



Inducted: 2004

George White, as a young man, recognized that the future of Canadian agriculture was dependent on the development of mechanical power. In England, his family had been involved in the farm machinery business for generations. While only one of many builders and developers of steam engines and thrashing machines in Southwestern Ontario, George White implements were known for their simplicity of construction and quality of workmanship. The addition of a dependable sales and repairs department and his marketing vision led to George White steam engines being introduced into regions of Canada that later became known as the “Western Provinces”. His business, George White and Sons Company Limited, based in London, was well respected within the Canadian agricultural industry for over 130 years.

**GEORGE WHITE
1834-1913**

George White was born Sept. 4, 1834 in Devonshire England, the fourth of ten children. As a young man, he learned his blacksmith trade in his father’s wagon-building shop. In April 1857 he wed Susan Baker and they promptly immigrated to Upper Canada, settling in London. Here, within the year, he entered into a partnership with Emanuel Edwin and Eli Pavey to manufacture wagons, carriages and small farm machinery. This firm dissolved in 1864. White, in the mean time, had acquired a farm north of London on the Thames River. There, by 1871, he set up a small water-powered works for the production of “all kinds of bolts for wagons, carriages, bridges or any other”.

Meeting with some success, White formed the “Forest City Machine Bolt and Nut Works” in partnership with Lucius George Jolliffe and William Yates in 1875. By 1878, both Jolliffe and Yates had left the business and White continued with the “Forest City Machine Works”, now specializing in boilers and portable steam engines.

By the 1880’s, steam engines were beginning to revolutionize the work of milling and threshing on Ontario farms: bought by one farmer or an enterprising engineer, a portable machine fuelled by wood or straw could power threshing equipment on several farms. Both White and his Forest City Works were well prepared to meet this small but promising market. In response to provincial legislation regulating the operation of steam boilers and machinery, which manufactures opposed, White astutely offered farmers training in his shops, for a fee. Further, stimulated by the growth of agriculture on the prairies, the boom in

steam engines from the mid 1880's to 1912 set the direction of White's business. Portable engines and the much larger self-propelled or traction engines claimed an increasing proportion of the output at his King Street plant.

During the late 1870's and early 80's, George White made several pioneer trips to the Canadian west and established his machines in this fast, developing area. He was among the first to introduce farm engines into this area. This was before the days of the railroad. From Winnipeg, the customary way to travel was to buy a horse and buckboard, use it as long as needed and then resell it. The first engines had to be shipped via U.S. railroads and hauled the long distance north by horses or oxen. After the Canadian Pacific Railway crossed the prairies, a large warehouse was built at Brandon, Manitoba to serve Western Canada.

As his close-knit family of nine sons (two of whom died young) and three daughters grew, his sons were apprenticed to and then taken into the business now called "George White and Sons". Incorporated in 1897, George White and Sons Limited was only one of several producers of stationary, portable and traction engines in southern Ontario, where the Canadian industry was concentrated. Though the firm was never a contender in the production of a full line of implements, White's access in London to no fewer than four railways was a definite advantage in his specialization. In 1898 the firm absorbed the foundry and implement works of McPherson and Company, in Fingal, and with it, the well-known "Challenger" line of portable threshing machines.

Technically there was little to distinguish White's simple but sturdy steam engines from those of many of his competitors, among them Case, of Wisconsin, and in Ontario, Abell, Sawyer-Massey, Bell, Waterloo, Waterous, Goodis and Macdonald. Certainly the White firm was not innovative. Indeed, it prided itself on "simplicity of construction" and its ability to offer "only the most thoroughly tested articles, those of established reputation, and nothing whatever of an experimental nature". This reliability and small mechanical differences -features such as the much-advertised return-tube boilers and unique wrist pin lubricators- were no doubt meaningful to many farmers. So too were the firm's excellent threshers, the development of machinery for the west, the repairs department, the sale of used and repossessed machines and the network of agencies, railway connections and plainly worded testimonials that filled the company's catalogue. This resulted in a manufacturing company that held a modest share of the Canadian market and experienced gradual growth. In 1911 the Whites, now employing well over 80 workers, opened a new larger plant in London.

Under the directorship of his sons and then as a public company, "George White and Sons Limited" which was based in London, flourished as a well-known and respected manufacturer and /or distributor of agricultural equipment. From a small beginning, the pioneer manufacturing business grew as the country opened up and eventually became one of Canada's foremost farm implement manufacturing firms, selling its products from coast to coast and extensively into the United States.

George White, the father of 12 children, was characterized as "a quiet family man with a large residence on Stanley Street". He served on London's Board of Health and Board of Trade, was a member of the London Gun Club and St. James Westminster Anglican Church. He died in 1913 at his summer residence.

It is interesting to note: White's summer residence, the farm known as "Springdale", described as being north of London on the Thames River, is now the site of the "Y" camp just north of the Thames River on Clarke Road. From the 1870's until 1911, White's companies worked out of a building located at 73 King Street across from today's John Labatt Centre and then moved to a new larger site on Cabell Street just south of the railway tracks from us today, here, at Western Fair grounds.

George White and his new bride immigrated, here, to London, ten years before Canadian confederation in search of opportunities. He raised a family. He operated several businesses. Since 1857 the name "George White" has become synonymous with the manufacture and distribution of quality farm implements both locally and continental-wide. We gather here today, to recognize George White, who found his opportunities and in doing so had a profound influence on Canadian agriculture. At this time we offer the name - **George White** – inductee, Middlesex County Agricultural Hall of Fame.