

Cecil Pond is credited with introducing the first riding lawn mower in the 1950s.



Lever Steer Tractor Led To Wheel Horse

The garage-built Pond lever steer tractors were the beginning of what would later become the Wheel Horse Products Company. Joe Papke, a decades-long owner of a Pond tractor, shared the history of these tractors in the Winter 2025 issue of *Lawn & Garden Tractor* magazine. With editor Brandon Pfeiffer's permission, we're sharing the Pond lever steer story here with credit to Papke.

Papke explains that Elmer Pond got into the tractor business by assembling Speedex garden tractors for his brother Harold. In 1946, Elmer and his son Cecil began designing, building and marketing their own tractor, which became known as the Pond

lever steer because of the lever that moved front to back instead of a steering wheel.

The first Pond tractors were assembled mainly from a variety of off-the-shelf parts, including surplus motorcycle, auto and truck parts. The frame was simple, made from angle or channel iron. The drivetrain used transmissions and differentials from Ford cars and pickups, sometimes from one, sometimes from both.

Even the exclusive Pond-built gear-reduction reversing box consisted of a cut-down Ford driveline welded to the gearbox. It was installed between the transmission and the differential.

Initially, the castings lacked indentations for the shifter rail housing. When many broke due to uneven pressure, new boxes were cast with the necessary indentations.

Final drives attached to the differential were Pond-built castings with internal gears machined by Schafer Gear Works. Cut-off Model A axles with the original Ford wheel hubs were used for the rear axles.

Most Pond tractors lacked a braking system. Papke notes that one Pond tractor he knows of had brakes made from Ford parts. Others had brake drums but no other parts.

The clutch system was a BorgWarner, foot-controlled, lock-over center type, similar to a power take-off clutch. The clutch housing was Pond-built, with early models featuring a hole in the side for greasing the clutch fitting.

Tractors built early in 1946 with a curved frame used a 6-hp Briggs & Stratton model ZZZ engine. Straight frames introduced later in the year were equipped with a Wisconsin Model AEH with just over 6 hp.

Front wheels also changed during the first year, starting with a welded spoke wheel. Later, a solid cast iron wheel was introduced to increase weight at the front end and counterbalance rear-mounted attachments.

The rear wheels had welded, flat-stock steel-spoke rims, and most used Goodyear tires.

Attachments for the 1946 and 1947 tractors included a moldboard plow, likely made by Oliver Farm Equipment, and a one-row cultivator. The cultivator was likely made by Pond. Both attached to a mid-point mounting system, not on the rear drawbar.

The Pond lever steer tractors were painted red, initially a darker shade than later. Regardless of the shade, any 1946 or 1947 Pond lever is rare. Only 50 were made, all hand-built by the father-and-son team. No literature or manuals are known to exist.

Pond continued making the tractor, adding a four-wheel Ride-Away Senior in 1947. It was also assembled with surplus parts and designed without a hood for easy access to the 8.3 Wisconsin engine. Later, they introduced a Ride-Away Junior, making all three models until the mid-1950s.

Along the way, the company changed its name to Wheel Horse. Cecil Pond is credited with introducing the first riding lawn mower in the 1950s. The company introduced several other innovations, including the first hydrostatic transmission. In 1974, the lawn and garden tractor company that started in a garage was sold for \$30 million. Eventually, it was sold to the Toro Company.

To learn more about tractors like the Pond lever steer, subscribe to *Lawn and Garden Tractor* magazine. Pfeiffer has a special Christmas offer for FARM SHOW subscribers.

"Our regular price is \$31.95," says Pfeiffer. "We're offering it to FARM SHOW readers for \$25.95 per year. Just give us a call or mail a check."

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Geiser Mfg. Co. built Peerless Portable steam engines. Peter Geiser founded the company in 1855 to sell threshing machines.



North Carolina Group Features Antique Equipment

The Foothills Antique Power Association (FAPA) of North Carolina has expanded greatly, starting with a modest three-hour event in 2010 to several action-packed events in 2025.

"We strive to entertain and educate visitors about vintage equipment and use a hefty portion of our income from admissions and souvenir sales to benefit local charities," says board member Wilson Sigmon. "In the past 14 years, we've donated more than \$150,000 to local groups."

Visitors to the FAPA events now see vintage tractors, farm implements, autos, trucks, chainsaws and stationary engines, all in good working condition. Threshing, shingle-making, grain grinding, blacksmithing, and steam engine operation captivate visitors, who also see hand and horse-powered equipment.

Sigmon says they have a two-day event on the third weekend in May at the American Legion Fairgrounds in Hickory, N.C. It's their main venue for displays. Complementing the demonstrations are a lawn mower pull, a pedal tractor pull, and a truck-and-tractor pull.

FAPA members who own equipment participate in parades, festivals and shows throughout the area. The Murray's Mill Fall Festival in Catawba, N.C., is another major event for FAPA.

Over the years, FAPA members have acquired, restored and displayed a variety of steam engines, old tractors, threshing and milling equipment. In 2017, FAPA displayed a Peerless 7-hp steam engine owned by the Conrad Moretz family in the back room of their General Store building. The engine dates back to the early 1900s, with a patent date of April 13, 1875, cast into the metal smokebox door.

The Geiser Mfg. Co. built Peerless Portable steam engines. Peter Geiser founded the company in 1855 to sell threshing machines and soon began producing the engines to compete with Frick Eclipse and other models. At one time, the company offered several different models; however, farmers soon turned to smaller 'tractors' powered by internal combustion engines. Geiser and its parent company, Emerson-Brantingham, were slow to adapt, and the business struggled. In November 1928, the J.I. Case Company of Racine, Wis., acquired its manufacturing facilities and 28 key patents. Emerson-Brantingham was the last of more than 800 implement companies to fall victim to tough economic times.

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Sheehan hopes her kintsugi-inspired eggshell installations encourage viewers to reflect on the relationship between fragility and strength.

Artist Creates Kintsugi-Inspired Eggshell Art

Elisa Sheehan from Saratoga Springs, N.Y., creates fine art inspired by the Japanese tradition of kintsugi. However, instead of mending broken pottery, she's chosen to work with eggshells.

Kintsugi, which translates to "join with gold," involves repairing broken pottery with lacquer made from tree sap and then filling in the cracks with liquid gold and other precious metals.

"I've always loved kintsugi," Sheehan explains on her website. "It calls us to celebrate age, history and the scars that life and time make on everything. I embrace this as a way to think about ourselves, others and our relationships as we age. It honors inevitable imperfections and represents the duality of fragility and strength, beauty and brokenness."

Every artist has their own prep process, and Sheehan is no different.

"I focus on making sure the shells are very clean by rinsing them under hot water and using my hands," she says. "I then just let them dry completely before painting in them. I use various coatings, inside and out, to preserve them long-term."

Only then can the art begin.

"Each eggshell is painted individually," Sheehan says. "I apply gold metal leaf to represent the repairs typically made to pottery

by kintsugi artists."

She then arranges each shell fragment in a frame or shadow box, using museum-quality, nearly invisible low-glare glass.

Sheehan sells both her original artworks and fine art prints made from them.

"All my prints are limited edition," she says. "They're created from extremely high-quality photographs of my original work. The detail is exquisite, and the paper is luxuriously thick. We use archival ink, and each piece is hand-signed and numbered."

Only 20 prints are available for each piece.

"They're extremely limited runs; once a print is sold out, it's retired and never printed again. This ensures the integrity and value of the pieces for a great investment."

Sheehan hopes her kintsugi-inspired eggshell installations encourage viewers to reflect on the relationship between fragility and strength.

"My art is an invitation to consider the fluent language of nature, the beauty in the broken, and the symphony of color and shape gifted to us by the world itself," she says. "I create custom work for the joy seekers of the world and the spaces that aim to uplift."

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