The Small, Versatile, Fordson & Ford Tractors

The author's father, Allen R Walker with brother Edward, with their first tractor, a Fordson F. This photo was taking July 1938.

Eugene Allen Walker

My father was born in 1885 on a farm in Thorndike, Maine. In 1904, he left the farm and went to Los Angeles, California, where he got a job with the LA Fire Department driving a team of horses for the fire wagon. Later, he was promoted to lieutenant in the LAFD. In 1916 he left the fire department and became an AT&T long lines crew foreman in the Midwest. By the late 1920s he had moved back to Maine and settled on a small farm in Unity, a town next to Thorndike, where he had grown up. His first tractor was a Fordson Model F with steel wheels.

He replaced the Fordson with a Ford 2N that had a hand crank, magneto, and steel wheels. Rubber tires were not available on the 2N at the time. Later he got rubber tires as shown in the 2N photo on the next page. That's me, age 3 in 1946, standing in front of the rear wheel along with my brother.

In 1948 my brother was a senior in high school and wanted to farm. At that time my father bought a 360-acre farm in Pittsfield, Maine, where we had 30 Jersey milking cows, and each year raised dry beans and fodder corn on about 20 to 30 acres. We traded the 2N for a new 8N with a Dearborn cab that same year. We used the 8N continually from 1948 until 1964, when my father retired and sold the farm.

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Gene Walker (author) and older brother Edward with the 2N in 1946. Here the John Deere manure spreader loaded and ready to work.

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Springtime was the start of each new work season for the Ford 8N. The first order of business was hauling and spreading the manure that had piled up over the winter. We had a Ferguson manure spreader for the task. It used a hook-and-eye attachment. The front pole or tongue of the spreader had a large eye and fixed stand at the end. On the tractor side, we attached a tubular frame with a large hook to the hydraulic lift arms. We backed the tractor up to the spreader with the lift arms lowered. After positioning the hook below the eye of the spreader pole, we raised the lift arms and the spreader was hitched up and ready to go. This was a standard feature for the Ferguson spreader at the time.

The next order of business was plowing the fields to get ready for planting. We had a Ferguson two-way plow that attached to the 8N via the three-point hitch. In addition, we installed a bracket on the tractor via the four bolts or studs at the PTO site. We used this bracket to attach a chain that went to the plow's trip mechanism that rotated the plow for plowing back in the other direction. The trip and rotation occurred automatically when the plow was raised. There was also a lockout for when we did not want the rotation.

After plowing and harrowing, it was time to plant the crops. We raised soldier beans, a variety of dry beans, for sale, and fodder corn for the cows. At this time the tractor wheel spacing widened from 52 inches to 72 inches. We used the Dearborn tractor jack that was attached to the lift arms, and so the tractor lifted itself up. The planter was a King of the Cornfield two-row planter, which was attached to the 8N's three-point hitch. When fully loaded with fertilizer and lifted, the tractor was a little light at the front end, but that did not pose any real problem. We also had an aftermarket crop sprayer with swinging booms attached to the 8N's front axle. A three-point hitch platform held 50-gallon drums and we attached a pump to the PTO. Control valves attached to the right and above the 8N instrument panel. For crop rotation, we had a seeder that was drawbar pulled for sowing a mixture of timothy, millet, and clover; it provided nutritious hay for the cattle.

Once the beans and corn were up, it was time to cultivate. We used an old horse-drawn cultivator but pulled it with the 8N. It required a second person to ride the cultivator, and with the use of stirrups, we could steer the cultivator blades precisely between the crop rows. My father did try using a rear three-point Dearborn cultivator, but that was unsuccessful because it tended to also dig up the row crops. The local Ford tractor and Dearborn dealership was unable to solve the problem,

and we abandoned the use of that implement in favor of the old horse-drawn cultivator. I always believed that the problem could have been solved with stabilizer bars, but my father was unwilling to get a set to try out—after all, how could a 10-year-old boy figure out what the dealership could not.

During summer, it was time for haying. We put the 8N's wheel spacing back to the standard 52 inches. We had a Dearborn rear-mounted, three-point attached mowing machine. At first, we harvested the hay loose, but later we purchased a New Holland hay baler, side delivery rake, and crimper. The crimper shortened the drying and curing time for the hay. We drove the baler and crimper by PTO connection and attached a Dearborn PTO extender to the 8N. It bolted onto the back of the tractor in the same manner as a pulley attachment. The PTO extender also included a short drawbar extender that bolted onto the wide tractor drawbar and secured under the lift arms. This setup accomplished two purposes. First, it conformed to the standard SAE PTO spline size, and second, it provided the correct distance from the end of the PTO shaft to the connection point of the drawbar. I have seen used PTO extenders for

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The author standing to the right of the new 1948 8N with cab. This tractor remained on the farm, 1948-1964.

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the 8N online, but none of the listings I've seen include the drawbar extender that originally came with it.

In the fall, it was time for crop harvest. We had a John Deere one-row corn binder pulled by the 8N to cut the fodder corn and tie it into bundles. We loaded the bundles onto a trailer and drove them to a stationary belt-driven International Harvester ensilage cutter, which chopped and blew the silage into the silo. We installed the pulley attachment on the 8N to power the ensilage cutter. Then it was time to harvest the dry beans. We pulled and loaded the bean plants onto the trailer and drove them to a stationary belt-driven threshing machine powered by the 8N with the pulley attachment. The thresher opened the dried bean pods and separated the beans from the chaff.

As winter set in, it was time to hook up the Dearborn lift-type cordwood saw to the 8N. We cut the cordwood, cut and dried from the prior year, into foot-long lengths for firewood and stored it in the basement of the house for wood furnace heating. After that, and once the ground was frozen, we drove the 8N into the woods where we cut logs and twitched them out into the field. There, we cut the logs into cordwood length and left them for next year's firewood. This ended a year's cycle of hard work for the 8N. At the end of each year we would take it to the Ford tractor dealership for an engine overhaul before snowfall. Over the winter, we used the tractor to plow the front yard and driveway.

Altogether, the 8N was a reliable and versatile farm tractor. The only features lacking that would have been useful were a live PTO and locking differential. A live PTO is useful when powering a hay baler because you can stop forward motion momentarily while a heavy load clears the baler. But that was not a real problem because we could slip the 8N transmission into neutral quickly to allow the baler to clear when necessary, thus accomplishing the same thing. A locking differential would have been useful when plowing in wet and muddy conditions to keep a wheel from spinning. But we overcame that by applying the individual rear-wheel brakes as needed to stop wheel spin.

When we bought the hay baler in 1956, we had the use of a Massey Harris 50 demo tractor with live PTO for the season. But my father opted not to keep it and instead bought a used 8N with a Dearborn front-end loader from the dealership. With the second 8N, we could leave the rear-mounted Dearborn mower on, while we used the first 8N with the PTO extender for the baler.

I left the farm in 1961 when I went to college at the University of Maine and majored in electrical engineering. Although I never went back to farming, I have many fond memories of our versatile 8Ns.

Do you have a story of growing up with Ford tractors? How about a family story about a Hundred or Thousand series?
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Colonel and Harry plowing the field in 1927 with the author's father at the rein. This was before the Fordson came to the farm.