company went bankrupt. As a young man Robert Avery’s dreamed in a confederate civil war prison to invent machinery to better agricultural production, the Avery 25-50 tractor is a manifestation of the grit and risk-taking it took to achieve that dream.

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