

# John Deere

In 1998, the RMS Convention was held in Moline, IL... Well, guess what was practically right around the corner from the convention site—the Deere & Company Administrative Center, a *must see* for John Deere collectors. The serenity of the park-like, tree-shaded, 1,000-acre office campus belies the globe-spanning activities of the world's largest maker of farm equipment. The product display building is open every day, from 9 AM-5:30 PM, and features examples of Deere's state-of-the-art farm equipment, as well as thousands of farm-related artifacts.

The success of the company, of course, is the end result of John Deere, himself. Already a blacksmith of some note by 1830 in Vermont, he relocated to Grand Detour, IL, in 1837. He soon recognized that the cast iron plows which Easterners were bringing to the Midwest were unsuited to the rich midwestern soil, which clung to the plow bottoms and made it necessary to stop every few steps and clean the blade. In 1837, he solved the problem by inventing the first commercially successful self-scouring steel plow. But, his contribution to the growth of American agriculture far exceeded this initial development.

It was the practice of the day for blacksmiths to build tools for customers as they were ordered. John Deere was the first to begin *stocking* plows and then taking them to the country to sell—an entirely new approach to manufacturing and selling in those early pioneer days. In 1847, he built a factory in Moline and began producing 1,000 plows a year...and, as they say, the rest is history.

In the ensuing years, an empire was established—and a new matchcover category, as well—*John Deere covers!* Tom Gray, IA, a long-time John Deere collector, reports that he has a total of 1,156 John Deere covers, including 9 Features.

Here's a breakdown of Tom's collection so that you can get some idea of what's available in this category:

**20-strikes:** 129 non-stock and 949 stock covers. 37 different stock designs.

**30-strikes:** 29 non-stock, 34 stock covers of the same design.

**40-strikes:** 4 non-stock, 2 stock covers of the same design.

Most collectors who are into the Agricultural topics (tractors, etc.) are interested in John Deere covers. I got started in them, myself, through my interest in Sets & Series. With John Deere, there are several long-running series of stock designs, two of which are pictured here.

There used to be a John Deere outlet right down the freeway from where I'm sitting. I don't know if the outlets still give out matchbooks.

