
NUGGETS OF HISTORY

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MANNY INGENUITY

IN DEVELOPING 19TH-CENTURY HARVESTING MACHINERY

REVOLUTIONIZED AGRICULTURAL METHODS



JOHN P. MANNY POSES ON ONE OF HIS MOWER/REAPER MODELS

Courtesy, John Howard

FROM AN EDITOR'S DESK



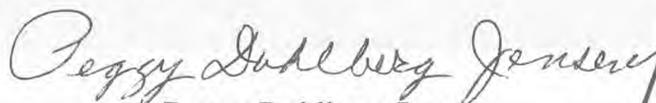
This issue presents a glimpse into the world-wide significance of Manny harvesting machines produced first in Waddams Grove (near Freeport) and then in Rockford. Beginning with the 1846 father-son Waddams Grove business of Pells and John H. Manny – later to be joined by Pells' nephew John P. Manny – the successful endeavor soon brought fame and fortune to Rockford. During the course of its history, the firm changed names so often that even Manny family members balk at tracing the progression. Therefore, in this context, we will usually refer to this reaper/mower manufacturer as “the Manny company.”

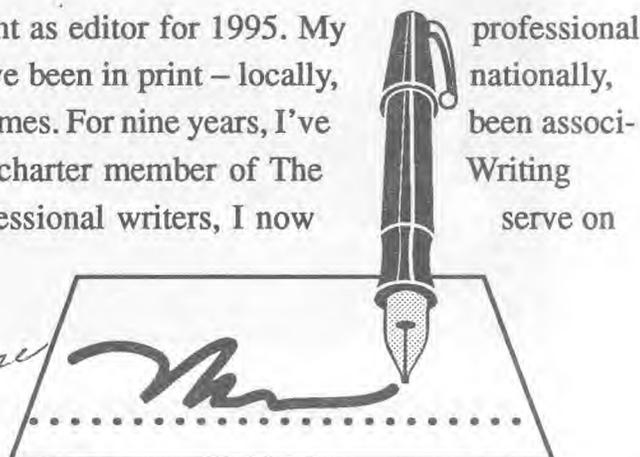
Dr. John Howard traces his Manny ancestry through his mother Edith Sackett Howard and his grandmother May Manny Sackett to his great-grandfather John P. Manny, a cousin of John H. Manny and nephew of Pells Manny. In June 1994, Dr. Howard presented “The Mannys and Their Mark On History” to The Monday Club of Rockford. Our published version here represents an adaptation of that lengthy speech.

Dr. Howard's distinguished career includes educational, military and governmental leadership positions, as well as numerous personal honors. Among them, president of Palos Verdes College and of Rockford College; current president of the Ingersoll Foundation; former president, and now Counselor of The Rockford Institute. Grove City College, Brigham Young University and Rockford College have each conferred honorary doctorate degrees upon this Phi Beta Kappa member who earned his PhD at Northwestern University. A professional writer, Dr. Howard has been a contributing author to seven books from the 1969 *Who Should Run the University?* to *Churches on the Wrong Road*, 1986.

Once again, we're introducing a new format: desktop publishing by Lori Whitman. We're attempting to gain not only a new look, but also to work toward publication professionalism.

And yes, I accepted the society's board appointment as editor for 1995. My writing/editing experience spans more than ten years. I've been in print – locally, and in Canada – in newspapers and magazines over 125 times. For nine years, I've ated with *Rockford Magazine* as a freelance writer. A charter member of The Academy, a national organization for aspiring and professional writers, I now the faculty as a professional reader.


Peggy Dahlberg Jensen



THE MANNYS AND THEIR MARK ON HISTORY

*Adapted by Peggy Dahlberg Jensen from a speech
by Dr. John Howard, great-grandson of J. P. Manny*

Rockford's Manny Reaper Company, a manufacturer of harvesting equipment, contributed a crucial factor in the growth and prosperity of America's heartland, especially in the 1850s and 60s. The company made a difference in this country's capacity to accept and to absorb millions of 19th-century immigrants.

In 1840, the United States had 17 million people. In the next decades, population more than doubled and became increasingly urban. These demographic changes created powerful incentives for the rural population, especially in the Midwest. Here, farmland was relatively flat, stone-free, and easy to plow. The soil was rich and the climate favorable for grain crops. Until the population explosion, farmers had grown food only for their own families. Now they aspired to feed urban dwellers. The bar-

rier to this transition was harvesting.

The problem: after wheat ripens, it must be harvested within seven to ten days. After that, it is fit only for livestock foraging. Until well into the 1840s, a farmer harvested by hand using a heavy scythe. A helper would gather and bind the grain prior to threshing. An experienced reaper could cover two to three acres a day, adequate only to feed his family and some neighboring townfolk, not the multitudes. These circumstances inspired farmer-inventors to meet the nation's food demand. Ingenious men all over the country busied themselves creating and improving harvesting equipment. Financial benefits to be gained from inventing labor-saving, mechanical harvesters created a situation akin to the "gold rush."

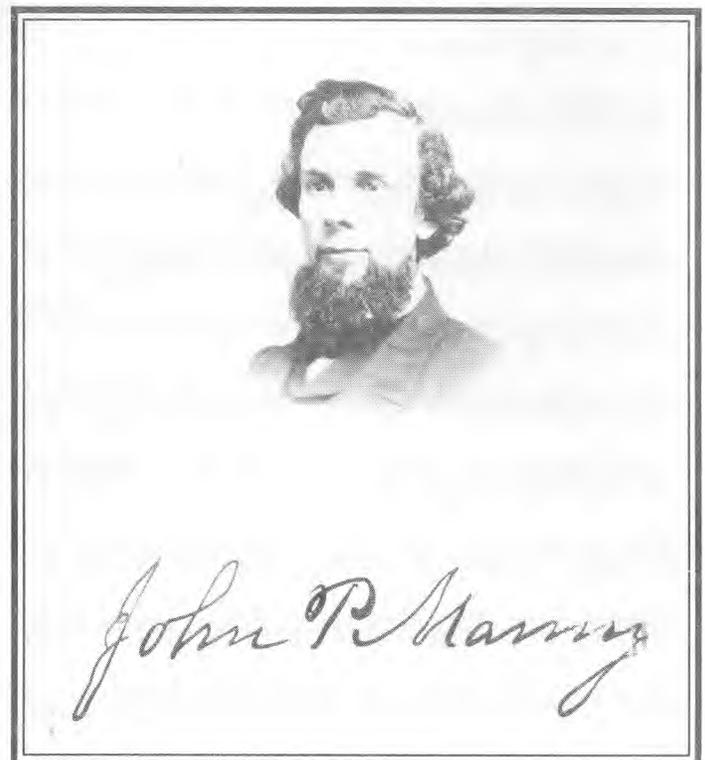
Reaper Manufacturing In Waddams Grove

Two early reaper producers, father and son Pells and John H. Manny, had come from Amsterdam, New York, in 1836. They farmed in Yankee Settlement (later renamed Waddams Grove), a town northwest of Freeport. In 1846 they purchased a “header” machine from a factory in Heart Prairie, Wisconsin, near Elkhorn. The horse-drawn header would cut the tops off wheat, leaving the straw standing. Pells and John worked to modify and to improve this machine. By 1848 they were manufacturing reapers with a mechanism that raised and lowered cutting blades, enabling the operator to perform two functions. Their reaper not only harvested grain tips, but on a second trip through the field with blades lowered, cut the straw.

Cutting blades that soon dulled caused the machine to clog. To solve this difficulty, the team turned to Pells’ nephew, John P. Manny, a new resident of Waddams Grove. They asked

him, a stone-cutter and blacksmith, to improve the cutting blade sections. John P. experimented with methods other than the contemporary use of brine. He developed an oil-tempering process which produced blades that kept a sharp edge longer.

(Sometime in the 1860s, a Mr. Whitman – partner in Whitman and Barnes, the world’s largest knife manufacturer – offered John P. the then astronomical sum of \$1 million for his secret oil-tempering process. For reasons unknown, he declined.)



A young John P. Manny photo with his signature
Courtesy, John Howard

Field Trial Successes

Field trials by rival reaper manufacturers at state and county fairs attracted huge crowds of farmers interested in new developments. A demonstration victory brought manufacturers increased sales and invaluable word-of-mouth advertising. The Manny reaper, with its phenomenal oil-tempered knife sections, ranked among the best machines. The men decided to enter the prestigious 1852 Geneva, New York, field trial sponsored by the New York Agriculture Society. A newspaper clipping, found in a Manny family scrapbook, relates the following:

1852 was the year of the coming of the railroad (to Rockford), and also of the great reaper field trial at Geneva, N. Y. John H. Manny, with his cousin, John P. Manny, started over the new railroad for the east. It was a wonderful experience. There was the joy of literally flying through space at the rate of twenty miles per hour, the anticipation of all the won-

ders that awaited them at the end of the road, and the consciousness of the glorious invention of their own which was the object of their trip – the young men were filled with hope and eager expectations. But alas! The car which contained their treasure was ignited by a spark from the engine and burned, and the reaper was badly damaged. As the young men stood looking at the charred remains of the car and their mutilated machine, it seemed as though this misfortune was the added straw which must break the camel's back. But youth and its blessed optimism triumphed. The cousins hurried the mutilated machine to a blacksmith shop as soon as they reached Geneva, and by working all night had it ready for service in the morning of the opening day of the contest.

People had gathered at Geneva from all over the land to see its merits

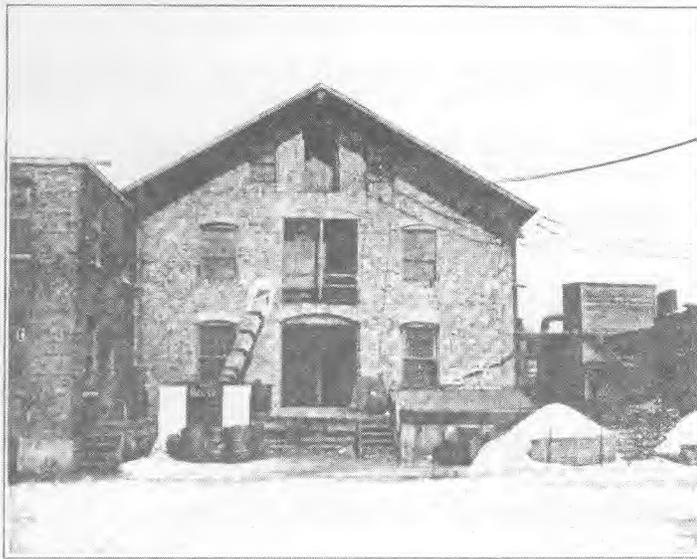
tested. Eleven other reapers were entered for the contest, among them the celebrated McCormick. Day after day, the judges, who were chosen from the best qualified agriculturalists from several states, put them through their paces, subjecting them to the most drastic tests. One after the other they dropped out, until on the last morning but three remained – the Manny, the McCormick and one other. The spot selected for this final test was heavy bottom land covered with tall, matted grass. The first machine started out triumphantly, clogged with heavy grass, was cleared and started again with the same result, and was retired from the contest. The McCormick followed and met the same fate. Then Mr. Manny drove out into the field with his machine. Round after round it made, and the grass fell like billows before it. On, on it went, and the gathered multitudes, almost frantic

with excitement, rent the air with their shouts. The prizes were awarded to the young Western inventor – not very great ones to be sure, when judged according to their value in dollars and cents, for it was only fifty dollars for the mower and thirty for the reaper, but they were just enough to open the door to vast possibilities for Mr. Manny. (He) was deluged with letters, applying for the right to handle the new machine in ... states from Maine to California.

Manufacturing Relocations

That was 1852. The following year John H. Manny moved to Rockford and built a plant in the Water Power District. His father, Pells, moved his manufacturing operation to Freeport. John P. relocated in Rockford to produce knife sections for his cousin's reapers. Jesse Blinn and Ralph Emerson, whose hardware company had supplied steel for the Waddams Grove company, became partners with John H., as did Wait and Sylvester Talcott, wealthy Rockton-

area farmers. Then Rockford had a population of 6700; Freeport, 1400; and Waddams Grove, 800. According to the *Rockford Register*, June 23, 1855, the Manny company's employees and their families constituted a tenth of Rockford's population.



The Mannys built their first Rockford reapers in this building on Race Street in the Water Power District.
Later the building housed the John P. Manny factory;
still later, the W. L. Davey Pump Corporation.
Courtesy, John Howard.

The Manny company produced 150 machines in 1853; 1100 in 1854; and 2900 in 1855. A year's production consumed a million feet of lumber, 550 tons of pig iron, and 250,000 bolts. John H. kept making adaptations and improvements on his machines, obtaining 23 different patents during his lifetime.



Paris Exhibition



Returning to the previous newspaper clipping, we read:

1855 was the year of the great Paris Exposition and the firm was determined to enter their reaper for the implement contest to be held at the close of the gathering. Mr. Giles Mabie of this county, who had become unusually proficient in handling the machine, was chosen to represent the company. The machine met with signal triumphs. Prince Napoleon, who was president of the committee in charge, sought a personal interview with Mr. Mabie, and asked to be instructed in the handling of the wonderful invention; its name and fame spread throughout Europe, as it had throughout our land, and agencies were established in many lands.

(Note: Prince Napoleon – son of Louis Bonaparte, King of Holland and the brother of French Emperor Napoleon – was President and virtual dictator of France.)

McCormick's Suit

McCormick also had entered his reaper in the Paris competition. Not able to tolerate the repeated and triumphant successes of the Manny machine, he soon filed suit against the Manny company charging patent infringement. The lawsuit had ramifications for the entire industry. If Manny lost, all other harvesting manufacturing makers feared that the wealthy and aggressive McCormick might try to drive them out of business, too.

P. H. Watson, a Philadelphia lawyer acting as counsel for a group of manufacturers who had put up a joint fund to assist J. H. Manny, hired Illinois Attorney Abraham Lincoln, giving him a \$500 advance. Unknown to Lincoln, however, other lawyers had also been assigned to the case, originally scheduled for trial in Illinois. Due to the importance of McCormick vs

Manny, the trial site was changed to Cincinnati, Ohio, then the most populous city in “the West.” Not until Lincoln arrived in Cincinnati did he discover that two other lawyers, Easterners Edwin M. Stanton and George Harding, had also been retained. Stanton ridiculed Lincoln as “a gawky ape” and threatened to resign if Lincoln were included. Since only two arguments could be presented by each side, a disillusioned Lincoln deferred to Stanton and Harding. Stanton made a stunning defense and won a victory for Manny. Lincoln marveled at the presentation. Later, without malice and in recognition of his rival’s brilliance, Lincoln appointed Stanton as Secretary of War in the presidential cabinet.

John H. Manny's Untimely Death

During the trial, John H. Manny’s health failed. He died of consumption (tuberculosis) two weeks after the favorable verdict. McCormick filed additional suits. His 1858 appeal to the United States Supreme Court ruled against

him. The Manny reaper company continued under the leadership of Ralph Emerson. Later, Charles Brantingham joined him in a successful firm known as Emerson, Brantingham.


John P. Manny's

Reaper Company

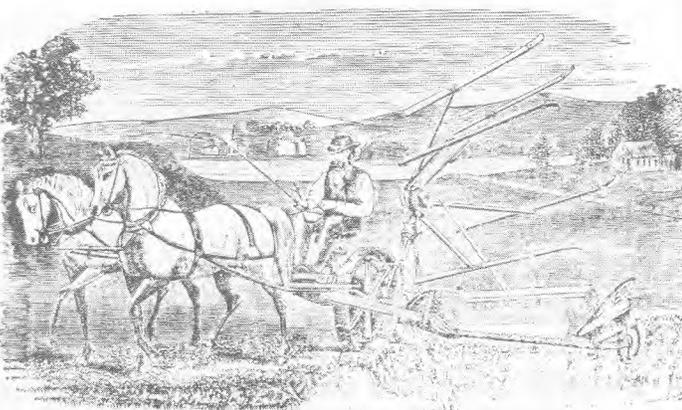
After his cousin's death in 1856, John P. devel-

THE NEW

JOHN P. MANNY

COMBINED SELF-RAKE

Reaper and Mower



Manufactured by
N. C. THOMPSON,
ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS.

BIRD, CURTIS & FISKE, ST. LOUIS, MO. PRINTED BY THE NEW YORK ENGRAVING CO., N. Y.

oped his own reaper manufacturing company in Rockford. He, too, made improvements and obtained patents, including one for the first two-wheel mover and reaper combine. Prosperous, his harvester firm – according to one report – was producing up to 4000 units per year in the 1860s and 70s. He also invented and patented the first lemon juice squeezer with a ridged cone.

N. C. THOMPSON,
ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS,
MANUFACTURER OF

The John P. Manny

COMBINED
SELF-RAKE

REAPER AND MOWER

ALSO
JOHN P. MANNY'S

New Two-Wheeled Self-Rake Reaper and Mower,
AND
TWO-WHEELED SINGLE MOWER.

THE
"DIAMOND"
PLOW,

GORHAM'S SULKY CULTIVATOR,
GORHAM'S WALKING CULTIVATOR,
AND
Holly's Corn Planter.

When N. C. Thompson manufactured John P. Manny machines, he ran these advertisements.
Courtesy, John Howard.

John P.'s Community Status

A profound and generous man, John P. paid unusually high wages, especially to employees with large families, and he assisted employees during times of financial

straits. He also lent money

to individuals and lo-

cal organizations

without regard

for repayment

ability. He served

his community as

City Council

member, Direc-

tor of Winnebago

National Bank, President of

the famed

Forest City

Baseball team,

Trustee and Sunday School teacher at Second

Congregational Church, and as Founding Presi-

dent of the Rockford Westside Cemetery,

known now as Greenwood Cemetery. He en-

couraged Rockford's cultural development, giving generously to Mendelssohn Club, founded by his sister-in-law Blanche Ellis Starr.

Eventually, Manny's generos-

ity and lending policies

forced drastic changes.

In 1890, he had to

close his reaper

company. He sold

his home at 737

North Main Street

– now part of the

Burpee Natural His-

tory Museum complex.

He and his family lived mod-

estly on revenues

from the lemon

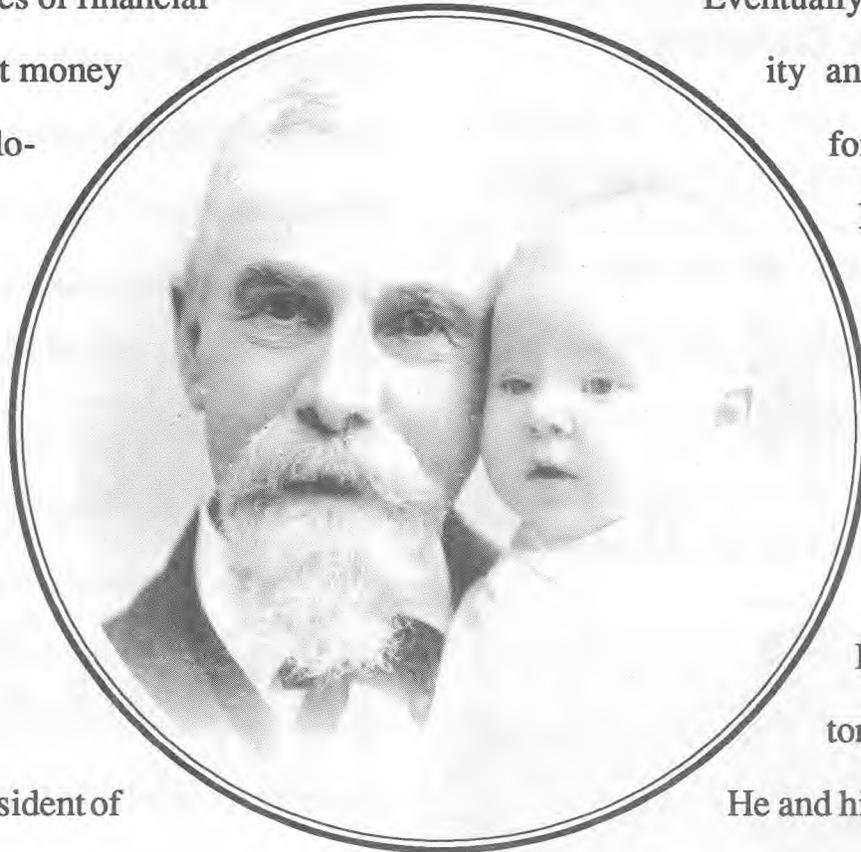
squeezer. His loss

of wealth did not change the public's percep-

tion of this admired and respected man. Fol-

lowing his death on November 16, 1897, acco-

lades filled a multitude of newspaper columns.



John P. Manny poses with his granddaughter Emily Sackett, the future mother of John Howard.

Courtesy, John Howard

During the many years in which he was identified with the business life of Rockford, giving employment to hundreds of workmen, Mr. Manny was looked up to far more than a mere employer and giver of wages. He was fairly worshiped by those in his employ, and when the days of adversity came, his firmest and staunchest friends were from the ranks of the toilers of the city. He enjoyed the closest relations with his humblest employe (sic), and his ear was always ready to hear any complaint or tale of suffering and his heart quick to respond. His office was open to all, businessman or medicant, and his charity was as broad as all humanity itself. He was a friend to the widow and the orphan, and in the closing days of his life he received the prayers of many who had not forgotten the aid rendered by the man of kind heart and generous hand in years gone by.

From Manny's obituary in
The Rockford Daily Register Gazette
November 17, 1897

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