

Early history of The Minneapolis Threshing Machine Company

By Leland Wyman

In 1877, John Stewart McDonald became interested in and purchased the Fond du Lac Threshing Machine Company of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin that he re-organized as the McDonald Manufacturing Co. The McDonald Manufacturing Company continued offering the “Pride of the West” apron type threshing separator and the “Reliance” Horse Power. During the early 1880’s the McDonald Manufacturing Co., using patents of Paul Swenson and Christian Tostenson, introduced the “Victory”; a threshing separator designed to operate using the newly developed agricultural steam engine. By 1885, John McDonald began looking for more financial support for his threshing machine factory and turned to a group of men in Minneapolis, Minnesota known as the Minneapolis Board of Trade. The result was the re-organization and re-location of the McDonald Manufacturing Co. to Minnehaha Township, Hennepin County, Minnesota.¹

The Minneapolis Threshing Machine Co. was planned for a twenty-acre site in Minnetonka Township, Hennepin County. The *Minneapolis Tribune*, dated April 1, 1887, stated: “that twenty acres had been secured and construction of the thresher works was to begin at once”. In the contract between Levi Longfellow and the Minneapolis Threshing Machine Co. the factory was to begin operation no later than January 1, 1888.² The new corporation was capitalized April 19, 1887 at 250,000 dollars with seventy-seven stockholders; most of the stockholders were prominent Minneapolis businessmen with a few investors from the Minnetonka/Saint Louis Park area. The officers of the new corporation were, John Stewart McDonald President, Levi Longfellow Vice President, and Treasurer George Henry Rust. The men on the Board of Directors were John Stewart McDonald, John Beckley Bushnell, William Smith King, Levi Longfellow, George Henry Rust, Charles Merrills Pond, Charles P. Lovell, and James Goldsbury.³

Construction got under way in May with John Owen Harrison, of Fond du Lac, as the construction foreman. With hundreds of men and building supplies arriving daily by wagon and rail, six brick buildings began to take form. The largest of the buildings was the main building; being fifty feet wide and one hundred sixty-seven feet long with an el-shaped wing forty by ninety-eight feet and three stories high. The foundry and blacksmith shops were built on the south side of the main building; the power house was built in the corner of the wing, and a two story paint shop was constructed to the east of the main building with an elevated ramp between them. While all this activity in West Minneapolis was going on all MTM products were being manufactured and shipped from the old McDonald thresher factory in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

The Minneapolis Threshing Machine Company of West Minneapolis, Minnetonka Township, Minnesota began manufacturing agricultural steam traction engines in 1890 using the Return Flue style boiler. This style boiler was manufactured for twenty-three years and was discontinued in 1913 with Engine 6991, a 22hp single cylinder 9½x11 steam engine that has survived. During the thirty-four years of steam engine production Minneapolis manufactured over 8500 steam engines of which 4170 were Direct Flue Fire-Box boilers.

¹ Gerald Gysler Parker; *The Minneapolis Threshing Machine Co. 1888 Catalog*.

² Hennepin County Government Center, Office of Deeds and Records, Book 23 of Misc, page 419 – 420.

³ Hennepin County Government Center, Office of Deeds and Records, Book 32 of Misc, page 404 – 406.