

PART 2

BEAVER

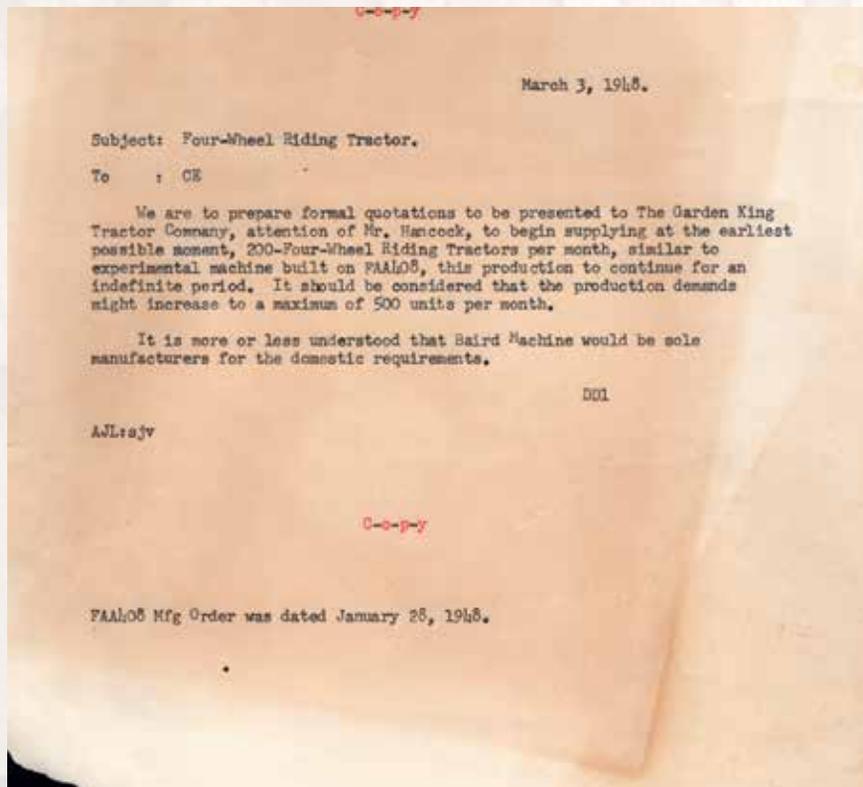
riding tractors



The Prototype

By **Brandon Pfeiffer**

Information provided by **Al Lewis, Paul B. Warner, and Peter Zander**



The Baird, Warner, and Lewis families were more than business associates; they were also friends. When one of the Warners asked Arthur J. Lewis what projects he was working on lately, he told him about the ACME tractor he had modified. The Warners were property owners as well and could see the benefits of a small riding tractor. Being businessmen, they also felt that manufacturing and marketing a tractor by Baird might be a profitable avenue for increasing revenues. It was just a few years earlier, during World War II, that the U.S government

had encouraged its citizens to grow vegetable gardens to help in the war effort by providing food for our soldiers. Known as "Victory Gardens," this event encouraged the building of garden tractors by various manufacturers to aid in the project. After the war was over, the garden tractor industry continued to thrive. Consequently, Warner suggested that Lewis build a new tractor of his own design, addressing the shortcomings of the ACME and designed to much higher standards.

Manufacturing work order number FAA408, dated



January 28, 1948, was issued for this project. Lewis developed sketches and finished drawings with some being completed by his youngest son, Burton Lewis, who also worked at Baird as the head of drafting. The design was from the ground up. Since the first machine was a prototype to be tested and modified, as needed, to perfect the design, it was built from weldments instead of castings. The rear wheels were made from modified automotive style rims. Several engine manufacturers were considered; however, Lewis settled on using a four-cycle, horizontal shaft, 3hp, heavy-duty,

Wisconsin model AB, air-cooled engine. This engine has a 2½-inch bore, 2¾-inch stroke, and a 13.5 cubic-inch displacement. It came standard with a fuel bowl filter assembly, oil bath air cleaner, and speed regulator. The decision to use this high-quality engine is the reason that so many of these machines are still around today.

The design of the prototype was a success, and Baird decided to move forward with entering the lawn and garden tractor manufacturing arena. Drawings were updated for the production machines. Castings replaced weldments.



This is the earliest known picture of the prototype built by Arthur J. Lewis II. This picture was taken behind the Baird factory. Notice that the engine belt guard is a weldment. The lady operating the tractor is believed to be Rita Wilkerson from Baird's accounting department. She started with the company in 1937.

It is interesting to note that the letters "A.L." were cast into the backside of the front axle on the early Beaver Tractors. These letters stand for the man who created this machine: Arthur J. Lewis II. The original modified automotive rear wheels were replaced with 5-by-12-inch rims with flat disc centers.

The prototype was restored to its configuration in 1949 after the foot pedal was added and the belt guard stencil was updated to the current Beaver "Riding Tractor" logo. The wheel color was updated from black to yellow. The belt guard paint is original from when it was updated in 1949.

When restored, all the gray, with exception of the belt guard, was painted the lighter gray used on the late 1950s

tractors. The rear-connected lug tires are original to 1948 but not original to this tractor. Front tire tread is similar to the originals.

It was now time for Baird to come up with a name for this new machine. According to Baird's marketing archives, the following story is how the name "Beaver" was chosen: "Everyone knows that the beaver is one of the most industrious, most hardworking animals known to man. It will tackle any job, no matter how difficult, and will succeed. It is persistent, ingenious, and unflagging in energy. We adopted the name BEAVER for our tractor because they have so many characteristics in common." The name stuck.

PATENTED



This photo shows the restored original prototype as it looks today. This machine is part of Al Lewis' Beaver tractor collection.

It showed up on the prototype unit as just "BEAVER." The words "garden tractor" were later added. Later yet, the name on the tractor was changed to "BEAVER riding tractor."

A memo was issued on March 3, 1948 informing management that they were ready to quote production quantities to Mr. Hancock, owner of the Garden Tractor King Sales Company. The first Beaver tractor brochures stated that Garden King Tractor Sales Company, Inc. was the national sales agent. During negotiations with Lou Hancock, however, a new agreement was reached and he went to work for Baird overseeing the new Beaver Tractor Division.

According to an article in the Newtown Bee Newspaper,

the first production model was completed in May of 1948. These machines were put under a series of tests to prove pulling power and ruggedness in design. One of these tests included successfully pulling 3,100 pounds of weight over all types of terrains. One of the Beaver tractors was even sent to the Army proving grounds in Maryland. According to the Newtown Bee Newspaper, "under the most rigorous testing conditions, the Beaver came out on top with an enviable record."

Note: Part III will begin covering the production Beaver Riding Tractors. 🚧